Selected Projects in Scenic Design

Sera Shearer

Utah State University

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Selected Projects in Scenic Design

By Sera Shearer
SELECTED PROJECTS IN SCENIC DESIGN

By

Sera Shearer

A Plan B report submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

Scenic Design

Approved:

_________________________________________________
Dennis Hassan, MFA
Major Professor

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Bruce Duerden, MFA
Committee Member

_________________________________________________
Richie Call, MFA
Committee Member
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Acknowledgements

In February of 2019, in a convention center in Knoxville, Tennessee, I started one of the greatest journeys of my life. At that conference, I was fortunate enough to meet Shawn Fisher, an incredible mentor who somehow managed to convince me in less than an hour that I should pack up my whole life and move to Utah for my graduate studies. I cannot begin to thank him enough for being the driving force that started this change when I most needed it in my life, and for all of his mentorship in and out of the theatre.

My time at Utah State also introduced me to several other incredible mentors who helped me grow as an artist and an educator over the three years of the graduate program. Dennis Hassan, Bruce Duerden, Kelly Simons, Amy Critchfield, and Scott Richardson have all taught me in very different ways what it means to be a designer, a technician, an educator, and an advocate for students, and I am so incredibly grateful to have learned from them during my time at USU.

Special thanks must also be given to the friends I’ve made through the program, in particular to Hannah Whorton. Thank you for being my favorite collaborator, the logical thinker behind my crazy ideas, and the best grad school buddy there is. It has been such a privilege to spend the last three years working alongside you, and I am so proud to call you my friend.

Thank you to my amazing partner, Jules, for her unending patience as I’ve navigated late nights, enormous piles of craft supplies, and no small amount of uncertainty at the beginning of this year in terms of where we would be come summer. I am so thankful to have the most wonderful woman by my side as I begin my next journey.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support throughout the years, whether they were attending plays at Stevenson High School to see me in the ensemble of Oliver! or
driving cross-country so that my first Thanksgiving in Utah wouldn’t be spent alone. My family
is the greatest support system I could have possibly asked for, and I am so glad to be moving
closer to them upon completing my graduate studies.

Dedicated to Doug Gowen.
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Chapter One: Physical Comedy with Physical Distance

A Flea in Her Ear

A New Version of Georges Feydeau’s Farce

By David Ives

Directed by Valerie Rachelle

Performances originally scheduled for November 13th-15th, 2020

Performances canceled due to COVID-19

Photoshoot conducted February 23rd-25th, 2021

Utah State University, Caine College of the Arts

Department of Theatre Arts

Morgan Theatre

Logan, Utah
Introduction

*A Flea in Her Ear* is a farcical story that primarily follows the hijinks of a wealthy couple and the friends and foes that get pulled into their marital drama. Victor and Raymonde Chandebise are what those around them would view as the perfect couple, but Raymonde has grown suspicious that her husband is having an affair; she notes to her dear friend, Lucienne, that his performance in the bedroom is now somewhat lacking. In order to determine whether her suspicions are true, the two women hatch a plan to lure Victor to the Frisky Puss Hotel with a letter written by a “mysterious woman,” where Raymonde will meet him to catch him in the act. The letter is penned by Lucienne, sprayed with perfume, and sent off to Victor anonymously.

What the women do not account for is that Victor does not believe the letter to be for him, but for his handsome friend, Tournel. Meanwhile, Lucienne’s jealous, hot-tempered husband finds the note, and sets off in search of his unfaithful wife and her would-be lover. At the Frisky Puss Hotel, chaos ensues as identities are mistaken and revealed, and confusion reigns supreme.

Victor turns out to be a perfect lookalike for the drunk bellhop, Poche, and is set to work by the hotel’s eccentric owners, Feraillon and Olympe. With the addition of several other colorful characters such as the drunk uncle, the maid, the doctor, the butler, and the nephew with a unique speech impediment, the characters run wild until ultimately all is revealed in the end, the couples make up, and all is well once more.

While originally scheduled to open in the Fall of 2020, *A Flea in Her Ear* never made it in front of the live audience that it deserved. Rather, our faculty and leadership were forced to make the difficult decision to postpone and ultimately cancel performances due to the COVID-19 pandemic following our first technical rehearsal. In order to preserve the work done by our
designers and technicians, it was decided that a full photoshoot would be conducted at a later

time, with small groups of actors called to maintain safe distancing onstage and in the dressing

rooms. *A Flea in Her Ear* was directed by guest artist Valerie Rachelle, Artistic Director of the

Oregon Cabaret Theatre, who was an excellent leader through the unknown as we navigated the

new barriers faced by artists due to COVID-19. Together with Valerie and the rest of the

production team, we were able to create something beautiful and lighthearted, all while abiding

by the necessary safety measures put in place to protect our students. While it certainly presented

its challenges, I was very proud of the work done on this production, and was thrilled to serve as

scenic designer for the first time at Utah State University.

  Directed by Valerie Rachelle

  Stage Managed by Karina Lopez

  Scenic Design by Sera Shearer

  Assistant Scenic Design by Piper Bouldin

  Technical Direction by Maya Bowers

  Scenic Charge Artistry by Hannah R. Whorton

  Costume Design by Jordan M. R. Draper

  Lighting Design by Katelyn Westergard

  Sound Design by Connor Stevens

  Properties Design by Steve Mathews

  Scenic Design Mentoring by Dennis Hassan
Design Concept Statement

Originally, *A Flea in Her Ear* had been set to be designed by my mentor, Dennis Hassan. In fact, a design had already been decided on and plans had been made to begin the build when the decision to slim down our production season was made. With this decision came the need to rearrange certain production team assignments, and I was asked to join the production team as the scenic designer in early August of 2020, a mere month before we were to begin the build. Thankfully, director Valerie Rachelle and costume designer Jordan Draper were quick to welcome me to the team, filling me in on the conversations they had already had and allowing me to bring my own twists to the table.

Upon first read-through of the script, it was evident that this play is silly, fluffy, and flirtatious. *A Flea in Her Ear* is a product of its time, written in 1907 and set at the turn of the century during a period known as *La Belle Epoque* (Figure 1.1). This period was characterized primarily by the inability of the very, very rich to cope with the grim realities of everyday life. With this in mind, it seemed only right to lean into the vibrant escapism that was so central not only to the period in general, but to the play itself. During a time when the world around us was full of
uncertainty and fear, I hoped to help create a fantasy that audiences could escape into for just a couple of hours.

In conversations with Valerie and Jordan, one of the great needs in the building of our world was the distinct separation between the two worlds: the prim and proper home of the Chandebise couple and their friends, and the exciting and over-the-top Frisky Puss Hotel where everything is topsy-turvy. Valerie specifically cited the television program Harlots as inspiration, particularly for the costumes, and Jordan had a loose idea of the costumes' color palettes based on that. Generally, we agreed that the Chandebise home should remain in the light, airy world of pastels and simplicity; not quite sterile in nature, but with everything in its perfect place. Conversely, the Frisky Puss Hotel would be bold colors and textures that matched the characters running the establishment. The hotel was to be “sexy but not seedy,” a sort of Las-Vegas-meets-Disneyland-and-the-Grand-Budapest-Hotel feeling.

Additionally, the requirements of COVID-19 safety measures had to be at the forefront of the design process. A farce is, at its core, a physical comedy, so it was imperative that we come up with a way to maintain the integrity of that theatrical style while recognizing the realities of the time in which we were producing the piece. To protect our actors, they could not remain within a six-foot distance of each other for an extended period, so the furniture would need to be strategically placed to provide them with acting barriers. We were also presented with the unique challenge of needing to remove the entire set from the stage every night, as during the day our theatre space was being used for socially distanced classes. While it did present a challenge, this requirement turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as it prepared me for future design work with repertory style companies where the same theatre is used for multiple shows with different sets at the same time.
Research

I began the process by looking into the art and architecture of the period, as the era was key not only to understanding the style of the play but to contextualizing this world for our modern audiences. The architecture of this time was incredibly varied due to rapid development and the creation of new monuments. Styles ranged from Romano-Byzantine (Figure 1.2) to Art Nouveau (Figure 1.3) and everywhere in between. This knowledge excited me for the possibilities that it opened up; while the play was set in the Paris of 1907, the architecture and interior styles could draw inspiration from numerous times and locations, as long as the connection to the period was there. Meanwhile, the art of the time focused on color and movement, two ideas that are central to *A Flea in Her Ear*. Impressionism saw studies in delicate light and color, while fauvism moved more into wildly colorful landscapes and expressive figures. Finally, Art Nouveau led to a complete break from the artistic norms of the time, with an emphasis on
natural motifs and organic shapes. With a broad overall knowledge of these styles, I was able to begin narrowing in on what could further inspire the two locations of the play.

Our first locale, the Chandebise Living Room, is home to two people who are members of the prim and proper society. They are, by their own admission, almost “too perfect,” and think very highly of themselves. They are not necessarily what one may consider “old money,” but they may be the type who try to replicate that air of superiority. For that reason, I drew a good deal of inspiration from Rococo and Neoclassical interiors (Figure 1.4). By 1907, these styles would have been a bit outdated and belonged to the older generation, but speak to wealth and power, something that the Chandebise family may aspire to. Late Rococo and early Neoclassical architecture in particular have a look that many modern audiences can quickly and easily associate with French wealth, as it is the style that Marie Antoinette embodied and brought to the Palace of Versailles. In a broader sense, I also sought out reference images of elongated walls, tall windows, and larger-than-life portraiture. These were people who thought very highly of themselves, and by relying on tall, straight lines and oversized scales, I hoped to convey that easily to our audiences. (Figure 1.5)
Additionally, the color palettes of many popular impressionist artworks fit squarely into the pastel range that the production team had previously agreed on. The works of Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Paul Cezanne provided the soft, featherlight feeling that ultimately inspired the final paint treatment of the walls. In particular, Monet’s “Woman With a Parasol” embodied the feeling of this world, and I drew my color palette primarily from this painting (Figure 1.6).

