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Scene 9.1&2

## Shaping Our Australian Scenographic Identities: A visual essay

Tessa Rixon, Jennifer Irwin, David Walters, Jeremy Neideck, M'ck McKeague, Richard Roberts, Anthony Brumpton and Latai Taumoepeau

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### Abstract

In the form of a visual essay, this reflection charts a course through eight specific moments in Australian performance design history. Selected by guest editor Tessa Rixon, this essay features contributions from Australia's most established designers from sound, lighting and costume through to the latest in performance design practice and research. Specially curated for this special edition on Australian scenography, each contributor reflects on a personal experience of a pivotal performance design from their own practice or their experience as an audience member. The resulting contributions present a mix of design forms and focuses, across all forms of live performance – mainstage theatre, independent site-specific performance, queer theatre, Indigenous theatre, Indigenous dance, scenography for performance beyond the stage frame, performance in response to the climate crisis and finally, a few pivotal stepping stones in our national scenographic identity – from the very personal, to the very global. These exemplars of design practice shape what we now could call Australian scenography.

### Keywords

Australian scenography, theatre design, dance design, scenographic identity, aural scenography, Indigenous performance, digital scenographies

### SUGGESTED CITATION

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## Introduction

Writing on the celebration of fifty years of Australia's involvement with the Prague Quadrennial, my co-author/designer Sarah Winter and I reflected on several potential defining characteristics of 'Australian' scenography. We contended that

Australian scenography is marked by a desire to present heterogenous perspectives, aesthetics and stories. Australian scenography is typified through critical consideration of direct address, political commentary, site specificity, and the performance of myths and histories. The practical challenges inherent in creating work within the unique geography of our wide brown land further mark our designs. We expand notions of form and space, experimenting with immersive scenographies. And finally, Australian designers continue to explore new ways of integrating technology and seek to understand its place in our scenographies while privileging the role of live body. There is a marked increase in the presentation of non-European knowledges and processes, but there remains more to be done in this space. (2020: 326–27)

These markers of our scenographic identity were in no way complete, and we argued that in order to match the evolutions occurring within our national design practice, research and education, the notion of the Australian scenographic identity must continue to be interrogated through the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

This visual essay comes as a response to that call. To further expand understandings of our national design identity/ies through a varied number of perspectives, I invited seven established professional Australian designers and performance makers to reflect on both moments in the nation's performance history, their own professional practice and their personal experience to arrive at a single exemplar of Australian design. Contributors were encouraged to reflect on their experience working on or experiencing this work as an audience member, and to locate the contributions of this design within the evolution of Australian scenography. Additional practitioners were invited to contribute but – in a positive turn of events in this pandemic landscape – these others were too busy with performance commitments to meet print deadlines!

The following contributions present a mix of design forms and focuses, across all forms of live performance – mainstage theatre, independent site-specific performance, queer performance, Indigenous theatre, Indigenous dance, scenography for performance beyond the stage frame; performance in response to the climate crisis and finally, a few pivotal stepping stones in our national scenographic identity – from the very personal, to the very global. The collection contains contributions from some of Australia's most established designers from sound, set, lighting and costume, through to the latest in performance design practice and research. It was my aim to not only gather a range of design perspectives, but to also break down barriers between academia and our practitioner communities by creating pathways to publication for these leading designers and thinkers.

The resulting six designs – combined with two historical moments I have selected – chart a course through moments in our scenographic history, each contributing in some way to what we now could call 'Australian' scenography. The reflections are not arranged in chronological order.

Jennifer Irwin *Connecting to country through costume*  
David Walters *Illuminating Ghosts*  
Tessa Rixon *Australian scenography on the world stage: Fifty years of the  
Prague Quadrennial*  
Jeremy Neideck and M'ck McKeague *Immersing Australians in the underground*  
Richard Roberts *The dodecahedron: Reshaping Australian expectations of stage  
design*  
Tessa Rixon *Recognizing 65 years of digital scenography on Australian stages*  
Anthony Brumpton *Aural scenography of Black Diggers*  
Latai Taumoepeau *Rising waters*

Through this reflection, the authors pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we write, design and create, and acknowledge that these have always been places of creativity and investigation.

