

**SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION**

**DESIGN
SKETCHBOOK**



JULIA

**BY JOANNA MURRAY-SMITH
DIRECTED BY SARAH GOODES**

DIRECTOR'S NOTE: SARAH GOODES

“FACTS HAVE THEIR IMPORTANCE – BUT THAT IS WHERE THE BIOGRAPHY COMES TO GRIEF. THE BIOGRAPHER CANNOT EXTRACT THE ATOM. HE GIVES US THE HUSK.”

- VIRGINIA WOOLF

As Joanna Murray-Smith observes in her notes, there is very little to be found in all the records and biographies of Julia Gillard's inner life. So all we can do in this production is attempt to capture the essence of her, the atom. And what better place to crack open these husks and fill them with our imaginations than the theatre – the home for imagination.

This is the third time I have directed a new play by Joanna Murray-Smith – the last one at STC was the world premiere of *Switzerland*, back in 2014. When Kip [Williams] called to propose this project, I didn't think twice. New work is not for the faint-hearted. As someone once observed when you mount a classic, all you have to do is move the furniture in and spend rehearsals deciding where everything should go but with new work you have to build the house first. However difficult this process is, it is also thrilling and exciting with a writer like Jo who is incredibly responsive to rehearsal rooms and the offers and shifts they can throw up.

Julia was ridiculed and imitated for her entire political term, so my first instinct with the piece was that I wasn't interested in exploring a typical impersonation. Instead, I was interested in playing with form. For many years I have watched Justine Clarke work on the stage and dreamed of working with her. Justine dives deep, bringing truth and heart to all her work. She is like a cormorant bird – she can fly high but she can also dive deep for the fish! We were all delighted when she accepted the challenge.

My early conversations with Justine circled around the generational intersection that Julia's speech activated. Justine and I spoke a lot about how, as women of a certain age, we felt slightly guilty for not having spoken up more when Julia was being treated as she was during her term as PM. It felt right to not meet Julia fully-formed, that we meet Justine as the narrator (an actor embodying every woman) who slowly embodies the imagined version of Julia and finally transforms into her entirely. We wanted to amplify

the universal in the piece: what it means to look back on a life and examine your choices and the times in which you were born and the tide that carries you through. Justine also spoke of how she imagined mothers and daughters might come to the show and the conversation between generations that it might ignite.



I started to think of the waves of feminism and why they are called waves and why they occur in waves. One generation ploughs the soil and then next reaps the seeds. I had a strong sense of a younger woman waiting silently, willing and waiting for Julia to make a stand – to make the speech that (it could be argued) opened the gates for the movement that followed. Julia's 'misogyny speech' is a brilliant example of the power of words – to open doors for us as individuals as well as collectives is endlessly fascinating – how social movements, like schools of fish, can take form and suddenly change direction as one organism.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE: SARAH GOODES

“Societies are shaped not by what is happening on the surface but by the great tidal movements underneath.”

- *The Making of Julia Gillard* by Jacqueline Kent

So the decision to include Jessica Bentley in the production as a fluid presence on stage – at times the younger Julia, at times her conscience, at times the future generations – was made. The witness and watcher – our younger selves – what we sacrifice on our way through life pursuing our dreams or fighting our fights – who we become in the process and what we leave behind.

Designer Renée Mulder and Composer & Sound Designer Steve Francis and I first worked together back in 2011 on Hilary Bell's play *The Splinter*. We have since worked on many projects. Both are incredible artists and theatre makers and together with the extraordinarily talented Alexander Berlage as Lighting Designer and Susie Henderson as Video Designer, along with Charley Sanders as the Assistant Director and the brilliant Jennifer White as Voice Coach, this has been collaborative theatre at its most exhilarating.

Renée and I used, as a springboard, the work of female video artists Pipilotti Rist and Angelica Mesiti and photographer Alex Prager. Susie Henderson pointed us towards Mesiti's work whose piece *Assembly* was presented as part of the Venice Biennale. Her work really struck a chord for us about how we wanted to approach this piece – the power of space, voice, and youth.

