



**BELVOIR ST
THEATRE**

MISS PEONY **牡丹小姐**

1 JULY - 29 JULY 2023

LEARNING RESOURCES **(PART A)**



Belvoir presents

MISS PEONY

By **Michelle Law**

Directed by **Courtney Stewart**

This production of *Miss Peony* opens at Belvoir St Theatre on Wednesday 5 July 2023.

Set & Costume Designer **Jonathan Hindmarsh**
Assistant Set & Costume Designer **Keerthi Subramanyam**
Lighting Designer **Trent Suidgeest**
Composer **Dr Nicholas Ng**
Sound Designer **Julian Starr**
Associate Sound Designer **Zac Saric**
Choreographer **Kristina Chan**
Singing Teacher **Sheena Crouch**
Vocal Coach **Laura Farrell**
Vocal Coach **Amy Hume**
Additional Dramaturg **Polly Rowe**
Production Dramaturg **Carissa Licciardello**
Assistant Director **Nicole Pingon**
Translator (2023) **Samantha Kwan**
Subtitling & Mandarin Translator (2021) **Dr Jing Han**
Cantonese Translator (2021) **Sylvia Xu**
Community Engagement Coordinator **Ailsa Liu**
Community Engagement Coordinator **Jessica Kejun Xu**
Stage Manager **Gayda De Mesa**
Assistant Stage Manager **Ayah Tayeh**
Assistant Stage Manager **Wun Zee**

With

Gabrielle Chan
Jing-Xuan Chan
Michelle Law
Mabel Li
Shirong Wu
Charles Wu

Supported by **Nelson Meers Foundation**

In Association with **Arts Centre Melbourne, QPAC** and **AsiaTOPA**

We acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land on which Belvoir St Theatre is built. We also pay respect to the Elders past, present and emerging, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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PART A PUBLISHED JUNE 2023. PART B OF THESE LEARNING RESOURCES WILL BE RELEASED AFTER THE SHOW HAS OPENED IN JULY 2023

BELVOIR

ST THEATRE

ABOUT BELVOIR

**ONE BUILDING.
SIX HUNDRED PEOPLE.
THOUSANDS OF STORIES**

When the Nimrod Theatre building in Belvoir Street, Surry Hills, was threatened with redevelopment in 1984, more than 600 people – ardent theatre lovers together with arts, entertainment and media professionals – formed a syndicate to buy the building and save this unique performance space in inner city Sydney.

Thirty years later, under Artistic Director Eamon Flack and Executive Director Aaron Beach, Belvoir engages Australia’s most prominent and promising playwrights, directors, actors and designers to realise an annual season of work that is dynamic, challenging and visionary. As well as performing at home, Belvoir regularly takes to the road, touring both nationally and internationally.

BELVOIR EDUCATION

Our Education Program provides students and teachers with insights into the work of Belvoir and first hand experiences of the theatre-making process.

Belvoir Education offers student workshops, teacher professional development workshops, work experience, VET placements, archival viewings and a wealth of online resources designed to support work in the drama classroom. Our arts access programs assist schools in Regional NSW and Western Sydney to access the company’s work.

Explore our education pages at belvoir.com.au/education



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CHECK BACK FOR POST-SHOW DISCUSSION, MEDIA AND REVIEWS, DIRECTOR'S NOTE AND MORE!

[BELVOIR.COM.AU/MISS-PEONY-2023/#SCHOOLS](https://belvoir.com.au/miss-peony-2023/#schools)

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM



Michelle Law
Writer



Courtney Stewart
Director



Gabrielle Chan
Adeline



Jing-Xuan Chan
Marcy



Kristina Chan
Choreographer



Sheena Crouch
Singing Teacher



Gayda De Mesa
Stage Manager



Laura Farrell
Vocal Coach



Dr Jing Han
Subtitling & Mandarin Translator
(2021)



Jonathan Hindmarsh
Set & Costume Designer



Amy Hume
Vocal Coach (2021)



Samantha Kwan
Translator (2023)



