

Feature



Creating a Goddess Rae Bradbury-Enslin

A costumer's decades-long fascination with the statue of Athena Parthenos lead to a multi-year journey, and her near-demise at the hands of the "Stume 'o Doom."

I discovered the Athena Parthenos statue in 1992, when my then-boyfriend showed me a photo of the reproduction from the Royal Ontario Museum. We both had Greek personas in the SCA, so I already had an interest in ancient Grecian clothing. I was very taken with the statue's history, scale and beauty, and decided that I wanted someday to reinvent it as a costume. Had anyone told me "someday" would be the year 2014, I might have changed my mind.

It's worth noting that I decided to make the costume two years before I met my husband, which means he has had to put up with this obsession of mine for the entirety of our 20-year relationship. Some people bring emotional baggage into a relationship, I brought goddess baggage. Fortunately he's coped with my obsession with grace and humor—the same way he deals with every other weird thing I come up with.

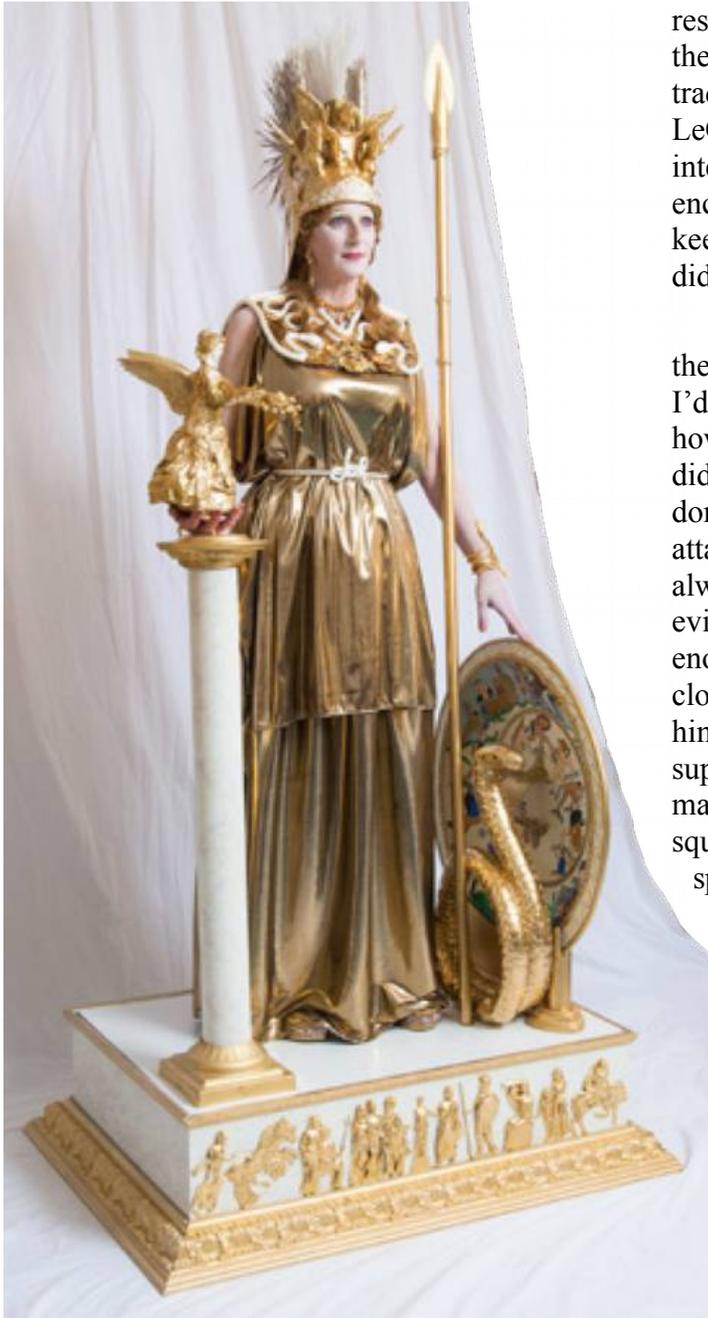
Enthusiasm for the costume wasn't a problem. That, I had in abundance. It was the myriad details of the statue that I found daunting. I love working with clay, but fine sculpting, especially the detailed sculpting of tiny people, is not my forté. And the more I looked at the statue's components, the more of the little twits I discovered. They were everywhere! The shield, the helmet, the pedestal. Tiny sculpted people, tiny painted people, (I'm even worse a painter than I am a sculptor) bits of furniture, landscapes, and a few random larger sculptures like the serpent and Nike. Every reproduction I found showed more minute details that I would need to recreate. I remember actually laughing out loud when I noticed that there were even friezes of tiny human figures on her sandals.

