

SURREALISM ARTS TO SCENIC DESIGN: A CASE STUDY OF GAME PLON KON TAI A STAGE PLAY.

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to study scenic design of *Game Plon Kon Tai*, the adaptation of stage play “*Loot*” written by Joe Orton. The creative research focuses on the surrealist set design, creative process and design analysis of this adapted stage play in Thai version. Thai stage director, Nattaporn Rattanachaiwong who adapted and translated *Loot* into Thai contexts would like the surreal imagery into set design. The researcher as the set designers was inspired by *The Son of Man*, the surrealist painting of Rene Magritte. The surrealist imagery was displayed through the story, shapes and symbols of scenic design. Finally, the research found that 1) The limited budget of theatre production (the external factor) and 2) The director’s concept (the internal factor) are affected to adjust the shape, the structure and surrealist images of this set design.

Keywords: Surrealism, Symbolism, Scenic design, *Loot (Game Plon Kon Tai)*, Joe Orton

INTRODUCTION

The play called “*Loot*” by Joe Orton is considered one of the classic works in England. It is remade into the Thai version called “*Game Plon Khon Tai*,” a dark comedy and social satire directed by Nathaphon Rattanachaiwongse, first performed in 2012 and 2015. It is a story about a teacher who has a perfect profile with perfect ethics, the Son who has never been interested in anything apart from himself, a nurse who has an interesting background, a sharp-eyed inspector and a body. The incident happens when 2 friends of the Son rob the bank and flee. They hide the stolen money in the Mother’s coffin at home based on the belief that the most dangerous place is the safest place. The chaos starts when everyone is back home and people’s instinct to survive starts to work.

Surrealism art was derived from Dada art group in the beginning of the 20th century in France, influenced by Sigmund Freud, a Psychoanalyst (Sigmund Freud, 1856-1939) and effects from the World War II where there were too many deaths that the surviving people became miserable, depressed and hopeless. They lacked religion to be their spiritual anchor, so this new kind of art was an escape from the art they once knew which could only portray artists’ skills. This new art was an interpretation of people’s dreams and a free form of connection. Distinctive traits of surrealism art were consisted of 2 points: 1) the meaningful past of the artist, feelings, disappointment, love, arrogance, fear and sarcasm and dark comedies about people, 2) regarding shapes and methods, the colors in medium intensity were applied harmoniously, reflecting smooth and soft feeling, and the materials could be anything the artist was fond of such as sand and oil paint or color paper and oil paint. The expression of the artist’s mind was also portrayed through the technique of glass writing to show the desired clarity out of vagueness. The light, shadow and color were too expressed. Andre Breton, a French writer and Dada artist, once mentioned about the importance of “an object,” which was the basic step in sensing the world especially the world of objects, an important method in creating the work since an object was considered as a “sign.” It was

therefore said that artist in this era created works from the reinterpretation of the object world based on their own understanding, portraying images from subconscious, dream and isolation, making the works surreal. It was the mixture between objects, an important element from the outside, and subconscious, an element from the inside, to freely and newly reinterpret these objects in contrast to the social standard. Various artists who portrayed this type of work were Jean Arp, Max Ernst, Giorgio de Chirico, Man Ray, Joan Miro and Rene Magritte, for example.

From the above mentioned, surrealism art is so interesting that it could be applied as a guideline in stage scene design for the play *Loot*, to best deliver the messages from the play director who wants the scenes to be beautifully crafted and staged.

OBJECTIVE

To create stage scene for the play “*Game Plon Kon Tai*” from surrealism art.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Studying the play “*Game Plon Kon Tai*” and surrealism art.

Designing and creating and stage scenes in the single setting format.

METHODOLOGY

The study was a qualitative reseach and analysed and interpreted deliberately with 3 processes as follows.

1. Pre-production: documentary study was made, and it included relevant books, documents, articles and journals from libraries in edicational institutions. Field study was also made, which included performance practices and in-depth Interviews.

2. Production: the process referred to data analysis and interpretation and production design, including scene breakdown, rough sketch for complete scenes, 3D models, drafting, creating and installing the scenes and work exhibition.

3. Post-production: this step included conclusion and suggestions of the work, leading to ariticles written and presented.

FINDINGS

Regarding the production design, this was the second time the play *Loot* was selected by the director in these 3 years. The researcher found 2 factors affecting the design which were external and internal factors. For external factors, limited budget for production still had an influence. The reuse of the scenes once made for the art thesis exhibition of the 4th year dramatic arts students at Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suansunandha Rajabhat University was then applied. The scenes were newly adjusted with an adaptation in shapes and designs. For internal factors, the change in the director’s idea to portray the stage scenes in a non-realistic way, based on surrealism art, was applied.

