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## Designing Costume for Circus Performers Considering the Special Capabilities of the Cloth

Elham Dehbozorgi<sup>a</sup>, Salar Zohoori<sup>a</sup>, Abolfazl Davodiroknabadi<sup>a</sup>, Seyedjavad Derakhshan<sup>a</sup>, Mehrnoosh Sakenyandehkordi<sup>b\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Department of Design and Clothing, Imam Javad University College, Yazd, Iran*

<sup>b</sup>*Department of Graphic, Imam Javad University College, Yazd, Iran*

Received 14 January 2020; revised 04 February 2020; accepted 05 February 2020

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### Abstract

This paper on designing circus performers' costume, has been written based on a play in which animals costumes are used instead of the real animals in order to protect them. In this paper costume of five main characters has been designed creatively. They are: The Turtle, the about to extinct Salamander, the Ant, the plant and the circus chief. They have been characterized through costume designing. The circus chief character because of his dominant presence has been designed based on the circus games style and the plant character is a symbol of growth while the Ant completely evokes the image of knowledge. Water and fire are the essential elements of the circus therefore, in this descriptive-experimental paper Titanium Silicate and Zirconium have been used in order for the costumes to be both fire and water resistant enough to provide the performers with better comfort.

**Keywords:** Circus; Cloth; Costume Designing; Illustration

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### 1. Introduction

The essence of the circus is intertwined with glamorous costumes. The acrobats, jugglers, illusionists, ropewalkers, the circus chief etc. all of them wear corona, highly happy color costumes. They mostly use red, golden and metallic in their costumes which catches the audience's attention easily. (Cambridge dictionary, 1995) The circus would not be attractive enough without the costume and it would not be magical in that case. These costumes play an essential role also in terms of making the audience trust and applaud at the end of the show.

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\* Corresponding author. Tel: +98-9173067942.

E-mail address: [mehrsa96@yahoo.com](mailto:mehrsa96@yahoo.com)

Nowadays there many different kind and forms of circus but in the past it was only circular and because of what this word means in English, it changed during the time to Circus which refers to a circular movement (Janet, 2002). Ella Storm One of the successful circus performers says:

As a circus artist I feel the power and magic of the circus when I wear my costume and this is so interesting and dramatic how the cloth, color, texture and its brilliance can so dramatically make me appear at the present moment and blossom. They invite me to make dreams and when I wear my costume I actually awaken a different part of myself which completely changes my mental attitude and even leads my focus towards the stage. George Speaight in the history of circus writes “the history of circus is a story of physical capabilities of human beings and instructing the animals happening in a circle (Ring) as big as 13 meters square with the audience seated around this ring. This ring is of course bigger than 13 these days” (Speaight, 1980; Antony, 1956).

This popular circus which we know today was performed in England for the first time including some performative movements by animals like horses. These trained animals together with men, used to travel from town to town for amusing people. The advent of modern circus was almost earliest days of the twentieth century. Many people used to enjoy amazing shows including lots of animals on the stage while they did not think of the backstage. Misbehavior with the animals and bad, low-standard care was among the usual things. They used to get injured during the show or training and while their health was in danger, their wounds was so risky for the people around them too. Poor animals which used to spend 96% of their lives in chain and shackle and cage. They used to travel eleven months of the year while being kept in boxes and cages with no fresh air or enough sleep and good food. Animal rights protection organizations finally could change this and removed them from the circus shows (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014; Michael, 1997; Oana, 2017).

Now based on these findings, researchers have demanded more distinct rules of better comfort for animals in circus. Government of the Netherlands in 2012 banned using animals in circus and all other countries did the same after from then on.

During the twentieth century circus costumes have rapidly altered from form-fitting designs to forms that had considered the new banning rules. That is to say, before the twentieth century form, shape and color were the only considered elements but after twentieth century they start to design more practical costumes. Safer, more comfort costumes based on the characteristics of every single show. One of the most amazing costumes were of Leotard (Stoddart, 2000).

Jules Leotard was a French gymnastics who in 1859 characterized this costume for the first time and performed his movements on the stage while wearing this costume. Women's clothing was at the same time being changed like men's clothing during the twentieth century. They start to become more tight-fitting especially the costume of the realists and acrobats which had made them freer in action and more practical. Plastic, tight clothes which let women to do the movements much easier. Nowadays, Leotard's costumes are considered as a revolution in the fashion world because they became a pattern for clothes such as swimming suits, ballet and thousands of others though it all started from circus (Peta, 2010; Parker, 2011).

