

# LIVE DESIGN™



## Phantoms Of The Opera

Mar 26, 2010 By Ellen Lampert-Gréaux

Visual Artist E.V. Day, known for her 3D Exploding Couture series, has created eye-catching costume installations for the Promenade of the [David H. Koch Theatre at Lincoln Center](#) by pulling pieces from New York City Opera's "retired" costume archives and animating them to float in space on fishing wire.

"Exploring the opera costumes was like a safari adventure, where I encountered a whole new species of highly developed archetypal characters to study and work with," says Day. The sculptures can be seen during New York City Opera's 2010 spring season, March 18 to April 18.

"As a 3D artist, the unique allure of the Promenade site is the three stories of surrounding balconies where one can experience a sculpture from all sides, close up and from afar," Day continues. "Especially exciting is the ability to view inside the sculptures from above and directly below, unobstructed. Early on, I knew I wanted to create an atmosphere of floating time capsules, suspended like constellations at different heights within the universe of the Promenade space."

Day selected iconic characters as a starting point: “To make a sculpture from a garment, it must be recognizable and emotionally loaded.” She toured the costume archives with New York City Opera wardrobe assistants Jimmy Holder and Bettina Bierly. “Their knowledge of the costumes, the stories they conveyed, and how they were constructed proved invaluable to my research. For instance, we would come across a rack of bloodied nightgowns, and I would ask, ‘Who would wear this?’ I learned that the bloody nightgown is not an uncommon convention in opera, but the most well known story it might appear in is the ‘mad scene’ of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. So I would research more and eventually feel out how I wanted to animate the garment,” Day says.

Day, who fell in love with the architecture and construction of the opera costumes—down to the last sequin—also found herself wanting to revise and reverse the tragedies into triumph for female characters such as Lucia, Carmen, Cho-Cho San, Violetta, Mimi, and Cinderella. “I shaped their costumes into suspended memorials of survival, self-defense, independence, or at least talking back. In addition to these character-based pieces, I was compelled to present the pure visual fabulousness of costumes you don’t normally get to see up close, as with the cascade of ‘exotic’ hats and the arrangement of bustles and panniers.”

The sculptures were built in a warehouse offsite from Lincoln Center, where the space allowed work on eight pieces at once and the ability to hoist them overhead to see how they would look from below. “Because the Promenade was not designed to support weight from its gilded ceiling or bronze balconies, there were several immediate limitations for suspending sculptures,” notes Day, who adds that City Opera’s lighting director Tess James illuminated the installations.

“With the inventiveness of prop and technical directors Scott Brodsky and Scott Levine, we came up with a new design and system for hanging and transporting my work,” concludes Day. “Each sculpture is lightweight, collapsible, easily reanimated, and can fit into a passenger elevator. I can even hang one in my apartment!”