

ARIEL AS HARPY, by Donatella Barbieri, commission for the British Library's *Shakespeare in Ten Acts* exhibition, 2016.

RATIONAL, CONTEXT AND DOCUMENTATION OF *ARIEL AS HARPY*, 2016.

Details of this artwork:

A commission from the British Library and Nissen Richards Studio to be included in the exhibition *Shakespeare in Ten Acts*, 2016, *Ariel as Harpy* (figures 4 and 5) is costume installation of a re-imagining of the first-ever appearance, in 1611 at the Blackfriars Theatre, of the shapeshifting 'sprite' Ariel in the guise of 'Harpy' in act 3, scene 3 of *The Tempest*. The play's spectacular and technically complex scenes, such as the initial shipwreck and Harpy's appearance, have prompted scholars to suggest that Shakespeare wrote it especially for the indoor and candle-lit Blackfriars (McMullan, 2016). There are no sources to indicate how this scene may have been staged or what Harpy may have looked like. While the initial brief was to reproduce a costume drawing by Inigo Jones of a winged, breastplated, tunic-and-legging wearing *Fiery Spirit* from Thomas Campion's *Lords' Masque* (1613), I demonstrated through my then un-published research (Barbieri, 2017), how Jones' design, for an aristocratic Jacobean court masque, (or *ballet de cour*, a predecessor of classical ballet) was incompatible with the retributational dramaturgy of the scene.

The resulting work drew instead from carnivalesque performances such a contemporaneous popular street theatre, made by ordinary people in public spaces. Foregrounded was the use of poor, raw materials and expressive form, while Harpy was reclaimed as a female, addressing Shakespeare's use of the vengeful mythical creature's anger, a woman's face in bird-like body (Wittington, 2014), see figures 2 and 7. As shown in figure 8, it was constructed through self-supporting frames alluding to the interior of late 16th and early 17th century garments, with stay, farthingale and ruff's underpropper extended through wings, and brought to life by the mask of a face distorted in anger. The open frame of wicker and willow supported thousands of blank book pages treated with tinted shellac, spiralling in winding bundles, suggesting movement dynamic as well a weaponization of Prospero's books, from where his magic emerges, see figures 6 and 8. Its height was 1.8 meters, with wings reaching 2.5 meters, the empty frame proved to be its own body, no mannequin was required.

The *Shakespeare in Ten Acts* exhibition at the British Library run from 16th April to 6th September 2016 and marked the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death. *Ariel as Harpy* was subsequently selected to be part of the World Stage Design 2017, 1st to 9th July, at the Taipei National University of the Arts. For the latter, it was a finalist amongst works in the Alternative category, with other groupings being Lighting Design, Performance Design, Set Design, Space Design, Projection and Multi-Media Design, Sound Design and Costume Design.

In the British Library *Ariel as Harpy* (see figures 3 and 4) was suspended as if about to be swooning down in the space dedicated to *The Tempest* accompanying First Folios and selected objects from early 17th century alongside with video clips of modern and contemporary interpretations of the play, including those *Prospero's Books* by Peter Greenway (1991), *The Enchanted Island* by Phelim McDermott and Julian Crouch (2011), and

