



THE INTERNATIONAL JURY PROCESS

BY ARNOLD ARONSON

The Prague Quadrennial (or PQ) is a juried exhibition and prizes are awarded in five categories: National Exhibit, Scenic Design, Costume Design, Thematic Exhibit (national or individual) and Architecture (national or individual). For the best national exhibit the Golden Trigue (Zlatou Trigu) is awarded; in other categories gold and silver medals and honorary diplomas are granted. An international jury is appointed to award these prizes.

I don't know if an exact count exists anywhere, but if I had to estimate, I would guess that there were between 10,000 and 15,000 individual items on display at PQ'91, including photographs, renderings, models, costumes, plans, videos, etc. Out of all these objects, the jury had to make its choices. The process was difficult, given the sheer quantity of material, but surprisingly easy, given the nature of the work on display.

Because Czechoslovakia is the host country, the jury has one Czech and one Slovak representative; the remaining jurors are chosen by the PQ Committee. This year I was privileged to serve as Chair of the International Jury. The other members were: Eric Alexander, Netherlands, an educator and former director of the Theatre Museum in Amsterdam; Marta Jaatinen, Finland, a theatre architect; Ivan Koós, Hungary, a scenographer for puppet theatre; Georgy Kovalenko, USSR, an art historian and theorist; Yannis Kokkos, a French scenographer who won the gold medal for scenic design at PQ'87; Marta Lacombe de Goes de Vasconcelos, a Brazilian journalist and critic; Miroslav Melena, stage designer and architect and resident designer for Studio Ypsilon in Prague; Hachiro Nakajima, Japan, a set and costume designer; Georgy Paro,

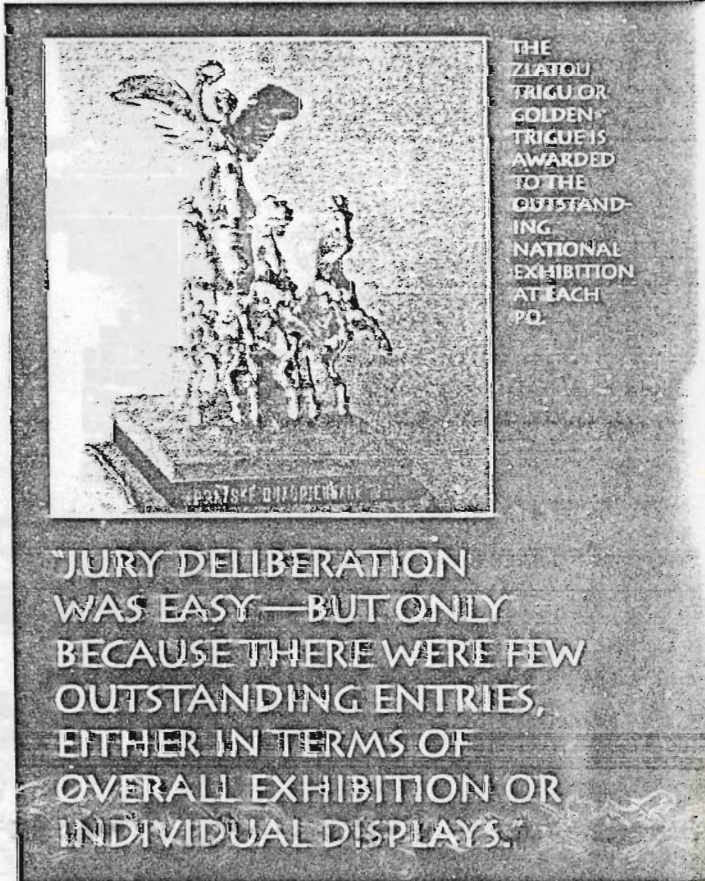
Yugoslavia, a director; and Jan Zavarsky, a Slovak scenographer. Clearly, this jury brought to the deliberations a wide range of backgrounds and points of view and was a fair representation of the active members of OISTAT.

