

NGV

Westwood Kawakubo

7 DEC 2025 – 19 APR 2026

VCE ART MAKING AND EXHIBITING
EXHIBITION RESOURCE

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(left) Comme des Garçons, Tokyo (fashion house) Look 2, from the Wanderland collection, autumn-winter 2009 (detail), Photo © firstVIEW, Model: Melodie Dagault, (right) Vivienne Westwood, 1994, Photo © Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinooch Matadin / Trunk Archive



WESTWOOD | KAWAKUBO

VCE ART MAKING AND EXHIBITING: EXHIBITION RESOURCE

This exhibition resource provides information specific to the NGV exhibition *Westwood | Kawakubo* to support the following Learning Outcomes of VCE Art Making and Exhibiting:

Unit 2: Understand, develop and resolve, Area of Study 1, Outcome 1

Unit 3: Collect, extend and connect, Area of Study 3, Outcome 3

Unit 4: Consolidate, present and conserve, Area of Study 3, Outcome 3

For a more detailed overview of exhibition preparation, presentation and conservation at the NGV refer to [Exhibiting Artworks at the NGV: VCE Art Making and Exhibiting | NGV](#)



Installation views of *Westwood | Kawakubo* on display from 7 December 2025 to 19 April 2026, at NGV International, Melbourne.
Photo: Sean Fennessy

Curatorial theme pictured:
Reinvention – Design Methods

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Westwood | Kawakubo is a major international exhibition developed by the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) that pairs the work of two of the most influential fashion designers in recent history, Vivienne Westwood and Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons.

British-born Westwood (1941–2022), and Japanese-born Kawakubo (b. 1942), introduced a rule-breaking radicalism to fashion by subverting the status quo. As self-taught, independent practitioners, Westwood and Kawakubo both rebelled against rigid social expectations, questioning conventions of taste, gender, beauty, the body and garment form and function to change how we think about fashion.

For further information on the exhibition including biographies of both designers and detailed information on the exhibition themes, please visit the exhibition page [here](#).

NUMBER AND TYPE OF WORKS

The exhibition includes over 150 garments as well as archival material, photography and film. There are also more than 40 display headpieces commissioned from legendary British milliner, Stephen Jones, in response to Westwood's work.

Installation view of *Westwood | Kawakubo* on display from 7 December 2025 to 19 April 2026, at NGV International, Melbourne.
Photo: Sean Fennessy

Curatorial theme pictured:
Reinvention – Tailoring



KEY TEAM MEMBERS

Curatorial:

Katie Somerville – Senior Curator, Fashion and Textiles, NGV

Danielle Whitfield – Curator, Fashion and Textiles, NGV

Exhibition Design:

Peter King – Exhibition Designer, Studio Peter King

Conservation:

Skye Firth – Senior Conservator of Textiles, NGV



CURATORIAL RATIONALE

Westwood | Kawakubo continues a model established by the NGV that places the work of two major artists in dialogue with one another. Previous NGV exhibitions have included *Andy Warhol – Ai Weiwei*, 11 Dec 15 – 25 Apr 16 and *Keith Haring | Jean-Michel Basquiat: Crossing Lines*, 1 Dec 19 – 15 Mar 20.

The exhibition places the work of two fashion visionaries in dialogue – Vivienne Westwood and Rei Kawakubo. Born a year apart in the early 1940s and completely self-taught, both came to fashion with a shared spirit of rebellion and desire to rewrite the “rules of dress”. Through their pioneering concepts and innovative design methods, Westwood and Kawakubo have changed the way that we think about fashion and how we wear it.

The exhibition includes a significant number of works from the NGV Collection, many of which were acquired specifically for this show, as well as important loans from international museums and private collections. The exhibition also features over 30 works that were part of a major gift from Comme des Garçons to the NGV’s Fashion and Textiles Collection.

Exploring the convergences and divergences between the two designers’ work, the curatorial themes are:

Punk and Provocation

Rupture

Reinvention – History

Reinvention – Tailoring

Reinvention – Design Methods

The Body

The Power of Clothes

Installation view of *Westwood | Kawakubo* on display from 7 December 2025 to 19 April 2026, at NGV International, Melbourne.
Photo: Sean Fennessy

Curatorial theme pictured:
Reinvention – History

CONSERVATION

NGV COLLECTION AND SPECIAL EXHIBITION LOANS

A substantial number of works featured in *Westwood | Kawakubo* are owned by the NGV. Works from the NGV Collection are supplemented with loans from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Palais Galliera, Paris; the Vivienne Westwood archive; and the National Gallery of Australia, among others. The specific display requirements of works on loan are agreed to in the contract prior to arrival.

TRANSPORTATION AND CONDITION REPORTS

Making sure that these rare, sometimes fragile works arrive safely is of vital importance. When shipping artwork, by plane in this instance, each museum or gallery sent a staff member as a courier with each consignment to closely monitor the artwork's movements. Shipping agents oversaw each journey, touching base with the courier at each landfall and overseeing the transport to the gallery.

