

The Costume as a Three-Dimensional Painting

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(Fig. 1)

The opening of *Il re pastore*, an opera seria in two acts composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, took place at the Zurich Opera on June 4, 2011, directed by Grischka Asagaroff and conducted by William Christie. The opera was first performed in Salzburg on April 23, 1775, at the archbishop's residence, in honour of Archbishop Colloredo and Duke Maximilian Franz, a member of the imperial family.

The libretto, written by Pietro Metastasio, evokes pastoral scenes—fashionable at that time—representing two couples of lovers, Aminta and Elisa, and Agenore and Tamiri, as well as King Alexander of Macedonia. The action takes place in the year 334 BC in Phoenicia. The character of Aminta is looking forward to her upcoming marriage to Elisa, a young shepherdess. However, after freeing the Phoenician city of Sidon from the tyrant Strato, Alexander, King of Macedonia, wants to put Aminta, its true heir, on the throne, and orders him to marry Tamiri, Strato's daughter. Agenore, an aristocrat from Sidon in love with Tamiri, reveals that Aminta is none other than a shepherd, who knows nothing of his origins. While the lovers Agenore and Tamiri are ready to obey the king's order out of duty, Aminta finally refuses to marry Tamiri, declaring that he would rather renounce the throne. Alexander, touched by the intensity of Aminta's love for Elisa and by his renunciation of power, ends up changing his mind and proclaims the legitimacy of Aminta and Elisa's love.

Within the scope of the *Il re pastore* production, the Zurich Opera's costume workshop used beautiful designs of rococo-style costumes created by Italian designer Luigi Perego as a basis to experiment with a new production technique. The pastoral theme is represented on the costumes themselves, using reproductions of paintings by François Boucher and Jean-Honoré Fragonard. As for the women's costumes, the technique is intriguing: the attire represented in the painting is both printed on the fabric of the skirt and serves as a model for the costume itself. Thus, the costume can be seen in three dimensions when worn by the singer, and in two dimensions as printed on the skirt. The reproduced paintings on men's costumes appear on their waistcoats and *justaucorps*.

In order to reproduce the paintings on the costumes' fabrics, the workshop experimented with a new technique: inkjet printing on the basis of digital files generated by computer programming. Unlike traditional techniques such as manual reproduction (which takes a long time) or screen printing (which is more expensive), this new procedure enables to copying quickly and at reasonable prices—even in limited quantities.

All concerned museums were contacted by the Opera to obtain the paintings' copyrights and scanned files in a minimum resolution of 300 dpi. These files served as a basis for the graphic work of Gerrit Holz, who was hired by the opera for this particular task. It was then necessary to find suitable textile printing experts. The fabric company Jakob Schlaepfer in St. Gall, known for its enthusiasm and creativity and supported by Head of Production Martin Leuthold, was chosen to carry out the project.

The company experimented with various fabrics in an attempt to find the best 'canvas imitation' that would provide a *trompe-l'oeil* illusion of the paintings, and ended up with various results from each fabric. The best result was obtained on a 100% polyester fabric with a matte surface and a linen structure similar to the linen canvas used for the paintings: KARINE 105147 in the 301 ecru colour. However, the fabric was too soft and not strong enough to sew a *justaucorps* or a skirt out of it without losing the shape in the movements of pleats and drapes. The solution was to conceal two layers of KARINE to obtain an optimal result. **(Fig. 2)**

Costume cutter Jennifer Ambos from the ladies' workshop calculated the necessary metrage for the volume of the skirt: 1,40 metres in height and 3,40 metres in length. As the original picture frames are much smaller, the graphic designer's first task was to add the desired measurements to the file. He extended the canvas on two sides, respecting the design of the edges, and closed with an invisible 360-degree seam. The concealed second layer of fabric remained in the original ecru colour. **(Fig. 3)**

The men's costume printings were more complex because all the seams had to be planned in advance. After consulting two cutters, Gerrit Debbert and Ulf Fietsch, the graphic designer applied the singer's made-to-measure patterns directly into the file of the chosen paintings, also taking the seam allowances into account. Again, all pieces of the pattern were concealed in a double layer, and in places where the fabric could be seen on both sides. Like the *justaucorps* panels, the same motif was printed twice. Both motifs were concealed from each other to be seen from both sides, outside and inside of the panel. Thus, the painting formed 360 degrees all around the body, continuously. **(Figs. 4 & 5)**

For the capes, yet another system had to be invented. Because of the circular pattern—more volume at the hem than at the top—the angles of the painting had to be modified to maintain the vertical lines. Also, the printing of the motif had to be done on both sides so that the forest pattern could be seen in all the movements of the body.

