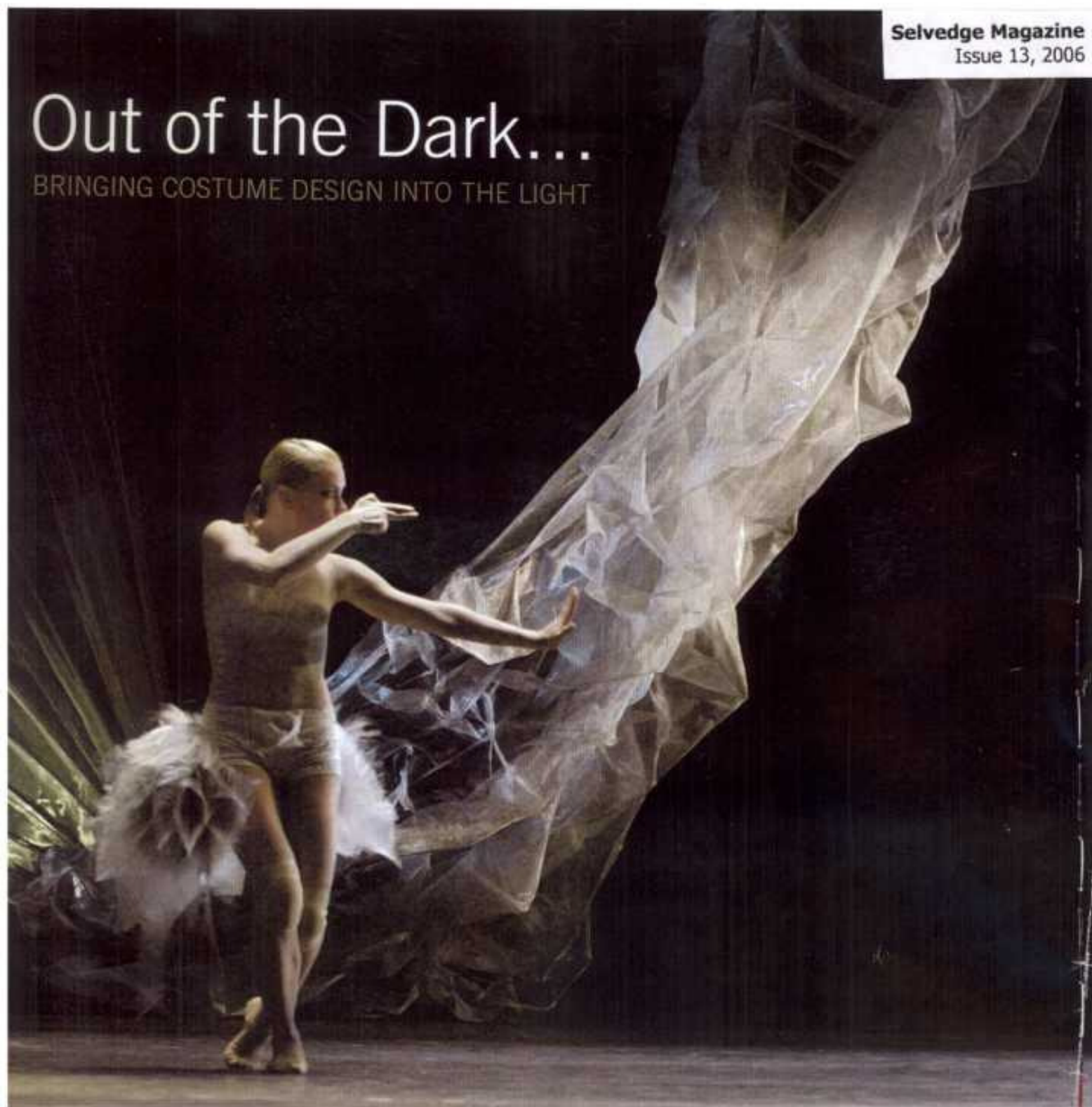


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Out of the Dark...

BRINGING COSTUME DESIGN INTO THE LIGHT





Try to imagine a living, breathing, monstrously-moving hologram emerging from the darkness, with claw-like hands clenching the air, sheathed knees in service to jaggedly swaying hips; its entire being a screen for the projection of such blinding images as giant eyeballs, that flick before our eyes like Man Ray's rayographs. One is frightened by this Nosferatu-like creature, yet riveted, just as one is transfixed by flames lapping at the side of a building on fire: to look away is impossible. Then hear the pounding, swelling music of Igor Stravinsky's revolutionary modern classic "The Rite of Spring", and watch this hologram draw ever closer to the light to be devoured by an enormous expanding skirt, with layered, diagonal pleats reminiscent of Braque's Cubist masterpiece, "Nude Descending a Staircase". Only then will you have the merest hint of "Hunt" (2002), the astonishing modern dance collaboration between choreographer Tero Saarinen and costume designer Erika Turunen. The two, both from Helsinki, have worked together since 2001 when she designed costumes for his piece "Onto the Same Wavelength" for the Finnish National Ballet.

The inseparability of costume and movement characterizes all Turunen's work, which is perhaps more textural than that of her peers. Her costumes are neither "pretty" nor "flowing"; rather they augment the dancer's very actuality. If Turunen, who trained in fashion and clothing design at Helsinki's University of Industrial Arts, has a signature, then it is her rich and nuanced colour palette and the development of new materials that are three-dimensional, translucent and abundant.

Turunen describes these patternless materials, that often begin as basic silk organza, linen and wool, as "like a stack of white paper, that when combined and connected with different techniques and thinking about the empty spaces between them, I can create a great paper sculpture which the wind could move and which could create an interesting world of shadows on the opposite wall." Turunen speaks of "wallowing in color," because of its ability symbolically to express characters' relations to each other, and to "link couples" by fostering the interplay of colour in those highly important spaces between a dancer's own body – the small space between the waist and the arm hanging at the side, for instance – and between dancers.

