

STYLEUP

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& LIFESTYLE

Naarm calling

Indigenous designers
take Melbourne Fashion
Week by storm

Gammin Threads
Picture: Long Story Short

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Gammin Threads Picture: Aidan McCorry



Yapa Mali Picture: Aidan McCorry



Banbu on the runway. Picture: Gemma Thomas

Country-inspired creations dazzle

PHOEBE BLOGG

First Nations designers were centre stage on Melbourne Fashion Week's opening night earlier this month.

Showcasing their work on the week's all-Indigenous ganbu marra runway were established and emerging brands and designers including Banbu, Kaninda, Yanggurdi, King King Creative, Yapa Mali, Gamin Threads, Goompi's Girl, and Laundry Gallery.

The runway also profiled creations from leading Indigenous Art Centres, including work from the Yarrenty Arltre Artists and Tjarlirli & Kaltukatjara Art.

Multi-talented First Nations creative Lindyn Rowland took on the role of creative director and runway stylist, with Karinda Mutabazi as consultant and mentor.

Known for his down-to-earth nature, creative drive and exquisite styling choices, Rowland was the perfect fit when it came to who would lead the creative direction of the popular runway.

"I have walked in the ganbu marra runway . . . and now I'm styling the show. I truly manifested this," Rowland told Style Up.

"I believe as a stylist you're booked to bring your personal flavour to the show, and of course I have no plans leaving my 'Concrete Cowboy' era, so that is exactly what this year's show is."

From cowboy-esque jumpsuits, to floor grazing sequined maxi dresses, in 2025 the ganbu marra runway showcased a slice of everything.

While all designers demonstrated their unique style, it was

clear they shared a passion for creating garments that fused elements of Country into their designs.

"I like to think of Banbu as the 'out-there cousin' among First Nations designers — it reflects a bit of how I feel in my own family: bold, playful, and a little unexpected," Banbu designer Brooke McGlone said.

"Each piece has movement and personality, letting people express themselves while staying comfortable and effortless. It's contemporary style with meaning, made to feel authentic and individual.

"There's a lot of love that goes into





Photography by **Long Story Short**

every stage of the process, from sketching to sewing, to make sure everything feels cohesive and true to Banbu.”

Aside from ganbu marra, First Nations designers also took part in several runway shows during Melbourne Fashion Week.

Clair Helen and Ngali's designers were displayed on the Opulent Tastes runway while the Fashion X Music runway (presented by Collarts) featured designers Grace Lillian Lee and Sarrita King.

“It is always exciting to be in Melbourne during MFW and

showing as part of the program makes it even more exciting and special. I love the atmosphere and the build as we get the week underway,” Ngali designer Denni Francisco told Style Up.

Taking place from October 20 to 26 under this year's theme,

Come As You Are, in 2025 Melbourne Fashion Week invited guests from far and wide to be part of the citywide celebration of self-expression.

This year the program featured six premium runways at stand-out locations across the city. Showcasing emerging,

independent and established designers, it continued its focus on sustainability and inclusivity whilst celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures.

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Torch offers bright light after prison

JARRED CROSS

Palawa artist Tye had barely picked up a brush 12 months ago, but as of Friday his work hangs on display and for sale in Future Dreaming, an annual exhibition featuring pieces by First Nations artists incarcerated in Victorian prisons, presented by The Torch.

The not-for-profit organisation and project, established in 2011, delivers Indigenous arts programs in prisons and post-release across the State. Artists keep 100 per cent of profits from sales.

Over 200 works, created in 15 prisons across Victoria this year, are hung on the walls of their Naarm gallery for the exhibition.

It's a representation of the artists' vision for themselves — personally, spiritually, for their relationships, systems ranging from politics to social and the environment — their future after emerging from the prison

system. "When I imagine what my future holds, I always think of security and protection for the people I love," said Wallumattagal artist Karlie, whose art features in Future Dreaming.

"The geckos symbolise past loved ones in my family and they often show up after funerals. I like to believe in my future my ancestors are looking down on my family, keeping us safe and helping us pave a happy future beyond prison."

For Tye, The Torch gave him more than purpose to pass time while incarcerated, it helped him further connect with his culture, he told National Indigenous Times, and look ahead to reconnecting with his "rock", his dog. "She's nine years old now. She's been there through lots of times with me, through the hard times, good times," he said.

"Finally connecting with my culture — Palawa ... I'm hoping to keep going and keep learning about it and hopefully can



The Torch arts officer Matty Chilly at Future Dreaming. Picture: Jarred Cross

keep going with my art work." Matty Chilly visits male prisons around the State and works with program participants as an arts officer with The Torch.

