

Costume Design:

Collaboration, Power, and Ownership

PQ artists explored harnessing power and agency in the creative process while working in an international environment of waning humanity and rising disconnectedness

BY MARGARET MITCHELL

The 15th edition of the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space occupied multiple locations, Holešovice Market, Veletržní Palác (The Trade Fair Palace), and DAMU, The Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, which offered a variety of costume programming this past June. Costume designers and scenographers across the world brought physical costumes, drawings, and miniature maquettes of costumes, as well as vibrant, imaginative, and daring costumed performances. Costume workshops were presented at DAMU, PQ Talk programming had a “Costume Day” at Holešovice Market, and the Costume Design Sub-Commission of OISTAT met and elected new leadership. Compared to the National Exhibitions, costume design had a greater presence in the national Student Exhibitions, The [UN]Common Design Project for students, and the popular exhibition *Fragments II*, held at Veletržní Palác. *Fragments II* echoed past PQs, which displayed traditional models and drawings alongside experiential pavilions. Unfortunately, a special international costume exhibition (such as *Extreme Costume* of past quadrennials) was absent from this PQ edition.

In the past decades of quadrennials, the physical documentation of design processes has greatly diminished, and curators have focused more on festival

Figure in Hong Kong's Student Exhibition entitled *Store Room*, a collection of objects from past productions. | Photos by Margaret Mitchell.



ELENI STROULIA



A Greek Postcard: Eleni Stroulia's design for *(Somewhere) Beyond the Cherry Trees*, produced in Athens and Strasbourg in 2021. | Postcard content photographer Alexandre Schlub; postcard photograph by Margaret Mitchell.

performances or pavilions expressing conceptualizations and big ideas. In some exhibitions, designers were not democratically or obviously represented, and design work was not shown in detail. Because many national pavilions, by their very nature, focus on space design, costume work was sometimes supportive or in the background unless the costumes were worn by performers interacting with visitors to the PQ. Some national exhibitions focused on performative costumes, such as developing a costume live during a performance (Israel), morphing costumes in daily performances (Norway) or costume transformations interacting with a physical environment (The [UN] Common Project, China). The National Exhibitions generally offered few sketches or photographs. The Greek exhibition was one exception, providing beautiful photographs of costumes printed on mailable postcards. Major themes across the PQ that intersected with costume expressions included ecoscenographic practices/sustainable design and construction, awareness and juxtapositions of human and non-human performers, issues of gender and costume, and the body as a central locus for social, anthropological, political, and economic injustices.

The Exhibitions

National Exhibitions of Regions and Countries

The PQ is traditionally divided into sections of exhibitions supported by meetings, panel presentations and workshop activities. The National Exhibitions of Regions and Countries were housed in multiple Holešovice Market buildings. Fifty-one regions and countries were represented in the national pavilions. Some countries and regions that have had a historical presence at PQ were absent due to war, civil unrest, impacts of the pandemic, economic strife, or combinations of these circumstances. In some cases, the outside political world entered the PQ and in other cases, not. Visitors were delighted and surprised that the Ukrainian artists installed a national exhibition, showing a force of resilience and defiance as they experience a terrible war. In an unprecedented act, the Russian Federation was banned from attendance. In past PQs political problems caused conflicts at the governmental diplomatic levels between Asian presences, but this year peace



Top: Norwegian Performance in the National Exhibition of Countries and Regions entitled *WE SHALL NOT EVEN KNOW THAT WE HAVE MET. YET, MEET WE SHALL, AND PART, AND MEET AGAIN. WHERE DEAD MEN MEET ON LIPS OF LIVING MEN*. Costume Design by Fredrik Floen. | Photo by Héctor Cruz Juárez, Prague Quadrennial 2023. Above and right: Taiwanese Performance, *The Rare Ship*, performed in the National Exhibitions of Countries and Regions. | Photos by Margaret Mitchell (above) and Jakub Hrab, Prague Quadrennial 2023 (right).

