

1—21 MAR
2025

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

SOUTHBANK
THEATRE



THE ROBOT DOG

BY ROSHELLE YEE PUI FONG &
MATTHEW NGAMURARRI HEFFERNAN

DIRECTED BY AMY SOLE

EDUCATION PACK – PART A

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Throughout these notes, look out for these icons for opportunities to learn more:



Activity



Discuss



Read



Video

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the support of the Department of Education, Victoria, through the Strategic Partnerships Program.



Department
of Education

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Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, create and gather. We pay our respects to all First Nations people, their Elders past and present, and their enduring connections to Country, knowledge and stories. As a Company we remain committed to the invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for voice, truth and treaty.

Melbourne Theatre Company

At Melbourne Theatre Company we believe theatre is for everyone. We are Melbourne's home of live storytelling, producing an annual season of plays created for and about the world today.



Southbank Theatre.
Photo: Benjamin Healley

Beyond the stage, we run a range of initiatives that support artist development, champion new writing, invest in future audiences and address underrepresentation across the industry.

OUR VISION

To be recognised as one of the world's preeminent theatre companies, leading the cultural conversation and chosen as a favourite destination for Australians.

OUR PURPOSE

To share remarkable stories that enable people to better understand the world around them.



Melbourne Theatre Company Headquarters Virtual Tour

Walk the halls of Melbourne Theatre Company Headquarters in this virtual tour and explore the spaces where plays are rehearsed, sets are built, costumes are sewn and wigs are created one strand of hair at a time: mtc.com.au/eduhub

About the play



Kristie Nguy and Ari Maza Long in rehearsal

SUMMARY

Bark meets byte in this thrilling tale exploring technology, language and culture in a fast-evolving world. It's 2042 and Australia is more automated than ever before. Janelle, a woman of Cantonese heritage, and her partner Harry, a First Nations man, move back into Janelle's family home after the death of her mother. As they attempt to navigate their work, relationship and job seeking requirements, they find themselves assisted by the quirky AI controlling their home and a robotic therapy dog. Janelle and Harry are quickly swept into a world of augmentations, restrictions and chaos. Does their new hi-tech life help them connect to culture and each other, or does it hinder it? *The Robot Dog* is an intercultural sci-fi comedy with a big, beating heart.

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

This production contains occasional coarse language, mature themes, the use of theatrical haze and smoke. For detailed information about the production's content, visit our production content guide at mtc.com.au/production-content-guide.

DURATION

Approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes with no interval.



Read the programme

Explore the digital programme for this production to read about the cast and creative team, and see more photos from the rehearsal room: mtc.com.au/programmes

Presented in association with

ASIA TOPA

Asia TOPA is a joint initiative of Arts Centre Melbourne and the Sidney Myer Fund, supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria, Playking Foundation and the Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

NEXTSTAGE

Commissioned and developed through Melbourne Theatre Company's NEXT STAGE Writers' Program, with the support of our Playwrights Giving Circle.

Cast and creatives



Jing-Xuan Chan
Dog, Hus, Melanie Chan Wing Lam
陳詠琳



Ari Maza Long
Harry (Tjapaltjarri) Burnett



Kristie Nguy
Janelle Chan Yi Ling 陳依齡



Read their bios

Explore the digital programme to read the biographies of the cast and creatives working on this production:
mtc.com.au/programmes



Roshelle Yee Pui Fong
Writer



Matthew Ngamurarri Heffernan
Writer



Amy Sole
Director



Nathan Burmeister
Set & Costume Designer



BROCKMAN
Lighting Designer



Chun Yin Rainbow Chan
Composer & Sound Designer



Kat Chan
Cultural Design Consultant



Samantha Kwan
Cantonese Consultant



Lavinia Napaltjarri Heffernan
Luritja-Pintupi Language Consultant

Playwriting



Co-writers Matthew Ngamurarri Heffernan and Roshelle Yee Pui Fong
Photo: Blakground Productions



Co-writer Roshelle Yee Pui Fong



Co-writer Matthew Ngamurarri Heffernan

How do two people write a play together? Co-writers Roshelle Yee Pui Fong and Matthew Ngamurarri Heffernan reflect on the evolution of their intercultural sci-fi comedy and what role writers play during the rehearsal process.