At this point it was clear that Athena was just messing with me.

Basically, at the time, I just couldn't do it. I didn't have the skill set. Still, perhaps in blind hope or ambition, I started to collect materials over the years. I purchased the fabric for her clothes, and I made a version of Nike that I placed into storage. (Only to disassemble her years later because I thought I could do better.) I found plastic helmets that I thought I might be able to repurpose, since I didn't know how to build one from scratch. I collected photos of various reproductions, and chatted on the phone with the volunteers at the Parthenon in Nashville, which houses the only full-size reproduction of Athena Parthenos in the world. They directed me to wonderful



Statues of Athena that served as inspiration. Left-to-right: Athena Parthenos, Louvre; Athena Severen, Boston Museum of Fine Arts; Athena Varvakeion, National Archeological Museum of Athens; Athena Parthenos, The Parthenon, Nashville, Tennessee; Athena Parthenos, Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto



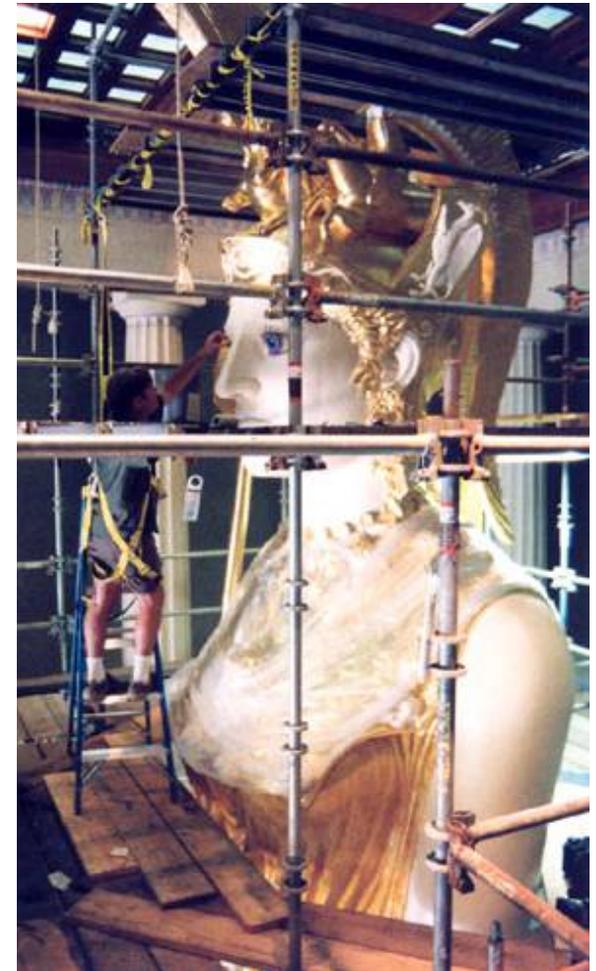
Costume during initial photo shoot for documentation. A number of things changed later including, makeup, dress, helmet, and hair.

resources, including a video documentary of the statue's conception and creation. I even traded a few emails with the sculptor, Alan LeQuire. I was flattered that he took a real interest and was generous with his encouragement and advice. He asked me to keep him posted as to my progress, which I did... over the requisite decades.

For years the costume languished on the back burner in my mind. Once in a while I'd dust off the idea, see if I could figure out how to make it work, then decide that I still didn't have a clue. It would go back into dormancy, and I'd refocus on more attainable projects. But the temptation was always there, and in 2011 the costume evidently decided that it had had quite enough of my dilly-dallying and began clobbering me with some rather obvious hints. I'd be rooting through a box of supplies and I'd find a long-forgotten material that I'd purchased for her and squirreled away. A new artist friend who specialized in movie special effects offered me some advice on sculptural techniques that answered some of my dilemmas and got me thinking about the costume again.

When I learned that Costume-Con was announced for Toronto in 2014, everything crystallized. It was the first CC within driving distance for some years. (I knew there was no way on earth that this project was going to go on an airplane or in the mail, so driving was the only way.) I would have three

full winters to work on it, which seemed like a realistic timeframe, even though I still wasn't completely sure how to complete every segment. Still, it seemed like Athena was telling me to get off my butt and deliver. And when a goddess tells you she's tired of waiting, you kind of have to pay attention.



Sculptor Alan LeQuire painting detail of Athena Parthenos statue in Nashville during the gilding phase. Photo: Andrew Rozario; source: [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athena_Parthenos).

