

A new show at the V&A documents how Kylie Minogue used fashion to transform herself from soap-meets-saccharine girl-next-door into the ultimate showgirl. By Tamsin Blanchard

The thing people always say about Kylie Minogue when they see her in the flesh is how tiny she is – even in her Manolo Blahnik heels. Her proportions are doll-like: perfectly formed and in miniature. But her onstage persona – and her status as a fashion icon – is as big as they come. For most designers, she is a dream, their very own Barbie come to life.

What sets Kylie apart from the dancing armies of pop princesses is her dedication to creating an overall image, from the choreography, including collaborations with Rafael Bonachela and Akram Khan, to the outfit she performs it in. She is far from the typical manufactured pop star of today. Her vision and her image are created in conjunction with her creative director and stylist William Baker. Between them, they dream up stories and narratives to accompany every song. It is the resulting costumes and outfits that are the

subject of a fascinating new exhibition at the V&A. According to Baker, who became Kylie's creative director in 1999 after he met her when he was working for Vivienne Westwood, everyone breathed a huge sigh of relief when she decided to donate the contents of her considerable wardrobe to the Melbourne Arts Centre's Performing Arts Collection, where it was on show before coming to London. At last, they could all be gathered up from storage on either side of the world, and looked after properly for future generations to enjoy.

Victoria Broackes, head of exhibitions and design at the Theatre Museum, was responsible for bringing the exhibition to London. She worked closely with Baker and Kylie's creative team to produce a backstage area – complete with a reconstruction the star's dressing room. "It looks like she has just left it to go on stage, with fan letters, lipstick, tissues and her chair

Below left: silk screen-printed dress with fitted bodice and random fabric swatches and trim; pink and black tulle underskirt. Designed by Kylie Minogue, Frank Strachan and Lisa King. Made by Ed Meedham. © Darenote Ltd (2004). Right: Enjoy Yourself tour, 1990. Black lycra catsuit with sequin Mondrian effect patches, by Ian McMough. Far right: Intimate and Live tour, 1998. Pink, silver and white sequin, bugle bead and fringe corset, by Kylie Minogue and William Baker. Made by Suzanne Burgess. Gifts of Kylie Minogue (2004), Performing Arts Collection, Melbourne Arts Centre



with its sheepskin cover," says Broackes, who went to see the real thing in Wembley in January. The idea behind re-creating both backstage and the stage itself (this section of the show has been built in its own sealed area so that the music and cheers can be given authentic sound levels) is to give visitors an insight into the whole performance experience – not just the clothes and Kylie ephemera, but the atmosphere of the star's world on stage, including the behind-the-scenes costume changes when she has 40 seconds and four people ready to rip off the Velcro fastenings of one outfit and dress her in the next.

Once worn for a particular tour or even a single event, many of these costumes are mothballed and locked away, never to be worn again. Every tour requires a new set of costumes, as we saw in October when Kylie wore a mix of John Galliano showgirl plumes and Gareth Pugh club kid gold for the opening of her long-awaited Homecoming tour in Sydney. This is a collection that deserves to be conserved as an important part not just of Kylie's story, but of recent fashion history. As well as featuring some of the big names of fashion, including Dolce & Gabbana, Pucci and Julien Macdonald, she has always been supportive of the young, raw talent, particularly coming out of London. Her stage outfits have been made by some of British fashion's influential but lesser known insiders, such as Judy Blame, who made a belt out of bicycle chain and tassels for the Money Can't Buy concert in 2003; Stevie Stewart, of Bodymap, who has done several collaborations with William Baker; or Fee Doran, who has designed some of Kylie's most memorable dresses,

# WHAT KYLIE WORE NEXT