Conversely, the hotel took inspiration from the wild and expressive colors of fauvism. The Frisky Puss Hotel was not the coordinated, measured perfection we saw in the impressionist-inspired Chandebise home. Instead, I looked to the bold strokes of Andre Derain’s paintings, the bright colors of Henri Matisse. The work I drew most from in terms of the hotel’s color palette was “Interior, Flowers and Parakeets” by Matisse (Figure 1.7).

In terms of architecture, I wanted to completely remove the hotel from the world of Victor and Raymonde’s everyday life. Initially, Valerie had presented the idea of setting this act in a Persian-themed hotel to justify the use of face masks. While we did not pursue this further in terms of costuming, I did find inspiration in the shapes and colors of Neo-Moorish and Islamic
architecture, both of which were making an appearance in France during La Belle Epoque (Figure 1.8). In terms of the story, the hotel’s proprietor, Feraillon, is the type of man who would certainly believe that his establishment was much grander than it truly was. He’s the sort who would find anything colorful and shiny and decide to make it his own without questioning the meaning. Modern inspiration came from images of hotels and motels in Las Vegas and Miami, Disneyland, and sugary sweet confection shops.

Figure 1.7 - Interior, Flowers and Parakeets - Painting by Henri Matisse

Figure 1.8 - Mofakham Historical Monument
Design Process

As previously mentioned, I joined the production team quite late in the process, and so faced the challenge of designing under a condensed timeline. In the end, this turned out to be an excellent learning experience, as it provided me with the opportunity to push myself creatively in order to have a professional product by my deadline. With time constraints in mind, I had to hit the ground running. I began with several rough sketches of each location, experimenting with different compositions and combinations of different elements to tell the story (Figures 1.9-1.11 and Plates 1.1-1.2). As I sketched, I had to consider not only how each location worked, but how that location could transform into the next as seamlessly as possible. While I considered countless options, some central ideas that I kept returning to were that of utilizing different textures of fabric to help set the tone and mask the backstage area, and units that could be quickly turned around to reveal the different locations. I also considered many flown elements for ease of transition and
storage, as well as different practical lighting fixtures for our lighting designer, Katelyn Westergard, to play with.

After sketching, I was able to seek feedback from Valerie and my mentor, Dennis Hassan. At this point, one of the primary points of concern was a lack of doors. As both Valerie and Dennis pointed out, a key element of the farce is the idea of slamming doors, and my sketches at this point were not conducive to that essential function. Our technical director, Maya Bowers, also expressed concern at this point over our budget; a rise in the cost of materials meant that a set like this would be more expensive to construct, while the need to social distance in the shops would cause our labor force to work more slowly.

With this feedback in mind, I returned to the virtual drawing board with a digital model of the set built in the Vectorworks drafting program. Typically, at this point, I would have constructed a physical scale model of the scenery. However, due to several factors including working with an out-of-state director and traveling cross-country during the majority of the design process, I chose to challenge myself by working entirely in digital mediums. At this stage, the Chandebise Living Room was slimmed down from five wall units to three, and two doors were added to allow for more comedic blocking opportunities (Figure 1.12). These changes affected the layout of the Frisky Puss Hotel in that the wall units

Figure 1.12 - Vectorworks 3D digital model of Chandebise Living Room
had originally been meant to turn around and reveal columns. Now that there were fewer wall units and the doors needed to be used, I opted to make the columns freestanding and reuse the doors from the previous scene but turned around (Figure 1.13).

At this stage, the director and technical director both felt more confident, so I continued my exploration with digital renderings created in Adobe Photoshop. Digital rendering is a medium I was not very well-versed in at this point, but I knew that I needed to be able to communicate the full picture to the rest of the team clearly and quickly. At this stage, I was also traveling cross-country, so being able to bring my work with me was imperative to the success of this design. I began by importing a screen capture of my 3D model into the program to use as a guide for perspective. During this time I also created my full drafting packet, which allowed me to take the exact sizes and shapes from the drafting into Photoshop to ensure accuracy (Plates 1.3-1.6). From there, I used a combination of edited assets and textures that I had created to communicate what I wanted the final product to look like. The most challenging part at this stage was not limiting myself by the assets I could source easily; there were several points where it would have been easy to compromise my idea and allow my design to be influenced by the images I could find. It took more time to create certain elements from
scratch, but in the end, I feel it created a product that was true to my vision as the designer and communicated my goals effectively (Plates 1.7-1.8).
Execution

At first glance, this design seems as if it would be fairly simple to execute. Thankfully, we had a technical director who knew what to anticipate, and was able to foresee the obstacles we would face during the build process. While we certainly had some curveballs thrown our way, I was incredibly proud of the work done by our shop staff and the students in the practicum classes to create a beautiful finished product, even if an audience never had the chance to appreciate it.

Due to the shifts in our season schedule, we were allotted a somewhat longer build time than is typical for Utah State Theatre productions. However, this time became imperative due to the slower pace of our labor force. By the time the build started, we had all been out of the shops for over six months and were out of practice, so things were slow to get moving. Our practicum classes were also significantly smaller. Our COVID-19 protocols required that the shops be capped at a certain number, and in order to abide by our rules, we had a smaller workforce than usual. The students we worked with were incredibly hardworking, motivated individuals, and I cannot express enough how impressed I was with what we managed to accomplish with our small but mighty team.

This show relied very heavily on colorful, detailed paint treatments, and it was so relieving to have a paint charge that I could trust. Hannah Whorton was the scenic charge artist for the production, and I was able to provide her with detailed paint elevations which she replicated perfectly in real life (Figure 1.14 and Plates 1.9-1.14). One hiccup we faced was during the painting of the arch drop for the hotel.

Figure 1.14 - Paint elevation for The Frisky Puss Hotel
scenes. We were excited to break in our new paint frame by creating a drop that spanned the entire width of the Morgan stage, over forty feet wide (Figures 1.15-1.16). However, midway through the process, Hannah was unable to physically be in the paint shop due to the most recent COVID-19 protocols. We had to think quickly, and ultimately what saved the day was being able to utilize FaceTime on an iPhone so that Hannah could see the progress on the drop and advise student painters in real-time.

There was also concern over whether or not the floor could be painted for the production. The Morgan Theatre is a unique space in which the floor is highly visible to audience members, and so becomes an important part of the design whether the designer wants it to or not. For that reason, being able to create a cohesive design hinged on having a floor that lived in the world of the play. During the previous summer, the floor had been renovated, and there was a good deal of confusion over whether we would be able to paint directly on the floor, or if we would need to lay down an additional layer of masonite hardboard on top of the floor to paint. It then became a question of time; with classes taking place on the Morgan stage during the day, there were concerns over whether there would be a block of time long enough for the floor to be
painted and completely dry before anyone had to stand on it. Ultimately, what ended up being the best option was leaving the floor unpainted for our first day of tech, and scheduling a call the next day when no one was in the building for the designer and charge artist to complete the floor treatment. The floor was kept very simple in relatively light purple tones so that it could fit in either world, with the idea being that heavy rugs would hide the paint and change the texture for the hotel set (Figure 1.17).

Shortly before our installation time, our shop staff all had a potential COVID-19 exposure. At that time, the vaccine was not yet available, and protocols required that we all return home immediately to quarantine until further notice. We still had quite a lot of work to do, and a full quarantine of all shop staff meant that no work could take place in the scene shop. I was certain that this would derail us completely, especially if any of our tests came back positive. Thankfully, everyone tested negative, and we were able to return to work very shortly after. Unfortunately, this did set us back, so we were still building well into our install time.

Our first tech was quite stressful, as it was the first time we had ever been able to put all of the scenic elements together at once and things were still not in their finished form. Pieces did not fit how I had expected them to, lighting instruments sat lower than I had accounted for, and areas that I thought would be covered by scenery were fully visible to the audience (Figure 1.18). People were also coming to me for things that are typically the job of the technical director, which prevented me from handling aesthetic issues while I dealt with technical concerns. After
the first half of our cue-to-cue, I was feeling disheartened. However, my faculty mentors noticed
this and walked the
set with me to help
solve my concerns.
Adding fullness to
the curtains would
make them look
more aesthetically
pleasing. We could
hide the scenery
battens by adjusting
how certain things
were hung. Drapery
could be shifted
slightly to better
hide the lighting
fixtures. All of my
worries could be
solved, and by
taking the time to
talk through
solutions with my

Figure 1.18 - Photo from first technical rehearsal showing The Frisky Puss Hotel

Figure 1.19 - Photo from first technical rehearsal showing Chandeise Living Room under lighting
faculty mentors I was able to head into the second half of tech feeling more confident (Figure 1.19).

While our shop staff and practicum students worked incredibly hard to make the show ready for an audience, our next technical rehearsal was ultimately canceled due to COVID-like symptoms being experienced by members of the cast. We were so close, and the first tech had everyone excited to see all of the elements finally come together. Unfortunately, the safest choice was to postpone performances; we would leave the set just as it was over the semester break, and would remount the production when we returned in January. With January came a further rise in the number of COVID cases in our area, and live performances were still not safe. The decision was made to cancel performances entirely, and to stage a photoshoot at a later time to capture the finished work of the designers and technicians.

Theatre is meant to be seen by an audience, but it was a relief to have the time to fine-tune the design elements for our photoshoot. We had very few notes remaining in order to make the scenery photo-ready, and we were able to adjust photos to look exactly as we wanted them to. The photos, taken by Anthony David Mesler, managed to perfectly capture the spirit of the play and allowed the actors the chance to revisit their characters one last time (Plates 1.15-1.19).
Reflection

*A Flea in Her Ear* was an incredible learning experience and, despite the challenges posed by attempting to produce theatre during a pandemic, is something I am quite proud of. It was wonderful to have the chance to work with Valerie; she was very open to allowing designers the chance to explore but was also very firm in maintaining her vision for the show. She pushed us to do our best work, and in the end, it created a cohesive piece that truly honored the spirit of the play. Jordan created beautiful costumes that tied in perfectly with each location, and Katelyn brought the scenery to life with vibrant colors and beautiful use of the practical lighting fixtures onstage. Technical director Maya Bowers, scenic charge Hannah Whorton, and I could not have worked together more smoothly, and it is because of this collaboration that everything came together despite our setbacks throughout the process.