Each work was packed for transport in crates which are designed to minimise the impact of movement, moisture and sudden climatic changes. These crates are also made with materials that minimise the risk of pests affecting artworks whilst travelling. The works were unpacked under the supervision of the courier and NGV conservator, who checked the condition of each work against its condition report to make sure there were no changes to condition after the journey.

EXHIBITION CONDITIONS

The display conditions of the gallery spaces align with the standard international museum environmental conditions. As the works in *Westwood | Kawakubo* are predominantly textile based, environmental conditions are carefully controlled, with temperature set at twenty-one degrees Celsius, relative humidity at fifty percent and a lux lighting level of fifty. The brightness of the multimedia displays on LED screens have been carefully calibrated to reduce light spill and conservators have been careful to keep works at a safe distance from the heat of the screens.

Conservation staff monitor these conditions with regular visits, ensuring that all works remain stable throughout the exhibition. Weekly dusting of plinths, mannequins and garments by conservation and art handlers ensures these conditions are maintained. Garments are kept dust-free with a soft brush attached to a mini laboratory vacuum. As visitor numbers increase, more frequent cleaning is required. Stainless steel finishes and mirrored plinths also require regular cleaning.

Installation view of *Westwood | Kawakubo* on display from 7 December 2025 to 19 April 2026, at NGV International, Melbourne.
Photo: Sean Fennessy

Curatorial theme pictured:
The Body





SELECTED WORKS

REI KAWAKUBO *LOOK 10, DRESS, 2024*

For her 2024 *Anger* collection, Kawakubo drew on the symbolism of black to express her feelings of frustration at the world and with herself. In the 1980s, when runways were dominated by colourful, body-conscious clothes, Kawakubo used distressed fabrics, asymmetry and black to challenge Western aesthetic values. *Look 10, dress 2024* incorporates motifs such as barbed wire and chains with exposed zips and vinyl all representing a state of punk-fuelled disaffection. This work was one of forty-five works gifted to the NGV by Rei Kawakubo in the lead up to the exhibition.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Look 10, dress 2024 is located in *Punk and Provocation* on a central galvanised metal plinth. The Kawakubo works in this space are placed in conversation with Westwood works created during the 1970s and early 1980s. Rather than presenting works produced in the same time period, the Kawakubo works in this space are from more recent collections and represent the designer's engagement with punk's ideals and aesthetics.

Look 10, dress 2024 weighs twenty kilograms; the bodice structure is formed by a series of zips while the cape is attached to the garment. To achieve the sculptural, voluminous quality of the skirt, crinoline fabric was cut into triangles and rolled to form cone shapes, providing support and enhancing the garment's form. The fabric of the dress features a chain motif which is mirrored in the chains which suspend the plinths from the ceiling.

Comme des Garçons *Look 10*,
from the *Anger* collection,
autumn–winter 2024.
Paris, March 2024. Image
© Comme des Garçons.
Photo: Yannis Vlamos.
Model: Josie Beckmann

VIVIENNE WESTWOOD CORSET GOWN 1998

Corset Gown from Westwood's *Dressed to Scale* Collection exemplifies Westwood's referencing of eighteenth-century gowns with its wide neckline, cinched bodice waist and voluminous bubble peplum skirt. Worn by Westwood to the Victoria and Albert Museum's *Vivienne Westwood Fashion Tribute* in 1998, the gown includes a separate corset and skirt.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Corset gown is located in *Reinvention – History*, which explores the ways in which each designer has referenced historical fashion, often revealing tension between tradition and transgression. Presented on its own on a custom-built plinth, *Corset gown* occupies the right-hand corner of the room. Reinforcing the key design concept of symmetry, a Kawakubo work is displayed opposite.

Corset gown is made from silk with a layer of nylon tulle underneath. To ensure the gown appears voluminous for the duration of the exhibition, conservation staff created an internal hooped petticoat made from calico and rigid nylon boning. Maintaining the integrity of the work is essential. As such, all materials used to make the petticoat are inert and similar to those used for historical garments. This additional support results in the full, round appearance of the garment.

In addition, the ruffled 'bubble' effect at the top of the skirt is achieved for display by using a system of rare earth magnets with varying magnetic strength. The magnets are placed inside the fabric, with a strip of mylar (inert polyester film) used to protect the fabric. The magnets pull towards each other, resulting in a bunched, ruffled appearance.

Conservation treatment was required on this garment prior to display, as it had sustained some staining from make-up and food during wear. This treatment was undertaken by NGV conservators and involved an initial light spot clean with water, followed by treatment with white spirit, a petroleum-based solvent which evaporates quickly. The area was then dabbed with blotting paper, removing traces of makeup and oil from food.

As with any conservation treatment, consultation took place between the conservators and curators about appropriate intervention. It was concluded that the best approach was to remove the stains to achieve the ideal presentation of the garment, as the designer would have intended.