I have to mention that my biggest fear in all that time was a very obvious one—that somebody else was going to think of this and beat me to it. Every time I attended a Costume-Con masquerade, I was convinced that the next costume that came onstage was going to be the Parthenos, and all the years I had spent trying to figure it out were going to be my downfall. This fear became even more intense after I was under way with the construction—what if I were half-finished and THEN someone else did it? What if I showed up in the green room and there were two of us? But as I worked on the costume, often becoming painfully bogged down in the details of each portion, I realized something I had simply never realized before. Something that partially soothed my concerns:

Surely no one else... no one in their right mind... could possibly be stupid enough to try this...

Seriously. It was a crazy idea, a stupid amount of work, and most costumers have better things to do with their time. It was going to be costly, cumbersomely large, difficult to transport and then of course there was the issue of presenting a statue on stage. Being immobile is the easiest way to totally

Editor's Note

To see Rae Bradbury-Enslin's award-winning documentation with build photos, and a video of her Costume-Con 32 performance, visit her [Athena Parthenos page](#) on her website.

bore your audience and have your presentation fall flat. Honestly, it was insane. But heck! By then I was already part-way done! Why stop now?

I started with the portions that I DID know how to do, but even some of those were annoyingly difficult. For instance, Athena's clothing seemed easy enough to get out of the way. Literally a half hour to an hour of sewing, and I would have my base. NO problem! Greek clothing is super easy!

The fabric I had chosen was the only thing I could find that I felt draped appropriately and would mimic the statue's golden clothing. It was a gold foil printed on spandex. I can now quite confidently place it on my list of top three worst fabrics I have EVER worked with. It snarled my machine, and the merest stretch of the fabric itself would split the gold print and show an ugly black mark caused by the black under-fabric being a stretch knit while the print itself was immobile. (Brilliant!!) And replacing it wasn't really an option because the modern version isn't nearly as well made as the fabric I had bought two decades earlier. The older fabric was superior, I had precisely enough to do her garments, and by the gods, I was going to find a way to make it work.

Every machine seam was so visible that I ended up doing all the hems by hand. It seemed appropriate, really. The rules for my category said, "Modern sewing techniques allowed." I took this rule, bent it sharply, and applied it liberally to all the other parts of the costume, forcing it to



Modern gold foil printed on spandex swimwear fabric closely approximated the look of Athena's gilded apparel.

mean that modern sculpting and fabricating techniques would also be allowed. (If they weren't, I would have to learn how to carve a marble pedestal...) I therefore thought it was rather amusing that in the end I had to hand sew most of my garment—just like the ancient Greeks would have done...

Once I had that finished, my next order of business was the pedestal. I figured I should start with the part I was going to stand on, because everything I had to do afterward would depend on how well that first section went together. It's probably lucky that the pedestal gave me absolutely no trouble at all. I didn't do the sculpted frieze on the front until months later, but the overall structure went quickly and I was pleased with the result. It bolstered my confidence. For the first time I began to feel I could do this. And that it could be spectacular.

Naturally this was the last time anything went smoothly.

Most of the pieces took numerous attempts before I was happy with them. The



Digitally created embroideries applied to gold fabric, then glued to commercial flip flop shoe platforms.

shoes were made twice. Nike was sculpted once in the nineties, then dumped as not good enough and re-sculpted in 2012. The helmet was fully sculpted, painted and finished... then trashed and completely reworked three times before I was able to wear it without giving myself a massive headache. I eventually took my special effects artist friend's suggestion and cast it out of latex to cut down the weight.

I created the aegis and was relatively pleased with it, but the Medusa medallion stared at me for months and mocked me every chance it got. I made three versions of that as well. Then I cut down the aegis to change the shape and completely refitted it.



Finished pedestal with attached gold painted sculpted frieze representing the birth of Pandora.

The large snake sculpture was completed, only to crumble off the armature because the clay I chose shrank as it dried. He also had to be done over completely. The shield painting split and peeled off the backing and had to be fixed, although at least with that I was able to make repairs rather than redoing it entirely.

There were a great many obstacles and challenges that had to be overcome. It's odd to talk about them now, since I mostly had to leave this information out of my documentation. It was already long enough, without adding in mentions of everything I screwed up along the way.



Nike made of porcelain head and hands, sculpted foam clay body, and draped plaster bandaging for the robe.



Rear view of Athena Severen's hairstyle in Boston Museum of Fine Arts (above). Curled wig of costume, painted gold to fully set the curls and make them look sculpted (below).



