Scenic Design – Capturing the Essence of a Play Through Metaphoric and Symbolic Imagery

Mona Maria Damian Ulmu

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SCENIC DESIGN – CAPTURING THE ESSENCE OF A PLAY THROUGH
METAPHORIC AND SYMBOLIC IMAGERY

by

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DEDICATION

To my amazing professors and this life changing experience and having been through many things together and having learned so many things from them, for their patience and generosity, also to my mother who supported me immensely, as always. But most of all to my belated father, Prof. Dr. Bogdan Ulmu, artistic director, writer, critic and academic professor, because he pushed me so hard to do this and wanted it very much for me, in hope that whatever good or artistic values I’ve achieved during my time here as a student, he saw and was proud of, and whatever he didn’t like, or didn’t reach his standards, hope he could forgive.
ABSTRACT

The following paper is meant to develop my experience as an MFA Candidate at the University of South Carolina. It was an MFA in Theatre, at the Department of Theatre and Dance, College of Arts and Sciences. I was a Scenic Design major but also studied Costume Design, Costume Construction and Patterning, Lighting Design, Vectorworks, Text Analysis, Pedagogy, etc. I was also hired as a teaching assistant, graduate assistant, working in the Theatre shop with undergraduate students, under Technical Director and Technical Director’s assistant supervision. This paper mainly explores my experience of making shows as a Scenic Designer and Scenic Artist, but also as a foreign student, English as a second language, the challenge at times of studying and making shows in another language than the native one. This paper underlines the perks but also the challenges along the way of designing shows and learning new things in the same time, studying and working in a totally new environment and setting.
PREFACE

"We have to do what theater does best. What theater does best is to be abstract and not to do literal reality. I really do believe that if you don't challenge yourself and risk failing, it’s not going to be interesting”

Julie Taymor, Curtain Speech – New Musical Theatre, 6 Oct. 2014,
www.brainyquote.com/authors/julie-taymor-quotes

When I think of my life in theater, I recall how it all began: by a totally unintended but certain, mute, inherited love passed on genetically from Mom and Dad, scenographer and artistic director and writer and from my Grandparents, costume designers, artists and writers. I was born between renderings and scripts, soon to bring my early funny “contribution”, making little exhibitions or “helping” Mom with costume renderings or models. Theater was a constant, very important part of my life, going to plays as an early age waiting for my dad or mom, quiet and serious, observant, and soon enough living in an alternate reality, like a very intense micro universe or precious secret kept from most of the kids my age.

After Art High school, University and then my first MFA, followed years
of Theatre and Film work back in Europe, it only made sense to come to America in pursuit for my second master’s degree, even way later than the first one. I was very happy to land a chance here at the University of South Carolina. It has been a good challenge, being an older international student, many times hard, but overall an amazing experience, full of learning great new things. Things like Lighting design, Costume Construction, or working in the Theatre Shop as a graduate assistant, building everything from scratch for the theatrical productions, alongside our amazing undergraduate students.

My relationship with theatre definitely grew, became complex and a complicated one, What I know for sure is that so many years later, I’m still in love with theatre and each project I take, I dream of only this throughout the entire process until the sweet release of the premiere. Therefore, maybe this thesis can become a love letter to this very special Art called Theatre.

Further down I will detail the experience and involvement in the few productions designed by me as a Scenic Design MFA Candidate in the two years at the Department of Theatre and Dance and the third-year internship at LaMaMa Experimental Theatre Club in New York.
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CHAPTER 1

THE MAGIC OF THE FINE ARTS, GATHERED TOGETHER IN
SERVICE OF ANOTHER ART, THEATRE

A very interesting and vast part of my master’s program was working in the theatre
scenic studio. Of course, an important segment is constructing sets, but more artistic
work for me, in which I got to practice and develop my previous experience gained in
film industry and theatre in Europe, was Scenic Art. Whether sculpting, painting,
decorating, plastering, drawing, etc., all new and reinventing itself, nothing ever the same
or getting to be boring or established enough. I have scene designed two productions at
the university, Eurydice and You on The Moors Now. This first chapter will explore a
few shows that I have exclusively done Scenic Art for.

SCENIC ART FOR MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
My first show to paint, in my first semester, Fall of 2019, was Much Ado about Nothing,
directed by Professor Dustin Whitehead and Set Design by MFA Scene Design Candidate
Nate Terracio. The minimalistic set in a theatre-in-the round setting, Longstreet Theatre
provided a 360 degree viewing arena with set pieces in four focal points within parts of
the audience. I therefor treated each set piece in a different technique of marble imitation
painting with slightly different shades used for each of the four. The piano area was the
only area treated with enlarged imitation wood fiber, all of these naturalistic patterns
found in nature were enlarged and distorted for effect and also to be visible from
all corners of the audience, as well as for monumentality and grandeur. In the middle, on the floor, on the lift area, I painted a similar shaded ever watching eye, in the same world as the rest of the painted elements.

