



The Linbury Prize Experience From the inside...

Ana Ines Jabares Pita

After an intense first month on the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama MA Scenography course in London, a couple of years ago now... I noticed a paper stack next to the design studio door. It said: 'Linbury Prize for Stage Design 2011' and below there were the photos of two 'Finalists'. I couldn't help being curious about this 'Linbury Prize thing', so as soon as I arrived home I Googled it.

My Linbury experience started at that precise moment; just one month after I arrived in London. It was a prize for theatre designers, the only one in the UK, according to the website, and I can affirm that it is unique in Europe. Definitely, I couldn't miss this opportunity to be involved in that adventure.

Back then, I had the chance to go and see the Linbury Prize exhibition at the National Theatre. It was the first theatre design exhibition I had ever seen in my life; all those black holes on the walls with micro-worlds built inside, full of tiny figures and objects. I couldn't believe that all those people from my generation were exhibiting at the National Theatre. What an amazing opportunity to showcase their work!

This exhibition was going to happen again in two years and there was only one chance for me to apply. I tried to get the most from my Masters course and after I graduated in 2012, I worked on over 20 projects both assisting and designing. I wanted (as I still

do), to experience space & design in all possible contexts: opera, theatre, dance, film, fashion, events and exhibitions. It was really useful for my portfolio and increased my practical experience. Working with professional designers helped me to realise how hard it was to become a theatre designer and the difficulties that would be faced in 'real life' after finishing school.

Later in the year, the Linbury Prize opened to applications. Around two months before the closing date, there were some 'Portfolio Advice Days' held all over the UK. I had the chance to go to the Royal Opera House, where three professionals from the theatre and film industry gave me advice about how I could improve my portfolio. I started to prepare my portfolio a month before the 'Advice Day' to make it look as good as possible. On the day at the ROH I had the chance to meet some colleagues who I would meet again later in the Linbury selection.

After I submitted my application, I was told that I had been selected for the first interview. I had to defend my work in front of the 3 judges. They were Es Devlin, John Macfarlane and Christopher Oram, some of the most well respected designers in the country. A couple of really intense weeks were about to start. I felt a mixture of joy and nerves. When I arrived for the interviews I was shaking like a jelly, but when I started to talk to them and to justify my work I felt calm and confident. They were there to help us to improve and give us useful advice. Just having the chance

to meet them was a valuable experience. I enjoyed talking to all of them. It was really exciting to hear what all of them had to say about our work and about us as designers. I learnt a lot from that day.

I know this might sound clichéd, but the best advice I was given before the interview was: 'Be yourself'. And actually it is true, it is the best you can be.

A week after the first interview there was another, this time with less than half of the applicants. This second round of interviews was with the artistic directors from the commissioning companies, English Touring Opera, National Theatre of Scotland, Nottingham Playhouse and Scottish Dance Theatre (in association with V&A Dundee). We had to defend our work in 10 minutes with each company and there was no break in between each interview. It was a challenging moment of the process and an interesting experience to have.

After this interview with the artistic directors and the one before with designers, I could compare both approaches. There were some differences between talking to a director and talking to a designer. I felt that whereas the directors were more pragmatic, the designers were appreciative of the concept, creativity and the process.

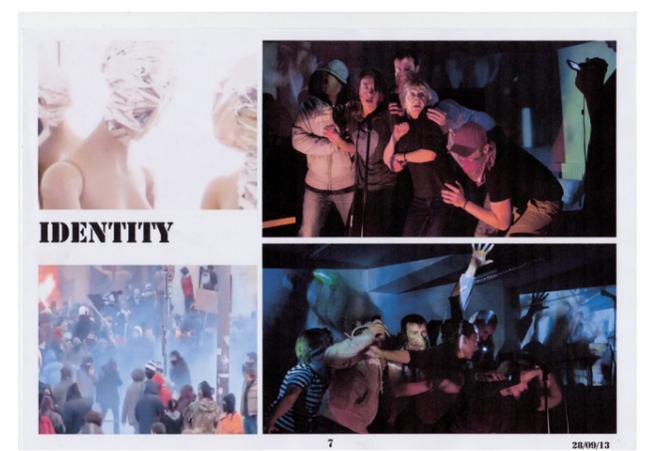
During the entire Linbury experience I had the chance to meet many other designers in the same situation as me. It was surprising to discover how nice it was to talk to people that were sharing similar experiences. Just through talking you can gain a great deal of knowledge.