Michelle Law
Lily



Mabel Li
Sabrina



Carissa Licciardello
Production Dramaturg



Ailsa Liu
Community Engagement
Coordinator



Dr Nicholas Ng
Composer



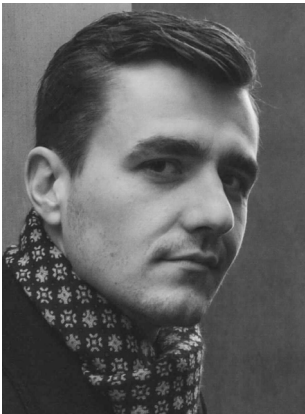
Nicole Pingon
Assistant Director



Polly Rowe
Additional Dramaturg



Zac Saric
Associate Sound Designer



Julian Starr
Sound Designer



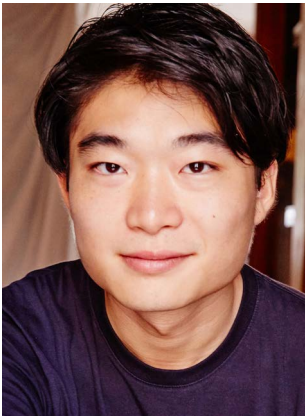
Keerthi Subramanyam
Assistant Set &
Costume Designer



Trent Suidgeest
Lighting Designer



Ayah Tayeh
Assistant Stage Manager



Charles Wu
Zhen Hua



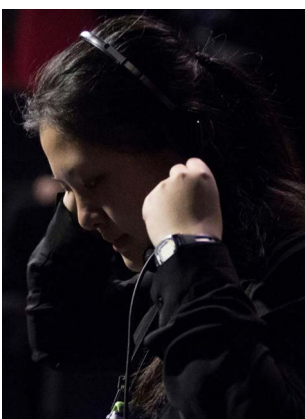
Shirong Wu
Joy



Jessica Kejun Xu
Community Engagement
Coordinator



Sylvia Xu
Cantonese Translator (2021)



Wun Zee
Assistant Stage Manager

WRITER'S NOTE

MICHELLE LAW

PROGRAM

Miss Peony was written over the course of several years, but the concept for it was seeded more than two decades ago.

TEXT

I was 11-years-old and visiting family in Hong Kong. My Kow Foo, Kum Moh, Biu Goh and I were watching the Miss Hong Kong pageant on TV, my jaw on the floor the entire time. Because I was born in, and had grown up in Australia, I'd never seen so many Asian women on screen before. It was incredible witnessing so many women who looked like me being celebrated for their appearance and connection to culture when I'd learnt to dislike these things about myself and assimilate in order to survive living in a western country.

DESIGN

One contestant stood out to me: a woman struggling to answer interview questions in Cantonese before ultimately giving up and speaking in English. She had an Australian accent.

I remember sitting straighter on the couch as I watched her. She sounded like an ABC (Australian Born Chinese) and a banana, just like me – yellow on the outside; white on the inside. She gave me hope that maybe there was finally a place in the world where I belonged. And then she was eliminated from the pageant.

Miss Peony is a story about the unique sense of displacement experienced by diasporic peoples and third culture kids. It's about the trauma of experiencing exclusion from all sides, and the ways in which we cope with the unspoken judgement and elitism from our own peoples when racial divides demand very narrowed definitions of cultural authenticity. It's also an exploration of intercultural racism and lateral violence among Chinese nationalities. We may be the world's largest ethnic group, but we are not a monolith. The same can be said for our languages.

PRODUCTION

MEDIA



Michelle Law, Courtney Stewart

Translating and surtitling this show has been one of the most exciting, political and challenging experiences of my creative practice to date. I could not be more grateful for our astounding translators Professor Jing Han, Sylvia Xu, and Samantha Kwan, who have spent countless hours massaging and troubleshooting this gargantuan task. I hope this script provides encouragement for more productions to decentralise English and the spoken word while making theatre more inclusive and accessible to historically excluded audiences.

