

(Courtesy of Bill Fregosi. Used with permission.)

OpenCourseWare asked Bill Fregosi, Set Designer for this production of *The Internationalist*, to comment on his creative process for this project. Below is this dialogue.

Q: Can you speak about your varying degrees of engagement with the text? About how you thought conceptually at the beginning, and where you ended up? What fell away, and what was added? What was deconstructed, and what became more real?

A: I began with a couple of fairly close readings of the script, making copious notes and compiling a list of questions for [director] Janet Sonenberg. I was struck that there were some shifts of focus in the author's definition of location—some locales obviously grabbed her and were described in great and specific detail while others seemed much more generic, or even in a kind of "limbo." I also set up lists of locations and furnishings as I read them in the script. I gathered office furniture catalogs and compiled a research file of contemporary corporate interiors and buildings, being especially struck by the new and daring "Gherkin" in London. Its 360-degree restaurant became my image for the "Observatory Bar" late in the play that remains my favorite scene in the entire script.

When we began design meetings, Janet felt that a revolving set would solve some problems, allowing the corporate office—the main set of the show—to be spun around and all the other locations to be played downstage of its back. When we got to the rough model stage it became obvious that the big and very expensive structure wasn't doing enough for us to justify the time, effort and financial outlay.

In a subsequent meeting I suggested layers that could open and close, sometimes revealing various depths of the enigmatic world of the play and sometimes shutting the audience out just as Lowell, the main character, is often excluded. From there it was "just" a matter of defining the style (a very high-surface Euro architect-tech look) and finding a way to bring it to our stage on the very restricted budgets we work with.

There were some other changes along the way. The flat windows I had designed at first bored me. One morning before a design meeting I threw them out and worked up a model of windows that curved in as they rose in a gentle arc, mounted on rolling bases and counterbalanced on the "outside" by an outrigger brace. The result was well received at the meeting and the finished pieces brought me more individual compliments than anything I have designed here in the last five years.

When the set arrived on stage, its final effect was the result of collaboration between lighting designer Karen Perlow and me as to which panels were opaque and which translucent and able to take rear projections of textures, colors and abstract patterns. The iridescent panel-cover fabric that shimmered between silver and gold worked particularly well although I was slightly disappointed in the effect of the metallic floor.

Collaboration with Janet is always a rational and enjoyable process. Ultimately, I found the play itself more "interesting" than fully satisfying but it's extremely important to do new work and that in and of itself is extremely rewarding.