Looking back, I wish I had taken the time to build a scale model during the design process. While the digital visualization skills that I refined have proven to be invaluable as I continued my education, I cannot help but wonder if I could have avoided some of the issues we faced on our first tech day if I had been able to physically visualize the scenery beforehand.

The lesson that stands out the most to me from this project is that of being able to roll with the punches. As artists, we can oftentimes get caught up in the tiny details of our work, and it is easy to get overwhelmed when the unexpected occurs. However, with help from those around us and a willingness to problem-solve, even the tasks that seem impossible can be completed, and something truly exciting can come to life.
Plate 1.1 - Rough sketch of the Chandeise Living Room

Plate 1.2 - Rough sketch of The Frisky Puss Hotel
Plate 1.3 - Groundplan for Chandebise Living Room
Plate 1.5 - Drafting for freestanding columns
Plate 1.7 - Adobe Photoshop rendering of Chandebise Living Room
Plate 1.8 - Adobe Photoshop rendering of The Frisky Puss Hotel
Plate 1.9 - Paint elevation for The Frisky Puss Hotel

Plate 1.10 - Paint elevation for The Frisky Puss Hotel
Plate 1.11 - Section of paint elevation for The Frisky Puss Hotel
Plate 1.12 - Paint elevation for Chandebise Living Room

Plate 1.13 - Paint elevation for Chandebise Living Room
Plate 1.14 - Original paint elevation for floor treatment featuring marble tiles
Plate 1.16 - Production photo of Chandebise Living Room
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Chapter Two: Creating Virtual Worlds

Re[Fuse]

A Fusion Theatre Project

Directed by Richie Call

Premiered Online April 22, 2021

Utah State University, Caine College of the Arts

Department of Theatre Arts

Virtual Production
Introduction

The Fusion Theatre Project is a tradition among Utah State Theatre faculty and students. It assembles a collection of actors, directors, designers, and playwrights to explore a collaborative process of creating theatre that is quite different from the typical theatrical production process. Students are given the opportunity to “audition” for a spot in the company, and are then expected to fulfill several different roles within the group. All company members are involved in discovering the theme and the direction of the project, and then as production gets closer, more specific roles begin to emerge.

In March of 2020, in the early days of the pandemic lockdown, the students interested in the Fusion Theatre Project were tasked with creating a video on the subject of “isolation.” There were no parameters other than creating a video that utilized some sort of visual communication. In so many ways, this very early exercise foreshadowed the project to come.

The initial plan for the Fusion Theatre Project, at the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year, was to collaborate on a script that would ultimately be performed in front of a live audience on the USU Morgan Stage. Twice a week, the Fusion company members would meet in the Morgan to work towards a concept that we all felt passionate about. Early explorations included creating protest signs and writing a monologue to go alongside them, ultimately ending in some group improvisation that later inspired further works. In another instance, company members split into groups aligned on opposite sides of some hot-button debate topics, and then engaged in a live debate that had members take a step forward on each point, leading to intense moments. These exercises were exciting and did spark some ideas, but we as a company still had trouble finding our “nugget.”
Heading into the semester break in December of 2020, there was still question as to whether our original plan for a live performance would be possible with the pandemic raging on. As a designer, concerns arose in terms of building a portfolio. If we weren’t able to carry on with live performances, how could I create a set? Upon returning from the break, our fears were confirmed: with the current state of the world, we would need to make a sharp pivot away from live performance.

The company as a whole was adamant about not wanting to do a play on the Zoom platform. At that time, it felt as though Zoom plays were happening daily, and we were all experiencing Zoom burnout after living much of our lives online over the last year or so. The designers were consulted as to what other options may be attainable. Thankfully, members of our team had experience in different video editing programs, including OBS and Adobe AfterEffects. We had also recently purchased three iPad Pros for the theatre department, and the camera on the iPad Pro is quite advanced. With these thoughts in mind, the decision was made to venture into the world of film. At this point, not everyone in the company felt excited by the prospect of film, so the designers were asked to explore possibilities and help get the teams excited. Preliminary research sparked ideas, and ultimately led to the creation of nine short plays that would be produced over a few short months.

The process to workshop each play was quick, as we needed to film almost immediately. The first play sent to film was the piece that I wrote. *Exodus 20:14* was a look inside the Catholic confessional booth as three women face issues of sexuality, love, and the ways that certain teachings can have lasting effects on our psyches. It was a somewhat poetic piece in which sections of dialogue were constantly overlapping and weaving between each other. *Whispered* by Jess Wallace was originally written to tell the story of Achilles and Patroclus, two Greek war
heroes who were said to be lovers. Ultimately, the roles were cast with women, which told a slightly different story. *Little Bird* by Anne-Marie Kate featured two former lovers sitting on a park bench as they talked through topics both inconsequential and trauma-filled. *Third Wave* by Aubrey Felty was written as a video call between two brothers debating the nitty-gritty details of feminism as it relates to Mary Poppins and the rest of the Disney canon. *15 to Life* by Gary Kemp followed a different set of brothers, one of whom is in prison and another who has come to visit with difficult news. *Don’t Tell Anyone* by Kaija Strong took us back to the 1990s and examined an inappropriate encounter between a therapist and his patient. *Knock* by Megan Codling contained very little dialogue, but portrayed a young woman in her apartment overhearing the abusive relationship between her neighbors and ultimately forming a bond with one of them. *Judgement* by James Wakeland was a one-person piece in which a man enters what might be described as a high-tech purgatory and is challenged to justify his life choices to determine what his afterlife will look like. The final piece, *Noise*, was written by Hannah Whorton, and personified anxiety and depression in the form of a cruel roommate who the story’s protagonist couldn’t escape.

Each of these plays was wildly different from the next, but all had a similar theme. When it all came down to it, whether we did so consciously or not, the stories we wrote all seemed to examine the theme of isolation in one way or another, just as the original prompt had. The stark differences between each piece allowed us to get creative with the approach we took, and at the end of the day, this became one of my favorite projects.
Director: Richie Call

Founder/Artistic Director: Shawn Fisher

Producer/Playwright: Aubrey Felty

Stage Manager/Literary Coordinator: Gary Kemp

Design Coordinator/Scenic Designer/Sound Designer/Props Designer/Video Editor: Sera Shearer

Technical Director/Lighting Designer/Video Editor: Hannah R. Whorton

Costume Designer/Animation Designer/Video Editor: Jess Wallace

Acting Company: Joe Bayless, Megan Codling, Jake Hansen, Anne-Marie Kate, Gary Kemp, Kaija Strong, Hannah Speer, James Wakeland

Playwrights: Hannah R. Whorton, Megan Codling, Gary Kemp, Jess Wallace, James Wakeland, Aubrey Felty, Anne-Marie Kate, Sera Shearer, Kaija Strong
Design Concept Statement

The shift to a virtual medium led to many questions for the design team. At the front of our minds was how we could make this production stand out from the hundreds of other virtual theatre productions happening at the same time. We also needed to consider how to approach the filming process safely. We could not put two actors together unmasked in front of a camera, so as a design team we needed to consider how we could get creative in terms of editing to allow for human connection to be conveyed onscreen. Finally, this was an opportunity to do something new and exciting that we typically cannot accomplish in a more structured theatre production.

Our general design concept was to create exciting worlds that could stray from something close to realism to something completely abstracted and removed from a physical time or place. Almost all scenery would be created virtually, and actors would be filmed on a green screen set that we built in order to allow flexibility in terms of placement onscreen. The virtual scenery would be created in an iPad application called Procreate, which enabled us to create painterly imagery in a digital medium. Each play would have its own unique style, and we would apply similar effects to both the world and the actors to unify the pieces. We also planned to explore different ways to compose the view onscreen, trying to veer away from the video chat box shape that had become such a large part of our everyday lives. The hope here was to focus on the possibilities that this method of production was providing us rather than getting caught up in the perceived limitations. A good part of this approach required us to completely throw out the usual theatre production process and embrace the uncertainty of film.

*Exodus 20:14* was the piece that I wrote, and as both playwright and designer, I had many thoughts on the concept. The language in the script was meant to be more theatrical than realistic, and my intention as the playwright had been that it would lean almost into the world of
spoken word poetry. This led to a clear desire for a setting that was not fully realized and that would allow us to move quickly between the women as their dialogue interwove. Generally speaking, the plan was to create a highly dramatized take on the Catholic confessional, using pieces of key Catholic imagery (screen in the confessional booth, kneeler, candles, stained glass, Virgin Mary/saint halo) to suggest the location, but taking them out of focus or deconstructing them to lean into feelings of isolation. As the sound designer, the hope here was to help flesh out the world with a few dramatic environmental sounds such as the tolling of a church bell or an eerie rendition of a Catholic hymn. Other than that, the only notable sound need would be to adjust the levels of the performers’ dialogue to help highlight certain words during sections of overlap.

