

## Don Quixote

By Costume Designer Maria Chenut / August 19, 2015

All photos by Marin Chenut. See more of Marin's work at: <https://mariachenut.wordpress.com>

I am very proud and excited to share with you the latest production I have been working on. (many many costumes, many up-cycled items, exploding creative juices, and lots of elbow grease.) I decided to take the time to give a detailed "how it was made" post. Enjoy:



Cervantes DON QUIXOTE made into a play by Peter Anderson and Colin Heath. This is the US premier. Seven actors tell the epic story of how imagination trumps reality.

### Featuring:

Ron Campbell as Don Quixote, John R. Lewis as Sancho Panza, and Cassidy Brown, Rick Eldridge, Lee Fitzpatrick, Monica Ho, and Jed Parsario as everyone else !

Directed by Lesley Schisgall Currier for the Marin Shakespeare Company, with Masks by David Poznanter, Costumes by Maria Chenut, Sets by Jackson Currier, Props by Joel Eis and Sound by Billie Cox.

### The Process:

While I collected inspiring images of all sorts to feed my imagination and dialogue with the director, it is collecting the actual palette of materials that most directly shaped the costumes. I was interested in

making something that went beyond period costumes though feeding from its shapes and textures. I focused on giving the costume lots of texture, so they would be interesting from up close and from afar. The United States is full of thrift shops and I was lucky to coincide with estate sales that delivered an assortment of transformable items. The costumes became about collage and the use of unconventional materials, in the spirit of surrealism. In fact many of the props in the show also function like this. Because 5 actors play most of the parts and change constantly from one costume to another everything had to be made to go on and off very fast, in as few condensed layers as possible.



Everyone's head needed to be covered almost at all times to hide the natural hair, to cover the forehead edge of the masks, and contribute to the character change. In the image below, the middle hat is made with a piece of a scarf, with the tasseled edge playfully at the back. Other hats are made of sweater and jacket sleeves... removing the sleeves actually made some of the jackets look less contemporary and helped their transformation.



I first made base costumes for everyone, a top and a bottom piece, out of a solid yet stretchy cotton based fabric, to use as a bottom layer upon which to add further layers to express each character. Each base piece was different, some with sleeves that transformed, one skirt folded into pants... and all taking into consideration how it would fit under something else, and what it would look like in another scene, for the other 5 characters the actor has to play!

In a typical costumer-stress moment, one actor decided he needed to wear kneepads. I protested not having been informed earlier, having just made him pants above the knee.... and of course in the end the new adjusted below the knee pants are much more interesting than the first ones!



Many pieces for the show use elements that are transformed. Antonia, right, as Quixote's niece wears two green panels that are embroidered pillow cases and many doilies. The pieces were joined to a pink sweater for a seamless appearance and quick scene changes.



Above Doctor Nicholas and Father Perez. The doctor's sleeves were cut off and bound to the top part of the collar creating ruffles, and the storm flaps were flipped out revealing the wine color of the lining. I

then added a piece of braided leather belt on top. The modern pockets were covered by the wide woven waistband. The front of Father Perez cloak has topstitched ruffles taken from a sweater.



The yellow jacket above for one of the Customers starts from a normal suit jacket. I cut off the sleeves and used them as sleeve caps for the shoulder alongside a strip from a towel. Down the front and around

the neck are placemats and the triangular patches down the front are pieces cut out years ago from an ottoman pouf. A belt covers the modern looking pockets.

The red jacket is actually two layers pieces. They are actually women's jackets, one suede, one wool, since for men the selection and colors is always so limited. The embroidered details are taken from a dress and sewn on.



The flexible armor was thought out to give Ron Campbell, who plays Don Quixote, the ability to do somersaults or whatever shenanigans he wanted. The individual pieces of vegetable steamers were separated, flattened, dulled, textured with light speckling of spray paint, sealed, and then layered in and sewn down among the faux suede fabric I had already cut into scale shapes, treated and sewn down onto a base of quilted material thanks to my trusty industrial Singer...







The Innkeeper's apron, above, is made from deconstructing a handbag for many of its parts. The dog wears an old fur and leather patched coat. Pigtails worked to give her even more personality.



Here Lee, as the Guard, wears her skirt as pants. The bottom back edge of the skirt is pulled forward and up, buttoning at the waist and gray straps wrap around her knees to maintain the shape.



The helmet is meant to hide her face as she is not wearing a mask. The white strip is a piece from the belt I wove through her thriftstore tunic and the vegetable steamers make nice eyeshades. These and the scallops around her neck echo Quixote's costume.