Figure 1.1 Much Ado about Nothing - All the set pieces and the painted stage

On the auditorium walls, there were very large black and white line paintings, drawn directly by brush, nude silhouette and actors’ portraits. The idea was that all of the paintings to be painted in a realistic manner to resemble the main actors, but body and hair style to be just like hair and body lines and look taken from Matisse, Scheele’s, etc. famous paintings.
Figure 1.2 Black and White Female Nude painting for the Auditorium walls

Figure 1.3 Marble imitation stage painting
In my second semester, spring of 2020, there was almost mounted a production of *Amadeus*, a show that was worked on almost to completion but was stopped at the last minute because of the severe and increasing pandemic. The Set Design was by Professor Nic Ularu. I painted eight panels of 20’ tall by 4’ wide in a palette of greys for a distressed cement look, with accidents that combined medium of texturized exterior paint on four shades of grays, warm and cold greys.

I wanted first to realize a contrast between the industrial rough looking panels and the existing furniture that I painted and decorated in a classic baroque 18th Century style, such as the piano, acting platforms, painted decorative elements for the curtains, etc. For the piano and the decorative elements I created floral patterns painted in tones of gold and bronze, being read very well on the red platforms and red oak tinted piano. On the accessories of the curtains, the bronze and black painting was also supposed to look like a 3D ornament.

Figure 1.4 *Amadeus* 3D Painted decorations for the Drapery
Figure 1.5 3D Painting of the stage mobile platforms

For the tall main elements of the background, the tall “cement” 4’ x 18’ panels treatment, in order to create a depth and volume alternation sensation, also for enhancing the 3D effect and fake depth, holes, indentations, I oscillated between matte and glossy seal on top of the thick texturized back layer. They had four or five shades and layers applied at times, in various techniques and patterns to create an abstract and non-temporal aspect in direct contrast with the elegant precise period painting of the rest of the set pieces and elements, furniture, etc.
Figure 1.6 Tall Background Panels - Examples of the 3D treatment, shiny and matte and texture/pattern example
In my fourth semester, spring of 2021, I had to paint for *The Complete Works of Shakespeare – Abridged*, directed by Professor Dustin Whitehead and Set Designed by Professor Nic Ularu, my scenic design professor. It was interesting altogether because it was happening during full pandemic times, therefore it was set to be outdoors in the Russell House area on campus. Set consisted of three stages, each made of two sections. I painted the stages to mimic a very old original Shakespeare’s times look. The unit were decorative but distressed to show all the performance on them.

The pallet was in basic primal colors, as there would have been at the time, vivid reds, greens, tones of blue and yellow, on a background of wood imitation. Technique wise, I looked back at the Flemish, meaning very monochrome backgrounds or drawing covered with multiple-colored glazes to get the right tint and intensity.

![The Complete Works of Shakespeare – Stage Platforms – the look we finally went for, a more present, louder palette](image)
Figure 1.8 Very loud complementary palette with a visible wood texture from underneath

Figure 1.9 The last of the three pairs of stages, *The Star*, less wood texture coming from the back, but with more decoration and in more similar tones palette
CHAPTER 2

UNDERWORLD AS AN ART INSTALLATION

SCENIC DESIGN FOR EURYDICE

In the fall of 2019, my first semester, I was surprised to find out I’m going to design a show, *Eurydice*. I was already in love with the Greek mythical story, with a love bigger than the universe itself, bigger than everything we hear nowadays, hard to conceive of its grandeur even.

Orpheus falls in love with Eurydice but so does The Dark Lord of the Underworld, who tricks her into death, so Orpheus tricks him back into going as a mortal into the Underworld, by hypnotizing them with his enchanting music. He makes a pact with the Underworld Lord to get Eurydice back alive. The Lord accepts with one condition, that he cannot turn back to see her coming behind him until she’s flesh. As they start exiting the Underworld towards the World, Orpheus starts to doubt the truth of their pact, just before Eurydice can fully become flesh again. He turns and looks, and therefor she’s drawn back into the Underworld so their only chance to meet again now is for him to renounce his life and get into the underworld too, where she is, which he gladly accepts, if that means being together again.
Our show was based on an adaptation of the myth, written by Sarah Ruhl, which gives different understandings and interpretations, completely different at times, to the initial story. Our director, MFA Directing Candidate Lindsay Rae Taylor, wanted a more independent, feminist modern approach, more focused on the generic love, paternal love, (due to the fact that here Eurydice meets her dead father in the Underworld, together with some confusing but friendly characters – the Stones) rather than the singular, romantic love in the myth, giving her options, perspective, sometimes indecisions even.

My initial concept for the Underworld was an art installation made of scrap metal, junkyard bits that composed a huge whale carcass, arms slowly moved by rigging, like a crab would move its arms, having a life of its own, like a tired mechanism that swallowed everything bad, forming the underworld. The floor would’ve been covered in textile spongy tubes of all kinds, suggesting crawling things, snakes, worms, intestines like shapes and decaying textures. This would’ve been buried a bit lower than the stage level, with the aid of the lift, to create a surprise and contrast with the wedding idyllic picture from the beginning, showing their puppy love. On the auditorium ceiling, a lighting grid, there was a texture of fishnets and all kinds of nets and web like textile fabrics collaged together and rigged in corners of the grid, to look like a huge web cobb that caught human and fauna remains, like body parts of sorts, arms, heads, etc.
For the Costume Design class, Professor Kristy Hall, asked us to make a Cornell Box, a mood box, a model almost, with elements that gathered would give the vibe of the play. The idea was to embody the essence of the play and its world, which I gladly did for *Eurydice*, so I could at least have a bit of my initial concept realized. This early design had an “elevator” door, to remind of the element I later chose to be the transition in between the two worlds scenic element, an upper level and a lower one, the world of under, as it’s written in the cardboard sign with carved out letters I put on the top of it. Inside the carcass made of random bits I found to suggest potential scrap metal parts, I had an oval shape frame with her portrait upside down and with cracked glass, in a symbolic manner of showing her going into the Underworld.