Originally from Mildura — with Wemba-Wemba, Neri-Neri, Yiti-Yiti, Mutti-Mutti, Wuradjuri, Yorta-Yorta, Watti-Watti, Barapa-Barapa, Gubbi Gubbi and Maori family connections — Mr Chilly is a multidisciplinary artist,

His journey in art, with knotting textile works, started young, taught by his parents,

Aunties and Uncles. For some of those he works with, it's their first introduction to art. For others he said it's about helping them find their "muscle memory".

"You can see, over time, their change in development of their styles, their techniques, their just overall content on the canvas," he said.

"They're getting that feel for the brush on canvas."

Mr Chilly says it's a privilege to see the relationships and see something develop in many of the men.

"All they know is the four walls. We're making impacts for these guys in their lives, with their art, with opening their eyes to a new type of path ... to make their future a little brighter. I see that happen. It's very important."

The Torch identifies an 11 per cent reduction in recidivism as a result of the program, Mr Chilly said.

Future Dreaming opened October 24 and will be held at 146 Elgin Street in Carlton for one month. All works are also available to purchase online.

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Empowerment comes home



Billie Jean Hamlet and a participant from the fashion workshop.

NATASHA CLARK

International model and proud Walmajarri, Gooniyandi, Wajarri and Yamatji woman Billie Jean Hamlet says she wishes the After the Flood Fashion Project had existed when she was a girl growing up in Fitzroy Crossing.

The remote town is around 400km east of Broome, in WA's Kimberley region.

"Having an all-female space where girls can express themselves without judgment is so important. I would have loved something like that when I was growing up," she says.

Billie recently returned home with Brodie George, founder of Jalayimiya swimwear, and Camilla Sawford, founder of Litiyalla earrings, to run two days of fashion and wellbeing workshops for local teenage girls at The Night Space, operated by Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation.

The After the Flood program was initiated by Marra Worra Worra and jointly funded by the Federal and WA governments through disaster recovery funding arrangements.

In January 2023, record flooding tore through the Fitzroy Valley, inundating communities and cutting key crossings. Although the bridge has been rebuilt, many families say the emotional fallout for young people has lingered.

Centred on building confidence, femininity, cultural safety and practical skills, the sessions drew 15 girls on day one and 18 on day two, all aged 10-17.

What looked like beauty basics was used deliberately as care and repair. While Billie taught skincare and make-up, every mask and brushed brow moved beyond pampering, into restoration, healing, and the building of self-esteem.

"Doing the girls' make-up, I couldn't help but look at their beautiful little faces and wonder about their stories and what they're exposed to," she



Pictures: Marra Worra Worra

said. "I definitely saw myself in each and every one of them — and some were even my relatives."

Growing up in Fitzroy Crossing raised her in culture, but also in "hard truths": domestic violence, substance use in the community, and tough, precarious housing.

"I don't think a lot of people realise, but growing up in an Indigenous, remote community is actually quite challenging. But there are also so many beautiful parts — like being connected to nature and culture, and being surrounded by your family," she said.

Coming back was confronting but cathartic for Billie. "There was an intention to help the girls feel beautiful and uplifted, but for me it was also about reconnecting with my inner child," Ms Hamlet said. "I've come back with a sense of peace and joy and feel stronger than ever."

The desire to provide a female safe space has long driven her.

"In a town like Fitzroy there's not much for girls to do unless they're sporty. The boys have footy, fishing, hunting, but the girls didn't really have spaces to feel beautiful or express themselves.

"That's why this project was so important, to show them they can do 'girly' things, feel confident and express their femininity freely."

It's a sentiment shared by Ms George, a proud

Walmajarri, Gooniyandi woman whose swimwear brand is rooted in female empowerment.

"I think girls in Fitzroy miss out on a lot. There are a lot of programs — particularly for boys and sport. I don't think there are many programs specifically for girls," she said.

"It's important to get people like myself who are in business — and I've got a background in beauty — to show them they can go down a few different paths. It doesn't have to be one path."

For proud Gooniyandi and Kija woman Camilla the tone in the room mattered as much as the techniques.

"I really stamped out the negative talk," she says.

"As Aboriginal people we like to make fun of each other - it can be a love language — but I said no: 'What do you think about her hair?' and changed the narrative to positive."

That insistence on self-respect is culturally significant, says Ms George.

In November the trio will return to Fitzroy Crossing for the After the Flood Fashion Show, where the girls' creations will shimmer under the evening light on the Old Crossing Bridge - the same bridge that once marked the height of the floods.

Head of Community Programs at MWWAC, Nicola Angell, said the centre's youth programs provide a platform for community-led projects.

Rapper sees second album as artistic statement

JOSEPH GUENZLER

ARIA Award-winning Yolnu artist Baker Boy is returning with his second studio album DJANDJAY — a deeply personal and culturally grounded follow-up to his acclaimed debut Gela.

