Selected Projects in Scenic Design and Painting

Chelsea Richards
Utah State University

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SELECTED PROJECTS IN SCENIC DESIGN AND PAINTING

by

Chelsea Richards

Plan B project report submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree

of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

Scenic Design and Painting

Approved:

_______________________________  _______________________________
Dennis Hassan               Bruce Duerden
Major Professor            Committee Member

_______________________________
Leslie Brott
Committee Member

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, UT

2014
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I only hope that I can go on to inspire others as all of you have done for me. Thank you.
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CHAPTER I

SCENIC DESIGN AND PAINTING

MAURITIUS

Synopsis and Introduction of the Play

“One wouldn't think that the subject of rare stamps would make for gripping, entertaining theater, but Theresa Rebeck's Mauritius... proves otherwise...” -Laurence Vittes, The Hollywood Reporter.

A parent’s passing will always generate drama within a family, but when you add a family heirloom with a potential value in the millions of dollars, the stakes are quickly raised. Theresa Rebeck’s gripping, anxiety-producing play, Mauritius, introduces tension through a subject most theatre patrons are unlikely to suspect: philately, the study or collection of postage stamps.

Jackie and Mary, estranged half-sisters, are forced into a reunion after their mother’s passing. Following Mary’s previous departure, Jackie took over the strenuous job of caring for their mother and now wishes to start a new life for herself. To do this, she is relying on her mother’s old book of stamps, which she hopes to be worth some money, to help her create that new beginning. When Mary comes home and attempts to claim the stamps as her own inheritance, tensions rise. Jackie has taken the book to a local collector’s shop (the main location in the play) to be appraised or perhaps even sold, setting off a chain reaction of events ultimately introducing three new men into their lives, one of whom brings with him the potential for great danger. The collection turns

1 Vittes
out to hold very valuable pieces, including the ‘crown jewel of philately’: the Mauritius One Penny and the Two Penny (Figure 1.1 & 1.2). With the five characters fighting for their own personal gain from what could be a financial windfall, the audience is taken on a ride of courage, greed, violence, and deception.

The play was originally produced at the Biltmore Theatre in New York City, opening previews on September 13, 2007, and running for twenty-four previews and sixty-one performances. It was directed by Doug Hughes with scenic, costume, and lighting designs by John Lee Beatty, Catherine Zuber, and Paul Gallo, respectively.

*Mauritius* was performed in the Black Box Theatre of Utah State University in the fall of 2012. It was directed by faculty member Leslie Brott with costumes designed by undergraduate student Rufus ZaeJoDaeus. Lighting and sound designs were by students Nathan Wagner and Skye Orchard, respectively. Properties design was completed by fellow graduate student, Spencer Potter.

---

2 “World Stamp News”
Design Vision

The challenges in designing this play arose very quickly. The script called for three separate locations, the stamp collector’s shop, a coffee shop, and the home the sisters shared with their mother. Performed in the Black Box Theatre, it was clear the set design would require some creative spatial solutions. In my initial meetings with director Leslie Brott, we discussed what was important for her vision of the play. There were obvious necessities: a display counter in the stamp shop, table and chairs, stools, boxes, etc. Other important factors included a sense of an entryway into the shop and girl’s home, whether that was accomplished by an actual door or just a suggestion, as well as a feeling of ‘home’ and of packing up the space in the mother’s house. Ms. Brott also expressed a desire for open acting space with room for violence as was called for by the script. She also wanted quick and seamless transitions between locales and an overall evocative feeling of “seediness”. After all, these characters were not exactly pillars of society, and their actions throughout the play led them lower and lower into the underbelly of a place with dishonorable intentions.

I set out, in my first design at Utah State University, to create a space that could encompass this world. I wanted the feeling of this piece to come alive, to not only just give the actors the needed material things to accomplish the telling of the story. I wanted to transport the audience to a place where they could feel the tremendous weight of the emotional baggage these characters were hauling.

Research

I began my research by investigating small shops in cities that felt akin to the stamp shop in the show. There were plenty to be found. I found that with each space I
bookmarked there were common factors. These shops appeared run down from both the outside view as well as the inside (Figure 1.3 & 1.4). They did not feel ‘complete’.

These were not department stores with professional display designers or even carpenters, in some cases. These spaces were put together by their owners using any materials they happened to have or they could get cheaply. The floors were not carpeted for comfort and the walls were not painted to perfection. Raw materials such as concrete, structural wood, and supports for light fixtures were not hidden. The objective of these shops was not to pull in tourists off the street with fancy signs or gimmicks, but to display their collections and have a usable, working space to conduct their business with like-minded collectors who knew where to find them.

Figure 1.3 Sliema Stamp Shop, Malta  Figure 1.4 Casey’s Rubber Stamps, NYC

The other important common denominator was the overwhelming feeling provided by clutter. It appeared that the displays created by these shop owners were organized, and I am sure they made perfect sense to someone who knew what they were looking at and looking for, but to an outside eye the sheer volume of material inside these

---

3 Biegler, “Living the List”
stores was overwhelming and oppressive (Figure 1.5 & 1.6). I wanted to incorporate this heavy clutter into the space, but it was tricky, as I needed to keep the acting space open and could not allow long scene changes to move actual clutter in and out.

I also heavily researched all of the stamps mentioned in the script and went on to further explore philately as a field. In order to understand what was really at stake for these characters, I felt the need to gain a greater understanding of these stamps and the types of people involved in collecting them. I learned that the Mauritius One and Two (as seen in Figures 1.1 & 1.2 previously) were issued by the British Colony Mauritius in September 1847. Their name comes from the wording on the stamps reading "Post Office", which was soon changed in the next issue to "Post Paid." They are among the rarest postage stamps in the world. The designs were based on the then current issue of Great Britain stamps (first released in 1841), bearing the profile head of Queen Victoria and issued in two denominations in similar colors, the one penny red brown and two

---

4 Davies, Paul “Tornado”
pence blue. Five hundred of each value were printed from a single plate bearing both values and issued on September 21, 1847. The stamps are highly prized by collectors because of their rarity, their early dates and their primitive character. Surviving stamps are mainly in the hands of private collectors but some are on public display in the British Library in London. Their estimated value is four million dollars, though they have not been sold as a set since 1993, so future sets could conceivably go for much more.\(^5\) Knowing just how valuable these slips of paper are, I could better understand the depths of depravity these characters were willing to sink into in order to secure their futures.

**Design Process and Execution**

Inspired by the actual stamp shops I found in my research, I began my design process by aiming to create a realistic interior space that felt aged and uncared for by its owners. I began with thumbnail sketches to explore the space and evocative quality in the composition. Initially, I stuck with what I thought of as more traditional compositions, that is to say that what I was drawing was walls and doors in a logical architectural layout, with levels and steps, in keeping with the realistic nature of the script (Plate 1.1). Keeping in mind Ms. Brott’s wishes for quick and seamless transitions between locales, I knew that I wanted all furniture pieces and any other large pieces of set dressing to be present on stage at all times. We could not allow for lengthy scene changes that required furniture to be brought off and on; it had to be kept minimal.

I designed this show in conjunction with the Design Studies class (Spring of 2012), being taught by professor Dennis Hassan. I continued progressing on the design in \(^5\) Skyblue Global Ltd.
class, touching base with Ms. Brott as often as schedules would allow. Many ideas were considered: ceiling pieces, wall and floor treatments, making the space feel more industrial versus more homelike, etc. before I settled on a final design. I continued sketching (Plate 1.2 & 1.3) and eventually built a model (Plate 1.4) which I presented both to the Design Studies Class as well as to Ms. Brott in a separate meeting.

