

SET CONSTRUCTION AND SCENOGRAPHIC INNOVATION IN SELECTED THEATRE ARTS PRODUCTIONS AT LAUTECH (2024 -2026)

Olawale Olatunde ITEOLA

Theatre Arts Department

Faculty of Arts and Social Science

LadokeAkintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso

M.A Theatre Arts

ooiteola@lautech.edu.ng

+234 07063881769

Abstract

Set construction is a fundamental component of scenography, shaping the visual identity of theatrical performance and influencing audience perception through the creative organisation of stage space. Contemporary theatre practice increasingly demands innovative scenic solutions that combine artistic imagination with technical execution to achieve functional and aesthetic objectives. This study examines set construction practices and scenographic innovation between 2024 and 2026, focusing on “Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again”, “The Lion and the Jewel”, “Morountodun”, “The Gods Are Not to Blame”, and “The 2026 Theatre Arts Initiation productions”. The study adopts qualitative textual and performance analysis, examining the scenic designs employed in the selected productions with emphasis on construction techniques, spatial organisation, material selection, scene transitions, symbolism, and the relationship between scenic elements and dramatic action. This study is anchored on Semiotic Theory, which examines how signs and symbols generate meaning within a communicative system. The analysis demonstrates that Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Theatre Arts department productions effectively combine conventional stagecraft with innovative scenographic approaches through the adaptation of locally sourced materials, flexible set configurations, symbolic design elements, and creative visual composition. These practices not only enhanced the aesthetic quality of the productions but also reinforced thematic interpretation, performer mobility, and audience engagement despite technical and resource constraints. The study concludes that scenographic innovation in Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Theatre Arts productions reflects an evolving culture of creative problem-solving and technical ingenuity that contributes to the advancement of contemporary university theatre practice in Nigeria. It therefore highlights the importance of innovative set construction as a catalyst for improving stage aesthetics, performance effectiveness, and technical theatre scholarship.

Keywords: Set Construction, Scenography, Stage Design, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso and Theatre Production.

Introduction

The visual environment of a theatrical performance plays a crucial role in shaping how audiences understand and respond to dramatic action. Among the technical elements that contribute to this experience, set construction occupies a prominent place because it creates the physical space within which the story is presented. A well-constructed set does more than represent a location; it establishes mood, reflects the social and cultural context of the play, supports actors' movement and reinforces the playwright's intentions. For this reason, scenic design has become an indispensable

aspect of theatre production, particularly in contemporary practice where visual communication is as important as dialogue and performance.

The concept of scenography has expanded considerably over the years. Rather than viewing the stage set as an isolated production element, contemporary theatre scholars consider scenography to be the creative organisation of performance space through the integration of scenery, lighting, costume, sound and other visual components. Howard (2002) explains that scenography involves the creation of a complete theatrical environment in which all visual elements work together to communicate dramatic meaning. In the same vein, McKinney and Butterworth (2009) observe that scenography is concerned not only with what appears on stage but also with how the audience experiences and interprets the performance. This broader understanding has encouraged designers to explore more flexible and imaginative approaches to stage construction.

Advances in theatre practice have also influenced the methods used in set construction. Contemporary productions increasingly favour adaptable scenic structures that can respond to changing performance needs instead of relying solely on elaborate realistic settings. Aronson (2005) notes that modern scenography places greater emphasis on expressive space and symbolic representation, allowing scenic design to become an active participant in storytelling rather than a passive background.

In Nigerian university theatres, these ideas are reflected in the growing use of locally sourced materials and innovative construction techniques. Theatre practitioners have continued to demonstrate creativity by developing scenic solutions that respond to limited resources without sacrificing artistic quality. Ododo (2015) maintains that Nigerian theatre practice has consistently adapted indigenous knowledge and available materials to meet contemporary performance demands. This tradition of innovation is evident in the productions of the Department of Theatre Arts, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), where plays such as *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, *The Lion and the Jewel*, *Morountodun*, *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and the 2026 Theatre Arts Initiation production reveal a deliberate effort to combine technical skill with creative scenographic expression. Although these productions demonstrate significant developments in stage design, little scholarly attention has been given to the construction methods and scenographic innovations that define them. This study therefore examines the set construction practices employed in these productions and considers their contribution to contemporary university theatre in Nigeria.

Set Construction in Theatre Practice

Set construction remains one of the most significant aspects of technical theatre because it transforms the designer's conceptual ideas into physical structures that support dramatic performance. As a practical component of scenic design, it involves the planning, fabrication and installation of scenic elements that define the performance environment. The effectiveness of any theatrical production depends not only on the dramatic text and performers but also on the successful organisation of scenic space through appropriate construction techniques. Consequently, theatre scholars have consistently recognised set construction as an indispensable element in the visual interpretation of dramatic action.