![Cornell – Mood Box – Model for Eurydice](image)

*Figure 2.1 Cornell – Mood Box – Model for Eurydice*
Then the concept changed. There was no time, not nearly enough people to realize all I wanted. In fact it was very clear that I was the only person who wanted it be an installation art piece. If I have moved forward with this approach, I would be on my own. Over the next few weeks, besides researching and doing concept work on this, I had to also complete a full set of technical construction drawings for the Technical Director. Since I was a very much beginner in drafting technical drawings, all this started to seem unrealistic.

It broke my heart, the fact that I had to give up this ambitious vision, my lighting design professor, Jim Hunter, was very supportive of it. Lindsay Rae Taylor, our director, liked the whole concept and world at first, but the Director wanted to return to something else she had in mind, although initially agreeing with our first conversations, references and direction. As she thought more and more about the show, the approach became more schematic and idyllic. A more breezy concept. It was in fact going to be a lighter approach, a funnier at times one. In an educational environment after all, with a smaller

Figure 2.2 Rendering for *Eurydice* – as part of the first Scenic Design concept, a whale’s insides as the Underworld
budget, it was simpler and faster things to do a more modest set. I was going to design, draw, draft, paint, plaster, sculpt, decorate and assemble all in the theatre shop and on stage (which I did until the very last minute), all during semester with other classes during the day and teaching assistant in the shop for eventual other shows, like finishing painting for *Much Ado about Nothing*, for instance.

So as heartbreaking and disappointing as it was, I had to rethink the concept entirely and start from scratch. Working with my professor Nic Ularu and to the director, Lindsay Rae Taylor, we agreed to focus the design on the four voms instead of focus on the main stage area. So, I came up with another concept: chairs of all kinds on the ceiling, with twisted kegs and looking like roots almost, hung on the grid, in the fishnet web cobb, symbolizing the elements on stage but distorted, decayed, as in the mirror, it being the Underworld. The stage lift would’ve come up to its maximum height for the moment of her death while the ceiling would come down, almost like trying to touch, the two surfaces to unite together, catching her in the middle of the two worlds. This was to be a tense, pressing movement, like in a purgatory. In the nearby, surrounding her, would’ve been hung (by their very long hair) mannequin heads as you will see in the pastel chalk rendering below. Big dolls heads, with lights instead of eyes, (no eyes and lit from behind the empty orbits) to be more present than the rest of the head, like mysterious presences, anonymous pairs of eyes coming to witness her arrival in the underworld. I thought of six designs for spaces represented in the play.

The four corners of the stage marked by the voms: *The Dock* with the Arcade, *The Cave* with the *Shower Elevator* coming from it, *The Organ Pipes Installation* with the *Water Pump* (faucet), and *The Dark Interesting Man’s Apartment*. Then the ceiling, grid
area, with *The String Room/Cage*, initially from the ceiling that lowers to the stage floor (lift area) and around it. This area included the sand dunes spreading and fading towards the audience.

![Figure 2.3 Chalk Pastel Rendering for *Eurydice*, second concept for the Scenic Design](image)

*The Underworld co-exists with the Real world, in parallel, and is upside down, as a distorted reality in the mirror, in reverse: None of them is totally right or wrong, good or bad...they tend to meet in a claustrophobic tension...Ghosts Skeleton structure chairs detach as spiders from the fisherman/spider/algae web textile collage*
There are 6 sets: 1. The Interesting Man’s Apartment; 2. The Dock / Beach; 3. The Elevator Shower; 4. The Water Source; 5. The Wedding; 6. The Mirrored World

Figure 2.4 Photoshop Rendering for *Eurydice*, second Scenic Design concept

Figure 2.5 Vectorworks Ground Plan for *Eurydice*
Figure 2.6 *Eurydice* Vectorworks 3D Model – Father’s Letter Scene – view of the Dock and Apartment

Figure 2.7 Vectorworks 3D Model for *Eurydice*, Eurydice’s death scene, entrance in the Underworld
Figure 2.8 3D Vectorworks Model for *Eurydice, String Room* Scene, Father introduces her to the Underworld

Figure 2.9 Ceiling Net – *Cobweb*, lowering for the Underworld
When I thought of Hades’s apartment, what came to mind were pieces of ground, cracked slices of dismantled soil like after an earthquake, what seemed to characterize him being disaster, danger, menace. The space also needed unusual luxury for arousing her curiosity and luring her into his world, deceit, and envy for their real love, something that he couldn’t obtain despite all of his power. When I chose the material, which in order to be seen from below the apartment, being the tallest point in the set, I thought of using metallic mesh on thin pipes frame. I thus conceived a big platform, and the next idea was to succeeded smaller and smaller slices under it as steps, but organically decreasing from big to small one, overlapping but descending in a fluid natural flow to the floor.

