

COSTUME AND TRANSFORMATION

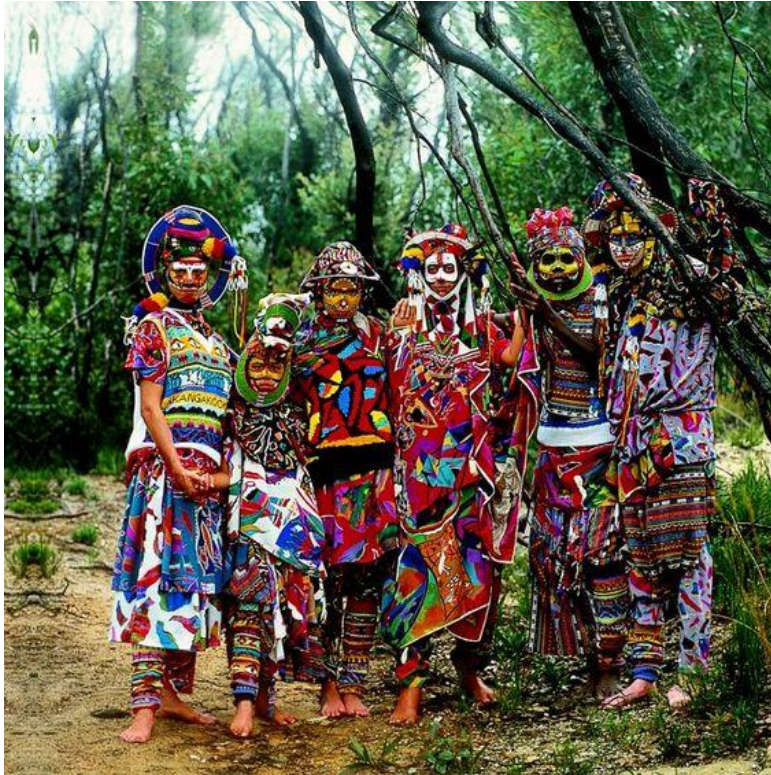
Research in Context-Q5-JL

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BA Surface Pattern Design & Textiles



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Question 5: Costume and Transformation by Damasque Wells



Pic 1- Picture of me in body paint

Encouraging me to be creative since I was a child my mother loved it when I would involve myself in all things that were flamboyant and fantastical. I believe I had given my mother a new lease on life when I told her of my opportunity to become a volunteer muse for a local Bodypainting Artist. Feeling exalted, I knew that becoming a trial 'body canvas' for the day would do wonders for my physical reality . The feeling of being transformed from my mundane existence into a liberated woman sparked an inner and outer quest and acknowledgement for whom I wanted to truly be.

I felt completely normal to be walking down the street, peak Adelaide Fringe Festival Season, with nothing else on asides from my underwear and a paint job covering every inch of my skin . Bumping into people from all walks of life and getting stopped by drunken festival goers, this new bodysuit was a topical conversation starter. All the while, how authentic I felt and how normal it was to be dressed up in a paint costume. As the 'Where'd I Put My Character' article suggests *"The transformation of the human body, its metamorphosis, is made possible by the costume, the disguise."* (Amidei, 2018, 26, pp.49–58)

Recognizing that costume has had a transformative effect on me personally and loving 'the disguise' that it brings, I would like to discuss a variety of topics in costume land that excite me and that I feel connect me to my own personal journey of discovery as I embark on my Surface Pattern Design Degree. Topics such as Art Fashion and Wearable Art, Surrealism, The Avant Garde Movement and Cultural Costume and Body Adornment are topics that I am drawn to and feel I can build upon in future years. Having a love of colour and texture, sculptural appendages and alternative materials excites me and allows one to ponder, explore and discover the world of Costume and transforming oneself into a walking Art piece.

Cultural Costume and Body Adornment

The Costume has adorned cultures and their belief systems throughout the world for thousands of years.

