

Statement of Creative Research

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Before an actor ever utters a word on stage, the costume they are wearing has made a thousand statements. Class, occupation, age, nationality, time period, season; these are just some of the meanings conveyed by a clothed body. My work creates public speech and imagines possible worlds. I design costumes to tell stories that bring communities together in moments of ritual and transformation. I am a shaper, maker, interpreter, and translator. As a multidisciplinary artist who navigates between complex collaborative spaces, I continuously exercise a wide range of skills. I dive deeply into language, music, and movement to create visual dramaturgy, in dialogues with directors, choreographers, and fellow designers. I engage with ethical research methods through critical approaches to the past, present and future. I paint, draw, collage, manipulate fabrics and materials by way of traditional methods as well as cutting-edge technologies. I lead large teams of collaborators, often spread across locations, in projects that span from a few weeks to several years. I work closely with performers to open up layers of meaning, and offer support for the risks they take onstage. Together we bring stories to life, through a ceaseless exercise of creating the big picture while engaged with the smallest aspects of the performing body.

My work is often about subtlety. I am a vigilant observer of the world, I strive to be an unbiased and ego-free collaborator, and an artist who is invested in chronicling contemporary journeys, joys and struggles. Dressing characters for such stories allows audiences to see themselves onstage, provides catharsis, pushes self-reflection, and often calls to action. I aim to capture cultural specificity, defy stereotypes, unveil layers hidden in the text. Small, powerful clues in dressing can shape the audience's entire understanding of a certain character's gender identity or family dynamic. The fit, style and wear of a pair of jeans gives a world of clues on economic access and aspirations, for example. At its best, this sort of design "disappears" from the audience, perfectly meshed with the actors' characterization. One could argue that when very well executed, the result is invisible, seamlessly placing believable characters in unquestionable realities. I believe subtlety can be a starting point for even the most fantastical design, as was the case in choosing a de-saturated color palette in the search for a cohesive visual landscape for a *Pericles* directed by Joe Haj that performed at the Guthrie Theater (2016), the Folger in DC (2016), and at OSF (2015). The DC Metro Theatre Arts praised my design for *Pericles* as "a visual delight." **I am a visual translator of Shakespeare's work, re-framing the canon through a de-centered cultural approach.** I grew up between cultures, speaking Portuguese and French as a child. In Brazil I first experienced Shakespeare's texts in translation and adaptation, (often playful and irreverent!) resulting in a fascination with its poetry and the range of human emotions at work, while also free from preconceptions and blind reverence. In the past two decades, my eagerness to engage with language, to play, explore and find relevance in Shakespeare scripts has made me a sought-after collaborator. A production of *Julius Caesar* in partnership with director Shana Cooper (OSF in 2017, and off-Broadway at Theater For A New Audience, 2018) also started from a place of subtlety and understatement. Using a grayscale and variations on men's tailoring to create an excessively masculine world, this design tries to capture the explosive, senseless violence of the script through a political, contemporary lens. The choices support the powerful physical vocabulary of the staging, bringing in primal elements of

blood and mud. Research around ancient Roman public rituals, as well as contemporary South American and West African festivals were a part of my research, which led to the creation of masks that, according to *The New Yorker* magazine, “effectively emphasize the mob’s frightening unknowability.” In 2022 I again collaborated with Shana Copper, on *All’s Well that Ends Well* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. This time the color palette was rich and varied, ranging for the stern jewel tones of the French court to the sensuous boldness and femininity of the Italian characters. The collaborative process on *All’s Well* exemplifies my passion for true exploration in design. As we discussed the challenges and motivations for bringing this script to a contemporary audience, we looked for visual references that would lift up a determined female protagonist, giving women voice and agency. The Chicago Tribune calls the production “an elegant affair, [...] with a classy set of costumes from Raquel Barreto. [...] It’s invigorating to see this show focus [...] on a rich, fresh palette, conceptually contemporary but not anachronistically so. It makes great use of fabric and music and a kind of gentle sway rolls over the whole evening, wherein the language feels fresh and crystal clear.”

