



MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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NGV announces ball inspired by Melbourne-born queer icon Leigh Bowery and further legacy projects in celebration of landmark exhibition *QUEER*



19 August 2022: In celebration of the NGV's landmark exhibition *QUEER: Stories from the NGV Collection*, and to ensure its legacy is carried into the future, the NGV today announced a series of community-centred collection and programming commitments, including the inaugural *Bowery Ball* and the Minus18 Queer Formal.

Since his death, Leigh Bowery's (1961-1994) legacy continues to be celebrated through club nights, queer balls, and popular culture, both around Australia and the world. From 2023, the NGV will host Melbourne's own annual queer performance art event named in honour of Bowery, a Melbourne-born transformative queer icon who remains widely celebrated for his

experimental and subversive approach to fashion design and performance art. The *Bowery Ball* will be an eclectic and dynamic celebration of queer fashion and performance, featuring some of Melbourne's most exciting and up-and-coming queer talent.

Born in Sunshine in Melbourne's western suburbs, Bowery transformed the international club and ball room scene with his iconic and often controversial costumes and performances. A performance artist, nightclub impresario, artistic muse, and queer icon, Bowery's creative outputs were famously fluid.

The *Bowery Ball* is one of the many long-term legacies of the landmark exhibition *QUEER: Stories from the NGV Collection*. It sits alongside continuing partnerships and future collaborations with leading queer and LGBTIQ+ organisations, including programming partnerships with Midsumma, the Australian Queer Archives, and Minus18.

In 2022, the NGV hosted the Minus18 Queer Formal, an annual event offering a safe and celebratory space for LGBTIQ+ young people to connect to community and be their true selves. The NGV will again host this important event in 2023.

The *QUEER* exhibition also provided the institution with the opportunity to reflect on the strengths, gaps and idiosyncrasies of the NGV Collection. The NGV is committed to actively acquiring and commissioning works by queer artists, particularly trans, non-binary and gender diverse artists, as well as integrating these works into future exhibitions and collection displays.

Minister for Creative Industries Steve Dimopoulos said: 'From Sunshine to the world, Leigh Bowery was a one-of-a-kind creative who made an enduring impact on queer style and performance across the globe. Inspired by his ground-breaking, boundary-pushing creativity, NGV's *Bowery Ball* is a chance to celebrate the creativity, vibrancy and resilience of Victoria's diverse LGBTIQ+ community.'

Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV said: 'The *QUEER* exhibition ignited and strengthened many close connections and partnerships between the NGV and the LGBTIQ+ community at large. We remain committed to our vision of inclusivity and look forward to working with our valued partners on the exhibition's legacy and new initiatives into the future.'

'Celebrating Leigh Bowery's prolific and unbridled creative outputs throughout the 1980s and 90s, *The Bowery Ball* will invite audiences to appreciate queer identity and performance art in dynamic and thought-provoking ways,' said Ellwood.

ABOUT LEIGH BOWERY

Born in Sunshine in Melbourne's western suburbs, Bowery moved to London in 1980 at the age of 19 and quickly gained renown in the underground club scene with his performances that rejected conventions of identity, gender and sexuality. In 1985, he opened Taboo nightclub in London's Leicester Square. While it was not an exclusively queer venue, Taboo attracted a predominantly queer crowd, largely due to Bowery's interest in experimental fashion and performance. Simultaneously, his striking and larger-than-life designs attracted critical acclaim in the fashion industry and in international media. In 1990, he art directed and appeared in Boy George's music video *Generations of Love*. Bowery went on to form two bands, Raw Sewage with Stella Stein and Sheila Tequila, and Minty with Richard Torry, Nicola Bateman and Matthew Glamorre. Shortly after his marriage to Nicola Bateman, in 1994, Bowery died at the age of 33 from AIDS-related complications.

"If clothes are going to mean anything they've got to threaten or challenge. If they have that edge they should provoke people into thinking ... I don't want the things I make to be merely flamboyant; that's been done before. I want them to have that edge, to be absurd or ridiculous." – Leigh Bowery

ABOUT QUEER: STORIES FROM THE NGV COLLECTION, 10 MARCH – 21 AUGUST 2022

On display at NGV International until 21 August 2022, *QUEER: Stories from the NGV Collection* has been a landmark exhibition that explores the NGV Collection through a queer lens and celebrates the rich, diverse and sometimes untold stories that emerge. Spanning five gallery spaces and featuring around 400 artworks traversing timelines and geographies, the exhibition has been the most historically expansive thematic presentation of artworks relating to queer stories ever mounted in an Australian art institution.

The artworks in the exhibition reflect the multifaceted meaning and usage of the word 'queer': as an expression of sexuality and gender, as a philosophy, as a political movement, as a sensibility, as an attitude that defies fixed definition, as well as the impossibility of a single term to capture the multitude of lived experiences. Many of the artworks included in the exhibition are by artists who identify as queer; some are by artists who lived in times when such identification was not possible; and some works are not by a queer artist but have a connection to queer histories.

The exhibition reflected on the gaps, strengths and idiosyncrasies of the NGV Collection, as well as broader concerns around collecting and exhibiting art works relating to queer ideas and identities in museum contexts.

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For more information visit: <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/bowery-ball/>

Image credit:

Leigh Bowery at the opening of the Lucian Freud exhibition, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1993
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IMAGES: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/2smh7aq7k0t8yqo/AABL2Zh4a82dAmlSqQMvu0u7a?dl=0>

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The Bowery Ball is generously supported by:

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