In a nutshell, what has been this play's journey from inception to now?

We've been super lucky to realise *The Robot Dog* through Melbourne Theatre Company's writing programs. Roshelle first explored a seed of the idea in an online playwriting course at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (2020). She continued developing it in Melbourne Theatre Company's 'First Stage' program (2021), culminating in a reading for the Emerging Writers' Festival. Soon after, the two of us met online in Creative Australia's 'Digital Fellowship Program'. We discovered Matt made a dog-like rover for his Masters of Applied Cybernetics, and from then, our creative fate was sealed. Matt became Roshelle's mentor, and we collaborated on the work for *Cybec Scenes* (2022), which was commissioned for NEXT STAGE Writers' Program later that year. As our friendship and collaborative relationship grew, the play increasingly reflected aspects of our selves; our humour, various perspectives on themes like AI, grief and racism, and our experiences code-switching, and attempting to connect to culture in the colony. This journey has been one of the most nourishing creative processes we've had ... It's testament to the magic that can happen when artists are supported to collaborate across cultures and disciplines, with adequate time to build thick, meaningful relationships.

How do you co-write a play? What does that look like?

Co-writing a play is a very vulnerable process. Before we began co-writing, we had lots of discussions about values, how much of our personal stories we wanted to commit and share, what our boundaries are, things like that. Our initial creative collaborations were exploratory, ranging from activities like examining circuit boards, to talking about programming, artificial intelligence, biomimicry, science-fiction and our respective stories and cultures. Once we started refining the overarching plot and key elements of our characters, we spent a lot of time sharing food together and exploring how the characters might interact by having discussions (as both human and non-human protagonists) about various topics. This revealed a lot, and some of these chats even made

it into our final script! As for writing tools, we primarily collaborated in Google Docs and Zoom, sometimes dividing up scenes or moments to write individually, and other times writing the larger character scenes in a kind of “free flow” banter style. Overall, there’s no rulebook or correct sequence of steps for co-writing a play! It’s part luck (finding the right person to collaborate with) and the rest is trust.

What do you do during rehearsals? How do you collaborate with the wider team?

Rehearsals have been a joy to be part of, and our brilliant director Amy and the team have been really welcoming and open to our offers. In the first week, we focused on locking off the rehearsal script, in response to hearing table reads. We also had Cantonese and Luritja cultural collaborators in the room, and worked with them and the actors to refine, experiment with and rehearse in-language dialogue. Since then, we have mostly handed the creation process over to the team. But it’s been a real gift witnessing Amy’s processes and they’ve worked collaboratively with actors on script analysis, choosing key moments, exploring subtext and staging memorable images. We’ve loved observing the designers at work too, and chatting to them and Amy about how their choices will shape the page-to-stage process. Sometimes this involved making tweaks to the script, as slight dramaturgical shifts and/or clarity emerged from discussions. And, of course, we’ve played ‘keepy uppy ball’ with the entire team – a ball game that’s sparked fierce collective investment in working as one! A real trademark vibe of the rehearsal process.

What do you hope audiences take away from seeing your play?

We know the audience is familiar with robots, artificial intelligence, and sci-fi and that they will be bringing all these expectations to the play. We hope that *The Robot Dog* gently deconstructs some of these ideas to help our audience further question the real world implications presented in this work. A lot of times when we see the future represented in media, it’s focused on how it might look, all the ways in which life might be different, and rarely do we get to see the granularity of life in the future for Aboriginal and Cantonese people, how we might practice our cultures and how technology might change these ancient ceremonies. We also want our characters to normalise intercultural conversations about topics like racism and grief. We hope the play encourages audiences to consider how they have tough conversations, or put them off, in their own lives. And perhaps they will leave the theatre emboldened to connect more with loved ones and strangers, even if it might be uncomfortable.