My design work is also spectacle, bringing magic, transformation, and visual delight to audiences. Extravagant silhouettes and luxurious fabrics fill the space, and the adorned body offers the primary clue on period, place, and mood of the story taking place. In Brazilian culture, spectacle (particularly in the regional manifestations of Carnival I grew up with) can be glamorous but also subversive, political, and daring. Masks, wigs, padding, quick-rigging, jewelry, and makeup are all tools to create bodies that are at times dazzling, fantastical, and larger-than-life. A terrifying ghost appears and vanishes in a matter of seconds; dancing fairies create a mysterious forest; a historical character comes to life, only to upend any expectation the audience might have of her... **I design for young audiences, engaging their imagination and opening possible worlds.** Between 2012 and 2019, I designed seven shows in collaboration with Mainstreet Players, a company outside Los Angeles focused on visually rich storytelling for the young and their families. For most of the school groups that filled the 536-seat theatre twice a day, this was their first opportunity to experience theatre. We brought to life stories where the audience saw themselves on stage, and created storytelling both accessible and sophisticated. Design for the young offers a chance to think on the essence of a design, how transformations can be achieved to create surprises, and when to leave things to the imagination rather than illustrating them for the audience. In *Frederick* (2018), a musical adaptation of the beloved children’s book for the very young, the boundaries between a human and a mouse are blurred in ways that asks children to imagine from a place of empathy and recognition. *A Wrinkle in Time* (2012) also adapts a classic story of the 1960s into a relatable world for tweens and teens, where simple, bold gestures of transformation carry the audience through a science-fiction world. *OlivéRIO* (2019) transports Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* into the streets of contemporary Rio de Janeiro, allowing me to draw from a place of lived experience to create the gritty and also colorful tale of a young orphan girl and her friends. My work invites and transports. It teaches about the past and actively shapes the future. Such design work provides release and subverts expectations. The choice to step out of our everyday lives into a performance space for a couple of hours can be transformative, and to find oneself immersed in magical storytelling is a most powerful collective experience.

In all instances of my work, thorough research and deep collaboration goes into creating every single item worn by the performer. Most of the shows I have designed fall somewhere between gritty, engaged accounts of our times and lush visual amusements. For every single one of them, I spend weeks or months developing visual dramaturgy: offering up iconography that grounds the world of the play historically, culturally, and emotionally. I gravitate towards directors who cherish the collaborative process as much as I do, and who share my belief in the importance of diverse creative teams: while a script or libretto exists on the page, every performance is absolutely unique, resulting from the experiences, points-of-view, and dynamics of each group of artists. I approach every project with a clean slate, and read every script as if it were a new one. While I chose projects that reflect my values, I do not subscribe to any specific trend in design. I create through collaboration and exploration, finding the answers to the style of a show in the process. To that end, I find being a part of the first iteration of a script absolutely thrilling. **Design is an active mode of engagement with the world, and I participate in the creation of new works, bringing to life stories that shape our times.** In *ROE*, which premiered at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2016 (also at Arena Stage and Berkeley Repertory Theatre, 2017) months of collaboration led up to the staging of Lisa Loomer's play, one of 37 commissions of the "American Revolutions: The United States History Cycle," which aims to create a "new canon" that chronicles moments of great change in American history. Led by director Bill Rauch, the artistic team focused on the political relevance and the relatability of the story, making sure we embraced the complexities and nuances of how the characters were brought to life. Conversations centered around intersectionality and the ways in which history is often told through a very narrow lens. My research focused on trying to expand that lens, making space for bodies and cultural perspectives that had not necessarily made headlines in the surviving iconography of around *Roe v. Wade*. The language of the costume design is at the core of what became the final version of *ROE*, with dozens of wigs, over 100 looks, and a complex choreography of costume changes that is deeply connected to the dramaturgy of the story. The play won a PEN Award and is now performed at major venues across the country, with renewed relevance. Reviewing the opening of *ROE* at Arena Stage the week of Donald Trump's inauguration, *The New Yorker* magazine points out that "At the time, *ROE* offers a remarkably fitting parable for the present women's resistance."

