

<https://design.artshub.com.au/news-article/reviews/design/gina-fairley/jenny-kee-and-linda-jackson-step-into-paradise-powerhouse-museum-nsw-259061>

DESIGN: ArtsHub

REVIEWS:

Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson: Step Into Paradise, Powerhouse Museum (NSW)

A great Australian story told through fashion that is a call for us to question our individual sense of identity today.



Linda Jackson and Jenny Kee (2019). Photo Hugh Stewart



GINA FAIRLEY

Wednesday 23 October, 2019

Everything about this exhibition is palpable. Walking through Powerhouse Museum's temporary galleries, *Step Into Paradise* washes over you in an incredible celebration of life, of colour, of creativity. It is seemingly endless in its gift to visitors; room after room unfolding another chapter in the careers of Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson.

It is the first major in-depth survey of the Australian designers and artists, with over 150 outfits, photographs, ephemera and stories that capture four decades of shaping an Australian narrative through fashion.

Even if you don't know your Rolodex of fashion's "who's who", this exhibition evokes memories of Australia branding itself in the 70s and 80s, a time that was perhaps less complicated and more embracing of life's good things.

In the true spirit of collaboration that captured a generation of designers in their wake, Kee and Jackson worked with Creative Director Tony Assness on the exhibition design. DJ Johnny Seymour and composer Nick Wales have curated the musical composition accompanying the exhibition, with lighting design by the award-winning Damian Cooper. And design collaborations with Australian label, Romance Was Born have also been included.

Creative Director Tony Assness said: 'It was important to us that *Step Into Paradise* was an experience for the visitors. We want them to feel the excitement and energy that Linda and Jenny felt in the frock salon and when they started the Fashion Follies parades. We also wanted to encapsulate their passion for the Australian environments which have inspired so many of their designs over the years.'



Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson: *Step Into Paradise*, Powerhouse Museum 2019 installation view. Photo ArtsHub.

Entering this exhibition is voyeuristic candy – blackened walls have peepholes into personal ephemera and snippets of history. It is a complete life-scape that is mapped, from young designers in a bustling hip London of the 60s rubbing shoulders with The Beatles to finding inspiration in collaborations that would shape a lifetime of making.

One of the highlights of the exhibition is a recreation of Jenny Kee's Flamingo Park Frock Salon originally located at Sydney's Strand arcade (opened 1973), where the creative partnership between Linda and Jenny began, and where they conceived their annual Flamingo Follies fashion parades.



Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson: Step Into Paradise, Powerhouse Museum 2019 installation view.
Photo ArtsHub.

The pop of colour sets the tone of an incredible era to follow. The viewer walks through a succession of themed rooms that capture the inspiration of the Great Barrier Reef, the Australian bush, opals and waratahs, the Opera House – the iconic gong of Australian identity that weaved their way into Kee and Jackson’s design – quiet literally, from knits to custom fabrics.

For those among you who know their fashion chronology, among the pieces on display are the suit from Karl Lagerfeld’s first Chanel collection in 1983 featuring Jenny Kee’s Black Opal print, Linda Jackson’s iconic flower-form 'Waratah' dress, Kee’s 'Blinky' koala jumper- a style famously worn by Diana, the Princess of Wales - a hand-painted Gladioli dress by Jackson, worn by Marcia Hines, the spectacular 'Frida Exotica' costume designed by Jenny Kee for the arrivals section of the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and Jackson’s 'Glacier gown and Penguin coat' worn in Antarctica by Nell Schofield for a Vogue Living assignment.



Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson: Step Into Paradise, Powerhouse Museum 2019 installation view.
Photo ArtsHub.

While for many *Step Into Paradise* might be a walk down memory lane, for a current generation it opens an interesting conversation about how we identify as Australians today? Have we become less nationalistic, less creative in our expression of our identity?

Anna Plunkett and Luke Sales, of label Romance Was Born, said of Linda and Jenny: '[They] transformed the cultural landscape with the sense of freedom, vibrancy and a passion for Australia which is seen in their work.

This exhibition is a great Australian story that is not exclusive to "fashion lovers", but rather is a celebration of life in our times that too often dwell on the darker side of contemporary society.

★★★★★ 5 out of 5 stars

[*Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson: Step Into Paradise*](#)

17 October 2019 - 18 February 2020

Powerhouse Museum

Exhibition Curator: Glynis Jones

Creative Director: Tony Assness

Exhibition Designer: Jemima Woo

Music Curation and Composition: Jonny Seymour and Nick Wales

Lighting Design: Damien Cooper

Included in admission to the Powerhouse museum