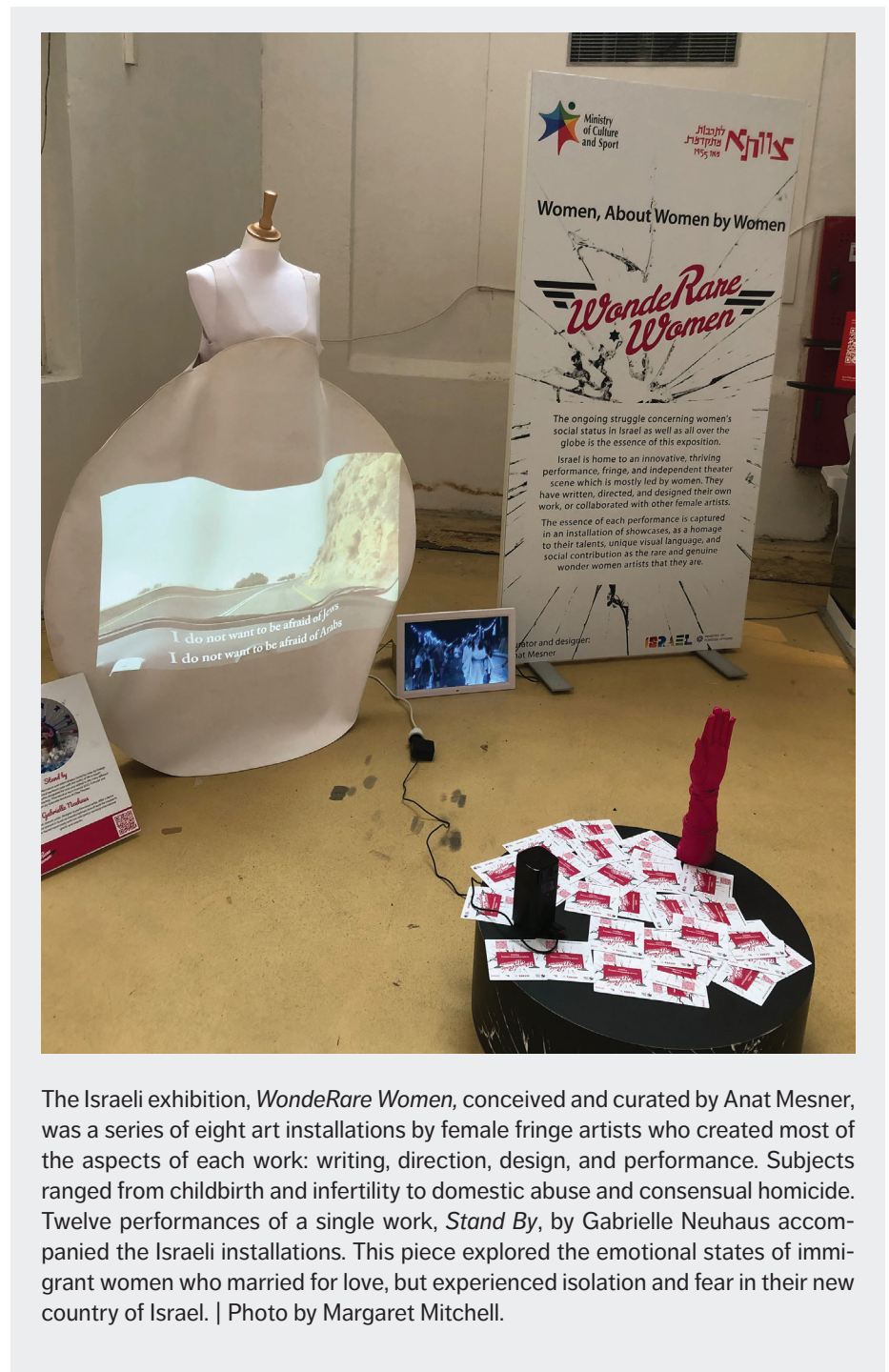
prevailed in the Asian pavilions representing disputed territories.

The footprints of the national exhibitions were physically smaller than they have been in previous editions of the PQ, but they were no less inventive. Themes woven through the National Exhibitions of Regions and Countries included environmental disaster and reclamation, climate change, the devastation of war, subjugation of women and other marginalized populations, personal freedoms vs. governmental dictatorships, memories, the meaning of home, the loss of humanity, and the resilience of humanity. There were few costumed dress forms, but in some cases, costumes were displayed as objects. In the Catalan exhibition, winner of the ÇT art Award for the Most Socially Sensitive Exhibition costume pieces without performers, expressed the absence of people, and the infiltration and resurrection of nature in a world destroyed by humans. The largest costume presence in the Exhibitions of Regions and Countries occurred during live performances, which were peppered throughout the exhibition spaces.

U.S. Costume Artists in the National Pavilion

The work of the designers featured in the National U.S. pavilion was experienced via two video screens accompanied by a soundscape visitors could access through headphones. In the soundscape, the artists verbally introduced and explained their work, and in this regard the format felt personal. However, like many of the PQ pavilions, the use of headphones also isolated people occupying the same physical space. There were no actual costume pieces or artifacts in the U.S. National exhibition, so the viewer experienced images edited and curated by the videographers.

Some thematic threads ran through both the subject matter and the practices of the artists. The pandemic, social justice issues, personal and societal identity issues, the environmental crisis, climate change, and imagining our country in other contexts were themes running through singular or multiple costume projects. Four artists generated original work alone or with a group of people; three artists presented work that was traditionally reactive to extant texts. Two of the three text-based works were highly reconceived or adapted.



The Israeli exhibition, *WondeRare Women*, conceived and curated by Anat Mesner, was a series of eight art installations by female fringe artists who created most of the aspects of each work: writing, direction, design, and performance. Subjects ranged from childbirth and infertility to domestic abuse and consensual homicide. Twelve performances of a single work, *Stand By*, by Gabrielle Neuhaus accompanied the Israeli installations. This piece explored the emotional states of immigrant women who married for love, but experienced isolation and fear in their new country of Israel. | Photo by Margaret Mitchell.

Othello

Perhaps the most radical reimaged adaption of a classic text was Tara Moses' adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*. The South Dakota Shakespeare Festival provided costume "creator" Elizabeth Wislar of the Northern Cherokee Nation the license to reimagine the *Othello* story, both aesthetically and in practice. Moses' adaptation set *Othello* in the year 2176 just after the United States has been dissolved and all tribal lands are returned to Native Peoples with help of the Black Liberation

Movement. Wislar and the other artists on the project began the rehearsal process by articulating their own familial histories, bringing awareness of individual biographies impacting the work of the storytelling in the style of Indigenous Futurism. Wislar also insisted on using only found materials to decrease the production's environmental impact. The result was a richly layered feast of color and texture, and a story turned on its end to offer the audience a future reality and history they may not have considered.