After this last interview, twelve finalists were announced; three candidates for each commissioning company. Each group of three had to follow a brief given by their company. At the beginning I thought that the three designs produced by each group were going to be similar, but I was wrong. It is interesting to see how from having the same starting point we can imagine totally different things.

Along with two more candidates I was selected to design a production for the National Theatre of Scotland (NTS), *The Driver's Seat* a novel by Muriel Spark. The creative process was incredibly enriching. We had three days of workshops with the director and actors, which were very inspiring to me. After that, we had another individual workshop with a video designer to devise some of the possible projections and video images that might appear in our final designs. This was a privileged process, often in real life you have to finish the design before starting to work with actors but in this case it was simultaneous.

I spent around one month just working by myself in my 'studio' (actually a small bedroom). In fact, I strongly believe that we all deserved a prize just for making those huge models in our tiny bedrooms. This part of the process is often quite lonely. Luckily each group of three was assigned a mentor. In the case of NTS the mentor was Vicki Mortimer. It was a privilege to spend two hours just talking to her about my approach, model-making tips and any doubts that I had at that point. She was tremendously helpful. I think it is really important to talk about your ideas and work with different people, they might see things that you couldn't even imagine.

One of the key parts of our brief was that we were invited to use live-feed camera video in our designs. *The Driver's Seat* is



a complex novel written by Muriel Spark. The main concepts considered in my design were Identity and Control.

Lise, the protagonist, has lived a grey and monotonous life. She has decided to take control of her own fate and become someone else in a colourful and delirious fantasy. The live-feed camera and sound assume control of the audience's minds. Using unconventional points of view and close-ups to highlight intimate moments between characters, we are able to understand more about Lise and her motivations. These sections may provide the audience with clues to the narrative... or deceive them. Meanwhile Lise's identity is disappearing, the police are trying to reconstruct it through witnesses' information and a big diagram on the wall. All the characters are wearing an ID except Lise. Different layers of projections and sound are present; creating a complex pattern that is building up in intensity, achieving its highest peak during the riot scene.

Apart from designing for a performance, we had to curate our stands for the exhibition. So we had to carefully choose the things we wanted the 'world' to see. This was the only chance we were going to have to show our work in this way. Pamela Howard made sure we realised how important this exhibition was. We were unlikely to have any more chances like this in our lives. This was the best opportunity we could have to show our work.

I didn't have the chance to meet all of my Linbury colleagues till the day of the exhibition installation. Although, we hadn't met previously the fact of that we all were sharing the same experience made me feel like I was part of something big and that I had known them forever. All of them were brilliant designers and what I loved most about the exhibition was the variety of styles and techniques there were in the designs and exhibits.

During the exhibition period there were a couple of exciting events. *The Linbury Prize for Stage Design: Getting Started* was a discussion with past Linbury winners and finalists about how the Linbury Prize affected their careers. Whether they were winners or finalists the Linbury exhibition opened a lot of doors for them. They talked as well, about the early stages of developing their work in stage design. The event was chaired by Pamela Howard and it was opened to the public. Many design students and professionals attended and it was a really encouraging talk.

Another event that the finalists took part in was the 'Marriage Bureau'. It consisted of meeting 36 directors in one morning. It was just great! It worked really well for all of us designers. I might even get married to some of them! Each of the designers were in front of their stands and the directors in groups of three asked us questions about our work and talked about theirs. Every ten minutes the directors changed their position to the next designer. It is amazing how in such a short period of time you can know if the person with who you are talking will be a nice collaborator or not.

The day after the 'Marriage Bureau' we had the 'Judging Day'. This was the day that we had all been thinking about since we applied for the Linbury Prize. Some of the questions that came to my mind the night before were: What am I going to say? How can I defend my work? Are there any weak points in my design?... Argh PANIC! PANIC! (I don't know how but that night I managed to sleep very well, I think that helped).

The judging day was THE DAY. The three designers selected by the English Touring Opera were the first group of the day. The

National Theatre of Scotland was second. The three of us stood in front of our models, as each member of the jury: Christopher Oram, Es Devlin and John Macfarlane, came to speak to each of us individually for 15 min. So in 45 minutes we had to explain our design approaches three times and to answer some questions (answering questions was the scariest part). Fortunately, the day before, with the 36 directors, we had the chance to 'practise' our answers for some of the repeated questions. The role of the jury was to help the director to choose a designer in case they weren't sure what decision to make and to select the overall winner.