Tessa Rixon,  
Scene Guest Editor

## CONNECTING TO COUNTRY THROUGH COSTUME

Jennifer Irwin



*Figure 1: Terrain costume design, 2012. Photograph. Bangarra Dance Theatre. Courtesy of Bangarra Dance Theatre.*

*Terrain* (2012) by Bangarra Dance Theatre

Premiered at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, on the lands of the people of the Kulin Nation

Artistic director: Stephen Page Choreographer: Frances Rings Set designer: Jacob Nash Costume designer: Jennifer Irwin Musical director: David Page Lighting designer: Karen Norris

My chosen photograph depicts my costume design for Bangarra Dance Theatre's (Australia's foremost contemporary Indigenous Dance Company) production of *Terrain* performed at The Sydney Opera House in 2012. The ballet grew from the story of the Arabunna people, the Traditional Owners of Kati Thanda (Lake Eyre) in far north South Australia. Kati Thanda is a vast shallow lake that is the lowest natural point in our continent. With the same salinity levels as seawater, Kati Thanda's waters completely disappear during the dry season, leaving a stunningly barren landscape.

The Arabunna people have maintained their deep connection with the Lake Eyre basin for thousands of years. In May 2012, the Arabunna won the land rights for Lake Eyre and its surrounds. This was a momentous time for these Traditional Owners, and we at Bangarra sought to reflect this in *Terrain*. Consider for a moment this significance:

The Arabunna read the Lake Eyre landscape by different methods and indications from modern western ways. Days are measured by the length of shadows, or when the afternoon clouds roll in; months are measured by the level of salt crust on the surface of the lake; and years are measured by the rise and fall of waters, the sweep through ancient river systems, transforming the desert and bringing new life. This knowledge serves to maintain the cultural life that has existed for the tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal people's relationship to the terrain of central Australia.  
(2012)

*Terrain* was an opportunity to create a work that reflected the connection to country that is fundamental to the identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In the words of *Terrain's* choreography, Francis Rings:

Landscape is at the core of our existence and is a fundamental connection between the natural world and us. It cleanses, it heals, it awakens and it renews. It gives us perspective. It reminds us of something beyond ourselves and it frees us. But more importantly when we are surrounded by nature we begin to understand our place and how we are a very, very small part of a much larger, much bigger picture.  
(Bangarra Dance Theatre 2012)

This photograph captures the 'Spinifex' costume in *Terrain*, a section performed by ten female dancers. The costumes were inspired by the trees and the cracking of the ground, the gatherings of spirit women waiting, suspended in time. After watching the initial choreography, I proposed long skirts that suggested how fractured earth of Kati Thanda becomes in the dry. This final skirt was bonded Lycra laser cut. The headpiece was designed to look like tortured twigs from branches. Enhanced by the side lightning yet not restricting the body movement, the boned corset tops were made of textured art worked stretch fabric.

The dancers performed against a bleak yet beautiful backdrop depicting the haunting vast landscape of the desert. Costume inspired by country, celebrating a return of country.

Jennifer Irwin

Costume designer, Bangarra Dance Theatre

Writing on the land of the Darkinjung people.

See more of Jennifer's costume designs for *Terrain* at <https://bangarra-knowledgeground.com.au/productions/terrain/terrain-costume-and-design-gallery>



## ILLUMINATING GHOSTS

David Walters



*Figure 2: Ghosts, 1989. Photograph. Royal Queensland Theatre Company. Courtesy of Queensland Theatre.*

*Ghosts* (1989) by Henrik Ibsen

Royal Queensland Theatre Company, Brisbane, on the lands of the Turrbal and Jagera/Yuggera

Director: Aubrey Mellor Lighting design: David Walters

Set/costume design: Bill Haycock

Musical composition and cellist: Christine Byrne

Photo credit: Photography by Chris Ellis/Lisa Jones © 1989

You see here a shot from Queensland Theatre Company's production of *Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen staged in the Cremorne Theatre of the Queensland Performing Arts Centre. Directed by the state theatre company Artistic Director Aubrey Mellor and designed by Bill Haycock it opened in July 1989. I am not going to suggest that the set and lighting design of this production represent a pivotal moment in the story of Australian design. However, it was a 'light bulb' moment in my career as an Australian lighting designer.

The design was largely inspired by Munch and the set and lighting worked together to create an 'other worldliness' where actors were stalked by shadows. Daringly, the lighting design abandoned conventional acting area light and expressionistically relied on a closely choreographed world of uplights, specials and shafts. At the end of the technical rehearsal, it appeared my lighting design had created an impossible matrix for the play that got in the way of the actors and the storytelling. After a sleepless night, I arrived the next day to watch a first run and prepared to relight completely. Watching the run something miraculous happened. Instead of just marking and finding light as they had done the previous day, the actors' emotional commitment to their roles began to come to life and the lighting and their art combined beautifully: vindicating the design decisions.