Erik Bergrin *The 8 Dissolutions* projected on the USA National Exhibit during PQ. | Photo by Jim Lile.

King Lear

Susan Tsu's design for *King Lear* produced by Quantum Theatre was performed in Pittsburgh at the rusty remains of the Carrie Blast Furnaces National Historic Landmark, one of the only surviving pre-WWII blast furnaces in the United States. The play's site-specific environment provided an opportunity for the story and the designs to fuse with the history of Pittsburgh and its people. Tsu's costumes evoke the decline of Pittsburgh's once globally important steel-producing industry, which was once the economic and social backbone of the city. The costumes were largely protective, multi-layered and heavily distressed, indicating a hostile environment where characters dressed to protect themselves while navigating their harsh kingdom. The costumes had an apocalyptic aesthetic, supporting the unjust war in the story, the greed of future generations and the general breakdown of a just society—all painfully relevant modern themes.

Acquittal

Unlike Moses and Tsu, Hyun Sook Kim's aim was historical accuracy for the design

of *Acquittal* by Shahid Nadeem. Produced by the Pan Asian Repertory Theatre in New York City, the play centers around the stories of four women unjustly imprisoned in Pakistan in the 1980s during the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq, who imposed radicalized interpretations of Islamic law. The characters live in a culture fueled by ideologies that discard the basic civil rights of women, and yet the women form friendships in a dangerous and oppressive situation. It is easy to see why the curators were attracted to this strong design supporting women's social justice causes that are resurfacing in radical extremist views in our own country.

The remaining costume work in the national exhibition was generated by the ideas of costume designers. Some works resulted in developed texts or new ways of collaborating that others did not. However, in all cases the costume work informed the rest of the project; the designers were not responding/reacting to existing text; they were making text, visual and verbal.

The 8 Dissolutions

Erik Bergrin's haunting and arresting

project "The 8 Dissolutions" explores the Buddhist stages of dying through the dissolution of the physical body into the spiritual body. Bergrin's work was exhibited in a museum and was not embodied with live performers. Prompted by personal, social, and political issues arising during the pandemic, Bergrin created beautiful evocative costumes exploring and expressing the eight stages. Bergrin explains further in his artist statement, "My artwork is about bringing up shadows in the subconscious. By doing this, I can turn these shadows into physical objects, confront them in a tangible form, and change them. Studying Buddhist philosophy and meditation, and having a background in fiber art and costume design, I combine all of these to do this investigating of my own shadows." Many of the textiles were Bergrin's own creations made from home-grown kombucha leather and crystals, as well as bark, seaweed, handmade felt, and other traditional fiber art techniques. Bergrin began this exploration as he experienced loss due to the pandemic on societal and personal levels.

For the Lost Children of Paris

While sequestered in her apartment during the pandemic, distinguished veteran costume designer Carrie Robbins rediscovered the book, *The Lost Children of Paris*. She found primary research about these Jewish children kidnapped from Parisian schools and murdered in Auschwitz during the second World War. She began drawing the children, and the drawings begat the puppets, text, and a Bunraku-inspired puppet performance of *For the Lost Children of Paris*. The play focuses on a single classroom of children who were deceived and kidnapped by a female German Lieutenant. A major theme in the work is deception, and adult puppeteers manipulating the child puppets create a tense power dynamic. In her artist statement, Robbins mentions the bombed theatre of Mariupol with the sign “Children” spray-painted on the building, and the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russian families. This work also evokes the haunting aesthetics of Tadeusz Kantor’s *The Dead Class* as well as WWII figurative memorials to children, such as the monument at Lidice, Czechia.

Superterranean and *Ocean Filibuster*

While Robbins’ work focused on historic loss and devastation, costume designer Olivera Gajic’s work focused on current and future losses and devastation related to climate change. Gajic had two projects, *Superterranean* and *Ocean Filibuster* accepted into the U.S. exhibition. *Ocean Filibuster* was commissioned by the American Repertory Theater with support from the Harvard University Center for the Environment and produced by PearlDamour. The aim of the project was to bring awareness to climate change through a musical story about a future Global Senate pitting humans against the ocean. The creation of *Ocean Filibuster* was interrupted by the pandemic and collaboration moved online for two years. As seen in Wislar’s *Othello*, Gajic’s environmental awareness (and the very subject of the project) inspired her to use recyclable materials to make a small environmental impact in production. In her artist statement Gajic stated: “My small steps of collecting the plastic bottles and making hundreds of organic shapes out of them to recreate oceans’ flora give me a purpose during these two COVID years. Making the ocean out of objects that pollute it gave



Olivera Gajic’s *Superterranean* projected on the USA National Exhibit, installed at the 2023 USITT Conference in St. Louis. | Photo by Jim Lile.

me a dual purpose, both to contribute to saving the ocean and also fulfilling my life purpose of making art that was essential for my survival during these times.”

Gajic’s other PQ entry also related to future relationships between humans and the environment. Conceived by designer Mimi Lein, *Superterranean* produced by the Pig Iron Theatre Company in Philadelphia explored the unseen physical urban infrastructures that affect the bodies and feelings of humans. Produced in 2016, the story expresses humans as small, isolated, and vulnerable compared to the large infrastructures impacting their daily lives. The wardrobe included hazmat suits as one example of costume

choices foreshadowing the pandemic.

