

**Summary**

**University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca  
Fine and Decorative Arts**

**PHD Thesis**

**THE MIRROR OPERA, THEATER SCENOGRAPHY BETWEEN  
TRADITION AND EXPERIMENT**

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### **Key words:**

- **Western theater**
- **Stage**
- **Directorial concepts**
- **Directions of scenography**
- **Visionary theater**
- **Importance of scenography**
- **The production of a theater performance**

The present work intends, as we can resume from its title, to analyse in detail the theater scenography between tradition and experiment, more accurately to present the elements that influence, serve as a basis or are part of the structure of this art.

The thesis is partly the result of our curiosity for the exploration of the sources of modern scenography and partly of the desire to point out the characteristic elements of theater that give birth to the scenographic concept that we see in a performance.

The thesis is structured on five separate chapters that follow a detailed presentation of the evolution and the scenographic thinking starting with the Ancient world till the beginning of the XXI-st Century.

**The first chapter** presents the beginning of scenography as an art form and its development from Antiquity to the beginning of the XX-th Century, its first bench-marks from nature to the human society, as well as an analysis of western theater and the role of the scenographer within the production of a theater performance.

The chapter opens with a detailed explanation of the term “scenography” and its evolution. The word “scenography” is one of those terminologies (regarding a profession) that’s origins are very old and transcends time, changing its meaning from one age to another, keeping though, at least partially, the memory of its original meaning and at the same time making it extremely difficult to define with accuracy. In the ancient Greco-roman world the scenography was the art of drawing and painting the set or the stage itself, evolving to a different meaning in the period of the Renaissance, which was that of the art of organizing space in perspective. In the second half of the XX-th Century, in France, its meaning will

change again, being finally perceived as a general intervention on the space, where the performance takes place, based on a previously established concept.

The term scenography comes from the latin *skenografia*. Translated freely it means the art of painting the set. Nowadays, the scenographer can attach to the image of the representation, the competences and the experiences of organizing space of a different type than the theatrical one.

We can affirm that the notion of scenography comes a long way from Ancient Greece to the modern and postmodern ages, keeping only half of its original meaning, because the contemporary scenographer is a creator of concepts and a producer by excellence.

Further on, the first chapter discusses the subject of the stage and its types and forms, as in the four types of scenic space that we came across during the passed centuries, in the development of the theater, along with examples and illustrated with images. These are the followings: proscenium stage, open stage, arena like theater, found and improvised spaces.

The first chapter of the thesis, also contains a short history of the theater scenography from its origins to the beginning of the XX-th Century, starting with Ancient Greece and its first trials within this art, from Thespis to Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides...

Along with the elements of scenography and set presented and largely explained, in this part of the thesis there are also presented the first stage costumes and makeups, in close relationship with the interpretation and the production of the performances of the Ancient Greek theater.

We continue with the Ancient Roman theater (heir of the Greek theater), considered a form of entertainment and relaxation. There are also presented the innovative elements regarding both the techniques of scenography and the concepts and even the purpose that these performances had.

The Ancient Roman theater evolves towards the Medieval theater, where the essential scenographic element would be the absence of a specific theatrical space, absence that leads to a series of improvised spaces, at street corners, churches, town squares etc. According to this fact, the theater of improvisation and especially the Commedia dell'Arte reaches its glory in the XV-th and XVI-th Century. One of the characteristics of this form of theater is represented by a series of special characters: the docker from Bergamo, the venecian merchant, the pedant from Bologne, the foreign soldier, the lovers, the brave fellow countryman. The public loves to see again and again the same characters and to follow their evolution, which will lead to the development of types of actors according to these types of characters. Going onwards we will observe the elaboration of the Italian theater, term that implicates the conjunction of a few elements, based on painting, the first

performance being the celebrations of kings and representations of Operas, from where it will spread throughout Europe.

The second element is the building itself, a closed and covered theater. This is organized around a vertical plan of symmetry that crosses it from one end to the other. In the Italian theater there is a separation somehow symbolic and in the meantime even material between the audience and the show, given by the vertical plan of the frame of the stage, called the “golden frame”. The stage itself becomes a fictional space, the audience being always seated in front of this space, where the illusion is meant to appear.

The elisabethan theater designates a form of public theater specific to England at the end of the XVII-th Century, where there are associated, on one hand, in an intimate fashion writings of authors such as Thomas Kyd, Marlowe, Shakespeare or Ben Johnson and of the special architecture on the other hand and finally of the way these plays were carried out and presented to the public. The name of Elisabethan theater also retains the explicit marks of the complex correlations between the theater and the political power, more specifically the political and social power of Queen Elisabeth the 1-st of England.