The see-through mesh also allows, as well as transparency, beautiful shadows and lights to be played with in the show. Initially I wanted a black shiny tub cut in front and used as a fancy high end but industrial sofa, a golden martini-cup-like bar table (since he offers her a drink), black shiny furs, as well as an imposing chandelier with strings of black chain, like a canopy made of chain around the sofa. The chandelier wouldn’t have been a classical one, only a pretext that reminds one of a chandelier, being more like a claw, looking like made of metal, like a construction site metallic claw grabber. Jim Hunter, our Lighting Design Professor and my technical drawing instructor, had a lot of patience with me helped me complete the drafting in time to submit to the Technical Director. He sent me his passion and interest for Vectorworks, making it fun and intriguing, even when it was challenging. This particular set was very hard draft, especially the 3D model mesh surfaces. It was back in my second semester that we learned 3D computer modeling of a show, with lights and surface textures. At the request of my main professors, my colleague Nate Terracio, having studied one semester more in
Vectorworks than I at that time, and as a reciprocity to my overtime, overnight, in
vacation, etc. painting for his show, Much Ado about Nothing, jumped in and helped me
to draft my elevations from my ground plan. These included the Shower Elevator and
The Pipes for the Organ set, as time was running low.

Even if the furnished look would’ve been more complete and said more, the
director decided to drop the elements on the main platform, to give the actors more space.
Only the chandelier and canopy remained in the central playing area. Instead of
constructing the unorthodox chandelier I was planning, I had to lower my expectations
and become practical, finally choosing a black gothic looking chandelier with candles
from our props collection. Lighting Designer Allison Newcombe put lights in the candles
to good effect.

Figure 2.10 Hand Rendering, Photoshop, Vectorworks files and look,
textures for the Interesting Man’s – (Lord of the Underworld’s) Apartment
The next vom represents *The Dock*, Eurydice’s and Orpheus's idyllic place of meeting. It is the first location to appear in the play, overlooking a sea, giving possibility and hope for their apparently bright future together, oblivious of what’s to come. This is their safe space, where he would often come back to when thinking or looking for her or trying to summon her with his hypnotic music. Hence the pastel pleasant hopeful and childish color pallet we used for the dock. The dock also had arcade elements evoking pure childish brand of new love. In terms of shape, it was a group, a pile of colored wooden looking pillars with a composition and rhythm forming an aesthetic mirroring with the set diagonally opposed the forest of *Organ* pipes set across the stage.

I designed an archway with natural field flowers, leaves and branches above the dock as a sweet, pure, poetic entry of the actors. The upper part of the archway has a few steps descending to the main platform of the dock. The dock seems to float above the water, in such a manner that would not interrupt the side line the views of the audience. The vom under the dock is not used in the show as an entry or an exit. The dock
symbolizes the couple’s untouched, uncorrupted yet, romantic and idyllic love, of a future life together.

Figure 2.12 View of the Dock and Arcade entry

The next vom is designed to be *The Cave*, a structure decorated with textile nest and fabric collages in dark greens and black. This deep mysterious cave symbolizes a death cave, a nowhere place, non-temporal. This is a transit space where the Shower Elevator mobile scenic element comes from bringing Eurydice and Orpheus at the end, bringing the dead into the world of under. *The Shower Elevator* is a time machine like installation that allows for transit between worlds. In the text there is an elevator, which is a more cinematic vision, harder to put in practice here.

Therefore, I thought of an installation piece, to look industrial and remind of, match, mirror somehow, the rhythm of the organ pipes in the next vom, but also like a mechanism containing a shower symbolizing baptism again, rebirth into another world. It
also has a piece of ground like base, a fragmented line shape one, a rappel with the apartment steps and platforms, a visual reminder of death. The base is also conceived to look like a roman war chariot, a cut in front a little copper-rusty decorated tub, with large wheels on the sides reminding of a chariot shape. The upper part of the installation is transformed from a vintage brass cylindrical shower shape, like one found back in in American history. This inspired me in its structure, looking like a spine with ribs structure, thus symbolizing human decay. It is pushed and rolled on stage by the characters named Stones. The shower is what brings a new person into the new underworld of death. On the sides, I complicated the shape with very thin brass painted tubes reminding of an instrument, trumpet like tubes, and mirroring Orpheus’s world.

Figure 2.13 Vectorworks and Photoshop files of the Shower Elevator and textures, look research
The fourth fix location and vom, is the Organ Installation set. This labyrinth maze pipe forest, using pipes of various sizes and positions, attempts to suggest a never-ending depth and perspective. It forms an ensemble organ-like mechanism reminiscent of Orpheus’s music world, but also his obsession with the world he is totally lost in. Competing with his love for Eurydice, the organ is his source of water. I made the organ connect to a water pump were Eurydice comes and drinks from.

Allison, the Lighting Designer, also enhanced the organ by illuminating it in teal and turquoise colors. We lit it from the inside of the pipes that I had made holes and cracks in, to suggest together with the light, the life and water source inside. An eternal life source. While it looks like a church organ, the central piece, was make to look like a
heart, symbolizing Orpheus’s heart. We also lit it from behind, from inside of the ensemble with the turquoise light, enhancing perfectly the copper shades on the pipes, brass and other rusty teals and olives, greens, silvers, blacks that I painted the pipes. The aspect is supposed to be monumental, in a monumental perspective, mysterious and deeply symbolic, elegant but industrial and rough in aspect.