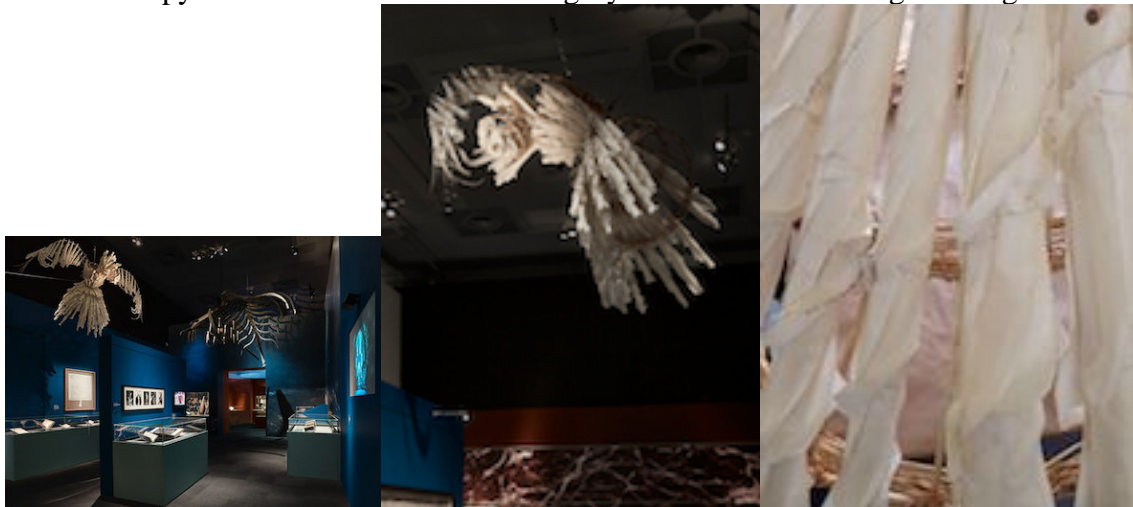
a display of Derek Jarmans's *The Tempest* (1979). It was however earthbound in Kuandu Museum of Fine Art in Taipei, see (figures 2 and 3), to engage a close-up viewing of textures, form and construction, while being displayed alongside with documentation of the development process in captioned composite images as in figure 1, as well as the one of the scale models made as part of the process.

Curated by British Library's Zoe Wilcox, the *Shakespeare in Ten Acts* exhibition was designed by Nissen Richards Studio, I collaborated in particular with architect Pippa Nissen in the planning stages of the project. I led a team that included wicker and willow craftsman John Page, project co-ordinator Bronya Arciszewska and a selected group of self-selecting students from LCF who applied to participate to the project following a presentation in which I exposed the eco-feminist dimension of the project. I was able to collaborate with Alexandra Kavanagh from the British Library to manage the complexity of the installation, object hanging specialist Jonathan Hoskins and with lighting designer Zelina Hughes to ensure its impact.

Top row - Fig 1 – panels of display of process, WSD17, Taipei. Fig 2 close-up of face, WSD17, Taipei. Fig 3 Harpy earthbound WSD17, Taipei



Ariel as Harpy selected as 'alternative' category finalist at World Stage Desing 2017 in Taipei



Ariel as Harpy displayed at the British Library 2016

Bottom row – Fig. 4 British Library, Ariel as Harpy displayed in the Tempest Room. Figure 5. Close up in British Library. Figure 6 close up of 'feathes' made of rolled up paper on a wicker and willow frame.

Agential costume and empowering female anger:

In previous research I have evidenced a historical instrumentality of costume in the making of the performance that goes beyond the costuming of performers (Barbieri, 2014 and 2017). The *Ariel as Harpy* costume installation questioned the premise that a re-imagining of Ariel's first ever apparition as Harpy in 1611, act 3 scene 3, *The Tempest*, would draw from Inigo Jones' resplendent court masques costumes, worn by the Jacobean nobility.