*Whispered* by Jess Wallace was loosely based on the ancient Greek myth of Achilles (Ach) and Patroclus (Patr), two soldiers who were said to be lovers. Cassandra (Cass) the oracle also played a role, as the three sometimes friends navigated the threat of the Trojan War hanging over their heads. While at first glance it may seem like a period piece, the language in the script was somewhat more modern, which removed it from falling too much into the confines of a specified period. The action of the script involved quite a lot of fight choreography and a small amount of intimacy, so part of the challenge involved working around these moments without crossing any lines in terms of safety regulations. We ultimately decided that this piece would take inspiration from indie comic books in style, which would provide opportunities for somewhat segmented cuts and still images to suggest fight choreography and intimacy. This concept informed all areas of the design. In terms of scenery, inspiration would come from imagery of Greek ruins to give a nod to the original period of the mythology, with the dilapidation of the structures removing it from the specific period and hinting at the destruction
that awaited the characters. Certain moments, such as when Cass experienced visions of the future, would lean into hazy, nondescript backgrounds that removed those moments from the “reality” of their world. All of the scenery would be stylized to match the animation style being created by Jess, our lead animation designer. The sound would be utilized to help support the fight scenes in the absence of fight choreography, as well as to further the unsettling feeling of the whispered voices that Cass heard in her head.

*Third Wave* by Aubrey Felty was written as a video call between two brothers, Quentin and Henry, who were just finishing a shared viewing of *Mary Poppins* and begin to debate issues of feminism. The two characters are very different in terms of the way they view themselves and their views of the world at large. Henry, the younger brother, is a college student who could be described using the slang term “woke,” and who approaches the conversation with his sibling with some amount of condescension. Quentin, on the other hand, is much more relaxed in general, and is less in tune with the changing cultural climate. The differences in their characters necessitated a stark contrast in their living spaces to further emphasize the rift between them. To create continuity in terms of the stylization from piece to piece, I also planned to take inspiration from Disney animation styles. Sound needs were quite simple, limited mostly to some computer sounds indicating the closing of internet browser windows. Effects would also be applied to the actors’ voices to enhance moments where we are in Henry’s room and hearing Quentin through the speakers of the computer, or vice versa.

*Little Bird* by Anne-Marie Kate provided insight into the relationship of Ethan and Jackie, two former lovers who had reunited in a city park. Throughout the play, they reminisce about their past, both the good times and the bad, and lingering feelings come to the surface. The play is not a memory play, but does comment on the unclear ways that we remember past
relationships. The characters sit on a bench for most of the play, so a bench was necessary in terms of scenery. The world around the bench would be hazy and romantic, the same way that these characters were considering their memories together. While there would be suggestions of a city park, the pieces of scenery would fade into nothingness - like the unfinished edges of a watercolor painting. The sound would play a large role in this piece, as there were several long moments of silence written into the script, each with different feelings. As the sound designer, I would need to flesh out the world of the park with ambient noises that fit the environment and fill the silences until the climactic moment of the show, where Ethan blames Jackie for the miscarriage they experienced and they both fall silent.

*15 to Life* by Gary Kemp was set inside an Arizona state prison, where brothers Charlie and Shane are speaking through a prison video monitor system. Similar to the brothers in *Third Wave*, these two characters are quite different. Charlie, the younger brother, is an honors student who is about to head off to college. Shane is a felon in prison for a reason that the playwright elected not to disclose in the dialogue, but who was sentenced at quite a young age. Due to the context provided by location, this piece called for a design that leaned closer to the realm of realism than some of the other pieces, and would need to show some very specific pieces of imagery that indicated the environment of the prison. However, to help differentiate between characters, the two rooms within the prison would have different color palettes. The sound needs were minimal on this piece, and were limited to a few scripted cues such as buzzers and environmental sounds to suggest that there is activity around Shane within the prison.

*Knock* by Megan Codling was an interesting contrast to the other pieces in that there was very little dialogue throughout the script. Instead, the story was communicated through what the protagonist, Gwen, overhears through the vents in her apartment. Gwen’s neighbors can be heard
in some moments singing along to a Whitney Houston song, and in others screaming at each other. Gwen is just moving into this apartment. To show the passage of time and to mirror the way the script slowly fleshes out the relationship of the neighbors, Gwen’s apartment would start in a fairly barebones, sketched style. As time passed, the apartment would become more fully fleshed out with shading, color, and detail. The apartment itself would also develop as Gwen unpacked and made it home. The limited dialogue in the piece meant that the sound cues would be very important in setting the mood. Effects would need to be layered over certain clips to help differentiate between sounds in Gwen’s room and sounds coming through the vents.

*Judgement* by James Wakeland was similar in that the action of the script focused on one person. In this case, the nameless protagonist has entered a strange sort of void with only a screen that gives instructions and shows a countdown. This void is the place where people who have died go to receive final judgement at the hands of what could be considered an impartial judge: a computer. Because the performer never receives a direct response from the omniscient screen he is interacting with, there is a level of discomfort that builds through the play as the character desperately tries to say the right thing. The opportunity to imagine this sort of a place allowed for a good deal of freedom, which was exciting. Generally speaking, I wanted to create a large, neverending space that would make the performer seem small in comparison, perhaps with the suggestion of some surreal architecture. The nature of the script also brought to mind the idea of an interrogation room, so I also planned to incorporate that feeling of discomfort. There were several scripted sound cues, and also a need to support the idea of someone alone in a large space with echoes.

*Don’t Tell Anyone* by Kaija Strong took place in the 1990s in a basement apartment. The play starts very shortly after Daniel, a therapist, engaged in sexual activity with his young
patient, Jamie. The two engage in several awkward moments of silence, and there is a strong power imbalance that is examined during the show. This is not a romance story. Rather, it is a cautionary tale about a man in a position of power who abuses his relationship with a client and crosses a professional boundary, and what that does to both parties. To create the world of this play, I knew that Daniel’s apartment would need to help set the period and also establish his role as a less-than-upstanding citizen. The script mentioned that he’d had to leave a previous place of employment, and the design team speculated that he likely did not have much money. Daniel’s apartment would likely be an older apartment with furniture that looked like he’d inherited it from an older relative or a garage sale. Empty food containers or bottles could help suggest that he did not have his life put together nearly as much as he wanted to pretend, and a dingy color palette would set the mood. Overall, the goal of the scenery was to create the architectural embodiment of the post-sex cigarette. There were no scripted sound cues, but some quiet background music could help set the time period and the mood.

*Noise* by Hannah R. Whorton was the last piece we worked on, and for that reason, we dove fully into the stylization as we now knew what we were capable of. The action of the play takes place in Jack’s apartment, where he is joined by an imaginary Roommate that personifies his anxiety and depression. As Jack makes attempts to make his living situation more comfortable, Roommate continues to insult him and inspire hallucinations that transform the world around him. The style of the writing took inspiration from the film *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* and led the design team to lean into the comic book aesthetic. The script notes that the apartment building is old and somewhat messy; not disgusting, but certainly not ready for company. The quick nature of the script and the hallucinations meant that the scenery would change regularly and rapidly, so I would need to explore several different ways to communicate
place. The sound needs for this script were extensive between scripted cues, a need for environmental noises, opportunities to layer effects on the voices of the actors, and more. The goal was to never allow Jack to get too comfortable in his environment, using noise to disrupt any moment that may start to become peaceful.
Research

The research was a key player in convincing the rest of the Fusion company to trust the design team as we leaned into the challenges of a new performance medium. As theatre designers, we needed to consider how to communicate in a two-dimensional virtual world. Our research explored several different ideas. Scenically, a large selling point was the capability to present a story in a non-literal environment. Suggestive backgrounds such as those seen in some films or art photography allow for freedom in terms of location (Figure 2.1). The scenery could also take the form of abstracted locations, such as painted forests or a city that was slightly out of focus (Figure 2.2). We also wanted to show the playwrights and actors that there were ways of incorporating realistic elements in non-realistic ways, so that even if they felt that realistic elements would fit their stories, they could start to imagine the exciting possibilities presented by the decisions to utilize greenscreens.

The design team also looked into how we could vary the composition onscreen. As previously mentioned, we wanted to veer away from the standard arrangement of Zoom windows and explore new ways to communicate just with onscreen placement. Research in this area began
with other virtual productions. We looked at other groups that had attempted virtual production with digital backgrounds and found samples of different arrangements of “box” areas, utilizing different views of the same location to justify not seeing actors on the same field, and ways to stitch actors into the same virtual world when there was no way around it. We also turned to film for inspiration in terms of split-screen moments, where the screen is separated to allow multiple views of the same scene at once (Figure 2.3).

The third area that we started to explore in these early stages was post-production editing. Before this project, Jess and I both had significant experience utilizing the Adobe Suite of products, while Hannah was well-versed in OBS, a live broadcasting software that can also be used to edit video. Our prior knowledge made us confident that we could create some unique, surreal moments, so we sought out images of surreal photography or videography to conjure inspiration in our playwrights (Figure 2.4).

With each unique play in the project came a distinct group of research to fit the needs of the individual stories. *Exodus 20:14* came first, and as

*Figure 2.3 - Still image from the film Last Call*

*Figure 2.4 - Invisible Girl by Albert Wu*
the playwright, I already had a solid foundation in terms of what the literal world would have looked like in a Catholic confessional. Certain elements instantly read as being affiliated with that world, such as stained glass windows, candles, and the screen inside the confessional booth that separates the Catholic priest from the parishioner. I also focused my research on how those elements could be stylized or blurred to remove them slightly from the world of reality (Figure 2.5).

The research for *Whispered* also started in a more realistic realm before shifting into abstraction. To begin, I sourced images of Greek ruins, particularly those that were on or close to a beach as was scripted. I also sought out paintings of Greek ruins and beaches to examine how those same locations could be communicated in looser terms (Figure 2.6). I also did research into hazy or neutral backgrounds to support moments of introspection, such as during Cass’ visions. At this stage, I also considered the position of the sun, and how the passage of time could be communicated through subtle visuals throughout the play.

Exploring the differences between the brothers in *Third Wave* led me to look for two very different styles of bedroom. For Henry, I focused on the typical college dorm room, looking for images of modern dormitories inhabited by relatively clean teenage boys. The type of room I was looking for had to
be relatively clean and organized to match Henry’s personality, and would have small touches that related to his newfound passions as a young, liberal college student. In contrast, Quentin’s room was meant to convey his status as an older sibling who either finished college or did not attend. I searched for messy apartments with mattresses on the floor and empty food containers everywhere, something completely different from the cleanliness of Henry’s space. For both spaces, I considered animation styles. I began by looking at imagery from Disney films such as *Mary Poppins* and *The Little Mermaid*, ultimately shifting my searches towards modern renditions of desks or bedrooms drawn in similar styles (Figure 2.7).