Mad Dash: Le Cirque

Michael Grasso/Jazz’s performance, *Mad Dash: Le Cirque*, a fast-moving quick-change feat for two performers in 12 “ideations,” addressed the curatorial themes of identity and coming home to the self in its many possible forms. Grasso indicated in his design statement that form followed function: “The design process became a representation of my material ecosystem, calling upon questions of access, budget, and scarcity (scarcity of funding, materials, and time; time for fittings, finishings, and alterations). In New York, we are fortunate to have access to some of the

most comprehensive material landscapes imaginable.” The design decisions, while driven by a theme, were ultimately made based on the needs of movement, choreography, and functionality.

The U.S. costume designers/makers/artists seem to be pushing boundaries, moving in different pathways than designers of recent past generations. Costume designers are no longer waiting for text to make their work, and if text is encountered, it is scrutinized and reinvented much like the Modernists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In our country, there is much to push back against: dissolution of basic civil rights, political demagoguery, internal threats to our republic/domestic terrorism, mental health issues, daily mass murders, climate change and catastrophe, economic, social, and spiritual poverty, and the right to live in one’s own identity. Costume designers are responding to societal instability and they

are no longer waiting on playwrights and directors to give them a voice.

Emerging U.S. Artists

Covid isolation, fear, loss, and educational interruption were mentioned often in the emerging artists’ statements. Even though our education systems and our industry have been greatly disrupted by the pandemic, students and emerging artists did not stop creating, and in some cases, emerging artists found opportunities off the production cycle hamster wheel. Only one entry was text-based; the rest were created from the costume ideas, and some projects were not embodied in a live performance.

Julianne D’Errico created a dress made of dried poured acrylic paint on mesh; the dress is an artwork in and of itself and was not used in a performance. For D’Errico, the design expressed the struggle against the patriarchal society and desire to uplift

and empower the feminine. The patterns in the paint are inspired by the movement of the planets and the oceanic and terrestrial topography of the earth. The dress, called “Force of Nature,” was also selected for the international exhibition, *Innovative Costume of the 21st Century: The Next Generation*.

Caught in the pandemic lockdown during her MFA studies at the University of Oregon, Ashley Baker also created costumes that informed a non-text-based performance. Baker chose to focus on Dr. Sarah Bowman’s aspects of the self in role-play games. Each costume represented an aspect of the self, and there was no story. The performers developed movement based on the costume designs. The project was performed live and under strict rules for public gathering. Baker frontloaded mask design to comply with Oregon state guidelines.

When Christina Beam’s production



The USA Emerging Exhibit showing numerous costume projects, lit with Gantom Lighting fixtures at night during the PQ. | Photo by Jim Lile.

of *Into the Woods* was cancelled due to the pandemic, she found herself “In the Woods” of the pandemic. To keep creatively functioning, she designed full-scale paper costumes for the characters of *Into the Woods*, and she also expanded the idea to include other fairy tale characters. In the tradition of Isabella de Borchgrave, these costumes are exquisite works of art in and of themselves. In her artist statement, Bean said she “built all of the costumes and accessories using paper products, including printer paper, Tyvek, poster board, cardstock, and cardboard.” Bean cast the characters, dressed the actors, and staged a gorgeous photoshoot, shot by Ben Tobin.

Gender fluidity and identity issues were the subjects of two projects, *Missing a Seat at the Tea Party* and *The Slipping Nymph*. Neither project resulted in a live performance. Malachi Ward explored corsetry as an expression of gender identity and fluidity. Ward began with upcycled materials and created a corset for himself—an act of truthful rebellion in the context of his highly religious traditional black family, where he, as a man, was not included at the ladies’ tea party. The project was documented in a photoshoot. *The Slipping Nymph*, a film/photography project written, directed, and designed by Julie Scharff and Rob Lewis, was performed and shot in a river in Pittsburgh. The beautiful evocative and delicate costumes were abstracted expressions that explored being a queer or trans adult in an environment that is not always accepting of these identities.

Identity and the body was explored cross culturally in *Little Red Book or Plural Body* by Xiyu Lin. Xiyu investigated the physical and metaphysical properties and experiences of what it means to be a Chinese person in a complicated time during a pandemic. The project, based at CALARTS, changed from live performance to a film using online technologies. The artists broke the normal boundaries of their job descriptions and collaborated in new ways. Xiyu and her collaborators explored the tensions between the individual body and the collective body. Xiyu stated, “While the pandemic continues to challenge our relationship with our bodies, the collective, and our understanding of theatre space, we want to acknowledge and present the tension between memory, discipline, and liberation: Are individualism and collectivism the two ends



A PQ visitor with Helen Dominguez’s costume design for *Agbedidi: Beginnings* in the USA Emerging Artists Exhibition. | Photo by Matthew Booth, Prague Quadrennial 2023.

of a spectrum, or two things that could co-exist?”

Helen Dominguez’s design for *Agbedidi: Beginnings*, produced at the University of Florida and choreographed by Rujeko Dumbutshena, was a live dance performance based on a Chivanu creation myth. The artists discussed the struggles against COVID-19, science and isolation, and were ultimately looking toward expressions of human connectivity. The textiles were inspired by nature: trees, waterfalls, and the night sky of Zimbabwe. The designs were also inspired by traditional Zimbabwean architecture. Dominguez stated, “It honored the journey of connectivity, mirrored by many in the time of COVID-19, into myth and the past. It is stories like these, performed in places far from their origin, that connect us to each other, our past, and our planet.”