The convicts. There are several such “groups” of characters in the show, requiring a “set” of costumes, meant to be seen together and reflecting a group identity.



The Holy Brothers are wearing silver placemats with added on trim and a curtain tie, atop long sweaters from which the sides were removed so as to make a sort of poncho. Joel Eis the prop master furnished the ornate metal crosses for these Inquisition figures. Matching hats were made from a sweater.









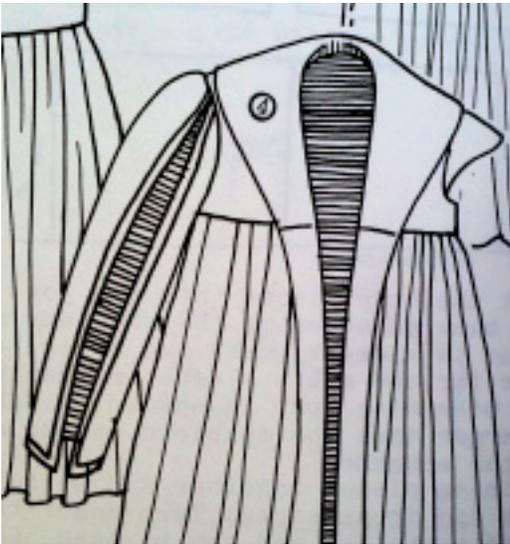
The Bookseller brings us into the more fanciful part of the play. It is inspired by The Professional Grotesques of Nicolas de Larmessin II, a set of illustrations from 1695 of people dressed wearing the tools and products of their profession, like an itinerant salesman. Because Quixote keeps getting into fights with everyone he meets, the costume actually had to stay pretty simple.



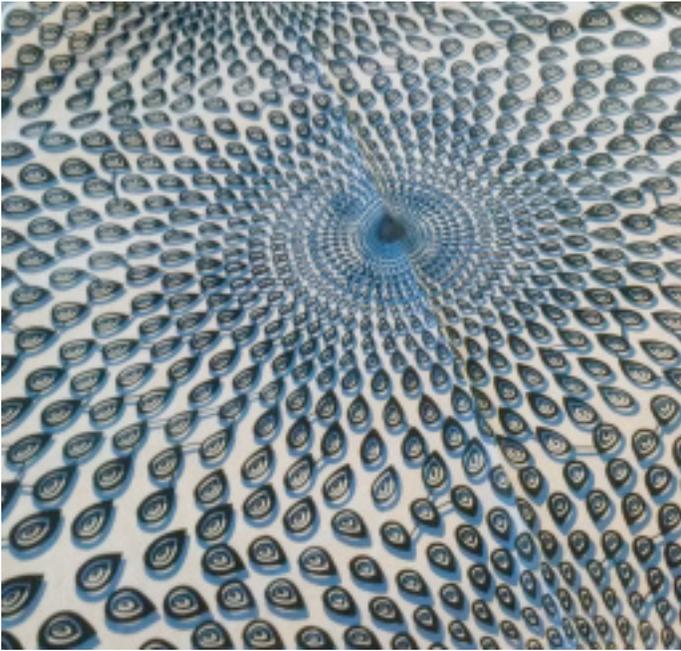
The slow building of color comes to a climax in the scene with the Duke and Duchess.



Her dress is a kimono I fitted to her body, shaping the sleeves from rectangles into triangles. The purple underskirt pinned below is a child's dress. The yellow neck ruffles are the bottom part of another dress. The top part of the same dress makes his hat, and the flowers of the same fabric adorn both the kimono and his hat. Her hat is the embroidered chest piece of another dress, turned upside down. The rest of that dress makes the yellow inset sleeves the Duke wears.



His jacket sleeves were opened up imitating the Elizabethan model, and for commodity. The jacket itself was once a woman's two piece suit so to fit the Duke I opened up the back center seam and added a full 8 inch wide piece I stole from the skirt, the rest of which makes the bustle tails.



Finding this wild African wax print was the breakthrough to making the Enchanters. They have the eyes that are watching it all, mentioned throughout the play. I had been looking at images of Kachina dolls, African grass masks, Inuit masks, and there was something animal yet abstract about how the actors played them. Natural items such as baskets and the weaves of placemats (yes, again) made it feel as part of the adhoc world of the props and costumes. The black and white “eye” circles are from a dress... of which there is hopefully enough left so as to make myself something!