Writing from the perspective of contemporary theatre practice, Pamela Howard (2002) argues that scenery should not merely provide decoration but should function as part of the dramatic language of performance. She explains that the scenic environment communicates meaning through its

spatial arrangement, textures, colours and architectural composition. Howard therefore regards set construction as the practical process through which scenographic ideas become visible realities on stage. Her position shifts attention from scenery as a passive background to scenery as an active contributor to dramatic storytelling.

Parker, Wolf and Block (2012) further contend that stage scenery should support rather than compete with dramatic performance. They argue that scenic construction succeeds when it enhances actors' movement, strengthens visual composition and facilitates smooth scene transitions without distracting the audience. Their emphasis on functionality reinforces the view that effective set construction is measured not only by craftsmanship but also by its contribution to the dramatic action.

Aborisade (1994), in his study of Nigerian theatre architecture and scenography, observes that theatre technology in Nigeria has evolved through continuous adaptation to available resources. He argues that scenic construction in Nigerian theatre is often shaped by environmental realities, resulting in designs that emphasise flexibility, improvisation and functional efficiency. His work demonstrates that the success of scenic production depends less on sophisticated equipment than on the designer's ability to manipulate available materials creatively.

Ododo (1998) equally maintains that the Nigerian theatre stage has developed distinctive scenographic characteristics that reflect indigenous aesthetics and practical realities. According to him, scenic construction in Nigerian theatre should not merely imitate Western conventions but should respond to local cultural expressions, performance traditions and audience expectations. This position is further developed in his discussion of scenic design concepts in Nigerian literary theatre, where he argues that scenery performs interpretative functions by reinforcing dramatic themes, cultural identity and performance atmosphere (Ododo, 2002).

Contributing to the discourse on technical theatre practice in Nigeria, Oni (2006) emphasises that successful theatrical production depends upon the effective integration of directing, acting and technical design. He identifies scenic construction as one of the major components through which directors' artistic visions are translated into physical performance environments. Oni also argues that technical theatre should not be regarded as secondary to acting because scenic construction significantly influences audience's perception and the overall aesthetic quality of production.

The foregoing studies collectively demonstrate that scholars agree on the indispensable role of set construction in theatre production. Nevertheless, differences exist in their areas of emphasis. Foreign scholars primarily concentrate on design philosophy, spatial composition and technological development, whereas Nigerian scholars focus more on adaptation, indigenous materials and creative responses to infrastructural limitations. Although these studies provide valuable insights into scenic construction and technical theatre, they rarely examine how recent university productions combine conventional construction methods with contemporary scenographic innovation. More importantly, little scholarly attention has been devoted to analysing the set construction practices employed in recent productions by the Department of Theatre Arts, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH). This gap provides the basis for the present study, which investigates how scenic construction techniques contribute to scenographic innovation in selected LAUTECH productions staged between 2024 and 2026.

Scenographic Innovation in Contemporary Theatre

Scenographic innovation has become a major concern in contemporary theatre as designers continually seek creative approaches to improve visual communication, audience engagement and the overall theatrical experience. Contemporary stage practice no longer depends solely on elaborate scenic construction but embraces experimentation with performance space, lighting, digital technology, environmental staging and the creative adaptation of materials. Consequently, innovation has become a defining characteristic of modern scenography, enabling theatre practitioners to develop performance environments that are both aesthetically compelling and functionally effective.

Christopher Baugh (2013) argues that developments in contemporary performance design have significantly transformed the role of scenography from the production of static visual backgrounds to the creation of dynamic theatrical environments. According to Baugh (2013), advances in stage technology, lighting systems and spatial design have expanded the expressive possibilities available to scenographers, allowing them to construct performance spaces that actively participate in dramatic storytelling. He further maintains that successful scenographic innovation lies in the integration of artistic imagination with technical execution, rather than in the mere adoption of sophisticated technology.

Similarly, Scott Palmer (2015) observes that modern scenographic practice has increasingly embraced flexible performance spaces capable of accommodating multiple dramatic functions. He also notes that contemporary designers employ movable scenic units, architectural platforms and expressive lighting to create adaptable environments that facilitate performer movement and audience interaction. Such flexibility, he argues, enables stage productions to respond effectively to changing dramatic situations while maintaining visual coherence throughout the performance. According to Dean (2002), these technological advancements enable designers to experiment with visual composition and scenic transformation in ways that were previously impossible. Nevertheless, he cautions that technological innovation should always support dramatic interpretation rather than become an end in itself.

