

The Costume Designer Who Made The Women Of Amazon's 'Hanna' Ready For Anything

Linda Maleh Former Contributor ©
I cover all things television.

Apr 27, 2019, 10:00am EDT

In Amazon Prime's *Hanna*, which dropped on March 29, the characters travel across Europe, adapting to new cities and situations. Costume designer Emily Batson had to consider all of these different factors, as she created looks that reflect each character's personality, and where they are at each moment of their arc. The women who lead this series face particular trials, as they kick a**, form bonds, and ultimately just try to survive. I spoke to Batson about how she created these nuanced looks.

The show follows Hanna (Esme Creed-Miles), a teenager who, after years of being raised in the forest by her father (Joel Kinnaman) in hiding, is now on the run from mysterious CIA operatives. Having, until recently, never met another human being other than her father, Hanna has never given any thought to what she looks like. Being viewed and judged through others' eyes is a new experience for her, as is style, and the idea of trying look good.



Esme Creed-Miles as Hanna while living in the forest in 'Hanna.' AMAZON

"The first time she sees someone reacting is when she's taken to that CIA detention center and they make her strip all of her possessions off," says Batson. Hanna is aware of the guard watching her, especially when she takes off her shirt, and she's not wearing a bra, but a piece of cloth wrapped around her breasts, binding them (she has been living in the forest for fifteen years after all). "I think she can sense that guard helping her finds it bizarre. So, I think that's maybe one of her first times thinking about how someone else might be looking at her."

Batson goes on to say that as the series goes on, whenever Hanna does make an adjustment to her appearance, it's usually out of necessity, or because someone else cares. "If Sophie (Rhianne Barreto) wants to dress her up she'll go along with it, but her appearance isn't deeply embedded in her psyche at all. And you can even see that when she goes to the movie night at Anton's (Gamba Cole) house, she's wearing some dirty old sweatpants, and she doesn't even think to clean herself up, or make herself look pretty, whatever that means," Batson explains.

Sophie is a British teenager who meets Hanna by chance, and winds up secretly sheltering her for a while, and even though she doesn't know Hanna's situation, the two become close friends. Anton, introduced to Hanna by Sophie, is Hanna's first real crush, and even though she can sense that Anton likes the way she looks, she doesn't totally understand what's entailed in that.

"A lot of the series is about her trying to figure out who she is, so the costumes had a lot to do with that in the fact that each kind of world that she explores, she takes on a piece of it and kind of tries that on with the actual clothing that she's wearing," says Batson. In the series, Hanna goes from the Polish forest, to the deserts of Morocco, to the city of Brazil, to the English suburbs, and back to Romania where she was born. By the end of the series, when Hanna picks out clothes, she picks out what she thinks a normal teenager would wear, as she tries to blend in and play that role. "She sort of gains some understanding of what teenagers are through the kids in London, and she's decided that like, this could be the thing that makes me blend in." Clothes are a very practical thing to Hanna. Oftentimes, they're how she camouflages herself and survives.



Sophie (Rhianne Barreto) and Hanna (Esme Creed-Miles) meet for the first time in the desert in...

[+] AMAZON

Another character in the series who uses clothes to blend in is Marissa Wiegler (Mireille Enos), the CIA agent hunting Hanna. When we first meet Marissa, back when Hanna is still a baby, and Marissa is hunting her and her parents, Marissa is one hundred percent committed to the job, and her look reflects that. She has very cropped short hair, and is sporting a very "streamlined and tailored look." It's a look that suggests she wants no distractions or attachments. "She's in it for the action," says Batson.

Fifteen years later, emotionally scarred from the things she had to do for the black ops project she used to run, Marissa has softened her look. She's grown her hair out and has a much more feminine silhouette. This Marissa is living in Paris, with a partner and his son. Though she still works for the CIA, this is a Marissa who's trying to have a family and a life outside work. "In Paris she's maybe the softest you'll see her. You get this idea that she's wondering, 'Could I have this life? Could this be me? And by the end of the series, it's like no, that's not who you are," explains Batson.

Whether Marissa's look is more tough and down to business, or softer and more feminine, one thing Batson says she never ever wears is a suit. "We've all seen the CIA grey suit world, so I think we wanted Marissa to have more dimensions than that ... And we always had really nice fabrics for Marissa. Even if it was simple, it was always great quality." As the series goes on and Marissa is forced to abandon her life in Paris, and into more dangerous situations, her wardrobe degrades as well. "As the series evolves, she goes from these perfectly polished looks to - by the end of the series she's reverted back to how we met her, where she's wearing like, tennis shoes, and trousers, and a trench coat, and she's like, like let's get it done. And she's left behind her life in Paris. She's like, this is what's important." Batson says.



Marissa Wiegler (Mireille Enos) in 'Hanna.' AMAZON

Aside from her own personal style, Marissa also knows how to subtly change her look if she's going undercover or needs to play a specific role. "She takes on disguises in the same way that Hanna does," says Batson, and gives the example of when Marissa goes to Sophie's family's house while Sophie is hiding Hanna. To try to take Hanna away, Marissa acts as Hanna's mom, which Batson says required a more "domestic" look. To create the look, Batson says, "We put her in this cornflower blue which made her eyes look really pretty, and it was just a lot softer than anything you ever see her in, but it still felt like her."

Despite how she may dress at times, Marissa still has mad spy skills. "You see her pick out a passport from her stack of passports, so she's schooled in doing this sort of thing too. Like, who is Marissa at the end of the day? It's a little unclear," says Batson. The answer may just be that Marissa is whoever she needs to be in that moment.

One person who never dresses to try to hide in this series is Sophie. Sophie is a very dramatic teenager who is fun, crazy, impulsive, and craves attention, and her clothes scream that. "Sophie's costumes were loads of fun. I really loved the teenagers. The teenagers were tons of fun. Sarah [Adina Smith], the director of episodes 1 and 2 wanted Sophie to be like a rainbow, so we always made sure that she had at least three patterns going in all of her outfits, and so many colors," says Batson. Sophie dresses to stand out, and it's a privilege that Hanna never has, but perhaps admires.

The women in the series face all sorts of trials, but as they're emotional and physical situations evolve, so do their looks. Anytime you want to know what a particular character is up to in the series, all you have to do is glance at them, and their look tells you everything. That's what Emily Batson managed to create with characters of *Hanna*. As the show has been renewed for a season 2, I can't wait to see what adventures Hanna, Marissa, and Sophie go on next, and what outfits they wear to match.



Linda Maleh

I am a New York-based freelance entertainment writer, with a focus on television and film. In addition to being a contributor for Forbes, I'm a staff writer at The Game of Nerds, and run my own blog, TV to Talk About. I often write about how themes of feminism and Judaism manifest on screen. I have had bylines at Bustle, In Style, The Mary Sue, Polygon, Collider, and the NY Blueprint. I am enormously passionate about the art of storytelling in all forms. **Read Less**