Ami Okazaki’s design for *Machinal* (1928) by Sophie Treadwell is the story of a woman who marries a man she detests, falls in love with another man, and then murders her husband. She is found guilty of the crime and executed in the electric chair. Okazaki designed scenery, costumes, and props for this production at Boston University. Part of the production process occurred during the pandemic, but the performance was live. The original production, designed by Robert Edmond Jones, was configured for a proscenium stage. Okazaki designed an environmental space in a black box, with audience members sitting among the action. Okazaki’s

design was the only text-based emerging artist entry representing the U.S. in the PQ.

Student Exhibitions

The Student Exhibitions were erected outdoors in a large area between two buildings of Holešovice Market. For the most part, these exhibitions were designed to withstand wind and rain, and in some cases, exhibitions had to be completely covered and protected during inclement weather. The location was less than ideal; the outdoor events contended with the noise and dust of construction, hot afternoons, occasional rain, and a lack of security. However, the work of the students and emerging artists is typically a high point of the PQ, generating excitement and energy among the visitors, and this edition was no exception. Compared to the national pavilions, the students exhibited more costume-related material and had more costume interactions with the public. The out-of-doors access and costumed people drew the PQ participants to the space. Holešovice Market is also a public space with shops and restaurants, and the locals seemed to enjoy the boisterous activities of the Student Exhibition, without even understanding the context of the PQ.

Like every other aspect of the PQ, the Student Exhibition included multiple performances. Almost every student pavilion was the site of a performance, class, or interactive activity. The Student Exhibition was constantly energized; every hour,



Above left: Costume created by the students at the Faculty of Textile Technology at the University of Zagreb for the Croatian Student Exhibition. Above right: Bulgarian Student Exhibition performance entitled *Living Things*. | Photos by Margaret Mitchell.

something was happening. One of the largest events involving costumes was The Estonian Performance Lab of Figurative Thought, run by students of the Estonian Academy of Art. They presented *You Only Have a Moment*, a two-year project and experiment that drew large crowds.



Estonian Student Performance, *Lab of Figurative Thought: You Only Have a Moment*. | Photo by Jan Hromádsko, Prague Quadrennial 2023.

Students dressed, undressed, and re-dressed models, selecting clothing items and objects, composing a costume on the spot in front of spectators. The costume compositions often negated the normal functions of the objects and clothing, and many of the designs contained social and political commentary. Once models were dressed, they walked a fashion show catwalk, supported by music and projections of the live performance they were creating in the moment. The entire exercise challenged the spectator (and the wearer) to encounter costume functions that change and manipulate a body or vice versa. There was no backstage, so the audience witnessed the creation of compositions on the spot. This project was one of the highlights of the PQ, and won a prize for best performance in the Student Exhibition.

***Fragments II* and The [UN]Common Project**

Veletržní Palác housed two popular exhibitions, *Fragments II* and The [UN]Common Project. *Fragments II* curatorially dealt with human scale relationships, mostly focusing on miniatures and maquettes. Although the objects in the exhibition were described as pieces of memory,

with no other purpose but ephemeral provocation, the objects were also regarded as works of art. Only a few nations focused on costume: Chile, Mexico, and the United States.

Chile's *Displaced Imaginaries*, created by the Regional Training Program of Scenic Design in Chile, offered intricate costumed miniature figures made of recycled and natural materials depicting folk as well as modern icons. The creators of these beautiful hand-stitched figures also expressed political and social commentary via their design choices.

The Mexican entry, *Costume as a Trigger for Movement*, delighted visitors with mechanically articulated costumed figures. Visitors manipulated the small figures and investigated tactilely how the fabric or costume piece changed and morphed with the movement of the figure. The Mexican costume designers have garnered international attention, including multiple international awards over the past two or three decades. This entry in *Fragments II* was the collective work of members of Vestuario a Escena Mx, the first independent professional association of Mexican costume designers.

U.S. designer and maker Kyle

Schellinger created six half-scale period costumes that provided a stark contrast to much of the costume work presented at PQ, which was typically rough, physical, abstract, and inventive. Schellinger's pristine small-scale costumes demonstrated his skill and craft without productions or performers; the work seemed almost like a calm throwback in the context of current visual trends of performance design.

Many young people were fascinated by *Fragments II* and spent hours investigating it. The models and objects allowed the viewer to witness and maybe even enter into a designer's process, tools, and materials. To the old timers of the quadrennial, *Fragments II* felt like the old PQ. The audience experienced the design process through actual artifacts of performances, rather than incessant QR codes or highly abstracted pavilions with no supporting process materials.

The [UN]Common Design Project, a part of the PQ Studio programming, was also exhibited in Veletržní Palác. Students were given the same prompt: the RARE, the general theme for this edition of the PQ. Many of the projects resulted in social and political activist events relating to public spaces, and most did not have a central focus on costume design; however, there were a few exceptions.

The Rusalka Project from Polish immigrant Filip Gesse, a student at the London College of Fashion, garnered attention because of the scale, materials, and intricate construction of the costume. The project documented the performance by Ella Muir, who wore Gesse's costume made of straw and grain. Muir compelled passersby in the London streets to stop and interact with her. Conversations with the public ensued about world hunger, war, environmentalism, farming, and the multilayered politics infiltrating all of these topics.

