

NGV

Westwood Kawakubo

EXHIBITION MAP AND GUIDE FOR SCHOOL GROUPS
7 DEC 2025 – 19 APR 2026

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Westwood Kawakubo

Westwood | Kawakubo pairs the work of Vivienne Westwood and Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons, two of the most influential fashion designers of recent history. Since the 1970s, both have introduced radical approaches that challenged conventions of taste, gender, beauty and the body, reshaping how we think about fashion.

Featuring over 150 designs, the exhibition explores themes such as *Punk and Provocation*, *Rupture*, *Reinvention*, *The Body* and *The Power of Clothes*, highlighting both the similarities and differences in the visionary practices of each designer, creating a rare and dynamic dialogue between two of fashion's most radical voices.

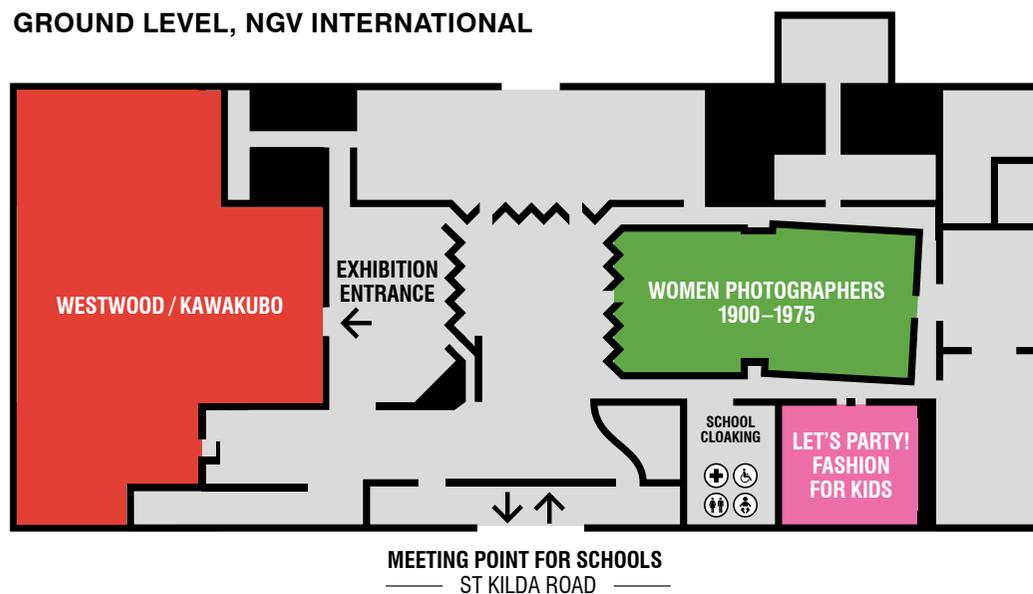
This resource includes a map outlining key locations for school groups at NGV International. It also provides an overview of the themes explored in *Westwood | Kawakubo* and a suggested route for school groups, along with questions, prompts and activity ideas to support teachers in leading meaningful, self-guided learning experiences throughout the exhibition.



ENTERING THE EXHIBITION

School groups will enter NGV International through the Waterwall entrance, on St Kilda Road. The map below highlights the location of the school meeting point, school cloaking, bathrooms and the exhibition entrance.

GROUND LEVEL, NGV INTERNATIONAL



This exhibition map for *Westwood | Kawakubo* presents key thematic highlights and a suggested route for school groups. Teachers can use the pathway and images to guide students and use the discussion prompts on the following pages to support engagement with the exhibition.