The last part of the first chapter presents the development of scenography in the XVII-th Century France and the technical and conceptual innovations brought to it by Torelli, as well as a summary of the avatars of the Italian stage, that continues to evolve by the rhythm of our own civilization, until the beginning of the XX-th Century, time which will lead to a rebirth of the interest for the Italian model beginning with the '70-s.

The chapter closes with the exemplification of a show that has a classical, baroque type of scenography with modern accents.

**The second chapter** of the thesis presents the stilistical tendencies in the theater scenography of the end of the XIX-th Century and the beginning of the XX-th Century, as well as the new directorial concepts. The chapter opens with the representation of the ideas and revolutionary thinking of the director Constantin Sergeevich Stanislavsky, concerning both the way we should perceive theater and the way we should relate to it as artists. According to him, the director is supposed to have the most extensive knowledge in all domains, he should be an observer of life, a thinker and a manager. His principals are: action and emotion, as well as a free conduct on stage in order to make the actor reach an organic interpretation of his character, (the closest thing to inhabit a character's skin). Having a primal nature, as all humans have, the actor depends on his work with himself on a secondary nature, that helps him forming a whole of the affective state and in order to prepare his role, he will need a strong moral force doubled by his physical force.

The second important personality presented in this chapter is Vsevolod Meyerhold, who understood, through theater, the show where the audience doesn't forget, not for one instance that he is at a theater, a show where he doesn't stop perceiving in the actor, an artist that is trying to play its part.

Further on we present Adolphe Appia and his innovations concerning the volumetric scenography, as well as the importance given to the actor as being the primary element of scenography; the artistic activity of Edward Gordon Craig; the modern theater proposed by Bertold Brecht, cleared and undressed of all the superficial elements and the new political theater promoted by Erwin Piscator.

The second chapter of the thesis closes with the exemplification of a show with a modern scenography, based on a classical Russian text by A. P. Chekhov, *Three sisters*.

**The third chapter** of the thesis deals with the new directions of theater scenography at the end of the XX-th Century and the beginning of the XXI-st Century with predictions, examples, evaluations and anticipations and a more detailed presentation of the activity of two great contemporary theater makers: Peter Brook and Robert Wilson, as well as the presentation of its structural elements along with the role and the importance of it in the production of a performance.

One of the most important aspects of Peter Brook's activity aims at the principals of producing a theater performance, principals that are largely discussed in his book, *The empty space*, first published in 1968, in which he tries to eliminate the artificial and to generate the poetic truth of the theatrical expression. The concept is developed during the four formulas, which link the notion of theatricality from its meanings of "fabrication" to that of a "complex vision", more exactly: Deadly Theater, Holy Theater, Rough Theater and Immediate Theater.

The present paper intends to elaborate on these principals, on Brook's thoughts about the realities of masks and as well as the "universality of Shakespeare" and the relationship that a theater director should have with the classical texts and their staging.

The second remarkable personality of contemporary theater that we make reference to is Robert Wilson, who proposes a new form of visionary theater. The language is one of the most important elements of his performances and he can manipulate it in many different ways, both as basic elements of conversation as well as a graphical element present in his set.

Further on we try to illustrate the importance of scenography and to present its structural elements in detail: space, set, costume, makeup, light and props.

Concerning the purpose of scenography we can strongly affirm that it is strictly related to the performance that it was originally designed for, and in the

absence of an actor, this set does not exist. The set is not a space where we can exhibit the actors as in a window display, but rather a place where the actors can evolve creating an immediate art. Here we also meet the importance of the stage costume, that comes to complete the set and to help the actor, defining him and making him easier to be perceived. We will also need the stage makeup, the special effects, the light, so that all these elements combined will help the performance become more coherent and complete.

The third chapter closes with the exemplification of a contemporary performance, a minimalist set and interpreted costumes inspired by the '80-s fashion.

**The fourth chapter** proposes some personal contribution to the contemporary scenographic thinking, regarding the and the staging of a theater performance.

This chapter speaks about aspects such as conceptual directions, taking decisions in the preparation of the show itself, the way a scenographer should know how to juggle with budgets and establish priorities, how he should get more financing for a certain production and when (if ever) to make compromises, having as only ally his imagination.

One of the first elements we are concerned about is space and its importance, representing the first and most important challenge for a scenographer. Space is part of the scenographic vocabulary, so we can speak about the translation and adaptation of space, the creation of suggestive apparitions and unifying these these with the dramatic time.

Another essential element is the text as starting point and constant reference to the production of a performance. The language is the absolute key that stands in the middle of a play. Most times the text holds all the information that the creative team needs to get in order to make the show but sometimes it is hard to perfectly trust it and not to let any preconceived ideas intervene in the structure of the show. A spectator should leave the theater moved and impressed by the entire quality of the show and not only remembering the individual performance of one actor, a certain part of the set or some special effects, that are only separate components of the whole event.

