

DIVINE WORDS: SCENIC DESIGN FROM
CONCEPTION TO EXECUTION

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a study and description of the process of designing the scenic elements of *Saying Grace* by Robert Smythe, an adaptation and translation of the play *Divinas Palabras* by Ramón María del Valle-Inclán written for Temple University Theater. The body outlines the process the author took in researching and developing the concept for the play, finalizing the design with the director of the piece, and completing the actual drafting and artwork necessary to realize said design. It also details the actual construction of the scenery, properties, and puppet elements, discusses the final product and offers self-evaluation. Plates of the drawing and drafting, and photographs of the scale model and final production accompany this work.

THIS THESIS IS WRITTEN WITH MUCH THANKS TO THE DESIGN AND
TECHNICAL FACULTY AND STAFF OF TEMPLE UNIVERSITY THEATER

AND

THE WONDERFUL THEATER GRAD STUDENTS WHO HAVE SHARED THIS
JOURNEY WITH ME, ESPECIALLY RITA AND KATE, WITH WHOM I HAVE
THE HONOR OF GRADUATING. HERE'S PULLING FOR YA. WE'RE ALL IN
THIS TOGETHER.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF PLATES	vii
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS	viii
 CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Collaborating with the Director	2
Production Parameters	5
Script Analysis	6
2. DESIGN DEVELOPMENT	8
Research	8
Initial Ideas and Look	12
Puppet Renderings	14
Painters Elevations	16
3. EXECUTION OF THE DESIGN	17
Working with Changes	20
4. SELF EVALUATION	24
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	26

LIST OF TABLES

1. Production Credits	27
2. Cast	28
3. Complete Scene Breakdown	29
4. Properties List	38

LIST OF PLATES

1. Textural Inspiration Collage	41
2. Example Preliminary Sketch	42
3. Groundplan Drafting	43
4. Groundplan w/ Cyclone	44
5. Centerline Section	45
6. Centerline Section w/ Cyclone	46
7. Centerline Section and Plot w/ Hanging Bulb Placement	47
8. Tent flap and Fence Elevations	48
9. Larry Puppet Rendering	49
10. Larry's Cart Rendering	50
11. Coimbra Puppet Rendering	51
12. Clemintina Puppet Rendering	52
13. Platform Painter Elevation	53
14. Dune Fence Painter's Elevation	54
15. Tent Flap Painter's Elevation	55

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Scale Model Images (a, b, c, d)	56
2. Encounter of Two Worlds	58
3. Exhibition of Pete's Nature	59
4. Allies and Enemies in the New World	60
5. Allies and Enemies in the New World 2	61
6. Exhibition of Pete's Nature 2	62
7. Waiting for the Serpent	63
8. With the Knife or with the Snake	64
9. New Flesh (the Welcoming)	65
10. Pandemonium and Promise of Heaven	66
11. We'll Dig a Hole for Her Together	67
12. You Only Fly Before You Fall	68
13. Hopeless Hope	69
14. To Suffer With	70

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Saying Grace (called *Divine Words* for the purposes of marketing) is an adaptation by Robert Smythe of *Divinas Palabras* by Ramón María del Valle-Inclán. The setting of the original play is Spain in the province of Galicia, circa 1920, in the impoverished village of San Clemente. Since the village has no priest, ecclesiastic authority falls to Pedro Gailo, the sacristan, who has a young beautiful wife Mari Gaila. Greedy for any money that comes her way and eager to leave San Clemente and her husband, Mari cares for a hydrocephalus-stricken child and uses him to beg for alms. The child becomes the source of their wealth.

That's just the start of the story that Smythe, a playwrighting grad student at Temple University, had the joy of translating/adapting. Robert was originally charged with merely translating the piece from the original Spanish in a new version for Temple University but, after much consideration and conversations with our director Felipe Vergara, decided to move the setting to an area around Arkansas, USA during the dustbowl of the 1930s. This meant that the script the design team was working from was in a bit of flux during the process. Smythe is also the former director of the Mum Puppet Theater in Philadelphia and wanted to incorporate puppets for the animals necessary in the script. This meant puppets needed to be designed and built, something I've never had the opportunity to do before and was very excited to try.

What was interesting in this particular piece is that it is primarily symbolist, that is the objects, places, and/or people are symbolic of something else, and has some very complex themes. I was excited about the opportunity to make a design that was a little

more subtle and symbolic in tone than my most recent work on Temple Theater's production of *Sweet Charity* (-*Charity* being more straight forward). Having worked with Vergara before on *The Ibsen Project* my first year at Temple University I knew he had a very organic, imaginative, and "guerrilla" style of directing that would be amazing to be a part of again. Also, having always been interested in puppetry, the idea of being able to research and design them was a very exciting prospect.

I had to start thinking about the design before having any kind of a script, just a basic concept and the original *Divinas Palabras* in Spanish, which I do not speak. The design team first got a script on October 15th, 2009 and I was able to have my initial meetings with the director a little while after. Our first production meeting was November 10, 2009, whereupon there were three further versions of the script in circulation. Our production team, besides me, was made up of Kate Edelson (costume design, also her thesis project), Jessica Wallace (lighting design), Felipe Vergara (director, also his thesis project), Matt Lorenz (sound design), and Bob Carlton (original music).

Collaborating with the Director

My initial design meeting with Vergara was on October 20th, 2009, about five days after receiving the first draft of the script. We talked about some of his inspirations for the piece; these ranged from Indonesian death masks to the photography of Dorthea Lange in 1936. Because our location and time wasn't exact, but rather generally somewhere in the area affected by the American dustbowl of the 1930s, a vast assortment of reference material was available.

As Vergara is a non-native English speaker from Colombia, he was initially unsure about transplanting the play into the 1930's American Midwest. He was not familiar with the culture, the dialect, or the folklore than he would need to really get to the heart of the piece. However, Dan Boylen, head of scenic design, introduced him to the HBO television special of 2003: *Carnivále*, a well-plotted story of a traveling sideshow troop in approximately the same period. Watching this excellently designed and researched program at the beginning of his process gave Vergara some much needed confidence in dealing with the period and culture and also influenced the final design.

We also talked some about the poetry of the words in this piece. The reason Vergara liked the original play so much was that he really cared about Ramón María del Valle-Inclán's playful use of language. His characters were the lowest dregs of society, but they clearly possessed souls. This was actually a contributing factor in Smythe's adaptation, as he felt the people of the dustbowl in this time period, and especially in nomadic groups like the Carnival folk, made up words and had their own playful dialect in a similar way.

Both plays were also going to be examples of Magic Realism. Magic Realism is a term applying to theater, literature, and art in which, the main work is mostly naturalistic except for that they include magical elements related to a mythology that occur and are viewed as perfectly normal by the characters. The mythology usually relates to the beliefs of the area in which the work takes place. For our purposes this meant that all of the "magic" that happens in the script was not to be overly showy or "theatrical" but more "miraculous" and even reverential.

We then were able to discuss the things that absolutely needed to happen in the show and what needed to exist in the world. The major scenic/properties issues to deal with in the script were:

- a) A hydrocephalic dwarf child, named Lawrence, in a carnival wagon who is capable of moving and speaking and has a large penis capable of getting an erection. His face would get eaten off by pigs every performance. He must also drink and throw up alcohol and the audience should not be able to see his operator.
- b) A dog, named Coimbra, who can tell the future by raising his right or left paw and can follow around behind his master and howl at the moon. The operator should be a very visible and integrated part of this puppet.
- c) A snake that could be handled during the revival and bite the pastor.
- d) A bird, named Clemintina, that can tell fortunes by selecting Tarot cards from the bottom of her cage and handing them to the fortunate.
- e) The goats /devils. It was decided that these should be masks that our costume designer would take care of, but they had to be able to fly Marina (our pastor's wife) home while having sex with her.

There would also need to be some kind of "crossroads" indicated in the main playing area. Roads that in one direction lead to the revival tent of the pastor and his wife and in the other direction leads to the carnival tent. The play was all about these crossings and choices that the people in the village made to go to either one or the other. Because of that the set would also need some kind of representation for both tents.

Vergara wanted the seating configuration to be nontraditional as well. Looking at the size of the space and thinking about the crossroads idea, we decided we wanted to set things up in a tennis court kind of style with the main playing space in the middle, which meant some audience risers would have to be added on the other side of the space.

Another important issue was the number of scenes that existed in the piece. Some scenes were short and bled into other scenes and we knew we wanted a very organic *a vista* feel to the scene changes, with actors moving pieces while staying in character. With that in mind we knew a small unit set would suit our purposes best and, because of the carnival wagon and travel themes, we decided we would put set pieces and furniture on wheels whenever we could to facilitate easy and quick scene changes.

Production Parameters

The play would be performed in Randall Theater and would open February 12th, 2010. I got the first draft for the script on October 15th, 2009. Our first production meeting was on November 10th, 2009 and final designs were due by November 24th, 2009 for a presentation to the cast and crew. Final designs were due to the shop on portfolio review on December 16th, 2009. There was a month of winter break between then and the first preview, which was on February 9th, 2010. My budget for the set was \$1200 plus \$200 for props.

The physical space was Randall Theater, a fixed audience black box theater that usually seats about 80 people. Randall is 33 feet from the edge of the audience to the back wall and 39 feet from side to side. The built in proscenium is 13 feet high by 28 feet wide. The second set of audience risers we were building across the acting area from the fixed set would take up a space 24 feet wide by 6 feet long in that space. That makes the

total actual main acting area 22 feet 9 inches by 28 feet in a long rectangle between the audiences. It seems like a lot on paper, but it was actually fairly squeezed considering all the traveling and rolling on of scenic elements that the actors had to do.

Vergara and I had decided early on that we'd want to be able to see the actors most of the time; to see them and have them be in character as they got props and moved set pieces and changed costumes. The decision was made to keep most of the floor open and not use traditional masking. I wanted to actually be able to see the walls of the theater and to have the actors be able to pass all around the audience members. To achieve this effect, the top row of the main audience seating section was blocked off to add a crossover for the actors. There was also space left open behind the opposite seating risers for a crossover there. With two crossovers as part of the stage design we now we had a bit more space for the acting and the actors could be fully around the audience at any given time.

Script Analysis

Several themes seemed prevalent in my first readings of this script. Since the script was continually evolving there were some scenes that were going to change, However, the major aspect in both the old and new script versions seemed to be highlighting the differences and similarities between the church revivals and the Carnival shows, along with the people who lived in or attended each. It seemed immediately apparent that there were not as many differences between the two worlds as the pastor and his churchwomen would like the townspeople to think. They were both putting on a colorful show, they both tried to attract paying customers, they both had their archaic rituals, they both plied the cake-eaters for money, they each looked down on the other,

they both even had snake-handlers! The difference seemed to lie in the attitude of the folks that attended each. The carnival was alive and vibrant and seemed to have more laid-back fun, while the church was more concerned with sin or even the appearance of sin and what others thought of you and your kin. One example is that the snake handling was considered a freakshow exhibit at the carnival, while at the revival it was considered awesome in the old sense of the word and worthy of reverence.

The idea of the “crossroads” was therefore a very important image in my design: people making choices and traveling on dusty highways. People meet, pass or run into each other while moving from one place to another. Money was a large part of this theme and coins showed up a lot. If you didn’t have money, you couldn’t travel; you had to stay where you were. With money comes Greed; when people will often do just about anything for money. One of the things *Saying Grace* does is to highlight the difference between people who actually need and people who are just greedy.