Performers are my close partners. No matter how large the cast, I engage in personal, deep work along with the performer to access a place of comfort and support. I am all too aware that I design for/with another body, and always offer up a costume sketch as an invitation to collaborate. I believe every body tells a story, and I spend time getting to know my collaborators. Committed work into radical empathy shapes my approach to working with performers, acknowledging differences, making room for lived experience and building tools to work through possible conflict. In the fitting room, I am as interested in matching the hat trim to my sketch as in discussing the contents of the character's purse – whether or not they are visible to the audience! Design is text and subtext. It is armor in the form of a ripped t-shirt, allowing the performer to explore the best way to walk, stand, and breathe life into the character. In storytelling, I appreciate beauty and elegance as much as I appreciate tension, conflict, and imperfection. **Representation is central to my work, which aims to shine light on the Latinx and immigrant experiences.** I have designed Quiara Alegria Hudes Pulitzer-winning trilogy around the Puerto Rican experience both at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (*Water by the Spoonful*, 2014 and *Happiest Song Plays Last*, 2015) and in Los Angeles (*Water* and *Elliot*, a

Soldier's Fugue, which played simultaneously at the Mark Taper Forum and the Kirk Douglas Theater in 2018.) I designed the premiere of Luis Alfaro's *Mojada – A Medea in Los Angeles* performed in the outdoor amphitheater in the Getty Villa in 2015. It was an impactful cultural event for the city of Los Angeles, as buses brought in audiences from predominantly Latinx communities to the home of Ancient European art. Another recent example of this partnership with contemporary Latinx playwrights was *Laughs in Spanish* at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. Alexis Scheer's new play is a comedy on motherhood, growing up Latina, and the choices one makes to become an artist. All of the themes hit very close to home, and I am fully aware of how deceptively difficult it is to design contemporary plays. In this process, I bring my research into conversations with the actors into my fitting room, which becomes a place of exploration. While I come into the space with a clear framework for the design – through an understanding of how colors, silhouettes, and tone of the costumes will coexist with the other design elements and extensive visuals to ground the world – I am also completely open to listening and discovering. I cherish learning in rehearsal rooms, individual conversations, and building together with performers.

Social and environmental justice are central to my work. As a Brazilian immigrant, inclusion and belonging are always at the center of why and how I choose to engage with works. I come from a culture of scarcity, one that is nonetheless abundant in community-created performances and rituals visually and musically impactful. As I navigate costume shops across this country, I invest in building spaces and relationships of mutual support, where every artisan and technician has a voice in the room. The work of a freelance designer can be alienating, in a constant rotation of collaborators. I have been lucky to call a roster of regional companies my artistic “homes”. I strive to create working environments that elevate everyone's point-of-view, and that use resources responsibly. Historically dismissed as “women's work”, making clothes is a central form of cultural practice in any society. My work with costume shops is a seeding ground for both innovation and resistance: it is where we practice size inclusivity, adopting language and methods that sees beyond the historical limitations of fashion; where we fight ableism, listening to performers and creating around their needs; where we foster and expand traditional methods such as darning, beading, pleating, and dyeing, keeping alive diverse cultural expressions; where we maintain, fashion, and re-fashion found garments, decades ahead of the current trend for thrifting; where we invest in the research and development of new ways of making costumes, with digital modeling, earth-friendly dyes, and LED wearables. In a recent collaboration with the Alley Theatre on a new adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* (2022), such exploratory methods were put into practice as we resurfaced from the Covid pandemic. Performances of *A Christmas Carol* was not a tradition of my childhood and I entered this process with skepticism, curiosity, and an enormous sense of responsibility to create a visual world that could live up to so many expectations and withstand the test of time. I was changed by the work, learning where I could find points of connection with my own traditions, making room for the use of vibrant colors and bold silhouettes. The scale of this production was unprecedented in my work, as was its rewards.

I am invested in bringing communities together in rituals around tales, traditions, and celebrations. I believe that process is just as important as product, and my work is a direct reflection of the rich exchanges that take place throughout the design journey, from conversations with the directors to the teams in the shops that host me, the dozens of hours in fitting-rooms, and the invitation we extend to audiences.

Five Projects

1. *Laughs in Spanish*, Denver Center for the Performing Arts (2023)
<https://www.denvercenter.org/tickets-events/laughs-in-spanish/>
2. *A Christmas Carol*, a new adaptation at the Alley Theatre (2022)
<https://www.alleytheatre.org/plays/a-christmas-carol-2/>
3. *All's Well that Ends Well*, Chicago Shakespeare Theater (2022)
https://www.chicagoshakes.com/plays_and_events/allswell
4. YA Shows at MainStreet Theater (2012-2019)
<https://www.americantheatre.org/2020/09/08/mainstreet-made-great-theatre-that-happened-to-be-good-for-kids/>
5. *ROE*
<https://www.osfashland.org/productions/2016-plays/roe.aspx>