I demonstrated how the mythical half-woman half-bird harpy embodied the fearsome retribution bestowed by Prospero on his treacherous court via the vernacular, carnivalesque creatures that had originated in the medieval 'mouth of hell' performances, with bodies rearticulated through part-animal grotesque costuming (Barbieri, 2017). The efficacy of the carnivalesque invited 'poor' raw materials which are also sustainably produced and recyclable such as wicker, willow, shellac and blank pages of old books alluding to Prospero's book-based magic that enabled Ariel shape-shifting. These paper pages that were also connected to the original *first folio* of Shakespeare's plays displayed nearby in the exhibition, formed her wings, ruff and body, twisted into the spiralling vortexes intended to materialise the force of her fury (figure 8). The latter was further emphasised in the distorted mask, which, marking an absent face, drew from Bosch and Breugel's grotesque faces (figure 7). The willow with which the frame of the wings, skirt and body were made, was the same material used to structure farthingale and stays worn by women in Shakespeare's time (Arnold, 1985). The installation embodied through twisted matter, female anger in a way that went beyond the reconstruction of a missing Jacobean costume, as a body-less unleashing of hell through costume in the here and now of the exhibition experience. While applying Brian Massumi's notion that the body may be a prosthesis of the costume as 'the thing, the object, can be considered *prosthesis* of the body—provided that it is remembered that the body is equally a prosthesis of the thing' (2002, p. 95), here an absent mannequin body drew attention to a material performativity in costume that acts independently of the body (Barbieri, 2014 and Barbieri and Crawley, 2019). It also connected to studies of contemporaneous stage technology that would have permitted the flying of a winged Harpy in the Blackfriars, through a 'vehicle' that eventually became the ubiquitous stage harness (Egan, 1997, p.65). The re-imagining of *Ariel as Harpy* as materially performing prosthesis that, as vehicle, may have driven the performance adds to the multifaceted growing discourse around costume's agency in performance.

The six months exhibition ensured that Ariel as Harpy was featured in The Stage, and was then invited selected for World Stage Design Exhibition in Taipei, where I also exhibited the design process, including maquettes, drawings, photographs (figures 1, 2 and 3) and I spoke about the connections between costume agency and intercultural discourse.



Two of the compositions made from the process documentation to be displayed in Taipei:

Figure 7 –clay sculpt of Harpy's face and papier mache' surface of mask

Figure 8 – paper pages edged with tinted shellack, details of back of the costume body which held the body together and suspended , wing assemblge and interior of farthingale.



Gender politics through material choices.

In a the growing discourse around an expanded practice of costume for performance (Barbieri, 2011, Barbieri & Pantouvaki, 2016), the presentations of ideas through the absence of the performer's body (Pantouvaki, 2014) demonstrating how costume performs independently of the absent body of the performer (Barbieri, 2012 and 2014) in which it is too often readily subsumed (Monks, 2010, Barbieri 2017) has offered opportunity to focus on costume's own material performativity that also find links with the display of dress as artistic and curatorial practice.

An inventive and meaning-making practice of dress as spatial and narrative when on display, is informed by the study of the work of exhibition maker Judith Clark (Crawley & Barbieri, 2013, Pantouvaki & Barbieri, 2014) in particular through *Specters, When Fashion turns Back*, (2005) with its inclusion of dress-based artworks that commented on and embodied ideas rather than purely exhibiting extant objects - much like *Ariel and Harpy* does - and *The Concised Dictionary of Dress* (2010) with its expressive and speculative relationship with its context, the Blythe House archive. Through the use of blank book pages, intended to connect the British Library and the play through Prospero's own magic derived from his books, materially, *Ariel as Harpy* embodied ideas through an empty dress.

In the display of costume for performance both the absence of the performer's body, and, in this case also, of the costume or sources relating to what it might have looked like, created the opportunity to speculate. Unlike Wilson's eerie death-like display of mannequins of costume (2009), the absence of a mannequin was intended to produce a state of presence through form and material, engaging the imagination of the audience. The 'empty', self-supporting costume drew from farthingale, stays and ruffs that encased and shaped the female body in the early modern period (see figure 8). These did not only offer a comment on the character of Ariel as shapeshifting sprite held in abeyance by Prospero's magic, but also made present a Brechtian (Kott, 1987) display of the mechanics of theatre costume through its underpinnings with its possibilities of hierarchical upendings (Bakhtin, 1984).

