

National Theatre

Press Release

7 August 2019

Costume at the National Theatre

Free exhibition in the Wolfson Gallery

Thursday 3 October until June 2020



The National Theatre's Costume department sources, constructs, alters, repairs, organises and maintains costumes for over 20 new productions on the South Bank each year. Meanwhile, the Costume Hire department circulates costumes from its stock of 70,000 to films, photoshoots and other theatre productions. This team of 46 can produce everything from muddy uniforms to giant caterpillars; dress an actor in a corset in under 60 seconds; and strive to ensure things look as good on the final performance as they did on the first. This new exhibition invites you into their world.

Featuring costumes from productions including *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *War Horse*, *Follies* and *Antony and Cleopatra* the exhibition visits each stage of the production process; from design to construction, sourcing and alterations, to dressing, repairs and laundering.

Costume at the National Theatre has been curated by **Aoife Monks** and is designed by **Tom Paris**. Both have worked closely with the NT Costume department and in consultation with designers **Vicki Mortimer** (*Follies*) and **Katrina Lindsay** (*Small Island*).

Aoife Monks said: 'Costume is one of the first things we see on stage, telling us immediately about the world of the show we are about to watch. Despite this we often overlook it, thinking more about the character wearing their fictional clothes than the actor in their costume. However, even the most ordinary costumes take extraordinary amounts of work. Drawing on

interviews with NT staff, this exhibition reveals the skill, thought and time that costume requires. You will never overlook it in the same way again.'

Tom Paris said: 'I'm thrilled to be part of a project that celebrates the incredible craft and unique skills found in the National Theatre's Costume department. I hope the exhibition will shed light on the often unseen attention to detail and sheer dedication that goes into each and every costume that steps out onto the stage. This exhibition gives a rare opportunity to get up close and to touch some of the most exciting and interesting items from the NT's extensive collection.'

There will be a book, *Costume at the National Theatre*, which will be published to coincide with the exhibition.

The exhibition will also be accompanied by a series of related talks and events:

Costume at the National Theatre on Mon 11 November, 6–7pm, Cottesloe Room, £9/£6

Staff from the National Theatre's Costume department talk about how they create costumes for productions at the NT.

Exhibition Insight Tour with Curator Aoife Monks on Sat 9 November, 12 noon–1pm, Wolfson Gallery, £5/£3

A short tour around the *Costume at the National Theatre* exhibition with curator Aoife Monks.

The Secret Lives of Costume: A Multisensory Walk at the NT on Sat 23 November, 12–1.15pm or 3–4.15pm £5/£3

This sensory walk backstage invites audiences to pay attention to the non-visual senses involved in theatre costume. Presented as part of [Being Human Festival](#).

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For more information, contact Louisa Terry: lterry@nationaltheatre.org.uk

Images can be downloaded [here](#).

Aoife Monks

Dr Aoife Monks is a Reader in Theatre and Performance Studies at Queen Mary University of London. Her work addresses the multitude of ways in which audiences look at actors in costume, and how actors themselves think about what they wear – and what wears them – on stage. She has also worked on the histories of fashion, virtuosity, and crossdressing at the theatre and also writes for newspapers and magazines such as *The Guardian*, *The Irish Times* and the *Times Higher Education*. She is the author of *The Actor in Costume* (2010) and co-author of *Readings in Costume* with the costume designer Ali Maclaurin. Aoife is currently writing a book on the relationship between virtuosity and Stage-Irishness in the work of Michael Flatley and Dion Boucicault. She is Co-Director of Research and Public Engagement at the Department of Drama at Queen Mary where she also founded and runs the Artist Research Fellowship scheme.

Tom Paris

Tom Paris is a set and costume designer working internationally for select venues include the National Theatre, the Young Vic and Theatre Royal Stratford East.

He is a frequent design associate to Rae Smith on productions for the Metropolitan Opera, the National Theatre, the Old Vic, Bridge Theatre, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Scottish Opera, Leeds Playhouse and in the West End

He previously designed the *Enter wonder.land* exhibition and *All Kinds of Limbo: A VR Musical Journey* for the National Theatre.

The National Theatre

The National Theatre's mission is to make world class theatre that's entertaining, challenging and inspiring – and to make it for everyone. It aims to reach the widest possible audience and to be as inclusive, diverse and national as possible with a broad range of productions that play in London, on tour around the UK, on Broadway and across the globe. The National Theatre's extensive UK-wide learning and participation programme supports young people's creative education through performance and writing programmes like Connections, New Views and Let's Play. Its major new initiative Public Acts creates extraordinary acts of theatre and community; the first Public Acts production was 2018's *Pericles*. The National Theatre extends its reach through digital programmes including NT Live, which broadcasts some of the best of British theatre to over 2,500 venues in 65 countries, and the free streaming service On Demand In Schools, used by nearly 60% of UK state secondary schools. The National Theatre invests in the future of theatre by developing talent, creating bold new work and building audiences, partnering with a range of UK theatres and theatre companies.

For more information, please visit <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/>

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