I chose to keep the logical architectural approach and the space felt like a realistic interior of a building. I elevated the main entrance to the shop, requiring two steps down to reach the main floor, in order to give the place a ‘basement’ feel (Plate 1.5). I wanted the characters to physically lower themselves (as they often were morally and emotionally) when they entered. The wall was a deteriorating plaster with beam work showing through the crumbling façade (Plate 1.6). The floor was a concrete treatment, in keeping with both the basement feel and the idea that the space was somewhat unfinished, as my research showed these shops often were. In addition to the main door to the shop, I placed two other doors to allow for exiting into other unseen areas. A second door on the platform led to other rooms in the shop, and a door on the opposite side of the stage was meant for use in the girls’ mother’s home, leading out of the basement. Furniture positioning (along with selective focus provided by the lighting designer) comprised the means for the changing of settings. The furniture included a large display case (to be used only in the stamp shop, but remaining visible throughout the rest of the scenes) a table, two chairs, a stool, and a small bookcase to be used in the home scenes. The only items to be carried on and offstage were boxes and small props such as beer bottles and cigarettes.
Reaction to my design was favorable both in class from my fellow students and professor, as well as from the director. With the design completed, we all set off for the summer in our other endeavors.

Upon returning to school in August of 2012, we began construction on the set. Very soon after, we all realized mistakes had been made. The platforms were installed and all other dimensions were taped out by the stage manager, Michael Retzlaff. Once these dimensions were in front of us to see, it was clear that there was not enough open playing space. The space as I had created it was not nearly as usable as it had seemed in a \( \frac{1}{2} \)” scale model. In reality, the blocking would be severely limited by the few available traffic patterns. I went back to the drawing board.

I collaborated heavily with Leslie to create a new space that would be more conducive to her blocking needs and the needs of the actors. Because construction had already started on the walls, I was somewhat limited insofar as I had to make sure my new design stayed within the dimensions of walls already created; I would not be able to purchase more lumber.

I revisited my research. What was it that was truly important to me about this design? What I found was that it was not the walls or the platforms or the doors or any of the actual objects; it was the feeling of this subterranean level of life, of character and morality. No matter how upstanding these characters had been previously in their day-to-day lives, during the course of events of this show, they were people behaving badly. Every character lowered their standards for their own behavior. They were all, in a manner of speaking, dirty, rough, and incomplete. This is what I wanted the environment to feel like.
I started researching again. I found images that, to me, felt like these characters. I was drawn toward cold colors, hard textures, and anything that showed a lacking of completion. Concrete quickly rose to the top of my list for textures. I found images of concrete that inspired both the floor treatment (Figure 1.7) and the wall (Figure 1.8).

![Figure 1.7 Floor treatment research](image1)  ![Figure 1.8 Wall treatment research](image2)

Additionally, I added structural wood to the wall, as if the owner of the space had planned on adding drywall or sheet rock, but had never finished it. I found many images that supported this (Figure 1.9 & 1.10). I felt this added to the ‘incomplete’ state that I wanted to convey. It was not meant to imply that the space was currently in process or that they would get around to adding the finishing touches eventually. I would age the wood and make it clear that it had been there for years, implying that it was not something that anyone was planning to complete anytime soon.

I eliminated the platform and drastically decreased the size of the display counter in order to free up more space for movement. I wanted the director to have complete
freedom spatially. The number of doors was reduced to only two, one stage right and one stage left. In adding to the ‘incomplete’ effect, I left them simply as frames, no door included, and masked the offstage sides in order to ease entrances and exits. Each doorframe served multiple purposes. For example, the stage right frame served as the entrance and exit to the stamp shop, and also as the entrance to the main room of the girls’ mother’s house.

I created a rough Photoshop rendering to present to Ms. Brott, as well as the rest of the production team (Plate 1.7). The redesign was enthusiastically received. The space was now playable, and the adjustments to the construction were minor. In fact, with the reduced size of the design, most of it had already been built.

Construction was ready to continue. I also acted as paint charge for this production. Our technical director, Matt Stowe, made a few minor alterations to the wall units that had been built so that they would work for the new dimensions. As soon as that was completed, I began painting. I used a lot of techniques to create the concrete look that I wanted. I scumbled, sponged, rag rolled, and spattered to get the desired effect
(Plate 1.8). I then used a very watery blend at the top and bottom of the units to create a water-damaged, aged look (Plate 1.9).

I used a rehearsal-free Saturday to paint the floor. This was also a concrete treatment but it had to have its own distinct look. Concrete walls and concrete floors do not look exactly alike. I accomplished the look I wanted with a wet blend followed by spatter (Plate 1.10 & 1.11).

From there, all that was left was to stain the counter and paint the furniture. A practical fluorescent fixture was hung above the counter to enhance the industrial feel during the stamp shop scenes. I worked with properties designer, Spencer Potter, to add the finishing touches with the appropriate set dressing.

**Evaluation**

This design and execution process proved to be extremely educational and beneficial for me. Being my first design at Utah State University, it was already guaranteed to not only be educational, but also nerve wracking. Ultimately, I am incredibly happy with the finished product. I feel I learned a lot not only about the process of designing a show in the academic arena, but also about communication, both oral and visual. Looking back, of course the main thing that sticks out about this project was the redesign and concurrent time constraints. I am nothing but grateful that happened. I look at my initial design and then what was eventually put on stage, and I see tremendous growth. The catalyst was Ms. Brott expressing her concerns with the space. The final design was much more appropriate for the Black Box Theatre, allowing the blocking and movement to happen freely and without being impeded by the set. It was also much more aesthetically and evocatively interesting. The minimalist set more
adequately set the mood for the piece; it just felt right (Figure 1.11, 1.12, 1.13, & 1.14).

The design I started with would have looked fine, but it was not anything special. The play was better because of the changes made.

I also made progress as a scenic painter and paint shop manager. This show marked the first production in which I was in charge of the Utah State Theatre paint shop. I had previously charged a show at USU, but I was not the paint shop manager. Through the process of this show, I learned more about organization, scheduling, and clear communication as a scenic artist. I had opportunity to exercise new techniques and problem solving skills in order to come up with the finished looks that I wanted. It was a very rewarding experience.
Plate 1.1 *Mauritius* thumbnail sketches
Plate 1.2 *Mauritius* preliminary sketch
Plate 1.3 *Mauritius* preliminary sketch
Plate 1.4 *Mauritius* original color model (scale: \( \frac{1}{2}'' = 1'0'' \))
Plate 1.5 *Mauritius* original ground plan (scale: $\frac{1}{4}'' = 1' - 0''$)
Plate 1.6 *Mauritius* original wall elevations (scale: ¼” = 1’0”)
Plate 1.7 *Mauritius* revised Photoshop rendering
Plate 1.8 *Mauritius* process photo, paint treatment on wall

Plate 1.9 *Mauritius* process photo, paint treatment on wall
Plate 1.10 Mauritius process photo, paint treatment on floor

Plate 1.11 Mauritius process photo, paint treatment on floor
Figure 1.11 *Mauritius* production photo, Dennis in stamp shop
Figure 1.12 *Mauritius* production photo, Jackie and Mary pack
Figure 1.13 *Mauritius* production photo, Jackie, Phillip and Dennis in shop
Figure 1.14 *Mauritius* production photo, the standoff
CHAPTER II

SCENIC DESIGN AND PAINTING

VIOLET

Synopsis and Introduction of the Play

Nineteen-sixty-four in the United States was a time prime for drama. The country itself was in a great period of transition, and the characters of Violet are exemplary of those changing times.