To conclude, the computer inkjet technique requires much more preparation than traditional techniques and implies anticipating all the stages of creation since the beginning of the design, without knowing the final result in advance. At the end of our first try, everyone was satisfied: the costume designer and the workshops staff, the singers, and the audience... After the performances at the opera, some of the costumes were exhibited with their original paintings in the participating museums! **(Fig. 6)**

Bibliography

Opera programme

KÜSTER M. R. (Red.), WUNDERLICH W., SENIGL J., GESSNER S., FRANZ A., // *Re Pastore*, Opernhaus Zürich, 4.Juli 2011 (Premiere).



Fig. 1

Malin Hartelius in the role of Elisa.

Photo: Markus Reichenbach.

Jean Honoré Fragonard, 'La Bergère,' 1750.
© Milwaukee Art Museum Collection.



Fig. 2

Zurich Opera, Ladies' Workshop, sewing table with models, files for printing skirts and fabric for Tamiri's costume (2nd costume).

© Dorothea Nicolai



Fig. 3

Costume for Ronaldo Villazon in the role of Alexandre.

Photo: Dorothea Nicolai

François Boucher, 'Paysage au moulin,' 1743.
©The Bowes Museum County Durham



Fig. 4

Details and general appearance of Alexandre's costume for the tenor Ronaldo Villazon.



Based on the work of Boucher, 'La targette d'amour,' 1758, Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. 2715

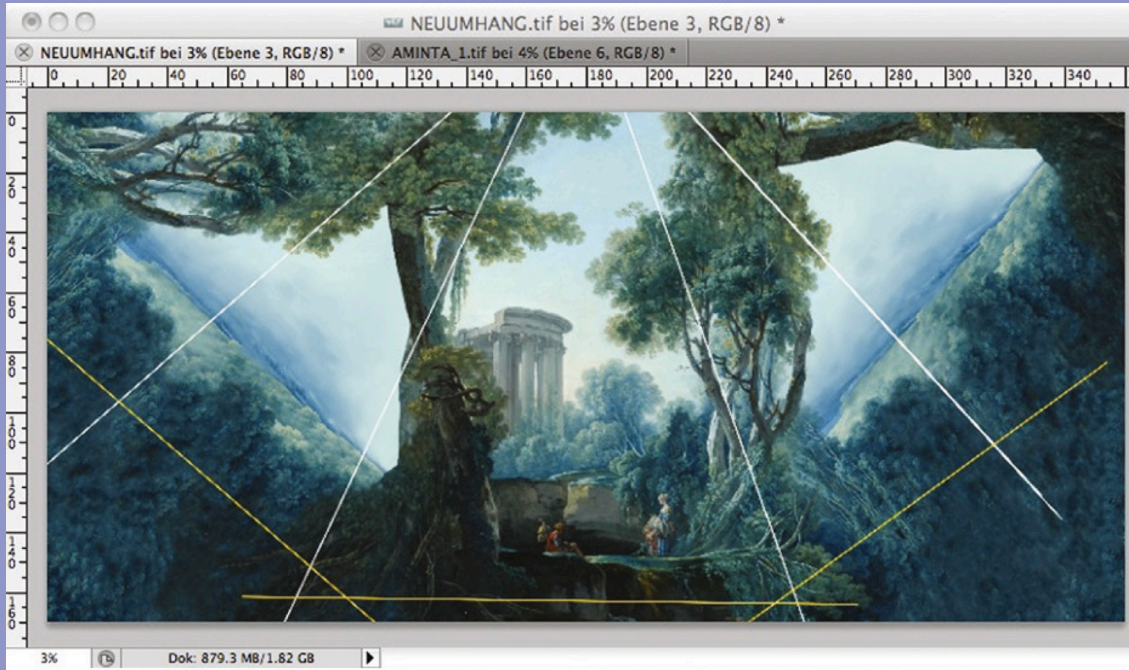


Fig. 5

Digital file for the cape of Ronaldo Villazon in the role of Alexandre.

Digital file: Gerrit Holz

François Boucher, 'Paysage au moulin,' 1743.

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Fig. 6

Ronaldo Villazon as Alexandre.

Photo: Markus Reichenbach

