

THEATER

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Shakespeare's Globe in
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SPARKED: Valerie Ramshur, Head of Costume Design

MASON GROSS SCHOOL ARTISTS DISCUSS THE ELEMENTS THAT FUEL THEIR WORK



Public Transportation

The beauty of subways, trains and buses is that all strata of society are jumbled together in a fixed location for a specific moment in time. People of all ages, descriptions and economic levels are represented, and there's a runway of fashions and character studies within reach. The choices that people make in their daily personal styling transfix me. The narrative they tell whether consciously or not is powerful, and important to study without judgment.

Photography

I take pictures everywhere of everything--the toy tossed in a garbage can, the odd mix of humanity in a public space, window displays, and the fish on ice at the supermarket, ornamentation on sides of buildings. There is an endless amount of inspiration in the ordinary; it is how we train our eyes to see and acknowledge it all, how we look deeper, and open ourselves to the countless ways in which to process all the stimuli coming in.

Color and Texture and Patterns

I'm inspired by textiles, food, gardens, cracked pavement, rusted metals, and charred wood--anywhere the interplay of color and texture meet. These visual narratives convey a time, place and mood.

Music

When working on a production I try to only to listen to music from the period of that specific project. I often create a soundtrack for myself of the type of music a character might listen to, allowing me to inhabit the time and culture of the characters. Call it "Method" costume design.

The Timetables of History, A Horizontal Linkage of People and Events By Bernard Grun

A fantastic resource of who did what and when dating back to 4,500 B.C. When I can see the interconnectedness of history, people, and events I can better understand the piece I am working on, as well as our contemporary culture.

Mazes/Labyrinths

These often provide multiple access points, paths, and some dead ends, but they're always engaging and meditative. They remind me that one cannot simply go from point A to point B. Both the creative process as well as everyday life is made up of small choices: left or right, up or down, yes or no.

Research

This is my favorite part of the creative process, hands down. I am constantly sidetracked. If I begin by researching 19th-century corsets, I often find a detour to 19th-century cookery or toy catalogues, which can contain as much information about a culture as fashion magazines or Old Masters. I often feel I am on a massive treasure hunt.

19th Century

We see empires fall and new ones rise. Colonialism and independence of many nations occur simultaneously around the globe. New religions are founded, social reforms put in place while slavery, child labor, and women's issues go unchecked for decades. Massive migrations occurred, which for many cities created an explosion in population and immigration issues never seen in previous decades. Nearly every eight to 10 years women's fashions reflect all the socio-political and economic changes.

Movement

Having started my life in the theater as a dancer and an actor, my training began in the rehearsal studio. How actors and dancers move in their costumes informs their choices, how fabrics feel against the skin, or how garments move in space is exciting and essential to consider.

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