The epiphany for me was a deeper understanding that performance art is intrinsically collaborative in nature and that good performance design is where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

David Walters  
Lighting designer  
Writing on the lands of the Turrbal and Jagera/Yuggera



# AUSTRALIAN SCENOGRAPHY ON THE WORLD STAGE: FIFTY YEARS OF THE PRAGUE QUADRENNIAL

Tessa Rixon



*Figure 3: The Australia Exhibit at the 1967 Prague Quadrennial of Theatre Design and Architecture, Czech Republic, 1967. Photograph. Courtesy of the PQ Archives.*

Exhibition curator: Desmonde Downing  
Works featured: Ken Rowell (right panel)

In 1967, under the curation of Desmonde Downing, Australia presented its national design on the world stage at the first *Prague Quadrennial of Theatre Design and Architecture*. Three female and ten male designers were featured, originating from Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide in addition to expats based in London and Europe. Their names, in order of the original PQ67 programme, are: Wilfrid Asplin, William Constable, Wendy Dickson, Desmond Digby, Desmonde Downing, Elaine Haxton, Frank Hinder, Max Hurley, Sidney Nolan, Ronald Reid, Kenneth Rowell, Douglas Edward Smith and J. S. Ostojka-Kotkowski.

Fifty years later, and under the revamped name of the *Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space*, we have continued to claim space at this pivotal international event. For the last half-century – minus a few exceptions! – Australian designers have taken part in what is fondly referred to as the Olympics of the performance design world, travelling personally or sending works halfway around the world every four years. PQ has always offered a place to stake our national claim to performance design, to showcase our wares, to demonstrate our skills.

As PQ has evolved, our design identity has evolved. While the first wave of designers showcased in 1967 (some shown in the image here) captured a relatively varied range of design trends, performance genres and perspectives – including leading female designers and emerging intermedial performance practices – the lack of diversity and strong presentation of Euro-centric design styles was reflective of the time. Fifty years later, we are a different country, and our scenography is now expansive, expanded, intersectional, interdisciplinary and ecocentric.

At times.

At other times, we still prescribe to entrenched traditional approaches, which, arguably, have their place. That place must constantly be poked and prodded – on our stages and in our studios. This photograph reminds us of how far we have come. The provocations in this special edition remind us where we are, and where we need to be.

Tessa Rixon  
Researcher, designer, academic in Scenography  
Writing on the lands of the Turrbal and Jagera/Yuggera

## IMMERSING AUSTRALIANS IN THE UNDERGROUND

Jeremy Neideck and M'ck McKeague



*Figure 4: 지하 (Underground), 2011. Photograph. Courtesy of Gerwyn Davies.*

*지하 (Underground)* (2011) by Jeremy Neideck and Nathan Stoneham  
Premiered at MetroArts on the lands of the Turrbal and Jagera/Yuggera  
Director: Jeremy Neideck  
Assistant director and designer: M'ck McKeague  
Costume designer: Noni Harrison  
Sound designers: Thom Browning and Nathan Stoneham  
Lighting designers: Hamish Clift (2011, 2012) and Daniel Anderson (2014)

Party lights strung at wild angles from the roof provide only the dimmest of glows to see by. The walls are plastered with layers of K-pop posters attached by yellowed and crumbling sticky tape.

Grimy kitschy paraphernalia is piled up like detritus against the walls, lined up on every ledge, filling every crevice.

Picnic tables, lounge chairs and milk crates provide surfaces for sitting and a giant umbrella, blown out as if caught unawares in a typhoon, flowers out of one table and meets the low ceiling, where a giant cardboard whale hangs.

In one corner is a cramped stage, littered with guitars, ukuleles, a theremin and other unidentifiable instruments and the tangled mess of a sound system is set up, playing old-school Korean pop off a rickety record player.

A makeshift bar serves an array of Korean liquor, such as Cass Beer, soju, cocktails in teapots and ubiquitously Korean snacks like dried squid, peanuts and anchovies, rice crisps and roasted seaweed.

*Jiha Underground* transported you to the underground of a Korean speakeasy, the design continuously evolving in complexity through multiple stagings in 2011, 2012 and 2014. The space itself is not only a portal to another world that the audience and actors pass through together, it is a central character of the story. One of the core mythologies of the space was that once you entered, you could be anywhere and everywhere – that all of the undergrounds are connected. The meticulously curated and crafted design is one that sees every surface of the space covered in what at first glance is ‘junk’ but, like a magic eye picture, the longer you look, the more you realize that the space is telling the story of the work.