It is stated that Samoyed Shamans from China use a mask as a handkerchief to hide their eyes allowing them to enter the world of spirit. The mask enables them to cut off any relationship and exchange with the sensible world to lose his ego enabling the wearers spirit and consciousness to be scared thus invoking magical powers of the mask. (Shuyun and Simoncini, 2003, pp.163–182).

As stated previously, costumes and in this case specifically, 'a mask' is being used for protection 'a disguise' to scare away any unwanted evil forces in the spirit world. Perhaps one could infer that in the physical real world, a mask or a costume is used in the same way 'a tool to ward off any individual who doesn't like to have fun.'

Similar to that of the Samoyed Shamans the Yoruba speaking people of Nigeria have an

exquisite cloth that plays this important role. Their Festival The 'Egungun' honors lineage ancestors in a ceremony conveying the culture significance of such an object as the costume. Being layered with multiple cloth lappets, the cloth is a major medium for the maskers transformation which expresses their wealth and status. To give the costume more performative power the lappets are decorated with patchwork, patterns, braids and sequins and tassels. The more decorated and beautiful the more powerful (Fitzgerald, J. Drewal and Okediji, 1995, pp.55-57).

Since prehistoric times in India, Hindu Mendicants or Sadhus have used the ashes of burnt and dried cow-dung mixed with straw to cover their bodies enabling them to renounce all worldly possessions. They believe the ashes to be sacred and *the body decoration is intended to transform the users natural appearance and project that person into a supernatural state of mind* (Untracht, 1997,p.23)

As I have come to understand body decoration and costume is extremely liberating . I was shocked to realise that I wasn't as conservative as I thought. This decorative suite I was wearing, was an authentic version of my true self. It felt so normal to be covered in paint and perhaps as ancestry shows us primal in nature.

Surrealism and Costume

Costume has played a major role in the Women's Liberation Movement and has touched on some socially dangerous issues such as feminism, feminine power and the degradation of the feminine species including the ill treatment brought about by men over the course of history. Having been overlooked as a major contributor to the Surrealist Movement Elsa Schiaparelli whose contribution to the movement was affluent and relevant



JEWELRY BY SCHIAPARELLI
PINTEREST

Pic 7- Jewellery by Elsa Schiaparelli



Pic 8- Elsa Schiaparelli collaboration with Salvador Dali to create a hat in the form of an 'Upturned Shoe'



Pic 9- Zsa Zsa Gabor in a Schiaparelli gown while shooting *Moulin Rouge* (1952)



Pic 10- Pair of evening gloves. The Circus Collection, designed by Elsa Schiaparelli, 1938, Paris, France

used clothes not to conceal the female form – to ‘disembody’ it – but rather to flaunt and exhibit it. She combined classical and avant-garde styles to produce fashionable pieces that were functional and feminine but that also played with and modified the key Surrealist trope of the fetishized female anatomy. The result was a set of singular variations on the age-old relationship between art and eroticism, and in which gender essentialism is both a theme that was explored and the driver the construction and deconstruction of costume. (Anon, 2011, pp.78–88).

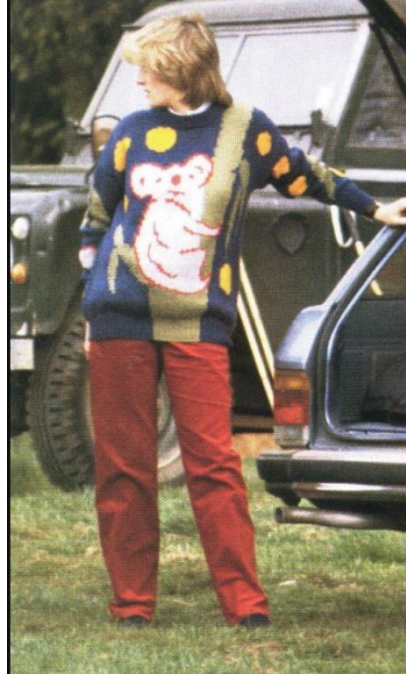
The evolution of female identity in the interwar years was life changing and there was a desire to democratize and embody a sense of freedom and sophistication. Schiaparelli’s sartorial designs, celebrated themselves from the work of her surrealist colleagues for their defiance to feminine stereotypes. Challenging entrenched ideas about females in the urban context, clothing itself may have provided an ‘illusion of being free’, conversations about its significance actually changed the way people understood women’s social and political roles (Papalas, 2017, pp.159–173).