In the opening scene of Violet, the audience is introduced to multiple characters, across a time span of twelve years, at once. There is thirteen-year-old Violet with her father and twenty-five-year-old Violet at a bus station with local townspeople. This opening represents two major moments of change in Violet’s life. As a thirteen-year-old, in this scene, the audience bears witness to the major catalyst that has led twenty-five-year-old Violet to this spot, that being when her father’s axe blade detached from its handle and struck young Violet in the face, leaving her with a disfiguring wound and subsequent scar. As an adult, now that her father has passed, Violet is boarding a greyhound bus to begin her journey to a faith healer in hopes of having that scar healed.

This scene sets the tone for this musical beautifully. It is a story of not only change, but also the journey to get there. From the Greyhound bus station, Violet begins her physical and spiritual journey from Spruce Pine, North Carolina, to Tulsa, Oklahoma, finding much more than she bargained for along the way.

On that bus, she meets two soldiers: the attractive and womanizing Monty, and Flick, a down-to-earth and kind-hearted African American. They, too, are in the midst of
a personal journey. They find an unlikely friendship, and agree to travel together until they must go their separate ways. Being from three very different backgrounds, these three characters agree and disagree in a variety of ways. Through getting to know each other, they grow.

By the time the three reach Tulsa, the bond that they have formed is tough to break. Monty begs Violet to return to him after she meets the faith healer. They head their separate ways. Upon entering the church, Violet finds the evangelist heavily involved in a rehearsal and quickly sees that he is not the presence of God she thought she knew from television. After a tense confrontation, in which the healer confesses to be a fraud, Violet seeks solace in the memory of her father. She experiences what she feels to be a profoundly spiritual moment, and convinces herself that she has been healed of her disfigurement. She heads back to the bus station to meet Monty, where she learns that she still wears the scar. Monty reveals that he is leaving to fight in Vietnam. Repulsed by herself, Violet is comforted by Flick and together they aim to start a new life.

*Violet* was initially developed at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Connecticut in 1994. The original production opened at Playwrights Horizons on March 12, 1997. The story is based on the short story, *The Ugliest Pilgrim*, by Doris Betts. The book and lyrics were written by Brian Crawley, with music by Jeanine Tesori.

*Violet* was performed at Utah State University on the Caine Lyric stage in February, 2013. It was directed by department head Ken Risch with costumes designed by fellow graduate student Spencer Potter. Lighting and sound designs were by students Kenny Driggs and Skye Orchard, respectively. Properties design was completed by undergraduate Morgan Golightly.
Design Vision

Early in the process, fellow designer Spencer Potter and I sat down with director Ken Risch and discussed the atmosphere of the nation during the time period of this play. Mr. Risch had very vivid memories of this time. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, Vietnam was taking shape and sparking mass (and sometimes violent) protesting, and civil rights legislation was in process. As Mr. Risch put it, it was a ‘time of transition in a scarred society’. There was that word again, *scarred*. At every turn, the nation was wounded, scarred, attempting to heal. The state of the country was akin to depression, it was heavy and attempting to trudge forward in any way possible. I connected to the idea of this, and wanted to create a space with the same evocative feel. The set needed to have texture, to be made of the materials that these characters would have lived their lives around: wood, rough and aged, and brick, crumbling but strong. It also needed to allow for transition, both for practical and ideological purposes. The show was rarely in one location longer than the duration of one song and short scene. On the small Lyric stage with no fly system, this was a problem that had to be solved. From the ideological standpoint, a set with movement and the ability to transition perfectly evoke the themes of the text and the time period.

Research

I began my research process looking for evocative images that struck me as bearing a likeness to this story. I found myself being drawn to the idea of representing heat visually. During my discussions with the director, the subject of heat came up more than a few times. After all, the play took place in the south in the summertime and the
characters were traveling by bus. Heat was basically its own character in the script. I searched for pieces of art that I felt communicated this aspect (Figure 2.1\textsuperscript{6} & 2.2\textsuperscript{7}).

![Figure 2.1 Evocative heat research](image1) ![Figure 2.2 Evocative heat research](image2)

I then moved on to research texture. I wanted every surface of the architecture of the set to feel gritty, weathered, scarred. I knew I wanted the main elements to be comprised of wood and brick, as they were logical for their surroundings and would also serve well in my endeavor to create that gritty feel. These sturdy materials can withstand severe abuse. They may show their wounds, but are overall unyielding to the tests of time. I was able to find great examples for the types of texture for which I was searching (Figure 2.3 & 2.4).

I then delved into period specific research. In addition to civil and societal issues, I wanted to find out more about the types of architecture and architectural elements that would have surrounded the characters. This was where I discovered the idea of ‘ghost ads’ (also known as ‘ghost signs’).

\begin{quote}
“Advertisements painted by hand directly onto the brickwork of buildings were once a common sight in cities, towns and villages across
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{6} Broadbent, Tony “Bon Voyage”
\textsuperscript{7} Tzadok, Osnat “City Heat”
the country. The rise of printed billboards soon led to their decline but many still survive, often faded, clinging to the walls that host them. These ‘Ghostsigns’ provide a window into the past and evidence of the craftsmanship that once went into their production. However, they are disappearing fast…” – *Ghostsigns, History of Advertising Trust*

I felt that these crumbling ads fit perfectly within the scope of ideas I was aiming for. Though faded and weathered, they clung to life, desperately hanging on to their original purpose (Figure 2.5 & 2.6).

![Figure 2.3 Texture research, clapboard](image1)

![Figure 2.4 Texture research, brick](image2)

![Figure 2.5 Research, ‘ghost ads’](image3)

![Figure 2.6 Research, ‘ghost ads’](image4)

I started to tailor my research towards more specific details. First I looked at period correct images of Greyhound buses and bus stations. Next, to furniture pieces and architectural details of the types of places they visited in the story: cafes, hotels,
churches, etc. The script required rapid changes in locale, presenting the challenge of keeping the set universal enough to represent numerous places, yet still atmospherically evocative. I was not yet sure how I would accomplish this, but I wanted to gain a solid idea of the actual period details through my research (Figure 2.7 & 2.8) in order to find the best solution.

![Figure 2.7 Research, Greyhound](image1)

![Figure 2.8 Research, Greyhound](image2)

**Design Process and Execution**

I re-read the play, sat down with my research and notes from the director, and asked myself what called to me. I knew what I wanted the textures to be, what I wanted the set to feel like, but I was unsure how to translate those desires into the physical space. I looked over my notes from Mr. Risch again and something he had said jumped out at me. It was obviously an important phrase from him, as I wrote it down word for word: “Three misfits journeying through each other.” For starters, I thought it was a brilliant statement that summed up the plot device of the show perfectly. As I considered it further, I realized it reiterated all of the ideas with which I had already been wrestling.

