

Volpone

A Play by Ben Jonson

Unrealized Costume Design

by

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Concept Statement for the Costume Design of Volpone

Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (1605) uses the immorality of its characters for comedic effect and to make a statement. Taking place amongst the Italian upper class, the play focuses on the scheme of the con artist, Volpone (the fox) who manipulates his victims (also with animal namesakes) into making him even wealthier. Jonson mocks the ultra rich and their vices through the outlandish characters and situations. Through the costumes, I aimed to reinforce the excessive classism and decadence in this play.

I drew from Italian Commedia Dell'arte, adapting it while keeping certain iconic elements. Commedia appealed to me because of its evolution and cultural associations throughout history. Elements of Commedia appear in films, and in traditions such the Carnevale celebration in Italy, which share an association with extravagance and indulgence. These associations compliment Jonson's comedy and the themes of the play.

My approach was to combine elements of traditional Commedia costumes with pieces of period dress as well as some of their animal characteristics to create opulent costumes that support the comedic dialogue and absurd characters. As they shamelessly indulge, the audience should see the frivolity and duplicitousness that Ben Jonson mocks.



Volpone is the cunning old fox. I looked for images that incorporated some historical content as well as his Commedia character inspiration (Pantalone). The fox is for color reference.



Fine Madame Would-Be's costume is a combination of several large, gaudy elements. I wanted to combine garments that would not usually be found on the same outfit. This aids in the perception of Lady Would-Be's attention seeking personality.



Because her name means "heavenly", I chose images of nearly white, full coverage clothing. She is described as one of the most beautiful women in Italy, so I wanted to clothing to reflect a delicate, feminine person.



Mosca's character design is loosely based on Scaramouche. I tried to incorporate as many fly characteristics as possible based on the fishing fly. The fishing fly showed off the texture and details I wanted better than a real fly.



I chose this particular vulture image for Voltore because of the feather ruff around his neck, which I felt was more regal and fit his character. The ensemble with the cape had the advantage of being period and having some bird like qualities. The cape in particular had the length and volume I was looking for.



Androgyno's costume would be similar to the other clowns in the trio and is heavily modeled after the zanni (clowns) of Commedia. This is done with a different color scheme and feminized costume elements.

