

# Feature



## Lady of the Lanterns Aurora Celeste\*

Photo: Richard Man.

*An illustration of a lady from a mythical world inspired the author to create the costume, and to solve some real-world problems to build the fantastic headdress.*

When I saw Dawn McKechnie's "Lady of the Lanterns" drawing from the Costume-Con 31 Future Fashion Portfolio, I decided to create the costume for the Future Fashion Showcase because it seemed like a challenge. I loved the look of the headdress and the design suited my body type.

A surprisingly difficult part was figuring out a pleasing arrangement of colors and fabrics for the dress that would show off all the elements present while still being texturally interesting and harmonious in hue. I think I went through ten or twelve different versions of the picture with colored markers and swatches trying to figure out what I was going to do.

And then there was the headdress. My main thought was making it light. I certainly didn't want to walk around all day with a crick in my neck from a heavy hat. I had previously experimented with [Worbla](#), a thermoplastic modeling material that comes

in sheets, and can be shaped using hot air, water or steam. I thought it was the perfect light material to base the helmet on. I used a cast of the back of my head from my Genevieve costume from Costume-Con 30 to make a skullcap out of Worbla.



Aurora Celeste - "Lady of the Lanterns." costume for the Costume-Con 31 Future Fashion Show. Photo by Don Searle.

Next, I worked on the antlers. A friend sent me a set of antlers, but they were heavy and still attached to a piece of skull shaped like a pyramid and perfectly designed to dig into my head were I to wear them as-is. About the time I was ready to start working



Dawn McKechnie - "Lady of the Lanterns." illustration from the Costume-Con 31 Future Fashion Folio.



Inside of Worbla skull cap.

on them, I found a YouTube [video](#) that I watched a lot, and decided to emulate it for light, durable antlers. I got ahold of some [KobraCast](#), but it was too expensive to get the amount I needed shipped from Germany, so I went with more Worbla for the project.

Using the video as an example I made two halves of the antlers and mashed them together to make one antler. Because the antlers I was using weren't as impressive as I wanted, I cast some extra points and added them in places where it seemed logical that a new point could grow. Since the two halves were hollow, putting them together was difficult, but I did the best I could. It did leave a few divots, which I tried to reinforce with [Paperclay](#). The Paperclay liked sticking to my hands more than the Worbla though, so I then decided to papier-mâché them with a few layers of newspaper. After that, the Paperclay worked well to smooth out divots.



Outside of decorated cap showing horn attachment point.

Next, I smoothed out the roughness with eight layers of wood glue thinned with water. I had decided pretty early on that I wanted smooth, fantasy-like antlers and not realistic textured ones, so the wood glue gave the antlers a smooth, almost extruded quality. After sanding the wood glue I spray-painted the antlers silver. Since I knew I



Real antlers where too heavy to use.

would not be able to travel with a completed headdress in my luggage I planned on assembling the end product in my hotel room.

To do this I made round Worbla donuts that perfectly matched the insides of each antler and attached them to the headdress. (left) This made it so that the antlers snapped on to the headdress and were easily held on with a little hot glue. At this point I spray painted the skullcap silver as well, since it was finished.

The last piece of construction was the two "handle" parts that stick out from the sides of the headdress. I decided to work with a new material for those. Keeping with my mantra of "light, light, light" I went with Crayola's [Model Magic](#). I sculpted the two handles out of white clay and dried them for two days, then painted them silver with Lumiere paint.



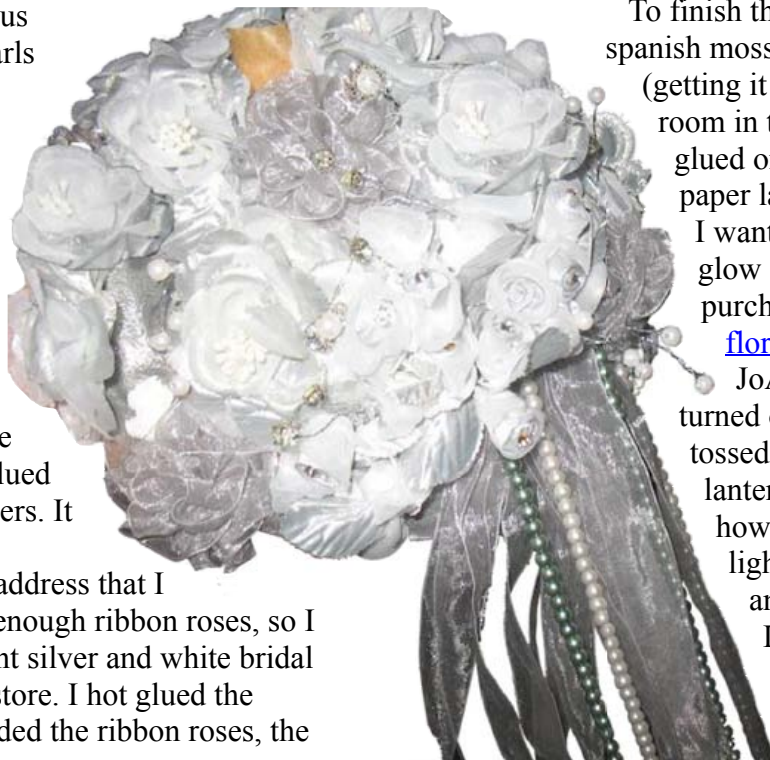
Modeled antlers assembled, sanded, and painted.