As Papalas, Marylaura, 2017 suggests perhaps ‘Costume’ only provides us with the ‘Illusion of being free’ but one could suggest that ‘Costume’ allows us to mutate one’s own inner demons (illusions) and the chains that bind us internally into an external body skeleton which in this case is the ‘Costume’. This is case for all created objects *they are mediums through which humans can elegiacally evoke their own dead. They are ontological hybrids—no longer possessions, yet not yet fully self-possessed. (Fraser, 2020, pp.80–98).*

Jenny Kee

Unique fashions and original ideas were brewing in Aussie Land in the 60’s and the new counter culture was on the cusp to creatively combust. Avant Garde Designers and the Art clothes scene were ideally positioned to expose and to set a new language of fashion. Jenny Kee and her quintessentially Australian iconic Art Knits and silk textile motifs reflected the spirit of the land and was a direct response to response to the bourgeoisie’s sartorial fashion etiquette. The fashion landscape in Australia was changing the transformative effect was taking shape

In 1982 a pregnant and 'windswept' Princess Diana was photographed by the English press wearing her chunky bright blue 'Blinky' jumper and a pair of red trousers at a polo match.



Pic 2 & 3- Princess Diana Wearing a Jenny Kee Knit ,May 2, 1982: Princess Diana on the polo grounds of Great Windsor Park

From the 'One Plus One' Interview from ABC in Australia Jenny states, 'I was always in love with embroideries and Indian and Guatemalan, just colour and textures in fabrics that is what I loved. As long as it had an amazing pattern. I didn't care if it was from the 20's or 30's but the pattern had to be really interesting'.

(ABC In Depth, 2020)

When Jenny came back from London to Australia in the 70's and opened up the boutique 'Flamingo Park' in Sydney with fellow Australian Designer, Linda Jackson, her energy and inspiration from her time spent in London was certainly the talk of the town . She decided to focus in on chunky knitwear which she derived her inspiration from the Chelsea Markets where she had worked styling and designing for famous Movie Stars and Musicians.

I wanted to create something unique in knitwear in OZ so using purely Australian wool handmade in Australia and decorated with our own Australian graphics my first Ozzie Knits were born. I had no idea at this time that this was the beginning of of a National Australian Style in Design (Kee).

Jenny states *'the very first antique clothing that she bought was an unusual knit and it had the signature of Richard Attenborough knitted into the jumper with all his films also knitted into the jumper. I bought it for 50 pence. That was the beginning of me buying unusual Knits'.* (ABC In Depth, 2020)



Pic 4- Jenny Kee in London



Pic 5- Jenny and her colourful fashion

Arguably, from the 1960s and 1970s onwards, momentum grew with the idea that one could actually wear a work of art. The body gave the 'canvas' form and volume, and the bodily movement gave the surface imagery a dynamism and liberation unrealised in Op Art or Kinetic sculpture. 'Wearable art' captured the imagination of Australia's finest. Both artists and fashion

designers wished to express themselves through creative and innovative means to bridge the gap between theatre, art and life through fashion. (Collins, 2016. pp.165–186).



