

Theatre and Creativity: Empowering students in Replicating both Still-life and Non-life Objects in Theatre Studio Studies

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Abstract: Most directors in theatre and film tend to use real props on set to appear convincing. Others find it difficult to take such steps for fear of injuries. This paper discusses some creative ways of replicating both life and non-life objects for stage and screen presentation mostly referred to as props in technical theatre. This form of creative design interpretation is an alternative replacement for natural objects used on set and which serves as robust scenic element. For any production at a given point in time, it tends to be cost effective, durable, actor friendly and a catalyst for comprehending and emphasizing both artistic and dramatic unity sequences'. Through explorative research design the authors investigate innovative alternative ways of designing and developing replicated objects forms for the theatre and film industry using recycled material as a key component for the development and execution of the whole design concept. It is seen that there is usually increased interest of students for props design and construction apart from its cost effectiveness. It is recommended that discarded materials meant for trash are recycled into functional stage props as it increases creativity in technical theatre.

Keywords: film, directors, film industry, technical theatre.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the early days according to Brockett, O. (1982) some ritual practices employed pantomimic dance and rhythmical musical accompaniment as primary means of their ceremonies. Vocal and sound is also common but speech and dialogue are used less frequently. Importantly, the mask as a prop was a typical accessory of the early performances. It was believed that mask and costumes were means of attracting or embodying the spirit to be controlled, consulted or propitiated. They may also be used to represent an animal to be killed or as aid in bringing about desired event. The overall visual style of a Greek theatrical production was largely influenced by costumes and masks as an integral part of the performance. In general, the conception of stage props dates back to the early Greek dramas, which were performed with mask since the time of Aeschylus. However, it wasn't until the 16th and 17th centuries that acting troupes began to heavily employ the use of props to help create the alternate reality of the production and may be used to convey meaning to the audience. The term props came from the word "property."

By common definition props are used by actors in the course of a theatrical production. Stage and film props are used to enhance productions, add meaning and help create realism. They are visual elements that reinforce the theme of the production and tell the story within a given context. Props can have different functions within a performance which may contribute to the "mise-en-scene, the idea that everything within a scene has a meaning. They may also allude to the narrative and give the audience greater understanding of a character or the motive. This scenic element in particular subscribes its tenets to the setting as far as the time, place, mood and style are concerned. Taylor, D. R. and Strickland, D. R. (2009) affirm that props offer specific clues about the character, especially the social status of the character in a play and the world they inhabit and may establish the plays era.

There are several different types of stage props. Hand props are those that are small enough to be held by the actor. Dress props are those that are not worn but add to the costume for instance a briefcase. Rehearsal props are used only in rehearsals, this may be because the actual prop is still being built or more commonly because the item is fragile and is

available only for performances. Set properties make up the scenery and are used by the actors to define the locale and to conform to the dictates of the production approach and they are in essence the design details of the overall visual composition. According to Parker, Oren. W., Wolf, Craig, R. and Block, Dick, (2003), their contributions cannot be overemphasized, even in unrealistic settings. Stage properties often provide the accent or artistic touch that makes or breaks a stage setting.

This paper explores ways in which the unavailability and high cost of props can be circumvented through the adoption of improvisational techniques in their construction. This experimental project was carried out using Theatre Studio class of University of Education, Winneba.

2. VISUALIZATION AND APPRECIATION OF OBJECT

Visualization as a design process is the ability to subconsciously incubate series of images relating to a theme that subscribes to the production approach of a design project. This exercise creates an opportunity for the designer to see in his or her mind's eye probable alternatives to a task or design thought in the design process. Elements regarding colour, form, style, period and texture among others are put within close perspective for an appreciable content analysis for the best option. Invariably, one needs to dream and give life to the idea for a better fruition as far as the production concept is concerned. Basically, visualization as a medium for creativity involves, focus, believing in one's self to do the best possible work on the project, ability to incubate series of ideas and be selective with precise options and to execute projects within a given time frame.

The idea of visual communication as regards design evolves on good perception, idea development and being truthful to one's visual interpretative intent. If these ideas galvanize into one whole thought pattern, then the creative interpretational skill become evident and ready for creativity. This process unearths a strong interest drive to "think out of the box" and a zeal for creative projects.

3. DESIGN CONCEPT

Gillette, M. J. (2000) believes that, one guideline works for all plays: that design should be expressive of the mood and spirit of the play. This also goes for other theatrical productions that leans its support on technical preparation and implementation. As a matter of fact, scenery as a major theatrical element helps the audience understand and enjoy a play by providing a visual reinforcement of the production concept for the theme. Parker, O. W. and Smith, K. H. (1974) are of the view that, scene design, like other kinds of creative design, is the creating of a form to fulfill a purpose or function as prescribed by the script. Invariably, props as a major scenic element enhances a production and creates the bridge between actors in costume and the stage set. Additionally, this visual element gives credence to the actor's actions and movements and puts into perspective the spirit of the play. Undoubtedly, props which are part of scenery provide a visual support to the dramatic form which is an integral part of the modern theatre paradigm, a philosophy of modern theatre practice. The whole idea of replication is based on the tier and paste technique which focuses and promotes the cardinal qualities of strength and lightness for stage and film.

