Scene & Unseen 2 (Sofia, 23-26 Jun 27)

Sofia, Bulgaria, Jun 23–25, 2027
Deadline: Jan 8, 2027

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Scene & Unseen 2: Built Narratives.
PD-REN Second International Conference.

Hosted by the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts (NATFA).
With the support of GEECT (Groupement Européen des Écoles de Cinéma et de Télévision).

Every story needs a place to happen, but no place is ever only a backdrop.

A worn threshold remembers footsteps. An empty chair holds the shape of someone absent. A city that has never existed becomes believable through the weight of a door handle, a stain on a wall, the light falling across a floor. Production design does not decorate the narrative. It builds it, in physical, digital and phygital spaces and everything in between.
To build a scene is not simply to determine what can be seen, but to shape what can be understood, imagined and felt. Every scene carries its unseen: the histories it implies, the emotions it holds, the worlds beyond the edge of the frame. Often it is what design lets us feel without ever showing: presence through absence, memory without image, a future made credible by a handful of carefully designed details.
Behind every scene lies another unseen world of research, drawings, models and decisions, where the narrative is first imagined, tested and made. And not every imagined world is built, nor every built world seen.
How does space construct meaning rather than merely contain it? What can a designed world tell us about what is absent, remembered or not yet real? And how might attending to the unseen change the way we practise, research and teach production design?
The Production Design Research & Education Network (PD-REN) invites production designers, researchers, educators and students to its second international conference, following the first Scene & Unseen at the University of Westminster, London, in 2025. The programme will combine contributions from this open call with invited keynote speakers from the international production design community.

Four Strands
What we construct. What we perceive. What remains beyond perception. And what might exist without ever being built.
Research, practice and education run across all four strands. We welcome artistic and practice-based research, professional reflection and pedagogical work within whichever strand it most closely addresses.

Scene: Building Worlds
How does production design construct the world of the narrative?
Possible topics include visualising the script, spatial storytelling, historical reconstruction, craft and materiality, virtual production, VFX and AI, and sustainability.

Seen: Shaping Perception
How does the designed world shape what audiences perceive, believe and understand?
Possible topics include history and identity on screen, representation and authenticity, codes of realism, challenging dominant visual narratives, and critical methodologies.

Unseen: Beyond the Frame
How does production design communicate what cannot, does not or need not be shown?
Possible topics include absence and the implied world, memory and hidden histories, off-screen space, authorship and the visibility of design labour, and archives.

Built & Unbuilt: Between Imagination and Materialisation
What happens between a world being conceived and becoming materially or virtually real?
Possible topics include unrealised designs and abandoned concepts, speculative futures, rethinking what it means to build, drawings and models as artistic enquiry, partial worlds, and designing without production.

Ways to Participate
We welcome papers, practice-led presentations (in which drawings, models, prototypes and process material are treated as research in their own right), panels, posters and visual research, workshops and demonstrations, and student PechaKucha presentations (20 images × 20 seconds).
Please submit an abstract of up to 300 words (stating the format and strand), a biography of up to 150 words, and your affiliation, if applicable. Practice-led, poster and PechaKucha proposals may include up to five images.
All proposals should be submitted by 8 January 2027 through the ONLINE SUBMISSION FORM (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeXgOh02fkQ2GUJ6gQ_qbFVoeWepGa69nXkfSF1n3ovXWp15w/viewform)
For questions regarding the Open Call, submission process or conference, please contact pdren.contact@gmail.com

Key Dates
Submission deadline: 8 January 2027
Notification of acceptance: 8 February 2027
Registration opens: March 2027
Conference: 23–25 June 2027
Details of registration fees, accommodation and keynote speakers will be announced in March 2027. A call for volunteers will be published closer to the conference.

Conference Steering Committee
Jane Barnwell (University of Westminster, UK), Natalie Beak (AFTRS, Australia), Jo Briscoe (University of Melbourne, Australia), Elena Trencheva and Boyana Buchvarova (NATFA, Bulgaria).

Reference:

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