(top)
Vivienne Westwood attends the Moët & Chandon Vivienne Westwood Fashion Tribute at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, November 1998.
Photo: Dave Benett – Getty

(bottom)
Installation view of *Corset gown*, 1998, *Westwood | Kawakubo* on display from 7 December 2025 to 19 April 2026, at NGV International, Melbourne.
Photo: Sean Fennessy



Vivienne Westwood
Orb, handbag 1989

SELECTED WORKS

VIVIENNE WESTWOOD *ORB, HANDBAG* 1989

The encircled orb, ringed like Saturn, is an instantly recognisable logo for Vivienne Westwood. Adapted from Scotland's famous heritage *Harris Tweed Authority* trademark, it was transformed by Westwood to embody her driving motivation; to take tradition into the future. First seen in her 1987 *Harris Tweed* collection as embroideries and buttons, the orb has since been used for the house label, jewellery and accessories such as *Orb, handbag* 1989. The symbol remains a powerful totem, playfully referencing royalty, tradition and forward-looking innovation and reflecting Westwood's self-proclaimed status as the 'Queen of Fashion'.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Orb, handbag is located in *Reinvention – Design Methods*, alongside two key collections of Westwood's – *Harris Tweed*, 1987, and *Anglomania*, 1993. For both collections, Westwood adopted quintessentially British materials – tweed, argyle knits and tartans in silk, wool and mohair. At the same time, her designs for both collections parodied notions of royalty and upper-class dress as a critique on British conservatism and the establishment in general.

Orb, handbag is displayed in a wall cabinet alongside NGV Collection works including replica jewels used in practice ceremonies such as *Imperial Crown of India* (c.1936) and *Sovereign's Orb* (c. 1936) which help to contextualise Westwood's designs.

The wall case is fitted with glass and displayed at a light level of fifty lux, which protects the fragile materials including velvet, synthetic fur and – in the case of *Orb, handbag* – plastic. Over time, the plastic may deteriorate with exposure to light and air, so preventative measures such as limiting light exposure are taken to protect the work.

REI KAWAKUBO LOOK 11, DRESS 2017

Look 11, dress was part of Kawakubo's *Invisible Clothes* collection. This collection was a continuation of Kawakubo's desire to challenge our expectations of what a garment is or should be. The works in this collection are characterised by a dark palette and non-functional silhouettes, which blur the line between fashion and sculpture. At the time, Kawakubo described the presentation as the "purest and most extreme version of *Comme des Garçons*". In 2025, *Look 11, dress* was donated to the NGV by Rei Kawakubo as part of a generous gift of forty-five of her works from key collections representing the last decade of her work.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Look 11, dress is located in *The Body*. It is placed alongside selected works from the *Invisible Clothes* and *2 Dimensions* collections, from 2017 and 2012 respectively. The *2 Dimensions* collection similarly blurs the boundary between body and garment, in this case using two-dimensional pattern-cutting to create 'flat clothing' that disregards the contours of the body altogether.

Maintaining the two-dimensional circular shape of *Look 11, dress* presented a challenge for our conservation team during installation. On the runway, the model's arms could provide the support needed to maintain the garment's shape, however additional support was needed to achieve this look on the mannequin.

To maintain the garment's circular form, a long piece of boning was fashioned into a hoop and sewn into black twill tape. This was then carefully sewn into the seamline behind the garment's ruffle, successfully concealing the addition. A tacking stitch was used to ensure that the intervention is easily reversible. At the conclusion of the exhibition the hooped boning will be carefully removed, but kept with the work itself. Both the hooped boning and the garment will be stored hanging in a wardrobe. The same method for dressing on a mannequin will be used for future displays.

(top)
Installation view of *Westwood | Kawakubo* on display from 7 December 2025 to 19 April 2026, at NGV International, Melbourne.
Photo: Sean Fennessy

Curatorial theme pictured: *The Body*

(bottom)
Comme des Garçons, Tokyo
(fashion house) **Rei Kawakubo**
(designer) *Look 11, dress* 2016 *Invisible Clothes* collection, spring-summer 2017, wool. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Gift of Comme des Garçons



IN THE GALLERY

How does the exhibition design impact the audience's appreciation and understanding of Westwood and Kawakubo's design practice?

How does the exhibition design support the curatorial rationale and enhance your understanding of the work?

What are some of the measures taken to protect artworks?

Describe how an artwork might be handled and transported to this location.



FURTHER RESOURCES

- [Exhibiting Artworks at the NGV: VCE Art Making and Exhibiting | NGV](#)
- [Explore Conservation | NGV](#)
- Exhibition catalogue: Katie Somerville and Danielle Whitfield (eds), *Westwood | Kawakubo*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2025.
- [Westwood | Kawakubo Exhibition Map and Guide for School Groups](#)

NGV SCHOOLS PROGRAM PARTNERS



The NGV warmly thanks Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family for their support of the NGV School Support Program