

ABSTRACT

Stephen Jones Hats: A Pragmatic Approach to Mounting 160 Objects in 30 Days

Presenters:

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The exhibition Stephen Jones Hats was on display at The Royal Pavilion in Brighton from February to June 2019 and included over one hundred and sixty hats designed by the iconic British milliner. Stephen Jones' extraordinary creations have been sported by everyone who's anyone, from Lady Gaga to Meghan Markle and regularly grace haute couture collections. The curator Martin Pel and milliner Stephen Jones had been in discussion for many years about the exhibition concept. It was initially conceived as a small spatial intervention consisting of a mere 15 celebrity hats positioned around the banqueting hall dining table, suggesting a fantasy dinner party. This was a far cry from the eventual 160+ hats currently on open display alongside nine couture costumes scattered, draped and suspended from every corner of the historic Royal Pavilion.

Due to uncertainty around funding the exhibition, the deadline grew uncomfortably close before a multidisciplinary team could be commissioned to assist. Zenzie Tinker Conservation Ltd., a team of Brighton based textile conservators, were asked to assess and mount the objects for this exhibition, a process which was only able to start in December (only seven weeks before the exhibition was due to open in early February 2019).

This paper will explore how the limitations of time and budget, challenges most local museums face on a daily basis, were not able to stunt the delivery of an ambitious and exciting exhibition. It will outline the necessity for a pragmatic approach combining tight planning with simple but innovative mount designs and choices of materials. With more than 160 hats involved, quick fix solutions had to be cleverly devised to maximise resources. Solutions were found by dividing the hats into four main mount groups and each of these will be discussed and illustrated in detail.

The paper will also discuss the importance, particularly when faced with such constraints, of staying close to home and sourcing a team of professionals who could move seamlessly between workshop, studio and exhibition venue. Zenzie Tinker Conservation Ltd. is based in New England House in Brighton, a creative local business hub whose resources became increasingly useful over the course of the exhibition preparation. Metal mounts and stands were made by Mike Penwolf from Panotechnica, also based in New England House whilst 3D printing specialists in the building were also enlisted together with a local gilding specialist.

The project highlighted the benefit of (and need for) local networks of professional conservators and specialist craftspeople offering a wider range of external services to museums beyond the limitations of one discipline.

Stephen Jones Hats at the Royal Pavilion 7th February -9th June 2019

BIO



Jamie Robinson and Ania Golebiowska are textile conservators based at Zenzie Tinker Conservation in Brighton. Ania moved to the UK in 2015 to join the ZTC studio after graduating from an MA in Textile Conservation at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, while Jamie studied an undergraduate degree in Fine Art and History of Art at Edinburgh University before taking an MA in Textile Conservation at the Centre for Textile Conservation, University of Glasgow. She joined the studio in 2016 after completing a one year HLF/ICON funded internship at The Bowes Museum, County Durham.

ZTC is one of the largest textile conservation studios in the country, working on a wide range of textiles, tapestries and costume. Clients include local, national and international organisations such as the V&A, National Trust and smaller collectors of costume and heirlooms. Jamie and Ania have worked together on the treatment and mounting of a huge variety of objects – from wigs to wall linings – and have taken part in a number of prestigious projects, including the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Galleries at Westminster Abbey and the ‘Inspired by Knole’ HLF funded National Trust conservation project at Knole House.