Contemporary drama practices

Discuss what this interview tells you about the process of writing the script for this play. What role have other artists, like actors and directors, played in its development?



Writing the play



Co-writers Roshelle Yee Pui Fong and Matthew Ngamurarri Heffernan

Hear more from the co-writers Roshelle Yee Pui Fong and Matthew Ngamurarri Heffernan in this video interview at mtc.com.au/eduhub

‘We also want our characters to normalise intercultural conversations about topics like racism and grief.’

**ROSHELLE YEE PUI FONG AND
MATTHEW NGAMURARRI HEFFERNAN
CO-WRITERS**

Artificial intelligence



Jing-Xuan Chan in rehearsal

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to the field of computer science that focuses on creating machines or systems capable of performing tasks that would typically require human intelligence. These tasks can include problem-solving, learning, reasoning, understanding natural language, recognising patterns, and making decisions.

AI uses various techniques like machine learning (where algorithms improve over time with exposure to data), deep learning (which uses neural networks to process large amounts of data), and natural language processing (for understanding and generating human language).

Benefits of AI

AI has arguably improved life in various ways, including healthcare (disease detection and robotic surgeries), transportation (self-driving cars and smart traffic systems), personal assistants (Siri, Alexa, and Google Assistant manage schedules, control smart homes and answer questions), customer service (chatbots and virtual assistants enhance customer support) and entertainment (recommendation systems in platforms like Netflix and Spotify provide personalised content suggestions).

AI's evolution

AI has been developing since the 1950s, but recent advances in computing power and the availability of big data has progressed AI rapidly, particularly in areas like deep learning and natural language processing. AI systems have become an integral part of many industries, with notable breakthroughs in speech recognition, computer vision, and autonomous vehicles.



Context and technology

Make more connections between this play and the real world (like robotic pets in aged care, smart homes in film, and the environmental impact of AI) by exploring the further reading links in our interactive pre-show resource at mtc.com.au/eduhub



Kristie Nguy in rehearsal

‘We know the audience is familiar with robots, artificial intelligence, and sci-fi and that they will be bringing all these expectations to the play. We hope that *The Robot Dog* gently deconstructs some of these ideas to help our audience further question the real world implications presented in this work.’

**ROSHELLE YEE PUI FONG AND
MATTHEW NGAMURARRI HEFFERNAN
CO-WRITERS**

Risks to our future

AI can be dangerous in several ways. AI already has a significant environmental impact, including water usage, particularly due to the energy consumption. AI can reinforce existing biases, leading to unfair outcomes in areas like hiring or law enforcement. Automation powered by AI may also displace workers, causing economic disruption. AI technologies can enable mass surveillance, raising privacy concerns. The development of autonomous weapons introduces ethical issues and the potential for misuse. Additionally, it can be difficult to assign responsibility for decisions made by AI systems, complicating accountability. Lastly, if AI becomes super-intelligent, there's a risk that it could pose existential threats if its goals are not aligned with human values. These risks highlight the need for careful regulation and ethical management of AI.

Written by ChatGPT

Characters



Kristie Nguy in rehearsal

JANELLE CHAN YI LING 陳依齡

Janelle Chan Yi Ling is a 27-year-old Cantonese multidisciplinary human who actor Kristie Nguy describes as 'feeling a bit stuck and lost in life. She is on a journey of self-discovery ... dealing with the loss of her mother, which leads her to reconnect with her culture. She is driven by love and her actions throughout the play stem from a deep love for those around her, even when it might not seem that way.'



Ari Maza Long in rehearsal

HARRY (TJAPALTJARRI) BURNETT

Harry is a 25-year-old Indigenous Engineer and is Janelle's boyfriend. Actor Ari Maza Long says Harry is 'trying to juggle the complications of living as a Blackfulla in the modern western world. His ultimate goal is to be there for his loving partner Janelle Chan Yi Ling, but through this comes the big question: how can one be there for someone when they can't even fully be there for themselves?'