Within the African context, Patrick Bassey (2022) observes that contemporary Nigerian theatre has witnessed increasing experimentation with multimedia technologies, programmable lighting systems and digital projection. Despite these developments, he also argues that the distinguishing feature of Nigerian scenographic innovation remains the creative adaptation of locally available materials and indigenous artistic traditions. He maintains that financial and technological constraints have encouraged theatre practitioners to develop alternative scenic solutions that combine functionality with cultural relevance.

In a related study, Molinta Enendu (2023) examines the emergence of kinetic scenery in Nigerian theatre and argues that contemporary scenic practice increasingly favours movable scenic components capable of supporting rapid scene transformation and visual continuity. He also notes that the integration of kinetic structures has enhanced flexibility in stage production while encouraging greater interaction between performers and scenic environments. The study concludes that innovation in Nigerian scenography is increasingly characterised by experimentation with movement, spatial organisation and material adaptation rather than by dependence on imported technologies alone.

Scenographic innovation has become a defining feature of contemporary theatre practice, reflecting the continuous search for new ways of organising stage space and enhancing visual communication. Unlike earlier scenic traditions that relied primarily on painted backdrops and fixed stage settings, contemporary scenography embraces experimentation with space, light, materials, technology and audience interaction. Innovation in this context extends beyond the introduction of sophisticated equipment; it involves the creative transformation of available resources into theatrical images that effectively support dramatic action.

According to Baugh (2013), contemporary scenography no longer functions merely as a decorative framework but as an integral element of theatrical meaning-making. He maintains that developments in stage technology and design have enabled scenographers to create dynamic performance environments capable of accommodating multiple dramatic realities within a single production.

Similarly, Scott Palmer (2015) explains that modern scenographic practice owes much to the revolutionary ideas of Adolphe Appia, whose integration of light, architecture and three-dimensional space transformed theatrical design. Palmer contends that Appia's greatest contribution was not simply the replacement of painted scenery but the recognition of stage space as a living environment shaped by the interaction of performers, light and architectural form. This approach, according to Palmer, continues to influence contemporary scenographic practice by encouraging designers to regard lighting, scenic structures and performers' movement as interdependent components of performance rather than separate technical elements.

The growing influence of technology has also encouraged designers to explore flexible scenic systems capable of responding to diverse performance conditions. Joslin McKinney and Scott Palmer (2017) observe that contemporary performance design increasingly favours adaptable scenic environments that permit rapid scene transformation, multiple spatial configurations and closer interaction between performers and audiences. They argue that flexibility has become one of the principal characteristics of twenty-first-century scenography because it enables designers to respond effectively to changing artistic and practical demands.

The foregoing review indicates that scholars generally agree that scenographic innovation extends beyond technological advancement to include the creative organisation of space, materials, movement and visual communication. While international scholars have largely concentrated on theoretical developments and technological transformation, African scholarship has emphasised innovation as a response to economic realities and cultural contexts. However, relatively little attention has been devoted to examining how these innovative principles are reflected in the set construction practices of recent university theatre productions in Nigeria. More specifically, there remains limited scholarly documentation of how scenographic innovation has been realised in productions staged by the Department of Theatre Arts, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) between 2024 and 2026. This study therefore addresses this gap through a textual analysis of selected productions, focusing on the relationship between set construction practices and scenographic innovation.

Set Construction and Scenographic Practice in Contemporary Theatre

The relationship between set construction and scenography has attracted increasing scholarly attention in contemporary theatre studies because both constitute essential aspects of visual performance. Although they are closely connected, scholars have consistently distinguished

between the practical process of constructing scenery and the broader artistic process of creating the visual world of a production. While set construction primarily concerns the fabrication and installation of scenic units, scenography encompasses the total visual composition of performance, including scenery, lighting, costume, properties, sound, stage space and the interaction of these elements in communicating dramatic meaning. Consequently, effective theatre production depends upon the successful integration of construction techniques with scenographic vision.

Similarly, Arnold Aronson (2005) observes that contemporary scenography has transformed stage construction from the creation of static settings into the production of dynamic performance environments. He explains that modern scenic structures are expected to accommodate changing dramatic locations, multiple interpretations and fluid performer movement without interrupting the continuity of performance. Aronson therefore argues that flexibility has become one of the principal characteristics of contemporary scenic construction.