Whomanity, created by the Hungarian University of Fine Arts students under the mentorship of Fruzsina Nagy, dealt with domestic violence and the lack of protection for battered partners in Hungary. The students created pastel satin dresses, stitched them together to make a large fabric surface and then laid them on a public street. They invited passersby to step in black paint and walk all over the dresses. They then unstitched the dresses, donned them, and wore provocative makeup depicting physical wounds and perhaps unseen mental or spiritual damage. Then,



Above: Maquette of *Migrante en Tránsito* from the *Fragments II* exhibition, *Displaced Imaginaries*, designed by Andre Álvarez Olivia, a student from the Regional Training Program in Scenic Design of Chile. | Photo by Margaret Mitchell.



Mobile maquette in *Fragments II* exhibition, *Costumes as a Trigger for Movement/Vestuario A Escena MX*. Gown showing a fast change transformation for the Queen in *Snow White*, designed by Sara Soloman. | Photo by Héctor Cruz Juárez, Prague Quadrennial 2023.



Above: Maquette from *Fragments II* exhibition, *Costumes as a Trigger for Movement/Vestuario A Escena MX*. Ambedo, designed by Carolina Jiménez for Teatro de la Danza Guillermina Bravo, 2019. | Photo by Anna Benháková, Prague Quadrennial 2023.



Sara Soloman's realized design of the Queen in *Snow White*, showing the exterior of the Queen's gown. National Dance Company of Mexico, the Witch: Mónica Barragán. | Photo by Carlos Quezada. Reprinted with permission of the National Dance Company of Mexico.



Interior of the Queen's gown after an avista fast change. | Photo by Carlos Quezada. Reprinted with permission of the National Dance Company of Mexico.



Exhibited in the [UN]Common Design Project, Filip Gesse's design for *The Rusalka Project*, London College of Fashion. | Photo by Margaret Mitchell.

the students went back to the street and created a striking small public parade to raise awareness of the issue.

Taiwanese costume design students, Yu-Ting Chiu and Mei-Hsuan Chen at Taiwan National University explored the futuristic idea of genetically engineered clones populating a post-apocalyptic world. Their elegant designs portrayed the clones, "The Future People," void of color in a palette of whites and grays. "The

People of the Past" wore colorful clothing and, in the story of the project, the clones participated in experiments to gain human emotion. As they did so, the clone clothing partially disintegrated, revealing vivid underdressed costumes. The project, set in the future, was a clear commentary on the present day.

The common thread in these [UN]Common projects expressed and explored the rarity of humanity and the lack of real personal connections in our current world. Students at Carnegie Mellon University created a fictional task force to address urban infrastructure problems in Pittsburgh. This project, the *Bridge Unification Strategy Task Force*, is addressed in more detail in Susan Tsu's piece *The [UN]Common Design Project*, on page 68 of this issue.

PQ Talks, Workshops and Meetings

PQ Talks

PQ Talks, a daily program of sessions and conversations, expertly curated and managed by Barbora Příhodová, featured "Costume Day," a major PQ focal point for costume professionals and students. Panels and discussions included topics on the future of costume pedagogy, costume agency, the uses of AI in costume design for animation, and performances generated by costume designers without a director.

Bodies of Knowledge: Futuring Costume Pedagogy, a panel moderated by Dr. Madeline Taylor of Queensland University of Technology in Australia,

incorporated multiple subjects meeting at the crossroads of current and future pedagogies. Speakers Dr. Suzanne Osmond (Australia), Rebecca Pride (UK), Dr. Jorge Sandoval (UK), and Dr. Erika Schwartz (Brazil) explored nonhierarchical teaching/learning methods, inclusivity, and political and social awareness that students need and demand in the current post-pandemic climate. Issues of gender classification traditionally abound in the costume world; sensitivity to gendered and non-gendered performers in the design and fitting processes are necessary *modern* considerations. Decolonization of traditional research resources and definitions of modern technology were confronted.

Costume FlashTalks, 10-minute snapshot presentations of a designer's work, are a tradition at international gatherings. The PQ FlashTalks addressed both non-traditional practices and the use of current technologies in costume. Talks on practice focused on breaking hierarchical boundaries in production. For example, Dr. Sally Dean (USA/UK) presented a project entitled *The Somatic Costume Dressing Room—Attending to Touch and the Poetic*. Both the performer and Dean created designs together, without hierarchy, in the dressing room. Slovakian designer ZuZu Hudek reversed the usual process. The choreographer and performers were presented with finished costumes, and they created the dance in response to the costumes. Hudek tested the boundaries of movement and materials as she designed and made the costumes; her experiments



Left: Dresses stitched together for *Whomanity*, Hungary. | Photo by Margaret Mitchell. Above: Exhibited in the [UN]Common Design Project, costume designs for the *Whomanity* by the students of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts under the direction on Fruzsina Nagy. | Photo by and courtesy of Julianna Nyiri.



Exhibited in the [UN]Common Design Project by students at the National Taiwan University Department of Drama and Theatre. | Photo by Adéla Vosičková, Prague Quadrennial 2023.

informed her of possibilities. However, she did not understand how the choreographer and dancers might respond to her work and create something unforeseen. Dean and Hudek broke through traditional hierarchical structures with these projects.