Figure 2.15 Vectorworks, Photoshop files and research photos of the Organ Pipes Installation Set
Figure 2.16 *Organ* Pipes Detail
I served as *Eurydice’s* Scenic Artist as well as the Scenic Designer. It was my second play to do the scenic art for. It was a very vast work, very detailed and with many elements to paint, sculpt, and decorate assemble. Maybe the hardest part about this show was having to submit, in my first semester, the technical plans to the theatre shop in a new software I was just beginning to study, Vectorworks. At the same time, I had to start sculpting, decorating, painting and doing all the finishes for the set, since the shop was only building the structure, so all the final aspect had to be given by me, serving as designer and Set Artist. The hard part also was that there were no other same level artists in the shop to help me bring it to a certain level and then finish, apart from a few hours in some days that the undergraduate students, very much beginners in art, (being mostly actors) working in the shop could contribute with.

Apart from the limited time and stress of actually handling so much work (vacation time or nights included many times), it was actually a good new experience, in terms of the actual making of the sets, structure- construction wise, as part of the work hours I had to put in the shop. This was unlike most previous sets I only designed or did the art for, in art departments in film industry or as a set designer in Europe. I worked on all aspects of the scene design’s creation alongside younger students, both graduate and undergraduate, under Technical Director Andy Mills’ supervision and Assistant
Technical Director Sam Gross. I have express my appreciation for Sam Gross, the Assistant Technical Director in particular, with whom I worked and learned a lot from, not just for this show but for all incoming ones after this, a great theatre person, technician, and human.

The most decorated areas I designed in the theatre were the actor entrance tunnels called the Voms, short for Vomitarium, each of the four representing another space supporting the play’s action. Participating actively in the construction of the set from the very beginning was new and surprisingly informative. It really did me good to do that technical part of the Set, as such: cutting, grinding the steel for the apartment island and its steps, polishing, assembling, covering the edges with foam tubes to make them smooth and safe for the actors, cutting wood for the dock, dressing them and painting them to look like wood pillars of the dock, its horizontal planks too, or pipes for Orpheus’s instrumental Vom, or assembling the shower elevator installation art as a mobile set piece or the cage coming down from the grid. In the end I built Styrofoam dunes of sand on the edges of the stage towards the audience, sculpted and painted them and collated them with fishnets and other textile bits to make them look like stuck algae and then the stage itself, the lift, as a swirly water – time machine clock.

The Shower – Elevator was one of the main mobile elements of design that came from one of the Voms, through a dressed arcade. It was assembled as an installation art, with pipes of different diameters and then collated together to look like a machinery with trumpet details and elements, assembled on a roman-chariot-looking-like van, all on a platform on wheels, all having several shades of patina of distressed super aged brass and copper and dark poison green. The palette of colors also has a symbolic role to play, brass
and copper being the expensive noble materials going way back in mythology, and the poison dark green patina brings foul play and death into the optics. It has its birth from the arcade dressing of the Vom it comes from, the texturized fishnet ribbons and various laces tapestry the arcade is dressed in to look like a mysterious nowhere land source, also colored in rotten greens and black.

Figure 2.17 Production Photo, *Shower Elevator* at the arrival in the Underworld

The next Vom belongs to Orpheus and is like a music installation, where he always comes from as an action, therefore it was made to look as an installation that represents his musical world, his heart made as an organ made of pipes, meant to be sacred and resembling a huge church pipe organ. It was painted in shades of metals but greens also,
turquoise and faint copper, black, olive, vibrating each from the different pipes put together like a forest of pillars, again leaving an unknown and inexplicit source he arrives from, a musical world, music being his whole life and existence, one he cannot share easily. It has a faucet, a tap with a wheel system at the end of a main, cracked pipe, and I made several little holes in it because me and the show’s Lighting Designer, Alumni Allison Newcombe, agreed to accentuate it by having lights put inside of it so it can look like an alive element, pulsating life and “heart beating” in a subtle reminiscent light.

Figure 2.18 Organ Set Piece painting

The Dark Interesting Man’s Apartment was the next vom and featured a staircase of interrupted contour, like wrenched pieces of ground, in organic roughly lined shapes. These islands varied from the largest island that represents the main room, descending down to the smallest step on to the arena floor. The levels were made of metallic mesh with Styrofoam tubes on the edge for safety and thicker contour.

I painted these elements matte black with accents of rust, symbolizing decay, intending to create the taste of hell, as the place the Lord of Darkness and The Underworld
himself lives in. The beauty and advantage of metallic mesh, besides its texture, is the see-through element that allowed for evocative lighting effects and throwing various shapes of shadows. Over the apartment and stairs, I created a Chandelier which I painted to look similar, with black chain strings hanging from it. Opened in rays on the surface of the apartment, in a disturbingly inviting form, the upper part, the crown, being lit as candles.

Figure 2.19 *Chain Chandelier* and *The Apartment* viewed from below

The next Vom is the dock, the idyllic happy initial place Orpheus and Eurydice share together but where they experience also bitter moments on their own, so I decorated the arcade they come through like a cradle of good feelings, to mimic pure and idyllic, pure fields - like vegetation, in an arcade that opens to the doc. Each plank is treated differently in terms of color but live together in a fully colored optimistic look, symbolizing youth, promise and hope, like every loving couple would, unaware of the disaster to come, the literally black cloud upon them. The dock is sustained by pillars, painted in equally optimistic colors, but showing hard distress and much history, maybe saying that it repeats itself, a story as old as time. The technical story behind them is
pragmatic, wooden pillars dressed in various materials and painted in more techniques, to imitate very old but baring wood pillars, full of history. The number of the pillars is exaggerated (if we think of real pear pillars), normally being too many for that structural Set need, but planned to enhance the dramatic depth and perspective they give. They also serve as a replica, but in different materials, to the diagonal Vom, the forest of pipes, the depth and forced perspective, creating mystery and unknown.