The material's weight, too, can amplify the dancer's visual impact by calling attention to the arc that the costume traces in the air, which light – another critical consideration – can shine



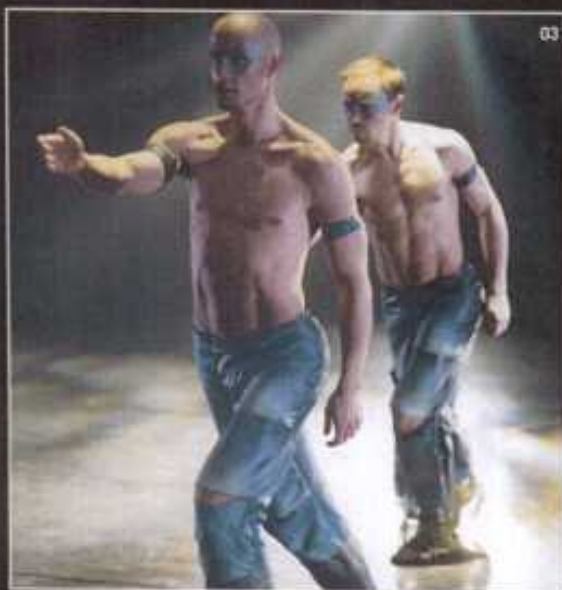
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upon or aid in the contouring of the dancer's body. Surprisingly Turunen says that the textural relationship of fabric to the skin is purely a practical one: it must keep perspiration from penetrating the upper layer to feel as dry as possible through "love and war", as she characterizes the performance.

Turunen has designed costumes for the Finnish National Ballet (including "Sleeping Beauty" in 1999, choreographed by Rudolph Nureyev), the Royal Danish Ballet, the Finnish National Opera, Netherlands Dance Theatre, the Lyon Opera Ballet, and the Opera de Rio de Janeiro, yet she readily admits her preference for contemporary dance. "It is wonderful food for the imagination and brings out the best in me," she says. "It often has dazzling abstract spaces where things and characters are put, and in these three-dimensional spaces created by the black hole of the proscenium arch and the lights and the smoke, I have almost infinite latitude for developing strange, fascinating, mysterious, delicious characters who move in the space and occupy it. The character has to be compelling in itself, and prompt thoughts and emotions but also has to be able to function in violent motion, in 'blood, sweat, and tears'. Finding the technical solutions to produce an artistic result is an ideal place to be able to maintain a constant creative flow."

The list of choreographers with whom Turunen has worked is long and includes Marilena Fontoura, Jorma Uotinen, Marjo Kuusela and Susanna Leinonen; yet in Tero Saarinen, whose eponymous dance company was founded in 1996, she has clearly found her match. They have collaborated since 2001, when his "Petrouchka" was performed by London's Company Toothpick. "Tero is more interested in the visual aspects of a production than your average choreographer, and we collaborate closely at the start of each production, not so much in the conception of costumes, because that is my contribution, but more in the way of Tero outlining three-dimensional shapes that he is interested in using. For instance, he may say that the dancers could have large shells or sleeping bags with them that could be converted into a hut to hide in, or into a majestic wrap-around costume."

The two have begun with poems, artwork and philosophy – anything that can emphasize character and movement in the dance. Yet other times, she may pose rudimentary questions such as, "Why are those two characters standing over there? Why does the character seem so desperate and sad all the time? Why are the characters in this space, or against such a background?" To this end, Turunen will sit in the corner of the rehearsal room, taking



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of individual dance steps and movements. "I start looking for shapes that can open up in movement or fall heavily toward the floor or follow the movement into ethereal light." Even in the formative planning stages, she is thinking about how the costume can technically be executed. At the same time, she is analysing the individual personalities and physical characteristics of the dancers who will perform the work. What remains after this give and take is what Saarinen calls the "marrow" of the ideas, which Turunen then makes manifest.

The second intimate collaboration is between herself and the lighting designer because it is on stage, under the lights, where costumes take on their three-dimensionality and power. Lack of cooperation between colour and light can spell disaster. "The lighting designer can erase three-dimensional spaces on stage with light and absence of light, with coloured lights and smoke," says Turunen. "At the moment when the dozens of hues that the dyer and I have conjured forth are put on stage, every shade of turquoise can be cancelled outright with an orange light."

It comes as rather a surprise, then, that the awe-inspiring "skirt" in "Hunt", which forms the screen for the hologram, was easy to create. "I remember the tragic poem Tero sent me and which provided the inspiration for the costume; the inevitable 'crowning' as a victim, a sort of bride who has to succumb to the relentless burden that descends from heaven upon her, to be consecrated, to be sacrificed."

"I thought of a dress lowered from the ceiling, something that would not reveal its secret immediately. It should be able to transform itself in the viewer's mind, into any number of things, before it binds the victim. Maybe I was thinking of some kind of 'designer lamp'. But the screens that the skirt is full of are made from silk organza, thick crinoline nylon, bones and fishing line. Above all, it was a *pièce de résistance*, by virtuoso seamstress Anne Koskela." Turunen's modesty betrays her. Her mesmerizing costumes seem to breathe the very life into the dancer, turning a choreographer's vision of body and grace into stage magic. ***** Rhonda Sonnenberg**

01 & 04 *Tickled Green Oak*, 2003, Susanna Lehtinen.

02 *Georgie*, 2003, Tero Saarinen.

03 *Und Dreams*, 2000, Jorma Uotinen.