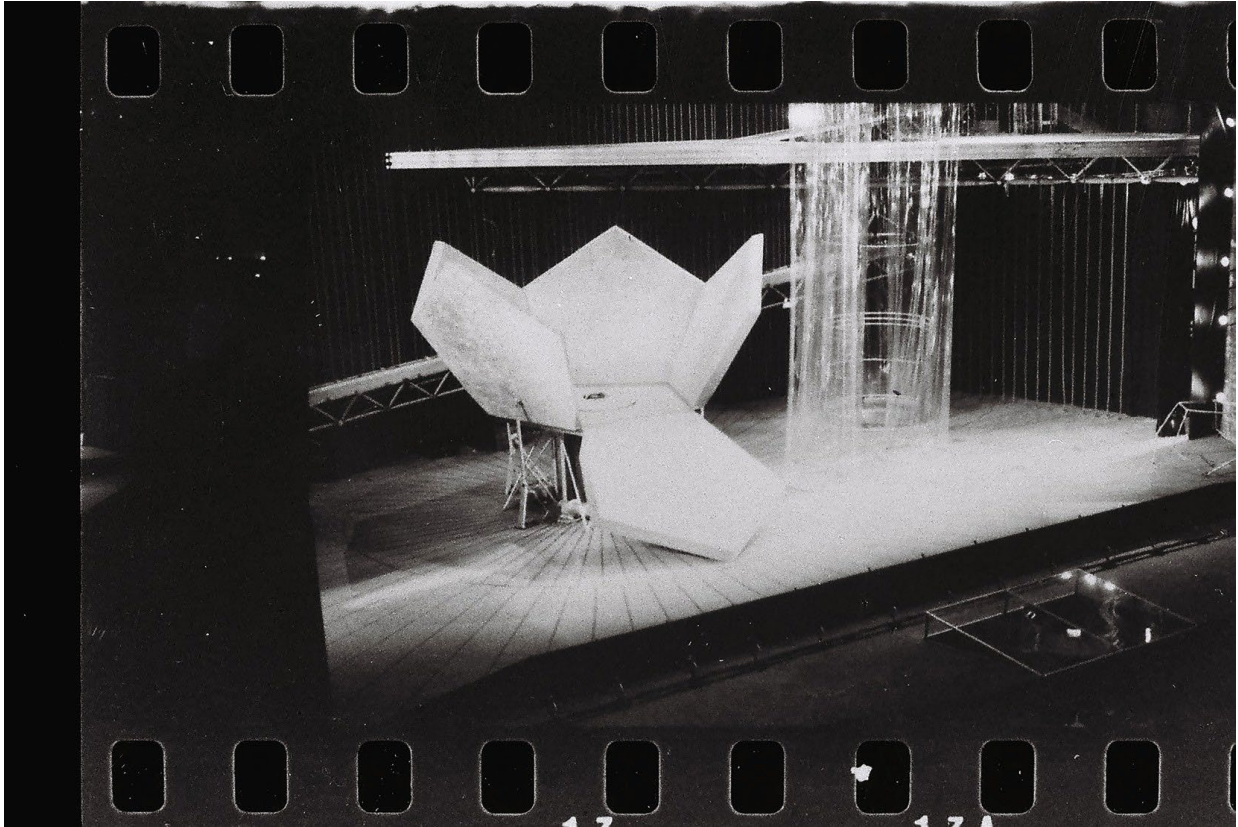
The queerness of *Jiha Underground* is entrenched not only in the content of the work but in the fabric of which it's made – including the design. Through immersive elements, the design disrupts the audience–performer binary and in doing so transforms the work's relationship to non-normative bodies and identities. The treasures that clutter the space are old and worn out, mirroring the fact that the audience does not need to look heteronormatively presentable to be valued there. The seating is a mix of odd couches, bean bags, kitchen chairs and stools, letting the audience know that different types of bodies are welcome there. There are lots of aisles so audience members can move around or leave if they needed, which implicitly makes the space more accessible to communities who disproportionately experience the kinds of trauma that make the idea of being trapped in a tightly packed seating bank unbearable. Shifting performance storytelling beyond the stage frame, enfolding the audiences, connecting them across oceans to place and character, exploring queerness in scenography – this is what made *Jiha Underground* resonate with our Australian audiences.

Jeremy Neideck (director) and M'ck McKeague (designer)

Writing on the lands of the Turrbal and Jagera/Yuggera and the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation.

## THE DODECAHEDRON: RESHAPING AUSTRALIAN EXPECTATIONS OF STAGE DESIGN

Richard Roberts



*Figure 5: Jesus Christ Superstar, 1971. Photograph. Courtesy of Brian Thomson*

*Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971) by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice  
Premiered at the Capitol Theatre, Sydney, on the lands of the Gadigal people  
of the Eora Nation  
Director: Jim Sharman  
Set designer: Brian Thomson  
Costume designer: Rex Cramphorne  
Musical director: Patrick Flynn  
Sound designer: John Morrison

In 1972, following a successful London production, *Jesus Christ Superstar* opened in Sydney at the ageing Capitol Theatre. It was directed by Jim Sharman with a set designed by Brian Thomson. Following the Sydney season, in 1973, the production transferred to Melbourne.