The third important element in the production of a performance is research and preparations. The challenge for a scenographic research is to know how to use an individual vision in order to emphasize the essence of the subject, so that later on to be able to take the decision whether to use it or not. The visual artist needs to extract the essence from up to date events and to present it with clarity. Research is actually the work of a detective. When the text was researched and the playing area is already known, there follows a new challenge for the scenographer which is to

compose and color the given space, using shapes and forms in order to create a visual package for the performance.

The fourth constitutive element is directing and its importance to the production of a show. The direction of a play makes the vision of the playwright to be known to the audience through the artists that participate to the production of the performance in case: directing, dramaturgy, scenography, choreography and light. The collaboration between director and scenographer is developing during the entire period of preparations, starting from a private discussion in the studio and evolving towards the moment when the show must be brought to the attention of the company that will play it. In all hypothesis and suppositions, direction represents a true act of courage.

The fifth element that we linger upon is the actor. In theater, as everywhere else, everything depends on the measure you take as basis, and here this measure is the actor. We can't start anywhere else, because as the human being represents the measure for the universe, the actor represents the measure for the theater. On stage, the actor is the center of all things. And things must be placed in prolongation of the actor and not the other way around. Just like in oriental theater, the actor must tell a story. Everything is constructed from this central reference point, more specifically his silhouette and his way of moving through space.

**The fifth and last chapter** presents the production of the performance of *Yvonne, Princess of Burgundy*, by Witold Gombrowicz, at Śląski Theater of Katowice, Poland, directed by Keresztes Attila, in February, 2010.

This part of the thesis debuts with a short biography of Gombrowicz, along with the presentation of his creative concepts and innovations brought to modern dramaturgy. Considering this, we conclude that his greatest discovery was that of the concept of Form, that he applies to his entire work, creating its originality. Gombrowicz chooses a rather unusual solution: the literary forms and stereotypes are used as in quotation mark. This is how in the work of Gombrowicz the most varied styles and tones appear simultaneously along with the most diverse narrative schemes.

We continue with a short presentation of the play and the concept of the performance that is the concept of laboratory, a sterile space where the unfit character of Yvonne enters against her wishes, without sketching any gestures at all and taking the conscious decision of not participating to "life", until the final moment of the play when she is murdered by the rest of the court.

Still in the same chapter, there are presented a series of posters from different performances worldwide, as well as the poster and the flyer, the sketches of the set and costumes designed for this particular performance along with the documentation, the production and the construction of the set.

The fifth chapter closes with the presentation of a series of photographs, from the press conferences organized in order to promote the show in Poland, photographs from the performance itself and a few reviews written in the Polish press.

A very last aspect of the thesis is represented by the conclusions concerning the role of the scenography and the importance of theater in the development of our culture and society throughout the centuries, the way this art influenced and continues to influence our perception of the world, society and arts in general.

## **Curriculum Vitae**

**Name:** Bianca Imelda

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### **Studies:**

From 2006 postgraduate student of the University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca, scientific coordinator: Prof. Univ. Dr. Ioan Sbârciu

2002-2004, Master in Design, University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca, majored in Graphic Design

1997-2002, Bachelor of Arts, Universitatea de Artă și Design Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Decorative Arts and Design, majored in Design

1993-1997 Școala Normală Sighetu-Marmației, majored in modern languages

### **Professional activity:**

From October 2006, instructor at the University of Babeș-Bolyai, Department of Theater and Television

2005-2006 S.C. Loart S.R.L., scenographer

2002-2005 S. C. Farmec S.A., graphic designer, departament of marketing and art

### **Artistic activities:**

#### 1. Stage and costume design:

-2011, June, costumes for *The magical blue cake* by Muszty Bea and Dobay András, Northern Theater of Satu-Mare, Harag Gyorgy Company, directed by Keresztes Attila

-2011, May, costumes for *The round-squared forest* by Lázár Ervin, Hungarian State Theater of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Albu István

-2011, April, costumes for *Johannes Hary* by Kodály Zoltán, Csokonai Theater of Debrecen, Hungary, directed by Vidnyánszky Attila

-2011, April, costumes for *Three sisters* by A. P. Chehov, National Theater of Szeged, Hungary, directed by Bodolay