A big thank you to the entire team at Belvoir for embracing *Miss Peony* and new Australian work; to our joyous and generous cast and crew; to Tracey Yu and Reiko Bui for their insights into the pageant universe; to the Asian Australian artists who took part in development workshops for *Miss Peony*; to Louise Gough, Polly Rowe and Carissa Licciardello for their dramaturgically brilliant brains; and finally

to director Courtney Stewart. Court, thank you for being there from the very beginning of everything, for being an enduring role model, and for continuing to be the most wonderful friend and collaborator. Thank 'your', sis.

This play is dedicated to my Ma Ma, Law Wong Ching Lan.



Michelle Law

CHARACTERS

WHO'S WHO IN MISS PEONY

PROGRAM



LILY 26-years-old. An assimilated, Australian born Chinese woman who rejects the traditional Chinese values with which she was raised. Spiritually lost and searching for acceptance.

TEXT



ADELINE Deceased. Lily's Por Por (maternal grandmother) who appears as a ghost. Once a Hong Kong beauty queen, and then a prominent member of the Sydney Chinese community.

DESIGN



MARCY 25-years-old. A first-generation migrant from mainland China and contestant in Miss Peony. Passionate about her family business and single-minded in her pursuit of success.

PRODUCTION



JOY 23-years-old. A Taiwanese international student and contestant in Miss Peony. Fiercely intellectual and a loveable oddball. Romantic, and seeking connection in a foreign land.

MEDIA



SABRINA 18-years-old. An Australian born Chinese LG - Little Girl - from Western Sydney and a contestant in *Miss Peony*. Grew up idolising Miss Peony winners and is pageant obsessed.



ZHEN HUA 28-years-old. An Australian born Chinese man who hosts and produces Miss Peony. Cares deeply about his community and works hard to protect it.

THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

Miss Peony is set in Sydney, Australia in the present day and takes place over several weeks during a highly competitive Chinese community beauty pageant called: 'Miss Peony'.

The production uses magical realism, with the action of the play taking place in the 'real world', but with fantastical elements.

The action of the play takes place in both the 'real world' where the audience observes the narrative and performative sequences where the audience assumes the role of the pageant audience. This creates a world where the characters behave in both observed and private spaces.

Locations within the play include a hospice room, a casino conference hall, a hotel room, a hot pot restaurant and a backstage green room.

This script is performed in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin. Subtitles are required for these three languages and are played concurrently.



Mabel Li, Shirong Wu, Michelle Law, Jing-Xuan Chan

CHARACTER PROGRESSION

READ THE FOLLOWING EXCERPT

This activity is best completed once you have read or seen the production. When reading the excerpt consider the following questions:

1. Describe the status of each character. What in the script gives you this information? Does their status change throughout the play? How so?
2. How does this scene demonstrate the characters journey from the start of the play. How has Lily's perspective shifted from the start of the play? What new information do we learn about Marcy in this scene?
3. How does the relationship between the characters suggest a perspective shift for each character?
4. What does this scene convey to the audience about the cultural complexities of being Chinese-Australian?
5. How is language used to convey the intended meanings of the play?

Content warning: The following scene refers to an instance of sexual harrasment.

SCENE 11

A HOTPOT RESTAURANT.

Later that evening. The women sit in silence, solemn. LILY stirs the hotpot and serves everyone, trying to lighten the mood.

LILY: More fish?

MARCY: (To Joy) Don't worry about Zhen Hua. He's a fool.
[in Mandarin] 你不用再想着振华了，他就是个傻逼。

JOY: I'm ashamed to say this, but I was scared.
[in Mandarin] 说出来太羞耻了，但是我当时很害怕。

MARCY: It WAS scary!
[in Mandarin] 这事是很可怕!

JOY: I never scared of Ken Lam. I scare of myself because I felt like I have enough rage to hurt him. Maybe even kill him. All of my anger towards men almost spill over, cause a mess. Does that make me evil?

LILY: Evil? It makes you relatable!

JOY: Do you know what I did when he pulled out his dick? I sighed, because I am so used to that kind of behaviour from men. And then I was angry because I shouldn't have to be used to it. Sometimes I just want to get a boyfriend so other men will finally leave me alone. If I belong to another man, at least they will respect his 'property'.