Jing-Xuan Chan in rehearsal

MELANIE CHAN WING LAM 陳詠琳

Melanie Chan Wing Lam is Janelle's mother, a virtual ghost and was 54 years old when she died/at her death. Actor Jing-Xuan Chan says, 'the character of Wing Lam has passed but her presence, spirit and memory are strong in her home. She has had struggles in her life, and we see her watching over Janelle, wishing for her daughter to know and feel the love she has for her that she may not have been fully able to express while she was alive.'



The rehearsal robot dog

DOG

Dog is a 'Domestic O-series Guidebot' created by the fictional Willow Bark Robotics. Actor Jing-Xuan Chan (who voices and operates Dog) says, 'Dog is a therapy bot and is there as a support and companion to his human, Wing Lam. He is driven by his wish to help the humans in his life. As Dog learns and evolves as a result of his interactions with Harry, Janelle and Wing Lam, he begins to question how effectively AI serves humanity.' Pictured here is the rehearsal robot.



Kristie Nguy and Ari Maza Long in rehearsal

HUS

Hus is an omnipresent smart-house interface created in Sweden. Actor Jing-Xuan Chan (who provides the voice of Hus) says, 'Hus is very task oriented and doesn't deviate from what he's been programmed to do. He spends the play trying to ensure Janelle and Harry stay on track with their task of finding jobs and packing up Wing Lam's home. He also monitors Dog to make sure he is facilitating this.' Pictured here are Janelle and Harry being scanned by Hus.

Directing



Director Amy Sole



Director Amy Sole

AMY SOLE

Amy Sole is a proud Wiradjuri/Worimi person. Amy is an award-winning playwright, director, actor, dramaturg and advocate. They are Creative Associate at ILBIJERRI Theatre Company and a graduate of MFA (Directing) at NIDA and hold a Master of Theatre (Playwriting) from VCA. Recent directorial works for theatre include *Emu in the Sun*, part of *Blak in the Room* with Melbourne Theatre Company, *Scar Trees*, *Whitefella Yella Tree* (ILBIJERRI Theatre Company); *Forgetting Tim Minchin* (25a, Downstairs Belvoir); *Benched* (Darlinghurst Theatre Company) and *Burning* (NIDA), which they also co-wrote. Amy regularly directs and dramaturgs developments of new works, some include Phoebe Grainer's *Sugarcane* for the Queensland Premier's Drama Award and Dylan Ven Den Berg's *waybackwhen* at Darlinghurst Theatre Company and *Big Name No Blankets* at ILBIJERRI Theatre Company. They have worked as assistant director on *God's Country* (NIDA, 2022), *Metamorphoses* (NIDA, 2021), and *RENT* (Sydney Opera House, 2021). They are a part of Melbourne Theatre Company's Artistic Associate Advisory Council, and a sitting Co-Chair of the Equity Diversity Committee.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

By Amy Sole

Yamandhu marang,

"When we forget our ancestors, we become a brook without a source, a tree without a root."

Truer words have never been spoken. This proverb beautifully captures what *The Robot Dog* asks us to sit with – our connection to ourselves, to our ancestors, and to each other. Because whether you're an AI cutie with a fluffy tail, an institutionalized HUS, or something in between, you have a story, a connection and a responsibility. As do we all.

So, in 2042, who will we be? What will have changed? What have we learned? What have we forgotten? And what are we still refusing to learn? The future is whatever we imagine it to be. A dream, a nightmare, or just a slightly glitchy version of now?



Initial Design Phase



Director Amy Sole and Set & Costume Designer Nathan Burmeister

Hear more from Director Amy Sole and Set & Costume Designer Nathan Burmeister about their early design concepts at mtc.com.au/eduhub



Jing-Xuan Chan, Amy Sole and Ari Maza Long in rehearsal

‘The best theatre doesn’t just tell a story – it wrestles with something real.’

**AMY SOLE
DIRECTOR**

Being part of this work has been a joy and a deep reckoning – stepping into a world shaped by two cultures that are not my own and learning from them. From the ritual of 生忌 Saang1 Gei6 to the way Luritja is spoken with the whole body and intonation, I’ve been reminded that language and culture don’t just sit still; they move, breathe, and insist on being felt.

