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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

“Creating a theatrical world: Scenic Design for Rhinoceros”

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Design)

by

Mingshuo Zhao

Committee in charge:

Professor Robert Brill, Chair
Professor Andrei Both
Professor Alan Burrett
Professor Manuel Rotenberg

2016

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The thesis of Mingshuo Zhao is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my professors, Robert Brill, Judith Dolan, Alan Burrett, Shahrokh Yadegari, Victoria Petrovich, and to everyone who has supported me throughout my journey as a designer. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to one of the most important people in my life, Andrei Both, my former professor and now friend, who took me here three years ago and gave me this incredible journey at UCSD.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“Creating a theatrical world: Scenic Design for Rhinoceros”

by

Mingshuo Zhao

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Design)

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Robert Brill

Unlike painting and sculpting and other traditional artistic mediums, scenic design can help create the dramatic space or environment for story telling. This invented space can be regarded as an “installation” for a specific text with a clear cultural message. Some of them are plays, musicals, operas or interpretive movement and dances. The shape, the material, the color and the texture bring about a tangible identity defining the space where the story takes place.

Theatre, as opposed to movies and television shows, has a conventional limited space, therefore the audience becomes aware of the piece, message and meaning in a more

direct and intimate way. Productions vary in size, some require constant scenic changes, some are more static, but they all convey meaning, mood, emotional state that ultimately enhances the story. This becomes difficult, especially when we are trying to create infinite possibilities in a limited space. Scenic design is not a solitary or selfish art form. It requires strength and endless capacity for invention, nor is it for the weak hearted. The designer's vision, is a cohesive part of a bigger reality, which is always a team effort. It is never complete in itself, and it is just one important facet among many that completes the universe of a production. My passion for scene design embodies two key components, collaboration and creativity. This for me is totally magical, and also defines me and my lifelong lifestyle.

Rhinoceros is an enormous play on many levels. Everybody in the play turned into a rhinoceros except Berenge who was the only person left in the world. The biggest challenge of designing this play in Shank Theatre as a small black box was how to take advantage of the intimacy of the space. We established a muscular, poetic world with those truss pieces. Instead of masking or hiding the space, we wanted to be honest with it. So the theatre structures, the lighting fixtures, the speakers, the cables, every single element was treated as a part of the scenery. When the actors climbed on those trusses, you could feel the whole world shake, that was the feeling that we wanted to give to the audience.

For the second half, we moved half of the audience onto the stage. So we turned the space into an arena. Everybody in the house became a witness to the transformations of the rhinoceros.