

7

Who Does What: The Costume Team

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

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SPENCER HORNE, Fashion Stylist and Costume Designer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 230 of *Get into Costume* book)

'Plough your own path and stick to your guns, whether you want to go into film, commercials or fashion. I never had a vision of what I wanted to do, but don't use that against yourself, be open to everything that comes along.'



Figure E7.1 'England Sinks'. Visually captivating pieces like this are fuelled by the collective vision of the director/photographer and the designer to bring them to the stage, the screen or the page. Costumes designed by Spencer Horne, flowers by Pal Griffiths for *Vogue* (2016). © Tim Walker Studio

◀ **What is it about spontaneity in design?**

Spontaneity has happened over time. I used to be much more rigid, but now I'm more relaxed. I always know that we can make it work on the day and sometimes it's better to do that. Sometimes I go to set with

a load of pom-poms and frilly bits, and I've absolutely no idea what I'm going to do! Then it all just happens on the day. With the paper dress, we kind of knew what the result needed to be. I'd recently done some mock-ups gathering paper, ripping and frilling it, and



Figure E7.2 When costume and fashion merge so successfully, it goes to show that there are no creative boundaries. Venezuelan musician Arca, *Vogue* (Mexico), December 2021. Costume designer: Spencer Horne. © Tim Walker Studio

◀ because it's all so light, you can do thousands of frills, and they've all got ripped edges. It's just gorgeous.

I'm visionary, I suppose. That's the way I approach things, coming up with ideas for fashion shoots. If something isn't working, I'll be running into the back room to do something else. It's a case of, 'Hang on, give me ten minutes,' and I run off, go through all my bags, put it under the sewing machine, and 'Here you go!' I love all that. However prepared you are for the shoot, you're never totally prepared. You need to have flexibility, and if it doesn't have to last forever, use that to your advantage.

I always want to do a really good job and to deliver something that is my own. But at the end of the day, you must learn to step back: it's just a service you provide. And whether that's a good or a bad thing, who knows? However hellish something is, you can laugh about it when it's all over, even when things go wrong; you see something happening in the distance, and I just find myself smiling, knowing this is going to be a drama when it kicks off!

Do you work well under pressure?

I work so much better under pressure. If I do things at home and I haven't got a timescale, then I could be working on something endlessly and it never gets done. I find it useful to be working with a time scale, and I've learned to use that to my advantage rather than against myself. It's like the fashion stuff – if you haven't got enough time, then you just have to think of a different way. I have so many ideas and different ways of approaching things.

Your tips to new people coming in?

You learn way more assisting, learning on the job, being on set, around loads of people, even if you have to do it for little or no money for a while. You need to be out there working and prepared to put in the hours because they tend to be horrendous. Be adaptable, but also have fun. It's not worth doing anything you don't enjoy, even if there's high drama!

Visit Spencer's website.

DAN GRACE, Costume Supervisor

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 238 of *Get into Costume* book)

'I really don't mind what background or training people have, as long as they love what they are doing.'

How do you manage stress in your team?

With experience, you can anticipate most problems, whether bottlenecks or schedule changes that might come along. By tackling issues early, you can get ahead and resolve them before problems arise. With last-minute changes, all you can do is try to alleviate stress by providing the crew with the resources they need and come up with ways to make things run as smoothly as possible.

Because we work so closely together in (at times) an intense environment, it's important that people get on, but there are always instances when they don't. Then you'll need to step in. The HR side of the job is often the hardest; we are people with a passion for costume and film, with no management training other than the experience we pick up along the way, and it takes time to learn how to handle people. ▶

◀ **Describe your working relationship with production?**

When you have a good working relationship with production, they will always try to help. The key is to show them why and how any issues have come about, which is generally due to unrealistic expectations or shifting deadlines. To get what you need, Production need to believe you know what you're talking about, that what you're asking for is necessary, and that if you're given the resources (money, crew) you've asked for, you will manage them properly. With experience and a good track record, your job becomes easier, but there comes a tipping point when you are often

more experienced than the producers and production managers you are working with!

Your advice to newcomers?

Be enthusiastic, want to learn, be interested in all aspects of filmmaking – don't get lost in the costume side. It's important to understand how all the departments come together and interact to get a better understanding of the whole filmmaking process, from lighting to VFX and stunt work, which will make you much better at your job.