Collectively, these scholarly positions demonstrate that set construction and scenography are complementary rather than independent aspects of theatre production. Foreign scholars largely emphasise theoretical developments in performance design and visual communication, while Nigerian scholars focus on adaptation, indigenous creativity and collaborative production practices. Despite these valuable contributions, relatively little attention has been devoted to examining how recent university productions combine construction techniques with scenographic innovation to achieve effective stage communication.

Theoretical Framework

Semiotic Theory

This study is anchored on Semiotic Theory, which examines how signs and symbols generate meaning within a communicative system. The theory originated from the works of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), who conceived the sign as the relationship between the *signifier* (the physical form) and the *signified* (the concept it represents), and Charles Sanders Peirce (1931–1958), who classified signs into icons, indices and symbols based on their relationship to meaning. These foundational ideas have been widely applied in theatre studies to explain how visual and performance elements communicate beyond spoken dialogue.

Applying semiotics to theatre, Keir Elam (1980) argues that theatrical performance is a complex system of signs in which scenery, lighting, costume, props, gesture, sound and stage movement function collectively to communicate meaning. According to Elam (1980), the stage should be understood as a network of visual and dramatic signs through which audiences interpret characters, themes and actions. Similarly, Patrice Pavis (1998) maintains that scenic design is not merely decorative but serves as a semiotic structure that shapes audience perception by encoding cultural, symbolic and dramatic meanings within theatrical space.

Further expanding theatre semiotics, Marco De Marinis (1993) contends that meaning in performance emerges through the interaction of visual composition, performers' movement and audience interpretation. He argues that stage space itself functions as a communicative text in which every scenic element contributes to the overall signification of the performance. More recent scholarship continues to apply semiotics to the interpretation of cultural texts and practices, emphasising how meaning is constructed through signs, codes, representation, and context (Chandler, 2022). This perspective demonstrates that theatrical meaning is produced through the relationship between scenic objects and their dramatic context rather than through dialogue alone.

The relevance of Semiotic Theory to this study lies in its capacity to explain how set construction functions as a system of visual signs within theatrical performance. In the selected productions *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, *The Lion and the Jewel*, *Morountodun*, *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and the 2026 *Theatre Arts Initiation* production the study examines how construction techniques, spatial organisation, materials, colours, levels and symbolic scenic elements communicate dramatic ideas, reinforce thematic concerns and shape audience interpretation. The theory therefore provides an appropriate framework for analysing how set construction practices contributed to scenographic innovation and the overall visual effectiveness of these productions at LAUTECH between 2024 and 2026.

Design Interpretation

Design Interpretation in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

The set design of *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* adopts a predominantly realistic scenic style, presenting a domestic environment that reflects the political and social realities embedded in the play.



Plate 1: Major Lejoka Brown's house with Okonkwo

The scenery recreates the interior and exterior spaces associated with Major Lejoka-Brown's household, employing recognisable furniture, architectural elements and props that establish a believable Nigerian post-independence setting. This realistic visual concept reinforces Ola Rotimi's satire on military influence in politics and the contradictions of postcolonial leadership. The arrangement of the performance space supports the interactions among the characters while visually communicating the tension between traditional values and emerging political ambitions. The use of familiar domestic aesthetics enables the audience to identify with the cultural setting, thereby strengthening the play's exploration of power, gender relations and political opportunism.

Design Interpretation in *The Lion and the Jewel*

The scenic design for *The Lion and the Jewel* combines realistic representation with symbolic elements to capture the cultural landscape of a traditional Yoruba community. The visual composition recreates the village environment through indigenous architectural motifs, open communal spaces and traditional decorative features that immediately establish the geographical and cultural identity of Ilujinle.



Plate 2: The scene showing Sidi coming back from the stream

Beyond realism, symbolic scenic elements reinforce the ideological conflict between tradition and modernity, which constitutes the central theme of the play. The careful organisation of the scenic space reflects the communal lifestyle of Yoruba society while providing an appropriate setting for ritual, dance and dramatic interaction. Consequently, the scenery functions not merely as a physical background but as a visual interpretation of Yoruba cultural identity and Soyinka's critique of the encounter between indigenous traditions and Western civilisation.

Design Interpretation in *Morountodun*

The design concept of *Morountodun* adopts a symbolic and expressionistic scenic style that reflects the revolutionary atmosphere of the play. Rather than reproducing every physical location realistically, the scenery employs simplified scenic structures, adaptable platforms and suggestive visual elements that evoke both urban and rural environments associated with the Agbekoya uprising.