[in Mandarin] 你知道他把小弟弟拿出来时我做了甚么吗？我叹了口气，因为我已经对男人这样的行为习以为常。然后我就生我自己的气，因为我不应该习惯它。有时候我想交男朋友也只是为了让其他男人放过我。如果我属于另一个男人，至少他们会尊重他的「财产」。

SABRINA: Oh Joy. You don't believe that.

LILY: What'd she say?

SABRINA: She wants a beard, but even that won't stop guys from being gross scumbags.

MARCY: She's right. Society teaches men to hate women from a young age. Even the so-called 'nice guys' may feel emasculated if you're more intelligent than them or earn a higher salary.

[in Mandarin] 她说的对。社会教导男人从小厌女。如果你比他们更聪明、收入更高，即使是所谓的「好男人」都会觉得被精神阉割。

LILY: I had one customer at work in a 'The Future is Female' shirt kiss me on a New Year's shift, tongue and everything. It wasn't even the kiss that disturbed me. It was his attitude. The sense of entitlement.

SABRINA: Once I had a guy peeping tom me in the Market City Timezone toilets and I called the police but it took them ages – ACAB – so the guy got away and it never got resolved. In the end I was so freaked out I had to stop going to Timezone and give my VIP membership card to my nephew. He used all my points on a Sonic backpack. It was terrible. So it's understandable why you're so angry, Joy.

JOY: Maybe I brought this upon myself. I'm an academic in gender studies taking part in a beauty pageant! What am I doing? I should quit.

[in Mandarin] 可能是我自己拿来的。我堂堂一名性别研究学者，居然来参加选美比赛！我到底在干甚么？我应该退赛。

SABRINA: Don't quit, Joy!

LILY: Miss Peony needs women like you, Joy! You're inspiring. You're all inspiring. Forget about Zhen Hua and – and have some more quail eggs instead!

JOY: Thank you, Lily. For your words, and for your eggs.

MARCY: We're 'inspiring' are we? I thought you'd rather be dead than be like us.

LILY: I'm sorry. I can't believe I said that.

SABRINA: I'm sorry too, guys. I promised myself I wouldn't be bitchy and competitive when I entered because that's not who I am. I'm just heaps passionate because the women in Miss Peony were my heroes growing up. They were the first people I saw on TV who looked like me and were winning at life instead of, you know, being investigated on *A Current Affair* and stuff. I entered because I was like, whoa, it'd be awesome to be that person for someone else one day. Be a role model for other ABCs out there. And on an international stage in Beijing! Getting to meet all the other Miss Peony winners from around the world.

JOY: Very good, Sabrina. On hard days like this, good to remind myself why I enter Miss Peony: to find a loving partner.

MARCY spits out her tea.

JOY: So many beautiful women competing and watching – better than dating app. Maybe I can find best friend. Then hopefully fall in love. I can't have that at home. Even though Taiwan make gay people legal, still my parents no accept. Still punishing me.

MARCY: I have the opposite problem. My parents gave me everything and now it's my turn to repay them. My brother ran our company into the ground. I'm the one with the business smarts but he has too much pride to let me take over. I entered Miss Peony to save Ausway; we need the prize money. If sales don't improve, we will lose all eight locations across New South Wales and have to file for bankruptcy. Please don't tell anyone.

SABRINA: Oh Marcy, I'm so sorry! My parents love buying bulk paw paw ointment from Ausway! Why did you enter, Lily?

LILY: I entered for my grandmother. And once the pageant is finished, I'll move to London.

JOY: Why you go to England? You want to be colonise again?

LILY: I guess the destination never mattered. I'm more drawn to the idea of starting anew.

MARCY: Trust me as a business owner when I say that starting anew can be overrated. Sometimes it's more worthwhile to focus on fixing what you already have.

JOY: Excuse me. I have to go wee wee.

JOY exits.

LILY: I haven't eaten hot pot since I was a kid. This has been really nice.