Figure 2.20 Dock pillars and planks painting and dressing
A mobile, surprise element coming from the grid, was the String Room, a golden-cage-looking element that the father builds Eurydice in the Underworld, as a safe place for both, also a place of protectiveness and memories, rememorizing and relearning everything new. We built a 4ft in diameter metallic structure that I painted bronze and decorated with accessories and textile elements, ribbon, pieces of lace, feathers, as well as a broken gold frame hanging from it, to symbolize the broken, suddenly interrupted life, world as she knew it, as an empty portrait medallion frame with missing subject.

The color pallet again used cold turquoises and dark greens to complement the golds and bronzes, with soft pinks present to subtly point the sensitivity of their relationship, pure, blood related love as opposed to the main romantic love in the play.

Softness, delicacy, and vulnerability, were also present through the choice of materials I went for, such as the delicate laces and feathers and flowers, spring in bloom.
flowers branches hanging hopeful from the cage structure, as an oasis of peace and love and hope oasis, a reassurance much longed for, like a drop of dew in the desert.

He “builds” it by opening it, unfolding it in front of her, together with her, extending the cords that the upper metallic cage is prolonged with, securing each cord under a stone, another very present leitmotif in the set, suggesting stability and durability, in contrast with all the mystery and ephemera look and sinister look and tease and threat, other elements are charged with.

Figure 2.22 *String Room* set piece, Production Photo
The most permanent aspect of the set is the sea and the sand dunes around it, surrounding the edge of the stage, very close towards the audience. I sculpted them in blocks of Styrofoam and then painted them to mimic sand dunes, in a very realistic manner, as in a film, where details need to be perfectly believable close up.

Then I merged them with the painting of the stage, in terms of technique and layers, but also in terms of volume alternation, from high volume to flat painting, from 3D to 2D. I decorated them as well with fishnets of various colors, from beige to dark poison green and other elements to mimic vegetation typical for the seaside, like glued algae to petrified sand, etc. I started from yellows and all the natural pallet of sand dunes, but then added much more contrast and darker areas and contrast, for dramatic enhancement. This volume and depth alternation also helped me break the geometry of the stage and delimitation to the audience area and thus create organic blend of the two surfaces on the sides, to bring the audience in, rather than leaving them as detached observers. One should feel like they’re right there, in the middle of the action, totally
involved and a part of the sea and sand there.

The sand dunes contrast chromatically very well with all the turquoises and greens and light cerulean shades of the sea, warm – cold chromatic contrast all over, predominant, there’s also a contrast in texture, smoothness and glass reflection of the sea, versus the rough grainy aspect of the sand dunes and blocks and stones, wild versus tamed, exact versus oblivion.

Figure 2.24 Sand Dunes with added fishnet as texture

Figure 2.25 Sand Dunes with fishnets added, them and the Sea relationship, sculpting near painting, volume and 2D
Last but not least, the Sea in the stage area, on the lift, is “moving” in a swirly spiral direction, dragging the sand in its twist, has many layers of colors and techniques of applying paint, to create depth and waves highlights. The tones are again turquoise and green, deeper petrol blues in the depth of it. It’s treated with a glossy finish as opposed to the rough super dry and matte aspect of the sands. The gold shades in the middle of and against the blue-green pallet of the sea is again to create an unexpected contrast with it, surrealistic in the realistic.

The subtle concept behind it is a roman golden, classic and noble looking clock, together with little wheels and other elements drawn in it, as a secret world, the unseen behind and under the seen, the dream world versus the real one. It is also symbolizing and reminding us in a very discreet manner, to be discovered at some point as a hidden little secret, of the timeless space we’re in, the oblivion nowhere land - neverland place of our existence, not only Eurydice’s and her father. It though suggests directly her lack of memory in the underworld, the new beginning and the never end, in a timeless space less atmosphere of dreamland rather than reality, such as our after death experience is so unknown for us, we can only dream and speculate about it.
Figure 2.26 *The Sea* - view from above, in relation to the sculpted *Sand Dunes*

Figure 2.27 *The Sea* painted stage detail showing the *Roman Clock* and mechanism symbols
CHAPTER 3

THE INFILTRATION OF ART EVEN IN THE HARDEST OF TIMES

SCENIC DESIGN FOR LOVE AND INFORMATION

In my third semester, fall of 2020, during the hard Covid times, the biggest challenge of them all, we mounted the show *Love and Information*. The pandemic made a normal face to face setting between live actors out of the question. The production was basically a show on Zoom with actors in their own spaces with Photoshop backgrounds instead of sets. This was much more like a dance with graphic design than set design, or a combination of the two visions. It was frankly in the end of a co-design process, between the actors and the Professor / Director Steve Pearson, that I began my work with the director with a few meetings on Zoom. I ended up discussing and proposing sets with Steven. Then the actors would choose the background that they liked.