Once we all finished talking to the jury, we had an individual thirty minute meeting with the artistic director of the company we had been designing for. It might seem enough time but it wasn't at all. Imagine all the things you want to tell to your director after a month of working on a project that you are expecting him to love. Well not just love, because I am sure he loved all of our proposals. The design needed to have that little something that was going to make him choose that one instead of the other two.

That same evening the winners were announced and it was afterwards that the jury told me what the little something was that had made the difference. They told me that it wasn't just because it was a beautiful design but that they could see that I had considered every detail of the performance and had all aspects of the performance in my mind.

The Linbury Prize has already opened for me a lot of exciting doors, for which I am really grateful. Hopefully this is the starting point of a number of new adventures.

I would strongly recommend that all graduates apply. This is a unique experience from beginning to the end. Even if you do not get to the exhibition, just having the chance to meet such an interesting group of people makes it worthwhile.

The whole Linbury experience has been an enriching process. It has helped me in many ways; to be more confident about my work and accept bad feedback as something positive. It has helped me to learn how to deal with different situations; from how to prepare a professional portfolio to how to deal with professional theatre companies.

Meeting all my future colleagues has been a wonderful experience. The idea of having a network of brilliant designers that can support each other in this, sometimes lonely, career is just great.

The Linbury Prize organisation did an excellent job of taking care of all of us; they considered every small detail. Having this platform to support young designers is a privilege. I wish there were similar platforms elsewhere in Europe but unfortunately it is not the case. We have to be grateful to Anya and John Sainsbury for supporting emerging designers in this country.

All the people involved in this Linbury project have been very kind in many ways, but especially with their time. They gave a lot of their time to help us to achieve our dreams, and that is remarkably generous.

This is the first year that the exhibition was shown twice. From 22nd February to 1st March the Linbury Exhibition was shown in Dundee, Scotland.

Ana Ines Jabares Pita, Overall 2013 Linbury Prize Winner



Silence at the Lighthouse

Tereza Moravcová

A desert island, nineteen people, four days. This isn't the script for a disaster movie, but a scenography workshop for students entitled SpaceLab: LIGHTHOUSE, organized by the Norwegian Theatre Academy/Ostfold University College and Prague Quadrennial as a part of the SharedSpace: Music Weather Politics project.

'The space in which we spent three days was so small that walking from front to back, from left to right, and once all the way around did not take more than five minutes,' is how Anna Krtičková, a Czech student at Prague's DAMU, described her first impressions of Homlungen Fyr, near Fredrikstad, Norway.

The unusual meeting of three teachers with sixteen students from around the world took place from 3 to 6 December of last year, and was led by renowned scenographer and professor Serge von Arx. The subject of the workshop, which provided a unique opportunity to think and practice scenography in the most unusual setting, was 'Music Weather Politics' – themes that from 18 to 28 June 2015 will resonate at the next Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space.

Krtičková said 'we were looking for interesting ideas and materials for ourselves. Over two days, we were supposed to create a work of our choosing, ideally in pairs (a student from the Norwegian

academy plus one student from a foreign school). Our source inspiration and our material were the island and lighthouse, and our only limitation was time. No matter whether we worked on an installation, performance, or something completely different, the entire process should take no longer than the journey from the harbour to the island.' Khiya James, a student at London's Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, shared her excitement, adding: 'To get ideas moving, we were all told to spend an hour in silence on the island, to really see as much as we could and after this we spent a couple of days exploring and developing our ideas to form either an installation, performance, discussion or otherwise.'

At the end of their stay, the students created several interesting works of land art, short happenings and performances inside and outside of the lighthouse. Photographs from the workshop show that they were more than successful.

Held in the frame of SharedSpace project, this event belongs to the SpaceLab – an essential educational platform designed to deepen the knowledge and practice of scenography beyond usual school curriculum and to create the meeting point for students with top professionals. The main goal of the project is to initiate the international experiential interaction and personal exchange between theatre and visual academies, and to create the specific educational platform as a part of the Prague Quadrennial which will be held June 18 – 28, 2015.

Tereza Moravcová

Tereza Moravcová is a journalist, translator, teacher. She studied film studies at Prague's Charles University and at the Sorbonne in Paris. She is a film, theatre, and art critic.