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Then I caught a break. While researching one of the reproduction Athena statues, I discovered it was surprisingly local, at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. I drove down on a day when museum admission was free, and spent about an hour taking photos. I'm sure the other tourists thought it was odd that I photographed the statue's hair, feet, hands, body, and face again and again, from every possible angle. Actually, there was one other photographer who was, seemingly, also intent on documenting the statue. She and I politely danced around each other and took turns. Still, I was clearly the more dedicated. She wanted to be thorough, but I was practically crawling underneath the pedestal to get shots of details in out-of-the-way spots.

But it was worth it. In the end I had a vast pool of new resource material—my only view of Athena's hairstyle from the back, for instance. And of course, it was this new data that

pointed out a rather glaring error I'd made on the initial garments. I had created the skirt as a closed tube like a chiton, unaware that it was a completely different garment called a peplos, and that one side was meant to be open and draped. I looked through all of my other photos. Now that I knew what to look for, I realized that they were indeed all styled the same way. I had simply never noticed because the statue was rarely photographed from that side.

Terrific.

Now I had a dilemma. On the one hand, I was probably the only person who had looked closely enough to realize that I had the garment wrong. I COULD simply omit photos that revealed my error and pretend that I had done it correctly. I probably would have gotten away with it too—I doubted anyone else had spent as much time staring at the statue as I had. But in the end I just sighed, rewrote the documentation to indicate the correct type of garment, and fixed the problem. I couldn't go to this much trouble and then deliberately hide a detail out of plain laziness. And



Costume helmet. Shell was sculpted, cast in latex, and glued to a toy helmet. Doll head was fitted into sphinx body, horses attached, brow and ear pieces affixed, and wings added to the figures.

I'm glad I didn't. It would have been poor costuming. Plus, Athena would never forgive me, and she's kinda scary...

By this time I was managing to find ways around my lack of skill in sculpting tiny faces. I procured a number of molds of figures that I could use and adapt for the various friezes. I used my embroidery machine to design and embroider the friezes on the sandals. I managed to sculpt the statue of Nike using a Christmas angel head, and used a similar trick for the sphinx on Athena's helmet. I sculpted buildings, furnishings, clothing and animals myself, but for the little people, I needed a bit of help.

A particularly useful find was the set of tiny plastic Trojan toy soldiers that I used for the shield. I was able to make several molds from those, which gave me a bunch of soldiers in various action positions to apply to the shield. Many of the molds weren't ideal for my purposes. The majority of the figures I needed to make were in three quarter view, and my molds were almost entirely straight on. As a result of having to turn them, most of the figures on my friezes have some seriously ugly and squished



Outer surface of costume shield was cast in latex from sculptured figures over plastic toboggan.

little faces if you get a good close look, but from three feet away they all looked pretty darned good. Anyone close enough to actually see otherwise and have the poor taste to mention it was close enough for me to stomp them in the head with my massive sandal.

I was closing in on the shield—the only piece I was still genuinely nervous about. Once again, my special effects friend suggested latex, using the same method that I had used to make the helmet. I had tried sculpting the figures directly onto the plastic background, but it was clear that one inadvertent flex of the shield would result in several of them breaking loose and falling off. The latex idea

sounded perfect—it would be one molded sheet that would have a tiny bit of flexibility. No chance of any of the figures falling off at a bad time. (I had numerous nightmares about tiny clay people jumping off my costume and running amok. I don't think I've ever done a costume that caused as many anxiety dreams as this one did. More about that later.)



Nashville statue's rendition of mural (above) was the basis for colors on inside of costume shield (below).





Larger wedge for shield than typical was needed. It was ornamented to better integrate with the platform.

The shield sculpt took several days. Each figure had to be created, clothed, given weapons, posed, and then positioned on the background individually. A few times I stepped back and realized that I had the spacing wrong and had to redo large portions. When it was finally ready, I drove the shield to my friend's special effects studio—an achievement in itself, considering that the unwieldy thing was covered in several pounds of soft clay that could easily get dented or messed up. He directed me in making a mold and pouring the latex. Then I waited for it to cure overnight.

I believe now that the one part of the costume that was really thwarting me all those years was the shield. Even after I had

already committed and begun work on the costume, it was the one piece I couldn't visualize a technique for completing. I left it until very late in the process, and the construction of the rest of the costume actually taught me new skills to use in the attempt. Preparing to pull it out of the mold was terrifying. I had already put so much time in, and had no idea if it was going to rip to shreds when I removed it from the mold.

Hands down, I can say that peeling that perfect sheet of latex out of the mold in one piece was the most satisfying moment of the entire construction process. I realized, in that instant, that I'd just leapt over my most worrisome obstacle. There it was, sitting in front of me, just waiting to be glued on and painted.

I was going to finish this thing.