Drawing on theories of subversion through the body of cultural and gender hierarchies (Bakhtin, 1984, Stallybrass and White, 1986, and Butler, 1990), has further focused on the material carnivalesque, as explored in chapter 3 of Barbieri 2107 via the everyday timelessness of wicker and willow, which linked Shakespearean female dress frames, frames of large carnivalesque effigies and stage machinery. It offered the material means through which to express the vernacular of this moment of retribution through theatrical mechanics, and to engage these with contemporary discourse on Shakespeare and ecology (Egan, 2015) and ecofeminism (Laroche and Munroe, 2017).

The gender of the costume had initially been considered as male through the design by Inigo Jones (1613), representing a dancer from a *ballet de cour* canon that referred to classical antiquity, in tights, tunic, breastplate with small flame-like wings attached to his shoulders. While it is true that all characters were played by male Shakespearean performers, I concluded that the character of Harpy ought to be a female embodiment of retribution

through the mythical Harpies as in Virgil's Aeneid 'bird-bodied, girl-faced things' with 'hands are talons, their faces haggard with hunger insatiable'. Reclaiming her mythical female hunger through anger and retribution is appropriate as she claps her wings to make the banquet disappear in front of the lost and famished court, subverting normative female nurturing qualities. Bringing to bear Ariel's shapeshifting and gendershifting qualities on research around the American Harpy Eagle, the largest bird of prey found in the rainforest, with identical plumage for male or female (Carl Linneaus, 1758, cited in Ferguson-Lees and Christie, 2001) enabled an engagement with the power and scale of their wings. As large feathers made of blank book pages, while referring to Arciboldo's rearticulation of the body in his painting *The Librerian* (1566) in the British Library, these vortexes of pages appeared to draw energy into their grasp aiming to evoke the fury of the apparition of the Harpy in the play, matched by the angry face mask held by the empty wicker frame, indicating its non-permanence. Given its significant presence in the space of the British Library, this embodiment of costume for performance was selected by international peers to be included in the exhibition of World Stage Design in Taipei in 2017, and discussed in terms of interpretations that might go beyond nostalgia and cultural exclusion zones to engage with material performantivity and notion of retribution and female anger.



WSD2017 Professional Designer

Italy
DONATELLA BARBIERI

ARIEL AS HARPY

Category | Alternative
Theatre Company | Shakespeare in Ten Acts
Premiere | 2015-04-14, British Library

Design Statement



The brief was to produce a costume that conveyed Shakespeare's own time through material and form, considering the play was written for one of the first in-door public theatre spaces Shakespeare had access to. As such the play is highly scenographic, opening with a ship-wreck. The apparition of Harpy is a fantastically exciting costume moment. The research journey initially revealed the meaning of Harpy – half predatory bird and half woman - in ancient myth, a channeling of pure female anger, of which Prospero makes ample use in his text. Research included the study of grotesque carnivalesque costumes from the Renaissance, and the meeting of street theatre and court theatre that the play invited. References to painters whose work articulates the body through material included the work of Arciboldo, Baroque court masques, the costumes of German street carnivals in the 1580s, the construction of winged effigies and female costume of the time. The use of willow in the frames of corsets and crinolines was extended into wings, while vortexes made out of book pages represented 'weaponized' feathers and the transformative use of Prospero's book knowledge.

would like to propose the full costume be installed in WSD as a hanging form.



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Figure 9 – cover of catalogue
Figure 10 – double page spread in catalogue

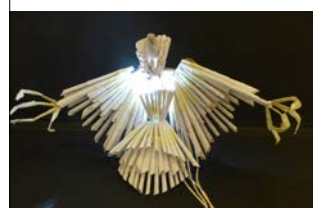


Image | Tom Og, David Shearing

Collaborators | Tempest By William Shakespeare | Curator: Zoe Wilton | Set Designer: Nissen Richards Studio | Lighting Designer: Selma Hughes | Costume Designer: Donatella Barbieri | Production Management of the exhibition: Alex and Susan Dymond | Hair expert: Jonathan Hoskins | Donatella Barbieri's Assistant and Costume Supervisor: Bronya Ariszewski | Visual Architect and Scenographer: Nissen Richards Studio | Props Designer: Emma Lomas | Willow construction consultant: Jaim Page | Design Assistant: Mimy Sun | Assistant makers: Sarah Lovell, Natalia Loannou, Adam Borowski |