SABRINA: Hot pot is the best! But make sure you always go with your Chinese friends cause whenever I go with whities they're like, 'So you have to cook your own food?' It's so frustrating. I just want to drink my watermelon juice in peace.

LILY: I don't have many white friends. Or Chinese friends for that matter. I've always kind of been alone.

SABRINA: Oh Lily, that's so sad.

LILY: You don't have to feel sorry for me! I'm always busy with work. And I like to read. I just finished reading Jane Eyre.

SABRINA: That whole book is about lonely women.

LILY: Is it?

SABRINA: Here! Have some more juice! (Filling everyone's cups.) We should toast to – to making friends! And to making the top 12 and persisting despite all the shit that went down. I can't believe Miss Peony ends tomorrow night.

They raise their glasses.

LILY: Wait. Where did Joy go?

SABRINA: To the toilet. Good on her. Exposure therapy.

MARCY: No, she did not go to the toilet. She went to pay!

JOY returns to the table and smugly takes a seat.

MARCY: Are you serious right now!

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

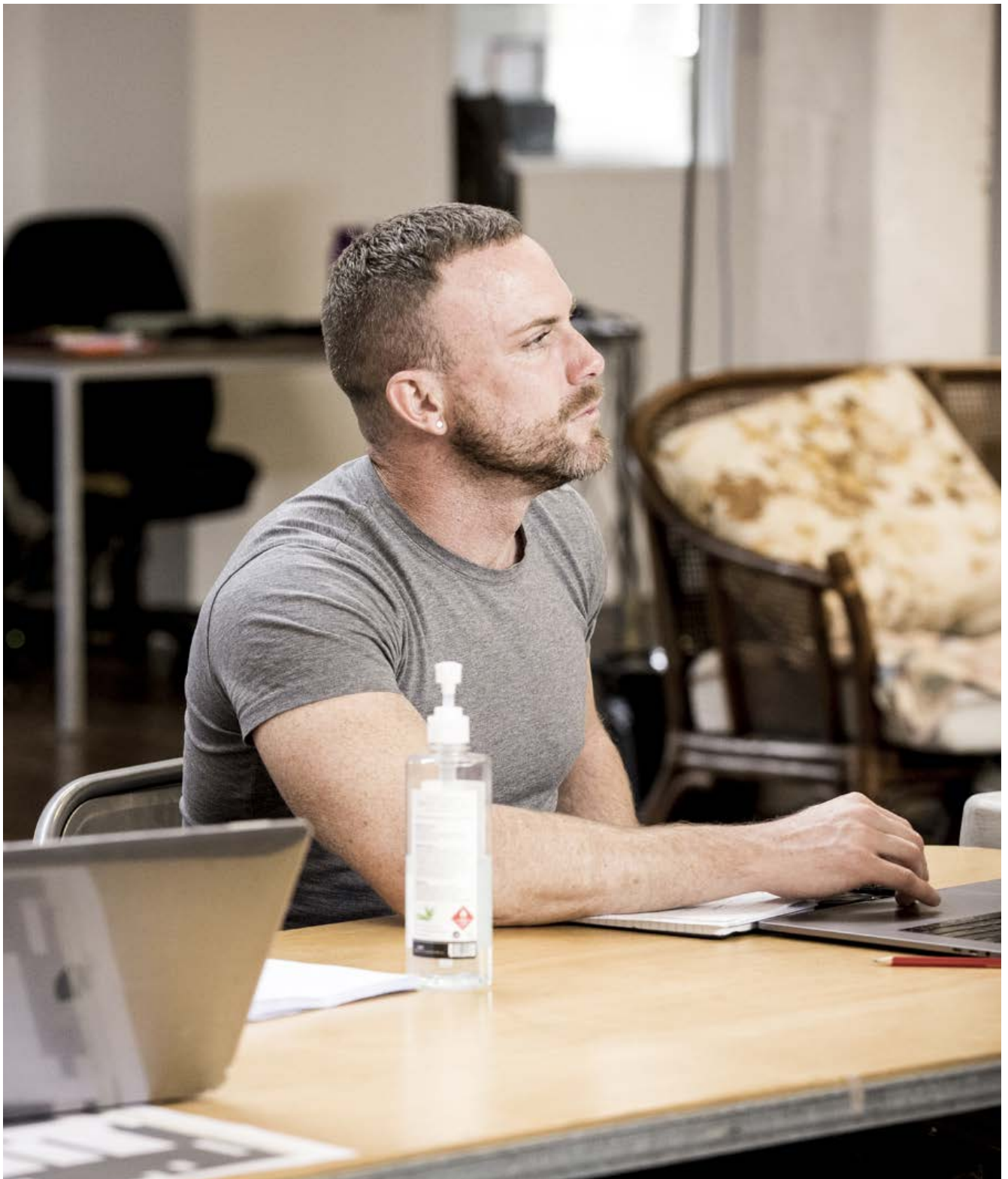
The elements of production are the technical and visual elements used to manipulate the elements of drama in order to effectively tell a play's story.