*Little Bird* was one piece that I had a very clear vision for before beginning my research. To contrast the somber ending of the piece, I knew that I wanted the environment to lean quite far into the world of romanticism, almost as if the two characters had accidentally stumbled onto the set of a romantic comedy. I researched images of beautiful city parks in springtime, particularly those with blooming flowers in shades of white or pink (Figure 2.8). Inspiration also came from loose watercolor paintings with ink details that were smeared or otherwise incomplete. At this stage, I was also thinking about pigeons. The primary action of the play involves feeding pigeons in the park, and we were still unsure whether we would see the pigeons or not. For this reason, significant research was also done into pigeons and artistic representations of them.
The playwright for *15 to Life* had a fairly specific vision as to what the visitation room in this prison would look like, so a good deal of time was spent trying to source accurate images of state prison visitation rooms that utilized monitors and telephones for inmates to interact with their guests. I made an effort to look for both new examples that had perhaps been recently upgraded and examples of spaces desperately in need of an upgrade. This was in part to allow the playwright some say in how well-kept this prison was, and also to provide further separation between brothers Shane and Charlie. If the part of the prison that Shane and the other inmates were in was a bit more run-down than the clean, sterile visiting room that Charlie was in, it would support their very different lives. I also sought out images that spoke to color, exploring how simple changes in the color and lighting of certain spaces could create different moods for each room (Figure 2.9).

The action of *Knock* primarily took place inside Gwen’s apartment, which the playwright noted should seem like her first “grown-up” apartment out of college. The very first scene of the play shows Gwen entering her apartment for the first time, so the research began with imagery of moving boxes stacked in otherwise empty rooms. Further realistic research involved finding “aesthetic” images of bedrooms on sites such as Pinterest, Instagram, and Tumblr.
particularly studio apartments. Through my research, I came across many images of bedrooms filled with house plants, which led to the idea of incorporating more plants in the room as time passed. We were also interested in exploring the passage of time in terms of the style and considered the idea of starting with a more sketch-like quality and moving towards something more fully finished by the final scene. I looked for inspiration in different styles of interior rendering, from roughly scribbled sketches to detailed watercolor portraits (Figure 2.10).

_Judgement_ was tricky to research in that it portrayed an unreal place with some starkly real elements. To begin research, I turned to images of interrogation rooms, particularly those that isolated a single chair under a bare lightbulb. Other images contained different types of fluorescent lighting that cast an unflattering glow or interesting shadows on the world around them. Veering away from the realistic, I sought out spaces that were surreal in ways that felt akin to the works of M.C. Escher. I was particularly interested in images with very little color and high contrast, and that seemed to have no end in sight (Figure 2.11).

In contrast, research for _Don’t Tell Anyone_ focused more on stuffy, claustrophobic apartments. In particular, I looked to apartments that had been decorated in the 1970s or 1980s, or that had elements that needed repairs. Textures such as wood paneling and shag rugs were a through-line in the
images I found, as were furniture pieces in dingy colors (Figure 2.12). I also looked into modern
apartments that were dark and messy to help emphasize that Daniel was not the put-together
adult that Jamie seemed to think he was.

Our final piece, *Noise*, was another play in which the playwright had a very
specific vision in terms of what the apartment would look
like. It was based loosely on her own experiences living in
an older New York City apartment, and the
less-than-desirable circumstances that living in those
buildings bring. In terms of scenery, the majority of my
research was done looking for city apartments, particularly
those in neighborhoods such as Brooklyn or Queens, that
were trendy enough to attract young tenants but old enough
to still be affordable for those tenants. Exposed brick walls
continued to appear in the images that I sourced, and
seemed to have just the right mix of trendy and unfinished
(Figure 2.13). Stylistic inspiration came from pop culture such as *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* and
indie comic books.
Design Process

The design process for this project was a challenging one in that scripts were being written and workshopped on a very tight schedule simultaneously with filming, so the actual design work needed to be very quick in order to accommodate the quick turnaround. Each week the designers would be given two different scripts to read and begin working on. From the final draft due date to the first day of filming, we had approximately one week to finalize a design concept, seek approval from the playwright and our director, Richie, and come up with a concrete plan for the filming process.

After the research phase of the process, each member of the design team would take the information and ideas previously agreed upon in the research section and begin to work on a visual storyboard. The idea of the storyboards was to explore how each of our roles could support the story in different moments, and allowed us to start thinking more cinematically than theatrically. Of course, art is collaborative, so our storyboards often informed other design choices, and we had to work together to agree on how we as a team saw the story unfolding.

When we began the process for Exodus 20:14, we were all still quite new to the idea of storyboarding and had different ideas of how those things would be communicated (Figure 2.14). The

Figure 2.14 - Section of a preliminary storyboard for Exodus 20:14
storyboards were not meant to be finished products at this point. Initially, the plan had been to share them with the director and the rest of the company. However, the company expressed faith in our choices and allowed us to take liberties with the direction we were heading.

In this stage of the process, there were still many uncertainties. While we had general ideas as to what we wanted each piece to look like, we knew that a good deal of the execution of design elements would be based on the footage we were able to capture once we reached the filming stage. For that reason, our preparatory design work was essentially limited to the creation of these rough storyboards (Figure 2.15 and Plates 2.1-2.3), which then served as outlines for our filming shot lists and background assets.

![Figure 2.15 - Section of storyboard for Whispered](image-url)
Execution

From the time we began finalizing scripts to our official “opening night,” the Fusion company had approximately seven weeks to film, edit, and re-edit the nine pieces that made up the production. This meant that we would need to come up with a solid plan that incorporated strict deadlines to prevent us from falling behind as we simultaneously filmed and edited multiple plays at a time. The design team worked together to create a production calendar (Plate 2.4) that outlined a plan of attack for the process. From the due date for finalized scripts, we would then have eight days to finalize the design concepts with approval from the director and the playwrights. Filming would begin during this time, with two to three days of filming per play allotted. Filming would conclude on Friday, the designers would work through the weekend to go through the footage, and by the following Tuesday the rough cut and general design would be due. That rough cut would be shown to the rest of the company for feedback, and the goal was to complete post-production by that Friday, one week after filming had ended.

![Shot List](image)

*Figure 2.16 - Section of shot list for Exodus 20:14*
After creating our storyboards and comparing them with each other, our technical director, Hannah Whorton, went through the script to create a detailed shot list meant to help speed up the process of filming (Figure 2.16). Armed with our shot list, we went into production for our first film, *Exodus 20:14*, feeling quite confident. The next matter to attend to was determining how we would approach the actual filming.

As previously stated, our department had recently purchased three iPad Pros for use by students. We would utilize the iPads to film each piece from multiple angles, and we ordered special tripods that were made to hold those particular devices so that the cameras would remain steady during filming. Our department had also recently come into possession of several small greenscreens, which we had access to. Another larger greenscreen that was typically set up in the department’s lighting lab was moved into the Morgan Theater for our production. As technical director, Hannah took on a large role in determining how the green screens needed to be arranged. As the scenic designer, it was my responsibility to determine which pieces could be added in through video editing in post-production and which pieces needed physical representation, so I would work with Hannah to design the “layout” of the room (Figure 2.17).
The decision to start with *Exodus 20:14* was a wise one in many ways. For one, there was very little action in the script, which meant that for the most part our characters would be seated and giving their confessions directly to the camera. Second, the script as a whole could essentially be broken down into three monologues. While each monologue did need to flow with the others, there were no times where we needed to film the onscreen actor listening to another character. The setup for *Exodus 20:14* included what would become our standard two-sided greenscreen box, one dark wood chair, and two iPads. I was also recording sound and utilized a Zoom H4n Pro Handy Recorder, which was a small handheld device that captured sound more clearly than the microphones on the iPads would allow.

Our plan for this piece was to film one actress at a time all the way through, cutting between every line and skipping ahead as needed. At this point, the actors were not expected to memorize large chunks of text, so the frequent cuts were also to allow them time to prep the next line. We took several takes of every line filming from two angles simultaneously, encouraging the actors to give us several different options (Figure 2.18).

Eventually, this process moved quite slowly. We had initially thought that we could finish filming the first piece within one day. Instead, due to the stop-and-go nature of the filming
process, it took almost three full filming sessions to capture, which cut into the time allotted for our next piece, *Whispered*.

*Whispered* was much more complex than the first piece in myriad ways. The story relied on human connection, so we needed to find a way to replicate that without the actors ever getting onstage together. Next, it was a piece that required a certain level of energy to all of the physicality, and we would need to get full-body shots of every actor. There was also the issue of matching eye-lines to make it look like the actors were looking at each other regardless of their position on stage. We also had plans for several specialty shots that would require us to physically move the cameras for close-ups or a birds-eye view (Figure 2.19).

*Figure 2.19 - Close-up still from raw footage of Camera 3 from Whispered*

We started to approach *Whispered* in the same way we had done *Exodus 20:14*, by cutting after every line and waiting for the actors. After a very long night of filming, we quickly discovered that this process was not going to work. The stop-and-go continued to take longer than we could afford, and it prevented the actors from reaching the necessary level of immersion in their characters. At the end of the night, the decision was made that moving forward, the actors would need to memorize as much as possible, and the new plan would be to carry the take as far as we could before stopping. If anyone felt that another take was needed, the new take would start just before the section that we were concerned about. This led to the need for a script
manager, someone who would monitor the script for accuracy and record where each take started and ended so that nothing got missed. The next day, filming was much smoother. We were able to move quite quickly through the script, as the actors did a phenomenal job of memorizing their lines quickly. We were still behind in our production schedule, but there was now the chance to start catching up.