Initially, starting with my main Professor Nic Ularu, I was thinking of the images as 16:9 ratio frames, cut in such a manner that would best fit into this format. My illustrations showed the actors as black silhouettes positioned on top of the image backgrounds set in perspective. It was trial and error finding the right perspective. In general, Steven went for minimalist – industrial looking sets, random finds, as the play was a collection of short stories put together, so it alternated very randomly from one place, action, indoors or outdoors, location or even mood, very different one from the
other at a very fast paced changes. A succession of very sudden and unexpected change and situation, one after another, basically.

As the title suggests, it was a collection of moods and celebrations of humanity and its feelings, in all its diversity, in all its beauty and glory, found in the little things, in the tiny aspects of everyday life and the conflicts that make it so unexpected and special and full of color. Locations where, as you can see shown below, are interiors typical everyday life, such as restaurants, cafés, offices, libraries, psychiatrist offices, inside people’s homes. The locations varied from bedrooms, kitchens and their intimacy, to the outdoors like the beach, industrial commercial spaces, subways, hallways, tunnels, yards, seaside, landscapes, etc.

They formed a beautiful variation and contrast, in look but also in treatment, chromatic palette and textures.

Figure 3.1 First Attempts of putting Love and Information Sets in Photoshop in a premade 6:9 frame, with actors’ silhouettes
Figure 3.2 Interiors such as Restaurant and Shrink’s Office, Garage, options of settings for various little plays within the show

Figure 3.3 Options of Settings for Exteriors and Interiors to serve as background sets
To enhance intimacy and give a domestic, family feel, the palette was more monochromatic and warm toned with brown tones, warm cognac tones, reds, and was a bit vintage looking at times. For the exterior sets, apart from the fact that I used very artificially saturated ultra-bright colors, I think the best thing to play with here was perspective. The images were maybe the main characters themselves. Many of the outdoors located stories were very deep, repetitive, infinite looking, long perspectives, as well as minimalist geometric shapes and lines, chiaroscuro – very bright centers and points of interest, of focus, in the midst of very deep dark or pitch-black surroundings, adding a surrealistic touch to the sets.

Some interiors such as industrial looking, neutral hallways and passages, tunnels, etc., were surprisingly intense and electric colored, (to contrast with the monochromatic toned down interiors), using very bold colors like turquoise, fuchsia, bright blues, greens or purples and artificial lighting, neon lights or shady lighting to add to the mystery and random location that was just a pretext anyway, to contrast with the warm, domestic, intimate vintage interiors mentioned above.

Another contrast, and in saying contrast, my purpose was to accentuate the variety found in life, was obtained due to the caloric contract of colors, warm versus cold ones, such as warm in the interior, very cold colors in the exterior or intermediary spaces, such as the hallways, passages, etc., together with the natural versus artificial looks and elements that composed looks. There’s a contrast in look, in some - lines, furniture, very natural and organic and in others, very cold, artificial and space-like. The contrast is also found in lines consists of sinuous, organic shapes and lines as opposed to straight, angular and minimalist strict lines, almost unnatural, out of space. In a deeper meaning, man
made against nature made and how they coexist in real life and in the same bigger picture
together, in the universe that harmoniously holds all of those and everything in it.

Figure 3.4 More examples of monochromatic exteriors mostly

Figure 3.5 Minimalist cubist exteriors mostly, deep perspectives, becoming abstract
Figure 3.6 Minimalist monochromatic but electric loud colored exteriors, industrial looking

Figure 3.7 Cold palette industrial rough looking exteriors for a neutral but unified look

Even though the situation was frustrating, like other situations during Covid, it was a good challenge that made us push our limits and overcome our boundaries, and made us realize how important each other’s input is and made us finally miss each other and
working together as a whole. The show was a success with everyone understanding its limitations, its conventions, as all live theatre art is, and presented us with a new way of growing, developing artistic expressions in unusual, restricted situations, also led to new ways of evolving together. So maybe in art, there’s a silver lining even in the worst of situations, under pressure and limitations, crisis situations and restrictions, we are actually forced to move forward, to push ourselves, inspired to progress and better our art.
CHAPTER 4

NATURE – AS THE UNIVERSAL LOVE LANGUAGE

OF FOUR CLASSICAL STORIES

SCENIC DESIGN FOR YOU ON THE MOORS NOW

You on the Moors Now was my third show to design in my fourth semester, spring of 2021. Written by Jaclyn Backhouse, the show was directed by Ibi Owolabi, and Set Co-Design by me with MFA Candidate Nate Terracio. It was set in Drayton Hall, USC’s proscenium theatre, a classic Italian type theatre. The play is a modern-feminist collage of the four classic stories, Wuthering Heights, Pride and Prejudice, Little Women and Jane Eyre, and their characters in a women against men war.

It was again a bit of a challenge, since I got sick with Covid that winter and it lingered through the beginning of the preparations for the show. I managed with the help of my professor, Nic Ularu and my Co-Designer colleague, Nate. The Vectorworks drafting part of the processed was handled by Nate and, in return, I was assigned the props-furniture and the hands on, scenic art portion. We worked on Zoom to form a set design proposition. We then got Ibi’s (our director, who was super flexible, open and easy to work with) consent for it in the design presentation we put together. Designers have their own ideas and co-designing can sound tricky, so our professor merged the good ideas together and made it work. So, part of the concept I initially thought which
was retained, was the relationship between the exterior and interior, although if working on my own I would have made it a bit more surrealistic, metaphoric, suggestive rather than obvious and descriptive, less literal.

