

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®



Costume Workshop

All Cirque du Soleil costumes are custom-made and the majority are produced at the Costume workshop at the International Headquarters (IHQ). The workshop, the only one of its kind in North America, employs specialists in fields as varied as shoemaking, textile design, lace-making, wig-making, patternmaking, costume-making and millinery. In total, the Costume workshop has almost 400 full-time employees.

Renowned Designers

To create its costumes, Cirque du Soleil employs the talents of designers renowned both in Canada and abroad. Here is the list of designers who have signed costumes for Cirque du Soleil shows:

Renée April
ZED

Eiko Ishioka
Varekai

François Barbeau
Dralion and Wintuk

Dominique Lemieux
Saltimbanco, Mystère, Alegria,
Quidam, «O», La Nouba, Corteo,
ZAIA and Banana Shpeel

Kym Barrett
TOTEM

Stefano Canulli
Viva ELVIS

Thierry Mugler
ZUMANITY

Méridith Caron
CRISS ANGEL Believe

Michel Robidas
DELIRIUM

Zaldy Goco
Michael Jackson THE
IMMORTAL WORLD Tour

Marie-Chantale Vaillancourt
KÀ and KOOZA

Philippe Guillotel
LOVE, IRIS

Liz Vandal
OVO

Alan Hranitelj
Zarkana

Research and development serving designers

Research and development plays a big role in costume design. Cirque du Soleil is constantly on the lookout for new materials or products that are likely to stimulate the imagination of costume designers. Working with the Workshop's teams of specialists (patternmakers, textile designers, dyers, costume makers, etc.), they produce the designs they have imagined for their show.

There are many aspects to research and development:

- The various existing technologies are of interest to the specialists, who study the possibility of applying them to costume designing. Certain materials, called starting materials, are used as is, while others are transformed to give texture to a costume, create a special effect or even an illusion. Materials used for dentistry, plumbing, aviation or even water sports may be found in the components of one costume or another.
- A technological watch is performed on certain types of products (batteries, adhesives, miniature lights, etc.) in order to see how these various elements can be incorporated into a costume and what effect they would have on the weight or maintenance of the costume, for example.

The production of costumes

In 2012, the Costume workshop will produce some 20 000 pieces and use more than 150 kilometres of fabric from around the world. 80% of all fabrics are treated and dyed in-house by the artisans of the textile design team. To dye fabric, various techniques are used, such as bath-dyeing, silk-screening (a stencil-based printing process done through a silk screen made), and direct application (hand-painted fabric).

Hats can be seen in every Cirque du Soleil show and are a key part of the costumes. Like the costumes, they are custom-designed and made in the workshop. To do this, precise measurements of each of the artist's heads are taken by a portable scanner and the milliners build the hats with the help of 3D prints obtained with these figures.

Versatility is key in the work of a props person. *Cirque du Soleil's* team of props people must know how to sculpt, weld, paint, mould, sew and saw, be familiar with such fields as mechanics, electronics and plumbing, demonstrate ingenuity and especially have an artistic approach to all projects.

A wig-making team is also part of the Costume workshop. These artisans master "ventilation," one of the longest and most arduous wig-making techniques, which involves building the wig one hair at the time onto a base using a hook.

Shoes are hand- and custom-made for all artists by the artisans of the Shoe Workshop. The leather pieces are dyed, trimmed and assembled on location. Brand new sports or dance shoes are sometimes altered to meet the specific needs of a costume. On average, nearly 3,000 pairs of shoes are produced by the Workshop every year.

With the need to dress more than 1,300 artists appearing in *Cirque du Soleil* shows in performance, and costume doubles also required for each, we estimate that nearly 4,500 costumes are found on all show locations every night. Numerous costume replacements for one show or another are made with great care and attention to detail by the Workshop artisans.

Some interesting facts :

- Moleskin is the type of Lycra most used at Cirque du Soleil.
- Among the materials most commonly used in making and designing costume accessories are an array of composite materials such as silicone, latex, plastics, fabrics, leathers, foams and urethane.
- In OVO, which is inspired by insects, the dragonfly's wings are evoked by pants made of veined lace, and the mosquito's stinger by a 'Mohawk' of fine red stems. The ten crickets have detachable legs that break away from their bodies, which give the impression that there is an insect invasion going on.
- Before proceeding with making a costume, the artisans use a new system that takes specific measurements, from head to toe, for each artist, in a few minutes.
- The Bungee costumes used in *Mystère* each have over 2,000 hand-glued sequins.
- The wig that takes the longest time to make is the one worn by the Diana character in *KÅ*. It takes more than four weeks to make such a complex piece. It requires the implementation of two cones on the top and then it is fully ventilated, hair by hair. The wig is then carefully cut and styled. It is renewed four times a year.
- The Workshop artisans created a continuous spiral effect for the Trickster costume in *KOOZA*. The same line starts at the hat, goes through the jacket and ends at the shoes. As a result, it echoes the image of a big top to perfection.
- For *ZAIA*, the Workshop artisans used the technique of sublimation to dye fabrics. This technique consists in setting the image in the webbing of the fabric, thus considerably expanding the colour range.
- Each costume in the Celestial/Human Nature scene of the show Michael Jackson *THE IMMORTAL* World Tour is equipped with 275 blinking LED lights specially designed for the show. They change color during the song to evoke constellations.
- The Crystal Man is a recurring character in the show *TOTEM* who represents the life force. His (literally) dazzling costume is entirely covered in small mirrors and crystals to create a ball of energy when he comes down from the sky in a beam of pure white light. The glittering mobile mosaic is made up of about 4,000 mirrors of three different sizes and 155 crystals on a stretch velvet leotard.
- In *Zarkana*, the lead singer, who plays three of the four mutants, had her entire body, together with the harness she wears throughout the show, scanned with 225 precise measurements. The data were used to produce a cast that minimized the need for in-person costume fittings.