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8 Hivemind, *Golden Age of Travel*
The ‘journey’, the transition, the movement, whatever you wanted to call it was not as simple as moving from point A to point B. What made the story of this journey special was the way these characters’ journeys intertwined with each other. The word ‘misfits’ was ripe with potential, and I think could be interpreted visually to mean a material that has ‘misbehaved’ or become distressed. I had to solve the problem of how to create a space that could very quickly transition from one locale to the next with minimal time and effort, and in Mr. Risch’s quote, I found my inspiration. I would create panels that moved through each other and could be quickly arranged and rearranged to suggest locations without explicitly representing them. This was not a show that needed every architectural or element present in the set in order to be effective, the feel of the thing would provide a perfect environment for these bold characters to live within.

I began small sketches (Plate 2.1). I presented my ideas both to the director and to my Design Studies class, being led this semester by faculty member Shawn Fisher. I spoke with other members of the department to see what kind of equipment we had in stock that could make this kind of moving scenery work. As luck would have it, we had a set of three tracks that had been used in the Lyric space before and could be reinstalled. I started more sketching with this three track system in mind. I began incorporating the feel and the textures and it started to seem like I was really getting somewhere (Plate 2.2).

The director approached me one day during this process and asked what I thought about the floor that was currently installed in the Caine Lyric space for another production. The department was in the midst of producing *The Miracle Worker* with a set design by Shawn Fisher. For this piece, Mr. Fisher designed a wonderful raked floor that also incorporated levels with sharp diagonals cutting across the stage. Mr. Risch really
liked the idea of keeping the rake as it would aid in his vision for the blocking and movement. I thought on it and decided it could be really effective to incorporate it into my design, although the sharp diagonals as they existed would not fit into my vision. With some minor adjustments, however, it could be very effective. I spoke with our technical director, Matt Stowe, about the adjustments that would need to be made, and he thought it would work just fine. I added the modified rake into my design.

The design quickly started to come together and I now had the materials, textures, and floor that I wanted. The tracked panels would be made to look like rough wood, the back wall would be aged brick with the suggestion of a ghost ad, and the floor would be painted to look like a cross between rough asphalt and an aged wooden floor. What I was missing was what initially grabbed me in my research: the element of heat.

I put my rendering together in Photoshop. I used this program because I could quickly and easily experiment with details. When the rendering was complete, it felt very gritty and heavy, which was good, but it did not feel complete. I went back to my research and asked myself what the images that represented heat had in common. It was an easy question to answer: color. Reds, oranges, yellows, and muted browns smeared across canvas gave a strong impression of oppressive heat. Did my design have room for these bold colors? The script was dark, my set was dark. Did it have to be that way? I picked my favorite image from this area of my research (Figure 2.9) \(^9\) and began playing with different ways to incorporate it into my design using my Photoshop rendering. Could these colors somehow be incorporated into the back wall? It was not working, it

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\(^9\) Castiglione, Edward “Abstract”
fought against the ghost ad and turned the brick into a strange mural that looked like modern day graffiti.

![Image of mural]

**Figure 2.9 Evocative heat research**

Could it be used on the floor? Too bright; the lights would bounce off of these colors in an unflattering way, and besides, not everyone in the audience in this space can see the floor, so it could not be relied upon to incorporate an important detail. The panels? Again too bright; the colors were overwhelming and they virtually erased the detail in the texture. I began to wonder if the heat element would have to go by the wayside. Luckily, I had another idea. I put the image over the panels and reduced the opacity. Now I was getting somewhere. By merely putting a suggestion of this visual display of heat but still allowing the wood texture to be the dominating feature, I was able to include all of the details I felt were vital to the setting (Plate 2.3).

Together with the director, we chose the minimal furniture pieces and dressing and with that the design was completed. I built a model so Mr. Risch could have a more accurate depiction of the design as it fit into the space (Plate 2.4) and provided detailed drafting to Mr. Stowe and the scene shop (Plate 2.5 & 2.6). Small projection details were to be incorporated, as well. It was decided that our lighting designer, Kenny Driggs, would design and execute these with my consultation.
With construction beginning in the scene shop, my role as scenic charge also began. Now with several shows as charge under my belt, I felt more confident as a painter and member of the production team. As soon as the adjustments to the raked floor were finished, I chose a day with no rehearsal to forge ahead with the floor treatment. The effect I wanted to create was a look that could be interpreted as rough asphalt or aged, dark wood, so as to effectively evoke both interior and exterior scenes. I began with a deep base mixed color and blended in raw sienna and a few touches of highlight, created by mixing the raw sienna with a white pigment. I then added spatter in multiple colors for extra texture (Plate 2.7 & 2.8).

When creating the panels, many details had to be kept in mind. They had to be light-weight, as we did not have a fly system that could handle the type of weight real wood slats would create. The panels were going to be tracked, which meant that a sturdy frame had to lead to the overhead track system. Through discussion with the technical director, it was decided to make them using 2” pink foam for the wood slats with a steel frame that would connect to the tracking system. Mr. Stowe cut the slats to the dimensions I gave him, as each of the three tracks required panels of different widths, and I then drew out details on each individual piece to be carved and cut to give them more texture and dimension (Plate 2.9). No two slats looked exactly alike. Once the carving was completed, I painted them with a black and white wood grain in order to form a base that the ‘hot’ colors would then be laid over (Plate 2.10). I decided on this approach because it was very similar to how I created the effect in Photoshop. It turned out to be successful. After I added the colors using a Hudson sprayer (Plate 2.11), I then toned with deeper, darker colors until I was happy with the end result (Plate 2.12).
The upstage brick wall posed some interesting challenge. Because it would often be lit as a cyc and also used as a projection surface, it was important that the bricks have actual dimension and not just be a faux finish painting treatment. After discussion with the technical director and production designer, it was decided the best way to create the brick was to use vacuform. This technique would allow for a lot of texture, was quick and inexpensive, and could also be produced by novice students. However, it ended up being tricky to paint on for two reasons: it was not a terribly stable surface as the curving of the heated plastic caused the paint to puddle (Plate 2.13). Also, I had never painted on vacuform plastic before and quickly found that it does not take paint like any other material I was familiar with. I spoke with my project advisor, Shawn Fisher, about how to more effectively paint on this surface and after discussion was able to adapt to the material (Plate 2.14 & 2.15) by using multiple thin layers of paint. Because the plastic does not absorb moisture, these thinner layers were necessary to reduce dry time and increase precision in paint placement.

Preliminary construction and paint was now complete and it was time to put it all together. The finished tracks and panels were transported to the Caine Lyric Theatre and hung in their proper placement. The vacuform wall was made structural with wooden framework and installed against the back wall. The design allowed the actors to be able to perform all of their own scene changes in a seamless and efficient manner. The foam slats on the steel frames made for some squeaky noises when the panels were moved across the tracks, but the music ameliorated the sound and it was found to not be a significant distraction.
**Evaluation**

This design and execution helped me progress in many ways. I most definitely felt stronger as both a designer and a communicator this time around. My drafting, sketching, and computer-rendering skills all progressed significantly and these improved visual communication skills made for fewer revisions and a more streamlined process. Looking back at the finished design in production photos (Figure 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14, 2.15 & 2.16), I do wonder if I succeeded in conveying the element of heat, as the dark colors definitely dominated aesthetically under the stage lights. Overall, I feel the design was compositionally strong and was successful in solving the problem of creating efficient transitions.

