

HEIGHT OF FASHION

Costume Designing in Miniature

“Denim is not denim, knitting is not knitting and flowing garments are not flowing garments.” The world of Deborah Cook – costume designer at animation production studio Laika films – combines ingenious engineering, imagination and seamstressing like few others. Here she tells us about the process of costume designing for animated characters between just nine and fifteen inches tall.

You studied sculpture: what led you to miniature costume design for animation?

My sculptural work included installation environments that featured costumes and upholstered art pieces. I’ve always worked with fabrics long before I attended art school and have made clothes since I was a child. Later I learned formal pattern cutting and other skills during my sculpture degree such as welding, carpentry, upholstery, film making, painting and photography. All of which I incorporated into my artwork and a skill set that has evolved and forms the basis of my approach to costume design.

How bodies move in different kinds of clothing fascinates me. I used to watch and draw boxers and American footballers. Their protective padding looked sculptural and abstracted their body shapes, propelling their movements in a more striking dynamic and theatrical way.

What is the crucial difference between designing for people and designing for puppets/animation?

I have created large-scale costumes but found ▶



that there's a deeper level of engineering needed for small scale costumes; especially for stop frame animation, it is another world entirely. Gravity is naturally present in human scale costumes, as is the movement of the body propelling it from beneath. Small scale costumes need both of those elements built into them to create a managed believable movement that can be captured in a still frame; twenty-four still frames per second is how we shoot stop motion films. There are additional restrictions in the scale of fabric I'm able to use. The possibilities of marrying the established ubiquitous techniques of sewing history to date with newer technical developments and concepts is my favourite place to create my costume designs.

What's the process of realising a character?

It's a collaborative and organic process. Each director has a different method for realising their characters. Researching all aspects of the character's costume and reviewing together with the director is the key to the emergence of the personality and also to the artistry of the film.

What's your research process like?

I thrive on new areas of research, I like to dive deeply into ancient cultures and contemporary and classic art and to also look to the world of modern textiles and fashion design. If I have a favourite area for research it's anything or anyone that has paid close attention to opulent, elegant detail and has a distinctive relationship with colour. ... **Grace**

Warde-Aldam

Kubo and the Two Strings, LAIKA Films, will be available on DVD from 16 January 2017



