

# DIGITAL AGNES

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## Tyffanie Morgan

*Patterns for All Bodies: Repatterning the Collection of Canadian Dress at Agnes*

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### SPEAKERS

Tyffanie Morgan

### KEYWORDS

Drag, Kingston artist, fashion history, Collection of Canadian Dress

### TRANSCRIPT

**Tyffanie Morgan:** When I was invited to be part of the *Patterns for All Bodies* project, it was, yeah, it was really exciting. So when I first arrived — what's the word I'm looking for here? When I was actually invited into the actual collection area, like the vault, you know, the underlings of Agnes Etherington, it was out. The tea dress — the tea gown was on a mannequin. And they're like, "Well, we were thinking about this." I'm like, "Yes. Yes, that's exactly." And especially when you started jumping into the *histoire* of it that it was a tea gown, it's a tea gown, it's meant to be worn by, you know, a highfalutin lady in Victorian, late Victorian era. And it was only meant to be worn in front of very close intimates. And it would be — yeah, I was just really enthralled with the passion that everyone had for the gown, first and foremost, but the fact that it was called the tea gown immediately it just got the ball kind of rolling with ideas of what I could do with it. You know, there was immediately some idea. I was like, "Oh, it's like a tea dance." You know, there were -- in gay world, there was -- well, actually, it was not just gay world but anyway, there were tea dances which turned into really big kind of parties and stuff. But, you know, tea's always kind of been part of that language, part of that subculture, I suppose. And I was like, "Well, I can easily throw my own stamp on it."

What caught my imagination with the tea gown was, well, it was interesting because when I first saw it, I didn't realize it was Victorian. I'm not a big costumer or anything. And it immediately kind of felt a little Rococo to me or something like that, a little Baroque or whatnot. And I've always had that little bit of a fantasy in my mind of some sort of big, huge, hooped dress and being able to run around, you know, up the stairs, down the stairs, over the bridge and through the woods like, you know, sort of thing, in this big flowing sort of dress. But when I saw, I was like, "Oh, my gosh, if I could wear that some big flowing, lots of fabric, just lots and lots of fabric, I was going to be looking really, really forward to that." So, yeah. And, yeah, it was just kind of tying into that fantasy that I've always wanted to do and then being able to kind of make it my own. So, when you said it was a tea dress, it was just so easy to kind of go towards the idea of just hamming it up, just using that kind of queer aesthetic. You're like, "Oh, it's a tea dress. Well, we're going to just dive right into tea dress here. We're just going to dive right in." So immediately when I was thinking about fabrics, I was thinking about patterns. I am not a dressmaker. I'm like, you know, you tell me something is sateen and something is cotton. And I'm like, "Whatever. It doesn't look good. Is it sequins," you know. But

I was thinking about patterns, and I was like, "I really would love some sort of teacups and stuff like that." And then when I started thinking about, you know, what kind of patterns I wanted on it then I realized then I'm like, "Oh, Delft. I love Delftware." Whenever, you know, you think about a tea set or something, you'd almost think about grandma's special Delftware, you know, up in the China cabinet. No one touches it. Comes out once a Christmas season or something like that. And then blue, you know, blue and white sort of thing. I was like, "Yeah, that's totally Tiffanie as well. I have patented blue! Blue is my signature colour. Blue is my signature colour." So, just kind of choosing those fabrics and then being able to accessorize. I had -- right from the beginning, I had an idea of doing -- making a headpiece. Although it's fallen apart at the seams, I've always had this idea of doing a headdress. I've made quite a few headdresses in the past, which is just, you know, just getting very creative with a hot glue gun. And some papier mâché and whatnot. But unfortunately, this time around, it didn't pan out the way I wanted it to. But who knows? Something might come out at some point.