Experiencing more collaboration between the design team (especially the costume and lighting designers) demonstrated the value of networking to me. This project solidified my design process for me, in terms of order of research, sketching, modeling, etc. and in how I prefer to collaborate with my fellow designers and technicians.
Plate 2.1 *Violet* thumbnail sketches
Plate 2.2 Violet sketch, ink
Plate 2.3 *Violet* Photoshop rendering
Plate 2.4 *Violet* model (scale: $\frac{1}{4}'' = 1^0''$)
Plate 2.5 *Violet* ground plan (scale: $\frac{1}{2}'' = 1'0''$)
Plate 2.6 Violet elevations (scale: $\frac{1}{2}'' = 1'0''$)
Plate 2.7 *Violet* process photo, paint treatment on floor

Plate 2.8 *Violet* process photo, paint treatment on floor
Plate 2.9 *Violet* process photo, carved slats

Plate 2.10 *Violet* process photo, slats painted grayscale woodgrain
Plate 2.11 *Violet* process photo, paint treatment on slats

Plate 2.12 *Violet* process photo, paint treatment on slats
Plate 2.13, 2.14 & 2.15 *Violet* progress photos, paint treatment on vacuform brick
Figure 2.10 *Violet* production photo, the bus

Figure 2.11 *Violet* production photo, the hotel
Figure 2.12 *Violet* production photo, mechanics cause a scene
Figure 2.13 Violet production photo, dream sequence
Figure 2.14 *Violet* production photo, the choir
Figure 2.15 *Violet* production photo, Violet’s revelation
Figure 2.16 *Violet* production photo, bus stop café
CHAPTER III

SCENIC DESIGN AND PAINTING

WOODPECKER KING OF TACONY

Synopsis and Introduction of the Play

Creating theatre is one of the most collaborative art forms. To be a part of any production team, whether it be on stage, as a designer, director, technician, producer, etc., is to experience true collaboration. But when you are a member of an ensemble that participates in all of these areas, you are blessed to be part of a truly special team.

Such was the case for Woodpecker King of Tacony, an original piece written by professor Shawn Fisher. After my previous collaborative experience working with the production team on Violet, I knew I wanted to be part of a collaborative team again, and Fusion was my ticket to true ensemble theatre. In the spring of 2012, I auditioned for and was selected to be a part of Mr. Fisher’s original theatre project, Fusion. “The Fusion Theatre Project is an experimental theatre company that employs a collective approach to creating and producing original theatre that is contemporary in content, style, and social voice.” Every member of the Fusion Theatre Project (eight undergraduate students, myself, and two professors) contributed and/or consulted as a performer, writer, designer and more. This allowed for complete freedom of expression, and it was exhilarating.

Woodpecker King of Tacony was set in the Tacony neighborhood of northern Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The action centered around two young men and their family and friends. Sam is a down-to-earth and kind schoolteacher, a homeowner in this

10 Fisher, Shawn “Fusion Theatre Project”
neighborhood of Philly. He is also gay. His childhood friend, Benji, a Marines vet, has recently returned home, severely wounded from his latest tour overseas. Before the action of the play, Benji’s stern and impetuous father committed suicide, throwing Benji’s and his two domineering Catholic sisters’ lives into a tailspin. After his father’s death, Benji needs a place to stay and Sam graciously welcomes him into his home. This causes drama within the family as the sisters are unhappy with this situation and attempt to ‘protect’ Benji from Sam’s influence and lifestyle. Benji had been taunted throughout his childhood for being gay, though he always fervently denied that accusation. Living with Sam, Benji feels the need more than ever to establish his masculinity. This drives him down a dark path of pills, alcohol, and fighting. A local priest who was a childhood friend, as well as an old high school classmate turned stripper, also figure into the chaos that is this Tacony-based backyard. The struggle for identity and connection within all different types of relationships is explored in depth through these characters. In the end, the love for the people around them proves more valuable than any of the characters realized, though it is clear that love on its own is never enough to make things easy.

The play was performed in the Black Box Theatre at Utah State University in April of 2013. It was written by Shawn Fisher and directed by adjunct professor Richie Call. Primary costume and lighting designers were undergraduate Tim Roghaar and fellow graduate student Josh Wilson, respectively. The primary sound designer was undergraduate Skye Orchard.

**Design Vision**

The process of creating this production was nontraditional, so it posed many interesting challenges. My comfort as a designer was challenged by the fact that the
design had to be finalized before the script was completed. I really had to focus on the basic needs of the play and the themes and motifs to guide my process. Because I so closely worked with both the director and playwright, communication throughout the process was constant and flowing.

I sorted through what I knew to be fact. The play took place in modern day Tacony, Philadelphia, in Sam’s backyard. Furthermore, this required a driveway (or a suggestion of a driveway) and a garage. Sam was living on an inner-city, public school teacher’s salary but received the house as an inheritance from his mother. This section of North Philadelphia is rough and run down. Because the play was being performed in the Black Box, spatial limitations had to be kept in mind. Also, the department would be coming off a major production of *Emma* in the Morgan Theatre which would extend the resources (space, labor, time) of our scene shop, and it would be a rather fast turnaround to get our show produced.

From there I moved on to investigate and analyze the feeling of the piece. These are characters going through a very rough time in their lives. They are physically, spiritually and emotionally drained and wanting. They all had the potential to clean up and look sparkly new on the outside, but they could not hide the inner turmoil and frustration for long. Given this in combination with the rough state of the neighborhood’s location, I knew I needed to create an environment that communicated it was once a very nice, potentially upscale place and perhaps could be again, but in its current state was somewhat unkempt, cluttered, and run down. This was the feel I decided to go after.
Research

I began my research by looking into the actual neighborhood of Tacony. I wanted to get a solid grip on what the community felt like, what the age of the architecture commonly was, and what one would see strolling down the streets. I found a lot of common denominators. The houses tended to be made of brick, iron fencing and decorative pieces were used a lot, and all the structures were close together (Figure 3.1 & 3.2). Yard space, especially grass, was at a premium. If a house was lucky enough to have a garage, it was generally placed behind the house, reached by a thin alley-like driveway. Yards were fenced and windows were barred. This was obviously a place where the citizens felt the need to secure their property.

I began looking more closely into specific pieces that I thought I might like to incorporate. I knew the fencing would be important. Looking at the Tacony neighborhood, there was a mixture of types present. Chain link, wood paneling, plastic paneling, and iron work were all possibilities. I pulled images for each type (Figures 3.3 and 3.4), but found myself drawn to the wood paneling for two reasons: first, the wood has a particular way of aging and deteriorating that I thought would reflect the state of the main character. Second, and more practically, because we were going to be in the black box, I knew sight lines would be an issue, and a crossover would probably be necessary. A privacy fence that would prevent actors from being seen when behind it would most likely be an ideal candidate for creating a crossover space where the actors could move freely without being seen by the audience.
Another significant detail troubling my mind was the garage door. It seems like a small detail, but working in such a small space with audience members all around made it into a challenge. The door had to be functional. It could not be an automatic sliding door, we would not have the overhead space for it to retract, it would be too noisy, and would cause all sorts of headaches to wire. A large door that swung out would cause significant sightline issues, no matter where or how the garage ended up being placed. Having it open inward was a thought, but not a logical one. I searched and searched (Figure 3.4 & 3.5).
Then I was struck by a memory. In my small hometown neighborhood of Stamford, Nebraska, my late grandmother’s old house had a tiny detached garage in the backyard. I loved going to play in the garage when I was little, and particularly enjoyed the challenge of opening the door. It was huge, heavy, and unwieldy for a child, even though it was conveniently mounted on a track. That was it! I could mount the door on a track. It would be simple to open and close, would not cause an issue with sightlines, and would add to the aged feel of the architecture. Once I knew what I was looking for, the research to back it up was easy to find (Figure 3.7 & 3.8).