In this paper, a play was selected and costumes were designed for its characters.

Cotton is the most plentiful and popular biopolymer in the world. It is the most valuable raw material in the world of textile industry. Cotton fibers and fabrics have been used from ancient periods. Owing to its plenty, biodegradability and some physical properties such as high humidity absorption, glossy, high stability, alkaline resistance and amorphous structure, cotton is an extremely great renewable resource for the improvement of environment friendly, exactly separate from its traditional and great use in paper manufacturing and textile industry (Yadav, 2006; Yuranova, 2006). Cotton fibers present a symmetric surface intercommunicated with the

hydroxylated nature of the organizing anhydroglucose units. This property caused to high hydrophilicity of cotton, provide the formation of powerful hydrogen bonding between cotton fibers and the organization of three-dimensional fiber-based structures (Goncalves, 2009; Subramanian, 2009; Li, 2006). In this paper we use cotton fabric in order to designing circus clothes.

## 2. Materials and Discussion

The clothes were first washed in distilled water and then were immersed in Silicate Titanium / Zirconium solution for 12 hours and then the processed clothes were dried at ambient temperature. Considering the removal of animals from circus around the world there are many factors that should be noticed including the artistic design. Most of the today's modern circuses perform their shows with a dominant focus on: Play writing, stage designing and the performance therefore, a surreal play has been written based on this notion to design the characters and costumes. Below you will read a summary of the play:

An extra-terrestrial creature comes to a mysterious planet named Earth by accident through a magical clothe which is in a memories-box and gets involved in the animals of the planet's adventures. Sahrook the antagonist of the play, who is also the circus chief using the black magic has made some of the animals to work in the circus. Two of these animals are of endangered species, Eagle-snout Turtle (Olaku) and the Lorestan Salamander (Machkul) whom Shrook has used their power to spell the other animals. The extraterrestrial character with the help of a wise ant named Mirizh and a magical tree named Titi starts a battle with Sahrook and etc.

There are two reasons for applying different dialects from around Iran in this play: 1) to make the audience feel an emotional bond with the story. 2) to make the people know this heritage to help protect it.

The designer's first task is to create the antagonist since there won't be any drama without it and any protagonist needs an antagonist in other words, there's no meaning for the evil without the good. The character is an essential building block of a story who is like a real human being. It is a model of his / her society. The character of Sahrook is based on the inspiration from real people in society who are eager for power such as the dictator, the mean or animal-torturer.

For designing Sahrook, the anatomy of an octopus has been a source of inspiration who's always been shown as the scariest marine creature in animations or the insidious, evil, greedy character of the science fictions. They are mysterious creatures who are able to do color-shifting. In the face of this character the antichrist's eye has been used which is known as a part of talismans, fortune telling rituals and ... the mustache has been used to make it look even meaner though some people think it make one to look mysterious. In order to make Sahrook look like a mysterious dictator an overcoat and a top-hat have been applied. Black and purple have been applied as colors for the body and costumes. The purple color which is a mixture of red and blue is neither warm nor cold and it is the first secondary color made by human being. This color has got a selfish, ambitious, leader characteristic. It has got power and has been used usually as a symbol of the magic, wealth or the magical rituals. This character's eyes have been designed in green to imply its seductive, hypnotic characteristic to make it complete. An Octopus arms have been used as a model to design Sahrook's hands and legs with a bit of a touch of exaggeration to intensify him being an animal-torturer; hands that look like a lash and can harm animals.

**Table 1** Characteristics of the leading and supporting roles of the play

|                            | Characteristics of the first role | Characteristics of the second role |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Name</b>                | Sahrook                           | Machkul                            |
| <b>Meaning of the name</b> | The chief (Kurdish)               | Salamander (Mazandarani dialect)   |
| <b>Character</b>           | The antagonist                    | One of the main characters         |
| <b>Applied technique</b>   | Hand-drawing & sculpture          | Hand-drawing & pasty sculpture     |
| <b>Used colors</b>         | Black purple green                | Yellowish orange black             |

**Fig 1** Sahrook

The designer has applied two animalistic characters for designing the supporting role in order to imply ecological concerns, one of which is the Lorestani Salamander. The close relationship between man and animals comes from the old ages which we can see its trace as drawings in pre-historic caves. Animals have always been important and vital for human beings and for this they are the best tool to make the audience involved. The animal's basic structure and anatomy has been kept intact while at the same time its face and appearance has been altered surrealistically to be both attractive and sympathetic thus, some wrinkles are on his face and a bit of a bent in his waist to make him look a bit sad and depressed while his big black eyes refer to a high intelligence though they are full of silence and sadness at the same time.