4. DESIGN PROCESS

This is a system whereby effective planning and preparation for the execution of a technical project was outlined and diligently adhered to for an effective delivery leading to an enhanced visual communication among the technical design team members. Gillette, M. J. (2000) is of the view that to communicate effectively, the designer must be able to present his or her visual concepts to the other members of the production design team in some clearly understandable manner. In this regards, students developed series of conceptual ideas in the form of thumb nail sketches that helped clarify and refined their intent for the various projects assigned them.

Commitment plays a major role in determining the extent to which the design challenge will take off and its success. This is a stage where the participants had to make decisions to be committed to the project to do the best possible work on the task. In view of this, the students were taking through a psychological orientation drill to accept the fact that they could create the props even though some of them did not have any education and experience in visual art, molding and sculpture. This exercise was a reassurance of the "can do spirit" drive, the possibility of handling the task confidently. The content of the psychological orientation was based on watching demonstrational prop making video materials, encouraging students and identifying their strengths and weakness within the creative art discipline and to reassure them of the ability to do far more than they think.

The next stage of the design process was for participants to identify objects they wish to replicate as props for the stage. These items ranged from life to non-life objects and the essence of the search for the items was for participants to have visual information and a reference point for the task. This enabled students study the contours, colour, form, size, texture and general appearance of the object for better interpretation. However, creativity in theatrical design is basically the combination of existing forms and elements into new arrangements or order.

The next phase of the process was to identify and gather materials for the construction and finish of the task. Govier, J. (1991) found that it is very important to note that many sources open to the prop maker are often free or can be found at give away prices. For instance, when we take a look in our garbage or trash cans, we will surely identify used up items that could be utilized or recycled. Example are, egg create, old news prints, card boards, brown paper, off cut fabrics, tins and bottles which were really thrown away. As props designers there is the need to train ourselves to recognize the potential of all kinds of waste materials that could be recycled into new forms. Another source dear to the eclectic prop maker's heart is the junk yard where old junks could be found once dealt with by a competent prop maker, can reemerge with a change identity. The philosophy of all this is not to waste anything, but to utilize all resources to the fullest of mankind. According to the Hamlyn Encyclopedia of decorative techniques (1995) expresses the view that all one needs to start this kind of design project are basic inputs essentially comprising items found in every household: news papers sheets of plastic used to cover tables and floors, buckets and rags, bottles old plates, worn out shoes among others and disposable cartoons.

Implementation was the next stage where the actual task began. The technique adapted for the project was the 'tear and paste' method. In the preparation stage, papers or fabrics were shredded in fragments and soaked in a bowl of water for a period of at most thirty minutes as indicated in plate (1). Basically this was to relax or reduce the creases in the paper or cloth to ensure malleability during molding.

Sample objects to be replicated are shown in plate (2). Items range from live object to non-life objects. These were identified to be replicated for the purpose and covered in a thin layer of gel or pomade to enhance separation of mold from replicated object when severed into two.





Plate (3) also shows the application method of the gel to the original object.



Plate (5) shows the application of fragmented papers or clothes dipped in a thin solution of white glue and applied severally on the mold to create a buildup of layer toughness all around the object. This form of technique bonded the fragmented pieces of materials into a hard skin. Of course, each repeated section of applied fragmented piece of material dipped in glue and fixed unto the mold was exposed periodically to the humid weather for quick drying. This effort was to enhance durability of the completed prop.



When the fragmented materials on object dried up, the next stage was to sever the mold vertically into two equal halves to enable molds to be pulled apart getting rid of the original object. The split open activity of the mold is carefully executed with the aid of a stencil cutter or a blade. For kids, the cut open process must be supervised by adult teachers or designers to prevent injury. When the split open process was achieved, the object was removed from mold and the two half molds gently aligned to each other as the original form with the aid of the Formica adhesive glue. To have a good finish there is the need to finally go over the joint replicated mold with the tier and paste technique in order to adequately fit together severed parts and allow it to dry and if possible finish it up with filler and a smoother to ensure smooth surface ready for painting. With this new appearance, the mold is ready to be painted in general specific colours as suggested by the original appearance of the object without details: label designs and graphics.

According to Rome Academy of Decorative Arts (1997). Before beginning to paint, it is essential to prepare

When the general painting of the replicated object was done with good finish, details of the mold in terms of labeling and graphic design treatment was then applied to complete the process. With this experience the replicated props is now ready to be used on stage or on screen.



Samples of finished props

5. CONCLUSION

The idea of replication both still-life and non-life objects has become necessary to ensure that students gained hands on experience with the construction of basic props for both stage and film productions in order to increase their understanding of theatre studio and passion for the creative arts industry and to increase the stock of stage props in the props room for academic work. Also, to make available materials for teaching and learning purposes. Thomas (1991) shares the view that, the construction of stage scenery can be particularly satisfying and he further indicates that theatre workshop provides an enormous opportunity for drama in all forms which lends its process to a more collaborative activity and ensures that the group or students work together and share ideas in a loose and enjoyable atmosphere. According to Thomas, theatre studio encourages discussion, exploration and understanding of the text of a play in focus and offers the student enough skills to attempt project confidently. The experience enjoyed on the project under review was worth it which harnessed a sense of theatrical belonging. As lecturers on the project it was observed that participants enjoyed the session, wanted more and owned the work.

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