- 2010, December, costumes for *Chigago* by Ebb-Kender-Fosse, Northern Theater of Satu-Mare, Harag Gyorgy Company, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2010, November, costumes for *La Bête* by David Hirson, Northern Theater of Satu-Mare, Harag Gyorgy Company, directed by regia Bodolay
- 2010, November, costumes for *Sweet Anne* by Kosztolanyi Dezső National Theater of Szeged, Hungary, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2010, Octombrie, costumes pentru *The awakening of spring* by Frank Wedekind, Tomcsa Sandor Theater, Odorheiul Secuiesc, directed by Szabó K. István
- 2010, October, set and costume design for *The Chioggia Scuffles* by Carlo Goldoni, Northern Theater of Satu-Mare, Harag Gyorgy Company, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2010, September, set and costume design for *Teibele and her demon*, by Isaac Bashevis-Singer, State Jewish Theater of Bucharest, directed by Szabó K. István
- 2010, June, set and costume design for *Leander and Lenszirom* by Szilágyi Andor, Northern Theater of Satu-Mare, Harag Gyorgy Company, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2010, April, costumes for *Liliom* by Molnár Ferenc, National Theater of Szeged, Hungary, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2010, April, costumes for *Homecoming to Denmark* by Kiss Csaba, Northern Theater of Satu-Mare, Harag Gyorgy Company, directed by Albu István
- 2010, February, set and costume design for *Yvonne, Princess of Burgundy* by Witold Gombrowicz, Śląski Theater, Katowice, Poland, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2009, December, costumes for *Queen of Csardas* by Kalman Imre, Northern Theater of Satu-Mare, Harag Gyorgy Company, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2009, October, costumes for *Three sisters* de A. P. Cechov, Northern Theater of Satu-Mare, Harag Gyorgy Company, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2009, April, costumes for *Clean House* by Sarah Ruhl, Hungarian State Theater of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2009, February, set and costume design for *Maestro Csillala*, by Kozma Maria, Hungarian State Theater of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2008, October, costumes for *The Actors* by Jokai Mor, Katona Jozsef Theater of Kecskemet, Hungary, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2008, October, costumes for *The scared creature* by Békés Pál, Tomcsa Sandor Theater, Odorheiul Secuiesc, directed by Szilágyi Regina
- 2008, May, costumes for *Queen of Csardas* by Kalman Imre, Jokai Theater, Komarno, Slovakia, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2008, April, set and costume design for *The woman from the past* by R. Schimmelpfenig, National Theater of Târgu-Mureş, directed by Harsanyi Zsolt

- 2008, February, set and costume design for *The Calling of Mathew* by Florina Ilis, National Theater of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Andreea Iacob
- 2007, December, stage and costume design for *The kidnapping of the Sabin women* by Keller-Horvath-Szenes, Tamási Áron Theater of Sfântu-Gheorghe, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2007, October, costumes for *Stone ashes*, National Theater of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Cristian Nedea
- 2007, September, costumes for *The wonderful Mandarin* by Bartok Béla, Hungarian State Opera of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Jakab Melinda
- 2007, June, costumes for *Rock'n'Roll* by Tom Stoppard, National Theater of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Andrei Șerban and Daniela Dima
- 2007, June, costumes for *Sunset*, Tranzit House Cluj Napoca, directed by Sinkó Ferenc
- 2007, May, set and costume design for *The merry wives of Windsor* by William Shakespeare, Hungarian State Theater of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2007, February, set and costume design for *A life in the theater* by David Mamet, National Theater of Timișoara, directed by Cristian Nedea
- 2006, November, set and costume design for *Across the muddy mountain* by Varró Dániel and Presszer Gábor, Hungarian State Theater of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2006, February, set and costume design for *Love* by Barta Lajos, Csíkijátékszin, Miercurea Ciuc, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2005, December, costumes for *Queen of Csardas* by Kalman Imre, Tamási Áron Theater of Sfântu-Gheorghe, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2005, February, costume pentru *The musicians of Bremen*, Hungarian State Opera of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Szabó Emese
- 2005, February, costumes for *The crucible* by Arthur Miller, Northern Theater of Satu-Mare, Harag Gyorgy Company, directed by Uray Peter
- 2004, December, set and costumes for *Run for Your wife* by Ray Cooney, Hungarian State Theater of Cluj-Napoca, directed by, regia Keresztes Attila
- 2004, October, set and costume design for *Carmen* by Bizet, Hungarian State Opera of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Tiberius Simu
- 2004, September, costume pentru *The magical blue cake* by Muszty Bea and Dobay András, Hungarian State Theater of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Keresztes Attila
- 2003, June, set and costume design for *Traviata* by Verdi, Romanian National Opera of Cluj-Napoca, directed by Tiberius Simu

## 2. Exhibitions:

-2004 June, personal exhibition of opera posters *A night at the Opera*, Romanian National Opera Cluj-Napoca

-2002, June, personal photography exhibition, *Night by Night*, Ataş Galery, University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca

-2001, December, personal photography exhibition, *Le Calle di Venezia*, Sighetu-Marmaţiei

**Spoken languages:**

-Fluent in Hungarian, English, Italian, French and Romanian

-Beginner: Spanish and Polish

**Hobbies:**

-travel, reading, watching movies

## **Bibliografie:**

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