Lust and death are two other, though not dissimilar, themes in this work. Greed, lust and death seem to be major themes in the work of Valle-Inclán in general so it’s gratifying to note that Smythe has stayed true to the original author. The characters seem almost animal at times in their selfish needs and their greed. Lust takes on a vitality and a personification that would make the church ladies “tsk tsk” if they could only guess. Some of the baser characters go so far as to identify more with animals than with people; such as Nick, the play’s “Puppet Man”, who states, “God’s lookin’ the other way.” Here in this world people lust for food, they lust for money, they lust for love, they lust for death, and they lust after each other, but dare show it to the world and you could end up stoned. The lust must be covered up, hidden.

CHAPTER 2

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

Research

Felipe Vergara is a director who always has a very clear idea of the type of mood he wishes to convey, but allows his designers to figure out how to get there. He is nearly always open to suggestions and advice. He wanted a kind of modern symbolist atmosphere to this piece while still bringing back in some of that Spanish gypsy aesthetic that's in the original work.

To begin the design process I decided to pick an actual year instead of just the 1930's in general. The period between 1935 and 1937, the time period in which Dorteia Lange's photography was most prolific, seemed appropriate. Because of the prevalence of photography in general in this time, plus the invention of the modern flash and the light meter, there is a wealth of photo research from the period. In addition to this research Vergara brought pictures of Indonesian Puppets and some of the work of artist Antoine Tàpies.

In the beginning of a design process I always try to find one to three art images that really inspire me in regards to the play. The work of artist Petter Massing, in particular his work "Goat Dog", as well as vintage sideshow posters of the 1930's and the medical oddities collection at the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia, PA all fit the bill in the case of *Saying Grace*. This last was particularly helpful in regards to the design of the puppets.

Apart from main thematic images I researched rough and dusty textured wood, burlap, rope, and wire. With the limitations of the budget, and wanting to keep the acting

space mostly open, the environment did not call for a lot of big scenic elements. The design would come mostly from strong textures and earthy tones; dry, rough, weathered, and stained.

Initial Ideas and Look

It is useful to start a design process by doing some research and finding some images and textures that are really inspiring in regards to the piece being designed. In the case of *Saying Grace*: weathered papers, sepia toned photos, knotted twine, and acid green seemed to evoke this world. In addition, the collage lets a director know it what direction a designer's thought process for a piece is headed and he may stop you if he feels you've gone off in the wrong direction before you get too invested in the process.

I started with some rough sketches of the groundplan and the way in which the theater would be laid out. Sketching roughly helps a designer to visualize the space from the audience's point of view. It also allows the designer to quickly put something visual down on paper to show to the director and other members of the design team, so that elements can be discussed and suggestions for furthering or altering the design concept can be made.

It was important that the audience could see each other across the space. It was also important to the director that the actors would be able to trek all the way around the stage space. Since there was not a lot of room, that meant the main acting space had to be small and eminently functional. While the environment needed a platform to focus the action and act as the "crossroads," that platform needed to be low to the ground and have ramps on all sides to allow for the wheeled set pieces.

It was decided at the beginning that the actors were going to be doing the scene changes and the scenes with the most furniture were the three scenes that took place in the “Carney bar”. It was decided it would be in keeping with the aesthetic to have all the furniture be represented by boxes wrapped in cloth or burlap and twisted with hemp cord à la the works of artists Christo and Jean Claude. Enough “furniture” would be created to furnish those bar scenes and, knowing how Vergara likes to block organically during the rehearsal process, let him create the other scenes from those pieces.

How to define the acting space though? Since Randall Theater was now open all the way to the cinder block walls, something had to keep the action and actors contained and prevent the world we were creating from coming to a jarring stop when it hit the real utilitarian space. Early on, while looking at my photographic research of the period, there were a lot of tall dune fences made from thin spines of wood held together with rusty wire. The way the shadows of these simple fences twisted on the sand below them and the weathered look they had with their thin lines juxtaposed against the dunes was really lovely and almost serpentine. A large theatrical version of them would beautifully contain the playing area and also define crossover space around the entire audience. It would be like the spectators were trapped in this dry, rough world as much as the characters were.

A challenge for anyone working in the Randall space is the false proscenium walls, which keep the theater from being a full black box. They jut out into the space and try to force a traditional viewpoint on any theatrical work. I decided eventually not to hide them but, to try and embrace them into the overall design as a framing device. They would be covered in burlap just like the ‘furniture’ crates, with ropes twisted around them to add to the texture of the show. They would also aid the fences in softening the change

from the rough artistically textured world of the play to the far too realistic walls of the theater.

Another important decision to make was how to represent the two tents in the work. Knowing that the changes wanted to be very smooth and rapid, having two full on tents would not be feasible. Keeping in mind the theme of travel and our “wheels” motif, two rolling doorway units with muslin hanging in the opening were created to act as the tent “flaps”. One would be painted with a period showgirl with a snake draped around her shoulders, to denote the Carnival, and the other would be a crucified snake cross, to denote the Revival tent. Both crudely painted, both looking to have been formerly bright colors, both looking well past their prime. This would allow characters to be inside or outside the tents just by proper placement and re-enforce the idea that the show going on in either tent was not that dissimilar.

Now the next major problem was the scene in which Marina had to fly. She is supposed to be lifted up and carried to her home by a group of goat devils that have sex with her in the air. Thus far, everything in the design was pretty much at one level and I felt it was important to have something breaking the *xy* axis and coming in from the ceiling. It being the dustbowl, a twister or “dust devil” would be a perfect means of devil-goat transportation. Though how to create one on stage without succumbing to the ‘theatrical falseness,” through the use of projection or recorded sound, of which our director was so afraid? My solution was to create a metaphorical representation of a dust devil by creating a spiral, of the same dune fencing that existed around the audience space, hanging in the air at stage center. It would be there for the entire play, broken and jagged like teeth, adding to the trapped feeling of these people. When Marina needed to

fly, the center of the spiral would push down, forming a cyclone. The fence spines would be hinged to point straight down as the unit moved and, with a little noise and wind from the actors, Marina could dance around the cyclone or within it with the devils to simulate flight.

Scale Model and Drafting

Having made these design decisions, the process proceeded immediately into drafting plans for construction and making a color model. The scale model is the most effective method of conveying your vision to the production team. It allows for a visual presentation of all the design elements in a three-dimensional form, which allows for discussion on spacing, blocking, and furniture placement. It also serves to give the scenic designer warning as to what elements may become problematic in actual execution.

The design was due to the shop before the students, faculty, and staff all left for winter break. It was also to be shown at that semester's portfolio review. As luck would have it, I was actually in scenic design class that semester with Vergara and was able to talk to him about how things were going to work as I finished pieces. I was able to show him the unpainted white model in class and get his approval and thus was able to progress immediately to the colored model step. Having class with Vergara weekly definitely sped up the design process and helped to avoid nasty surprises such as spending a lot of time on a model piece's construction only to have the director not like that element. The model was in 1/2" scale, as Randall is not a large space and was thus able to show some more detail than a model in 1/4" scale would show. It was created using Foam Board, Wonderflex plastic, white artist's gesso, paint, cotton muslin, brown paper, illustration board, and various types of scale lumber.

There was a working version of the cyclone for the model, which helped the director visualize what it was and how it would work. This step really helped the cast and crew to be able to see the space and how actors would work and move around in it. Once the model and groundplan were approved I was able to set immediately to drafting the pieces for construction, starting with a finished version of the groundplan in CAD software program Vectorworks.

The groundplan is always the first drafted plan in the design process. It allows a designer to calculate spacing in the theater and also allows you to anticipate and manipulate cast member traffic patterns. It is the footprint of the space and the dimensions used will be the dimensions used in the elevated drawings from which the technical director will make his or her plans for construction. It can also be taped out by stage management in a rehearsal space so that actors get a feel for their space. It is also given to the lighting and sound designers to assist their decisions in the placement of their lighting equipment and speakers.

Next drafted was the centerline section. A centerline section is an elevated side view of the scenic elements as if sliced straight down center and seen from only the right or left side. It is a direct visual reference to the height of all the scenery that is drafted in the groundplan. In this case it was drafted with the cyclone scenic element down so that I could check how it would function in the space and also to let the lighting designer know its exact placement.

The last things to draft were the elevations. Elevations are drafting that show the size and shape of all scenery from a front, side, and plan view. All details are included so as to show the technical director exactly what everything needs to look like. This then

helps the technical director to determine the most effective way to construct the elements drafted and also to budget out the materials needed. In this case elevations of the tent flap frames construction and the different sections of dune fencing were drafted.

Puppet Renderings

Having never designed puppets before, it was necessary to get the help of Martina Plag. She is an artist formerly of the Philadelphia Mum Puppet Theater and I had worked with her on previous projects. Knowing that this show was my thesis and that I'd be devoting a lot of time to its design and construction and painting and properties, I knew there was not going to be time to also construct the puppets. Luckily we were able to hire Plag and she provided invaluable advice during the process.

Taking what Vergara and I had talked about in regards to Indonesian wood puppets and also objects abandoned by people fleeing their homes in the face of the dustbowl, some watercolor renderings of the puppets helped Plag to come up with some ideas for their construction. The snake was simple enough to do as just a linked wooden toy and I opted to purchase one and focus on the three main functional puppets.

Larry, the hydrocephalic dwarf child, needed to do several things:

- a) He needed to be operated without seeing the operator.
- b) He needed to get a very large erection during the show.
- c) He needed to be able to vomit up "alcohol."
- d) He needed to have his face eaten off by pigs every night.

Research for Larry was based on hydrocephalic skulls at the Mutter Museum and also on some great pictures of abandoned baby dolls with their faces all covered in dust that had been recovered from houses involved in the dust bowl. A vintage plastic and

cloth baby doll was bought off eBay with the plan to replace its head with a functional puppet head that resembled a warped, oversized, and abandoned baby doll head. This would allow us to avoid making the whole body from scratch. Plag was able to take my drawings and the doll body and make something really wonderfully lifelike. It was decided that we would have a second “faceless” version of Larry for after he dies, so that the operational Larry’s face did not have to come off. Also the “faceless” Larry did not have to be operational because the character is dead at that point and didn’t have to move. This allowed other actors to pick the little body up out of the cart without showing the operating mechanisms. In addition to designing the puppet, it also required a wagon capable of hiding the actor operating Larry from view while still allowing the actress playing Larry’s mother to wheel both Larry and Operator around easily.

The dog, Coimbra, had to tell the future by raising his right or left paws for yes and no respectively. He had to be fairly big and, originally, he was going to be a marionette. Vergara eventually decided he wanted him operated from the ground so that the actor had to hold his body in a doglike position as well. It was decided that it would be acceptable if the audience saw the operation of this dog and Vergara and I wanted the operation to be easy and natural looking. An old Carnival photo provided a reference for the dog’s head and I made a watercolor sketch using a lot of curves and carved wood textures. Plag made a rehearsal version from this sketch and the final puppet looks just like the picture! Plag was able to help to simplify the actual operation and we ended up using a control rod on the back of his head and a simple strap to hold up the back of the body.

The bird puppet, Clemintina, had to tell fortunes by picking tarot cards up in her beak and passing them to people outside the cage. She also had to be carried around in a “backpack” style cage by the character Little Mike. Initially, Vergara had talked about a parrot in a little hat. As we got further along though, Vergara decided he wanted something more associated with fortune telling, like a crow. Plag made a bird puppet with wire feet and I was able to attach them easily to a pole in the backpack cage. The bird’s head could be raised and lowered on that pivot point by means of a piece of fishing line attached to the back of its head. A magnet was hidden in his beak and a tarot card was rigged with a small piece of metal so that when he bends he could “pick it up” from the bottom of the cage.