**Fig 2** Machkul

One of the other characters is the turtle. Here the theme has been its fatigue and desperation because of cruelty human beings. For this reason, its body and shell have been designed separately. This turtle leaves his shell and stops trying for survival. Hear again, big wide eyes have been

applied to show the fatigue and sadness of the character. Olaku the turtle has been personified through hung eyelids, forehead wrinkles and a bent spine. Blue is cold, passive and introvert as a color therefore, it has been used for this character based on his temper.



**Fig 3** Olako

**Table 3** The characteristics of the third to fifth roles of the play

|                   | <b>Characteristics of the Third Role</b> | <b>Characteristics of the Forth Role</b> | <b>Characteristics of the Fifth Role</b> |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <b>Name</b>       | Olaku                                    | Mirizh                                   | Titi                                     |
| Name meaning      | Turtle (Gilaki Dialect)                  | Ant (Lori Dialect)                       | Blossom (Gilaki Dialect)                 |
| Character         | One of the main characters               | The Protagonist's Assistant              | Tree, Magic Mushroom                     |
| Technique applied | Hand-drawing and Sculpture               | Hand-drawing and Sculpture               | Hand-drawing and Pasty Sculpture         |
| Colors used       | Blue, Brown                              | Black, Blue                              | Light Green, Orange, Blue                |

The protagonist's assistant is a wise, smart, determined, knowledgeable and sharp person with a tiny body. Ants are among the oldest creatures on earth which date back to 110 to 130 million years ago, the age of dinosaurs. They are one of the most interesting mysterious creatures on planet earth. On an ant's head there are two antennas which move on a constant basis to detect smells, tastes and even sounds. These antennas and the ant's anatomy have been applied in an exaggerated manner to make the character look somehow like a satellite receiver. This makes the character to find a solution for any issue at any moment just like the internet. The ants' society is run based on teamwork, interaction between the members and the complex problems solving-abilities.



**Fig 4** Mirizh

The designer has applied a magical plant for the fifth character to be both simple and imaginatively evocative. Mushrooms are among the oldest plants on earth dating back to 3.1 billion years ago. There are many different kinds of them and they have been always a part of magical rituals like the Portobello mushroom (magic mushroom) thus, it is an appropriate choice to imply magical powers of the character.

There have been two reasons for designing a tree-like trunk for the character. First, in some mythological anecdotes the tree is considered as a magical plant which is the cause of immortality, healing, renewal of the youth power or achieving wisdom and knowledge through eating its fruit. In designing the character of Titi wisdom and magical knowledge have been considered.

Second, a rectangle-like shape has been applied for designing his body as a symbol of order, intellect, safety and strength and also to make it easier to be worn. The mushroom's stalks have been designed in a moving vertical form to imply the essence of being dynamic.

Titi has got a young, kind, gracious, helper and wise character therefore, its color is green which reminds us of nature, wisdom and knowledge, peace and friendship and kindness while the light green implies hope, youth and joy. For mushrooms, orange which is a secondary warm color has been applied and the blue parts are a sign of power and knowledge.



**Fig 5** Titi



Fig 6 Olako, Mirizh, Machkul, Titi and Sahrook in circus

### 3. Conclusion

In this paper, a play related to circus animals was written and costume designing was done for its five main characters. We tried to design costumes based on the pre-determined traits of the characters to make them effective enough to influence the audience. We also tried to consider ecological environment protection and the endangered animals. The two characters of Salamander and turtle have been designed based on the color and design principles in a way that clearly shows them being endangered. The chief is fully based on the circus games considering his dominant character and the plant character which is the symbol of growth. The ant also has been designed in a way to imply the characteristic of being wise and finally, the cloth used for the costumes could be of the kinds which based on the scientific experiments are resistant against water and fire which are the two essential elements of circus, this way they will be comfortable and safe enough for the performers.

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