



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

2025 PAYPAL MELBOURNE FASHION FESTIVAL LAUNCH RECEPTION

Friday 21 February 2025

Acknowledgments

The Honourable Steve Dimopoulos MP, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, *representing the Premier of Victoria*, and **John Cardona**

Sam Groth MP, Deputy Leader of the Victorian Liberal Party, and Shadow Minister for Tourism, Sport, Events and Hospitality

The Honourable Ted Baillieu AO, former Premier of Victoria

Launa Inman, Chair of the Board

Caroline Ralphsmith, CEO, and **Dion Werbeloff**, and **Members of the Board**, PayPal Melbourne Fashion Festival

Members of the Consular Corps

Distinguished guests

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this House stands – the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people of the Eastern Kulin Nation – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

The floorboards beneath your feet hint at this room's original purpose – the hosting of grand, lavish balls.

A lot of things were different then – particularly the way people dressed.

A typical women's outfit to a Government House ball was heavy with stockings, petticoats, corsets, bustles and in some cases, metal, which held the large gowns in place.

Men weren't much better off, sporting weighty coats, tight vests, and mercury-tipped hats.

Looking out at this room tonight, I see a wide array of artistic expression and individuality.

When this ballroom was used for balls, that was less the case.

Styles, of course, change over time.

But today such changes are much more motivated by the “why” rather than the “what”.

In the final years of Coco Chanel’s life, she put words to this idea, stating that:

“Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only.

Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening.”

Back then, clothing was a strict marker of position and place, pushing conformity and compliance, as much as current ideas of beauty.

But slowly, we have moved away from that idea, with fashion becoming a point of individual expression, creativity and above all else – art.

And Victoria has played a pivotal role in this transformation.

We are proudly home to many fashion icons that have made, and continue to make, their mark.

In the rapid changes of the 1960s, a young Victorian became the first Australian to truly break into the international market.

Dubbed the ‘Golden Girl of Fashion’, Prue Acton, put youth, women and expression to the forefront.

This was a defining moment for Australian-designed fashion, emphasising its artistic core.

Prue described herself *“as an artist who chooses to work in the field of fashion.”*

Another trailblazer soon came on the scene, with Jenny Bannister highlighting a growing sense of individual identity along with a need for sustainability.

In the 1970s, before the term “upcycling” was even coined, Jenny began her career in fashion through transforming old denim into new clothing.

Bannister’s designs were bold and unconventional – resonating with Victoria’s growing subcultures who had broken free from traditional constraints.

It meant more than just the clothes on their back – it was a statement.

Fashion shifted from conforming to expectations to celebrating personal expression – culture no longer defined style; style began to define culture.

Your presence here tonight is a testament to this very transformation.

For more than thirty years, the Melbourne Fashion Festival has celebrated the artistry of fashion, placing creativity and identity centre stage.

Tonight, we not only reflect on where we’ve come from but where we are going.

And with every bold, creative decision, we continue to redefine not only what fashion is, but how we see ourselves.

I now invite Minister Dimopoulos to address us.