Candidate's Statement on Research/Scholarship/Creative Activity

> *"What you wear is how you present yourself to the world, especially today, when human contacts are so quick. Fashion is instant language."* —Miuccia Prada

As a costume designer, I am a storyteller and artist. My medium is fabric. The story shifts based on the playwright's intentions and the director's vision. My designs tell a story through each carefully chosen item placed on the body – how it is worn, and how time and repetitive actions have impacted the clothes. Effective costume design establishes the personality, time, place, occupation, and attitude of a character. Often before the actor speaks any lines, the costume design communicates critical information to the audience and the actor can use the costume to express a deeper connection to character and story.

My role as a costume designer encompasses the overall look and feel of every piece of clothing. I have done my job well, if the audience never thinks about the long process of bringing the costume to the stage, but the process is what I relish most. The beginning of the process is, at its most basic, the same; I am tasked with interpreting the playwright's words and implementing the director's vision. I am passionate about finding ways to meld the original intention of the piece, while answering questions of why this piece of theatre is important right now. I can design the same play six times (and at times have), but each time the design will be different, as it is based on the director's point of view and the collaborative team interpreting the piece. Everytime we create, we are creating for the here, the now, and the why.

As a designer, I completely immerse myself in the world of the play. I extensively research the period, the place, and the people. I strive to know everything I can about the world and the people in it. After all, how can I help make the work relevant to my audience, if I don't completely understand the people the play was written for and/or about. After landing on a big idea, or concept, in consultation and collaboration with the director, I create a set of sketches that are used as a roadmap to bring the two-dimensional rendering into a three-dimensional space. However, the sketches are only the beginning and not the final work of art. They are a critical piece of the process, but I believe the art is what ends up onstage, not what is created alone in my studio.

In regards to the rendering, I would like to take this moment to discuss the other avenue my creative activity and scholarship has taken. While the primary focus of my creative activity and research has been costume design, I used the disruption of theatre during the COVID-19 pandemic to pivot and focus my attention on a new research topic: digital rendering for costume designers utilizing the ProCreate app for iPads. With theatres closed, folks working from home, and online learning becoming an ideal way to engage with new material, my research partner, UTK alumnus Eric Abele, and I used this time to bring our work to a large group of designers and educators.

Our research began with a question: why is costume design for theatre in an analog holdover? While advancements in digital rendering had completely overtaken and standardized the

communication tools used for lighting, scenic, and sound design, the art of costume rendering—which deals in the communication of the organic human form—did not yet have intuitive digital rendering tools or accessible instruction.

Through the advancement of pressure-sensitive digital tablets and styluses (specifically, the iPad and Apple Pencil), a costume designer can more easily digitize their process. When sketching in a drawing app (specifically ProCreate), pressure-sensitive technology translates the pressure your finger or stylus applied to the touch screen to create different thicknesses of line (e.g. heavy pressure means you draw a thick line). This adaptation neatly mimics the pencil-and-paper sketching method already taught to and used by designers at all levels, from student to professional. The sketches can be sent directly from ProCreate and arrive in the inbox of whomever needs to respond to the work. Colors, lines, shapes, and textures can be instantaneously adjusted, saving many hours of labor during revisions. However, having these tools at our disposal does not necessarily mean we know how to use them.

The key problem that our research solves is the lack of pedagogical training in digital costume rendering; in other words, designers need to be taught how to use their iPads to draw and paint. Professor Abele and I have developed a pedagogy through short in-class exercises, small Zoom workshops, and masterclasses. What began as a two-hour workshop teaching the basic functions of the app to 15 costume designers has expanded significantly over the past three years. We have to date taught over 400+ undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and industry professionals ranging from international designers, Broadway, tv/film, and the highest levels of American regional theatre.

Through experimentation in various course units, even though initially centered on the experience of the advanced costume designer, our innovative pedagogy has proven valuable to a much wider population than anticipated. It is a *beginner* student of *any* discipline who is well-positioned to start their drawing journey through digital rendering. Using ProCreate, ideas are instantly clearer, designs become highly effective communication tools, and young artists can more confidently present their work in as little as a few weeks of practice.

What we have found to be most useful, is that through our teaching we are allowing designers to more clearly communicate their designs, and shorten the amount of time it takes to do so. No longer do you need to be born a skilled visual artist to be a costume designer. I believe that we have closed an equity gap with this work, allowing all designers to get their ideas out of their heads and onto the page, so they can start to bring the art to the stage.

Working digitally and following my own pedagogical methods, I am able to give the director a clear sense of what the costume will look like on the actor cast. I am able to communicate body type and even include the actor's face in the sketch. This process allows the director to connect with the sketch, and offers me the opportunity to make any change to the design or casting quickly, without having to completely start over.
Once the sketch is complete, the costume designer collaborates with the talented costume technologists to bring the costumes from the page to the stage. Costume designers regularly

collaborate with drapers, first hands, stitchers, patternmakers, tailors, milliners, cobblers, craft artisans, dyers and painters, and many more to create each individual garment. Hundreds of hours are spent meticulously working on each costume. I deeply respect the work of costume makers and artisans. I find that when a designer is open to the ideas of the team, that is when the best work is created. Eliminating ego, and being truly collaborative with the costume shop, is the best way to create something beautiful and unique.

As I mentioned earlier, the costume cannot come to life without the performer. Character is created through behavior and action, and as such, the costume designer and technologists introduce the clothing to a performer through a series of fittings where much is discussed about how to inhabit the clothing, how an accessory is used, and/or the style of a wig. Much of this conversation is driven by practical concerns (the actor has to crawl on stage or has a major sword fight), and some is driven by nuanced aspects of behavior created in the rehearsal process. The sheer number of conversations and interactions concerning the costume from initial drawing to the final product seen on stage is staggering and incredibly collaborative in every way.

As a designer, I work tirelessly to bring my ideas and visions to the table, always knowing that my work will be positively impacted by the actors, the director, and the other designers. I love the challenge of staying true to my ideas, while melding my ideas with the needs of the production. Since my appointment in 2018, I have lived and breathed this collaborative life. I have designed thirty-nine productions, at twenty professional theatres, in fourteen states across all timezones. The projects have varied from Shakespeare to new works, dramas, comedies, musicals and operas. I have worked at Tony Award Winning theaters and collaborated with Broadway directors, designers, and performers. What follows are examples of every production I have designed over the last five years. This varied work represents what I have done and what I hope to continue to do for and with the students of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.