Figure 3.5 Garage door research
Figure 3.6 Garage door research

Figure 3.7 Tracked door research
Figure 3.8 Tracked door research
With all of the elements I pulled into my research, I also gathered images which showed how they aged and deteriorated. Again, this was not going to be a brand new house and it had to show its use. I found examples of this in brick for the house, wood for the fencing and details, concrete for the driveway, etc. With a firm grasp of what all of the elements would look like, I began putting them together.

**Design Process and Execution**

Because I had been in constant contact with the director during readings, rehearsals, and meetings, I knew what the play required. My next step was figuring out how I could fit all of the elements in the black box. I drew thumbnail after thumbnail of ground plans trying to find the best solution in the small space (Plate 3.1). The script was not yet finished, but I was anticipating a few challenges that Mr. Fisher had hinted may be coming in the near future. He mentioned that there may be a scene where it would be important for actors to be behind the fence, heard but unseen. One of the many possibilities I had drawn out was to have the fence up flush against the back wall, this way we could have it present and get the ‘neighborhood’ effect from it without it actually taking up any space. That possibility was now out. I knew the logical place to put the back corner of the house was by the door to the control room. Having the home’s door there would allow actors to pass through it and move easily into an offstage space. It also made sense to incorporate the garage structure into the overhang space that sits stage left in our black box theatre, but we had always had seating there. I had never seen the seating arranged any other way in that space and was not sure if it was allowable to move it around, especially since moving it to the only other available location meant we would be playing our scenes in the laps of those audience members. I spoke to Richie Call, our
director, about that possibility and not only was he okay with it, he was excited: we would be placing a section of the audience on the stage, which would add a whole new dimension into their level of involvement. With that decision made, I was able to put the elements in place, finalize the groundplan, and set to work on more fun details (Plate 3.2). Knowing the footprint of everything, I then decided on the look. I built a color model (Plate 3.3) and made a color rendering (Plate 3.4) and presented them to my classmates in Design Studies, once again being taught by Shawn Fisher, and to Mr. Call. The design was set, I completed the required drafting (Plate 3.5 & 3.6) and we were ready to begin executing.

The exterior walls of both the home and the garage were to be brick. After having worked on Violet only a month or so prior, I knew that I did not want this brick to be made of the vacuform plastic. I spoke with Matt Stowe, the technical director, and it was decided that we would use a different method we had used during a production of Proof a few years before. We made bricks of the correct size out of celotex (an insulating fiberboard), then split them in half, creating two brick pieces with a very ragged face. Each and every brick was cut to size and split in half. Then they were stapled to the surface of the constructed walls, after which the entire wall panel was covered in Primus D (a dry-blend, polymer-based adhesive and base coat) both to help with adherence and to give the look of a brick with grout finish. From there it just had to be painted.

Once again, I acted as scenic charge artist for this show. Because the scene shop was just coming off a major build, it was a few weeks before I was able to begin painting the actual scenery. So I started by painting the floor. The majority of the floor was to look
like a cement driveway aside from a small section that was to be laid with pavers (Plate 3.7 & 3.8).

The only true difficulty in the process was the time entailed in bricking the walls. Not only did each brick have to be laid individually, but it was a painstaking process of lining them up, keeping the rows level, and applying the correct thickness in the correct areas. There were some bricks with more thickness than others, and even some where we laid a double level in order to create a decorative pattern. The areas around the window and doors also had to be treated with extra care and attentiveness. Once the scene shop finished building the luan walls for the house unit, and I called in a few fellow Fusion members to help with the process of finishing the brick walls. Together, we laid the brick and applied the Primus D compound. Then I set about painting. Overall, the time and tediousness paid off as the look was very effective (Plate 3.9 and 3.10).

A very fun detail on the set was the streetlight. The script was originally to be titled Streetlight Woodpecker, and for good reason. Throughout the play, Benji is exasperated by a woodpecker that keeps pecking on wooden poles and even metal in order to draw attention from female woodpeckers. Benji connects with him on this front, as the woodpecker is trying to shout the loudest and be the toughest in order to prove his attractiveness to mates. To an extent, Benji does this, too. A critical scene in the play finds Benji burying the body of the woodpecker, as it had just ‘committed suicide’ by pecking through an electrical cord connected to the house. I chose to place a streetlight on the set, running that electrical cord from the house to the light. It provided an authentic community detail and offered wonderful lighting moments (Plate 3.11).
At last came the set dressing. On some projects, set dressing can become a very tedious task, but this was not the case in this instance. In particular the garage provided a fun opportunity. This garage had to be a place that could realistically feel as if it had been being used for storage for at least two generations. Not only that, but the more we crammed in there the greater the illusion of depth became. The space we were working in only allowed us to create a structure that was about eight feet deep, far less space than a practical garage must have. By adding more and more and essentially creating less space, we actually created the illusion of having more. Together, Shawn Fisher and I packed that garage full of anything and everything a garage might hold.

Specific set details were added last to create a greatly needed realistic quality. I attached a hose and its mount to the side of the house, installed gutters and a drain pipe, placed a practical light over the house door, constructed a landing and stair railing, and added decorative bars on the windows. These small details really rounded out the set and made it feel complete and lived in.

**Evaluation**

The collaborative process involved in this ensemble project did two major things for me: taught me more about group dynamics and how to work more effectively within them, confirmed my preference for working collaboratively. For me, working as a team to develop new work is the most exciting process I can imagine. Being so immersed in all aspects of theatre and knowing that the people around you are just as committed, that is truly a blessing.

This was some of my best work, and I do not doubt it was a product of the process and a tribute to those that I was working alongside. The proof was in the product (Figure
3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, & 3.13). The joy of creating theatre is never more present than when you are working on a piece you are passionate about and alongside equally passionate people. The Fusion Theatre Project provided our group with that experience. *Woodpecker King of Tacony* was a truly inspiring piece and I only hope I can continue to find work which will inspire me in the same way. This will undoubtedly be my favorite project from my time at Utah State University.
Plate 3.1 *Woodpecker King of Tacony* groundplan thumbnails
Plate 3.2 Woodpecker King of Tacony groundplan (scale: ¼” = 1’0”)

Plate 3.3 Woodpecker King of Tacony color model (scale $\frac{1}{2}'' = 1'0''$)
Plate 3.4 Woodpecker King of Tacony color rendering
Plate 3.3 *Woodpecker King of Tacony* house and streetlight elevations (scale $\frac{1}{4}'' = 1'0''$)
Plate 3.4 *Woodpecker King of Tacony* garage and fence elevations (scale: $\frac{1}{4}'' = 1'0''$)
Plate 3.5 *Woodpecker King of Tacony* floor treatment

Plate 3.6 *Woodpecker King of Tacony* floor treatment, pavers
Plate 3.9 *Woodpecker King of Tacony* wall paint treatment

Plate 3.10 *Woodpecker King of Tacony* wall paint treatment
Plate 3.11 Woodpecker King of Tacony streetlight
Figure 3.9 Woodpecker King of Tacony full set
Figure 3.10 Woodpecker King of Tacony Benji’s flashback
Figure 3.11 *Woodpecker King of Tacony* Before the funeral
Figure 3.12 Woodpecker King of Tacony Home from the gentlemen’s club
Figure 3.13 Woodpecker King of Tacony Final moment
CHAPTER IV

SCENIC DESIGN AND PAINTING

STILL LIFE WITH IRIS

Synopsis and Introduction of the Play

Steven Dietz’s play Still Life with Iris is about identity and the power of human connection. In a fantastical world where everything is man-made, we are taught that the experiences we create for ourselves are what make us who we are. Geared specifically towards a youth audience, Mr. Dietz created a world (on the page) of wonder and enlightenment, a place where every child could learn the true value of the place that is home.

