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NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

MEDIA CONTACTS: MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS, NGV
MARION JOSEPH | 0427 147 999 | MARION.JOSEPH@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU
BONNIE HORNE | 0448 369 260 | BONNIE.HORNE@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU
BRIANA TOMASINO | 0408 333 399 | BRIANA.TOMASINO@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU
SIENNA TAYLOR-GIBSON | 0455 579 397 | SIENNA.TAYLORGIBSON@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU
ANNIE ROSS | 0447 679 440 | ANNIE.ROSS@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU

***Westwood / Kawakubo*: world-premiere exhibition celebrates the ground-breaking designs of two icons of the fashion world**

Westwood / Kawakubo | NGV International | 7 December 2025 – 19 April 2026 | Ticketed



1 July 2025: Opening 7 December 2025, the NGV's world-premiere summer blockbuster exhibition pairs two global icons – and iconoclasts – of the fashion world for the first time, British designer **Vivienne Westwood** (1941 – 2022) and Japanese designer **Rei Kawakubo** (b. 1942) of **Comme des Garçons**. Born a year apart in different countries and cultural contexts, each brought a rule-breaking radicalism to fashion design that subverted the status quo. Today, their critically acclaimed collections are celebrated globally for questioning conventions of taste, gender and beauty, as well as challenging the very form and function of clothing.

Through a showstopping display of more than 140 innovative and ground-breaking designs, *Westwood / Kawakubo* explores the convergences and divergences between these two self-taught rebels of the fashion world. The exhibition brings together important loans from international museums and private collections – including New York's **Metropolitan Museum, The Victoria & Albert Museum, Palais Galliera, and the Vivienne Westwood archive** – alongside 100+ outstanding works from the NGV Collection. The exhibition features more than 80 works that have recently entered the NGV Collection, including nearly 40 outstanding works recently gifted to the NGV by Comme des Garçons especially for this exhibition.

Presented thematically, *Westwood / Kawakubo* charts the defining collections and concerns of their practices – from the mid-1970s to the present day – inviting audiences to consider the multiple ways that Westwood and Kawakubo have each rewritten fashion conventions and codes over the course of their careers. These include: the impact and influence of the punk zeitgeist of the 1970s; the reinterpretation and reinvention of historical fashion references; their experimental design methodologies and the interrogation of gender and the idealised body. Alongside fashion, the exhibition also features archival materials, photography, film and runway footage, offering audiences a deep insight into the minds and creative processes of these two legends of contemporary fashion.

Exhibition highlights include Westwood's iconic punk ensembles from the late 1970s, popularised by London bands such as **The Sex Pistols** and **Siousie Sioux**; a romantic MacAndreas tartan gown from Westwood's *Anglomani*a collection (autumn-winter 1993-94), famously worn by **Kate Moss** on the runway; and the original version of the corseted *Wedding dress* first shown in the *Wake Up, Cave Girl* Autumn-winter 2007-08 collection and later worn by **Sarah Jessica Parker** in *Sex and The City: The Movie*.

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In 2017, The Met in New York staged the exhibition, *Rei Kawakubo / Comme des Garçon: The Art of the In-Between*, which opened with the pop culture phenomenon the **Met Gala**. The NGV exhibition features a version of the sculptural petal ensemble worn by **Rihanna** on the red carpet, as well as key designs from collections of those worn by **Lady Gaga, Katy Perry**, and **Tracee Ellis Ross**. Also on display are dramatic abstract works spanning the recent decades which challenge the relationship between the body and clothing, including the playful *Two Dimensions*, spring-summer 2012, and the abstract forms of *Invisible Clothes* spring-summer 2017. Striking gingham sculptural forms from *Body Meets Dress – Dress Meets Body* collection (spring-summer 1997) also feature.

Major showstopping moments in the exhibition include a dramatic, spotlight gallery highlighting how both designers have been influenced by fashion history; Westwood's sweeping silk taffeta ball gowns inspired by 18th century court dress are presented alongside Kawakubo's punk interpretations in pink vinyl and rich floral jacquard. A further dynamic display juxtaposes the bold, red tartans, English tweeds, grey plaids and navy pinstripes of Kawakubo with Westwood's iconic tailoring. Sculptural, deconstructed, cinched and exaggerated silhouettes demonstrate their exacting approaches to cutting and textile traditions.

The exhibition design presents the two distinct voices of Westwood and Kawakubo as parallel yet fundamentally unique forces in fashion. The design uses symmetry as its cornerstone concept, presenting these designers like left and right hands; symmetrical but not identical.

Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Steve Dimopoulos said: 'The NGV's summer blockbuster exhibition is one of the most anticipated events on the Gallery's calendar of year-round programming – and this year's Westwood | Kawakubo will be no exception. Since these exhibitions began in 2013, visitation has more than doubled, highlighting the incredible appetite for cultural experiences over the summer period among both Victorians and visitors alike.'