Plate 3: A scene showing the rural setting of the play

This approach allows the stage space to accommodate rapid changes in dramatic action while emphasising the ideological conflict between oppression and resistance. The visual interpretation reinforces Femi Osofisan's themes of class struggle, political consciousness and social transformation. The flexible organisation of scenic elements encourages dynamic actor movement and underscores the collective nature of the revolutionary movement, thereby transforming the stage into a symbolic representation of resistance rather than merely a geographical location.

Design Interpretation in 2026 Initiation

The set design for the 2026 Initiation Production is predominantly symbolic, employing ritualistic scenic elements to construct an atmosphere of mystery, transition and communal identity. Rather than depending on elaborate realism, the scenic composition utilises carefully selected visual motifs, ceremonial objects and spatial arrangements that evoke the sacred environment associated with initiation rite.



Plate 4: Stage cleansing during 2026 initiation ceremony

The organisation of the performance space distinguishes ritual zones from communal areas, enabling the audience to interpret the progression from ordinary existence to spiritual transformation. The scenic concept reflects indigenous cultural traditions while visually reinforcing themes of identity, continuity, cultural transmission and collective memory. Through this symbolic interpretation of space, the production transforms the stage into a performative ritual landscape that extends beyond physical representation to communicate deeper cultural meanings.

Design Interpretation in *The Gods Are Not to Blame*

The scenic design of *The Gods Are Not to Blame* integrates realistic and symbolic scenic conventions to portray the traditional Yoruba kingdom in which the tragic action unfolds. The visual composition establishes the royal palace, sacred spaces and communal environment through architectural forms, elevated platforms and culturally recognisable scenic objects that communicate political authority and spiritual significance. At the same time, symbolic scenic features reinforce the inevitability of fate and the relationship between human actions and supernatural forces.



Plate 5: The scene showing Ojuola's body after the discovery

The arrangement of the scenic environment enhances the tragic progression of the narrative while reflecting the cultural worldview upon which Ola Rotimi's adaptation is based. By visually interpreting both the physical kingdom and its metaphysical dimensions, the scenery supports the play's central themes of destiny, leadership, sacrifice and moral responsibility, allowing the audience to experience the tragic conflict within a distinctly Yoruba cultural context.

Scenic Composition

Scenic Composition in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

The scenic composition of *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* is organised around a realistic domestic environment that serves as the primary location for the unfolding dramatic action. The arrangement of furniture, doorways and open performance areas establishes a coherent spatial structure that reflects the social status and personality of Major Lejoka-Brown. The composition maintains visual balance by separating private and communal spaces, thereby allowing the audience to distinguish between moments of personal conflict and public interaction. The careful positioning of scenic elements creates clear sightlines and supports the actors' movements, while the uncluttered stage enhances the comic rhythm and satirical tone of the production. Consequently, the scenic composition functions as an effective visual framework through which the play's political and domestic conflicts are communicated.

Scenic Composition in *The Lion and the Jewel*

The scenic composition of *The Lion and the Jewel* reflects the communal structure of a traditional Yoruba village through an open and flexible spatial arrangement. Indigenous architectural motifs, symbolic village structures and strategically positioned scenic properties create a performance environment that accommodates dance, music and dramatic interaction.

The organisation of the scenic space encourages fluid movement among performers while maintaining a strong visual focus on key dramatic encounters. The balanced composition also reinforces the communal nature of Yoruba society by minimising physical barriers between performance areas. Through this carefully organised spatial design, the production effectively captures the cultural atmosphere of Ilujinle and visually supports the ideological conflict between tradition and modernity.

Scenic Composition in *Morountodun*

The scenic composition of *Morountodun* adopts a flexible and dynamic spatial arrangement that reflects the revolutionary nature of the play. Rather than depending on elaborate scenic structures, the production utilises adaptable platforms, open performance areas and symbolic scenic units that permit rapid transitions between dramatic locations. This fluid composition enhances the pace of the performance by allowing continuous actor movement and uninterrupted narrative progression. The strategic organisation of the stage space also creates varying levels of dramatic emphasis, directing audience's attention to moments of confrontation, solidarity and ideological transformation. As a result, the scenic composition complements the play's episodic structure while visually expressing the instability and collective energy associated with revolutionary struggle.

Scenic Composition in 2026 Initiation Production

The scenic composition of the 2026 Initiation Production is structured around symbolic ritual spaces that establish a sacred performance environment. The careful placement of ceremonial objects, ritual pathways and designated performance zones creates a visually coherent composition that guides both performers and audience through the successive stages of initiation. The balanced arrangement of scenic elements allows ritual actions to unfold naturally while preserving the spiritual atmosphere of the performance. Open spaces facilitate choreographed movement, processional sequences and communal participation, whereas focal scenic elements direct attention to moments of symbolic significance. This organised spatial composition transforms the stage into a ritual landscape where physical space functions as an expression of cultural belief and communal identity.

