

# How to design for touring

ADDRESSING THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF SET DESIGN FOR TOURING SHOWS  
WITH DESIGNER BIANKA KENNEDY

Designing a set to tour is a really unique experience with a lot of elements to consider. I'll speak about this with references to my work on State Theatre Company South Australia's 2019 touring show, *Animal Farm*.

From the beginning, we needed to think about the fact that this set needed to tour. It needed to be adaptable to the different venues that we're going to, particularly given that some of the regional theatres have very low ceilings. There are also differences in how the venues offer seating – some have raked seating, while others don't. You want to keep the experience of viewing the show as consistent as possible so those elements were thought about a lot and led to us sloping the platforms of the set.

I feel like what we have with the story and set of *Animal Farm* is significant enough to stand alone on a stage. Given the set is black, and in general the theatres are black, you feel like you expand the sense of the space that you're using, even though the actor is confined to that one platform. Having black-on-black actually gives you this feeling that there's more space, as well – a colourful set would probably feel much smaller.

You've got to consider the resources when designing a touring set, and that includes budget, man power and your bump-in resources. For the surface, we've used wood sheets painted with 2 Pack Paint, which has a three-day application process that gives a durable glossy finish. 2 Pack is often used in the automotive industry and for kitchen cabinets. It's really important that we have materials that are durable and that is not going to get scuffed easily.



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.

---

We've also got to consider the skills and ability of the workshop team and, if it's touring, the number of people taking the show on the road. We've only got two people going on tour with this show so things need to be broken down into components that two people can lift and that will fit through the doorways at the different venues.

We needed to make sure we could break everything down into components so it could be moved in and out of venues within the three hour maximum time window. This includes time to screw things back together and get lighting set up, so the set had to be able to be broken down and put back together quickly and easily.

In terms of physical resources, it needed to fit in a variety of venues – some of which have an issue with ceiling height. To address this, I've created a piece at the top of the set that breaks off. This means that in most venues we can take the full set, and when we're in the two with the lowest ceilings we can take off the top pieces. This piece at the top doesn't affect where we have the inbuilt lighting bars so we haven't lost that effect either. The truck size is also really important, meaning you can't go overboard in the stuff you produce. This set has to fit into a three tonne truck – and it does that, but we wouldn't want to have much more volume.

It was a requirement of the set that it have self-contained lighting, but we'll also be bringing extra transportable lights for venues that don't have or aren't normally used for theatre.