Steve Francis and his composition is the texture we needed – we talked a lot about soil, growth, the earth, light, and transformation – how even moments and events can transform in the hands of the next generation and listened a lot to Carolyn Shaw's album *Let the Soil Play its Simple Part*. A huge thank you to Dr Rebecca Sheehan, Ruth Little, Alice Osbourne, and the Stage Management and Production team at STC, and to STC and Canberra Theatre Centre for inviting us all to work on this new Australian work.



Justine Clarke and Jessica Bentley

SET AND PROP DESIGN: RENÉE MULDER

QUESTIONS FOR DESIGNER RENÉE MULDER

Thank you for allowing students and teachers to view your design sketches of *Julia* in STC's Design Sketchbook. It is such a privilege to have access to your process in the Final Design Presentation. Can you tell us a little about the process of designing for *Julia*?

The process started as a conversation with Director Sarah Goodes. We spoke about when Julia Gillard made that now famous speech and how that moment became viral around the world.

The production of *Julia* relies on the audience being able to enter the inner world of the character. Can you tell us about the way that your set design enhances this experience for the audience?

In *Julia* we explore the public and the private sides of the character. This is represented in the space by using reflection, refraction and isolating the stage into separate performance areas. The carpeted square serves as a public area, at other times it's a space that represents her inner thoughts. The front and side edges of the space move to a more memory space.

Can you tell us about the way that set design works with the other Elements of Production (sound, costume, video, and lighting) to create Sarah Goodes' vision for *Julia*?

All elements of the production work together very much hand in hand. Video and lighting provide focus and assist with the flow of the storytelling. The sonic world of the play is also incredibly important, bringing tension, suspense as well as emotion. Costume helps flesh out the character visually. All elements are equally important in a piece like this and are all key in supporting the cast's performance.

***Julia* uses props to indicate changes in time, place and situation in the character's inner and outer world. Can you tell us about the choices you made and the creative thinking behind these choices?**

As the setting for this production is sparse, any prop item that makes its way onto the stage has to be just right. For example when the character Julia is recounting a childhood memory – a vintage kitchen stool/step ladder is brought out for Justine to sit on. When she lets us in on a private thought

a rather domestic floor lamp is positioned on stage. The symbol of a flower is a recurring thought and image that we see and consider throughout.

***Julia* is not biographical, but rather, an imagined journey into the experience of Australia's first female prime minister. How did this impact your choices for costume design?**

From the beginning we collectively decided that this wouldn't be a satire or strict impersonation of Julia Gillard. The character of Julia is not just Julia Gillard, she's also a narrator, an observer, the representation of the everywoman. Jessica's character floats between a young Julia, a reflection, an aid and a representation of the next generation. I've referenced a certain colour palette that was initially inspired by the colours Julia Gillard wore the day she made the famous 'misogyny speech'. However, the final costumes have really developed beyond this. For the clothes I've aimed to provide an essence of shape and function that serve all the roles that both Justine and Jessica play in the piece.



THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION

SET DESIGN

Mulder's set design creates a transformational space that reflects Julia's psychological world as well as the material reality of her life up to and including 2012 – the year of the "misogyny speech". The character of Julia is developed across different historical contexts, from her childhood in Wales and South Australia to adulthood at university and Parliament House in Canberra. All must be created Realistically in order to anchor the audience to the narrative as it moves through and across time and psychic spaces.

