

# Interview with Set & Costume Designer Juan Sebastian Dominguez

*Edited by Dana Pinto*



**Dana:** It is an absolute honor to meet you Juan Sebastian Dominguez especially as we follow of your design work and so it is a pleasure to be able to talk to you in further depth. Please introduce yourself and describe your approach to design.

**Juan:** My name is Juan Sebastián Domínguez and I am a Set and Costume Designer. My design work focuses mainly on stage and costume design, although occasionally I also do explore lighting and video scene design. My designs are generally characterized by the simplicity of the shapes, especially in the field of scenery. I like straight lines, suggestive spaces and enjoy to work with the metonymy of space, making the viewer complete with their imagination what you see on stage. I am not a scenographer who uses hyperrealism in my montages, except in cases related to directing demands. I believe suggestion is the key to my work and this is the same for the costumes: I try to create the personality of the characters on the scene through the small details, the color ranges, the textures. I am not very fond of prints for example, I always try to play more with the psychology of colour when designing a wardrobe or in search of the silhouette that transmits an era or a state of mind. Even if that involves making anachronistic garments or outside the time of the text.

**D:** You have designed range of many productions, but what would be the first production you designed that you would consider launched your career? At what point, did you recognize a turning point that strengthened your design career?

J: My first professional production was an opera by Háendel: Tolomeo, King of Egypt, directed by Curro Carreres which premiered at the Arriaga Theater in Bilbao in 2008, before I had done several works, but I think this was the most outstanding of my beginnings for its complexity and for the design of the scenery and costumes.

Later there are other productions that have marked my career "Karamazov" based on the novel by de Fiódor Dostoyevski, which was my presentation to the Peruvian Theater. "Jardiel, a writer back and forth" directed by Ernesto Caballero, for the National Dramatic Center or the work done with Paco Azorin: "Salomé" and "Squad Towards Death". These were works that have marked me a lot and that I am especially proud of.

D: Your designs are dramatic, dynamic and very characteristic. Could you tell us more about your influences, sources of inspiration and how these have an impact on your creative work.

J: My main source of inspiration is the word, the text. Almost everything is in the text, you just have to know how to read, analyze each word, understand it. Then I am very inspired by the history of art, cinema, people, architecture and everything surrounding me. There are no boundaries, inspiration is everywhere. Actually, the world around me is a great source of inspiration, you just have to know how to focus on the right element to see its possibilities and be able to transfer it to the scene.

D: This instinctively leads onto the next question of gaining further understanding of your design process. Please deliberate on how you devise your initial designs and then what techniques and methods you use to refine your final designs.

J: I always start from the word and the actor; in the text I find a lot of information that I translate into images, I always read and draw at the same time, take notes, make quick drawings in the margins of the pages. And then there is the actor, hearing that text in his voice, seeing his physiognomy and how he moves in space. These are the initial points to be able to design; then I add layers to the design: with the previous research, the study of the time, the author etc. All this while I continue drawing by hand, when designing an opera where the production process is greater a more detailed model-box would be produced. On other productions, I would start with sketches and then go onto developing these further on the computer where I sketch a lot in digital, either with the iPad or directly with photoshop. But there is always a first stage of traditional drawing.

D: How do you define your role as a Set and Costume Designer? And how do you see your role develop along with the future of scenography?

J: My role as a set designer is to translate an image or an idea that the stage director has into a corporeal and three-dimensional element. But not only to carry out that idea, but to enrich it and sometimes even improve it. My role is to create those worlds inhabited by immaterial characters, and my job would be both with the set design and the costumes, giving those beings corporeality.

I imagine the future of the scenery in constant evolution and learning. This is a profession that never ends, we are like sponges that absorb all kinds of information, everything can be valid to bring it to the scene. Therefore, our future will be to be attentive to new technologies and how to apply them to our designs; new materials, etc.

D: It has been wonderful talking to you and would like to conclude for you to share a personal highpoint of your career and what you are looking forward to working on in the future.

J: The highlight of my career is now, being able to dedicate myself to this profession that I love and enjoy every second I step on a stage. That for me is the best experience I can have. Beyond great shows: operas, musicals etc that I have been able to carry out, the excitement of starting a new project, the vertigo of facing the blank sheet, for me it is the best moment of my career. Well, in the future I would like to continue learning about this trade; working on all kinds of projects, even those that may be further from the scene: theme parks, cinema, exhibitions. The field of scenery is very broad and there is much to discover.

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