Pic 6-Jenny Kee- Mamie Jeannette tricote mais pas que

The Avant Garde and moving forward into the 90's with Viktor and Rolf

The unruly Avant Garde Artists in the early 1910's who practiced costume and face-painting demonstrated a renegade attitude toward the materials and craft of visual art similar to that of the Futurist's toward language. The reconceptualization of physical appearances and using the body as an artistic canvas, relied on the basis of experimentation with materials using them in an unexpected fashion, disturbing conventional culturally resolute aesthetics and challenging the design objectives. Their method of forcibly stylizing the body and its presentation swayed the mainstream and generated a new cultural shift.

The avant-garde attitude toward self-representation resonated with Shklovsky's literary theory: redefining the relationship between object and function, construction material and purpose, is akin to rupturing the relationship between the word and its referent, signifier and signified. (McQUILLEN, 2012, pp.413–435).



Minya Diez-Dührkoop, Dance costumes for "Technik" (1924), black and white positive on silver gelatin paper (all images courtesy [MKG Collection Online](#))

Pic 11- Minya Diez-Dührkoop, Dance costumes for "Technik" (1924), black and white positive on silver gelatin paper



Minya Diez-Dührkoop, Dance costume for "Insektentänzer" (1924), black and white positive on silver gelatin paper

Pic 12- Minya Diez-Dührkoop, Dance costume for "Insektentänzer" (1924), black and white positive on silver gelatin paper

Moving forward to current historical times Dutch Avant Garde Fashion Designers Viktor and Rolf's original intentions to become fashion designers was an extremely foreign concept to them both seeing that they came from a land of Dutch Clogs and cheese.

The spark of seeing a perfume advertisement in the 80's seemed to Viktor magical and mysterious and a source of inspiration for his first thoughts of art fashion .Like Viktor Rolf was also transported into thinking about fashion by beauty and images. (Refinery 29, 2015)

Having studied together at Fashion School ArtEZ Institute of the Arts in Arnhem where they begin their collaboration as unemployed designers.

Entering numerous contests, they finally hit the jackpot by winning first prize in the biggest one in Europe. As pictured below.

APR 1993

SALON EUROPEEN DES JEUNES STYLISTES
Festival International de Mode et de Photographie in Hyères, France:
Prix de la Presse, Prix du Jury and Grand Prix de la Ville de Hyères.



FEB 1994

"L' HIVER DE L' AMOUR"

First installation as part of an international group show of contemporary art entitled "L'Hiver de l'Amour" at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France.

Being in the right place at the right place gave them a new perception and insight on themselves and what they wanted to become as Designers.

In their mind they were Fashion Designers although crossing the boundaries between 'what is art and what is fashion'. They presented a lot of their works in art galleries because the art world seemed to respond much more and much sooner than the fashion world to their creations (Refinery 29, 2015).

They had a prophetic vision like the book 'The Secret' whereby they created an exhibition pretending that their fashion ambitions were becoming a reality. They made installations about becoming successful fashion designers. Using dolls in different sets and scenes for an example a doll in a photoshoot, a doll in a fashion shop and a doll at a perfume stand.

Haute Couture they felt represented both of them and they wanted to start at the top of the pyramid, you can always go down in value but never go up Rolf states. They are influenced by fashion history but not trends (Refinery 29, 2015).

They state "we like it when something can be stupid and intelligent, romantic and aggressive at the same time" (Archer, 2009, pp.120–127).



Pic 15, 16, 17-Viktor & Rolf Design Creations (Archer, 2009)



Pic 18 & 19-Viktor & Rolf Design Creations (Archer, 2009)

In 1999 their show 'Russian Doll' ruptured the notion of a classical runway demonstration. By stacking 70 kilograms of apparel layer by layer on an individual motionless model,

the weight of expectation both reflected and turned inside out the anticipation that is associated with a Russian Doll, a Toy which one progressively takes apart in order to reveal its core. Layers of active participation are vital 'In our minds', the couple state, 'Fashion and Art are not separate entities (Sculpted Expressions, 2016).



