

The Glass Menagerie Design Concept



"The play is memory. Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic."

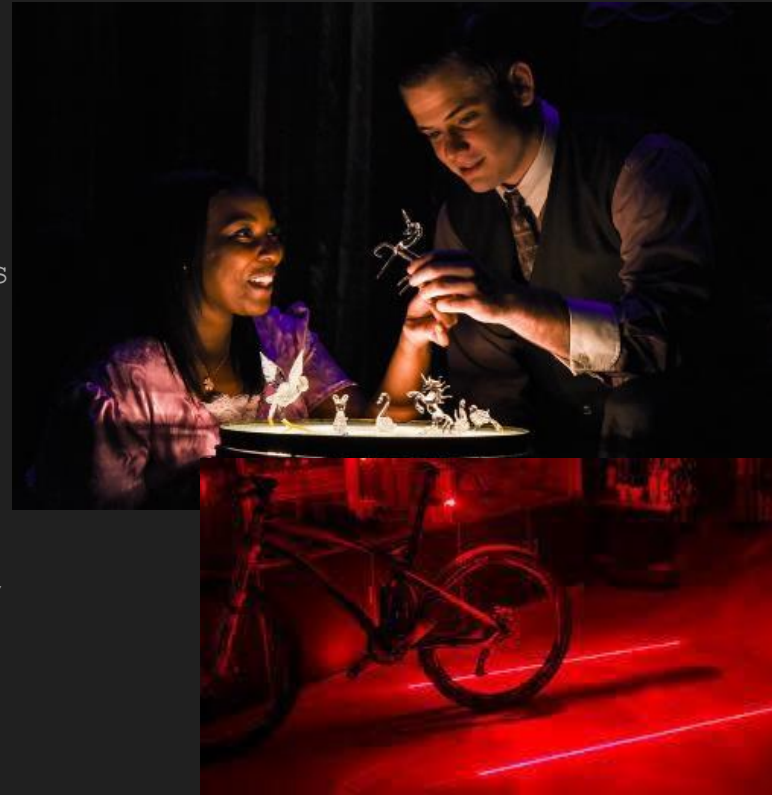
-Tom Wingfield, *The Glass Menagerie*

Theme

There are a few central themes in *The Glass Menagerie*, but there is one that is strongest to me, and that theme is the impossibility of true escape. In the play, Tom longs to leave his family to travel and have real adventures, Amanda wishes for the days of her youth, and Laura would prefer to be in her own world with her glass menagerie. Unlike Amanda and Laura, Tom's escape is achievable, but he has to sacrifice the financial security of his family, Amanda's trust, and Laura's future to get it. When he does leave, he is haunted by memories of his family. There is a secondary theme which ties in well with this one, which is the difficulty with accepting reality. Amanda escapes to her memories, Tom finds comfort in movies, books, and drunkenness, and Laura lives in a world constructed by her imagination. None of these are true escapes, and none of them are reality. It is on these concepts that I would base the design of the play.

Production Concept

The play should be dreamlike. That means that the characters and objects they interact with are fairly realistic looking. It is when we look at the rest of the set that reality begins to dissolve. Certain details like silverware and lamps are left out. Costume colors and the lights are more significant than in reality. They take on a meaning of their own. Most of the set is kept in darkness except for the parts that the characters are interacting with, to bring emphasis to their personal experiences. Whenever you can cut corners on reality, do so.



Costumes

Directions for costumes described in the play should be followed as closely as possible. Other than those, I would recommend:

-All clothing should be from the twenties, preferably late twenties. The Wingfields' wardrobe is usually decided by their mother and budget, so it would be either second hand or cheap imitation fashions. Most of their clothing is old and may not be in peak condition.

-Laura wears a lot of pastels, delicate pinks, lavenders, and baby blues. Delicate, flowing fabrics recommended.

-Amanda wears cheap imitation fashions or old clothes she has kept for decades. Old lace, faded colors, strings of pearls, cheap fabrics and imitation fur all recommended.

-Very blue collar. Dress shirt, loose tie, suspenders, and vest in different combinations. Go for a little bit of a Newsies vibe. Dim colors. For the gentleman caller, go for a similar look with nicer clothes and brighter colors. No hat.



Makeup

Makeup can be minimal. This may be a memory play, but it isn't Kabuki. The characters are the most "real" thing onstage, so they should be realistic. For each character:

- Tom and the gentleman caller should only have enough makeup to keep from being washed out under stage lights. Foundation, eyeliner, etc.

- Laura's makeup should also be minimal with the exception of blush and very soft blue-purple eyeshadow.

- Amanda can have more makeup than anyone else. Some blush, but lighter than Laura's to avoid looking youthful. More prominent mascara and eye liner. Use noticeable purple eye shadow, but avoid looking like a Bratz doll and lean more towards Marilyn Monroe. Red or pink lipstick.



Lighting

As Tom describes, use dim lights. Don't let light fill the whole space to emphasize actions occurring on different parts of the stage.

-Use a purple, blue, and yellow "kaleidoscope" effect when Tom is narrating, especially in the beginning and end.

-A bluish spotlight should be on Laura during the argument between Amanda and Tom, and any time Laura is emphasized.

-Use very dim red and orange, possibly pink lights to emphasize the arguments between Amanda and Tom.

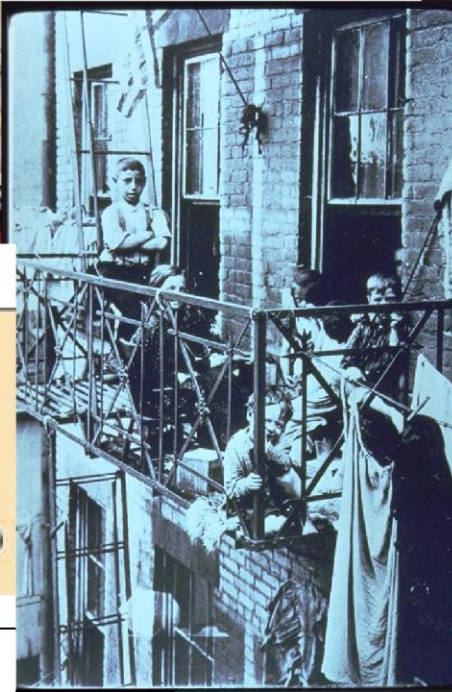
-Dim white lights and some purple can be used in scenes between Amanda and Laura. Emphasize sombreness, hopelessness even in the moments preparing for the gentleman caller.

-On the fire escape, use gradually bolder orange and red lights on Tom. Add yellow when the gentleman caller joins him, as if he is a ray of hope.



Set

This can be one of the most dreamlike elements of the play. Use flats for the walls inside of the apartment. In front of the first should be the dining room table. It should be set slightly in front of the two others to create the illusion of another room behind it. Right of it should be the two other flats. The middle should be the biggest and plain so images may be projected on it. The last could simply be a section of wall understood to be where the door is, or the door itself. Downstage center should be the couch and a coffee table. Allow room for the scrim between the flats and downstage furniture. Slightly behind the couch on the left is Laura's shelf containing her glass animals. Left of that would be an armchair. By the door should be the typewriter, its table, chair, and the charts on the wall. The fire escape can be stored right of the door, but should be movable to center stage during scenes where it is important. Allow it to be close enough to the flats for light to bounce off of them and make "shadows on the walls."



End