The best theatre doesn’t just tell a story – it wrestles with something real. It surprises us, drags us under, and spits us back out, changed. *The Robot Dog* does all of that and more. And look, the real question here – if AI dogs are part of our future, do they still get the zoomies? Do they dream of electric bones? (I’d like to think so).

Set design



Nathan Burmeister in rehearsal



Set & Costume Designer Nathan Burmeister



Cultural Design Consultant Kat Chan

The set design for *The Robot Dog* includes specific details in response to the script. In this Q&A, Set & Costume Designer Nathan Burmeister and Cultural Design Consultant Kat Chan explain how symbolism in the design enhances the storytelling.

What is the world of this play? What big ideas are you exploring in the design?

Nathan: When looking at the 'world' of the play, we consider two concurrent ideas: 'what is the context the characters are in' and 'what images are we presenting on stage'. The contexts indicated from the script and the images we choose to make on stage may be aligned (i.e. the story is set in a living room so we put a living room on stage), but they can also be divergent from each other.

The world we are presenting on stage is an oversized altar, an exaggerated playing space that connects more to the themes of grief, ritual, death, and connection to culture than it does to time and place. This altar is the spiritual landing pad for the storytelling to occur. A space for these fairly intense themes to play out and for the characters to find resolutions. The world also has the capacity to become the visual representation of a key line from the text: To forget one's ancestors is to be a brook without a source, a tree without roots.

Kat, what's your role as Cultural Design Consultant?

Kat: As the Cultural Design Consultant on *The Robot Dog* my role has been a discovery with the creative team to see how I can support their design responses to the script and examine what cultural authenticity looks like in the world they're creating. The main conversations have been with the set and costume designer, Nathan Burmeister and director, Amy Sole. I think of this role as a resource for the designer/team if they have any questions or want to check in about specific Chinese cultural practices and how it could show up in design.

How have you worked with Nathan on a particular aspect of the set design?

Kat: The conversations we've had about set design have been quite all-encompassing, from use of space, aesthetics and materials that might feel true to a second-generation Chinese home in Australia. A specific aspect of the set design that we've had the most ongoing discussions about has been the home altar and what it needs to be culturally appropriate.

'This altar is the spiritual landing pad for the storytelling to occur. A space for these fairly intense themes to play out and for the characters to find resolutions.'

**NATHAN BURMEISTER
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER**

What were your inspirations and design references for the set?

Nathan: We explored many different variations of the set. Some designs included very futuristic/sci-fi elements, some designs were referencing interior layouts of the apartment, and some were abstract representations of the world. The images of different Guan Yin altars in people's houses were most exciting for us and for the story. I looked at many traditional Chinese woodworking methods and furniture to create a library of textures and shapes that could be formed into the playing space.

Once we had the shell of the space, we were able to bring in the language of the blue/red/white bags. These objects could be easily manipulated to create different shapes on stage and a great tool for narrowing in on the narrative of objects connecting to memory – an important narrative for Janelle throughout the play.



Discuss Guan Yin statue

After reading this Q&A, discuss how the Guan Yin statue might demonstrate application of symbol in the production.



Lighting Designer BROCKMAN, Set & Costume Designer Nathan Burmeister, Director Amy Sole and Stage Manager Annah Jacobs in rehearsal

‘The script mentions there is a statue of Guan Yin on the altar and I think it is such an anchor to the story in terms of what it symbolises.’

KAT CHAN
CULTURAL DESIGN CONSULTANT

There are many examples of symbolism in this production and design. Can you tell us more about one and why it's important in this story?

Kat: The script mentions there is a statue of Guan Yin on the altar and I think it is such an anchor to the story in terms of what it symbolises (Guan Yin is the goddess of mercy, compassion and maternal love) – having her centre stage of the show represents the heritage and mother figure Janelle has been repressing and the importance of ancestors in Chinese religious and cultural practices.

