

Testimonial
Vin Burnham – Industry Lecture

As part of our commitment to our students receiving a ‘real’ experience on the BA Costume for Theatre and Screen Course at Wimbledon, we offer a broad and exciting programme of Industry Lectures by key speakers about their career trajectory and experience in the costume industry.

In May this year, we were very honoured to welcome Costume Designer, Vin Burnham to come and take part in this series and speak to our students about her career, the importance of collaboration and her process whilst she is working. As we were in Lockdown at this point, Vin’s lecture was new to us in that she was our first external online speaker. She proved to be an excellent introduction to this new medium and presented a very broad and exciting lecture to a full house of nearly 200 students from three year groups. Her delivery from the onset was completely charming, engaging her audience in discussion about themselves, showing an interest in them and giving a very strong sense that she wished to pass on her wealth of knowledge to a new generation of future costume professionals. The feedback afterwards was excellent from all students and her lecture proved to be inspirational for many of them, some of whom used Vin’s career and practice as a starting point for research in their final self-directed project of the year.

The course at Wimbledon has two pathways: Design and Interpretation and often our guest speakers will sit comfortably within one pathway, appealing to one specialism more than the other. This was not the case with Vin who by including design, construction, styling and creature production effortlessly within her repertoire crosses those boundaries that often exist between designer and maker. This also ensured that she very clearly reinforced many of our core course values about the importance of collaborative practice, dialogue with fellow practitioners and performers and an understanding and appreciation of the work of different departments and specialists. The breadth of work that Vin has undertaken is breath-taking and the students gained valuable insight hearing about the processes involved in commissions as diverse as Lady Gaga’s ‘Living Dress’, music videos for the Jonas Brothers, ‘Batman’ and both the original and newly commissioned ‘Dark Crystal’.

The lecture was presented chronologically and supported by a wide range of visuals including stills and backstage imagery but also images from Vin’s personal collection – so we felt very much that we were gaining valuable insider information into the industry with clear analysis of working with innovative and unusual fabrics and fabrications and how these impacted on the performers wearing them. The talk

culminated in some very clear and useful tips for entering the industry, applications for jobs, roles and overall professional etiquette for students who are just starting to make enquiries for placements and entry level employment.

I was very moved by the generosity of Vin's lecture in terms of sharing and communicating her experiences to a new and eager audience but also by how she managed to normalise the industry to a group of students who find the idea of the film industry daunting. She very kindly shared some of the content of her new book with us, further enhancing the sense of being given access to a wealth of insider information and which resulted in a very lively and productive Q&A session at the end.

This was most definitely an excellent, insightful and extremely valuable lecture that made a massive impact on my students and added significant value to the course.

Student feedback:

'Vin Burnham was amazing, she really showed me what I want my career to be like'
(First Year Student)

'I am really amazed that someone like Vin Burnham would come and give a talk at my Uni'
(First Year Student)

'Vin Burnham's lecture made me realise that I would like to explore creature costume and prop costume in my third year'
(Second Year Student who used Vin's practice as a base for her Self Directed Project in Year Two)

'She is awesome! I hope I have a portfolio like hers one day'
(Third Year Design Student)

'It was really interesting seeing how the Batman suit was made and how costume and sculpture can work together'
(Third Year Interpretation Student)

Kevin Freeman
Course Leader
BA Costume for Theatre and Screen
Wimbledon College of Arts

Telephone: 020 7514 9641 ext: 9660
Email: k.freeman@wimbledon.arts.ac.uk