Painter’s Elevations

The painter’s elevation is a full front view of each scenic element along with some idea of the colors used for the benefit of a scenic artist on a production. The scenic artist can use these elevations to mix colors, buy paint, and make sure the painting of the actual constructed set is exact. Sometimes they include examples of research the designer looked at while painting the elevation so that the scenic artist gets an even more clear idea of what the final product should look like.

For *Saying Grace*, elevations were made for the dune fence sections, the main platform from above, and painted muslin that would hang inside the two tent flap frames. The charge artist, Ian Guzzone, then was able to take these and produce paint samples, which were approved for the production. He then took charge of mixing colors and painting the final scenic elements.

CHAPTER 3

EXECUTING THE DESIGN

To succeed in the execution of this design depends on the accuracy of the drawings and the speed and skill of the crew. Thankfully, the crew at the Temple Theater scenic shop can do anything with just about nothing. Guzzone offered to be my charge artist and he made some wonderful paint samples off my renderings and the surfaces reference pictures.

The first thing we did was to place the second audience platforms into the Randall theater space. They were taken straight from the risers used in the previous mainstage production of *Shot!* at Temple University in Tomlinson Theater. We then built the main platform. It was 11x15 and only 6 inches tall so our Technical Director, Andrew Laine, decided to build it like a “stud wall” on the floor. This used more wood than a normal platform construction, but it is very sturdy and the wood remains undamaged so it can be easily used again. To accomplish this, we built the platform shape twice in two layers of 2x4 with appropriate length splints between them.

After the platform was in place we were able to layout and cut the precise planking pattern for the rough board “crossroads.” We cut them out of ¼ inch Masonite and routed the edges with a bevel to make them appear to be of thicker wood. The boards were textured in place with a mix of paint, sawdust, and joint compound as a primer before they were painted. The result was a wonderful sandy, weathered earthy finish with a spray of surprise grass green.

The dune fencing presented an interesting challenge. Dune fencing in large rolls is available commercially, but it did not come in the large theatrical size that was necessary

for this show. The fence was built in 12 foot sections, each at 8 feet tall. We ended up cutting the slats from ¼ inch plywood and attaching all the ends to a single 2x4 to give it some support and a way of attaching them to the stage floor. We roughed up all the boards with a pull-saw and chisel to make them look really weathered and old. Then three holes were drilled in each slat and a thick, but flexible wire threaded through and twisted between each to make the actual fence. The design called for a total of 34 feet of this fencing so this was probably the most time consuming step of the construction. The fence sections were first stained with a much diluted earthy paint, so that you could see the grain of the wood, and secondly spattered to look like dried rain and dirt. Once they were in place a little orangey rust color was dripped under each of the wire holes to make it look as if the fence had been out in the elements for years.

It turned out that burlap fabric was too expensive for our budget. To create the look the design called for, one had to improvise. For the coverings for the two false proscenium pieces heavy weight muslin was purchased, cut into panels, and dyed with brown Rit dye. It came out a little red so they had to be toned and textured by spraying greens and browns through loose weave erosion cloth. Once the fabric panels were the right color, they were attached loosely to the false proscenium walls with staples and toned with paint again in place so that the folds would be accentuated. The proscenium arch was then wrapped with rope and fitted with small pieces of hardware. The dune fences were then installed in front of the Proscenium arches on both sides and behind both audience areas.

Several crates were pulled from storage for use as furniture; enough to recreate the infamous “Carney Bar” scene. Vergara had been using a large table with three crates,

a bar table with three stools, and one large crate for sitting on in rehearsals. I built a table top of rough 1x4 pieces to fit over two low rectangular crates for the large table, a long box and two small crates held up the bar with three milking stools in front of it., a large crate and one more small for good measure. All of these were to replace the rehearsal versions during the actual tech week of the show. All of the crates were covered with brown burlap and hemp cord twisted around them. Random letters and number stencils were then sprayed on them so that they looked like old cargo, then they were all toned with a dark spray to make them look dirty. These pieces were easily able to become a multitude of various furniture pieces throughout the rest of the scenes.

The wagons presented an interesting challenge. The wagon for Larry was designed by fitting it around me, as the boy playing the Larry Puppet was about my size. Plag and I had wanted something that would look thin and hide the fact that there was an actor in the wagon as much as possible from the audience. Some old bicycle handlebars, wheels, and buggy wheels were found in prop storage and I wanted to incorporate these found objects into the design. Some sketches were drawn involving these pieces, but it soon became apparent that neither Plag nor I possessed the technical expertise to really hide the fact that there was an actor in the cart. Final design was very much like a large pram and allowed the actor to sit upright and operate the puppet on his lap, while covered up by rags. Fellow grad student Kyle Melton built the cart and engineered the differential that allowed it to turn easily. A scrim covered door was added to the front of the actor's sitting area, so that he could see out, but the audience couldn't see him. The whole inside of the cart was padded for his comfort and painted to look like old wood. Sloppy sideshow slogans were painted on the sides of the cart and little gypsy beads and bells

hung from it, trying to alleviate its very solid shape and give it a little more whimsy.

After the construction issues with this piece, it was a great relief to be able to get the time to really decorate it and make it special and detailed to the environment.

The other cart was very much like a pioneer handcart and made use of large steel cart wheels that were also found in prop storage. A small actress had to pull our largest cast member around in it, so it had to be light, but sturdy. Guzzone made this cart from 2X4 and thin plywood, incorporating the two cart wheels. It was then painted up to look like weathered wood and the wheels, formerly gold, were sprayed to look like rusty iron. The cart was then filled with bags and boxes to hide the wheel mechanism, but also to give our cast member something more comfortable than plywood to be lying on.

Working with Changes

After the first design deadline the production and design team went off to winter break for a month and were mostly out of contact. Our director was, of course, still thinking about the rehearsal process and I was trying to get ready to build everything immediately upon returning to school. Upon returning to Temple it became apparent that Vergara hadn't really come up with a concrete idea of how to block the scene with my "dust devil" cyclone. Prior to leaving for break the Technical Direction class, taught by Laine, had been trying to figure out how to build and make the "dust devil" work and had been running into some issues of both feasibility and cost. It was obvious to me that, despite my talking to Vergara about ideas on how to make the cyclone work, he still wasn't convinced it wouldn't hinder his blocking and also that it would take a great deal of my budget and labor/build time to make it happen properly. With the backing of my mentor, Boylen, I made the decision to cut it.

This made Jessica Wallace (our lighting designer) happier about her lighting placement, but did mean some rethinking from her end as she had made her lighting plot with my cyclone in mind. It also left me thinking that there still needed to be *something* that broke the ceiling line and came down into the space. Originally, Vergara had wanted some strands of large Christmas-type white lights strung in the Randall lighting grid for the carnival scenes, but after talking to Boylen further, I decided it might solve the problem if we hung single vintage style filament light bulbs from the grid in a random pattern. When dim the bare bulbs could act like stars or lightning bugs and when bright they could be the midway for the carnival scenes. I talked to Wallace about this idea and she graciously agreed to work with me on it. I quickly drew out a new drafting detailing where I wanted them placed and bought the bulbs with the scenic budget. Wallace and Chris Hollenbeck (master electrician) then wired and hung each bulb.

Now that the cyclone was gone, we had to find a way to make Marina fly during the goat devils scene. My initial idea was to have a couple of ropes with knots tied in them lower from the grid, thus allowing a little bit of climbing to achieve the “flying” effect. One of our students, Tyler Lawrence Simon, is a trained circus aerialist. When Simon heard about the ropes he talked to Vergara about the cast members involved in this scene doing some aerial “tricks” on them. Vergara and Tyler came to me and I said I would look into how feasible that would be. It meant getting actual aerial cotton-fiber ropes and approved circus-rigging hardware. Tyler worked with Kate Edelson (our costume designer) in the costume shop, so she was told about the ropes, as was Jennielynn Streed (out costume shop manager). I enlisted Wallace and she helped me to

find good places to hang these aerial ropes so that they would have enough space around them for the trick without risk of hitting any of her lights or the now hung bulbs.

All of this was going on within the design team, but it all happened quickly immediately after winter break and, when we had our first production meeting a week and a half after returning to school, it became apparent that the aerial rope switch had never made it into a production report. Matt Miller (our production manager) and Marie Anne Chiment (The head of design) did not know about them. We'd assumed since we'd asked about the original knotted ropes that the Arial ropes would be approved as well. The ropes and Tyler's aerial moves ended up needing to get approval from Roberta Sloane (the theater department chair) and our board of directors. At this time there was a general lack of communication: while we had two meetings to determine rope safety, Roberta Sloane was not able to make them. Eventually we were made aware that she thought we were rehearsing the moves so that we could show the board of directors that all would be safe, while Matt Miller had given explicit instructions that the ropes were not even to be hung until approval was given. By the time any of this was discovered it was too late to rehearse the movements without danger to the cast members. The ropes were cut and the flying ended up being the actress portraying Marina standing center stage with a bright spot light on her body.

Vergara had also been talking about a rain effect to take place at the end of the play. He wanted it to rain on Saletta, Marina's daughter, as her father and mother walked away from her into the sunset during the last scene before blackout. Rain is hard to achieve in general, but especially so in Randall because there is no drainage and a very low grid space. Also it would be the end of the show, so the audience would have to walk

over puddles of water. Our technical director, Laine, said we could not do the rain but, Vergara still wanted *something* to fall. In his mind he changed the symbolism of the moment from “water finally appearing in this dusty dry landscape” to “the weight of the world falling on the shoulders of this ‘moon child,’ Saletta.” He now asked me about getting a trickle of sand to fall right on Saletta’s head. After the debacle of the ropes, I felt badly about how it had gone and worked on making a sand drop box before tech week. A 1/4th a cup of sand fell beautifully on Saletta’s head at the end of the show, symbolizing the real world coming down in all its dirt upon her.

The whole production also happened in the middle of winter in Philadelphia, PA and during tech week, after only one day of tech, we had a massive blizzard. Philadelphia got record-breaking amounts of snow, apparently more inches of snow than it’s had since they first started recording snowfall. School was closed and tech rehearsals were cancelled for two days. We still had to make opening night though, so Vergara decided to cancel the first preview performance and hold a dress rehearsal instead. On the night of the dress rehearsal, however, it snowed again and school was closed again. So it was that we staged opening night with only half a tech week’s work, one dress rehearsal, and no previews. The cast held up admirably, I only wish, as do we all, that there could have been more time to work those minor technical “bugs” out.

CHAPTER 4

SELF EVALUATION

Overall, I feel like my design became a very beautiful set. It was beautiful in its weathered tatters, its rough textures, and its magic realism. It was even more compelling in final practice with the single light bulbs dangling than it would have been with the intended “dust devil.” I think one of the only things I’d really like to have done differently was to have actually had the burlap for the false proscenium, so that there was an even heavier texture on those surfaces.

Obviously I would have liked to have had the ropes or time to rig some other method of Marina “flying.” In the scene the way it was played, it was just that much harder to figure out what was going on. Because it was a new work it would have been better to have a longer period of time before the design process started to talk with Smythe and Vergara about what each of these elements really *were*. For example, up close and personal, the Lawrence puppet was exaggerated and awesome. As soon as it was on stage under lights, though, it was far too cute and the Hydrocephalic head was not nearly exaggerated enough. By that time, though, we did not have the time to do anything about it.