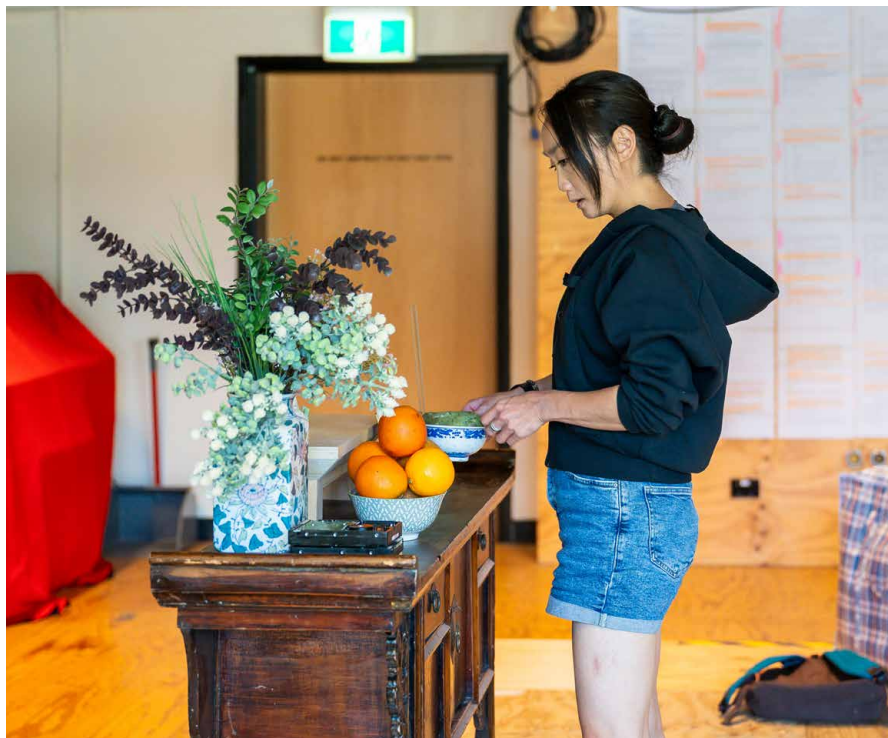
How does the Cultural Design Consultant contribute to the storytelling in this production?

Kat: As the Cultural Design Consultant, I think of my role as supporting the designer to make choices that I think feel true to the experiences of Chinese diaspora in Australia, specifically first or second-generation. This is so audience members will see a production that feels authentic and also to help the Chinese community feel represented on the stage in a respectful way.

How have you worked together on a particular aspect of the set?

Nathan: Working with Kat Chan to develop specific elements of the design was a crucial step in the process, and specifically in designing and realising the altar cabinet. There were many conversations about what would be on an altar, how these would be displayed, what the meaning is of a Guan Yin altar, and the texture and scenic finish of the altar. The fretwork that is on the doors of the cabinet was directly inspired by a specific piece of furniture Kat referenced during our conversations. This fretwork design was also pulled into the edge of the stage as well, connecting the stage and the altar to an authentic reference. It was both small specific details and insights, as well as large broader dramaturgical conversations that Kat and I had regarding the design.

Designing the world of a play that is outside of my specific lived experience is a skill that designers need. It's up to us to engage in rigorous research and conversations to make sure the design is faithful to the play, faithful to the creators of the work, and faithful to the characters. The relationship with Kat Chan was part of the rigour.



What are some examples of symbol within your set design?

Nathan: The most obvious and often used symbol in the performance is the movement and shapes that the blue/red/white bags make throughout the show. The way these bags are treated by Janelle and Harry are analogous to where they are in dealing with the trauma they have come to face. Janelle will surround herself with the bags and literally plant herself on them in defiance of the task. Harry stacks them in a pile in an effort to clean, overstepping the boundary set up for him and tries to take control of the situation. The bags also transform and become nonliteral in their representation of objects, transforming into the couch as an example.

Are there any tricks/reveals/technologies included in your set design?

