

Citation - Catherine Martin AC

9 October 2025, 2.30pm

Presiding Pro-Chancellor, it is with great pleasure that I present to you Catherine Martin AC for the award of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa), in recognition of her extraordinary and enduring contribution to the Australian and International film industry as a designer and producer.

Catherine is a visionary creative force whose work has shaped the visual language of modern cinema. Over a career spanning more than three decades, Catherine has brought to life some of the most iconic films through her meticulous costumes, set and production designs. She has collaborated with many different designers and commercial companies, sharing her creative genius with the world in many ways. Her collaborations with Baz Luhrmann, her husband and chief collaborator, have produced visionary reinterpretations of classic works that have gained worldwide acclaim.

Born in Linfield, Sydney, Catherine's fascination with vintage clothing and museum costume displays began in childhood. She attended North Sydney Girls High School, an institution that provided her with the opportunity to begin her education in the creative arts. Whilst still at school, Catherine worked as an usherette at the independent family-owned cinema, Roseville Theatre. Here, Catherine's interest in the stage, costume and design flourished. At just 15 years of age, she created her own dress patterns inspired by blockbuster childhood films such as *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*.

Catherine studied visual arts at Sydney College of the Arts, pattern cutting at East Sydney Technical College, and graduated with a Diploma in Design from the National Institute of Dramatic Art in 1988. It was through an introduction by Elizabeth Buthcher of the National Institute of Dramatic Art that she was introduced to Baz Luhrmann who was looking for designers to collaborate with on his bicentennial projects and thus beginning a lifelong creative partnership.

Some of Catherine's earliest work experiences were designing sets and costumes for theatre and opera productions. These included Luhrmann's *Lake Lost* in 1988 and the Belvoir Street Production of *Diary of a Madman*. Their breakthrough came with *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), which won Catherine two Australian Film Institute Awards for Best Production Design and Best Costume Design as well as corresponding BAFTA's.

Catherine's artistry has mesmerised audiences and critics alike, winning four academy awards, six BAFTAs and a Tony Award. As the designer and co-producer of Luhrmann's, *Romeo + Juliet*, she was applauded for her unique and daring approach to the Shakespearean classic. The feature film *Moulin Rouge* received eight nominations at the 74th Academy Awards and went on to win Best Art Direction and Best Costume Design with Angus Strathie, with their costumes being described as a glorious mix of historical detail and fictional extravagance.

Catherine created sets for Luhrmann's Broadway adaptation of *La Bohème*, which earned her a Tony Award for Best Scenic Design of a Musical. Catherine expertly and meticulously brings stories to life through her designs and collaborative visions. This was no different for her more recent films, *Australia*, *The Great Gatsby* and *Elvis*, which all reflect her excellence and unparalleled talent as a designer.

Beyond film, Catherine's creative influence extends to fashion and interior design. She has collaborated with brands like Prada, Miu Miu, Tiffany & Co., Mokum, Designer Rugs, and Anthropologie. Her Elvis-inspired textile collections and guest editorships for *Vogue Australia* showcased her versatility and flair.

Catherine was honoured as the 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award recipient at the G-Day USA Gala. In 2022, she received the Longford Lyell Award, the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts' most prestigious accolade and in 2025, was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia, one of the nation's highest honours, recognising her eminent service to the arts.

Catherine Martin's legacy is one of bold creativity, collaborative excellence, and cultural impact. Her journey, from a curious child sketching dresses to a globally celebrated designer, is a testament to the power of imagination, dedication, and artistic courage.

Catherine's longstanding commitment and sensational contribution to the field has inspired many others. Currently, the most awarded Australian in Oscar history, Presiding Pro-Chancellor, I present Catherine Martin AC for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) and invite you to confer the degree upon her.