From page to stage

WORKING THROUGH THE STAGE DESIGN PROCESS
WITH DESIGNER BIANKA KENNEDY

The process of bringing a piece of theatre to life as a stage designer starts with reading the script. From that first reading ideas and concepts will emerge that you're never going to get from a second or third reading. It's important to take note of these ideas.

One of the other early steps, which is really important, is having a meeting with the director to find out their intentions for the show.

From there, you'll start a process of trying to really understand the world that they're looking to create and you'll both need to do some research on the show and its concepts. As a result, there might be an image or a reference that you're drawn to and that you try to fit with the intention and ideas behind the play and the world you're trying to create. This might happen with a number of images or references, with some back-and-forth between you and the director.

Sometimes the director might not know exactly what they want or need at the stage of the early discussions. Things can change and evolve. But as you go back and forth, you learn more. You refine and define what the parameters are until you become clear on what the cohesive message is that you're trying to express through the set and the play. From there you'll start to refine that one idea.

I like to design through making physical models so I'll take model pieces of different sizes and have discussions with those pieces. During this process, accidents can happen where you do different things that you weren't expecting and you go 'hey, this might work' or 'what do you think of these dimensions?' That's what happened with this play for me. I like working with physical models because those sorts of happy accidents can happen more easily with them.

BIANKA KENNEDY IS AN ARTIST AND DESIGNER LIVING IN THE ADELAIDE HILLS.

SINCE COMPLETING HER FORMAL TRAINING IN LIVE DESIGN, BIANKA HAS DEVELOPED A DIVERSE PRACTICE SPANNING SET, PROPS AND COSTUME DESIGN, PUBLIC ART AND RESPONSIVE INSTALLATIONS.

SHE HAS WORKED WITH INDEPENDENT THEATRE MAKERS AND PRODUCTION HOUSES INCLUDING STATE THEATRE COMPANY AND HOUSE OF SAND, AND HAS DESIGNED PIECES FOR FESTIVALS AND EVENTS. SHE HAS DESIGNED AND PRODUCED PUBLIC ART WORKS FOR CITY OF ADELAIDE, SA POWER NETWORKS AND LOCAL SCHOOLS. SHE ALSO WORKS PART-TIME FOR VISUAL ARTS NOT-FOR-PROFIT GUILDHOUSE AND SERVES ON THE AUSTRALIAN PRODUCTION DESIGN GUILD SA COMMITTEE.

After you go through that refining process, you'll need to do your first white card presentation where you'll present a basic outline of the concept of the design. This is really useful for other teams so they can look at it and go 'I think that'll fit in the truck', 'I think that's going to be within budget' or 'I think that's going to work for everyone involved.'

Once the concept has been approved, you'll go on to develop the designs further and start to draft them. I use AutoCAD (a design and drafting software application) for my drafting, which allows me to draft to scale. This helps the construction team to figure out what material will work best and how much they will cost.

As part of the design process, you'll also need to start thinking about costumes. Working by yourself or with a costume designer, you'll work on drawings, find reference images for the things you like, and maybe even start scouring the shops for any items you need to purchase. You want these things in place ready for the final design presentations.

In terms of props, you'll need to compile a list of all the props you'll need so these can be discussed with the relevant people.

Once it all gets through the design presentation stage, you're up to the build phase, which is the exciting part.