Nathan: It was very tempting to fill the set with a range of techy theatre trickery. Being set in the future, we would expect the set to be technologically magic. We decided to resist that urge, and let the costumes, dialogue, characters, and props bring us into the future instead. This meant we had to focus on more classic theatre tricks. Such as embedded LED light strips in the fascia to 'float' the stage, LED lights that emit from the cabinet, and haze machines. These were choices all made in conversation with the lighting designer, BROCKMAN.



Application of symbol

Identify three examples of application of symbol in the set design.

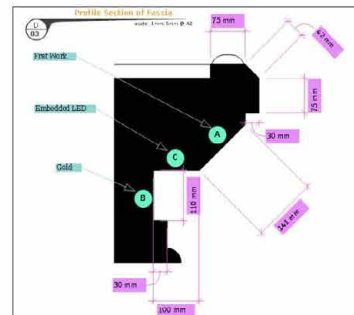
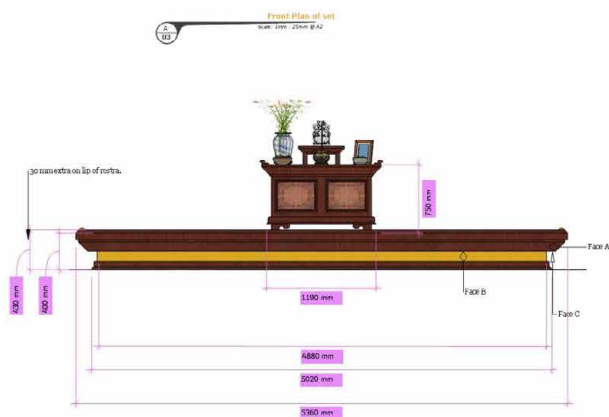


Contemporary drama practices

Discuss how the design and execution of the set demonstrates contemporary drama practices.

'The most obvious and often used symbol in the performance is the movement and shapes that the blue/red/white bags make throughout the show.'

NATHAN BURMEISTER
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER



- NOTES**
- Final design delivery. Alterations and confirmations available through discussion.
 - Rostrum solid red lacquer material to be primarily measured as heavily lacquered, deep red, solid rostrum wood. Reference provided.
 - More details will be added to the underside of the rostrum (particularly flow A) in the form of first work and detailed construction. These details to be shown in consultation with production and budget.
 - Flow B is a solid red lacquer with pattern. Reference provided.
 - LED strip lighting embedded in the underside of the rostrum, flow C. This is ultimately a TBD in consultation with LX design.
 - Cabinet specifics provided on a further page.



McLaurin Theatre Company
The Lifford
44-50 Market Boulevard

VISIONARY
ACTY 2020

SET AND COSTUME DESIGN
Nathan Burmeister

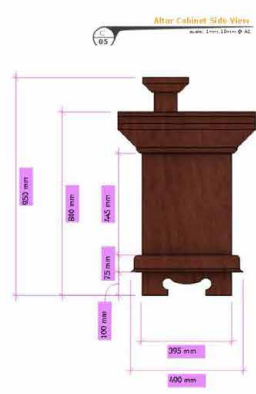
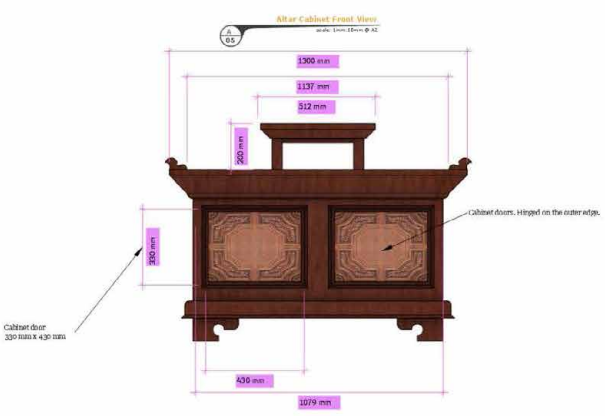
PROJECT
"The Robot Dog"
by Rachelle Feng and
Matthew Squarum Hoffman

DESIGNED BY
Nathan Burmeister

DATE
Final Design Presentation:
1/3/2025

DESCRIPTION
Front, Isometric, and Top Plan of set,
Isolated from views.