I think all the costumes shared the same kind of dilapidated beauty that I was trying to achieve with the set. Edelson did a wonderful job keeping everything in the world that the director and design team were trying to create and I really enjoyed working with her. I do wish that we had collaborated a little more closely on the final design of the goat/devil masks so that their overall aesthetic matched a little more closely to that of the puppets.

Everything looked beautiful under Jessica Wallace's lights. She had a wonderful color palette that brought out the secret colors I had painted under the weathered surfaces at just the right times. She dealt with the scenic changes, especially the bulbs, with a smile and was a joy to work with. Her hazy effects, too, created that mysterious and magical atmosphere necessary to certain scenes.

Martina Plag was an invaluable asset in regards to the puppet construction and I learned more than I ever could in a class. She's really raised my interest and awareness in that field and I'm looking forward to working with her again. I also have more confidence in regards to puppet and mask making for the next production of which I am a part.

I really enjoy working with Felipe Vergara and I think he, along with the entire design team, was really able to pull off what we had set out to do: create that quixotic brilliance of gypsy magic in the all too real world of the dustbowl.

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TABLE 1
PRODUCTION CREDITS

Playwright	Robert Smythe
Director	Felipe Vergara
Assistant Director.....	Pheobe Schaub
Scenic Designer	Sarah “Cory” Palmer
Costume Designer	Kate Edelson
Lighting Designer	Jessica Wallace
Sound Designer	Mathew Lorenz
Stage Manager	Len Luvera
Tech Director	Andrew Lane
Production Manager	Mathew Miller
Scenic Charge.	Ian Guzzone
Puppet Master	Martina Plag
Assistant to Costume Designer	T. Lawrence Simon
Master Carpenter	Marka Suber
Master Electrician	Christopher Capello
Costume Shop Supervisor.....	Jennielynn Streed
Head Cutter/Draper	Julie Warson
First hand	Laura Seeley
Prop Masters	Faith Meaney,
	Keith Rodgers

TABLE 2 CAST

Kate Czajkowski	Marina
Rob Kahn	Pete
Rebecca Rich	Mehetabel
Steve Kuhel	Nick
Julian Cloud	Little Mike
Sara Howard	Saletta
Carl Granieri	Blind Man
Jasmine St. Claire.....	Rhoda
Jordan Motram	Laurence
Laura Edoff.....	Zipporah, Aurelia, Brandi Alexander
Rachel Kitson.....	Girl, Calpurnia, Misty Morn
Lee Minora.....	Eugenia, Emmeline, Luvena
Kathryn Sullivan	Parthenia, Church Lady, Serena the Temptress
Robert Carlton.....	Bayless, Agent 1, Carnie
Nate Logue.....	Coimbra, Hobo, Carnie, Goat
Joe Wozniak.....	Boy, Young Man, Carnie, Agent

TABLE 3
COMPLETE SCENE BREAKDOWN

ACT 1 SCENE BREAKDOWN

PART I: THE CARNIVAL VISITS THE CHURCH

1. LOOK AT ME!

Who: Blind Man, Misty Morn, Serena the Temptress, Brandi Alexander, Hobo, Eugenia,

Larry, Musician

Where: Outside of the Carnival Tent

When: Before Every Show

Pages: 1-2

Objects: Carts, Stool

2. DUSTY LIFE

Who: Marina, Saletta, Misty Morn, Serena the Temptress, Brandi Alexander, Escorts

(Nate, Bob, Joe)

Where: In between the carnival, the theatre and the revival tent.

When: Every night

Pages: 3 (Until "Saletta retreats into the tent")

Objects: Doorframes, Windows, Seats

3. THE PARADISE IS ELSEWHERE

Who: Marina, Saletta, Pete, Boy, Girl (Rachel)

Where: In Front of the Revival Tent

When: Noon

Pages: 3-6 (Until Saletta: "Daddy")

Objects: Coins, Bible, Dust

4. ENCOUNTER OF TWO WORLDS

Who: Nick, Coimbra, Parthenia, Little Mike, Marina, Pete, Clementina, Saletta

Where: In Front of the Revival Tent

When: Noon

Pages: 6- 11

Objects: Cars, Blood, Bench

5. EXHIBITION OF PETE’S NATURE

Who: Coimbra, Pete, Little Mike, Nick, Marina, Parthenia

Where: In Front of the Revival Tent

When: Noon

Pages: 12- 14 (Until “... settles back down, playing the whistle”)

Objects: Bench

6. ALLIES AND ENEMIES IN THE NEW WORLD

Who: Marina, Nick, Little Mike, Calpurnia, Zipporah, Emmeline, Parthenia (sleeping)

Where: In Front of the Revival Tent

When: Noon

Pages: late 14- 17

Objects: Flowers, Chicken, Eye Patch,

1. THE CARNIVAL IN EXHIBITION

Who: Marina, Nick, Little Mike, Eugenia, Pete (for a second), Larry, Misty Morn, Brandi

Alexander, Serena the Temptress, Hobo, Blind Man, Luvena, Parthenia, Robert, Joe

Where: In Front of the Revival Tent

When: Noon

Pages: 18- 23

Objects: Cloth to wipe the sweat, Carts, Stuff hiding Larry

PART II: EUGENIA'S DEATH

8. CUDDLING DEATH

Who: Eugenia, Larry, Little Mike, Nick, Rhoda, Misty Morn, Brandi Alexander, Serena the Temptress, Hobo, Blind Man, Luvena, Parthenia, Bob, Joe, Young Man, Coimbra

Where: Crossroads

When: Noon

Pages: 24- 28

Objects: Carney carts, Windows, Tricycle

9. TRAGIC NEWS (ABOUT THE BLACK SHEEP AND HER HALF-WIT SON)

Who: Rhoda, Pete, Zipporah, Calpurnia, Emmeline, Marina

Where: Outside the meeting tent.

When: Dusk.

Pages: 29- 33

Objects: None

10. WHO'S GONNA HAVE THE IDJIT?

Who: Mehetabel, Eugenia's corpse, Larry, Zipporah, Calpurnia, Emmeline, Rhoda, Marina, Pete, Bayless, (Part a) The same w/o Zipporah, Calpurnia, Emmeline and Rhoda (Part b)

Where: Crossroads

When: Night

Pages: 34- 40 (a: 34- 36 Till “Rhoda:...muscle it outta here” ; b:36-40)

Objects: Lanterns, candles, other ritual objects (like oils –Pete-), shawls, bottle

11. WAITING FOR THE SERPENT

Who: Aurelia, Mehetabel

Where: Crossroads

When: Noon (In the transition we should have the whole day)

Pages: 41-43

Objects: A folding chair, a wooden box, a Mehetabel’s waiting kit.

12. INTRODUCING A MONSTER FROM MYSORE, INDIA

Who: Mehetabel (At the beginning), Aurelia, Misty Morn, Serena the Temptress, Blind Man, Little Mike

Where: The carnival

When: Night

Pages: 44- 45

Objects: None

13. WITH THE KNIFE OR WITH THE SNAKE

Who: Mehetabel, Pete, Saletta

Where: At the revival tent

When: Noon

Pages: 46- 50

Objects: Fan, Wooden box

PART III: A NEW MEMBER OF THE CARNIVAL

14. NEW FLESH (The Welcoming)

Who: Blind Man, Marina, Hobo, Luvena, Misty Morn, Serena the Temptress, Brandi Alexander, Rhoda, Little Mike, Fairgoers (Sara, Joe, Bob)

Where: At the Carney Bar

When: Late at Night

Pages: 51- 57 (Till: “L. Mike: Speak a’ the devil”)

Objects: Luvena’s cart bar (counter), Money, Drinks, Flask, Long Table, Small table, stools, pillows

15. THERE’S A NEW COUPLE IN THE CARNIVAL

Who: Blind Man, Marina, Hobo, Luvena, Misty Morn, Serena the Temptress, Brandi Alexander, Rhoda, Little Mike, Nick, Coimbra, Clementina.

Where: At the Carney Bar

When: Late at Night

Pages: 57– Early 60 (till: “...they squeal in delight”)

Objects: Same as previous

16. PANDEMONIUM AND PROMISE OF HEAVEN

Who: Blind Man, Marina, Hobo, Luvena, Misty Morn, Serena the Temptress, Brandi Alexander, Rhoda, Little Mike, Nick, Coimbra, Agents

Where: At the Carney Bar

When: Late at Night

Pages: 60- 63

Objects: The same... Some blood.

17. CARNY MARRIAGE

Who: Marina, Nick

Where: Clearing

When: 3 am.

Pages: 63- 67

Objects: A tarot card

SCENE BREAKDOWN ACT II

PART I:

1. WE’LL DIG A HOLE FOR HER TOGETHER

Who: Saletta, Pete

Where: Pete and Marina’s House.

When: Night.

Pages: 69- 72

Objects: Knife, Table, Pillow, Blanket

2. THE SPECTACLE OF LARRY’S DEATH

Who: Rhoda, Little Mike, Serena, Misty, Brandi, Luvena, Larry, Saletta, Coimbra.

Where: At the Carney Bar

When: Late Night

Pages: 73- 78 (Until “Rhoda: Ain’t nothing happened”)

Objects: Blood, Glasses, Bottles

3. CAN’T STAY HERE MRS. SINGH!

Who: Rhoda, Marina, Little Mike

Where: Where: Out of the Carney Bar

When: Late Night

Pages: 78- 80 (Until “... leaving everything behind”)

4. YOU ONLY FLY BEFORE YOU FALL

Who: Marina, The Goat (Laura, Lee, Kathryn, Rachel, Bob, Nate, Joe), Saletta, Nick,

Pete, Little Mike, Rhoda, Larry

Where: Between the desert and hell

When: Late Night

Pages: Mid 80- 83

Objects: Fans (about 7)

PART II:

5. BACK HOME

Who: Marina, Pete, Saletta

Where: Pete and Marina's House

When: Night

Pages: 84- 88

6. ABSOLUTE SILENCE

Who: Children, Marina, Pete, Saletta

Where: Pete and Marina's House

When: Morning

Pages: 89- 90 (Until "Pete: [says nothing]" –before Mehetabel entrance)

Objects: Plate, fork, knife, carts to see through, glass to break

7. THERE'S NO MAN IN THIS HOUSE

Who: Marina, Pete, Saletta, Mehetabel, Pigs sounds

Where: Pete and Marina's House

When: Morning

Pages: 90- Early 95 (Until "...Saletta turns to her mother")

Objects: Knife, Glass, Bottle

8. WOMAN TO WOMAN

Who: Saletta, Marina

Where: Pete and Marina's House

When: Morning

Pages: 95-Mid 97 (Until "... Marina hums to herself")

Objects: Knife, Glass

9. THE DARK STRANGER IS BACK

Who: Marina, Nick, Agents, Hobo, Saletta

Where: Pete and Marina's House

When: Morning

Pages: 97- Mid 99

Objects: None

10. HOPLESS HOPE

Who: Saletta, Zipporah, Calpurnia, Emmeline, Pete

Where: Outside the Revival Tent

When: Late Morning

Pages: 100- 102

Objects: Tin to beg, some coins

PART III:

11. THE JUDGEMENT OF THE GREAT WHORE

Who: Every one

Where: The Side of the Road

When: Noon

Pages: 103- 108 (Until “Mehetabel: What is it, chil’?”)

