

# JESSE DREIKOSEN

SCENIC DESIGNER

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## Approach to Creative Activity & Research

My creative work and research interests have been focused in two major areas. Primarily I have focused my creative work within the world of theatrical scene design. As you will see my creative work in scene design spans many different types of shows in many different types of spaces. Theatre is a collaborative art and, with that, every production is a completely different experience but my process as a scene designer is ultimately the same. The sets are as varied as the plays I design for but as you will see there are conceptual theatrical worlds and also very realistic ones. My thought is that space matters; the connection between actor and audience is tantamount; details make a difference and it's all in service to the art. I am always striving to make one thing clear in particular in my scene designs and that is that the actor and the audience share the same big room. Robert Edmond Jones states it best by explaining that, "the energy of a particular play, its emotional content, its aura, so to speak, has its own definite physical dimensions." It extends just so far in space and no farther. The walls of the setting must be placed at precisely this point. At the beginning of the process I always ask the questions, "What is the story we are trying to tell" and "why are we telling this story?" Those two simple questions lead me down the path to designing a space that will eventually answer them. It's my insistence on these matters that allows and yes, requires the engagement of the audience that, in turn, leads to a richer theatrical experience.

The other major area that I have been focusing on in my research is the debate that has surfaced in our field of theatrical design as to whether we are producing more designers than there are jobs for. An article in *American Theatre*, a magazine published by the Theatre Communications Group, discussed this dilemma and sparked my interest in this question. The article consisted of a conversation amongst seven design faculty members from around the country discussing exactly what we are training our young designers for and how we are training them. The article also states that we seem to be just cranking out new designers with no thought as to what they are going to do with their design degrees or whether they will be able to find work in their field. I started to explore this issue in more depth, suggesting that there is a trend towards introducing alternative avenues of design, particularly for scene design students. Examples might be designing for themed restaurants, trade show booths, amusement parks, or retail stores, just to name a few, in addition to traditional theatrical scene design. I think we can open more doors for our design students if we start incorporating these other avenues into the design curriculum. The question is how to do it, what should be included and what would have to be deleted to make room for any new material; what other directions might training to be scene designers actually go. During the past seven years I have explored this subject even further by stimulating further discussions among my colleagues and presenting my findings at conferences and festivals around the U.S. I organized and curated a national exhibit of theatrical scene designers trained in theatre that are doing work outside of traditional scene design at the United States Institute for Theatre Technology National Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina which jump started the conversation on this subject. I have also presented workshops for faculty and students at festivals and conferences with the intention to introduce these alternative avenues in design opportunities available to theatrical designers and potentially expand the national conversation on design curriculum. I am currently working on publishing my findings on this subject.