The jury was smaller than in past years and only three were veterans of previous juries. This was a very deliberate choice on the part of Jaroslav Malina, the new Commissioner General of the PQ, as part of an overall attempt to give the event a new tenor in keeping with the new spirit of Czechoslovakia after the Revolution. Perhaps most telling was the absence of Josef Svoboda and Ladislav Vychodil who had been permanent presences on the jury since the beginning. This change was not unlike altering the permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

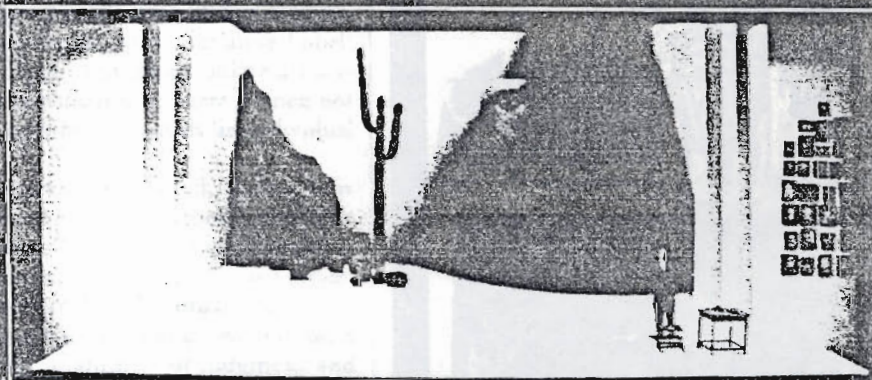
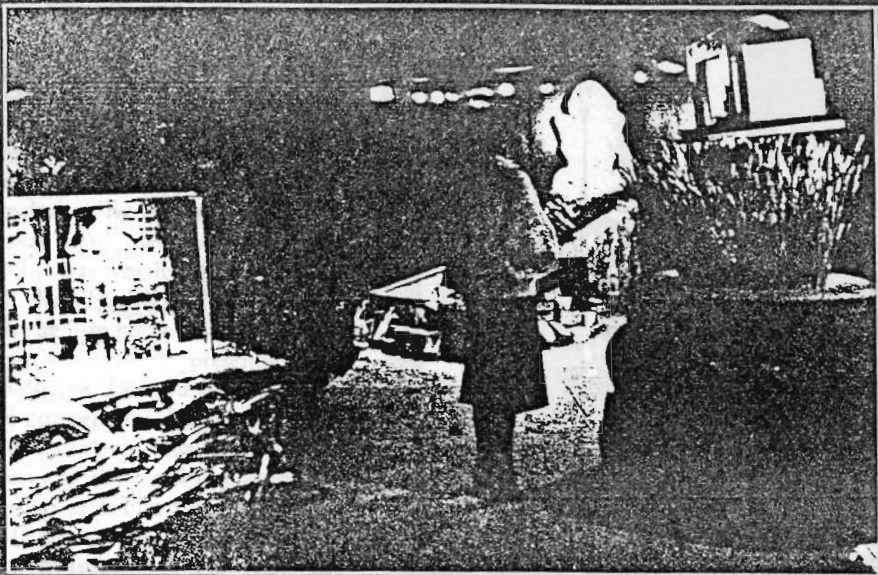
There were no set rules for voting other than that the Chairman could only vote in case of a tie. We established a loose process of discussion followed by a first ballot. Any entry that received only one vote on the first ballot was automatically eliminated. There might be further discussion before a second ballot. A majority vote was required, but this was usually achieved by the second ballot. (In a couple of cases only one was required.) The Chair could propose Honorary Diplomas. The latter were often used to

acknowledge unusual entries that for one reason or another were not awarded medals but, the jury felt, deserved recognition.

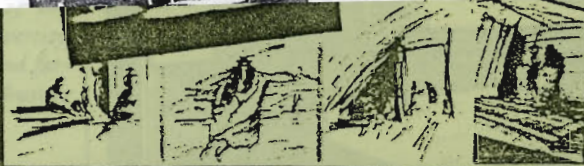
In a certain sense, the jury deliberation was easy—there was relative agreement on most choices and few disputes were serious enough to prevent quick acquiescence. The reason, however, was unfortunate—there were few outstand-



ing entries, either in terms of overall exhibitions or individual displays. The leading contenders were quickly apparent. Surprisingly, this was not always due to quality; rather, it had more to do with