In these notes we are going to look at the *Miss Peony* design concepts including:

1. the set model box and
2. costume reference images.

DESIGNER

JONATHAN HINDMARSH



SET DESIGN

REFERENCE IMAGES

Reference images are used by designers to communicate aesthetic concepts with the director or to the cast. These might communicate a moment in the play, or an overall texture or style.



Reference images collected by Jonathan Hindmarsh



Set Model Box, by Jonathan Hindmarsh

Questions to consider after seeing this production

1. What are the key differences between the early model box design & the final set design?
2. Why might this change have taken place?
3. How many different locations were represented in the production?
4. How are set pieces used to change the space? What impact does this have?
5. How has the designer used stage space, texture, colour and composition to enhance dramatic meaning?

COSTUME DESIGN

PROGRAM

TEXT

DESIGN

PRODUCTION

MEDIA



Reference images, character lookbook, by Jonathan Hindmarsh

Take a look at the following costume reference images collected by designer, Jonathan Hindmarsh. For each character, consider the following:

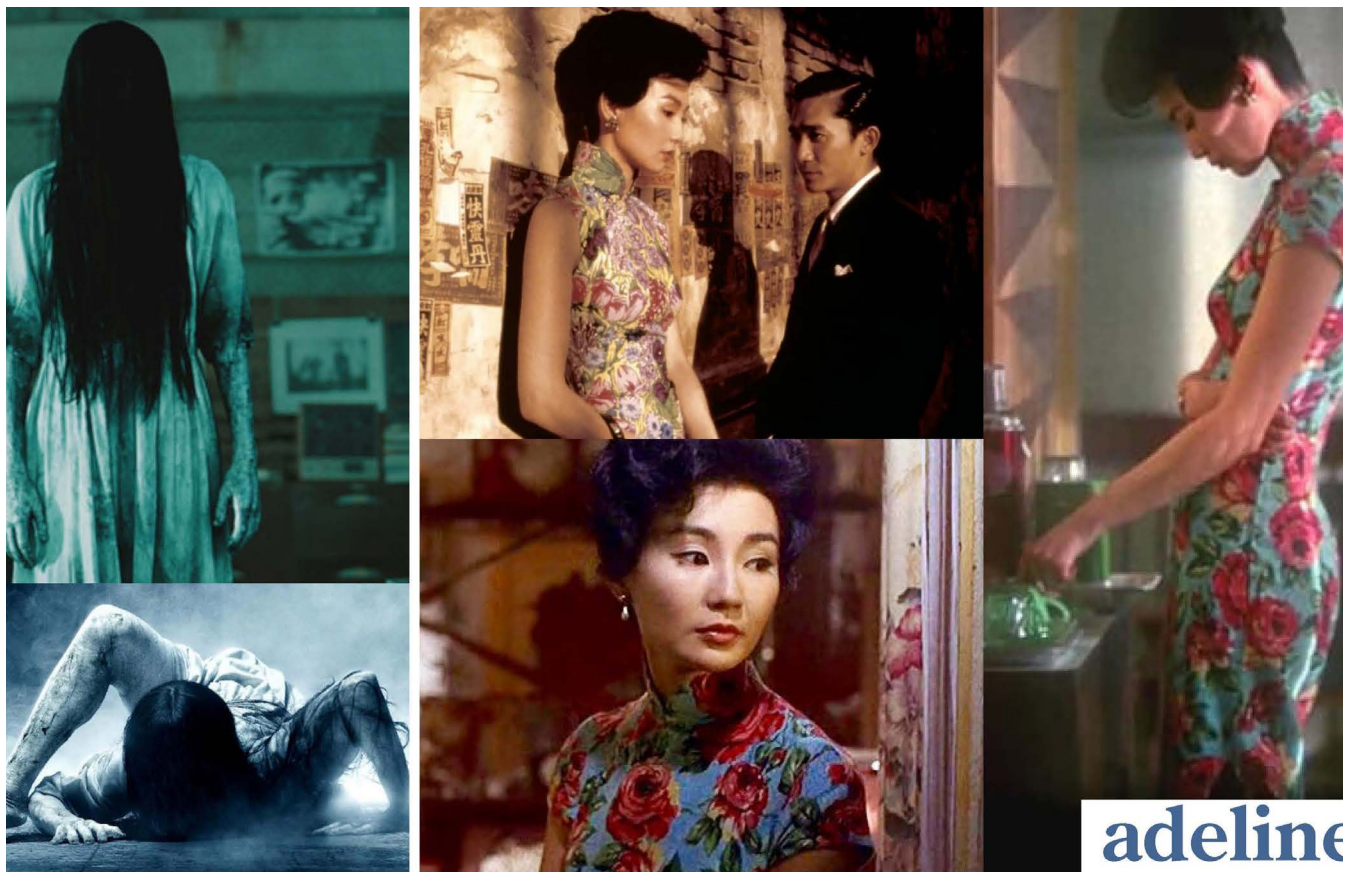
1. How would you describe this character based on the costume references?
2. What characteristics do you think this character has based on the aesthetic presented?
3. What do you assume about this character and their status based on the costume references?

LILY



Reference images, character lookbook, by Jonathan Hindmarsh

ADELINE



Reference images, character lookbook, by Jonathan Hindmarsh

MARCY



Reference images, character lookbook, by Jonathan Hindmarsh

JOY



Reference images, character lookbook, by Jonathan Hindmarsh