Objects: Mud

12. TO SUFFER WITH

Who: Everyone

Where: In front of the Tent

When: Noon

Pages: Early 108- 113

Objects: Snake

TABLE 4
COMPLETE *DIVINE WORDS* PROPS LIST

Carts- Larry's and Nick's

Stool/s

Doorframes

Windows

Seats/boxes

Parthenia's Baby

coins

bible

flowers

basket of fried chicken- whole baked chicken in a straw/ wicker basket

sweat cloth

bicycle- for Boy (Joe)

(3) lanterns

candles

shawls (costumes??)

wooden box/crate- wooden box 1x1.5x1, to keep snakes in

(7) fans- black, Chineseish, semitransparent with flower design, as similar as possible to each other

money- \$119 in bills

drinking glasses

(2) flask- glass and metal

pillows w/ dust

tarot card- the hanging man

(2) pouches of coins- must have something in them, big

birdcage

wheel

(8) knife- evil looking hunter knife shiny

(2) plate- tin plate

(2) fork utensil

(2) knife utensil

tin to beg- can w/o label, rusty

snakes

liquor bottles- amber color, no green or transparent, some jugs

paper for bird- playing card size??

playing cards

hobo's bundle- big smooth river stone, curves, looks like a pillow real, wrapped in piece of fabric

can of hash- able to be opened

can opener

rag

Blind Man's cane- sword cane

(7) Pocket knives

Shroud for Eugenia- tea dyed

Blanket to cover hobo- burlap

Blankets covering Larry in cart

(3) Nuts w/ newspaper container- for guests in the carnival to eat

White sheets- bed sheets for 3 girls to fold

Silver Zippo lighter

Matches- needs to be lit

Flashlights...

Flower wreath for Larry- for when he dies, crown of lilies

Flowers- bed of flowers to decorate cart for Larry

Larry's shroud- can see shiny red thread going down the center, suggests body has had stitches

Rope- for handcuffs

Mud- to throw at Marina

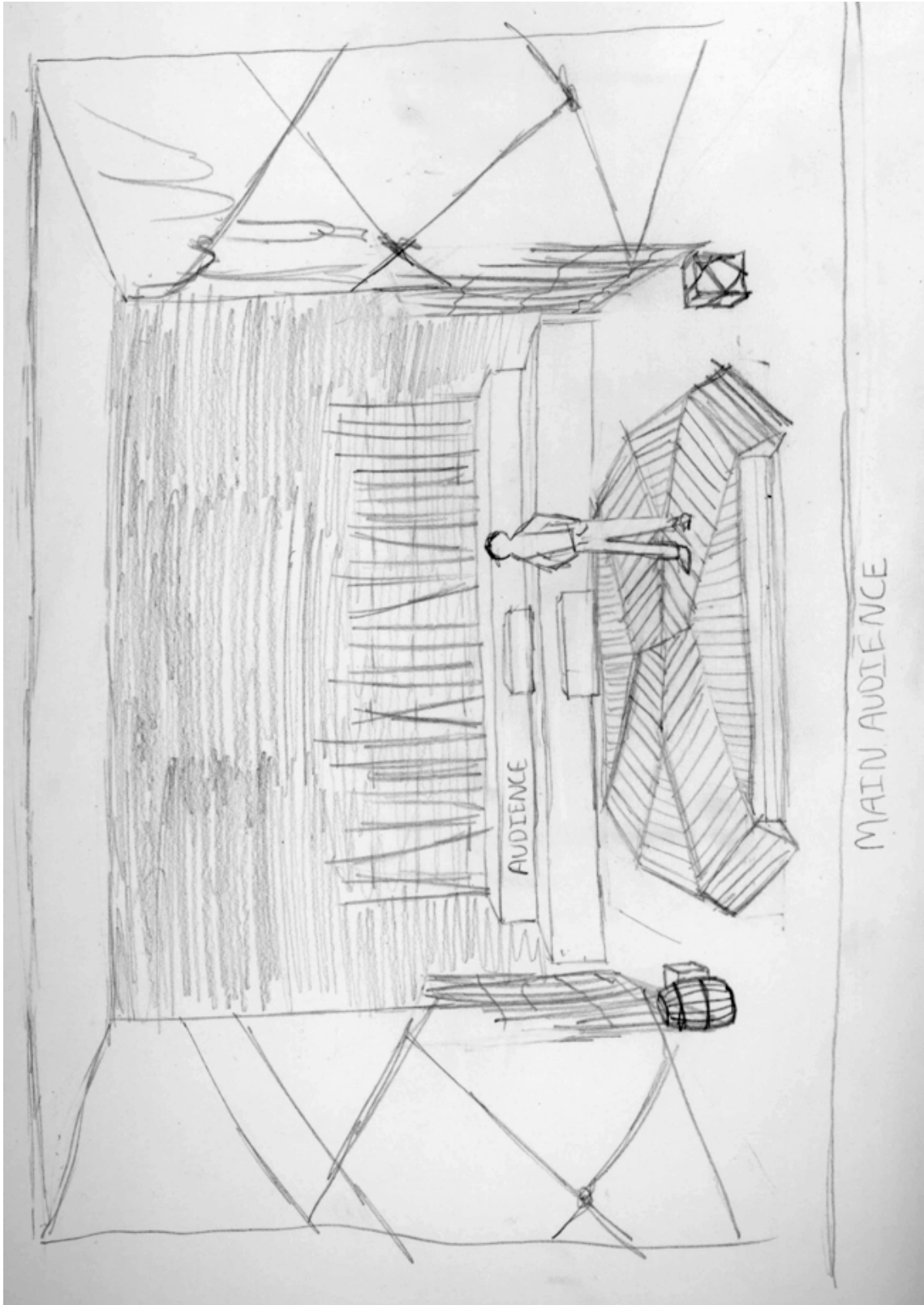


PLATE 2
EXAMPLE PRELIMINARY SKETCH

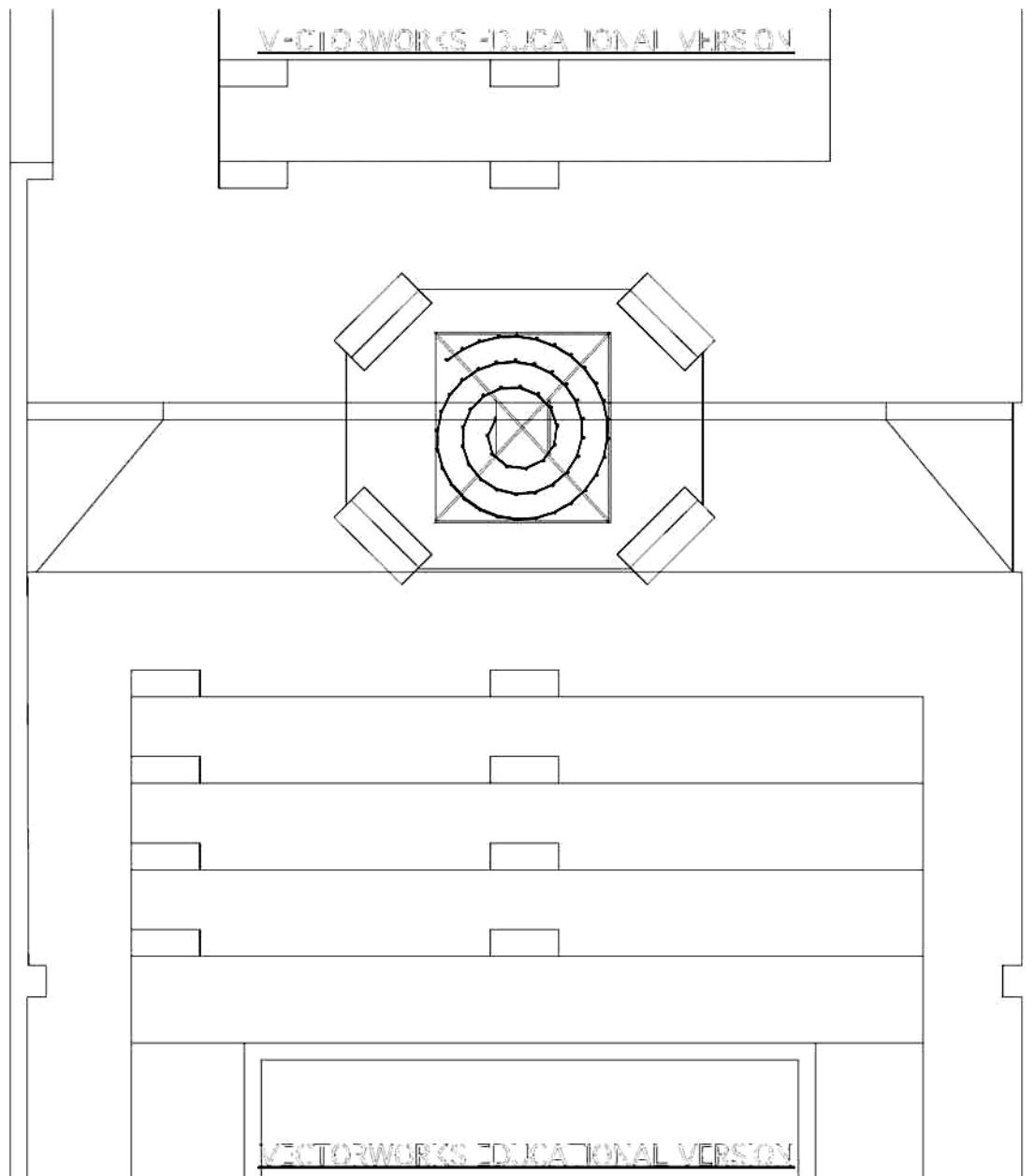
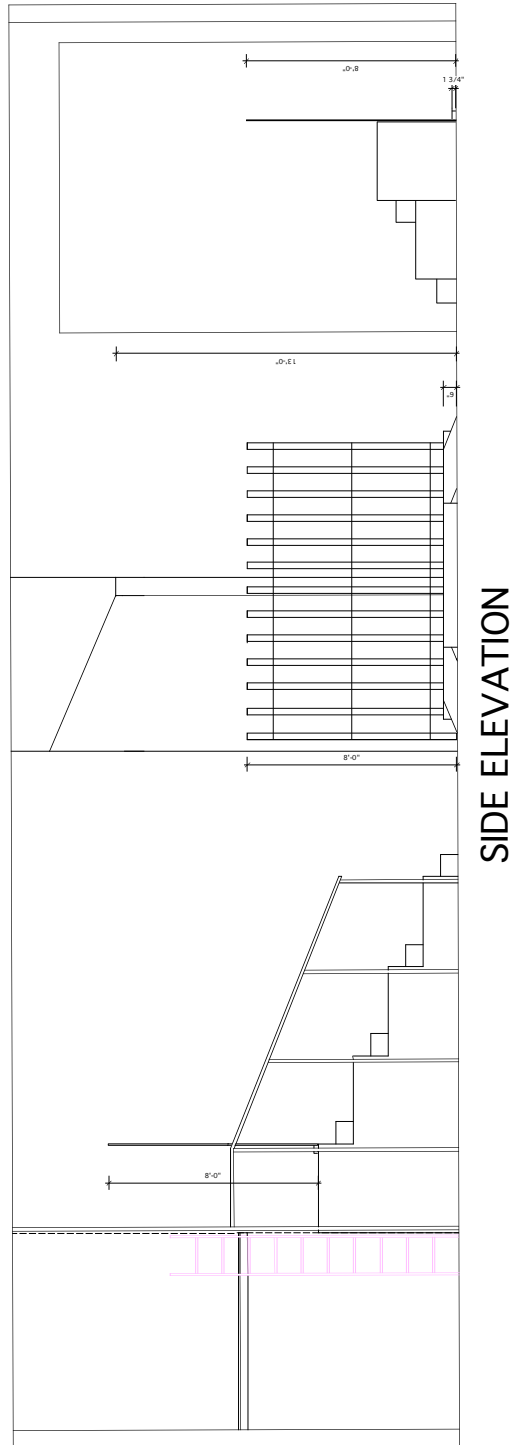