1. GOLDEN TRIGUE: EXHIBIT OF GREAT BRITAIN.
2. GOLD SCENOGRAPHY: MIRJAM GROTE-GANSEY (NETHERLANDS)
3. SILVER SCENOGRAPHY: RONI TOREN (ISRAEL)
4. SILVER SCENOGRAPHY: ALAIN CHAMBON (FRANCE)
5. SILVER COSTUME: VERA MARZOT (ITALY)
6. GOLD ARCHITECTURE: MANOS PERRAKIS (GREECE)
7. GOLD THEME: USA
8. GOLD THEME: JAN VANCURA (CSFR)
6. GOLD ARCHITECTURE: FRANCE



presentation. With few exceptions, there was no range of work to be seen from individual designers. Four years ago, for instance, when Mr. Kokkos won, the overall excellence of his art was apparent to spectators because at least half a dozen of his works were presented in combinations of models, renderings and production photographs. One could see his work in different contexts and view the process from conception through execution. Whether one agreed with the decision of the jury or not, Kokkos' work was eminently "judgeable." Few scenographers presented that possibility this year—the year of the warehouse.

I think the award-winning exhibit from the United States at PQ'87 had a profound effect on many displays this time, but many exhibitors, it seems, took away the wrong message. The American exhibit last time displayed an overwhelming number of artifacts of the designer's process in a four-room environment representing different types of design studios. The overall effect was of the energy and process of design and no one designer was highlighted in any way. This year, several national exhibits went the route of the conceptual environment—but in many of those cases (Finland, Poland and Germany, for instance) the concept and environment overwhelmed any individual designs, while others went for the "show-as-much-as-you-can" approach. The Japanese literally referred to their two-story teahouse as a design warehouse.

What this meant for the jurors was an inability to judge anything on its own terms. There were interesting models with no production photos. Do you give an award to a designer based on a single interesting model? There were photos of some productions that looked startling but which lacked any other documentation. We quickly decided not to award designs represented only by photographs. (But then, Spain/Catalonia was represented by an artful and dynamic display of photographs alone and the impression was so strong that an Honorary Diploma was awarded.) The labyrinths, mazes and environments created by several nations were wonderful, fascinating pieces of theatre, but what was their relation to any specific work of theatre or to the designer's process? It was unclear.

Given all this, our work became fairly simple: in one area or individual awards, medals would only be awarded to designers who presented a body of work in some sort of context. This quickly limited the pool to a handful whose individual merits could be discussed. It was in the

area of set design that the most extended discussion and debates occurred. While this process ultimately worked well, I believe, for the set designers, it proved less successful for the costumers. There were a few well-presented displays, but these tended to be of less interesting work. It was finally decided that no costume exhibit was worthy of a gold medal and even the silver medal violated the principals the jury had established.

The national exhibits presented a different challenge. Do you reward a well-executed conceptual display even if it tends to obscure individual designs, or do you bestow a prize on a clear presentation of theatrical art? The awarding of the Golden Trigue to Great Britain was, in a sense, a compromise (though one that was arrived at almost immediately and without debate). The display had a conceptual unity and each work was presented in a clever environment. On the other hand, each of the carefully chosen models was clearly presented and most jurors felt that they were among the best designs at the PQ. What prevented an individual British designer from winning a medal was, again, the lack of a body of work or a context in which to view it. Something similar could be said for the "Mozart in America" display which won the Gold Medal for best thematic exhibit. The bright, clean presentation of a wide range of American Mozart design gave a very good impression of contemporary opera production in this country. But while the works of Adrienne Lobel, George Tsy-pin and John Conklin attracted some specific notice, there seemed not enough on which to justify an individual award.

Ultimately what struck me was how non-acrimonious the process was. The PQ Committee had no way of knowing how harmonious we might be as a group, yet here were 11 individuals from four continents who got along well and had a surprising unanimity of judgment and taste. Although politics, supposedly, had occasionally been a factor in the past, it was completely absent this time. In the end, I think all the jurors felt that this had been a rewarding experience, yet I believe we all felt that we hoped that next time the process would be more difficult because the choices would be so much greater. 12

Arnold Aronson is chair of the Theatre Division at Columbia University, author of American Set Design and former editor and currently a contributing editor of TD&T.