Minister for Creative Industries, Colin Brooks said: 'Westwood | Kawakubo builds on the NGV's incredible track record of more than 50 jaw-dropping fashion exhibitions, again celebrating the work and creativity of some of the world's most iconic designers. With the largest and most significant fashion and textiles collection in the southern hemisphere, the NGV is already a major drawcard for fashion lovers and this exhibition is set to attract visitors from far and wide.'

Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV said: 'This exhibition celebrates two leading female fashion designers from different cultural backgrounds, who both had strong creative spirits and pushed boundaries. Through more than 140 designs from the NGV Collection and key international loans, *Westwood | Kawakubo* invites audiences to reflect on the enduring legacies of these groundbreaking designers and contemplate the ways in which fashion can be a vehicle for self-expression and freedom.'

'We're indebted to the donors who have helped the NGV to acquire key works by both Westwood and Kawakubo, transforming our holdings into one of the most important in the region. They are Comme des Garçons, Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM & Family, Takamasa Takahashi and David Tune, Robyn Beeche, Andis and Deborah Salins, Anastasia Kogan, Dr. George Kokkinos and Melissa Tonkin, and Fair Shen.'

Jaime Cohen, Managing Director, Mercedes-Benz Cars & CEO, Mercedes-Benz Australia/ Pacific Pty Ltd said: 'We are honoured to take our place as Principal Partner for *Westwood | Kawakubo*, exploring the work of two of the most visionary and influential fashion designers in recent history. Mercedes-Benz Australia has an unwavering commitment to innovation and creative excellence, two principles that will be paramount in the NGV's summer blockbuster exhibition, set to take visitors on a transformative journey through the eyes of two groundbreaking creatives.'

The exhibition explores Westwood and Kawakubo's practices across five themes. *Punk and Provocation* considers how punk, both aesthetically and conceptually, crystallized in the early collections of each designer and has remained a touchstone, if not a design manifesto, throughout their careers. Highlight Westwood works in this section convey some of the key aspects of punk clothing – offensive graphics, bondage trousers, distressed knitwear, tartan, leather, safety pins and chains. In dialogue, four notable works by Kawakubo demonstrate the influence and ethos of punk in her practice.

Rupture explores the unique design lexicons of Westwood and Kawakubo, revealing how each have been driven by the desire to break free of convention and reinvent the rules of dress. Early highlights here include displays of Westwood's *Pirate* (spring-summer 1981) and *Nostalgia of Mud* (autumn-winter 1983) collections that encapsulated the New Romantic and Buffalo movements of 1980s London, contrasted by recent works from Kawakubo's *Not Making Clothes* collection, spring-summer 2014, which saw her negate the boundaries between body and garment.

Reinvention looks at the way both designers have referenced the past or looked to the future, looking to sources of inspiration that include fashion history, tailoring traditions, decorative arts and textiles. For Westwood art history has been a constant influence, most notably in her *Portrait* collection (autumn-winter 1990), which featured prints of

famous eighteenth century paintings by Boucher and Fragonard emblazoned on the corsetry. For Kawakubo, breaking the rules of taste has resulted in collections that bring together clashing pattern, ruffles and frills.

The Body: Freedom and Restraint explores the ways in which both Vivienne Westwood and Rei Kawakubo have consistently challenged existing conventions related to ideal and idealised female bodies and rallied against objectification. Beginning with iconic works from Westwood's *Erotic Zones* collection (spring-summer 1995) and Kawakubo's *The Future of Silhouette* (autumn-winter 2017-18), this section considers the ways in which both designers have redefined the female body.

The final section of the exhibition, *The Power of Clothes*, considers fashion as a tool to convey a message, personal or political, and the powerful individual female voice. It concludes with recent Westwood collections – *Propaganda* (autumn-winter 2025) and *Chaos Point* (autumn-winter 2008-09) – that utilise clothing and fabrics as a canvas for messaging about the environment, social inequity of political freedoms in an echo of her early punk days. These are seen in context with the self-reflective power of Kawakubo's recent collections (*Uncertain Future*, spring-summer 2025) which express her emotional response to the state of the world.

The exhibition will be accompanied by an ambitious world-first publication, also titled *Westwood | Kawakubo*, exploring the intersecting histories of Westwood and Kawakubo with new reflections from industry experts including Jane Mulvaugh, Valerie Steele, Stephen Jones, Akiko Fukai and Dame Zandra Rhodes.

Alongside the summer presentation will be a free kid's exhibition titled *Let's Party: NGV Fashion for Kids*, opening on 28 November. Featuring spectacular garments from the NGV's Fashion and Textiles Collection including evening dresses, bold, imaginative outfits and playful accessories, young visitors can enjoy hands-on activities where they'll have the chance to create their own show-stopping fashions.