The physical setup for *Whispered* was different from *Exodus 20:14* in that there were no physical scenic elements. Every piece of the environment would be suggested through the digital medium, so the actors had very little around them to work off of. After speaking with the playwright and fellow designer, Jess Wallace, I decided to add a box covered in green fabric to the set as a stand-in for a “rock” in that world. This allowed for some more blocking opportunities and for the actors to have some sort of physical marker onset (Figure 2.20).

![Figure 2.20 - Still from Whispered featuring actress Hanna Speer in front of the green screen “rock”](image)

Once filming finished, the design team was faced with a dilemma. Each of us needed to work on these films, and the order in which we received each piece mattered. We discussed what our individual needs were, and at this point decided that Jess would start by creating a rough cut of the footage. It would then be passed to me to add the background and scenic elements, then back to Jess for animation, then to Hannah to fine-tune the lighting, and finally back to me to import the final sound files, as I would need to match up the files that I recorded on the Zoom microphone with the video captured on the iPads. That weekend while Jess began work on the
rough cuts, I was able to start the process of designing backgrounds for *Exodus 20:14* and *Whispered*.

I began work on *Exodus 20:14* as the need to communicate exact location was less important than in *Whispered*. Referring back to the research and storyboard, I was able to begin creating several assets that could later be imported into the rough cut that Jess was working on. The process at this point involved utilizing Procreate on the iPad to create painterly backgrounds that drew inspiration from iconic Catholic church imagery (Figure 2.21). These backgrounds were then pulled into Adobe Photoshop so that a filter could be applied to unify the design. Due to the simple nature of these backgrounds, we were able to release a rough cut with complete background effects early in the process.

*Whispered* proved to be significantly more difficult. As we were still figuring out how filming was supposed to go, we did not quite capture the footage that Jess was hoping for as the playwright and lead animator. At this stage, she requested that if we had time later, we come back to reshoot several instances. We had built extra time into our calendar, so at this point, we agreed that we could proceed as such, though in the end we never returned to film any additional scenes.

The following week, the design team began to realize the challenges that we had posed for ourselves. The filming needs for our projects grew to be a bit more complicated. *Little Bird*
did not have the same physicality as *Whispered* but did require that the two characters appear to be sitting next to each other on a bench. To accomplish this, we found a bench in our properties storage that had a metal bar splitting right down the center. The idea was that if each actor filmed their scenes on their side of the bench and did not cross the center bar, we could splice the footage together (Figure 2.22). We also took footage from two other angles so that we could regularly switch views throughout the piece and cover up any strange cuts or times when one actor broke character. To assist with issues of eye-line, the off-camera actor became the camera operator for the camera shooting profile, so when an actor would normally turn to look their scene partner in the eye, they were actually looking at their scene partner just offstage.

During this time we also began to realize that the design team may have overbooked themselves. Between filming every night, the time it took to set up and tear down the filming, preparing storyboards, reading new scripts, and continuing our work as students with heavy course loads, the editing process slowed down significantly, and we very quickly began to miss our editing deadlines. In part, this was also because we needed to manually pass each file from designer to
designer via flash drives, which grew to be very confusing very quickly. To streamline the process, we further divided the rough cuts between us rather than leaving them all to Jess. For *Little Bird*, this allowed me to move quite quickly with the digital scenery, which meant that I could hand off the rough cut with final scenic elements directly to Jess ahead of schedule (Figure 2.23).

The exact editing process for each piece varied by who started with the rough cut, but generally, they all followed the same order. Using the list of takes created during filming, the design team member working on the rough cut would look through the raw footage for the appropriate takes from various angles, label it, and save it to the appropriate folder. From here, the designer would consult the storyboard to see which view was most appropriate. If for some reason the footage from the intended view was not of the quality we had hoped, a different angle would be chosen. Next, those files would be taken into a computer program to remove the green screen from the video through a process called keying (Figure 2.24). Jess and I predominantly used Adobe AfterEffects for this process, whereas Hannah opted to work in OBS. Then, depending on who created the rough cut, an estimation of the general location onscreen would be created in AfterEffects or Adobe Premiere Pro, typically with a rough sound edit for purposes of clarity. In some cases, additional elements that were ready to be

*Figure 2.24 - Set of Judgement after removing the green screen walls and floor in AfterEffects*
incorporated would be added at this step to help the rest of the company visualize the end product more fully (Plate 2.5).

For several pieces, the creation of the background work was contingent on the arrangements of the rough cuts. In these cases, I would wait until I had received the rough cut of a piece and would then take screen captures of specific angles. I would then need to decide where in space this moment was. In some cases, there was furniture to guide me (Figure 2.25). In others, it relied more on context clues and the direction that the actors onscreen were looking. Either way, the screen capture would be inserted into a Procreate file where I would isolate the human figures and any furniture elements. I would then create the world around the figure to ensure that the scale of the background elements was correct (Plate 2.6).

Certain pieces required more detailed physical scenic elements than others. *Third Wave* was one such example where the desk spaces of each brother would need to have some depth added with set dressing. These pieces were some of the most exciting, as the detailed props work was a welcome change from the time spent staring at a screen while
creating the digital content. Quentin’s desk space ended up being the most fun to decorate, including assorted garbage, empty bottles, and gaming dice (Figure 2.26).

Depending on the show, some of the scenic elements needed to be animated in order to add life to the pieces. Working with Jess, we were able to determine what the smartest order of operations would be for each of these cases. For Little Bird, a filter was applied to the entire video to make sure the people and the background had the same general look to them. Others, such as Judgement, required me to create individual assets to give to Jess, which she was then able to animate to the proper patterns of movement (Figure 2.27). The look for Judgement took inspiration from the surreal architecture in my research and imagined what similar structures would look like if they were constructed in a way that felt more futuristic. Initially, the plan had been for the imagery to remain static, however, after speaking with the rest of the design team, it was decided that a simple movement would add quite a lot to the piece, so we changed our course of action.

Once each background was finished, attention could be turned to sound while the other designers added their elements to the main file. This turned out to be one of the biggest challenges for me, as I began the process with fairly minimal sound editing knowledge. Due to the way we filmed and recorded sound, each audio clip had to be carefully trimmed, lined up with the video perfectly, and the levels adjusted to be sure the actors were balanced. This process took much longer than anticipated, and as it was the last piece to be put in the puzzle, it led to some very stressful days leading up to opening night.
The rest of the Fusion company was more than happy to help as our deadline grew closer and we began to finish the filming process. The designers were asked on a near-daily basis what the other company members could do to help. At first, we were unsure how they could assist; the technical skills needed to edit the videos were too complex to teach quickly, and we did not have time to wait for others to figure out the established process. The action that turned out to be the most helpful was simply having company members go through raw footage and begin to label the takes. This is a process that took up a good deal of time when the designers were making the rough cuts, and having extra hands to take care of it truly saved us in the end. We also had help from other company members when it came to creating title cards, arranging the end credits, and organizing an introduction piece to play before the rest of the shows. This was a remarkably collaborative process that could not have come to fruition without the entirety of the company.

The few days before our production was scheduled to stream, our design team was working around the clock to try to finish the final product. Adjustments were being made to some videos after receiving feedback from the company, and others were only just starting to receive final editing treatment. In particular, *Noise* was the piece that truly came together in the last few hours (Figure 2.28). It was the last piece we filmed and had incredibly complex needs in every area, and we truly were working on it until the very last moment.

Ultimately, *Noise* did not
finish exporting until too late in the process, and in order to meet our premiere deadline, we had to first upload a version of the production without *Noise* in the line-up, with the intention of releasing a second edition the following day.

At a little after 7:00 pm, just before our 7:30 premiere scheduled to go live on YouTube, *Re[Fuse]* in its (almost) complete glory finished uploading to the internet, and the designers could relax. Our opening was strange in that rather than designers sitting in the house to watch the action onstage, the full company sat on the Morgan stage and watched together for the first time as the fruits of our labor appeared on a television screen (Plates 2.7-2.14).
Reflection

To this day, Re[Fuse] continues to be the project from my time as a graduate student of which I am the proudest. At the beginning of the pandemic, many students were worried about what the restrictions on public gatherings would mean for theatre artists. There was a good deal of talk about whether the work done during that time would be beneficial or worthwhile since it would not fit the parameters of typical theatre studies. Re[Fuse] was a breath of fresh air in that, rather than focusing on what we could not do or what we were missing out on, we had the opportunity to try new things that we typically would have never even attempted. Video production is not a skill typically covered in the theatre curriculum, especially in terms of production. The Fusion Theatre Project offered the chance to hone these video editing skills and dip our toes into the world of film. In a practical sense, these video editing skills have proven to be invaluable tools as a projection designer, and I would not have been able to hone these skills had we pursued a more traditional method of presentation.

The one challenge that I wish we had thought of before it was too late was the sheer amount of time that everything would take. The calendar that the design team created at the top of the process was incredibly ambitious, and as we started to fall behind it became easier to ignore our deadlines for the sake of just getting something done. This led to some sleepless nights spent editing and some work that was not as refined as it could have been. In the future, I now know that any video editing will take significantly longer than planned and that I will need to account for computer processing time when estimating how long something will take.