Scenic Composition in *The Gods Are Not to Blame*

The scenic composition of *The Gods Are Not to Blame* integrates royal, communal and sacred spaces within a unified visual framework that reflects the hierarchical structure of the traditional Yoruba kingdom. Elevated platforms, symbolic entrances and carefully positioned scenic properties establish clear spatial relationships that distinguish political authority from communal interaction. The composition creates visual depth and balance while accommodating ceremonial processions, royal assemblies and intimate dramatic encounters. The organisation of the stage also enhances the tragic progression of the narrative by directing audience's attention towards moments of conflict, prophecy and revelation. Through its harmonious arrangement of scenic elements, the production effectively communicates the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the play while reinforcing its themes of destiny, leadership and moral responsibility.

Scenographic Innovation

Scenographic Innovation in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

The production demonstrates scenographic innovation through its creative interpretation of a realistic domestic setting as a dynamic dramatic space. Rather than functioning solely as a literal representation of a household, the scenery is organised to accommodate the rapid progression of comic and political action without requiring extensive scene changes. The integration of furniture, props and lighting establishes multiple areas of dramatic focus, allowing the same scenic environment to support both domestic interactions and political discussions. This multifunctional use of space enhances narrative continuity and reflects a contemporary approach to scenography in which scenic design actively participates in storytelling rather than serving as a passive backdrop.

Scenographic Innovation in *The Lion and the Jewel*

The scenographic innovation in *The Lion and the Jewel* lies in the integration of indigenous visual aesthetics with contemporary stagecraft to create a culturally expressive performance environment. The production moves beyond literal representation by employing symbolic architectural forms, open performance spaces and culturally significant scenic motifs that communicate Yoruba identity while supporting dramatic action. The flexible organisation of the stage accommodates dance, music and ritual performance without disrupting the visual unity of the production. This innovative synthesis of traditional cultural imagery and modern scenographic principles strengthens the thematic exploration of tradition and modernity while providing a visually engaging theatrical experience.

Scenographic Innovation in *Morountodun*

The production of *Morountodun* exhibits scenographic innovation through its flexible manipulation of stage space and symbolic scenic elements to represent multiple dramatic locations. Instead of relying on elaborate realistic scenery, the production adopts adaptable scenic units and abstract spatial arrangements that facilitate seamless transitions between scenes.

The interaction of scenery, lighting and actor movement transforms the performance space into a visual expression of political conflict and revolutionary struggle. This economic expressive use of scenographic resources demonstrates an innovative approach in which spatial transformation becomes an integral component of the narrative structure and emotional intensity of the performance.

Scenographic Innovation in 2026 Initiation Production

The 2026 Initiation Production demonstrates scenographic innovation by transforming the conventional stage into a symbolic ritual environment through the integration of ceremonial objects, spatial symbolism and atmospheric lighting. Rather than emphasising elaborate physical structures, the production relies on visual symbolism and spatial organisation to communicate the sacred nature of the initiation process. The coordinated interaction of scenic elements, movement, costume and lighting creates an immersive theatrical experience that blurs the boundary between ritual and performance. This innovative scenographic approach enhances audience engagement by allowing visual symbols and performance space to communicate cultural meanings beyond spoken dialogue.

Scenographic Innovation in *The Gods Are Not to Blame*

The scenographic innovation of *The Gods Are Not to Blame* is evident in the successful integration of realistic scenic structures with symbolic visual elements that communicate both the physical and metaphysical dimensions of the narrative. The production employs elevated platforms, symbolic royal spaces and carefully controlled lighting to reinforce the tragic atmosphere and the inevitability of fate. The scenic environment is designed to accommodate ceremonial processions, dramatic confrontations and moments of spiritual revelation without compromising visual continuity. By combining traditional Yoruba cultural imagery with contemporary scenographic techniques, the production creates a layered visual experience that enriches the audience's understanding of the play's themes of destiny, kingship and moral responsibility.

Semiotic Reading of the Set

Semiotic Reading of the Set in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

The set in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* functions as a semiotic system through which political ambition, authority and domestic power relations are communicated. The realistic domestic environment signifies more than a family residence; it represents the intersection of private life and public politics that defines Major Lejoka-Brown's character. The orderly arrangement of furniture and interior spaces initially conveys stability and authority, but as conflicts intensify, the same environment symbolically reflects the disintegration of political control and patriarchal dominance. The contrast between the seemingly organised household and the disorder generated by the protagonist's ambitions reinforces Ola Rotimi's satirical critique of post-independence political leadership. Consequently, the set operates as a visual signifier of the instability that often underlies the appearance of political order.