But it wasn't over by any stretch. Immediately after this triumph, I stumbled right into my next creative obstacle. I started working on a way to attach the shield to the pedestal, and I realized that it was much too short. I couldn't rest my hand on it the way Athena did. In fact, I had to bend over sideways to even come close. I knew the proportions were correct because I had made several paper mockups. When I made the shield large enough to reach my hand, it would hang over both sides of the pedestal in a ridiculous fashion and it hid most of my body if I tried holding it.

Now, I happen to have unusually long legs, and at first I was concerned that threw the proportions of the statue off a bit. I was

partially right, but as I would later discover there was far more to it. But at the time, I simply raised the shield up several inches on a small stand, documented the deviation from the historical model, and didn't think much more about it.

I mentioned before that the only true-scale reproduction of the Parthenon Athena was in Nashville. A you might imagine I'd yearned to visit for years, but it just never worked out. Finally, I managed to combine of of my husband's business trips into a research trip for myself. We left for his trade



The author visits Athena at the Nashville Parthenon.

show in Nashville a few days early, and I finally got to see the Athena statue reproduction at full size. It had a profound effect on me. I was expecting a tawdry tourist attraction, but I was stunned to discover how much the Nashville Parthenon honors the spirit of its historical counterpart.

Originally built in the 1800s as a temporary part of a large city celebration, the Parthenon was so popular that it was permanently rebuilt with the assistance of scholars and experts on ancient Greek architecture to be as accurate as possible. All the sculptures were copied or extrapolated from the remains of the originals.

For nearly a century this mammoth replica was empty of its patron goddess, but in 1982, the vast job of recreating the statue was undertaken by Alan LeQuire. It was completed in 1990, and in 2002 the funds were raised to cover the goddess's clothing in gold leaf, making her as close a representation as possible to descriptions of the original statue that had once stood in Greece.

It was a genuine pleasure for me to stand in that huge, silent room, and imagine what it must have been like to see her counterpart in Greece so many centuries ago. Where I was expecting loud, obnoxious

tourists, souvenir stands, Cola machines and elevator music, I instead found a somber inner sanctum worthy of emulating this amazing piece of history. For some time I simply stared at her. Everything I'd been working on for months, brought to reality. Even though it wasn't the real thing, it was truly magnificent.

But there was something else tickling the back of my mind... Athena was big. Really big. I mean, of course she was big. She was forty feet tall. Still something else, though... Her shoulders were big. Her head was big. Actually, the woman was built like a linebacker... HEY!! Her upper half was disproportionately large!! No wonder she could rest her hand on her shield. Her upper body was gigantic!! WAY out of proportion to her lower body. Several years of art history lessons suddenly slammed forcefully into the forefront of my brain and reminded me (I thought rather patronizingly) that historically, large-scale statuary often had disproportionate sections to make them appear the correct size to people gazing up from the ground. Mr. LeQuire's statue was painstakingly researched and based on descriptions of the original, so it had the same proportions.

In my documentation I called this a Eureka moment—I finally realized why I had been having so much trouble with the proportions of my shield. But quite frankly it was more of a Facepalm moment. It had never once occurred to me until I was standing at her feet that Athena was larger