PLATE 4
GROUNDPLAN W/ CYCLONE



TEMPLE UNIVERSITY	DIVINE WORDS - RANDAL THEATRE			A E O
	GROUND AND SECTION			
	DESIGNER FOR	A. HERR		
	DIRECTOR	E. L. E.		
	SCALE	1/4" = 1'	DATE 02-28	
	A. ROWED			

PLATE 5
CENTERLINE SECTION

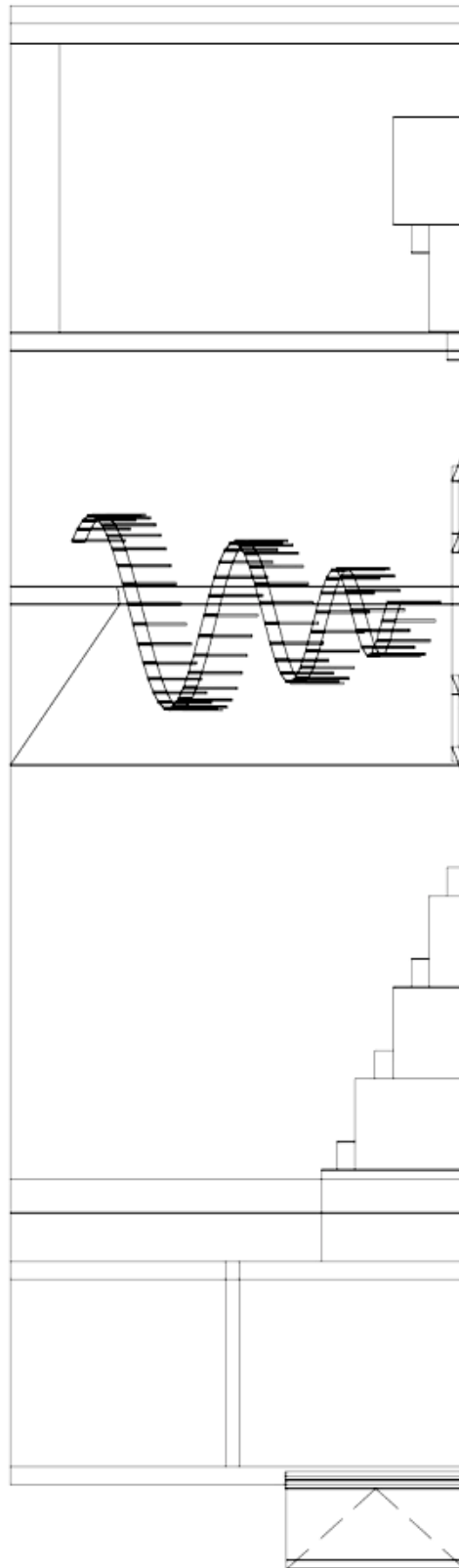


PLATE 6
CENTERLINE SECTION W/ CYCLONE

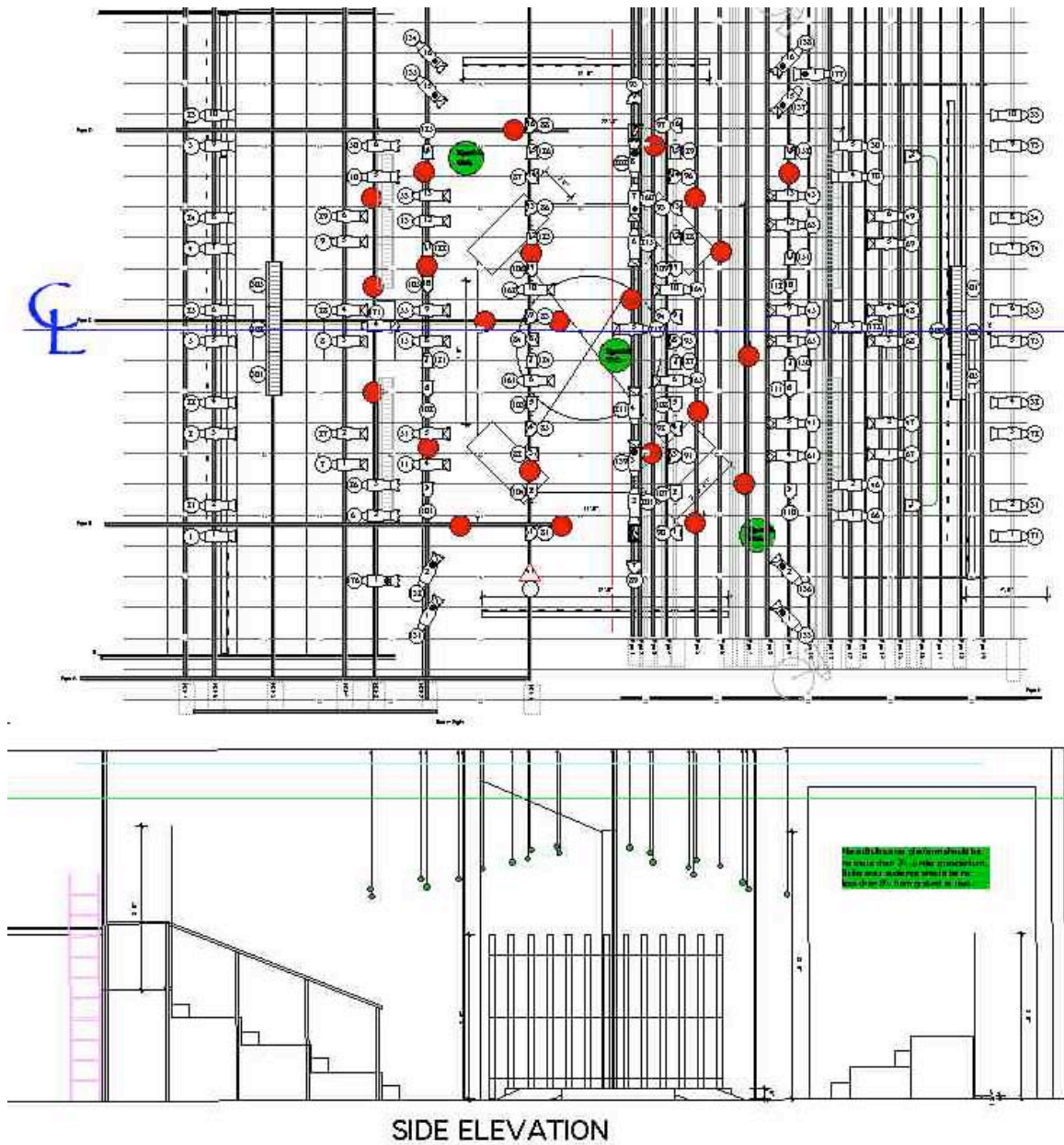


PLATE 7
CENTERLINE SECTION AND PLOT W/ HANGING BULB PLACEMENT

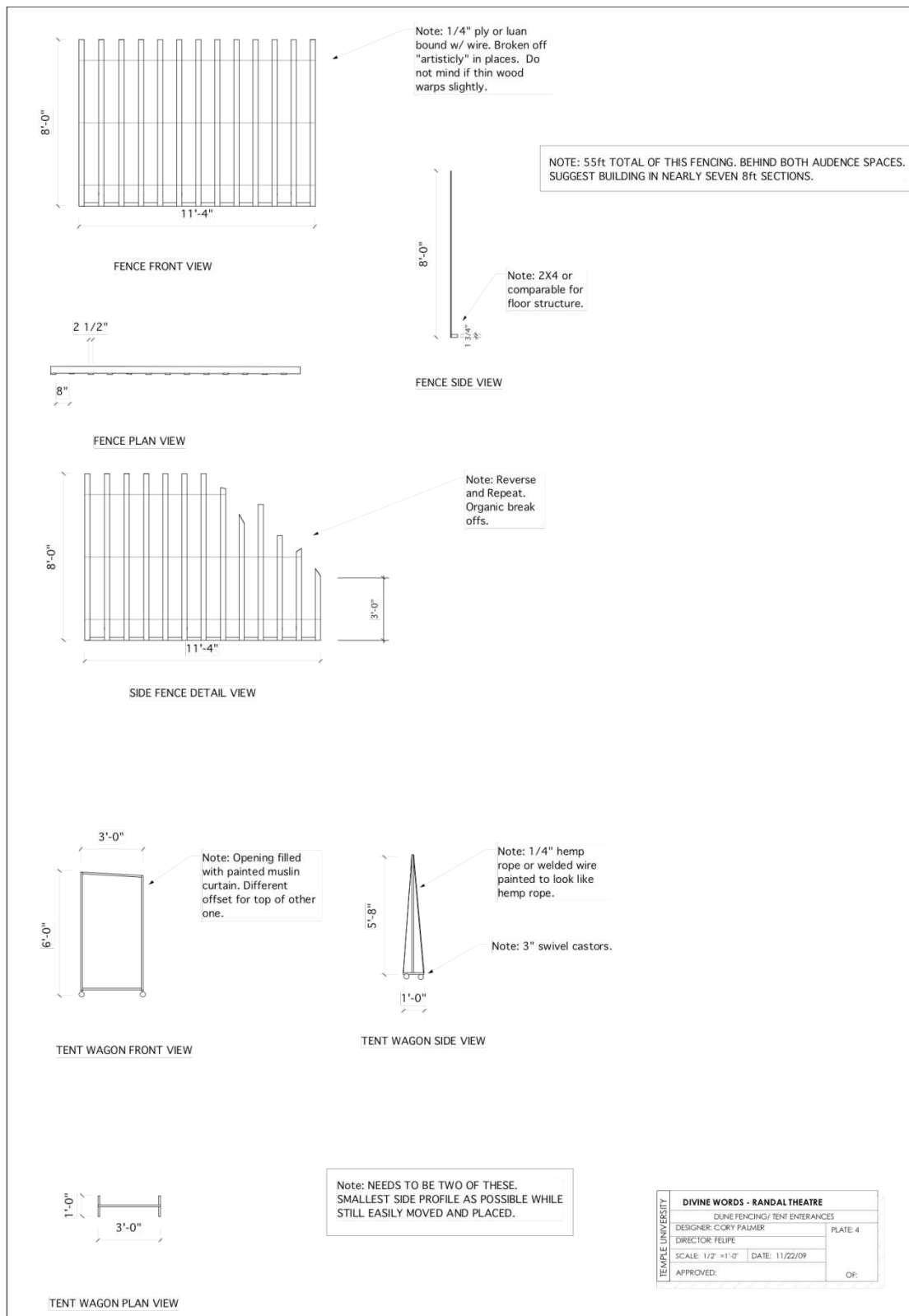
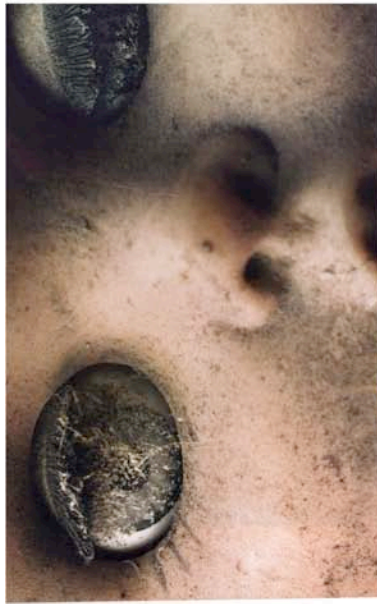


PLATE 7

TENT FLAP AND FENCE ELEVATIONS



HYDROCEPHALIC
HEAD

PENIS MUST
BECOME ERECT.
UNDER BLANKET?