Semiotic Reading of the Set in *The Lion and the Jewel*

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the set serves as a visual representation of Yoruba cultural identity and the ideological conflict between tradition and modernity. The traditional village structures, open communal space and indigenous decorative motifs signify continuity, communal values and respect for ancestral heritage. These scenic signs establish Ilujinle as a cultural space deeply rooted in indigenous customs, while the limited presence of modern visual elements symbolises the gradual intrusion of Western influence. The spatial relationship between traditional and modern symbols reinforces the ideological struggle embodied by the principal characters. Thus, the set functions as a semiotic expression of the cultural tensions that shape the narrative, allowing the audience to interpret the visual environment as an extension of the play's thematic concerns.

Semiotic Reading of the Set in *Morountodun*

The scenic environment of *Morountodun* communicates symbolic meanings associated with oppression, resistance and social transformation. The adaptable platforms, open performance spaces and simplified scenic structures signify the instability and uncertainty characteristic of revolutionary struggle. Rather than representing specific geographical locations, the set symbolises the broader socio-political landscape in which power relations are constantly negotiated. The fluid organisation of the performance space reflects the collective nature of resistance, while the transformation of scenic elements throughout the production signifies ideological change and the emergence of political consciousness.



Plate 6: A scene showing the resistance of the Agbekoyas

Through these visual signs, the set reinforces Osofisan's critique of social injustice and the necessity of collective action in confronting oppression.

Semiotic Reading of the Set in 2026 Initiation Production

The set of the 2026 Initiation Production functions as a symbolic ritual landscape in which every scenic element contributes to the communication of cultural and spiritual meanings. The ceremonial objects, sacred performance zones and ritual pathways signify purification, transition and communal acceptance. The deliberate organisation of space distinguishes the sacred from the ordinary, visually representing the initiate's movement from one stage of existence to another. The restrained use of scenic materials further emphasises the symbolic rather than literal function of the environment, encouraging the audience to interpret the performance space as a manifestation of indigenous cosmology and cultural continuity. Consequently, the set becomes a visual language through which themes of identity, tradition and spiritual transformation are expressed.

Semiotic Reading of the Set in *The Gods Are Not to Blame*

In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, the set operates as a network of visual signs that communicates authority, destiny and the interaction between the human and supernatural worlds. Elevated platforms signify royal power and political hierarchy, while sacred spaces and ritual objects represent the pervasive influence of divine forces over human existence. The spatial separation between the palace, communal environment and sacred locations reflects the different spheres within which political, social and spiritual actions occur. As the tragic narrative unfolds, the scenic environment increasingly symbolises the inescapability of fate, with its visual structure reinforcing the inevitability of Odewale's downfall. Consequently, the set transcends its physical function to become a semiotic expression of the tragic worldview that underpins Ola Rotimi's adaptation, communicating the inseparable relationship between destiny, leadership and moral responsibility.

Findings and Gap Filled by the Study

The study found that set construction played a significant role in shaping the visual identity and dramatic effectiveness of the selected LAUTECH productions between 2024 and 2026. The analysis revealed that scenic designs were carefully developed to support the themes, settings, and cultural backgrounds of the plays, thereby strengthening audience understanding and enhancing stage aesthetics. The productions demonstrated that contemporary set construction within the department has moved beyond conventional decorative scenery to embrace a more integrated scenographic approach in which scenery, lighting, props, costume, and stage space function collectively to communicate dramatic meaning.

The study further established that innovation in set construction was evident through the use of modular structures, symbolic scenic elements, flexible stage arrangements, and the creative adaptation of locally available materials. Despite limitations arising from inadequate funding, limited access to modern equipment, and technological constraints, production teams consistently employed resourcefulness and technical creativity to achieve visually compelling stage environments. The findings also showed that effective collaboration among directors, designers, stage managers, and technical crews contributed substantially to the artistic success of the productions.

These findings fill an important gap in theatre scholarship by providing a focused analysis of recent set construction practices and scenographic innovation within LAUTECH Theatre Arts productions, an area that has received little scholarly attention. Unlike previous studies that examine set design or scenography independently, this research demonstrates how both concepts interact to produce meaningful theatrical experiences within a university theatre setting. By analysing productions staged between 2024 and 2026, the study also offers current documentation of evolving design practices, highlighting practical approaches through which educational theatres can achieve innovative stage productions despite financial and technological limitations.