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Alternative
David Shearing

Research questions:

1. How does the process of considering a costume as an installation enable an advancing of a nascent discourse of costume as material performance? How can it enable a process of materialising answers to other questions beyond the ones proposed by the commission, in particular: how can costume entangle gender, social and cultural justice discourses in its practice?
2. How might such material performance enable and support an intercultural dialogue on Shakespearean text, given that it started life as a response to a brief that asked for the reproduction of the Jacobean ballet de cour/court masque design by Inigo Jones?
3. How might the Ariel briefly appear as Harpy in a re-imaging of an original production of *The Tempest* staged in 1611? Would Harpy be male and wearing a court masque/ballet de cour costume? Or might the carnivalesque better represent this scene?
4. Looking at Act 3 Scene 3 of the play, the performer may have as little as 30 seconds to make his way into the flying mechanism of the Blackfriars theatre to appear in a different guise from the one worn in Act 3 Scene 2; the stage directions also ask him to make the banquet disappear. What theatre material, mechanics and form would most usefully represent this in the context of costume exhibition, the here and now of a global context of Shakespearean performance as well as in response to the brief to address reconstruction of a moment that happened more than 400 years ago?

Different questions were asked beyond reproduction of approximate sources, while aligning the process of designing a costume-centred moment in performance to impact on audiences and applying a design-led performance-making process. This permitted the designing of a museum installation through the techniques of theatre making through a devised design dramaturgy. This hybridisation of practices (exhibition installation making and performance making) enable the piece to be selected as 'alternative' at World Stage Design 2017 (the only costume project to make the finalists short list) and the re-application of the process with a later commissioned costume installation at the V&A for *Salome', the Dance of the Seven Veils*, (2017) which embodied the use of costume with murderous intent in Richard Strauss opera in the Opera: Power, Passion and Politics exhibition at the V&A (2017).

While the alluding to farthingales, stays, ruff underpropper and wings made the work specific to the reconstruction of character and moment brief, the abstraction through repurposed materials and forms enabled its impact to float free of its original sources and site and connect to an international audience of theatre makers. As such it permitted the making of connection with ideas around de-colonising of performance through material performativity, embodiment and form, beyond established semiotics, cultural hierarchies of Shakespearean re-production.

Costume for performance is a nascent area of research. By its nature costume disappears materially (costumes are working clothes that historically have been worn out or repurposed), conceptually (costume is seemingly subsumed into the body of the performer as far as the discourses in performance studies go) and by the nature of its interdisciplinarity can disappear in more established fields of research (historically, fashion and fine art). This project has enabled me to discuss costume and dominant cultures in panels in keynotes-length presentation at WSD 2017, raising important questions on ethical engagement, on process and on countering outdated notions through research.

To engage in a co-production of meaning with a range of audiences, I have purposefully worked with materials that are used all over the world, re-devising simple techniques such as basket weaving in ways that have enabled impact both in the British Library and in Taipei. I have ensured a foregrounding of its embedding of ethics in all discussion on the project, while making the process transparent in the exhibition in Taipei by presenting documentation in the exhibition alongside the costume installation which permitted close-up viewing. I have worked with humble materials engaging experts in the field (John Page, work with cane and wicker, and Bronya Arciszewska, Elizabethan costume reproduction expert) while ensuring that the benefits of the process were spread amongst the self-selecting student work placements who applied to join the realisation process of the project.