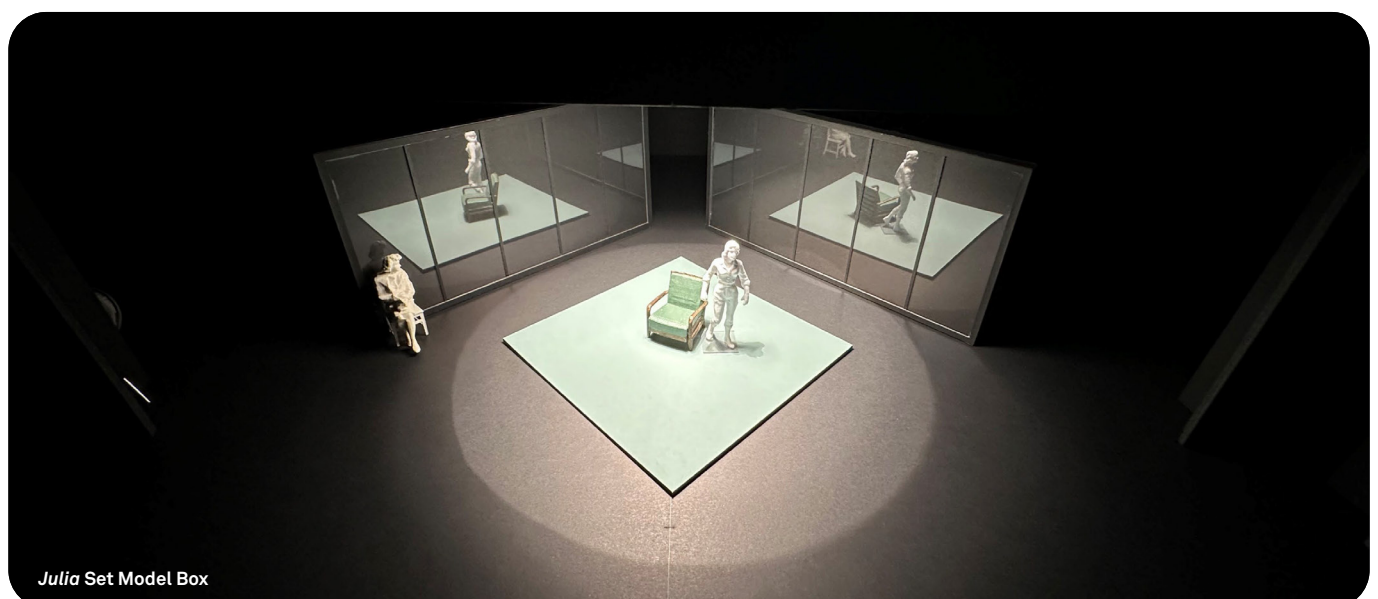
In creating the psychological space of the character, Mulder's set design is a mostly black space, with two 6m x 3m screens upon which images and light are reflected and projected. Made of glass, the screens also allow reflections to be created using Alexander Berlage's lighting design. The reflective nature of the glass screens communicate the experience of intense pressure felt by the character of Julia as she is watched, observed and commented upon by those outside of herself. The actor playing Julia is able to scrutinise herself in the reflections, intensifying the experience of being under surveillance by wider society, unable to escape heightened, mediated images. The character of Julia is also able to see the reflection of the audience, who at the same time watch their reflection as the action progresses. The audience becomes part of the narrative, suggesting our own culpability in the treatment of Australia's first female prime minister.



Julia Rehearsal Room Flowers

The top, or ceiling, of the set has a large tubular shape in it, in which light is thrown down toward the actors in the space. This is used to create an atmosphere, in particular, feelings of isolation and interrogation. The circular shape is suggestive of a megaphone and is a representation of the media. The inner tube of the circular shape, painted black, has also been designed with an uneven, rough texture, suggestive of the ugliness and power of the oppressive weight of political leadership.

The floor of the set has green carpet, symbolising the green of the House of Representatives in Parliament. Further, set against the black floor of the set, the carpet suggests the limits of public space for Gillard, and by extension, women in Australia's political arena.



Julia Set Model Box

THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION

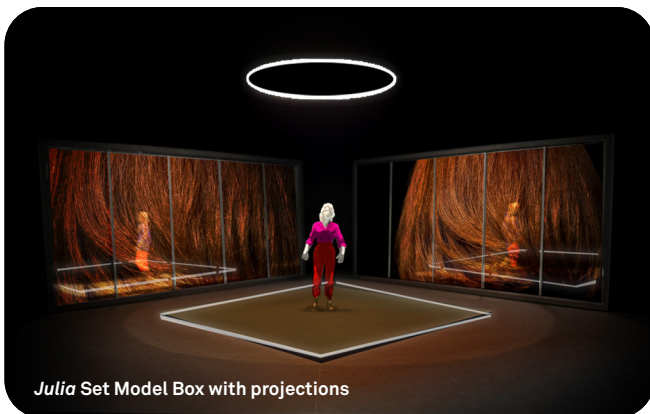


PROP DESIGN

Set and prop Designer Renée Mulder has made the choice to anchor the material realities of Julia's existence through the use of Realistic props. This fusion of the conventions of Expressionist set design, representing the inner workings of the character's mind, with the conventions of the Realistic props located in the appropriate historical context, gives insight into the perceptions of the character as she