Conclusion

The study concludes that set construction has become an indispensable component of contemporary theatre production at Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, (LAUTECH) contributing not only to the physical organisation of stage space but also to the interpretation and communication of dramatic ideas. The selected productions demonstrate that effective scenography is achieved through the harmonious integration of artistic vision, technical competence, and creative problem-solving rather than through the availability of expensive materials or sophisticated technologies alone.

Although challenges such as inadequate funding and limited technical facilities remain evident, designers are highly encouraged to develop innovative methods of construction, maximise available resources, and explore flexible scenic solutions suitable for different performance contexts. Consequently, the study affirms that the continued development of set construction practices and scenographic innovation will enhance the quality of theatrical productions within the department. It therefore recommends sustained investment in theatre infrastructure, modern production technologies, and specialised training to strengthen practical theatre education and promote higher standards of stage production in Nigerian university theatres.

The study concludes that scenographic innovation in LAUTECH Theatre Arts productions demonstrates a growing commitment to creativity, resourcefulness, and technical development in university theatre practice. It reveals that the effective application of innovative set construction techniques has enhanced the visual quality of stage productions, strengthened dramatic expression, and supported the continuous growth of technical theatre within the Nigerian university theatre system. The study therefore affirms that innovation in set construction remains a vital factor in improving stage aesthetics, production efficiency, and scholarly development in contemporary theatre practice.

References

- Aborisade, J. O. (1994). *Theatre in Nigeria: A consideration of the scenographic, technological and architectural elements* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria).
- Aronson, A. (2005). *Looking into the abyss: Essays on scenography*. University of Michigan Press.
- Bassey, P. (2022). *Scenography and new technologies in Nigerian theatre practice: An overview of different deployment experiences*. In *Proceedings of the 34th Annual Conference of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA), 2021* (pp. 127–136). Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA).
- Baugh, C. (2013). *Scenography and performance*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Chandler, D. (2022). *Semiotics: The basics* (4th ed.). Routledge
- De Marinis, M. (1993). *The semiotics of performance*. Indiana University Press.
- Dean, B. (2002). *Stage design: A practical guide*. Crowood Press.
- Elam, K. (1980). *The semiotics of theatre and drama*. Methuen.
- Iwuh, J. (2024). Kinetic scenery and experimentation in Nigerian theatre: Molinta Enendu's example in James Weldon's *Noah Built the Ark*. *AIPGG Journal of Humanities and Peace Studies*, 5(1), 1–22. ISSN 2756-5831.
- Gillette, M. (2013). *Theatrical design and production: An introduction to scene design and construction, lighting, sound, costume, and makeup* (7th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Hann, R. (2019). *Beyond scenography*. Abingdon, Oxon, England: Routledge.
- Howard, P. (2002). *What is scenography?* London, England: Routledge.
- McKinney, J., & Butterworth, P. (2009). *The Cambridge introduction to scenography*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ododo, S. E. (1998). The Nigerian theatre stage and scenography design. *Journal of Humanities*, 6, 74–78.
- Ododo, S. E. (2002). Scenic design concepts and performance styles in the Nigerian literary theatre practice. *Alore*, 12, 88–109.
- Ododo, S. E. (2015). *Facekuerade theatre: A performance model from Nigeria*. Kraft Books.
- Ododo, S. E. (2006). Design practice in the Nigerian theatre. In D. Oni & S. E. Ododo (Eds.), *Technical theatre practice in Nigeria: Trends and issues* (pp. 17–36). Lagos, Nigeria: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC).

- Oni, D. (2006). Introduction to technical theatre practice in Nigeria: A general overview. In D. Oni & S. E. Ododo (Eds.), *Technical theatre practice in Nigeria: Trends and issues* (pp. 9–15). Lagos, Nigeria: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC).
- Palmer, S. (2015). A "chorégraphie" of light and space: Adolphe Appia and the first scenographic turn. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 35(1), 31–47.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14682761.2014.995604>
- Parker, W. O., Wolf, R. C., & Block, D. (2012). *Scene design and stage lighting* (10th ed.). Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Pavis, P. (1998). *Dictionary of the theatre: Terms, concepts and analysis*. University of Toronto Press.
- Peirce, C. S. (1931–1958). *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Vols. 1–8). Harvard University Press.
- Saussure, F. de. (1983). *Course in general linguistics* (R. Harris, Trans.). Duckworth. (Original work published 1916)