

Rogošić, Višnja

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Višnja Rogošić

100 Years of Croatian Set Design and Costume Design 1909–2009

Ana Lederer, Martina Petranović and Ivana Bakal. *100 Years of Croatian Set Design and Costume Design 1909–2009*. Zagreb: ULUPUH (Croatian Association of Artists of Applied Arts), 2011. 396 pp.

The monograph *100 Years of Croatian Set Design and Costume Design 1909–2009* finalises a series of events marking the 100th anniversary of the emergence of the professional set and costume design in Croatian theatre. As stated in the copy of the original contract which is published in the introduction to this book, the first person hired for that position at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb was the painter Branko Šenoa in 1909. The project curator Ivana Bakal and expert associates and selectors Ana Lederer (set design) and Martina Petranović (costume design) have chosen that historical point to form the time frame for a selection of examples from both fields, which were initially presented at a five-segment exhibition during 2009 and 2010 and are now available in print.

Highlighting issues which are still insufficiently researched by Croatian theatre scholars, the bilingual volume (in Croatian and English) is structurally similar to the occasional smaller publications of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts dedicated to the work of individual artists. It opens with the selectors' introductory texts but mostly focuses on the visual presentation of the key set and costume designers on the Croatian scene. The editor chooses to juxtapose various stages of their work and offer the opportunity for a comparative analysis: the initial

research and patterns (sketches, drawings, paintings, and collages), final models (exhibition photos), artist's visions in performance context (performance photos). The impressive number of artefacts gathered from the collections of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Museum of Arts and Crafts, The City of Rijeka Museum, archives of individual theatres and private collections, makes it possible to unfold not just the once visible outcome which is no longer available for the public, but also the hidden creative process which can be intriguing both in content and form (for example collages of costume designer Ljubica Wagner). Given the amount and the variety of the material, the book is extremely user friendly as it provides basic information for every artefact that is introduced (performance, opening night date, director's and designer's names) and a final Index of Set and Costume Design Works.

Both Petranović and Lederer are among the rare local experts who have published widely on their respective subjects, however, for this publication they have been invited to submit short introductory articles. It is unfortunate – considering the attractive layout and the rarity of the visual content calling for more elaborate scientific contributions which the authors can certainly provide – still, their articles offer a valuable insight

into the historical trajectory of both professions and in part describe the status quo. Up until the late 1930s those creative functions were blended into one position, usually that of a set designer who also performed costume designer duties. The late ascension of historical realism in Croatian theatre at the end of the 19th century added new limits to the creative scope of the field as the artist was expected to simply deliver a realistic imitation of the period. Therefore, the true aesthetic development of the set design was initiated by the modernist solutions of Tomislav Krizman (1912–1922) whereas costume design grows with the appearance of Inga Kostinčer, who was also the first to be hired as the permanent costume designer at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb in 1947. As these guidelines suggest, the book focuses on the institutional theatre attempting to shed more light on the development of the mainstream (also as the basis for specific alternatives), however, the selectors do not fail to mention significant achievements of the strong student theatre scene in the 1950s and 1960s. Namely, along with the expanded infrastructure (student theatre groups, festivals, performance spaces), the student scene helped in bringing certain relevant names, such as set designer Želimir Zagotta, to the surface.

The material is organised chronologically and, as expected, dominated by the projects from the proliferating Zagreb theatre scene from the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, although the curators try to create a more balanced and complete picture by emphasizing the long careers of several designers from other theatre centres such as Split (set designer Mijo Adžić,

costume designer Marija Žarak), Dubrovnik (set designer Marin Gozze), and Osijek (costume designer Aurelija Branković), as well as valuable examples from the beginning of the century. That period gives prominence to the legendary collaboration between one of the most relevant Avant-Garde designers Ljubo Babić and the leading Croatian theatre scholar and director Branko Gavella, by presenting set designs for the performances of *Richard III* (1923) and *Twelfth Night*; and, *What You Will* (1924) which received international awards. Analogous to the historical overview is an insight into various stylistic periods (for example abstraction as the basic principle for shaping the scene in the 1950s) and collaborative modes (for example, designers who work with particular directors only such as Tihomir Milovac who devised some of the spectacular and also minimalist site-specific environments for Branko Brezovec's performances in the 1980s). In addition to the narrated timeline, set design is perceived from the point of view of other creative endeavours of the presented artists as many of them chose the careers of painters and architects, as well as in relation to other media in theatre especially in the field of light design. On the other hand, considering the connection between the costume and the actor's body, costume design is analysed in the context of the actor's expressivity, especially within the aesthetic frame of collective physical creations, and puppet theatre.

The book does have its weaker points, unavoidable in every one-volume selection that covers such a wide time frame. For example, as suggested by Ana Lederer, the vibrant history of performances in the

open urban and suburban space as well as environmental theatre, especially within the context of summer festivals with a long tradition, such as the Dubrovnik Summer Festival (1950–now) or the Split Summer Festival (1954–now), is insufficiently represented by a few performances in some of their representative spaces (the Perystile or the Lovrjenac fortress). Also, the performative shaping of the real space and everyday clothes are

largely omitted from the pages of this book especially when it comes to the collective or collaborative alternative projects where costumes and the set are devised by the whole company. However, by pointing at the issues which are still unveiled the volume also attempts to inspire and support similar future endeavours discovering the legacy and the current trends in the ever evolving Croatian set and costume design.