Re[Fuse] was an incredibly special project, from its beginning as we all brainstormed a theme together, to laughter and silliness on the set, to the satisfaction of watching the finished product together and seeing everything come full circle at the end. The entire company was so
supportive and dedicated to the project, and I would be happy to work with any one of them again in the future.
Plate 2.1 - Section of storyboard for Third Wave

Plate 2.2 - Section of storyboard for Little Bird
Plate 2.3 - Section of storyboard from Knock
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**MARCH 2021**

**APRIL 2021**

*Plate 2.4 - Proposed film production calendar*
Plate 2.5 - Screen capture of Adobe Premiere Pro file for the rough cut for Little Bird
Plate 2.6 - Screen capture of Procreate file with actor Joe Bayless for scale
Plate 2.7 - Still from Exodus 20:14 by Sera Shearer
Plate 2.8 - Still from Judgement by James Wakeland
Plate 2.10 - Still from Third Wave by Aubrey Felty
Plate 2.12 - Still from Little Bird by Anne-Marie Kate
Plate 2.14 - Still from Whispered by Jess Wallace
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Chapter Three: Shakespeare in a Contemporary World

_The Tragedie of Julius Caesar_

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Michael Shipley

October 19th-23rd, 2022

Utah State University, Caine College of the Arts

Department of Theatre Arts

Morgan Theatre

Logan, Utah
Introduction

The story of Julius Caesar and the fall of his Roman empire is one familiar to many. Historical evidence tells us of the lasting impact that Caesar had on the Western world, while stories and songs passed down through the ages have lifted this man into the stuff of legends. Perhaps the most well-known telling of Caesar’s tale is William Shakespeare’s play, *The Tragedie of Julius Caesar*, which tells a dramatized, poetic version of the infamous uprising and the chaos that followed.

*Julius Caesar* begins on the streets of Rome, where Roman citizens eagerly await the arrival of Caesar’s triumphant troops. Two tribunes, Marullus and Flavius, scold the citizens for their adoration of Caesar, reminding them of the greatness of Caesar’s rival, Pompey. This distrust between the two wealthy society members and the working-class citizens who love Caesar hints at the conflict to come. The scene shifts and we are introduced to Caesar and his entourage, including Brutus, Cassius, and Antony. A Soothsayer stops Caesar and warns him to “Beware the Ides of March,” but Caesar brushes them aside. Away from Caesar, Brutus and Cassius discuss their fears: if the people crown Caesar king, it will be the end of the republic as it currently stands. Brutus does love Caesar and feels conflicted about these fears, but Cassius starts to plant seeds of doubt. Their fears become true, as Caesar is offered the crown three times, declining each time and causing the adoration of the common citizens to grow stronger. That night, an ominous storm falls on Rome as plans are laid by Brutus, Cassius, and the other conspirators to assassinate Caesar. Caesar’s wife, Calpurnia, has dreams of Caesar’s destruction and begs him not to go to the Senate, but Caesar is persuaded by the very conspirators plotting his demise. The conspirators are successful in their plan, and Antony returns to find Caesar dead. Antony asks to speak to the Romans, and the conspirators permit it, but only after Brutus speaks.
They come to discover that this is a mistake, as Antony reveals to the crowd Caesar’s will and incites a riot. War breaks out, and Rome falls into chaos. Brutus, haunted by whether the conspirators made the right decision, is visited by the ghost of Caesar, who predicts that Brutus will meet death on the battlefields. The ghostly prophecy turns out to be correct, and the conspirators meet their fates one by one on the Plains of Philippi. At the end of the play, Marc Antony and Octavius, Caesar’s nephew, look ahead to a new Rome.

Work on *Julius Caesar* began quite early for the production team. Jess Wallace, Hannah Whorton, and I were all excited to begin work on the project once the assignments were announced, and started our collaborative process incredibly early. Ultimately, this was one of the most important aspects of this production, as the collaborative relationship that we established early on allowed us to create a cohesive overall experience from start to finish. It was also exciting to be working with director Michael Shipley, who seemed excited to try something interesting with the text after so long without being able to produce live theatre. A goal that we all agreed upon early in the process was that we did not want to create a period piece that felt tied to historical accuracy. Instead, we hoped to remove it from the historical timeline and create something exciting for our contemporary audience, which we were able to accomplish quite well in both design and direction. It was a joy to serve as the scenic designer for this piece, especially since *Julius Caesar* continues to be one of my favorite Shakespearean works.

Directed by Michael Shipley
Assistant Directed by Megan Codling
Stage Managed by Janae Vigil
Scenic Design by Sera Shearer
Technical Direction by Amy Critchfield
Scenic Charge Artistry by Hailey Haymond

Costume Design by Jess Wallace

Lighting Design by Hannah R. Whorton

Sound Design by Hyeonah Choi

Properties Design by Alex Heder

Scenic Design Mentor: Dennis Hassan
Design Concept Statement

Early read-throughs of the script and discussions with the creative team of *Julius Caesar* raised several questions. One that we continued to return to was “Why this play, at this theatre, at this time?” We questioned what about a story written hundreds of years ago, based on historical events from even further in the past, would draw in a modern audience. Ultimately, the answer to that question would come down to three main points. The first was the idea of the fragility of society demonstrated throughout the play. Even the strongest monuments, both physical and metaphorical, begin to wear down and break over time (Figure 3.1). Contemporary society is constantly in a state of change, and particularly in the few years preceding our production, conflicts and discontent have abounded. Much like the world of Shakespeare’s Rome, our world seemed as if it could all come crashing down at any moment.

The next was a question of one’s true self versus the self that one is willing to show to the public. In *Julius Caesar*, we see the characters donning literal and metaphorical masks throughout the play as they take on different roles: senators, friends, spouses, soldiers. The Caesar who exists in the safety of his home with his wife is a different man than the one who oversees the Senate. In addition to this, there is the idea that we cannot truly see ourselves. Brutus does not see himself the way that Cassius says the rest of Rome does. Brutus is also
perhaps too close to the assassination of Caesar to judge whether his actions were truly as noble as he believed them to be or if he got swept up in the ambitious possibilities laid out before him. In 2021, people around the world were constantly wearing masks of their own, whether literal masks that hid part of the face or the perfectly manicured personas that are made visible on social media. After wearing masks for so long, are we truly able to determine who we are at our core, or are we, too, swept up in the possibilities of what we could be?

The final idea was an exploration of the ritualism and superstition that influence the actions of the characters throughout the play. Ghosts and storms and ominous dreams inform the players in the story, and characters such as the Soothsayer claim to know the future. To a modern audience, this may seem silly or outdated; as a society that claims to be scientifically led, ghost stories seem as if they’d hold little weight. However, the idea of ritual and spirituality are almost intrinsically tied with modern society. People all over the world prescribe to their own religious practices in the same way that the Romans did. Astrology and psychic mediums appear to be more popular in mainstream society than ever. Stories about otherworldly encounters fascinate contemporary audiences, and the story of Julius Caesar is no exception.

My primary goal as the scenic designer on this project was to support these themes visually while providing as many opportunities for my collaborators as possible. I approached this goal by beginning to explore a sculptural environment not bound by any particular period, but that showed signs of wear and tear that could become more apparent as time went on.
Research

The research process began with the backbone of Caesar’s Rome - order. To this degree, I focused primarily on tall rectangular shapes that evoked the feeling of enormously tall buildings or age-old monuments. The tall, imposing shapes would echo the overwhelming power of Rome. I primarily focused on examples from architectural photography and installation art (Figure 3.2). I also looked into the architecture of spaces of power, such as government buildings. The Capitol Rotunda was particularly interesting in terms of the circular shape and the feeling of being surrounded (Figure 3.3).

The next phase of research examined how these structures start to fall apart. I sought out examples of how different objects or materials start to break or bend under pressure, whether they shatter, tear, or crumble. In this phase, inspiration came predominantly in the form of art installations that were fragmented or otherwise appeared broken in some way (Figure 3.4). I was particularly drawn to a piece titled “Megalith at the Bath House Ruins” by teamLab (Figure 3.5). The angle of the glowing megaliths and the crumbled earth at the base gave the impression of
the pieces being shoved back into the ground, or of emerging and breaking free. It seemed in some way like a metaphor for an uprising; either the action of the oppressed being forced down or rapid escalation.

My research continued with a study of ancient mirrors and semi-reflective metal (Figure 3.6). My initial interest was in mirrors in general; Jess has been playing with the idea of putting the conspirators in masks for the assassination of Caesar, and I wondered if there could be an interesting moment where the conspirators remove their masks and see their reflections in the wake of the murder. However, historical research took me to the types of mirrors found in Rome and Egypt, which were typically made of metal that allowed for some reflection, but nothing nearly as crisp as the reflections that are seen in modern mirrors.

Something is intriguing about the ghostly, not fully formed shapes that appear in the reflections of rough metal. The incomplete images spoke to the idea of the unclear views we have of ourselves, and the idea that even if we try, we may never be able to see clearly.

The final element of my research revolved around astrological symbolism, ancient ways of telling time, and the meanings behind various natural materials. Different stones and metals have different meanings in alchemy and witchcraft, and often play a role in rituals. Two stones that particularly caught my eye, both in terms of meaning and appearance, were obsidian and
black tourmaline (Figure 3.7). The jagged shape of the black tourmaline felt rough and dangerous, and the downward lines gave the impression of motion. Meanwhile, the meaning of obsidian in astrological circles felt relevant to the story; it is thought to help cut emotional cords, much like how Brutus had to sever ties of friendship with Caesar to do what he felt was best for Rome.
Design Process

After consulting the rest of the team to be sure that we were on the same page, I began experimenting with some rough sketches (Figures 3.8-3.10 and Plate 3.1). I was particularly interested in exploring circular arrangements to speak to both ritualism and the order of the Senate. To this end, I attempted different arrangements of angular pieces, focusing on the overall composition most at first. However, these early sketches did not feel strong enough, so I continued to experiment with the addition of circular platforming. I also considered ways to create an underlying sense of danger. Different sketches played with leaning figures that felt as if they may topple over, with varying degrees of angle, and pieces suspended in the air. I also considered extending that danger to all levels, including the addition of an uneven floor.

At this stage, our design team returned to early discussions, and thankfully we were all on the same page. Jess had plans to incorporate astrological symbolism into the costumes and was experimenting with the idea of basing each character off of a specific tarot card. This tied into
some of the research I had done in that regard, particularly the sun-dial motifs that had begun to take shape in early sketches. Hannah was excited by the possibility to cast interesting shadows and brought up the idea of whether any pieces of the set could be internally lit. The most recent sketches did not seem as if they would work well in that scenario, so I knew that I should return to the drawing board. I was also still not quite satisfied with the way that the monoliths were placed, and the rest of the team encouraged me to continue exploration without limiting myself to what I perceived as “realistic.”

