

Karen Suskin

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Film Work experience:

2016 – 2017

INTRODUCTION

With a wide-range of expertise in textiles and fashion and an unappeasable curiosity in all things designerly, I affianced myself in 2016 to the Art and Crafting of Costume in the film industry, as head of department in Dye and Breakdown. The exercising of my creativity and imagination during many years as a designer and design lecturer have given me an innate understanding of textiles, of how we wear clothes and what stories they tell of us.

A skilled researcher, I have a deep interest in and knowledge of historical and contemporary fashion but my guiding questions are always: how does the 'look' best serve the overall narrative? and how does it reflect the emotional journeys of the characters? The garment goes beyond the aesthetic representation of a sketch to become a cohesive part of the whole production process.

COLLABORATIVE MAKING AND TRACKING

Crucially, I work with a team of skilled artists, dyers and fabricators who share a sensibility to the story line and to how the physical specifics of the garment intersect with the narrative of the character. Together we envision and maintain the visual unity, contribute to the overall aesthetic through deliberate aging and breakdown, and ensure consistency and continuity during filming. Given that a production can require multiples of the same garment, a good eye for detail is an imperative. So is creative response in the moment.

WORK ETHIC

It has been my experience that effective collaboration between team members requires certain basic qualities. These include respectful interaction; high motivation; ability to take initiative, especially in the frequent situation of demanding deadlines; strong organizational capacities; stamina to work long hours and last, but most certainly not least, a consciousness of ethical responsibility for human and environmental needs.



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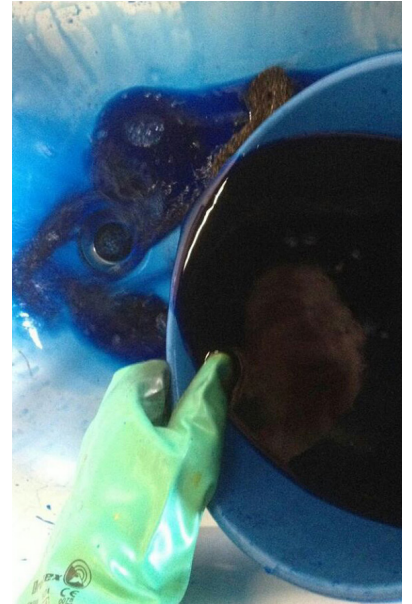
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This is not limited to the adherence to strict safety precautions during production but extends to the possibility of raising awareness of greater cultural questions. We are not unaccustomed to the influence and power of film but such a commitment to ethical responsibility in production can develop great potential to deliver powerful messages. Think *Ane Crabtree*, whose capacities as researcher and intuitive thinker lead to the blood-red capes she created for *"The Handmaid's Tale"* becoming a symbol of protest among women all over the world.

SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION

A further component of the ethical lodestone guiding my work is the embracing of discerning and sustainable practice with regards to materials used. Thinking on one's feet can be a healthy way to operate - leading one to save materials, recycle and reuse. Sensitivity to environmental damage means I use low impact products, mostly water soluble with low toxicity. Where possible, water is retained and re-used and left over dye is offered to art schools.

Even actors such as Emma Watson (*Beauty and The Beast*) have highlighted the issue of striving for sustainability in costuming:- "The cape was made from up-cycled, traditionally woven British Jacob's wool from around 1970 bought at a vintage fair. The fabric was over-dyed using natural dyes ...The jacket was made using hand-woven linen from the 1960s, sourced from eBay ." The front panel of the organic dress was made from "hand woven nettle" fibre, her leather boots crafted in an "environmentally respectful" way.



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TO CONCLUDE

Based on my experience as a designer I believe that as costume artists we are as important as any good script. The ability to listen deeply and observe perceptively are part of the skill set required to extract essences and make aesthetic and visual decisions which support narrative credibility - in short, to take the role in production of an alchemist. Indeed, my understanding of clothing and the designer's role comes from long personal exploration of life values and meaning in which I see the act of creating as part of the long process of step by step self-cultivation.

The South African film industry has a reputable name world-wide yet we are so much more than a series of photogenic venues. South Africans themselves hold the complex set of practical and artistic skills to inspiringly craft cinematic story. With my range of expertise and leadership qualities honed over many years, I can contribute to that collective with creativity and commitment.