As a student at the time, I found myself one day entering into a similarly run-down theatre in St Kilda – The Palais – not knowing what to expect of this Rock Opera that had broken all the rules of musical theatre – and all the records.

What was the world of this ‘greatest story ever told’ going to look like? Stories from the Bible involved Charlton Heston and Frank Thring in sandals and togas, didn't they? These images were etched on our visual memories through endless reruns at Easter of *Ben Hur*, *The Ten Commandments* and *The Robe*.

What I saw onstage was completely unexpected – a stripped back, minimalist, structural world of plastic tube, steel truss, elevated stages and walkways, and right at the centre of the picture – the dodecahedron. A twelve-sided polygon the top half of which could fly up allowing the bottom half to open up like a flower.

Inspired, I went straight home and made a model of it!

Brian and Jim clearly had an incredibly creative partnership and one that endured long after *Superstar*. They introduced Australian audiences to a completely new way of looking at the stage – less decorative and more architectural, more structural. It was a bold and fresh approach to space and materials, where all the technology of the set was fully on show – central to the visual aesthetic of the design – and not hidden behind painted, presentational scenery. This show – part rock concert, part opera, part musical – was a new way of thinking about what stage design could be. A place where architecture, graphic design, pop culture and contemporary visual art all combined to make a new scenographic style.

For a young aspiring designer, it was a revelation!

Richard Roberts

Theatre designer, associate professor and head of design, Victorian College of Arts  
Writing on the land of the Boonwurrung and Yallikut-Willam



## RECOGNIZING 65 YEARS OF DIGITAL SCENOGRAPHY ON AUSTRALIAN STAGES

Tessa Rixon



*Figure 6: Marjorie Conley as Pamina, Janne Ross, Doreen Morrow and Eunice McGowan as the Three Genii in The Magic Flute in 1956. Photograph: Norman L Danvers/Opera Australia Archives.*

*The Magic Flute* (1956) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder  
The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust,  
Premiered at the Theatre Royal, Adelaide, on the traditional country of the Kaurna people of the Adelaide Plains  
Director: Stefan Haag  
Designer: Desmonde Downing  
Musical director: Joseph Post  
Stage manager: Colleen Gough  
Wardrobe mistress: Mary Poxon



This photograph does not look like much, but what you see is arguably the first use of projection in an Australian mainstage production.

Desmonde Downing – the same Downing who curated Australia’s first Prague Quadrennial exhibit in 1967 – used glass painted slides to project images on a gauze screen as part of her stage design. There is so little written about Desmonde’s practice that this fact is not known to many, which is an absolute pity.

The fact that a female designer was the first in the country absolutely must be talked about.

At the time of writing this piece, no image of the full design – especially one that captured how Downing used this projected light into her environment – could be found for publication. Hopefully, with continued conversation, time and deep dives into national archives, we can unearth more about this first hint of intermedial performance in Australia.

We must also continue to talk about how and why we use our present-day digital scenographic techniques – projection, LED screens, motion tracking, real-time and Extended Reality systems and more – on Australian stages.

Our designers follow in the wake of 65 years of Australian experimentation with these ‘new’ media forms – J. S. Ostojka-Kotkowski, *Company in Space*, Australian Dance Theatre, *Chunky Move*, *Legs on the Wall*, to name a few – and yet, technology still intimidates (until we break down barriers between roles, assumptions and discourses); and it distracts and overwhelms our works (unless we carefully consider its dramaturgical and scenographic purpose).

For the next generation to be able to intelligently craft the future of Australian digital scenography, we look back, see where we started, then look to where we are heading.

Tessa Rixon

Researcher, designer, academic in Scenography Writing on the lands of the Turrbal and Jagera/Yuggera

## AURAL SCENOGRAPHY OF BLACK DIGGERS

Anthony Brumpton



*Figure 7: Black Diggers, 2014. Photograph. Queensland Theatre Company, Brisbane Festival and Sydney Festival. Courtesy of Queensland Theatre/Branco Gaica.*

*Black Diggers* (2014–15) by Tom Wright

Queensland Theatre Company, Brisbane Festival and Sydney Festival, in association with QPAC and The Balnaves Foundation

Premiered at the Sydney Opera House, on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation

Director: Wesley Enoch

Set designer: Stephen Curtis

Costume designer: Ruby Langton-Batty

Lighting designer: Ben Hughes

Composer/sound designer: Tony Brumpton

*Black Diggers* (2014–15) was a significant new Australian work revealing untold stories of the contribution, treatment and lack of recognition Australian First Nations people received in the First World War and Second World War. Placing the cast of First Nation Australians at the sonic centre of the work, a complex aural tapestry was woven around them using advanced creative and technical techniques to create an immersive aural experience for the audience as the production exposed this dark part of history and gave voice to these forgotten soldiers on a national stage.