Visit Dan's IMDb page.

DARRELL J. WARNER, Costume Concept Artist/Illustrator

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 266 of *Get into Costume* book)



Figure E7.3 Darrell J. Warner. Photographer: Candy Trounson

'Having studied portraiture, I got to study clothing which aided my transition into film. Knowledge of fashion is not necessarily a requirement, but being versed in period costume is always helpful when interpreting designers' drawings or ideas. Understanding costume vernacular, both period and modern, is always important.'

How do you interpret the costume designer's brief?

Once a profile or vernacular style has been established and signed off, we can begin to work within that frame of thinking, and the designer is often more than happy for me to oversee. I find it extremely important to be inside my designer's head whilst trying to pre-empt design problems. Some designers welcome visual continuities and details whereas others have a more rigid peripheral. I veer towards those who develop a creative bubble to work within. If I have earned their trust and belief in what I can deliver, then we have an exceptionally strong understanding and working relationship.

◀ How much free rein I have depends upon the designer and the nature of the project. Some leave it up to me to interpret initial ideas following the amassed mood boards. The more creative designers allow a certain amount of ‘blue sky’ time – or enough rope to go and hang yourself – before reeling in those ideas. Because I’m given artistic licence within a brief, the designer harvests more ideas than they might conjure themselves.

Following a period of development drawings, the designer will begin to hone them and establish profiles and looks for given characters. Although the costume concepts are a ‘given’ in many cases, I’m often asked to reinterpret a costume to make it ‘work’ on our cast. It’s worth noting that concept artists broadly tend to base their concepts on ‘perfect’ figures, whereas in reality we

may have an actor with a high hip or a truncated body which might call for different style lines.

How knowledgeable are you of costume and fashion?

Knowledge of garment construction is not always necessary, but, given the nature of films I tend to be involved with, I would vouch that any new illustrator should spend as much time as possible with the makers. The understanding in a team of artisans is priceless and a great insight that should not be passed. Each new project throws up any number of problems, so by communication with the makers, I have greater insight and ability to deliver ever more informed drawings.

Visit Darrell’s website.

The Future of AI in Costume Design?

(Continued from p. 266 of *Get into Costume* book)

I asked Darrell Warner for his thoughts on the controversial subject of the impact of AI (Text to Image) on costume design.

AI ‘text to image’ software from Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, DALL-E or Craiyon AI present enormous problems for the creative industries as a whole but specifically for the visual artist. Since its very inception, these software programs have become disruptors for those of us who are artists, by way of reducing lifetime goals and achievements to homogenized visual fodder churned out en masse. It’s viewed as a timesaver or quick fix, a cool tool.

I believe it is none of those things in truth. Indeed it is the simplest, quickest way to generate an image without having an artistic bone in one’s body. But it is soulless and ultimately about the bottom line: Saving money. I get it, but I am far from a fan. I abhor the narcissistic need of those using it and the commercial entities who have profited off the backs of others who tout it. We are simply not ready for such a tectonic

shift in practice, and the question needs to be asked, ‘Does the creative entertainment business actually require it?’

I am unapologetically analogue in practice. Hardcore, old-school, and I absolutely believe in the acquiring of craft and skill through dedication and observation as an artist. That is what I bring to my job when I am employed by a costume designer. However, I am under no misconception that the software is and will be embraced because the film business is the harbinger of any new technology – it has already been used most noticeably as a tool to de-age actors. I foresee independent design studios starting up to service the industry alongside those existing ones who already deploy it. How that affects costume design, costume concept art and costume illustration, we will have to wait and see. I know of both art-department concept artists and production designers who are using it on film projects now. I guess the questions we need to ask is, ‘Is it right?’ and ‘Will it be any good?’ From what I am seeing, I have yet to be convinced. ▶

◀ Given that the majority of these software programs are also ‘Open AI’ means that they remain unregulated. The ‘open’ aspect of the data mining is controversial and in breach of billions of copyright images. Hence the numerous legal cases being brought before the law courts the world over. One can only conclude that it is unethical, yet hundreds of millions of dollars have been realized on the back of these AI companies aforementioned without any compensation or acknowledgement of those copyright holders. It is a travesty for the best part, a disservice to both creative labour forces of today and those of the future.