navigates her experience of the outside world. These props include swivel chairs to reflect the prime minister's chair in the House of Representatives, a kitchen stool from the 1960s, gardening implements, a house lamp and a ceramic flower pot to which flowers are added to by the 'Young Woman' as the impact of the 'misogyny speech' begins to reverberate throughout Australia and the world.

THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION



VIDEO DESIGN

Julia's video design, by Susie Henderson, makes use of abstracted images, reflections and refractions of light to allow the audience to enter the inner world of the character of Julia and experience an imagined sense of what it might be like to be the first female prime minister of Australia. Read against the Realistic props, the projections encourage the audience to engage empathetically with the creation of Julia's inner reality.

Towards the end of the production, the actor playing the character of Julia makes the choice to add the blue jacket and red hair of Julia Gillard in front of the audience in order to deliver the original speech for the audience. As this

occurs, Henderson's video design incorporates projected images of young people listening to the speech. These images, contrasted with the newly Realistic creation of the character of Gillard, foreshadow the beginning of change as the articulation of Gillard's truth about her experience of misogyny and sexism in parliament. At the same time, the choice to transition the 'Young Woman' to the centre of the performance space, with the character of Julia stage right and the projections of young people behind, suggests that Gillard's 'misogyny speech' has had repercussions beyond its immediate context. The emergence of a tiny flower from the floor of the set during this moment reinforces the motif of the simplicity of small acts of change, particularly those that are occurring for the first time.

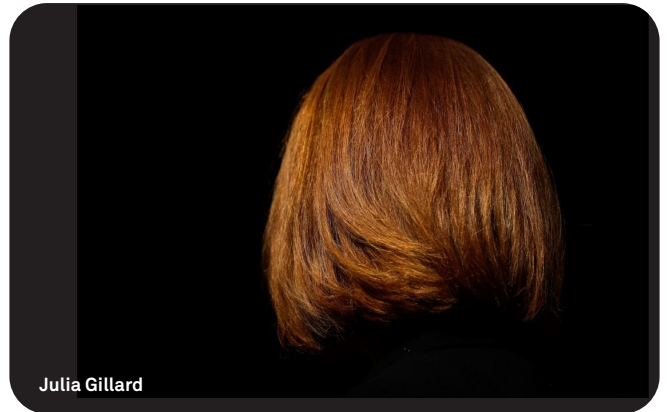
COSTUME DESIGN: RENÉE MULDER

Renée Mulder's costume design vision was to create a contemporary and casual image of the character of Julia. The creation of this character relied on the signature cut, colour and line of Julia Gillard's professional dress. It featured strong colours, fitted jackets and loose trousers, suggestive of Gillard's aesthetic, without slavishly reproducing it.

Similarly, the cut and shape of Gillard's hair is evoked through the styling of the actor's own, without relying on the use of a wig until the final moments of the production. During these moments, the deliberate donning of a red wig by the actor playing the character of Julia allows the audience to experience the original words of the 'misogyny speech' by the woman who conjured them into being.

Reinforced by the the projection of Gillard's iconic red hair onto the glass screens, the power of this image evokes a strong memory of Julia Gillard, reminding the audience of past (and inappropriate) attention to her colouring and style.

The 'Young Woman' is costumed in a manner that suggests her youth, whilst making connections to the character of Julia through the similar colour tones chosen for her costume.



Julia Costume Design

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Rehearsal and production images are courtesy of
Prudence Upton.



Justine Clarke.

Compiled by **Kelly Young**.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Kelly is the Education Manager for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Kelly on kyoung@sydneytheatre.com.au

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