Regarding the inspirational pictures for the production, the researcher had studied the some of the works by Rene Magritte (Rene Magritte, 1898-1967) and noticed that her works had the traits of surrealism art, perfect to be used as a guideline for the play’s production design. The details are shown below.

Table 1. Analysis of Rene Magritte’s Surrealism Art and *Game Plon Kon Tai*’s Production Design

Source: Pukkaporn Pimsarn

| Rene Magritte’s Surrealism Art | Game Plon Kon Tai’s Production Design |
|--|--|
| Isolation | Isolation |
| The change in position of objects and new places | The presentation of realistic setting to non-realistic setting based on surrealism art. |
| Modification | Modification |
| The transformation of objects | The transformation of objects was made by using the old stage scene structures to recreate the new ones. The change was made in compliance with the play script, especially scene description and blocking / entrance exit for actors. |
| Hybridization | Hybridization |
| The hybridization of two objects leading to a new object | The hybridization of the non-realistic setting and realistic props |
| Change the Scale | Change the Scale |
| Change the scale | Objects’ scale was changed to become non-realistic big to emphasize on what the director of the play wants to express. |
| Accidental Encounter | Accidental Encounter |
| Accidental encounter | Accidental encounter was made based on the play script, referring to the bank robbery and hidden huge amount of money in the Mother’s coffin. |
| Double Image | Double Image |
| Double image | To create double image, stage scene structures were painted to be seen as if they were one. |
| Paradox | Paradox |
| Paradox | To place two objects together in the different position. |
| Conceptual Bipolarity | Conceptual Bipolarity |
| Conceptual bipolarity | Conceptual bipolarity has 2 factors which were actors’ actions and difference in props. |

From the analysis of the play and the discussion with the director, the researcher found keywords in the play *Loot* which are “orchids and emptiness,” and adapted these 2 keywords to “signs” from “objects” based on the idea of surrealism art mentioned above.

Table 2. The Analysis of “Objects” and Meaning Expression
 Source: Pukkaporn Pimsarn

| The Analysis of “Objects” from the Play Loot | Meaning Expression |
|---|--|
| Orchids | Flowers mean respect, and orchids are also flowers for the Teacher’s Day. It is said that orchids are like education works and teacher’s life. Teachers all around the country experience hardship and fight for what they believe and what they do, which is for the future for the country. M.L. Pin Malakul, a teacher and veverable person in Thai education, composed the poem called “Orchids” for all teachers in the country as shown below. “ Orchids blossom just slowly The same as education Once it blooms fully The wise educated beautiful minds show.” |
| Sky | Sky means dream, freedom and infinite emptiness. |

Production Design

Scene Breakdown

From the scene description, it was described as a one-story house in the suburb. Inside the house, the door was seen in the far-right corner and the way to the bedroom was located on the left with a closet and a coffin in front of the bedroom. There was also a patient’s bed with curtain on the left and the sofa set and window in the back on the right.

Scene Installation

The ideas of object modification and double image were applied through the coloring of scene structures and stage to make them appear like the sky. It was the place signifying dream, imagination and infinite emptiness.

The idea of scale change was applied to the orchids, which was specially designed to be unusually big, emphasizing on the director’s messages of value, emptiness, distortion and sarcasm. This well corresponded with Jutharat (2017) who said “surrealistic scenes were made for delivering signs through objects which could have a significant scale or be shown as just an element on the stage” (Jutharat Karakade, 2017, p. 84). It could also include the hybridization from the non-realistic setting, together with realistic props of the black sofa. Paradoxical position of objects was further applied. Orchids normally put in the vase were now weaved together and attached along the stage scene structures.



Figure 1: Production Design of “Game Plon Khon Tai”

Source: Pukkaporn Pimsarn

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION

The production design of the play *Loot* was changed from realistic scenes to unrealistic ones based on Rene Magritte's surrealism art notion. All of her 8 elements included isolation, modification, hybridization, change in scale, accidental encounter, double image, paradox and conceptual bipolarity, which well delivered key messages of the play based on the director's objectives.

However, it is important to control the budget for production design to match with the director's need for the perfect performance. The contemporary play *Loot* is a type of social satire which has been performed all along, and it is clear that application of other forms of art to help design the play is still a very interesting idea.

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