The project started as a conversation during a research visit to the British Library in October 2015 while working on *Costume in Performance* (and, incidentally, specifically chapter 3 that deals with the grotesque body). The initial brief was for a reconstruction of Harpy in act 3 scene 3 of *The Tempest* based on Inigo Jones' Fiery Spirit for a Jacobean court masque (1613). I presented different interpretation of the of notion of reconstruction, given that there are no existing sources that may enlighten on the actual costume, engaging a speculative and interpretative process, deploying visual and textual sources, extant historical dress, considering grotesque and carnivalesque early modern vernacular culture and performance alongside contemporary readings of Shakespeare. I took time to design and pitch initial ideas led by costume and material performativity, archival research, application of performance making processes, design processes inherent to scenography, rather following the much easier possibility of reconstructing an artwork by the primary Jacobean court architect and costume designer of early modern Britain.

In my research presentation I referred to archived sources held in the V&A, British Museum and the British Library, which enabled me to determine a specific historical materiality and form that would address the here-and-now as well as reconstruction. Amongst the contemporary sources were designers, artists and exhibition makers who had worked in contexts that made dress and absent bodies sites of meaning-making, including Simona Rybakova, Judith Clark and Susie MacMurray.

I applied processes emerging from my background as theatre designer, working on script breakdown, storyboards, 3 D experiments, maquettes and visual research, while critically focusing on the way materials' movement and performance may translate in relation to space and audience in an exhibition space. I made a succession of sketches and maquettes, some of which were included in the display in World Stage Design in Taipei. Having previously

worked with paper forms as a elements that enable or even initiate the wearer's body movement (Wearing Space, Prague Quadrennial 2015) I experimented with paper in various forms as the means of expressing movement and gesture, eventually finding the twisting / vortex making a the most efficacious form. The use of paper as recyclable everyday object also reiterated the carnivalesque where, as papier mache', it has existed in performance at least since the middle ages (Margolis, 2017). The wicker and willow frame are equally ubiquitous and its application go back millennia across the globe.

The presentation of the maquette, the budget breakdown, proposed realisation team, hanging position, lighting, material compositions, were all approved through a succession of design presentations from early January 2016, while the realisation of the project took six weeks. I was able to borrow space at Lime Grove where a team that included wicker and willow expert consultant John Page, project co-ordinator Bronya Arciszewska, a small group of student placements and I made and stored some of the elements. In advance of the installation I was able organise a simulation of the hanging system to work out the appropriate distribution of weight, using a hoist to obtain the most effective angle. This ensured that the day-long hanging process in the British Library went smoothly. Once the costume was installed in The Tempest space where it stared across the room in an inter-performative manner to the ship-wreck of act 1 scene 1, part of Nissen Richard Studio's atmospheric space design, it also benefitted from the lighting design by Zelina Hughes.

Being selected for World Stage Design 2017 in Kuandu Museum of Fine Art in Taipei enabled the presentation of process and the close up viewing of Ariel as Harpy. This was done in conversation with OISTAT's (The International Organisation of Scenographers, Theatre Architects and Technicians) former Executive Director Kathy Hong. Other critical supporters of World Stage Design 2017 were Taiwan Theatre Technology Association and Taipei National University of the Arts. The initial nomination process included an application by me encouraged by OISTAT colleagues. Once selected as exhibited finalist, Ariel as Harpy was freighted to Taipei where I installed it alongside documentation of the process. I spoke at the event about the work in relation to designing Shakespeare, intercultural dialogue, ecofeminism and social justice.

Press and other research dissemination indicators.

The Stage <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/2016/backstage-how-i-gave-ariel-wings-for-shakespeare-exhibition/>

Exhibition design review World Stage Design: Emily Collett, Studies in Costume and Performance, (Collett 2018).

Book - Catalogue of World Stage Design 2017

Website - <https://www.wsd2017.com/exhibition/detail/?pid=1026>

Listing of my intercultural lecture

<http://www.wsd2017.com/scenofest/detail/?pid=525>

Evidence of awards or nominations for awards (e.g. award letter/URL)

List of finalists: <http://www.wsd2017.com/finalists>

Document with authenticated audience/visitor figures relating to the output (e.g. letter from gallery)

15.000 visitors from all over the world: see headline statement in the website:

<http://www.wsd2017.com/about>

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