The voices of the cast were the central sonic theme: as they laughed, cried, spoke and sang from the work's opening gunshot and a screaming flock of fleeing cockatoos – triggered by the murder of an Australian First Nations community – to the lonely hymns sung in the trenches far from the soldiers' homelands. The aural scenography of *Black Diggers* carefully established time, place and tone surrounding and supporting dozens of locations and moods across the multi-narrative of the work.

Dialogue, music, soundscapes and effects were carefully intertwined to take the audience on a journey with the characters of the play, focusing particularly on blurring the line between elements. Scenes of dialogue and scene-setting soundscapes merged into songs and atmospheres that morphed style and form, moving the audience through time and space while progressing the emotional journey of the narrative.

To achieve this complex blending of sonic elements, many different forms of organically sourced and digitally manipulated sonic media were produced using varied techniques including ambisonic recordings of Australia environments; contact and hydrophone recordings to create the unnerving and alien feeling of the ocean voyages and the trenches; and a mix of live and virtual instruments orchestrated to feel raw and unpolished alongside the human voice of the spoken and sung moments of the show. The prerecorded content was mixed with the voice of the cast (all wearing lapel microphones). These sounds were amplified and reproduced using a three-dimensional speaker array arrangement – firstly in the low ceiling and tomb-like drama theatre in the initial Opera House production, then in larger playhouses style venues around the Australia – integrated with the acoustic sound of the occasional didgeridoo, bugle and the rare moment of 'silence' where the audience was left listening to their own breath.

*Black Diggers* stands as an exemplar of aural scenography in the field Australian theatre. Sonically the work was a complex level of auditory immersion woven together using multiple advanced technical and creative practices to support the audience on the complex journey through multiple times, places and emotions that ran through out the work. At its core, however, despite this complexity, the work was built on the sounds of the cast – giving voice to a piece of history that had too long been ignored. It is this rich immersive environment that facilitated these pieces of history to not only be told but heard and felt. This is what elevates the work to a truly significant piece of Australian aural scenography.

Anthony Brumpton  
Designer, academic and researcher in aural scenography  
Writing on the land of the Western Wakka Wakka people

## RISING WATERS

Latai Taumoepeau



Figure 8: A still-frame of *Repatriate*, 2015. Film frame. Courtesy of Latai Taumoepeau/Zan Wimberely

*Repatriate* (2015) by Latai Taumoepeau and Elias Nohra  
Premiered at Carriageworks *24 Frames Per Second*, on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation  
Co-author, producer and performer: Latai Taumoepeau  
Co-author and cinematographer: Elias Nohra  
Editor and visual effects: Bec Stegh  
Sound designer: James Brown  
Image credit: Zan Wimberely

From the artist:

*Repatriate* endures as a screen-based installation work. Commissioned by and premiering at Carriageworks in 2015, it has been exhibited in various group shows and was presented as a live durational performance at Liveworks Experimental Arts Festival, Sydney (2016).

In its original form, *Repatriate* is presented on five iPads on the black wall of a purpose-built, galley-like space; 5 metres long and open on both ends. A soundtrack layers the textures of recorded hydrophonic sounds with samples of the Tongan *me'etu'upaki*, an ancient prayer traditionally performed by men in preparation for sea voyage.

Using Tongan metaphor and my own embodied archive, I perform an urgent poetic distress dance using my body and humble materials. In a large Plexi glass tank originally engineered for a television commercial advertising waterproof glue, I enact varied Pacific Island dances from Samoa, Kiribati, Aotearoa, Tonga and Kuki Airani learnt in my lifetime. I wear children's swimming floatation devices around the wrists, ankles and waist, replacing the usual body adornment of floral and leafy garlands in Pacific dance and ceremonial practice.

As the tank fills with water the floaties become buoyant, and I struggle to articulate the choreography.

It becomes impossible to sustain and eventually I am submerged.

*Repatriate* demonstrates the reality of the eventual submergence of lowlying Pacific Island communities already impacted by sea level rise and global warming. My work emphasizes the economic disparity between developing and developed countries regarding crisis, and relocation in the face of human induced climate change.

Latai Taumoepeau  
Writing on the lands of the Gadigal people

From the curator:

*Repatriate*, along with Latai's other work *Stitching Up the Sea*, won a coveted Excellence in Performance Design Award at the *Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space* in Prague 2019. The international jury said of the work 'this performance artist combines ceremonial movement and objects with contemporary practices to activate public space through durational performances that protest the radical effects of colonization and climate change on the Pacific' (*Prague Quadrennial* 2019). *Repatriate*, along with Latai's vast body of work, captures one of the multiplicities of Australian scenography, and the vast cultural legacy and power embodied through our artists and their designs.