I note that some art schools/universities have begun to offer courses in text-prompting imagery, and I sense there will be rafts of students who will enrol only to fall under the spell of the quick dopamine AI image. The equivalent of the newspaper (today’s news is tomorrow’s chip paper), a throwaway image. An endless stream of fakeness created on the backs of others.

Will people care? Again, we will have to wait and see. It is very emotive and ultimately the homogenization of the arts. By way of democratizing the mystery that is the arts, AI enables the unskilled and untalented to pretend they are skilled and talented. Of course there will be and are artists who have already positioned themselves as AI evangelists and procure extraordinary images. Eye candy. But can the operators prompt to an exacting brief? I have yet to see any proof.

‘There is no path until you walk it,’ I was once told. I sense anyone who chooses to step onto that mid-journey path thinking they may have a career to step very, very carefully. It could well be a very, very short career. Not a fulfilling one either. AI is an entirely new vehicle of creation, and one must ask of those who choose to adopt it whether it will further help them develop as an artist. I surmise it will lead to professional artists being both lazy and greedy. I have already witnessed it. AI = Diffusion Illusion. I’d much rather AI stood for Artistic Integrity.

I have heard of some costume designers using it and passing images onto costume illustrators as part of a pipeline and to further work out in the normal practice of things. It’s all a bit of a smorgasbord with endless images. Now some may say that due to the mushrooming of film studios over the past decade or so there are too many concept artists employed and AI is a natural culling. It’s a bit of a vicious circle and a result of many of the studios adopting a policy of quantity of image over quality and intelligence.

I do find it mind-numbingly painful when I visit an art department (costume too) and witness endless iterations. Why? Surely an HoD [head of department] is employed to make decisions not to waive that right to studio executives by way of offering endless options. It is a worrying trend amongst the large multimillion-dollar productions. The pre-production pipeline offers too much scope, and we, as artists, are cheap facilitators in the bigger scheme of things: table three options and move on. The studios are under some sort of illusion that we as creatives are expensive. Well, we are compared to AI. The underlying trend will mean that even more gets offered with AI, further paralysing design. Creatives need to be more militant about their talent and design aesthetics.

AI can replicate artists’ styles by ingesting samples and churning out images ‘in the style of’. That’s not to say that I personally couldn’t create my own data files, feed into Midjourney and thereafter solely mine for my own work and that would be seen to be OK and the correct way to use the technology. However, with a 5.5 billion image database available through ‘open AI’, invariably it is much easier and quicker to generate an endless stream of images. As a result, there are many legal cases, as mentioned, taking place throughout the Western world taking the likes of Stable Diffusion and Midjourney to court. It’s a tipping point, a Dolly the Sheep moment in time. Is it right and are we actually ready for it? It’s presently in the laps of the courts. Watch this space ...

STEVE GELL, Textile Artist and Designer

Continuation of Close-Up interview (p. 276 of *Get into Costume* book)



Figure E7.4 It's a significant set-up when a dye shop is needed on a film. Equipment may be owned by the textile artist, bought in new, rented for the duration or all of those. Steve in his dye shop, equipped with everything he needs, exactly where he needs it. © Steve Gell

How do you approach multiple costumes which are subject to continuity?

I am often asked questions like 'When you want to make something old and used, like a WWI uniform, do you tie it to your car bumper, and drive around the car park?' Or 'Surely you make period costumes out of old fabric, or maybe you could find an old period frock?' Well, you might use the above methods in certain situations, but probably not!

Although it might be possible, if you were extremely lucky to find a beautiful period dress, you would never find two, and in films it is usual to have multiple copies of the same costume. This is for a variety of reasons: sometimes because we need to fit a stunt double who is a different size; and sometimes there is a scene where the actor gets wet, or comes into contact with blood, so we will need a few costumes ready for them to change into so we can shoot the scene again from the beginning.

Another reason why we need multiples is because a character has a storyline where they get slowly more dishevelled (broken down) as the story unfolds. However, films aren't shot in the order in which you watch them. This might be down to an integral actor's availability, so we have to shoot all their scenes at one time, irrespective at what point in the movie the scene is. Maybe we have to shoot all the scenes that are at a certain location or on a stage set that production want to strike (remove) to put up another set. All this leads to multiple costumes, sometimes just one or two, although some action movies will need upwards of twelve identical costumes. For one superhero movie, we made twenty copies. This meant we could have the costume broken down to three different stages for the actor, and the stunt doubles, and therefore shoot any scene at any point in the story whenever we wanted.