POSSIBLE TO
JUST DIRTY
BABY DOLL BODY?

FACE MUST PULL
AWAY REVEALING
SKULL ATE BY



PERSON OPERATES
FROM UNDER PLAGS

Li'l Larry

Cory Palmer Feb, 2010

PLATE 8
LARRY PUPPET RENDERING

Li'l Larry's Cart



PLATE 9
LARRY'S CART RENDERING

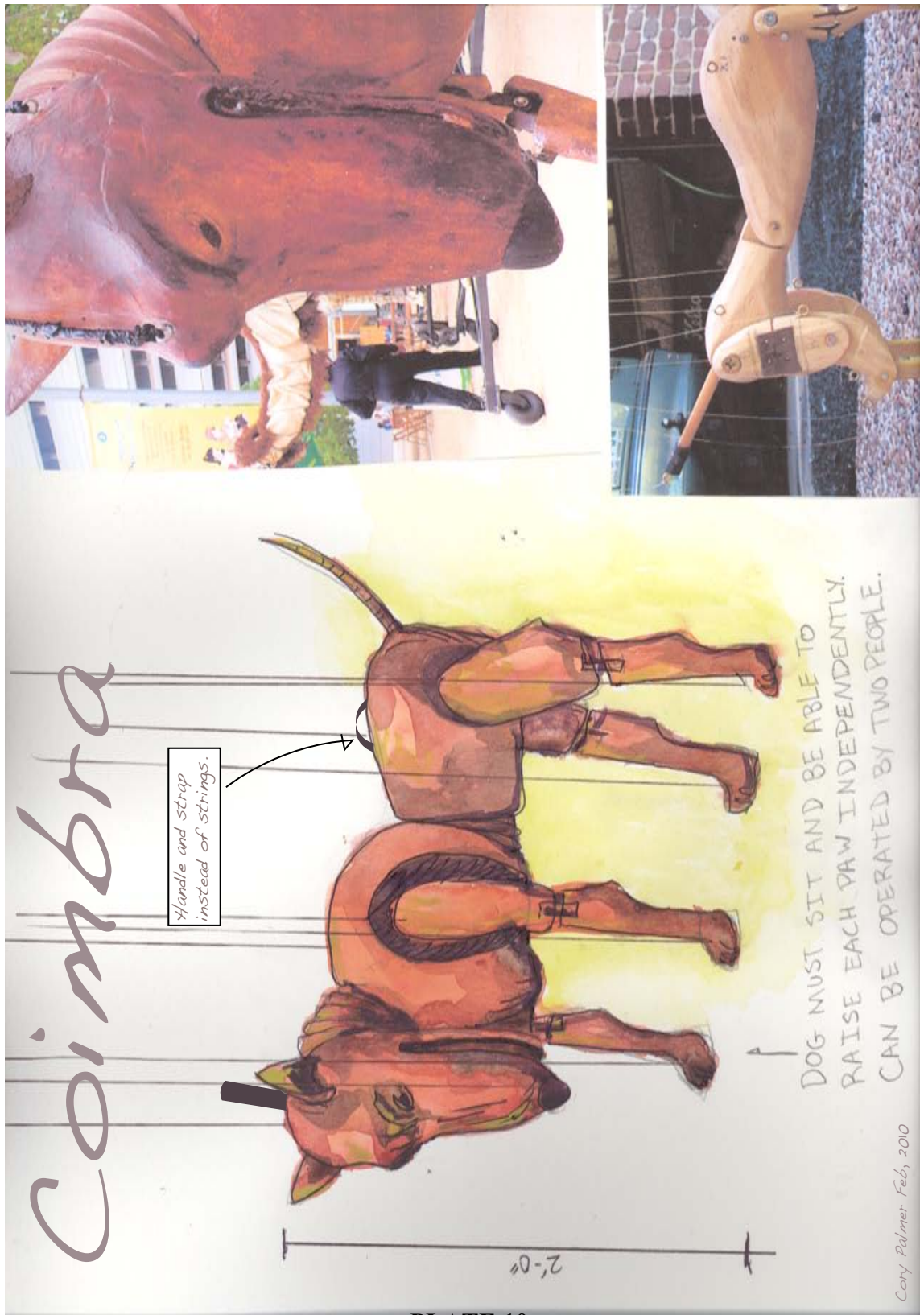


PLATE 10
COIMBRA PUPPET RENDERING

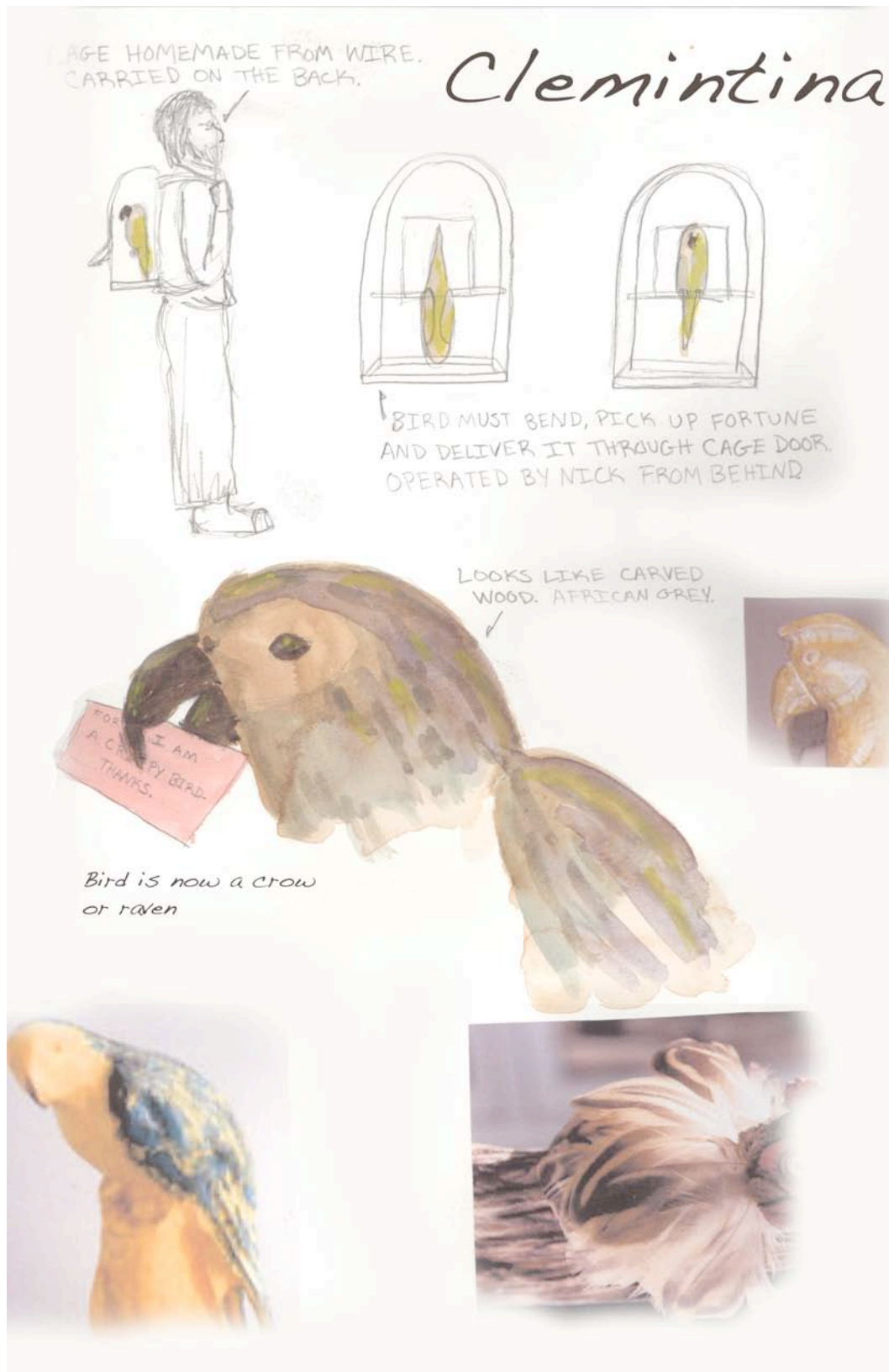


PLATE 11
CLEMINTINA PUPPET RENDERING

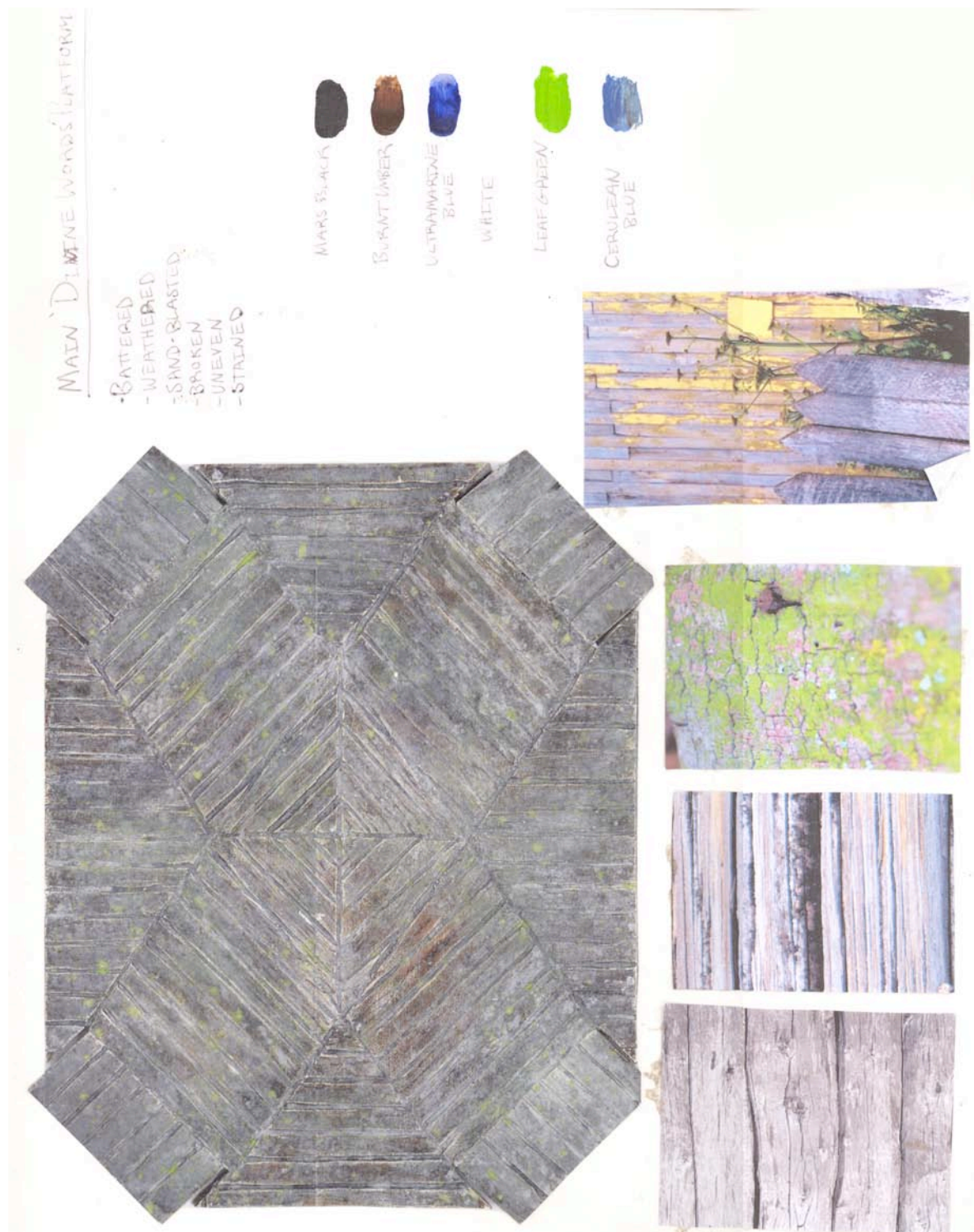


PLATE 12
PLATFORM PAINTER'S ELEVATION

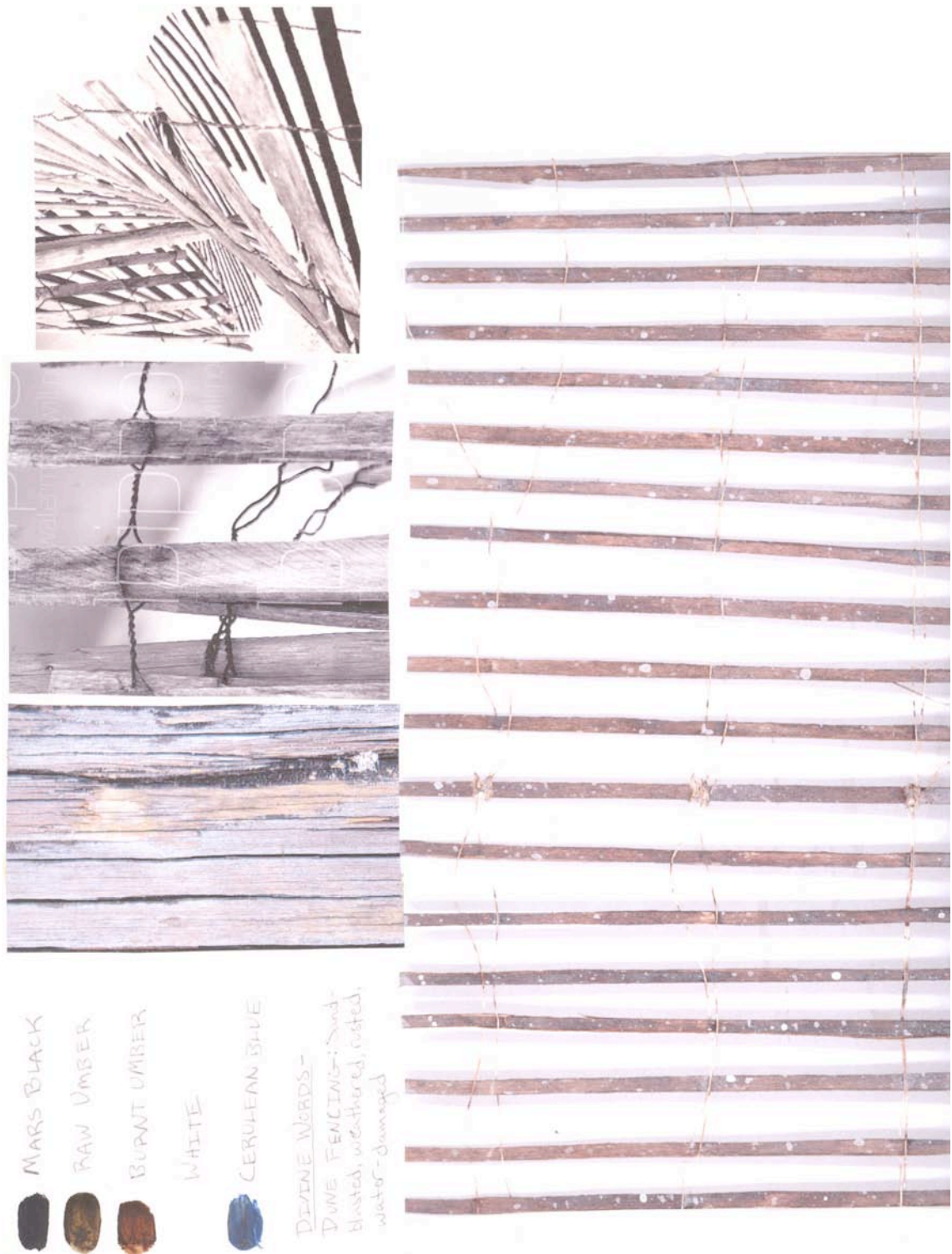
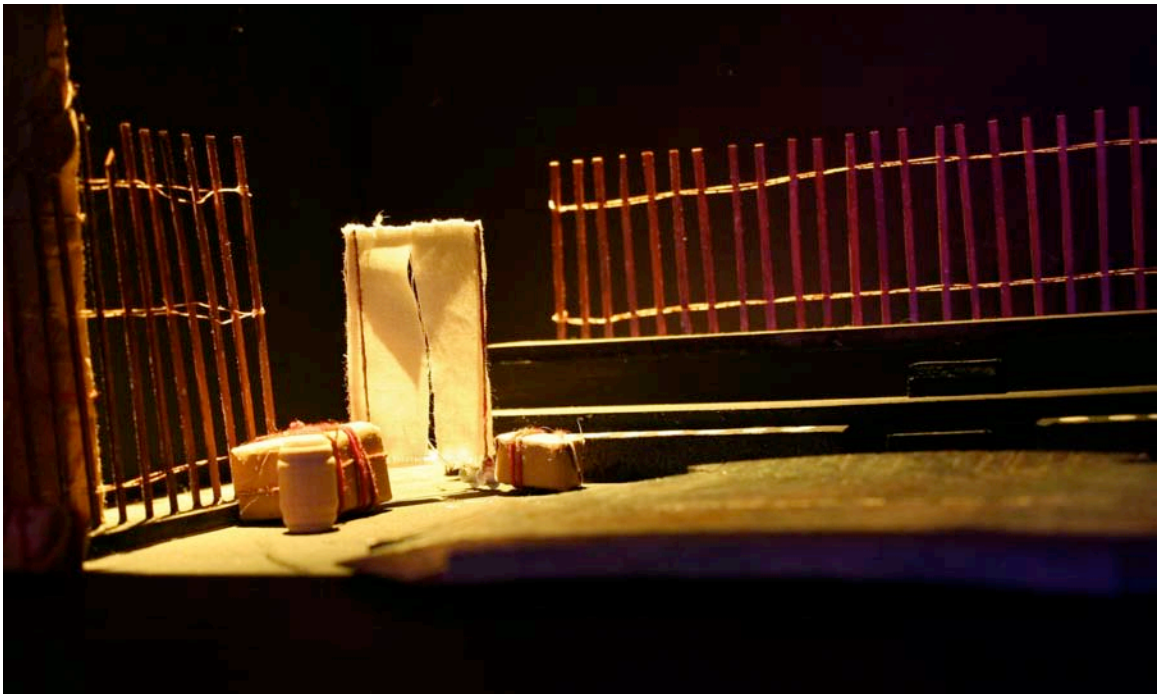


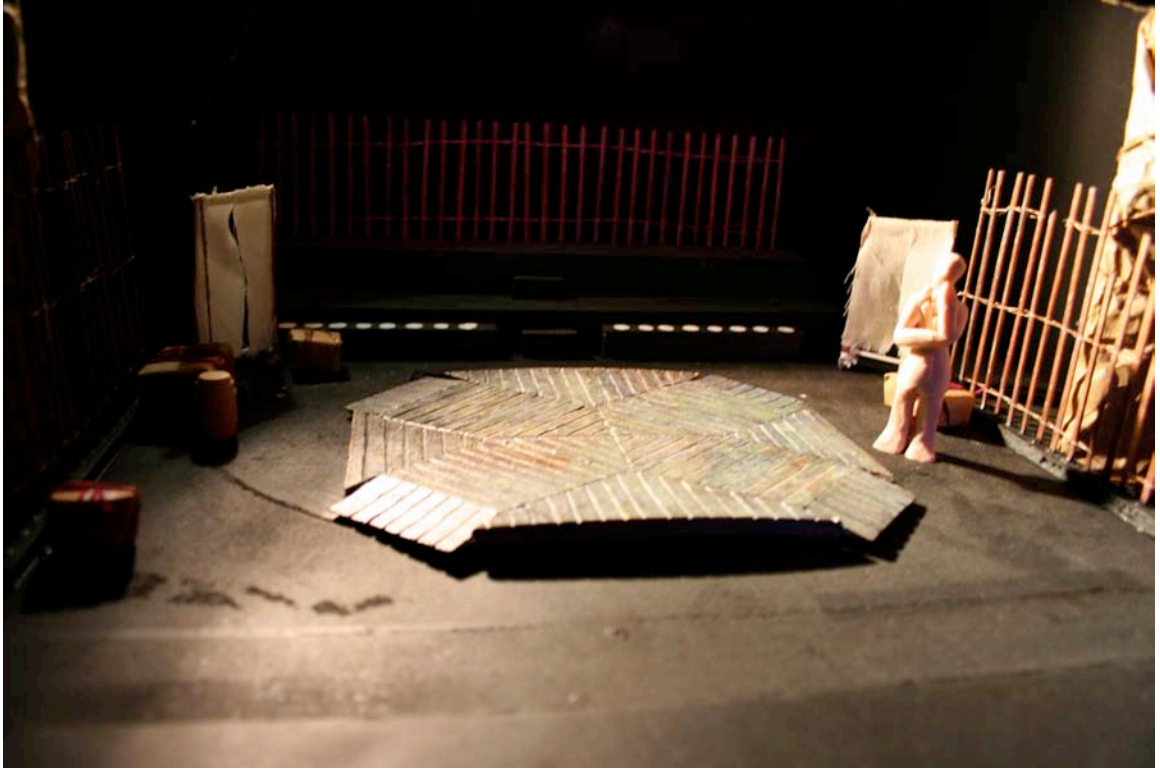
PLATE 13
DUNE FENCE PAINTER'S ELEVATION



PLATE 14
TENT FLAP PAINTER'S ELEVATION



**PHOTOGRAPH 1 (A & B)
SCALE MODEL**



**PHOTOGRAPH 1 (C & D)
SCALE MODEL**



PHOTOGRAPH 2
ENCOUNTER OF TWO WORLDS



PHOTOGRAPH 3
EXHIBITION OF PETE'S NATURE



PHOTOGRAPH 4
ALLIES AND ENEMIES IN THE NEW WORLD



PHOTOGRAPH 5
ALLIES AND ENEMIES IN THE NEW WORLD 2



PLATE 6
EXHIBITION OF PETE'S NATURE 2



PHOTOGRAPH 7
WAITING FOR THE SERPENT



PHOTOGRAPH 8
WITH THE KNIFE OR WITH THE SNAKE



PHOTOGRAPH 9
NEW FLESH (THE WELCOMING)



PHOTOGRAPH 10
PANDEMONIUM AND PROMISE OF HEAVEN



PHOTOGRAPH 11
WE'LL DIG A HOLE FOR HER TOGETHER



PHOTOGRAPH 12
YOU ONLY FLY BEFORE YOU FALL



PHOTOGRAPH 13
HOPELESS HOPE



**PHOTOGRAPH 14
TO SUFFER WITH**