My finished tea gown – when I thought about my finished tea gown was just wow. I – well, first and foremost, because it was difficult because we had some moments where it was like, "OK, it's been a while since I've seen it. How does -- do I remember how it fits on me and how it is?" But yeah, putting it on for the first time, yeah, it was – at the time, because it was during the photo shoot, it was during the photo shoot that I finally put on the final gown, I felt stressed at the photo shoot. And of course, it took like two or three people to put the dress on me as well. And I was like, "How would I ever do this in person by myself?" Because I don't even know where all the fasteners -- people are fastening things behind me. I'm like, "I have no idea how this is being connected to me." But at the end, just looking at it in the mirror too, I think that kind of reminds me of the first time doing drag because when, my drag mother was Jas Morgan, when she was putting my face on for the first time, painting my face, she's like, "You're not looking into a mirror until at the end when it's the finished product with the wig and everything on." So, yeah, here I am sitting there not knowing what I look like. You know, people are doing all this stuff around me sort of thing. And then finally turning into the mirror and then seeing the finished look. And it was just – it was quite the transformation; it was quite the transformation. Yeah, I do love the gown. It's -- I love how it – I love how the panels in the back. Oh, my gosh, like I need to do some very kind of flowy movements all around. I just got to not stop. I just got to keep moving around, and just so people can see all the fabulousness of the fabric. But, yeah, and it's been -- like I said, it has been such a long time, too. So to finally see the final product, it was -- it's just a climax at the end, you know, of a long but very joyous project because I found so much joy in this. I've learnt so much. You know, you have like a little bit of a hand in some historical costume. You know, you watch some historical shows and stuff like that and you're like, "Oh, this is what they would have worn." But then, it's just the nitty-gritty, too, as which people will find out through the patterns is that little nitty-gritty. How is this being held together? How would you have adjusted this outfit? And how many actual yards of fabric there are? I will say I was a little – I think I was a little bit more of a princess than Rowena and Dare when it comes to the choice of fabric because you – we all went to the local fabric shop. And I'm like, "Nothing here is for me." And I was like, "I want custom purchased online for my Delftware pattern." And thank you for indulging me!

Well, like I said earlier, I'm going to be kind of trying to live my Rococo fantasy but showing it off as kind of late Victorian sort of thing. So, when it comes to the performance, yeah, there's definitely

going to have to be a lot of movement. And when I say movement, I'm not meaning splits and cartwheels and stuff, but just moving around the room, just moving around, just being able to show off the garments. But I think a lot of the performance will be in the upper body when it comes to the arms and stuff because there's a lot of – there's the inner sleeve, there's the outer sleeve—like there's a lot of sleeve. There's a lot of sleeve to that as well. And you're going to be able to see that moving. I love the ruffles as well, the ruffles over the hands. So, when it comes to the performance, there will be some fan work. I do have some – a fan or two that will now match with the outfit. And I'm kind of looking forward to that. That will be kind of fun. And yes, of course, you know, when it comes to all the accessories, I made – I felt like I needed a necklace. I'm sorry, Tyffanie Morgan always has to have a necklace, even though this dress doesn't really call for one. Like the dress – you could just wear the dress itself and that would be enough, that would be enough. But I felt like I needed some pearls for some reason, so I'll have some really big chunky kind of pearls as well. And then, I'm wearing my “Old Blue,” my first hair wig that I ever purchased ever, “Old Blue” as I call her. But then also Funeral Face Nails, the nails. I have fake nails. And those are a performance in themselves, as Alicia knows as well, because Alicia helped me put them on for the photo shoot! But these are very unique nails. They feature teapots and teacups—teacups with tea in them. It looks like there's tea in them. And they are made in a kind of Delft-y sort of pattern sort of thing, blue or white on blue, blue on white. The fact that the bottom of the nails like the under nail is also painted, I was just like floored by that. It's a 360 kind of art piece. So, when we were doing the photo shoot, it was like I really just wanted to make sure the nails were featured in there as well. But yeah, there's going to be a lot of arm movements and whatnot. Those nails are pretty heavy so I'm hoping – I'm not looking for really quick movements because any kind of quick movement, there might be a nail flying across the hall.