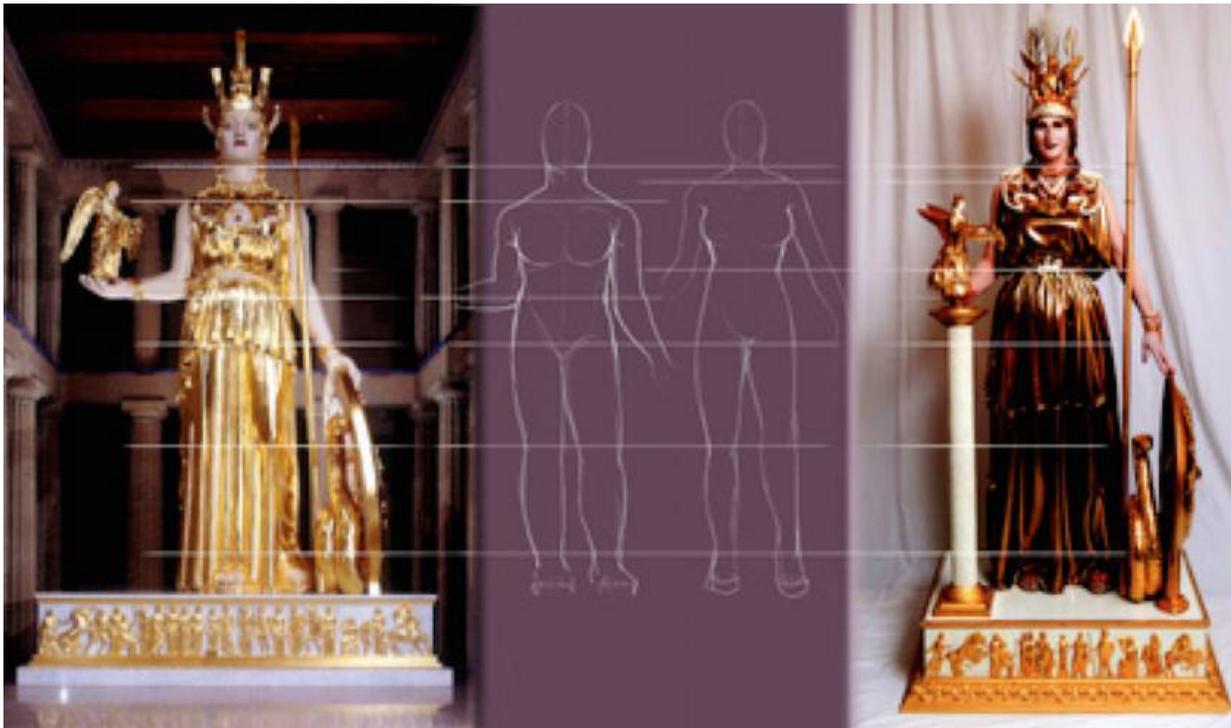


illustration demonstrates difference between author's proportions and those of the Nashville statue. (The Nashville Athena was based on the dimensions of the original sculpture, so she shows the issue most clearly.)

on the top than she was on the bottom. Looking back now I can easily see it in the photos, but this was the first time I could actually wrap my head around it. So, with this newfound knowledge, I took all my photos, bought a T-shirt and some postcards in the (very tasteful) gift shop, and waved a final goodbye to Athena.

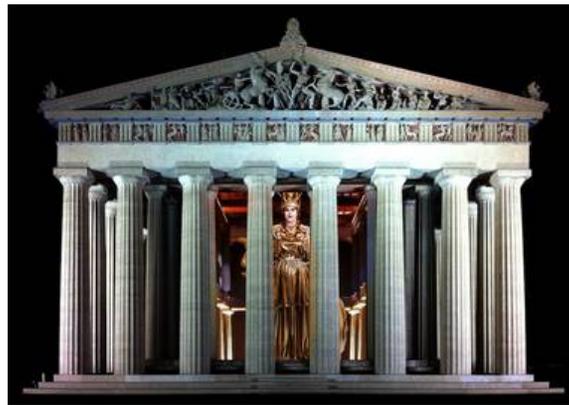
My husband said if I had spent much more time photographing and staring at her, she would have taken out a restraining order. Personally, I figured if I walked out of there on my own two feet instead of spider legs, she couldn't have been that upset.

My timing for visiting the statue was perfect. All I had left to do was my documentation. I had had the costume professionally photographed the previous year and I had made sure to document every piece as it was made. I now had a ton of photos, sources, and stories to work with. I spent most of the winter on that. There was so much to cover with not only the costume itself, but all the additional statue sculptures. I had some concerns that these would be considered props and not parts of the costume, and it did worry me—technically without all that I was wearing a relatively simple dress with an elaborate helmet.

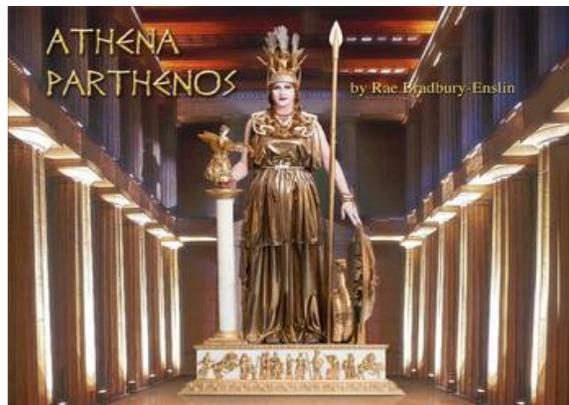
Ultimately I documented everything. To me the costume wasn't complete without the pedestal and all its accoutrements, so I included every frieze, every secondary statue, and anything I felt was related. I'm sure the judges just about had a cow when they saw it, but I at least made sure to



View of Parthenon exterior used to create outer cover.



Documentation outer cover showing Parthenon exterior and cut-outs showing Athena figure inside.



Documentation splash page shows Parthenon interior with overlaid image of author in Athena costume.

package it prettily, and I actually did keep it as brief as I possibly could.