Out now via Island Records/UMA, DJANDJAY marks a new chapter for the proud Yolnu musician.

Where Gela introduced audiences to Baker Boy's vibrant energy and party anthems, the new record reveals a more mature and layered side tackling resilience, identity and growth.

"It was a lot of pressure for me to try and top Gela," he told National Indigenous Times.

"The difference between Gela and DJANDJAY is more about storytelling



Baker Boy's second studio album is out now. Pic: Sulaiman Enayatzada

and me being able to be vulnerable. At the end of the day, I'm human."

The album takes its name from a powerful source of inspiration.

DJANDJAY is both the name of a Yolnu spirit, an octopus that guides souls forward and Baker Boy's late grandmother, who played a central

role in shaping his family's relationship with music and performance.

"Naming this album after my grandmother was because she was the pillar of the family," he said.

"She was always telling everyone to get up and dance and not be

shame. She would get up with you and do the dance, and that's something I inherited from her."

That spirit of movement and connection is deeply woven into Baker Boy's identity.

Hip-hop and performance were part of his upbringing, with his father and uncle once touring remote communities under the name Baker Boys, a name that would later become his own.

"I grew up around traditional dancing but also hip-hop, so it's always been in my bones," he said.

"Becoming a musician was just part of it, it was already there."

While Gela was filled with upbeat tracks designed for the dancefloor, DJANDJAY tackles deeper themes, from the fallout of the Voice referendum to racism and the

pressures of public life. Baker Boy said this evolution was about showing the full picture of who he is.

On tracks such as Lightning featuring REDD, Baker Boy raps in three languages: Yolnu Matha, English, and Burarra, his mother's language from Maningrida.

"In Lightning I'm rapping in three languages, going back and forward," he said.

"It's one of the most evolved sounds sonically, and I finally get to share my mother's language on the album."

Baker Boy hopes listeners will see 'DJANDJAY' as more than just an album, but as a complete artistic statement.

Baker Boy will take DJANDJAY on the road in 2026 with a national headline tour.

Whiskey's work to go on display

PHOEBE BLOGG

The work of Yankunytjatjara artist Kaylene Whiskey will be celebrated in the National Portrait Gallery's major summer exhibition from November 15-March 9.

"Super Kaylene Whiskey" brings together Whiskey's joyous portraits of pop culture icons amid everyday life in Indulkana.

Whiskey's celebrated paintings foreground her traditional Anangu culture alongside depictions of her heroes – Cher, Wonder Woman, Tina Turner and, notably, Dolly Parton. It's a world where local plants and Coca Cola commingle, where Whiskey and her idols hunt and collect bush tucker, and every scene is composed to soundtracks of classic rock, pop and country music.

Radiating elation and irreverent humour yet also candid about the realities of personal experience, Whiskey's

representations of First Nations culture are empowering, captivating and enduring.

"I'm so happy that my exhibition Super Kaylene Whiskey is opening at the National Portrait Gallery in November. You can see all my artworks come together for one big special show – it will be like a big party celebrating kungka kunpu (strong women), friends, family, culture and, of course, Dolly Parton," Whiskey said.

"I want to share a peek into Kaylene's world with visitors to the exhibition, and I hope it will make you laugh and smile . . . and maybe even dance and sing too."

National Portrait Gallery director Bree Pickering said Whiskey was among the most exciting contemporary artists working in Australia today.

"Every detail in her portraits signals what matters to her, her passions, interests and strong



Flying over Indulkana by Kaylene Whiskey.

sense of self, and are always delivered with humour and lightness," she said.

Exhibition curator April Phillips said Whiskey's work typified the potential of First Nations portraiture to explore identity from the perspective of lived experience.

"Kaylene's portraits represent her, often on Country, and within the contexts of her culture, placed in unfolding moments across time," she said.

"Then, she takes her locality a step further, to include the glittering world of celebrity, universal brands and a sprinkling of emoji-like

symbolism for good measure.

"Kaylene is dancing in many worlds and invites us to join her."

Whiskey works out of Iwantja Arts, an Indigenous-owned and governed Aboriginal art centre in the Indulkana Community of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in the north-west of South Australia.

A three-time Archibald Prize finalist and winner of the 2018 Sulman Prize, Whiskey's collaborations with knitwear label Wah-Wah and Mecca and the National Gallery of Victoria have seen her fast become a household name in Australia.

Her now famous 2020 work, Dolly Visits Indulkana, was projected on to the sails of the Sydney Opera House for Badu Gili: Wonder Women, in collaboration with the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2021.

Super Kaylene Whiskey will include a new commission made specifically for the exhibition, the epic interactive installation Kaylene TV, commissioned for the 2024 Biennale of Sydney, and her renowned 2021 painting Seven Sistas Story.

Super Kaylene Whiskey will be accompanied by a program of special events.

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