Westwood | Kawakubo will be on display from 7 December 2025 to 19 April 2026 at NGV International, St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Entry fees apply. Tickets and information are available via the NGV website: [NGV.MELBOURNE](https://www.ngv.melbourne)

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ABOUT VIVIENNE WESTWOOD

Vivienne Isabel Swire was born in Glossop, Derbyshire on 8 April 1941. In 1961, she married Derek Westwood, later divorcing and partnering with Malcolm McLaren. The couple became creative collaborators and proprietors of a retail outlet at 430 Kings Road Chelsea, going on to have a radical influence on international fashion over the next decade. Westwood and McLaren stocked the store with a combination of their own designs and purchased items, changing the name every few years to reflect the tenor of the clothing. Over subsequent years the store became; Let it Rock (1971), Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die (1972), Sex (1974), Seditionaries (1977) and World's End (1980).

In 1980, Westwood and McLaren's interests began to diverge and by 1984 Westwood was designing independently, moving her business to Italy for production with her new business partner Carlo d'Amario. Over the next two decades, Westwood redefined her practice, embracing and reimagining Saville Row tailoring techniques and British textiles. She also began conducting regular archive research of London's Victoria and Albert Museum and The Wallace Collection. In 1990 she launched her first full menswear collection and structured her business into a variety of labels, including Gold Label and its diffusion line, Red Label. Twice-awarded British Designer of the Year, in 1992 Westwood was granted an OBE, and in 2006, a DBE. Westwood died in London on 29 December 2022.

ABOUT REI KAWAKUBO

Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo was born in Tokyo in 1942 and graduated from Keio University in 1964 with a degree in Literature and Fine Art. After working first as a stylist, she began designing her own clothes and established Comme des Garçons in 1969. The label was incorporated in 1973, coinciding with the presentation of her first major women's collection. Despite her lack of formal training, Kawakubo courted critical and commercial success. A new Tokyo boutique was launched in 1975, followed by a dedicated menswear line, Homme Comme des Garçons, in 1978. Kawakubo debuted on the Paris runway three years later, in 1981, where she continues to show her two main collections twice-yearly. Her work is known for its conceptual and avant-garde leanings, and for a groundbreaking approach to form and function. Many subsequent projects and ready-to-wear lines have since been introduced and include knitwear, furniture and perfume.

Kawakubo's work has been featured by museums in solo and group exhibitions and she has received numerous honours including the Mainichi Fashion Award in 1983 and 1988, Fashion Group Night of the Stars Award in 1986, the French *Chevalier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* in 1993 and, most recently, the Harvard University Graduate School of Design Excellence in Design Award in 2000. In 2017, her work was the subject of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute exhibition, *Rei Kawakubo / Comme des Garçons: The Art of the In-Between*.

IMAGES:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/glemr05xo5h0nnuym7cad/AHSIXGRtln42UMPZbGmyqS4?rlkey=q8jy4tf0f3o8jkewgy6oca4ii&st=0soagrgg&dl=0>

IMAGE CAPTION: **Vivienne Westwood, London** (fashion house), **Vivienne Westwood** (designer) *Look 49*, from the *Anglomania* collection, autumn–winter 1993–94. Le Cercle Républicain, Paris, March 1993. Photo © firstVIEW. Model: Kate Moss; **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** (fashion house), **Rei Kawakubo** (designer) *Look 16*, from the *Return to the Source* collection, autumn–winter 2023. Paris, 7 March 2023. Image © Comme des Garçons. Model: Lauren Stevenson; **Vivienne Westwood, London** (fashion house), **Vivienne Westwood** (designer) *Look 26*, from the *Anglomania* collection, autumn–winter 1993–94. Le Cercle Républicain, Paris, March 1993. Photo © Guy Marineau / Condé Nast via Getty Images. Model: Linda Evangelista; **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** (fashion house), **Rei Kawakubo** (designer) *Look 1*, from the *Blue Witch* collection, spring–summer 2016. Paris, 3 October 2015. Image © Comme des Garçons. Model: Maja Brodin

Media Contacts:

Marion Joseph, Associate Director, Media and Public Affairs, NGV

0427 147 999 | marion.joseph@ngv.vic.gov.au

Briana Tomasino, Senior Publicist, NGV

0408 333 399 | briana.tomasino@ngv.vic.gov.au

Bonnie Horne, Senior Publicist, NGV

0448 369 260 | bonnie.horne@ngv.vic.gov.au

Sienna Taylor-Gibson, Media and Public Affairs Assistant, NGV

0455 579 397 | sienna.taylorgibson@ngv.vic.gov.au

Annie Ross, Media and Public Affairs Assistant, NGV

0447 679 440 | annie.ross@ngv.vic.gov.au

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