The opening of the play introduces the audience to Nocturno: a manufacturing land where everything that is used by day is made by night. The central character, young Iris, is a happy child, eager to learn what her appointed life-long trade will be and settle into her role in society. The only real problem in Iris’ life is one that is shrouded in mystery: where and who is her father? When she was just a baby, her father left for work one evening, as he had to wrangle the moon before morning and signal the sun to rise, and never came back.

One day, conflict arises when an unknown man in town, Mister Matternot, comes to Iris’ home with the intention of kidnapping her and her mother, and taking them away to the island of the Great Goods. The Great Goods are the rulers of the land of Nocturno, and also collectors. They collect perfect things, one of everything, and have deemed Iris to be the perfect little girl. Mr. Matternot takes Iris’ and her mother’s “past coats” (they
store their memories in their coats), removing any trace of their former selves in the process. The three set off for Good Island. Without the aid of her memories to guide her, Iris struggles with her sense of identity and belonging.

Upon meeting the Goods, Iris finds herself surrounded by the beauty of their collection, but feels empty. She rebels against her new parents (the Goods) and escapes to search for what is missing. She is not sure what is missing, but she knows it has something to do with a picture she sees in her mind when she holds an old button. The button, as the audience knows, came off of her very own “past coat,” and the picture she is seeing is a memory of her house; three white chairs around a white table, upon which sits a vase with a single iris. During her time as an escapee, she meets new characters Annabel Lee, a feisty pirate, and Mozart, a young musical prodigy. These new friends are instrumental in helping Iris find her own identity, even without the aid of her past coat.

In the end, Iris discovers her own strength and is able to fight to regain her past, as well as her future, as she learns that her father was the mysterious Mr. Matternot all along. He also had his past coat taken from him and was selected to work for the Goods many years ago. With her family unit restored, Iris takes her rightful place in the city of Nocturno, and with her past restored, looks forward to her future.

Still Life with Iris, by Steven Dietz, was performed at Utah State University in the Morgan Theatre in December of 2013. It was directed by Dr. Matt Omasta with lighting design by undergraduate student Kenny Driggs. Costume and sound designs were by students Katie Eborn and Chanel Silver, respectively. Dr. Omasta also organized opportunities for local elementary schools to bring their students to attend daytime performances.
Design Vision

It was important to me and to the director, Dr. Matt Omasta, to create a space that was fantastical, in keeping with the style of the play, but also practical as to how these characters would realistically fit into the environment. That is to say, the set could not be fantasy for fantasy’s sake, and while it may have looked foreign or even absurd to us as the audience, it had to feel as if the characters realistically belonged there.

The manufacturing nature of the town of Nocturno inspired a cog and support system design. These characters were people who lived and breathed to create, and their environment, I felt, had to be a reflection of that. The population of the city formed their own well-oiled machine and I wanted everything that surrounded them to be a necessary extension.

One major challenge, scenery-wise, was the transition from Nocturno to the land of Goods. It was important to me that while the Goods’ home have its own flavor, that it still feel very much a part of the world of Nocturno. The Goods ruled over this land, they still lived within its boundaries, they just chose to ignore the parts of it they deemed less than perfect. I wanted the basic set to stay the same throughout the story, but to find a way to narrow the focus within the home of the Goods.

Overall it was important that the scenery feel whimsical but not overdesigned, playful yet practical. The thrust proscenium stage not only allowed for, but seemed to demand large scale scenic elements for the actors and audience to immerse themselves in.
Research

I began my research in a very general way for this show. Before I dove into the specific details that would create this set, I wanted to find things that would provide general inspiration. The show, I felt, had a great sense of whimsy and I wanted to find a way to visually convey that feeling. I began by finding images I felt contained that sense of wonder that I wanted (Figure 4.1\textsuperscript{11} & 4.2\textsuperscript{12}).

![Evocative research](image1)

![Evocative research](image2)

Figure 4.1 Evocative research  
Figure 4.2 Evocative research

My faculty advisor, Shawn Fisher, gave me an interesting suggestion on this topic. He had seen his son playing a video game that he thought fit into this category of whimsy I was exploring. “Little Big Planet”, a popular game created by Media Molecule and published by Sony Computer Entertainment\textsuperscript{13}, seemed to embody the idea of a world of made objects and whimsy (Figure 4.3 & 4.4).

\textsuperscript{11} Duncanson, Megan “Home on the Range”  
\textsuperscript{12} Nussbaumer, Karen. “Cinema Oriental”  
\textsuperscript{13} Media Molecule
With these inspirational images in mind, I began searching for more specific images to draw from. While still staying on the evocative side, I began looking at art pieces that used cogs and gears in their composition (Figure 4.5\textsuperscript{14} & 4.6\textsuperscript{15}). These objects were going to play a huge role in my design, I knew, and I wanted a wide variety of types (both realistic and fanciful) to draw from. I also pulled in real gears and studied their working parts (Figure 4.7 & 4.8).

\textsuperscript{14} Savad, Mike “Time is Complicated”  
\textsuperscript{15} Lightspring “Gears and Cogs”
I also pulled images of support structures (Figure 4.9 & 4.10). If I was going to put gears on stage, they would have to be supported by something, and I did not think I would want to hide the support system. After all, I wanted this place to feel like a well-oiled machine, and when you look at a machine, you can see all of its parts, not just the pretty ones. I knew there would be a way to incorporate truss and support and make it beautiful.

I then began my attempt to put the full design together.
Design Process and Execution

This was the largest design I had been assigned up to this date and I found the scale of it daunting at first. The thrust proscenium is tricky to design for, and the right combination of elements need to be used to give a director not only adequate playing space but also interesting opportunities for blocking patterns. I began with a very open ground plan, no levels, nothing to get in the way of any action. After having made the mistake of taking up too much space with *Mauritius*, I did not want to fall into the same trap again. I showed a few thumbnails (Plate 4.1) to my faculty advisor, Shawn Fisher, and he suggested playing with the idea of a floor piece. The Morgan is a big space and it can easily look very empty. He advised me that if you executed correctly, levels create opportunity, for the director and actors and do not actually take up space.

With Shawn’s advice I went back to the drawing board. I made my plan for the verticals in the space; they were to be four towers, two stage left and two stage right, each with two functional gears mounted on them. I also wanted four overhead gears, two in line with the downstage towers and two in line with those upstage, to turn each into a type of portal unit. Then I thought, there are gears all around these people, why would there not be gears below them, as well? I continued thumbnailing (Plate 4.2) until I settled on a configuration for a ground plan that I was happy with. I began my Photoshop rendering very early in this process, as soon as I had a ground plan and sketch I could build on. With these rough Photoshop renderings (Plate 4.3 & 4.4), I was better able to communicate with Dr. Omasta where the design was headed.

