

Awards-Contending Costume Designers Dress to Reflect Characters' Journeys

By [RANDEE DAWN](#)



Earlier this year, Ruth E. Carter won the costume design Oscar for her heroic efforts in creating outfits for “Black Panther,” but 2020’s contenders are more likely to reflect the real world. And many of those assist the film’s story by undertaking their own journeys.

In “Queen & Slim,” the titular fugitives spend the entire movie on a cross-country journey, and change significantly along the way. But the alterations Jodie Turner-Smith and Daniel Kaluuya’s characters undergo along the way weren’t just on the page — their outfits had to change, too.

“I started off the film with cold grays; for Queen it was white,” recalls first-time feature costume designer Shiona Turini, who collaborated with hip-hop fashion pioneer Dapper Dan for some of her flashy looks. “As they travel to the South and warm up to each other, the costumes are more comfortable, more colorful.”

Such a journey was literal for Oscar winner Alexandra Byrne’s (“Elizabeth: The Golden Age”) costumes in “The Aeronauts,” in which Amelia (Felicity Jones) and James (Eddie Redmayne) endure weather extremes at high altitudes wearing costumes appropriate for the 1860s setting. Byrne created a flight costume for Jones made of waxed cotton, for example.



Adam Driver Wins Gotham Award for 'Marriage Story'

One critical journey threads through the entire film, which means the actors had to appear in one costume for a large number of scenes. “You had to go through all the stages of breakdown their outfits would go through,” says Byrne. “They get wet, they get dry; we built in frost deposits. Eddie and Felicity were also immensely physical, so you had to come up with clothing that behaves in action.”

Change was more metaphorical in “Jojo Rabbit,” which set Scarlett Johansson’s Rosie character in colorful clothes with strong patterns that were fashion-forward. For much of the film, she’s the cheeriest thing on the screen. “You’re seeing her through Jojo’s [Roman Griffin Davis] eyes, so of course she’s bright to a young person,” says costume designer Mayes C. Rubeo.

By the time the war descends into its final battles, there’s one last gasp of explosive color in the reimagined Captain Klenzendorf’s (Sam Rockwell) uniform, which features a cape and feathers. “Sam said, ‘Think of me like Bill Murray playing this character.’ So I added parts to make it really over the top, like the feathers,” she says.

Mid-20th century America also aimed for a stylized reality. In “Once Upon a Time in Hollywood,” costume designer Arianne Phillips re-created iconic outfits for real-life people populating the 1969 Hollywood scene (Steve McQueen, Mama Cass, Bruce Lee), but also had two fictional main characters actively in the biz: Rick (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Cliff (Brad Pitt). Phillips had to create not just late 1960s costumes for the pair, but also needed to fashion garb that worked in Rick’s movie and TV career from 10 years earlier.

“I’m always looking for a beginning, middle and end for characters as a costume designer,” she says. “How people dressed really helps move the story along.”

In “Motherless Brooklyn,” costume designer Amy Roth struggled with a limited budget and depleted rental houses (“The Irishman” and “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel” got there first) to re-create a noir feel in 1950s Gotham.

“We were going for realism,” she says. “The 1950s are often seen as happier times, and they weren’t for people living in the Bronx when the expressway was being built. I didn’t want people to look at this story and see poverty that looks great.”

Still, for all the realism and historical drama, there’s always room for flights of imagination: Ellen Mirojnick went full fantasy with multiple environments and fairy queendoms in “Maleficent: Mistress of Evil.” And then she had to figure out how to incorporate wings.

“You are basically dealing with a two-dimensional silhouette, fabrications that must be totally natural and cannot appear to be manmade, and at the same time must have fluidity in flight as well as appearing stealthy,” she says.

She always kept in her mind what director Joachim Rønning insisted: “This was not your ordinary fairytale!”



LEAVE A REPLY

COSTUME DESIGN

JOKER

MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN

OSCARS

QUEEN & SLIM

THE AERONAUTS