A.o.3



NOTES

- Final Design. Alterations and confirmations available through discussion.
- A cabinet in the same finish as the set flooring used as the altar.
- First work added on cabinet doors to be determined.
- Alternate: props for the altar are stored inside the cabinet. Possible need for a single shelf inside.
- Handles to be found from stock.
- Widths and thicknesses of details can be altered to suit stock timber.
- Inserted set LX placement and use to be determined with Lighting Designer.
- Preps to go on top of altar:
 - Guan Yin Statue
 - Bowl of Oranges (swapped out with aged version in the show)
 - Bowl of Rice (swapped out with aged version in the show)
 - Native flower bouquet in vase (swapped out with aged version in the show)
 - Framed portrait
 - Long incense and burner
- Prep specifics to be designed in consultation with Kat Chen.

NOTES

- Aged lacquered red mahogany
- Natural wood and patina around edges and corners.
- Same treatment should be stage floor and rostrum facade details.



McLaurin Theatre Company
The Lifford
44-50 Market Boulevard

VISIONARY
ACTY 2020

SET AND COSTUME DESIGN
Nathan Burmeister

PROJECT
"The Robot Dog"
by Rachelle Feng and
Matthew Squarum Hoffman

DESIGNED BY
Nathan Burmeister

DATE
Final Design Presentation:
1/3/2025

DESCRIPTION
Side, Front, right, and isometric
views.

A.o.4

Performance styles



Kristie Nguy and Ari Maza Long in rehearsal

The Robot Dog is presented in an eclectic performance style with aspects of what you might call naturalism (two actors each play one human character) as well as **puppetry** (the dog is a tricked-up remote-control tank operated by an actor), **ritual** (生忌 saang1gei6, honouring ancestors on their birthday) and **magic realism** (the presence of Melanie Chan Wing Lam's ghost).

In terms of performance style and design you'll see **retrofuturism** and **sci-fi** elements, as well as the notion that theatre is **ceremony**. This play is also multi-lingual with **English, Cantonese, Aboriginal English, Pintupi-Luritja** and **Mandarin** (briefly) spoken. The show includes aspects of First Nations, Anangu and Chinese culture and theatre-making.



Discuss style

Identify moments in the script where you expect to see aspects of performance styles.



Script notes



Ari Maza Long, Jing-Xuan Chan and Kristie Nguy

Hear from the cast as they discuss an early scene from the play in this video at mtc.com.au/eduhub

Dramatic elements

The following questions are intended to help you consider how *The Robot Dog* might be interpreted onstage through the lens of VCE Drama. Refresh your memory of the definitions with our dramatic elements flashcards at mtc.com.au/eduhub.

CLIMAX

Make predictions for how design production areas might support a moment of climax.

Which moments in the script do you identify as potential moments of climax? How might various production areas enhance these moments?

CONFLICT

Between which characters do you expect to see conflict?

How might Harry or Janelle demonstrate internal conflict?

CONTRAST

How might actor Jing-Xuan Chan manipulate contrast to differentiate between her characters of Dog and Hus?

What are some examples of contrast within the design aspects of the production that you're expecting to see?

MOOD

Identify two moments in the script where you expect to see different moods.

How might design production areas enhance mood in these moments?

RHYTHM

How might rhythm be manipulated in scenes where Hus is speaking?

Annotate your script with predictions about rhythm, based on the length of sentences or paragraphs.

SOUND

What might parts of the set sound like when the performers interact with it, e.g. the bags?

How might the sounds of living in 2042 be applied in this performance by the actors?

SPACE

What opportunities does the set offer for the performers to vary levels, proximity and depth?

In what ways is the altar set design symbolic?

TENSION

How might tension be created through stillness and silence?

Identify one moment in the script where tension will be broken for comic effect.



Download Part B

After you've seen *The Robot Dog*, download Part B of this Education Pack to read more from the cast and creative team, see photos from the production, and respond to analysis questions: mtc.com.au/eduhub



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