Our printer is also an artist friend, and he came up with the brilliant idea of doing the cover as the cut-out exterior of the Parthenon, with me showing from the inside as the statue. The interior cover shows the inside of the Parthenon, with a clearer view of my costume. My original plan was to do the documentation on scrolls, before I realized how much material I would have to cover. I even painted a nice Grecian vase to hold them. It was, shall we say, a flawed concept. I will be eternally grateful to my friend for coming up with a much better package. I'm sure the judges would have beaten me to death with my own documentation if I had done it the way I'd planned.

The only downside with having the costume finished was that now I had time to tweak it. And tweak it I did. I kept finding new, better ways to do things that I thought were already finished. Each time I changed something, I had to go back into my documentation files and alter those as well. The ninjas I had recruited to help me schlep the costume to and from stage started threatening to tie me down and steal the damn thing if I didn't stop messing with it. But I believe every change was an improvement. I realized that part of my dress was the wrong length, so I shortened it. I added detail to the helmet that genuinely improved its look, especially from a distance. I redid my sandals and was much

happier with the result. In the end, it was my costume, and it was up to me to decide when it was truly finished.

But calling me dangerously obsessive at that point would definitely have been an understatement.

Finally everything was ready and the time had come to show it. With the help of one of my ninjas, we had built padded cardboard crates and storage containers for all the fragile pieces. I built a hatbox for my helmet (dubbed “The Headpiece from Hell” during a particularly frustrating failed attempt) out of a hatbox from which I removed the bottom and then duct taped to a 5 gallon bucket. It was the only thing it fit into. I had even loaded everything into my SUV a couple of times to make sure it all fit. It was a good thing that my driving companion didn’t have a costume to show—I barely had room for our suitcases, much less a whole extra costume.

I competed Athena at a very small masquerade just to road-test the presentation, and received an excellent response from the audience. I won the official “Best in Show” award—as well as a considerably less official “We Hate Rae” award from the judges. (Which all costumers consider the highest compliment.) I was pretty sure everything was ready.

I had a month until Costume-Con, and this is when the anxiety dreams notched up to almost nightly events. They had a hard time really getting to me at first. My subconscious wasn’t being very original.

Most of them involved some form of under-preparation—which was laughable after so many years of fiddling with everything. I also had a dream about stepping onto my pedestal onstage and falling straight through. I had spent hours stomping around on the thing.



Sculpted, close-cropped golden curls around author's face, with longer tendrils on the sides and back, created a lovely contrast with Athena's ivory skin.

Even asleep, I knew those dreams were nonsense. So, my subconscious took a new tactic and I now found myself breaking things. Forgetting my passport. Showing up at the convention and realizing I had forgotten one box. Nice realistic scenarios that I had a hard time being sure were just

dreams. This was in addition to all the more surreal nightmares of the little people on my friezes coming to life, poking me with tiny spears, chasing my pets, and generally wreaking havoc. I knew it was getting out of hand when one of my ninjas texted me to tell me HE had started having dreams about breaking my shield right before the masquerade and me never forgiving him.

Fortunately Costume-Con arrived before I went clinically insane and took all my friends with me. We got everything there with no hiccups. Nothing got left behind. No pieces got broken. We weren’t stopped at the border. When the guard asked us about the boxes that completely filled my Durango, I handed him my documentation and said, “I’ll open anything you want to see, but that’s what’s in them.” He flipped through it, and I watched his eyebrows get closer and closer to his hairline. He finally asked if we would be selling it. I told him no and explained about the costume competition aspect. He confirmed that everything was coming back to the states when we were done, handed me back my book, and waved us through.

I breathed a sigh of relief—not being allowed into Canada had been my final fear. We had even researched which border access points to avoid. Some of them had reputations for crankier guards, so we wanted to stay away from those. I didn’t want to have to plead my case that I had a goddess in a box and she really, really wanted to visit Toronto.

The first day in town, my ninjas and I took a quick field trip to the Royal Ontario museum, to visit the Parthenos display that had started this whole crazy journey. It was odd to see her, after everything she had inspired. That particular reproduction is only about four feet tall, so the impact wasn't the same as it had been in Nashville. But it was wonderful to lay eyes on her all the same—and tell her to her face that this was all her fault.



Author shows documentation to Athena Parthenos at the Royal Ontario Museum

Then it was on to Costume-Con. I managed to cram my gigantic costume into the small window area of our hotel room to keep it out of the way until Sunday. I slept next to it and I think everyone staying in the room with me was a little afraid to venture anywhere near it for fear of it spontaneously exploding into bits and them taking the blame.

