

Interview with **Julie Charland**

My name is Julie Charland, and I'm a costume designer.

What documentation do you use when you design for period pieces?

Actually, I'll use any visual documentation that I find interesting for the project. The research can be based on historical or reference documents. I also do research on the artists, painters and photographers who created during that time. I find contemporary visual references in fashion and photography magazines or in any other visual document that will bring something to the project. This can also mean researching images on the Internet. Sometimes, I'll even get inspiration from films.

What relationship exists between the costumes you create and period clothes?

I think the relationship has to do with the inspiration I get, because I use some of the visual reference documentation from the period, and some from today. So, the relationship, the link has more to do with the inspiration of the period costume. I look at the cut, but it's more than that: it's the mood of the costume rather than the costume itself. This can be the costume's elegance, eccentricity, softness, rigidity, or even its bizarre side. I get my inspiration there, then I bring it up to date, integrating certain period visual elements as well. I think my job is to create, to design, and not just do an historic reconstruction. Often, the projects designers are interested in are period pieces; we take them on because we feel they're still relevant today. So, my aim is to innovate, to bring something other than the tried-and-true, something new so that there's a bridge across time, which makes it interesting for everyone.

What do you look for, in particular, in the texts that you read to find your inspiration?

I certainly approach the text in a very personal way. I usually notice things about the characters first, their psychology, how they feel, how they are, then, starting with that, I'll try to find a suitable covering to accentuate those aspects, the emotional side of the characters. The cut is certainly important, so is colour, so is fabric. There are so many choices when you do such a personal reading. It's really up to us, as designers, to decide what we want the character to exude, or what we want the audience to get from this character, and not just design a period look which, to me, is cold and sterile.

What advice would you give to young designers starting out?

I think the first thing of all is to take the time to evaluate the pros and cons of being a costume designer. Try to meet people who are designers, who work in the field, and learn about all the positive sides of the business as well as the negative ones, because they exist, we can't deny it. It may not be the greatest profession in the world, but it's

very interesting. It's also a good idea to learn more about what it means to be a freelancer. Find out about the schedule of a self-employed worker so you can decide if it's really what you want. Finally, choose the right school to get a solid grounding. Learn to draw properly and do research; accumulate the most tools you can to ply this trade which is really very demanding on many levels.