Tessa Rixon  
Writing on the lands of the Turrbal and Jagera/Yuggera

## Conclusion

By way of concluding this visual essay – and this special edition as a whole – it is worth reflecting on the variety of aesthetics, practices, philosophies and processes that sit under the banner of Australian scenography. It would be foolish to attempt to define our design in words alone: you will note our contributors did not spend much time waxing and waning about the *what* and the *how* of each design. Rather, we try to let the image speak for itself as we have shared our experience and broader perspective on the Australian context that is represented in these images. The old maxim of *A picture paints a thousand words* stands true, and nothing quite captures these moments in our scenographic evolution like the visual essay format.

Very few collections of this sort exist in the literature, and I advocate that further visual (and aural, sensory, interactive and moving image) anthologies of Australian design need to be created and preserved. The academic journal is an ideal tool to achieve this aim.

The contributions in this visual essay also demonstrate a shift in Australian scenography. We are moving towards something different, something new. In small incremental steps, we step away from the pernicious white colonial agenda in theatre and performance, and its subsequent impact in design, and towards a more distributed, disruptive, ecologically conscious and intersectional ontology of scenography.

This is reflected in the contributions of this special edition – from Ross and Beer’s discussion of the expanding field of ecoscenography to Coyle’s use of the model box as a healing tool for communities, performance design is no longer what it once was. In the face of pandemics and the climate crisis, our field will only continue to expand.

Let us continue the conversation.

Tessa Rixon



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## CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Tessa Rixon is a practitioner-researcher in intermedial performance, digital scenography and Australian performance design. As a lecturer of scenography in the School of Creative Practice with the Queensland University of Technology, Tessa lectures in performance design, computer-aided design and performance technologies. Tessa's research promotes new modes of integrating established and emergent technologies such as motion capture, augmented and virtual reality systems into live performance, exploring the potentiality of authenticity within digital scenography, and showcasing Australian performance design practice and histories.

Contact: Z9 Building, Kelvin Grove Campus, Queensland University of Technology, Kelvin Grove, QLD 4059, Australia.

E-mail: [tessa.rixon@qut.edu.au](mailto:tessa.rixon@qut.edu.au)

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7874-1990>

Australian costume designer Jennifer Irwin's career spans 36 years designing for drama, opera, dance and ballet as well as the largest spectacular events ever staged in Australia. Jennifer's work has been seen on stage in over 70 countries, over 500 cities and venues including the Royal Opera House, Lincoln Center, City Center NYC, Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Sydney Opera House. Costume commissions in Australia include 36 ballets for Sydney Dance Company, 26 years of repertoire for Bangarra Dance Theatre, multiple works for Sydney Theatre Company, The Australian Ballet, Melbourne Theatre Company, Belvoir Theatre Company, Australian Dance Theatre, West Australian Ballet, Queensland Ballet and Opera Australia. Jennifer designed costumes for the 'Awakening' segment of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and co-designed all the costumes for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games Closing Ceremony and the official ceremony commemorating the Federation of Australia in 2001. Jennifer has been recognized for her contribution to Australian design with multiple Helpmann, Green Room, Australian Dance awards and nominations.

Contact: Bangarra Dance Theatre, Wharf 4/5, 15 Hickson Road, Walsh Bay, NSW 2000, Australia.

E-mail: [jenniferirwincostume@gmail.com](mailto:jenniferirwincostume@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7783-5554>

For the past 40 years David Walters has worked as a professional lighting designer in Iceland and Australia. His work experience spans lighting designs for opera, theatre, ballet, dance, puppetry, circus, exhibitions, major events and architectural installations. From 1978 to 1986 David worked as a freelance lighting designer in Iceland where he is recognized as one of the pioneers in this field. In 1986 David returned to Australia to take up a position as Resident



Lighting Designer with the Queensland Theatre Company. Since 1990, as a freelance designer, he has worked extensively throughout Australia and designed for the Melbourne Theatre Company, Sydney Theatre Company, State Theatre Company of South Australia, Handspan, Playbox, La Boite, Rock 'n' Roll Circus, Nimrod, Company B, Expressions, Queensland Ballet, Australian Ballet, Opera Queensland, The Powerhouse, Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Zen Zen Zo, Topology and Bell Shakespeare Company. His work has toured extensively overseas and he has lectured in lighting design at several universities. Throughout his professional career David has maintained close ties with Iceland where he has worked for the National Theatre, the National Opera and the Reykjavik City Theatre.