Dr. Simona Rybáková (Czechia), Dóra Halas (Hungary), Juli Balázs (Hungary), and Fruzsina Nagy (Hungary) also broke barriers with their project *Eastern Bloc catwalk concert*. Designers and musician Hálás generated their own story via costume exploration; the collaborators were designers, directors, storytellers, and writers. The project was born during the war in Ukraine with Communist oppression looming as a concerning threat to Eastern Europe. They began their collaboration on Zoom with plans to create a site-specific performance. They also wanted to work with younger people who had not personally experienced living under Communist rule, and Nagy's students were brought onto the project. The site of the original performance was the image rich Memento Park, a Budapest graveyard of defunct Communist monuments. The show was performed in an invented false spoken language based on common words in Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Slovak. The visual content, which was simultaneously frightening, powerful, and humorous, was paraded down a catwalk

and supported by gorgeous acapella singing, some spoken text, and evocative projections. A portion of the entire piece was performed at Divadlo X in Prague during the PQ, and its inventiveness, biting humor, and costume-driven storytelling was met with resounding audience enthusiasm. This piece demonstrated that artistic collaborators without the traditional hierarchical structure led by a director can create a cohesive, focused, and highly successful work.

Digital Technology

Throughout the PQ, the uses of technologies old, new, and renewed were discussed and demonstrated. For some practitioners, the presence of ecoscenography is gently moving into the front-loaded calculus of design considerations. Environmental awareness can sometimes lead us back to older (and perhaps lost) forms of technology, such as natural dying or newer inventions such as edible/compostable costumes and scenery. Some uses of electronic digital technologies can also conserve physical resources, saving time, money, and perhaps even having an environmental impact. The moral and economic implications of the use of AI in digital creation of costumes is only now coming to a general cultural awareness; the ownership of the creation of AI material is in current debate, and it will likely

have longstanding legal implications for artists.

The Marvelous Designer software workshop conducted at DAMU by designer, researcher, and author Dr. Maarit Kalmakurki (Finland) demonstrated an expanded design process, as well as the possibility of conservation as a byproduct of digital design. Marvelous Designer is one of the current industry-standard digital tools for animation costume design; the program is used in gaming, animated feature films, and television. Kalmakurki expertly walked participants through an all-day hands-on workshop that explored the many features and tools of the program. Essentially, Marvelous Designer allows the artist to draw a flat pattern piece in one screen and then the pattern piece is automatically sent to the body of an avatar in another adjacent screen. The designer can manipulate the pattern pieces to change the way they drape on the avatar. The program cannot be reversed in process: drawing the design and then developing the flat pattern. The design must come from the flat pattern drawing. Hence, students in the workshop with costume construction and physical flat patterning skills worked with more facility than students who had little or no knowledge of patterning and draping. The designer can “sew” the pattern pieces together on the avatar, and this process joins the pieces, uniting



At the PQ Costume Day Talks: Simona Rybáková and Fruzsina Nagy presenting Eastern Bloc designs for the Summer House Catwalk. | Photo by Margaret Mitchell.

them in one digital object.

Marvelous Designer allows the creator to circumnavigate the design, seeing it in 360 degrees; it allows for multiple fabric weights and hands, multiple textures and surface treatments, and it even allows the designer to move the avatar and assess movement of the design and the fabric. Beyond a digital design product, Marvelous Designer can also be applied in the live theatrical construction process. Unlike the CLO program, which is also commonly used in film animation, the avatars in Marvelous Designer may be created to the exact measurements of performers. Designers and cutter/drapers may invent the patterning on the performer's avatar and troubleshoot patterning or design problems by testing movement in the program. During the pandemic, when performers and makers could not be in the same location for a fitting, first mockup fittings were sometimes done via Marvelous Designer. The first physical mockup phase was eliminated entirely, saving mockup fabric expense, travel costs, and time. The digital costumes created in Marvelous Designer can also be used in live performances that integrate physical performers and digital components. Kalmakurki is currently experimenting with this integration, expanding the understanding of digital environments/scenery to include motion-captured digital costumes in a live

Many of the costumes exhibited physically or in photographs (and a few drawings) were costumes of ideas, memories, dehumanization, loss and grief, and a suffering world environment

production of *Alice in Wonderland*.

Costume artist Heli Salomaa (New Zealand), lecturer in fashion design technology at Victoria University in Wellington, also presented on digital design relating to character emotion and audience response. Her presentation, *Costume as an Emotional State in a Transmedia Digital Narrative*, explored emotional states of both the character's journey and the gamer's experience playing the game. Digital games are designed to arouse or stimulate the gamer so the game will be played; games are also designed to bring the gamer into a balanced emotional state when they win, score, or advance. Thus, an

emotional rollercoaster entertains/addicts the gamer so they will continue to play. In the context of Jungian Shadow Work, Salomaa applied the Balance Arousal Emotional Matrix to character/costume design, supporting the design of the game, as well as targeting the balance arousal emotional states of the gamer. Salomaa also uses AI as an exploratory design tool. Although the approach of tracking and deliberately stimulating the emotional balance and imbalance of the gamer might provoke ethical questions in game design and audience manipulation, in principle, it is somewhat akin to what designers and performers do in the live theatre. We aim to mine the emotional responses in our audiences. Traditionally, the production team for live performance believes they filter meaning into a story for the audience to experience within the boundaries of that filter. No buttons are pushed to win or lose and move to the next scene; however, audience agency impacting the outcome of the story is, in some cases, seeping into traditional storytelling in the theatre.

The Threads

The most coveted prize at the PQ is the Golden Triga, awarded to the country or region by an international jury of practitioners and theorists for the most compelling national exhibition. This year, Cyprus was awarded the Golden Triga for its national exhibition *Spectators in a Ghost City*, curated by Marina Maleni. The ghost city Famagusta was abandoned in 1974 upon the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. The Cypriot PQ team imagined using "reverse scenography" to explore the power of absence and trauma in the abandoned spaces and, in so doing, use memory, scenographic artifacts, costume, and story to converse with history, reverse-engineer trauma, and find empathy. The performers wear and drag the architecture, and an insistent image of memory is worn and scaled down, scaling up the human body and referencing its power.