SABRINA



Reference images, character lookbook, by Jonathan Hindmarsh

ZHEN HUA



Reference images, character lookbook, by Jonathan Hindmarsh

REHEARSING MISS PEONY

PROGRAM

TEXT



Michelle Law, Mabel Li

1. What do you think is happening in this scene? Give reasons for your answer
2. What evidence is there that this is a rehearsal?

DESIGN

PRODUCTION



Jing-Xuan Chan Shirong Wu, Mabel Li, Michelle Law, Nicole Pingon

1. Describe what you see in the photo above
2. What do you think is happening? Give reasons for your answer.
3. What in this picture gives you a clue that this is a rehearsal and not a performance?

MEDIA



Shirong Wu, Gabrielle Chan, Mabel Li

1. Describe what you see in the photo above.
2. What do you think is happening in this moment?
3. What do you think the relationship is between these characters? Give reasons for your answer



Charles Wu, Michelle Law

1. Describe what you see in the picture above.
2. What do you think is happening in this moment? Give reasons for your answers

WATCH & LISTEN

PROGRAM



Interview with Writer & Actor Michelle Law

Recorded at Belvoir's 2023 Season Launch, writer and actor Michelle Law introduces MISS PEONY, the sixth show in the 2023 season.

WATCH NOW

TEXT

DESIGN



Social Media | *Miss Peony*

Lots of sneak-peek content, and promotional information can be found on social media.

Take a look at the grid and the stories for more content during the run.



PRODUCTION

MEDIA

CONTACT EDUCATION

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Belvoir Education would like to thank Jonathan Hindmarsh, Xu Yang Chua, Jake Severino and Gemma Clinch for their support creating these resources.

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