The Body



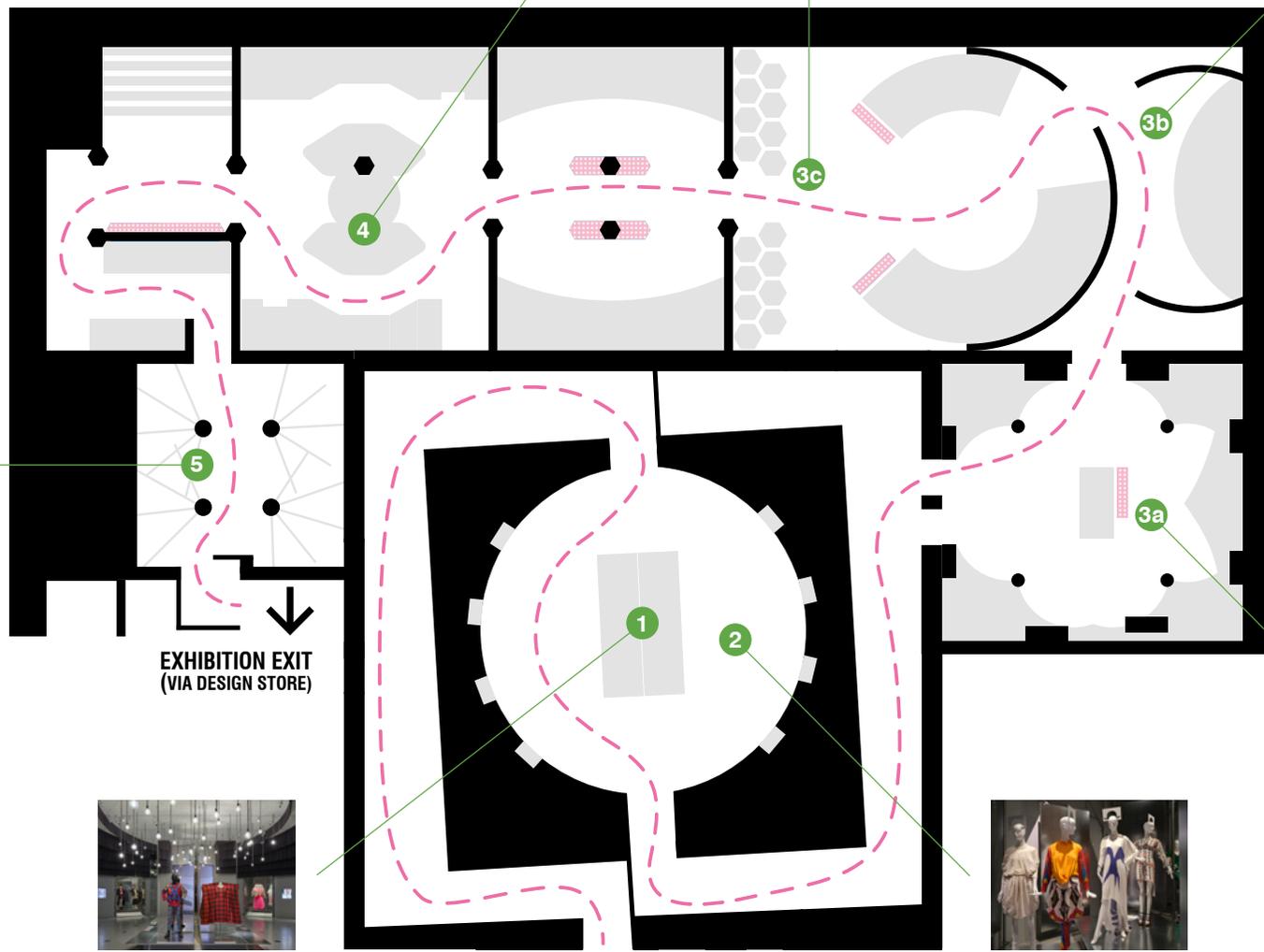
Reinvention – Design Methods



Reinvention – Tailoring



The Power of Clothes



Punk and Provocation



Rupture



Reinvention – History

↑ EXHIBITION ENTRANCE
(VIA GALLERY KITCHEN)

↓ EXHIBITION EXIT
(VIA DESIGN STORE)



1. Punk and Provocation | 2. Rupture

The first major room of the exhibition introduces two themes: *Punk and Provocation* explored in the central display and *Rupture* presented around the perimeter. Vivienne Westwood and Rei Kawakubo pioneered a new fashion language rooted in the ethos of punk, not just as an aesthetic, but as a radical mindset. Both designers reject conformity and flattery, using fashion as a tool of provocation to challenge social expectations and reframe ideas of beauty, gender and the relationship between body and garment. Both Kawakubo and Westwood created without compromise, introducing asymmetry, enveloping volumes and introducing the use of black and distressed fabrics into Western fashion. Through garments that confront convention and disrupt traditional silhouettes, they push against the limits of the fashion system itself, expanding what fashion can express and who it can empower.

Kawakubo declared she would “start from zero” and “do things not done before”. What evidence of this attitude can you see in the garments on display in this space?

Informed by what you see in this space, what words would you use to describe the idea of ‘punk’?

Westwood said, “You have to go faster than the system”. What do you think she meant by ‘the system’? How might fashion be perceived as a system that can be resisted or challenged?





