

Work in Progress: "Unearthing" History: Museum Costumes as Research Tools

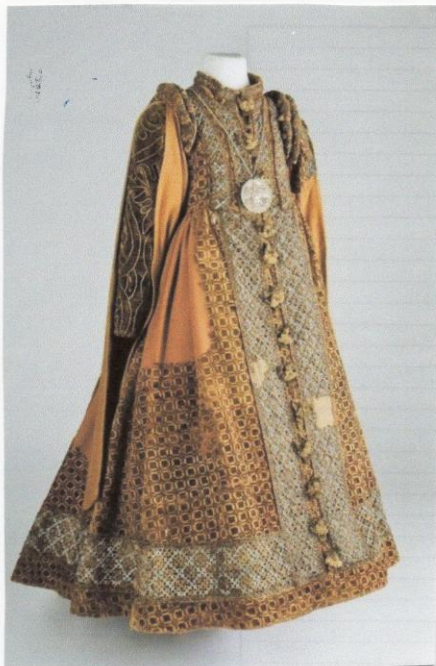
The costume concept developed out of research into a permanent exhibition of Czech clothing from this period found at the Mikulov Museum in Prague. This staggering collection is unique in that the garments have literally been exhumed from graves, then restored for display purposes. The colours of the clothes have darkened to a dull patina; the trims and fabrics have changed their textures. My design challenge is to achieve a similar, worn-down quality with the costumes for Elizabeth Rex.

Experimenting with chemical solutions, fabric dyes, inks and other miscellaneous products that would change the surface texture of the fabrics under study, my research assistant will test the viability of this process for theatrical use on costumes used in a realized production.

The intent is to use these products to create a patina of age and therefore resemble vintage clothing, especially with metallic materials which were popular in the Elizabethan era. These treatments all need to withstand the rigours of dry-cleaning and laundering to maintain their appearance.

The study will therefore be twofold – to test the products and then apply them to specific surfaces; also to dry-clean these samples to determine the viability of their use on stage for a successive period of 3-4 months.

The photo below shows the colour and texture differences between two pieces of 17th century clothing. The stored gown from the German museum (left) is lighter in colour and softer to touch. The exhumed gown from the Czech museum (below, at the right) had darkened and is stiffer.



Lippisches Landesmuseum
(salvaged, restored gown)



Mikulov Museum
(exhumed gown)