Ultimately, I found what I was looking for in the digital renderings that I created (Figures 3.11-3.12 and Plates 3.2-3.8). At this point, I was fairly well-versed in rendering with Adobe Photoshop, and so wanted to challenge myself to work in a different program. Utilizing an iPad Pro that I was able to borrow from the theatre department, I created a base rendering to which I could add color and shading in order to communicate the different scenes. Implied and real diagonal lines moving in opposition with each other were meant to hint at the instability of this world; in particular, the jagged tear in the banners upstage could be adjusted to be barely there or blown wide open to show both different states of chaos and different

Figure 3.11 - Digital rendering of Act II Scene 4

Figure 3.12 - Digital rendering of Act V
locations. Clusters of semi-reflective metal shards created odd reflections and shadows, and also hung at an unnatural angle meant to create an air of discomfort. Finally, the central platform, based on the markings of ancient sundials and the textures of obsidian and black tourmaline, sat at a rake in opposition to the surrounding ramp. To communicate the functionality of the set with Michael, I took the time to render every scene in the play and show how the unit set could be utilized for different locations and scenes.

At this stage, I had approval from the director and the rest of my team, but a technical director had not yet been assigned to the project, so for a few months, progress was slow. However, during the summer our new staff technical director, Amy Critchfield, joined the production team, and I was able to meet with her to see if my ideas were technically realistic. The first meeting with Amy went very well, and she felt confident that we could accomplish the set within our time and budget parameters. It was such a wonderful experience to work with a technical director who was excited about the challenges posed by the scenic elements, and it laid the groundwork for a solid collaboration. Amy requested that along with my drafting, I provide her with a white model (Figure 3.13). The white model was incredibly helpful to create as I started the process of fine-tuning the drafting packet (Plates 3.9-3.13).
Due to the rising cost of materials, some small changes were made throughout the drafting process with recommendations from Amy. The first was to make the semi-circular ramp a bit narrower than was indicated in the white model. Utah State Theatre already owned the lumber to build a similar ramp that was approximately three feet wide, whereas the ramp in the white model was five feet wide. This change would save us nearly $2000, so it was an easy compromise to make. Amy also asked if the upper sections of the banners could be drops rather than soft flats to cut down on both cost and weight. At this time, challenges had started to arise with the fly system in the Morgan Theatre, and a weight limit was being placed on anything that would need to go in the air. I was nervous to lose the structure, but agreed that drops would likely be fine as long as they had a piece of plywood at the very bottom to act as a stiffener.

With final approvals from Amy in terms of budget estimations, I finally turned my attention to creating a color model (Figure 3.14). Creating the white model had been helpful in terms of basic drafting, but it was not until I began work on the full-color model that I truly began to understand how this set would come to life. To create many of the elements, I imported a screen capture of the drafting I had created in Vectorworks into Adobe Photoshop, where they were sized appropriately for the project. I was then able to add the correct colors and textures before printing each piece and beginning to assemble it. The shard clusters were a different story entirely, especially considering the small scale of the model. For these, it was necessary to cut each tiny piece of aluminum foil by hand,
apply the paint treatment, and then use tweezers to attach them to the plastic understructure. It was labor-intensive, which was indicative of how long it would take in full scale, but the result was worth it.
Execution

The build process for *Julius Caesar* was an exciting one, as we had all been out of the shop for almost a year by this point due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A good deal of the excitement came from the opportunity to work with nontraditional construction materials such as corrugated plastic, cherry tree netting, and insulation foil. These materials were combined to create clusters of shards that would hang in the air. The process started by laying out the overall shape of each side of each shard cluster on a 4’ by 8’ sheet of corrugated plastic. Initially, I had intended for the corrugated plastic to be clear, as I thought we would use it to give a rigid structure to the clusters while still allowing light to come through. However, our technical director ordered white plastic. In order to not fall behind in the build, we opted to cut the individual shards out of the white plastic since they would be covered by another material, and order a package of the clear plastic to come in later. Ultimately, this was due to a miscommunication where the technical director had figured out a way to truly make the shards seem as if they were floating whereas the method I had suggested would have a less ethereal look to it. Once we realized what the source of the confusion was, we were able to move forward with a better plan that suited the needs of the design much better.

Each triangle that was drawn on the corrugated plastic was labeled according to a color-coding system, cut out, roughly sanded, and adhered with white glue to textured insulation foil. The foil was then given a paint treatment meant to age it and dull some of the reflective quality. After this step, patterns were created out of brown craft paper to guide the shapes of the cherry tree netting skeletons. The netting was cut out and attached to a solid base, then hung in the shop for assembly. Due to the height of the structures, the only place that they could be assembled was in the UST paint shop by hanging them over the edge of a balcony. Once hung,
each individual triangle was attached temporarily to the cherry tree netting with tape in order to allow for adjustments as the sculptures came together (Figure 3.15). While this was certainly the most challenging aspect of the execution, in many ways it was also the most exciting. The opportunity to create something entirely different from standard stock scenery was such an excellent learning experience, and inspired a desire to continue learning about installations of this scale.

Another part of the build process that was particularly enjoyable was having the opportunity to mentor an undergraduate scenic charge artist through the process. Our paint charge, Hailey Haymond, had never taken on this particular leadership role before, but was excited to dive into the challenge. Hailey and I were able to meet and work together prior to the beginning of the painting process to be sure that she understood the duties that came with the position and what would be expected of her. Once we were in the paint shop, Hailey stepped into the role of a leader effortlessly, and made my job as the designer much easier. One thing that was particularly relieving was that Hailey had the skills and the drive necessary to complete a more detailed floor treatment on the central circular platform (Figure 3.16). Overall, there were seven circles, many with different centerpoints, twelve numbers, and
two intricate flourishes that made up the detail section of the floor treatment. Together with the students from paints and props practicum, Hailey was able to perfectly execute the design as was indicated by the provided paint elevations (Plates 3.14-3.17).

One challenge that we did face during the process came in terms of scheduling. Due to the nature of the scenery, there were many tasks that could not be fully completed until we were in the Morgan Theatre with items at least partially assembled. Returning to the theatre for the first time in almost a year left all of us scrambling to get back up to speed, and one area that we collectively struggled with was scheduling the space so that workers in each area had the appropriate amount of time to accomplish their goals. Ultimately, this small obstacle was easy to overcome with clear communication and a willingness to compromise. Painting was done in the dark, lights were roughly focused while awaiting final scenic placements, and projections were shifted as mistakes in scenic placements were corrected. A situation that had the potential to become very stressful turned out to be the most minor inconvenience, which I attribute entirely to the incredibly understanding and hardworking team that I had the opportunity to work alongside.

While we certainly had our fair share of difficult days, the final product of the hard work put in by every member of the company truly paid off in the end. Every aspect that we had carefully collaborated on looked just as we’d hoped, and the common themes that resonated with the design team were central to the storytelling. It is never quite possible to capture the magic of theatre with a single image, but somehow our photographer, Andrew McAllister, found out how to do just that. In addition to every other photo he took, Andrew managed to capture one single lightning flash onstage that took place during a long storm sequence (Figure 3.17 and Plates 3.18-3.22). For just one moment, time stood still.
Figure 3.17 - Production still by Andrew McAllister
Reflection

*Julius Caesar* was, in so many ways, the very best return to the magic of live theatre that any of us could have asked for. As designers, we were offered the chance to let our imaginations run wild and to create something completely removed from the world as we currently know it. Our students had the opportunity to refresh skills they had not used in two years, and several of them walked into the Utah State Theatre scene shop for the very first time. While it did not come free of challenges, the lessons learned were some that will continue to inform my choices as a theatre artist, and I am so unbelievably proud of the work that we did.

In retrospect, one area in which I see room for improvement is in standing firm in design choices when necessary. Throughout the build process, I was often faced with questions of whether or not small adjustments could be made to the scenery. This is not an unusual experience, but my desire to be what I considered “reasonable” led to me signing off on changes that set certain chain reactions in motion. Moving forward, I now know that it is important to remember the big picture, and how small changes can ultimately make or break that experience.

At the end of the day, the greatest success in this project was the strong collaboration between members of the design team at every level. Scenic, costumes, lighting, projection, and sound all worked together almost seamlessly, allowing us to create a theatre experience that was fully rounded and free of any one element attempting to take over the spotlight. I will never forget my time working at USU, and the incredible artists that I was fortunate enough to get to know along the way.
Plate 3.1 - Thumbnail sketch
Plate 3.2 - Digital rendering of Act III Scene 2
Plate 3.3 - Digital rendering of Act IV Scene 3
Plate 3.4 - Digital rendering of Act IV Scene 2
Plate 3.5 - Digital rendering of Act III Scene 1
Plate 3.6 - Digital rendering of Act II Scene 3
Plate 3.7 - Digital rendering of Act III Scene 3
Plate 3.8 - Digital rendering of Act II Scene 1
Plate 3.9 - Primary groundplan
Plate 3.10 - Drafting depicting circular platform and ramp
Plate 3.11: Drafting depicting bottom sections of upstage banners.
Plate 3.12 - Drafting depicting upper sections of upstage banners
Plate 3.13 - Drafting depicting largest shard cluster
Plate 3.14 - Paint elevation for circular platform
Plate 3.15 - Paint elevation for semicircular ramp

Plate 3.16 - Sample texture for shard pieces
Plate 3.17 - Paint elevation for lower banner
Plate 3.18 - Production still by Andrew McAllister
Plate 3.19 - Production still by Andrew McAllister
Plate 3.20 - Production still by Andrew McAllister
Plate 3.22 - Production still by Andrew McAllister
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