



**Artistic Director
Justin Audibert**



**Lily Arnold (Set/
Costume Designer)**

Justin: The production is set in the Minerva which is a 323-seat theatre on all three sides and the beautiful thing about doing this play here is that you can move the show really quickly, and actually that's vital with what I think about this version of the play. We really want to create that sense of it being a political thriller, and the danger that's within a kind of society in political turmoil, in a state of discontent, crumbling, decaying, and with young people being let down. This sense, that, Old Ghost Hamlet, has let decay and rot set into society and there's a power vacuum within it.

What is so brilliant about the Minerva is you can move things quickly in the space. That's what Lily (Arnold – Designer) and I were thinking about really, when we were working through the design.

With that in mind, we put in two classic kind of vomitorium entrances, but we've also put in loads of small locations where people can be hidden, because it feels to me that when Shakespeare was writing this play, in 1599, it was towards the end of Elizabeth I's reign, and actually, I think this infuses the play, a sense of a society in decline, lots of paranoia, lots of suspicion and lots of people spying. Although we're not setting our play in the Elizabethan court, we want that sense, that feeling of danger, paranoia, spying, and suspicion should be rife throughout it, and that felt really important and really thrilling to explore.

Lily: Thinking about the Minerva and that sense of this space being a kind of pressure cooker once an audience is in, you get this real intensity, and



so I was thinking about how we can achieve that, but also create enough space for the rest of the population of the story to have places to be, which isn't easy in the space with 16 cast members.

So that was the starting point, working out what that architecture could be to enable us to have that playground where we can blur that boundary between being on the stage and off the stage, and to create a fluidity to everything as well.

One of the first issues that Justin and I spoke about was the logistics of this space and the scale of this play. We looked at Kronberg Castle, notionally where Shakespeare set this story, and there's a kind of internal courtyard surrounded by the origins of the castle, and then beyond that, the sea. So, there's this feeling of a of dam, like battlements that are held up against the encroaching nature, also the encroaching civilisation.

Justin: If you look at where Denmark is, you are surrounded by other countries, other states, other nations, and there was something about that idea that the land itself, and that society, is under threat, externally and under pressure internally. It feels like that should be the thrust of our production. It's the rottenness within and the pushing on it from without as well.

Lily: In terms of what those forces are; so, there's both the forces of the landscape and we talked a lot about climate change and this idea of erosion and weather systems happening to this place. So, as Justin said, there's that external pressure on everything that's trying to unfold and then there's also the internal pressures of the struggles between the old and the young. And all these forces, acting upon each other, and I kept finding images giving this sense of one force and another force sitting together and of supporting each other, but also ultimately leading to a kind of tension.

And because we talked so much about this idea of decay and erosion and that things are crumbling, we had this idea that in the centre of our space, we have this big torrent of earth. And it's abstracted, though previous iterations where it was coming from a wall that was decayed, or the sense of it spilling in from a place beyond. But it's now become a bit more of an abstracted mound of earth. Probably there'll be more of a connection with the younger characters, particularly Hamlet and Ophelia, with the raw earth of nature and the sense that they have more of a connection to that, and with Claudius and Gertrude, the mound is like the elephant in the room.

Justin: It's like the court's been declining, but everyone's a bit like, "It's all fine." Like the decay is creeping in, really clawing its way into the very fabric, but we're going to put our nice frocks on and our fancy clothes and we're going to pretend that everything's fine, and there's a lot of that with leadership. The pomp and the show that happens with pageantry, but we want to show that it's definitely not all that pageantry.



Lily: So, there is a place that can be excavated in the mound so we can access the coffin and then the rest of the mound is a walkable on structure and you can actually climb all the way up to our central row, upper level space. This will also be Gertrude's bedchamber, so will double as the lookout battlements for the opening scene and for other scenes where the ghost of Old Hamlet is seen, then also becomes Gertrude's bedroom and the place where Claudius is slaughtered.

On the front of this room there are curtains that will track all the way round and back so we can completely open that space out and then we can also completely close it up, and these will have a translucency to them. So, this allows the opportunity to play with transparency and shadowy things happening behind there as well. At the back of the upstairs space, there's a back wall and Ryan Day, the Lighting Designer, is going to put a row of lights, like a blind row of lights there, to create a horizon line of light. We've talked a lot about elemental aspects as well; we talked about light and this circular form that keeps reappearing as well in the show.

We have this circular table, which is our main court table / wedding detritus for the first scene, Gertrude, and Claudius's wedding party and it's in four sections, so each of these pieces can be split apart and can also be arranged in different formations. It's almost like an iris at the beginning in the middle of the stage, that then, in the way that we use everything in different ways, the table also becomes a more fragmented structure.

Then on the stage left side, we've got a staircase that's behind this flat staircase running all the way down to a door, and then on the other side, there's a bridge walkway with a window and there's this kind of avenue that can be crossed at that upper level.

The material we're using for the walls is a reclaimed timber we sourced from a local timber charity, near Chichester. They're burning it for us, so it's going to be charred, which came from a lot of references; quite Scandinavian but was originally a Japanese technique to fortify and weatherproof wood. If you burn the wood enough, it becomes impervious to water. It's also used quite a lot in Scandinavia, and this sense that I'm not using any painted surfaces. All our materials, bar the gilded fresco detail are themselves. So, the wood is charred wood, the floor is a stained plywood, and our mound of earth is going to be cork chipping, so it's all natural. We're trying to stay in this world where everything's authentically itself, and the burnt timber felt like an interesting way to go because of all our conversations about climate change and man's interaction with nature, materials, and decay. I hope that it will have a bit of a smell as well, and that there should be a scent of charred timber in the air, which could be interesting.

Above the table, we've got a circular truss clad in the same burnt timber, and in that is a ring of very clever spotlights. So we're going to create a halo of light, and those lights do lots of things, they can and zoom and focus in and so we can create an intense boardroom feel over the table, and at the end, we're going to have a rain shower over Hamlet for the final moment of the play, all will happen within this



circle, so the rain will fall between that light for the final moment of the play.

This halo is an ever-present thing that hangs above the stage. The Minerva doesn't have a high grid, so it feels very present and it's very much a thing that you reference when you're watching a show, so it felt important that we acknowledge it as part of our landscape.

There's lots of entrances; we've got entrances underneath the platform, two down stage right and then crossing over the back and crossing over the front. We've got seven entrances to the ground level.

Costume is set in the general language of the day, trying to find quite a difference between younger characters and the older characters. There's definitely some 16th/17th century shapes and references, with some of the cuffs and collars and then I'm also bringing in a contemporary shape but with features. And then there's also this element of decay, so again, particularly for Hamlet and Ophelia finding this level of costume that looks like was once very, very opulent and a picture of perfection, but things are slightly starting to wear. Not in a way that looks scruffy, but there's this feeling of slight decay. The feel of make do and mend but it's, still very much in the rich fabrics, golds, and brocades.