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ART SPECIAL

In conversation with

# JENNY KEE + LINDA JACKSON

The iconic design and art duo sit down with Saskia Tillers ahead of their exhibition opening

**MC:** Your exhibition *Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson: Step Into Paradise* explores your creative partnership over the past 40 years. Take us back to the day you first met ...

**LJ:** It was at an exhibition in Sydney, and we just stood there and looked at each other.

**JK:** It was creative love at first sight. She looked straight out of a '50s movie, and designed and made these exquisite clothes. There was an instant camaraderie. When we were together it was like we were in a bubble – we only vibed with each other.

**MC:** From your infamous liaison with John Lennon to selling clothes to Mick Jagger in London, Jenny, what was it like being in the epicentre of a legendary era?

**JK:** It was a completely unique situation because there will never be another Chelsea Antiques Market [in London], where we dressed up in vintage Balenciaga and Fortuny with the most fabulously creative people. [But] when I came back to Australia afterwards, it had the energy of a country that was about to happen – so I never looked back.

**MC:** Jenny, you opened Flamingo Park Frock Salon in Sydney's Strand Arcade in 1973, which stocked many of Linda's designs. What were those early days like?

**LJ:** We'd come from travelling the world in opposite directions, so all the things we'd been inspired by joined up.

We weren't the type of people who wanted to have a big business. [It was] personal, the way we'd greet people, make friends with everyone.

**JK:** It was an amazing hub that attracted all the actresses, artists, musicians, singers and film directors. People flocked [in] not just to see what beautiful things we were making, but [also for] the atmosphere – even [to hear] what music we were listening to. We set trends.

**MC:** Jenny, you've said before that growing up as a mixed-race child in Australia helped you learn to embrace your differences.

**JK:** It did, because I [grew] up in a racist country. My Chinese relatives wanted to fit in. But when I hit puberty, I thought, "I am different and I want to be different." There was strength in not being like anyone else. I was going

to leave my mark – "I'll show you!" I had that drive. I knew this face was something people weren't going to forget.

**MC:** In 1982, a photograph of Princess Diana wearing your "Koala" jumper went viral, and the following year, Karl Lagerfeld used your opal designs for 65 garments in his first Chanel show. What was it like being catapulted onto the international stage?

**JK:** That was a big moment, because Princess Diana was the princess dream of all. She looked so gorgeous – I loved her being in my knit. The whole thing with Karl Lagerfeld, well, equally he was transfixed by [our designs]. People were falling in love with Australia, discovering it for the first time through film and music, and we were sort of pioneering that discovery.

**MC:** You were ahead of the times in your approach to sustainable



FROM TOP Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson in hand-painted outfits by artist David McDiarmid; inside the Flamingo Park Frock Salon, Strand Arcade, Sydney, in 1976; in animal print, circa 1975; and the duo wear Jackson's Bondi Blue and Opera House outfits at the Bondi Baths in the 1970s. OPPOSITE PAGE Jackson and Kee today.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY HUGH STEWART/POWERHOUSE MUSEUM; WELLIAM YANG; FRANK MOORE; ANNIE MOON



"MISTAKES ARE FABULOUS. THERE CAN'T BE ANY REGRETS"

– Jenny Kee

Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson: *Step Into Paradise is at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney until March 22, 2020.*



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