

Media Release

national
wool
museum



CITY OF GREATER
GEELONG

Friday 16 May 2025

Emerging Designers Lead the Charge in Sustainable Fashion: Finalists Announced for the \$10,000 Prize

The City of Greater Geelong's, National Wool Museum has revealed the 20 finalists for the highly anticipated We the Makers Sustainable Fashion Prize 2025, spotlighting the next generation of fashion leaders who dare to design differently.

This year's finalists represent a powerful blend of creativity, innovation, and a deep commitment to sustainability. Each designer brings bold ideas to life through garments that challenge convention, revive traditional techniques, and turn discarded materials into visionary fashion.

The competition attracted over 150 entries from 13 countries and from every state and territory across Australia — including 10 from the Geelong region, cementing the city's growing status as a global hub for sustainable design.

From the UK and Europe to Asia, the US, and back home in Australia, the entrants pushed boundaries and embraced bold, purpose-driven design. Designers used natural dyes, slow fashion techniques, and upcycled textiles to reimagine what sustainable fashion can look like in 2025 and beyond.

The 20 shortlisted garments will go on display at the National Wool Museum, Geelong from **14 June to 30 November 2025**. The winners will be revealed at a special exhibition opening and awards event on Friday 13 June.

Prizes include:

- National Wool Museum Designer of the Year Award – \$10,000 prize and acquisition of the winning garment into the Museum's permanent collection.
- UNESCO City of Design People's Choice Award – \$2,000 prize, with voting open to all exhibition visitors and the winner announced during Geelong Design Week 2025.



ALICE PÄRTELPOEG, Estonia, OF SCARCITY

National Wool Museum

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ISOBEL HYLAND, Melbourne VIC Australia, Pivot City Punk

An expert panel of international fashion and sustainability leaders will judge the shortlisted entries, ensuring the winners reflect global standards in ethical and innovative fashion.

Visitors can take part too — by voting for their favourite design, they help shape the future of fashion through the People’s Choice Award.

Held every two years, We the Makers is a major event on the National Wool Museum’s calendar and a cornerstone of Geelong’s role as a UNESCO City of Design.

The prize champions emerging designers with less than 10 years of industry experience, offering them a global platform and meaningful career support.

We the Makers doesn't just celebrate fashion — it redefines it. It shines a light on designers who prioritise ethics, creativity, and material consciousness. These finalists aren't just making clothes — they're building a better industry.

Be part of the movement. Explore the exhibition, cast your vote, and discover the trailblazers shaping fashion’s sustainable future.

JUDGES:

Shonae Hobson, Independent Curator and Arts Consultant: A Southern Kaantju, Umpila, and Kuuku Ya’u woman from Coen, Cape York Peninsula, she is a leading curator of First Nations art, fashion, and design. As Curator of First Nations Art at the National Gallery of Victoria (2021–23), she launched the NGV’s first Indigenous Fashion Commission, supporting First Nations artists in fashion and textiles. Previously, as Bendigo Art Gallery’s inaugural First Nations Curator (2018–21), she curated *Piinpi: Contemporary Indigenous Fashion*, Australia’s first major survey of Indigenous fashion with national and international impact.

Circe Henestrosa, Head, School of Fashion LASALLE College of the Arts, University of the Arts Singapore: A Mexican fashion curator, Circe explores tangible and intangible heritage to shape new design languages. She curated *Appearances Can Be Deceiving: The Dresses of Frida Kahlo* (2012) at The Frida Kahlo Museum, co-curated *Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* (2018) at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and curated *Frida Kahlo: In Her Own Image* (2025) at Bendigo Art Gallery. Her work critically examines identity, tradition, and innovation in fashion curation.

Sai-Wai Foo, Visual Artist and PayPal Melbourne Fashion Festival Programming & Events Executive: A Malaysian-born Chinese artist based in Naarm/Melbourne, Sai-Wai integrates fashion design techniques, finishes, and materials into her practice. As a Programmer for PayPal Melbourne Fashion Festival, she leads the Independent Programme, showcasing emerging designers, small-scale makers, graduates, and community organizations. The programme examines fashion’s cultural role through workshops, exhibitions, performances, independent runways, screenings, and talks, fostering innovation and dialogue within the industry.

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QUOTES:

“The Sustainable Fashion Prize is a powerful example of how Geelong is building on its rich textile legacy while embracing the future of sustainable design. As a UNESCO City of Design, we are proud to support this important program that connects our City’s historic roots in textile manufacturing with a new wave of global innovation. This prize is a celebration of creativity, sustainability, and our ongoing commitment to shaping a more sustainable future for the fashion industry.” Mayor Stretch Kontelj OAM

“We the Makers celebrates the bold vision and ingenuity of emerging designers who are reimagining fashion for a more sustainable future. This prize not only recognises creative excellence but also champions the urgent shift toward ethical, slow, and circular fashion. The winning design will be acquired into the Museum’s permanent collection, preserving a piece of this transformative movement for generations to come. The National Wool Museum is proud to provide a global platform for designers who are not just making clothes — they’re shaping the future of the industry.” Padraic Fisher, National Wool Museum Director

UNESCO Creative City of Design

As Australia’s first (and only) Creative City of Design, Geelong is a member of the UNESCO Creative City Network. Geelong has a long and proud history as a creative city and a leader in design. On 31 October 2017, Geelong was designated a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). The City of Design designation is about using creativity and innovation to build more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive communities.

Media Contact: Andrea Cross, andrea.cross@geelongcity.vic.gov.au 03 52724878/ 0468 572 889 | **Interviews by arrangement:** Senior Curator, Josephine Rout and finalist and former Geelong resident Isobel Hyland.

WE THE MAKERS SUSTAINABLE FASHION PRIZE 2025 SHORTLIST

NATHANIEL YOUKHANA, Sydney NSW Australia
Untitled

SASHA MATTEUCCI, Lismore NSW Australia
Audio Wave Weaving Wearable

CHRISTINA SUNTOVSKI, Point Cook VIC Australia
Dressing Dance Performance

SHIVA YOUSEFPOURSHAH RIVAR, Sydney NSW Australia
UNBOUND

CHRISTOPHER HRYSANIDIS, Melbourne VIC Australia
Lilies

SILVIA ACIEN, England
Freckle

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INDIGO STUART, Brisbane QLD Australia
Inheritance

ALICE PÄRTELPOEG, Estonia
OF SCARCITY

ABHA GUPTA, Melbourne VIC Australia
16o8

Corin Corcoran, Melbourne VIC Australia
sustain our stains

ELISE MASCIA, USA
Sankofa

LIAM HOLMES, Melbourne VIC Australia
Saturns Return i

HAYLEY (MOOSE) VAN REE, Melbourne VIC Australia
Head Over Heels

KATYA EKIMIAN, USA
Heritage Wool Evening Gown

ISABELLA CHARLES, Gold Coast QLD Australia
The Hunter

ETHAN BERGERSEN, Sydney NSW Australia
ECDYSIS

MAX BELL, Melbourne VIC Australia
Transfiguration

ISOBEL HYLAND, Melbourne VIC Australia
Pivot City Punk

SHERRY JOHNSTONE, Warrnambool VIC Australia
Coastal Country

CHENCHEN YU, Japan
heymein100years

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