Costume and makeup, the closest physical design elements to the performer, provide the alchemy that fuses the performer to the character, the thought, the idea, the wounds, and the balms. During the 2023 PQ, many of the costumes exhibited physically or in photographs (and a few drawings) were costumes of ideas, memories, dehumanization, loss and grief, and a suffering world environment.

Yet small glimmers of grace, humor, hope, and beauty also appeared in a mostly inhumane landscape of our own making. Costume themes reappeared in many variations:

- Projecting, painting, stitching, or weaving an anthropological problem onto a costume onto a body
- The costumed body as a locus for pain and healing
- The rejection of hierarchical structures in design development and creation
- Addressing fluid and non-fluid gender designations in costume practice
- The desire to reconnect with and heal the ecological environment
- Costume design as a generative art, not a responsive art to a single vision of a director
- Colonization on many levels

These themes all suggest the costume artist may, should, or could harness power and agency in the creative process, a situation that is not typically structurally or financially supported in traditional theatre in the United States. The awareness of these issues and the desire to explore them theatrically usually resides in more experimental production companies, and in colleges and universities in our country. The commercial theatre in the U.S. is usually not an artistic laboratory for experiments in costume theory. However, the PQ has evolved into a crucible of conceptualized performance design and theory, rather than a documentation of how “the best” or the most famous designers create designs.



Margaret Mitchell is a freelance costume designer, author and Professor Emerita at the University of the Incarnate Word in San

Antonio, Texas. With Oscar Brockett and Linda Hardberger, she is the co-author of Making the Scene, which was awarded the Golden Pen Award and the PROSE Award in 2010. She is a two-time Herb Gregg Award recipient, and she is a general editor of TD&T. Mitchell's design work has been exhibited at three PQs, and she has also served on U.S. PQ curatorial teams. Her design work is collected in the Tobin Theatre Arts Collection at the McNay Art Museum. She is active in the International Activities and Publications Committees, and she is a USITT Board Director and Fellow.

Headshot photo by Zachary Mitchell-Kemp

OISTAT, World Costume in Action and the Critical Costume Symposium

The long-standing relationship between the PQ and OISTAT (The International Organization of Scenographers, Theatre Architects and Technicians) is no longer fully integrated into PQ programming. However, OISTAT activities, relegated to an island, both literal and figurative, existed alongside the PQ, and the OISTAT costume designers were in full force. The OISTAT Costume Design Sub Commission is also rebranding itself and is now called World Costume in Action (WCiA). This name change occurred at the business meeting in Mexico City in 2022. Highlights of the Prague meeting included the vote for new leadership, reports on ongoing projects of WCiA, the group's future plans, and connectivity with other international costume entities and events. The detailed minutes of the Prague business meeting of WCiA are available on the OISTAT website.

Outgoing Chair Simona Rybáková (Czechia), a highly effective leader, reached her term limits, and Rosane Muniz (Brazil) was elected as the new chair. She appointed two vice chairs, Fruzsina Nagy (Hungary) and Margaret Mitchell (USA), and the vice chairs were approved by the membership. Ongoing projects of WCiA include an international database of costume books, journals, scholarly resources, and training programs, a new photo gallery of the WCiA members' work, and drafting guidelines and standards for international copyright. Members are also charged with creating detailed programming for future meetings. The membership has an agenda of connecting more with designers working beyond Euro-centric practices and cultures.

The next confirmed OISTAT WCiA meeting will be held in Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, at World Stage Design in 2025. At the date of this publication, WSD organizers have not yet communicated the format of the program. Colleagues in India, Morocco, and Romania have extended invitations to WCiA for meetings in 2024. The first post pandemic in-person Critical Costume Symposium entitled, *Got Fiction? Whatever the Medium, Costume is the Character*, will be held in Los Angeles at UCLA, March 6-9, 2024. Dr. Deborah Landis is convening this event, which will focus on film and television costume design. The symposium's timing coincides with the Academy Awards ceremony. Dr. Sofia Pantouvaki communicated the online resources of the past Critical Costume Symposia and also endorsed the journal, *Studies in Costume and Performance*, published by Intellect Press. This journal, the only one of its kind in the English language, is double blind peer-reviewed and focuses on costume theory.

WCiA members gather to share their work and conduct OISTAT business meetings that support ongoing projects. These costume designers and makers also travel together and socialize online twice a year, in December and on or around International Woman's Day in March. Online gatherings provide connectivity for colleagues and friends who have travel barriers. All members of USITT are automatically members of OISTAT because USITT is the OISTAT Centre for the United States. Connecting with WCiA is an opportunity to gain international perspectives on costume creation and making. It is an opportunity to be a part of a worldwide network of costume friends and colleagues who help one another to learn and grow.

For more information on OISTAT, World Costume in Action see:

<https://www.oistat.org/commissions.php?mode=Costume%20Design%20Sub-commission>.

For more information on Critical Costume symposia, publications and projects see:

<https://www.criticalcostume.com/>. Recordings of past online symposia are in the Events tab.

For more information on the journal *Studies in Costume and Performance* see:

<https://www.intellectbooks.com/studies-in-costume-performance>.