If you need multiple costumes, the chances are, unless you're incredibly lucky, that you won't find

◀ them. So, if a designer can't buy the costume or find the fabric they like, then it is my job to create it from a plain piece of fabric. For period costumes, maybe an original piece of fabric is found. First, we discuss base fabrics, what the costume will be like, what the colours could be, if it needs a pattern, or texture, or maybe it

needs to be dyed to a colour to suit the actor, or the right colour palette for the film. Then we will produce a series of samples, tweaking this way and that, until the brief is met. Finally, we will go into production.

Visit Steve's IMDb page.

Materials and Supplies: Some Examples

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS

- adhesive tapes
- calico/burlap
- canvas
- coutil
- drafting paper
- drill
- dyes
- foams
- glues
- interlinings
- leather
- paints
- plastics
- sprays
- wadding
- wire.

HABERDASHERY

- corset boning and laces
- elastic
- fastenings (poppers, studs, buttons, buckles, zips, eyelets, rivets, magnets and velcro)
- needles
- pins
- tape
- thread of every possible kind for machining and hand sewing, made from cotton, linen, silk, polyester and nylon, from jumbo cones of overlocking thread to dainty reels of pure silk floss
- webbing

TRIMMINGS

- beaded and embroidered motifs
- braids (metallic, cotton or synthetic)
- beads
- cords
- crystals
- feathers
- fringing
- lace edgings and motifs
- nylon 'crin' (horsehair in the USA)
- pearls
- rhinestones
- ribbons
- sequin and diamante trim
- sequins
- tapes
- tassels

EQUIPMENT AND TOOLS

Equipment

- bins
- cutting and machine tables
- desks, chairs and stools
- extraction
- hanging rails
- irons and ironing boards (domestic and industrial steam irons)
- mannequins (tailor's dummies)
- mirrors (wall and free-standing)
- office and fitting facilities
- overhead and task lighting
- pinboards
- printer/scanner/copiers
- sewing machines (domestic, industrial, leather, overlock and interlock)
- shelving and stacking storage boxes
- shredders
- spray booths
- steamers
- ventilation
- Wi-Fi
- work benches

Tools

- corset bone cutters
- craft knives and blades
- hole punchers
- pliers
- rotary cutters and blades
- scalpels and blades
- scissors (ones that cut fabric, general purpose do not!)
- tagging guns and tags
- tape measures
- tracing wheels
- wire cutters

CONSUMABLES, SUSTAINABILITY AND RECYCLING

- batteries
- breakdown sprays and supplies
- double-sided, masking and packing tape
- folders
- garment and bin bags (compostable, biodegradable and eco-friendly please)
- hand warmers
- handheld fans
- hangers
- heel grips
- hot water bottles
- insoles
- laundry bags
- laundry markers
- rail dividers
- rain ponchos
- safety pins
- Sharpies
- space blankets
- stationery
- teabags
- thermals and keep warm coats
- towels
- umbrellas
- underwear (Spanx, tights, socks)
- warm coats
- washing powder
- water bottles for performers

Tips for Buyers

- Use wheelie suitcases to carry more shopping.
- Try new shoes on a carpet or towel. Scratches on the soles will render them non-refundable.
- For visible contents, use clear carrier bags (recyclable) for shoes and accessories, kept with the outfit.
- No logos or branding on clothing and shoes (it's advertising). Unbranded sports clothing can be found online

Costume and Wardrobe Assistants: Example Tasks List

- alterations
- assisting at fittings (holding pins, taking photos, making notes)
- buying
- compiling fitting photos and documents
- continuity
- costume breakdown
- drawing
- dressing
- laundry
- maintenance
- making tea/coffee
- office and paperwork
- pulling costume rental stock
- research
- returns
- sampling
- sandwich runs
- sewing
- tidying up recycling, taking out trash

Wardrobe Tips

- To stop shoes slipping, score the soles with a sharp knife or paint with Coca-Cola and allow to dry.
- Build your own stock of earrings and reuse. They are non-refundable.
- For emergency alterations on set: Kimble tags, safety pins, double-sided tape.