← RUSSIAN DOLL

#8

Eschewing the catwalk convention of a procession in which each model wears one outfit, the show featured one model who wore the entire collection – at once. Dressed live by the designers themselves, the model, Maggie Rizer, arrived on stage wearing the first garment, a short dress made of coarsely woven jute and silk satin, and stepped into a pair of shoes on a turntable, rotating like a figurine in a music box. She was then slowly dressed in eight additional layers of couture dresses, each heavily embroidered with crystals and lace, and each referred to by the designers as a ‘preparation’ for the next layer. The preparations acted as pieces in a puzzle, each new layer completing or mirroring a detail or an element on the preceding tier.

Pic 20-Haute Couture — Viktor&Rolf (viktor-rolf.com)

Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren’s current creations have taken on a new meaning in the ‘Wearable Art’ World creating a Haute Couture COVID-19 theme collection.

The nine garments, revealed in an online video, consist of three mini-collections, each with a negligee, dressing gown and coat. Each mini-wardrobe is meant to evoke a mood provoked by the pandemic: anxiety, in black and midnight blue; confusion, in pink; and love, in white. The coats also send a bit of a social distancing message, with projecting cones, hearts or tubes. The narrator of the film debuting the collection noted, "You will remain in your own safe zone while venturing out into the world." "The situation has been so terrible, it made us both wonder, 'Are we allowed to do this?' " Snoeren told Vogue. After conferring with their staff they decided to forge ahead, but the clothing "had to be meaningful," Horsting said (Anon, 2020,pp.32–33).



Glittery tubes protrude from the maximalist, candy-coloured coat made from faux leather, which has one extra puffy sleeve. Viktor & Rolf describes this look as "at the same time unapproachable as well as attractive".

Pic 21- (dezeen.com, 2020)



The first collection of outfits – described by the duo as a "panoply of gloom" – aims to emulate a feeling of sadness and anger, and features a navy satin nightgown embroidered with dark raincloud motifs made from lace.

This is presented alongside a flared, grey chenille dressing gown that takes design cues from "masculine" robes, adorned with a quilted bow tied around the waist and elongated sleeves with wide cuffs.

Upon reflection as I look back onto the variety of topics discussed I feel that *the embodied character of the costume seemingly collapses the past into this present time*. (McGann, 2008)

The bodypainting experience for me was the stripping back and the tearing down of my ego. Although naked, and vulnerable, to rebuild and resurrect myself was an empowering, life changing experience. Transmuting one's sovereignty into the prowess of their alter ego with costume naturally helps us to shapeshift internally and externally mutating from one archetype to the next and allowing us to feel freedom from the nuances of the world that we live.

Like Mary, Queen of Scots For her, fashion was a tool to reinforce her own sovereignty in the eyes of her people, to emphasize and secure her position. She may have had, as she herself said in her 1588 Speech to the Troops at Tilbury, "the body of a weak and feeble woman," but she wielded it as a weapon. Call it the original power dressing. (Anon, 2018, p.1).

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Pictures

Pic 1-Picture of me in body paint

Pic 2- Princess Diana Wearing a Jenny Kee Knit

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Pic 3- May 2, 1982: Princess Diana on the polo grounds of Great Windsor Park

Pic 4- Jenny Kee in London (Screenshot from Youtube)

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Pic 5-Jenny and her colourful fashion

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Pic 6- Jenny Kee- Mamie Jeannette tricote mais pas que

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Pic 7- Jewellery by Elsa Schiaparelli

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Pic 8- Elsa Schiaparelli collaboration with Salvador Dali to create a hat in the form of an ‘Upturned Shoe’

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Pic 9- Zsa Zsa Gabor in a Schiaparelli gown while shooting Moulin Rouge (1952)

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Pic 10- Pair of evening gloves. The Circus Collection, designed by Elsa Schiaparelli, 1938, Paris, France

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Pic 13 & 14- Viktor & Rolf Heritage Page from Website

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Pic 18 & 19-Viktor & Rolf Design Creations (Archer, 2009)

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