

Practitioner's Statement

Australian Flora and Fauna

Chelsea Clark

My brief was to design a series of costumes for a new upcoming Cirque du Soleil show. The costume will be worn by the acrobatic acts in the new show, and needs to be inspired, and reflect the theme and stories of Australian Flora and Fauna. The costumes will need to be bold and innovative whilst also functioning for the acrobats to move freely and showcase their talents.

The starting point for my design began as a personal one – I got to experience “Totem”, a Cirque Du Soleil show, when it came to Australia last year. I was mesmerised by the performance and the intricate, crazy costume designs the acrobats wore. I was influenced by the costume designs of Liz Vandal as I quite liked her insect work for “Ovo”. I was also heavily influenced by various Australian Indigenous dreamtime stories as I explored the “Australian Flora and Fauna” theme. The main stories I was connected to was the that of the Frill Necked Lizard and the Sturt Desert Pea. I was quite drawn to the symbolism in both dreamtime stories. The Frill Necked Lizard focused on greed and the symbolic representation of the bird sisters and their skirts. I also loved the symbol of forbidden love which evolved in the Sturt Desert Pea. I wanted to incorporate the dreamtime stories, so that my costumes could describe historical and traditional elements of our country.

The final design is based on the dreamtime story of the Frill Necked Lizard. I found that the most important part of the story was the honeypot, as this is the basis of the dreamtime story and without that there would be no story. I wanted my designs to be innovative and to look bold and striking on stage from the audience whilst still reflecting the story. The textures of the various dreamtime elements such as the metallic honeycomb pattern and the soft feathers contrast and yet harmonise well to produce a stunning and effective texture. I found that black spandex lycra would be practical to construct the base leotard and functional for the performers. My grandma became my mentor and she passed on her knowledge in sewing.

Each element represents a separate aspect of the dreamtime story. The feathers represent the lizards black bird sisters. Their skirts get consumed by the lizard, which I represented through neck tube. The bold honeycomb pattern represents the honeypot that the lizard steals the honey from. The wavy centre piece and the inner leg pieces represent the scales and patterns of the actual frill necked lizard. The colour scheme for the costume has a lot of neutral tones of silver and gold that also reflect the colours of the Australian outback. The costume complements the model and the black fitted leotard recedes as the bold, vibrant elements jump out off the main garment.

Overall, I believe that my final design resolution met the requirements of the brief and reflects the dreamtime story of the Frill Necked Lizard. The complexity and sophistication of the final piece reflect the theme of “Australian Flora and Fauna” and look aesthetically pleasing from a distance, especially from the perspective of an audience.