3a. Reinvention – History

This space explores the theme *Reinvention – History*, examining how Westwood and Kawakubo draw upon fashion history not to replicate the past, but to transform it. Both designers look to historical silhouettes, textiles and dress traditions as raw material for innovation, reconfiguring familiar forms through exaggeration, displacement and abstraction. While Westwood's work often looked to art and fashion history for inspiration, Kawakubo rarely quotes the past so directly. Her references, if present, are always abstracted. By reshaping the past, both designers reveal how fashion history can be a powerful engine for new ideas and contemporary expression.

Kawakubo says one half of her mind loves tradition and the other wants to break the rules.

Do you think tradition and innovation can coexist? Why or why not?

If you were to reinvent an everyday piece of clothing, for example your school uniform, what would you keep and what would you change?

Choose one garment in this space. What historical elements can you identify and how has the designer transformed or reinvented them? What new ideas are being expressed by the garment?





3b. Reinvention – Tailoring

This space focuses on *Reinvention – Tailoring*, highlighting how Westwood and Kawakubo share an interest in Western tailoring traditions and menswear. Throughout their careers, both designers have interrogated traditional ideas about clothing, gender and power by experimenting with unconventional materials and innovative approaches to cutting and shaping garments. While Westwood’s garments in this space celebrate her British heritage through the reworking of historically British methods and textiles such as tweed, fine wools and tartan, Kawakubo explores the juxtaposition of masculine suiting and fabrics with traditionally ‘feminine’ decoration, creating hybrid forms that disrupt gender binaries and challenge conventional expectations of fit and form.

Notice the silhouettes of garments in this space. How might these designs conform to, resist, or subvert traditional expectations of femininity and masculinity? How have the designers used tailoring to empower rather than constrain the feminine form?

How do you think the radical ideas of Westwood and Kawakubo might have influenced more recent everyday fashion?

How might these tailored forms impact the wearer’s physical experience of movement and posture?





3c. Reinvention – Design Methods

This space explores *Reinvention – Design Methods*, considering how Westwood and Kawakubo challenge traditional ideas of what clothing is and what it can express. Through experimentation with materials,

fragmented forms, exaggerated volumes and genderless silhouettes, they have reimagined the traditions of tailoring and dressmaking by experimenting with cut, form and function. Today, their material, technical and conceptual innovations continue to disrupt the status quo and shape the way we dress. As self-taught designers, both Kawakubo and Westwood began their careers without formal training, which has enabled an expansive freedom in their approaches to making.

Looking at the shapes and silhouettes in this space, how do they challenge your expectations of what clothing should do or how it should look?

Some of these designs might feel unusual, confronting or exciting. What emotional response do they provoke in you, and why do you think the designer might want you to feel that way?

How do unexpected materials like plastic, metal or distressed fabric change the story a garment tells?





4. The Body

This space explores the theme *The Body*, examining how Westwood and Kawakubo confront and dismantle traditional ideas about the body, femininity and beauty. Rejecting the notion of the 'ideal female form', both designers use fashion as a tool of resistance, creating garments that distort, exaggerate or even obscure the body rather than celebrate it as an object of display. Westwood challenges gender expectations through parody and excess, amplifying and subverting symbols of sexuality to expose their social constraints. In contrast, Kawakubo redefines the relationship between body and garment, using abstract forms and asexual silhouettes to propose that beauty can exist beyond prettiness or symmetry. Together, their work reimagines the body not as a fixed ideal, but as a site for power, identity and transformation.

Look at the silhouettes of the clothing in this space.

What do you notice about the shapes?
How does this affect the way you think about the relationship between the clothing and the body?

What do you think Rei Kawakubo means when she says, "For something to be beautiful it doesn't have to be pretty"?

What makes a garment 'beautiful' or 'ugly'? Who decides?

Can you think of a time when clothing made you feel confident, powerful, different, or more like yourself?

What was it about that outfit that promoted the feeling?





5. The Power of Clothes

The final room of the exhibition is dedicated to the theme *The Power of Clothes*. This space highlights fashion as a powerful medium for personal and political expression, showcasing how both Westwood and Kawakubo use design to articulate deeply individual voices and responses to the world around them. The works presented here convey a shift toward self-reflection and emotional urgency, revealing collections that respond to global issues, cultural anxieties and the human condition. Both designers use fashion to communicate messages about identity, activism and the future, affirming the role of the designer as a visionary commentator and the body as a site of powerful storytelling.

The exhibition suggests that designers can be 'visionary commentators'. What do you think this means?

If you were to design a garment to express something you believe in or care about, what message would you want it to send and how would you communicate that through the materials, shape or silhouette used?

Some of the looks in this room respond to global issues such as climate change, gender equality or social justice. How might clothing encourage people to think differently about these topics?

