

Creativity, deep research earn theatre student Midwest design honor

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Among his hundreds of famous lines, Shakespeare penned “the play is the thing” for Hamlet. True. And without convincing, artful costumes, it isn’t much of a thing.

Just ask University of Wisconsin Oshkosh student Eve Funnell.

Funnell knows what it takes to design for and dress a cast. The theatre major recently earned some prestigious Midwest recognition for her creativity and attention to detail, winning first place in the “unrealized design” category of the United States Institute of Theatre Design and Technology (USITT) Midwest Regional Section’s Digital Design Competition.

About 5,000 people attended the event, said UW Oshkosh Theatre Professor Kathleen Donnelly, Funnell’s instructor in Theatre Design II, the course she originated her award-winning renderings in.

Funnell’s conceptual work on costumes for Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night” earned her complimentary registration to attend the USITT Conference in Fort Worth, TX in March.

“USITT is a great jumping off point for both summer internships,” Donnelly said. “They have an expo area where students can take their portfolios and get portfolio review. Steppenwolf (Theatre, of Chicago) is there. Disney is there.... Some students have gotten jumpstarted into careers there.”

“The process to create designs, even those that aren't realized, is quite substantial,” Funnell said. “From the very first read-through, I'm working on a concept, trying to grasp what the play says to me.”

The craft of costuming is more than a technical exercise. There is deep research, particularly when overlaying stylistic and thematic concepts as Funnell did.

The Shakespeare play was first performed for an event at the turn of the 17th Century. Funnell’s design concepts for “Twelfth Night” were inspired by the artist Fragonard's famous painting, “The Swing,” a French Rococo period painting from the 18th Century that depicts a fancifully-dressed woman in a sun-splashed garden on a tree-slung swing.

More than a century separate Shakespeare’s and Fragonard’s works, but Funnell saw thematic ties to feature in her conceptual production. Research was key to her designs, she said.

“Once a concept is established, it's research time -- gathering enough historical research to support accurate depictions of the time period,” she said. “My designs are based in the 1780s. After historical research, I sketched a variety of options, narrowed down the exact look, established a color palette and collected fabric swatches for each character's costume.”

The USITT competition category she won first place in required her to translate her deep research and artistry into final, submitted digital designs.

“The pieces of the process were brought together as a clean, precise representation presented as a drawing of each costume,” Funnell said. “Overall, if I were to condense the time, I spent four to five weeks on these designs, and most of that was the essential, preliminary work and not the actual creation of finished renderings.”

Donnelly said Funnell also presented her Twelfth Night designs at the regional Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival last year January. She was a semi-finalist in the regional project design category. Her work will also be featured in a forthcoming book and related website.

Funnell’s talent isn’t confined to costumes. She is currently designer scenery for UW Oshkosh Theatre’s production of the play “Bus Stop,” debuting Feb. 12.

“We try to train students to be a bit multifaceted,” Donnelly said. “She’s also an incredible scenic painter...”

Funnell’s design talents haven’t been limited to the theatre, either. She [collaborated with her sister](#), also a UW Oshkosh student, on a series of children’s books, including one dedicated to the story and memory of a UW Oshkosh alumnus’ son who died from a rare disease called Bruton’s X-linked Agammaglobulinemia (XLA).

Funnell said she plans to channel her creativity and theater design-program experience gained at UW Oshkosh into a career within the film or TV industry.

“I am particularly interested in any position that deals with artistic creativity,” she said. “When I earned the scholarship to attend USITT, I was thrilled considering the conference provides lots of opportunities to gain new knowledge and experiences. Also, I’m hoping to meet people and network with students and those who are already established in the industry. The Theatre, Film, and TV field is all about making connections and being personable. The skills can be there but there’s so much collaboration, the networking is essential.”

Learn more:

- [UW Oshkosh Theatre](#)
- [Beyond Classroom Walls: From Pupil to Published](#)