A key part to getting the headdress right was getting paper lanterns of various sizes to match the ones on the headdress. I found a great variety of lanterns at [Just Artifacts](#). (right) They came with wire or plastic holders that kept them 'inflated' without relying on hanging and gravity, which made them perfect for my project. I also got the perfect 'stick', an interestingly twisted root, from some friends. Finally, I made 20 ribbon roses out of silver ribbon and collected various flower picks of pearls and rhinestones to serve as the tiny flowers sticking out of the headdress.



purchased roses, and the flower picks all over the headdress.

I ended up running out of flowers towards the bottom of the skullcap. I thought about cutting the skullcap short to take care of it, but I wasn't sure of the integrity of the whole piece (since I still hadn't had it all together) so instead I gathered strips of extra ribbon and strings of pearls and beads and glued them on the back like a cascade coming out from underneath the flowers. (below)



I assembled the headdress in the hotel room at Costume Con 31. First I hot-glued the antlers on, then I glued the stick to the antlers. It was evident in just mocking up the headdress that I had nowhere near enough ribbon roses, so I went out and bought silver and white bridal roses from a craft store. I hot glued the handles on then added the ribbon roses, the

To finish the look I glued spanish moss onto the stick (getting it all over our hotel room in the process) and glued on the inflated paper lanterns. For stage I wanted the lanterns to glow softly, so I purchased a pack of [floral LED lights](#) at JoAnn's. (right) I turned on the lights and tossed 1-3 in each lantern, depending on how big it was. The lights glowed nicely and moved a bit as I turned my head, making them flicker nicely.

## About the Costume-Con Future Fashion Event

The Costume-Con Future Fashion event has of two parts: The Future Fashion Folio design competition, and the Future Fashion Showcase.

The design competition takes place prior to the conference, with designers submitting work by mail or email. Designs are reviewed by a judging panel who decide what will be included in the Future Fashion Folio. Designs are published in a *Future Fashion Folio* approximately 6 months in advance.

For those inspired by the designs they see in the Folio, the Future Fashion Showcase is their opportunity to make one of the designs into a reality and present their creation on stage. Designers may reserve exclusive rights to their own designs, or allow other costumers to interpret their designs. The fashion show presentation consists of a simple runway walk. Finished garments are evaluated on how they realize the original design.

In all I'm really proud of the headdress and how it worked out. I was pretty sure of the construction even before it was fully assembled. I had extensively tested the Worbla parts on their own, so I knew the skullcap fit well and that the antlers fit on it and were light weight. I tested it out with a broomstick at my house beforehand, so I was pretty sure that once decorated it would

be pretty secure. I think the key was having the skullcap formed to my head, using a cast of my head was very advantageous.

I'd recommend Worbla as a headdress material any day. I think my biggest lesson was that Paperclay will NOT stick to Worbla no matter how much you want it to. I also don't recommend working with Model

Magic because it isn't very sturdy, it dented in my luggage even after drying the required time and since the con it has continued to shrink and crack, and if I'm going to wear the costume again I need to redo the handles. Otherwise, though, I don't think I'd change anything about how I did this headdress.

*Aurora Celeste has costuming interests that are all over, but her passion is reproducing costumes, mostly sci-fi and fantasy movies and TV shows, anime and manga, and Joseph Michael Linsner's Dawn character. She is also active in theatrical costuming. Visit her [website](#) to learn more and read her costuming tutorials.*



*"On the completely forested planet of La Forit the pioneers have invented elegant solutions to the planet's long nights and the dark forest floor hundreds of feet below the endless canopy. Among these are the fashions of the Lantern Ladies, who wear glowing lanterns on their heads, illuminating their beautiful garb and making them seem like glowing angelic creatures as they go about their business. The elaborate headgear is not only a fashion statement but is useful in leaving their hands free to go about their nightly tasks." - Dawn McKechnie*

Aurora Celeste - "Lady of the Lanterns" headdress, Costume-Con 31 Future Fashion Showcase. Photo by Don Searle.