The workmanship judging was nerve-racking, but not as scary as it had been the first time I showed a historical costume, many years ago. I had gone to the trouble of requesting a time slot that was immediately after the judges' lunch break, so it gave me time to get everything set up. Since I had so many parts, there was no easy way to just bring the costume down on a hanger. Instead I had a good half hour in the room to set up

my pedestal with all the additional sculptures, spread my jewelry and helmet out on the conveniently wide windowsill, and even set my dress up on an inflatable mannequin. (It looked completely flat on a hanger, and I just couldn't bring myself to show it that way.) The judges were excellent. They asked me lots of questions, but never once gave away any hint of what they were thinking, impressed or not impressed. It was just the

way I think workmanship judging should be.

When the big night arrived, I believe I was mostly calm. Unbeknownst to me, my ninjas were texting regular mental status reports to my husband, who couldn't be at the convention. I don't think there was much for them to tell, however. I remember being relatively relaxed. I knew that anything that could break likely had already done so, and I didn't think the costume could possibly surprise me at that point. It was as ready



Costume and pedestal during workmanship judging.

as it was possible to be, and there wasn't much good I could do by stressing about it any more.

I knew I was last in the running order. That was something else I had requested ahead. I knew that getting my pedestal on and off the stage would be easier if we didn't have another group behind us. In fact, I'm fairly certain I set a record for asking nearly three years in advance if I could have the last presentation slot unless someone else genuinely needed it.

I have to mention here that Byron Connell, the masquerade director, was immensely patient with me for the entirety of this process. I had so many odd needs for getting the costume to the convention, finding a place to put it before the masquerade and various other logistical concerns, that I was writing to him very early on in my efforts to make the process as

simple as possible for everyone involved. He was gracious and helpful, and never once implied that I was very likely out of my mind.

This is probably the only time in my entire costuming career that I was really aiming for a particular award. I have always firmly believed that I'm only competing



Author during her presentation at Costume-Con 32 masquerade. Watch her performance [here](#).

with myself and not my fellow costumers. If I happen to get a ribbon, I'm pretty darned happy. The title of the award is always secondary for me. But for the first time I have to confess I was genuinely hoping for Best in Show. I have done many elaborate costumes—some of which were equally obsessive in their own right. But after all those years of waiting, planning, and finally, actually building, all the skills I had learned, all the research I had done... I had never put in this kind of work before, and I really

wanted proof that it was as clear to everyone else as it was to me. In addition, I was in the historical masquerade, which is about as far from my comfort zone as I can get.

As I looked around the green room, doubts filtered back in. I saw all the beautiful details on everyone else's creations and it occurred to me once again that when it came right down to it, I was wearing a belted tube of fabric and a pretty hat. If everything else I had busted my butt on were considered mere props, then that would be all that I was judged upon. You don't see a lot of ancient Greek garments in masquerades, because there isn't really much to them. (Looking back, I know I was being silly, but I defy any costumer to say that they haven't had similar moments of self doubt.)

I'll close on my strongest memory of the evening. As I walked out onstage, I felt perfect. In the zone. I threw my shoulders back, went through my routine, and tried my utmost to channel a goddess. Everything went smoothly. When I finally froze into the statue's iconic pose at the end of the presentation, I had one tiny moment to release my breath and realize I had finally come to the end of my own little costuming odyssey. It was all over, and now I'd see what everyone else thought of it.

Then a noise exploded out of the audience as the lights went down that just about blew me backwards off my pedestal. I've gotten a few great audience reactions over the years, but I have never heard a

masquerade audience make that kind of sound. Maybe it's different when you're the one on stage hearing it, but I like to think it was reasonably high up on the I-Blew-A-CC-Audience-Out-Of-The-Water scale. I glanced offstage at my ninjas, my loyal Parthenos Pit Crew, who had put up with all of this for so long, and they were jumping around ecstatically and dancing in their excitement. Even the regular stage ninjas whom I did not know where jumping, hugging, and screaming with them.

As I stood there in the darkness and listened to the cheering go on and on, a goofy, un-goddesslike grin spread over my face. I had gotten it right. Maybe Athena had been looking over my shoulder and had made sure—I really have no idea. I'm hoping she was pleased. I'm still not an olive tree, so I like to assume I did her proud.

Rae Bradbury-Enslin is a self-taught Master-level costumer who has built a large body of work – drawing from historical, mythological, media, and fantasy themes. Some of these costumes are reproductions of specific characters, but most are her own design. Since 1989 she has competed and taken awards at numerous events and conventions, including the elite masquerades at the World Science Fiction convention and Costume-Con. She has costumed professionally for comic book and electronic games companies, but mostly makes her living creating cameo jewelry. Visit her [website](#) to learn more.