

Costume Design: Key Questions

Costume designer and architect [Gabriela Yiaxis](#) worked with Whitechapel Gallery Children's Commission 2015 artist **Rivane Neuenschwander** on the exhibition *The Name of Fear*. Gabriela is an experienced freelance costume designer who works worldwide on feature films, advertisements, TV, fashion and music. In this resource she shares key questions and the process of taking a costume from script to screen.



Rivane Neuenschwander: The Name of Fear 2015

Costume Design: Key Questions

Costume designer Gabriela Yiaxis shares some of her key considerations when developing costumes for feature films. Think about how all of these questions effect what you see on screen, some of these questions can also be applied to developing costume for theatre, advertising campaigns and catwalk collections.

Setting

What is the story about?

Is the film contemporary, futuristic, epic, period? Which exactly era?

Does the storyline have a fantasy or realistic approach?

How does the director wants to tell the story? Funny, realistic, surreal?

Will the film be shot in black and white, sepia, colour?

Who is the audience for the finished product?



Costume Design: Key Questions

Building a character

Examples of questions you should ask yourself when they are not on a script .

How old are they?

Is the character rich or poor?

What is their social status? Aristocracy, working class, middle class?

What is the characters family background? Are they from a traditional family background, alternative family background, single parent household, grew up in care?

What is the characters role in the story? Banker, waitress, doctor, athlete, writer, homeless, musician, salesman, criminal?

Consider how the characters personality affects the costume. Is the character: boring, modern, traditional, stylish, elegant, chic, cool, loud, introvert?

How does this influence the characters colour palette? monochromatic, bright colours, bold, minimal, patterns, neutral?



Costume Design: Key Questions

The previous questions are a small part of the journey that a costume has to go through. Here is an overview of some of the key stages in bringing a costume to life, from script breakdown to the final Wrap.

Read synopsis of script/ directors breakdown; work with the director to discuss the tone of the film in terms of aesthetics, when? Historical, contemporary? Location? Season?

Reading script and breaking it down; analysis of the script to help determine individual characters costumes.

Meeting with the Director and Production Designer: communication is key across all departments, all aspects of initial notes discussed.

Building the characters; always in conversation with other departments (sets, lights, make-up, photography) to ensure harmony and continuity of ideas. Supported by research, mood boards, illustrations, colour palettes, textures and fabric examples.

Cast List; measurement charts for each cast member

Wardrobe Budget: communicating and working with the Production department

Buying; new? Vintage? Designer? Fabric?

Hiring: uniforms, military, period costumes, fantasy and other specialist costumes

Costume Design: Key Questions

Making: some costumes are unique, specific and can't be sourced elsewhere and need to be made. Others need to be re-made for comfort, practicalities, especially when stunts are involved.

Fitting/Wardrobe Call: considering quantity of options, adjustment making, number of costumes per scene, working on multiple costumes at once, photographing adjustments and finished costumes.

Costume Breakdown: important stage to evaluate all work up to this point to create a satisfactory finished product.

On set shooting, single characters: observing, photographing and adjusting to maintain continuity. Costume change overs, as shooting doesn't always happen in chronological order.

Shooting of crowd scenes; creating realism and harmony throughout the duration of shot, taking into consideration all details as final edit might feature a close-up of a particular extra within the scene. Disguising of extras so that they can be used in different crowd scenes as part of the same film.

Wrap: return all hired costumes, equipment, pack-up, non-approved costumes, sign-off all accounts. That's a wrap!