E-mail: [david.walters7@bigpond.com](mailto:david.walters7@bigpond.com)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9380-3560>

Jeremy Neideck is a performance maker and academic who has worked between Australia and Korea for almost two decades, investigating the interweaving of cultures in performance; the intersection of queer identities and theories in performance; and the modelling of new and inclusive social realities. His research is internationally focused and of national significance, and he regularly consults on the architecture and facilitation of collaborative projects and programs of institutional and community transformation. Watch out, Jeremy is Bad

Company: [www.companybad.org](http://www.companybad.org).

Contact: Z9 Building, Kelvin Grove Campus, Queensland University of Technology, Kelvin Grove, QLD 4059, Australia.

E-mail: [jeremy.neideck@qut.edu.au](mailto:jeremy.neideck@qut.edu.au)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4469-4836>

M'ck McKeague is a performance maker, set and costume designer and installation artist currently based in Melbourne, Australia. M'ck's career highlights included collaborating on queer, bilingual music theatre works in non-traditional spaces with artists working between Korea and Australia, including sell-out seasons of 지하 (Underground) in Brisbane and Seoul, the development and presentation of The 떡볶이 Box (The Dokboki Box) at Federation Square for Next Wave Festival 2014.

M'ck is currently collaborating on new works with All the Queens Men, Polyglot Theatre, Elbow Room and Company Bad. Dissatisfied with master narratives and the systems and spaces that uphold them, M'ck seeks out collaborative scenographic practices that embrace difference and disrupt privilege in process, form and content.

E-mail: [mck@mckeague.com.au](mailto:mck@mckeague.com.au)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4521-6556>

Richard Roberts has designed for drama, dance, film, television and opera. Since his first professional engagement in 1977 as a resident designer at the State Theatre Company of South Australia, he has worked for all the major performing arts companies in Australia, as well as working extensively overseas. Richard is the recipient of four Greenroom Awards, including best design for drama in 1998 for the Playbox premiere production of Stolen, and in 2000 for the MTC premiere production of Life after George. In 2001 he won Best Design in Dance for The Australian Ballet's Requiem and in 2004 for Molto Vivace, also for The Australian Ballet. Richard is currently head of design and associate professor at the Victorian

College of the Arts.

Contact: Faculty of Fine Arts and Music I The University of Melbourne. Room 213, Elisabeth Murdoch Building, 234 St Kilda Road, Southbank, VIC 3004, Australia.

E-mail: [caleb.roberts@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:caleb.roberts@unimelb.edu.au)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8095-7595>

Anthony Brumpton is a lecturer in the School of Creative Practice at Queensland University of Technology. His professional practice and research investigates augmented aural realities (AAR) through the lens of aural scenography as an approach for inclusion, placemaking and environmental awareness. His teaching fields include technical production, sound design and intermedial theatre. Anthony has over 20 years professional experience in the fields of music, sound and technical production, having created hundreds of creative works across Australia and internationally. Anthony currently resides in Queensland, Australia on the land of the Traditional Owners the Gubbi Gubbi.

Contact: Kelvin Grove Campus, Queensland University of Technology, Kelvin Grove, QLD 4059, Australia.

E-mail: [a.brumpton@qut.edu.au](mailto:a.brumpton@qut.edu.au)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0328-5836>

Latai Taumoepeau is a Punake, body-centred performance artist; her faivā ('temporal practice') is from her homelands, the Island Kingdom of Tonga and her birthplace; the Eora nation – Sydney, and everything far and in-between Oceania. Latai activates Indigenous philosophies and methodologies; cross-pollinating ancient practices of ceremony with her contemporary processes and performance work to re-interpret, re-generate and extend her movement practice and its function in and from Oceania. Her work brings the voices of marginalized communities to the foreground. Much of her work is in climate change advocacy for Pacific Island nations through her extensive body work and various engagement projects. Works such as Ocean Island Mine, Repatriate, Stitching up the Sea, and i-Land X-isle have been presented in gallery and performance contexts including Carriageworks, Sydney Festival, Perth Festival, Tanz Im August (Berlin), Dance Massive, Sydney Biennale, Museum of Contemporary Art, Performance Space, Sydney Opera House, Arts House, Blacktown Arts Centre, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, The Australian Museum, Brisbane Powerhouse to name a few. She has also toured internationally to London, Germany, France, Japan, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Slovenia, Cook Islands and New Zealand.

Contact: 10226 05174, Shop 1 546-548 Marrickville Road, Dulwich Hill, NSW 2203, Australia.

E-mail: [latai.taumoepeau@gmail.com](mailto:latai.taumoepeau@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0106-305X>