In selecting the color palette for the design, I decided to go with very cool tones; this was the land of Nocturno, after all, a place of perpetual night. I had images in my
research (Figure 4.11\textsuperscript{16} & 4.12\textsuperscript{17}) that provided inspiration for the palette that I eventually used.

I continued developing the design in Photoshop, finalizing the looks for each scene. With the majority of the Nocturno looks nailed down, I had to figure out exactly how to accomplish the transition to the home of the Goods. I knew I wanted to reduce the focus and narrow the space, but I did not want to entirely block out the world of Nocturno’s gears and towers. The script mentions a very grand drape in these scenes, so I toyed with the idea of curtains, but the look was not effective as they blocked out the gears behind them. I needed to \textit{frame} the space. Well, there it was: a frame. I pulled an image of a grand, gold picture frame into my Photoshop rendering, and I was satisfied. The frame fit aesthetically and it did not obscure too much of the land of Nocturno behind it. After showing the preliminary renderings to the director (Plate 4.5, 4.6 & 4.7) and getting them approved, I completed a detailed sketch (Plate 4.8). I then built a full

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{16} Giberson, Brian “Lost City Scape”  
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{17} Ostman-Magnusen, Kathy “The Mask”
color model (Plate 4.9) which I presented to the production team and my classmates. It was enthusiastically received.

I then drafted my designer’s drafting plates, as I had a draftsman assigned to work with me on this project and he would take over with the more detailed elevations (Plate 4.10, 4.11, 4.12 & 4.13).

With the design in place, I also stepped into the role of scenic charge. The first and most daunting task I faced as a painter was the gear-shaped platforms. I made very detailed paint elevations for these (Plate 4.14) and carrying them out involved a lot of math and precise measuring. This was definitely the most meticulously planned painting I had ever done, but the precision paid off, as the results were very effective (Plate 4.15, 4.16 & 4.17).

After the platforms were finished, the rest of the painting was really quite simple. I painted each gear on the vertical towers to have a different look, but with common factors throughout: heavy texture and cool colors (Plate 4.18 & 4.19).

One difficult thing left on my end was figuring out how to accomplish the picture frame that would form the visual boundary in the Goods’ home. Fellow graduate student Spencer Potter who was assigned as a scenic hand, stepped in and helped to devise the process. The frame was built to the proper dimensions with luan facing and then foam pieces were added for depth. Spencer then began the tedious process of molding and shooting vacuform pieces of plastic to form the decorative treatment on the frame (Plate 4.20). He then applied the pieces to the luan and painted the frame unit as a whole. The unit was then hung on a downstage fly rail. The end result was stunning (Plate 4.21).
As the set went up, only one problem was left to solve: how to make the gears turn. It was very important to me that the gears be functional. Again, I did not want this to feel like fantasy for fantasy’s sake, and the set had to be a working part of the town. If the gears did not turn, this would not be the case. The gears that were placed on the four vertical towers were always planned to turn, but it had not yet been decided what would be the best way to make that happen. Together with the technical director, Matt Stowe, Shawn Fisher devised a system. All of the cogs on the towers were rigged within a three-point system, with a turning point on each gear leading to a pulley that was mounted to the floor offstage. Each tower was run independently, hand powered by stagehands and occasionally actors. The tension generally needed to be adjusted after every performance, but we could easily reposition the pulley offstage to adjust it as needed. The gears turned upon characters’ first entrances, anytime something was being produced (as in when, for instance, flowers were painted onstage or thunder bottlers were bottling thunder), and also during scene changes. It was nice to have this during scene changes as it added a little excitement to an otherwise dark stage and kept with the theme of work being done.

Evaluation

While the large scale of this project intimidated me at first, I was very happily surprised to find it quite manageable. Organization and efficiency is what I came away from this project with. I was able to break the process down into manageable parts and attack each with plan in place. When so many elements are required within one piece, organization and efficiency are what can turn an adequate process into a professional process. I feel my professionalism gained through handling the execution of this show. There were plenty of problems that had to be solved along the way, but while these at one
time would have completely stressed me out and set me back days trying to figure out, I was now able to handle them in a calm and productive manner. I am incredibly happy with the final look of the set (Figure 4.13, 4.14, 4.15, 4.16, 4.17, 4.18 & 4.19) and I know it will be a significant feature in my portfolio for years to come.

I took this design to the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Region VII Design Competition in Los Angeles in February of 2014. It was great to finally take something to this festival and see how my work stacked up against my peers in the area. My design advanced to the finals in the design competition where I received an Honorable Mention for my work.

I am grateful that I got to work on this project for many reasons, but the biggest is that I was forced to confront my fears of taking on such a large scale design. I was afraid, I will admit, of the scope and work required at first, as I was not sure I would have what it would take. What I learned was that I did, and now feel capable of tackling even larger projects in the future.
Plate 4.1 *Still Life with Iris* preliminary thumbnails
Plate 4.3 *Still Life with Iris* preliminary Photoshop rendering

Plate 4.4 *Still Life with Iris* preliminary Photoshop rendering
Plate 4.5 *Still Life with Iris* Photoshop rendering, opening scene
Plate 4.6 *Still Life with Iris* Photoshop rendering, Iris’ home
Plate 4.7 *Still Life with Iris* Photoshop rendering, The Goods
Plate 4.8 *Still Life with Iris* sketch, graphite
Plate 4.9 *Still Life with Iris* color model (scale: $\frac{1}{4}'' = 1'0''$)
Plate 4.10 *Still Life with Iris* ground plan (scale: $\frac{1}{4}'' = 1'0''$)
Plate 4.11 *Still Life with Iris* ‘designer drafting’ elevations (scale ½” = 1’0”)
Plate 4.12 *Still Life with Iris* ‘designer drafting’ elevations (scale $\frac{1}{2}'' = 1'0''$)
Plate 4.13 *Still Life with Iris* ‘designer drafting’ elevations (scale $\frac{1}{2}$” = 1’0”)

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Plate 4.13 *Still Life with Iris* ‘designer drafting’ elevations (scale $\frac{1}{2}$” = 1’0”)

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Plate 4.14 *Still Life with Iris* floor paint elevation
Plate 4.15 *Still Life with Iris* paint treatment on platform

Plate 4.16 *Still Life with Iris* paint treatment on platform
Plate 4.17 *Still Life with Iris* paint treatment on platform
Plate 4.18 *Still Life with Iris* paint treatment on gear

Plate 4.19 Plate 4.18 *Still Life with Iris* paint treatment on gear
Plate 4.20 *Still Life with Iris* frame process photo

Plate 3.21 *Still Life with Iris* frame process photo
Figure 4.13 *Still Life with Iris* production photo, pre-show
Plate 4.14 *Still Life with Iris* production photo, the lightning bender
Figure 4.15 *Still Life with Iris* production photo, bringing in the clouds
Figure 4.16 *Still Life with Iris* production photo, the rain barrel
Figure 4.17 *Still Life with Iris* production photo, Iris’ home
Still Life with Iris
production photo, the Goods
Figure 4.19 *Still Life with Iris* production photo, the beach
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Bibliography for
Mauritius


APPENDIX B

Bibliography for
Violet


<http://flickrhivemind.net/Tags/goldenageoftravel/Interesting>.


APPENDIX C

Bibliography for
Woodpecker King of Tacony


APPENDIX D

Bibliography for

Still Life with Iris