My research image that was very most successful with my professor is the one below, and based on it and other research images we provided, we agreed on how to encapsulate the essence and esthetics of the play.

![Research Photo](image)

**Fig. 4.1 Research Photo, looking for an aesthetic – Rachel Rose, Model for *The Sound of Music***

This is how my initial approach was, with the exterior inside the interior, in a glass – like house contour, and a few set changes, such as below:
Figure 4.2 Photoshop and pastel chalk renderings of Interior scenes under different lighting

Figure 4.3 Photoshop and chalk pastel renderings for interior scenes under different lights

Figure 4.4 Outside gardens and moors scenes under different lights
To create the world of the play, my research led me to the theatre shop, (except for the purchased) in search of furniture and textures that we wanted to use and compose the world with, since I was the one assigned with the dressing and set art part of the show.

The set was predominantly exterior, with a stage floor painted as, as layered fields, and moors in the distance in a very deep perspective simulated through light to dark gradient in paint, two fixed “stones - hills” platforms with more steps, two mobile ones with two steps only, on wheels, coming in and out from the wings, for additional acting spaces. They were dressed to look like stones with bits of vegetation of various sorts and textures and colors stuck to them and placed in front of a middle piece, hills in perspective, as a skyline, silhouette, to rhyme with the sky contour. A contoured field-hill was created from a sustained plywood set of panels put together in a continuous line to match the sky one, as wide as the stage opening, as the main background made of bushes and hills in the distance, giving depth and perspective to the landscape, but also texture. It was decorated on top and dressed with sculpted and decorated Styrofoam, with foliage and branches. To mimic fallen trees or bushes but with the function of handrails for the fixed platforms, we added metallic pipe to the fixed platforms, for the safety of the actors when climbing and jumping on the platforms.

We marked changes from one story to the other, one subject and setting, one period to another by changes of props and furniture, alternating between interior spaces through furniture elements, such as table, armchairs, textile partition, fireplace, etc. to exterior elements. Backstage exits and entries (Shakespeare Doors) were decorated with drapery all around them as a window treatment interior lateral house entries and exits. In the script it was Mr. Darcy’s Pemberley domain, now turned museum after years, where they
all come together in the end. A big wall come down from the attic in the third act, with large off white French doors which I wanted initially to be made of books, all around the doors, or at least look like made of books, as a metaphor, a symbol of those times.

Then we realized there was no time for ambitious ideas, so instead we used burgundy and golden silk wallpaper, molding and five foot of marble at the base, and we decorated it with aged bronze sculpted frames of paintings representing their ancestors.

The relationship of the interior with the exterior aspects, as well as nature and interior textures was present or suggested in the colors, wall on the green fields-like painted stage, but also through the sandblasted French doors’ glass, that mysteriously announced the fields’ silhouettes and like a leitmotif were a permanent presence behind them. For this I covered the fake transparent glass with matte sticker self-adhesive foil on top of it, for a translucent look.

![Figure 4.5 Production Photo - Relationship between the outdoors set elements and inside ones, photo taken in fade out, in between scenes](image)

We made sure that the fabric of the wallpaper, marble, etc., as well as the color palette, were in the same period, texture and world as the costume design, here made by
MFA Candidate Campbell Childers. It was also a pleasure and very productive working with lighting design students, MFA Candidate Lawrence Ware, our lighting Designer for the show, whose creative vision and good chromatic eye enhanced the set and dramatically illustrated temperature changes and tensions in the action. Working with Lawrence also helped give many changes and shades in the textures of the set, the moors platforms, stage painting and the clouds sheets, through their transparency, sometimes becoming full and sometimes transparent or full of electricity. One of our good ideas was making the clouds move, alternating their coming down and up from their rigging, combining at times two of them to move together or just one or all three, depending on what moment we wanted to enhance. For instance, all three let down in a very low position was meant to accentuate the dramatic literal and metaphorical storm in the play.

Fig. 4.6 Production Photo - Example of various movements of the clouds panels, heavier look with the upstage cloud lowered down to the maximum and first one very high up

The trees that were conceived as dramatic expressive black silhouettes on a see-through fishnet support, 10-12ft high, we thought of for the Wuthering Heights story, to
represent it as characters and symbolic presences to illustrate the story’s subject, mark it through these inserted sinister, savage natural elements were also coming down at times, very slowly, to mark their world, sometimes lower, as beaten down skeletons of bushes and sometimes up, present, in their full height.

Figure 4.7 The Tree panels mid stage that came up and down in various scenes

I thought, for marking a moment in the Little Women part of the play, of putting in a swing, coming down from above, with a thick rope and a thick plank, but decorated with flowers and branches, to suggest the fragility of...men. We had also two exterior stone benches, an easel, textile partition, trunks, bar, fire pit accessories, etc.
Figure 4.8 Examples of indoors set elements, mobile like the multifaceted bar

Figure 4.9 Storm and changing elements on stage, easel, room divider (partition wall), etc.
MAKING OF YOU ON THE MOORS NOW – SCENIC ART

PAINTING, SCULPTING, DECORATING, PLASTERING

I started by decorating the two trees we put in as an intermediary layer towards upstage, on very thin black fishnet support, two big sheets of fishnet seven feet by ten feet, the decorated area. In terms of materials chosen, fishnet was a good choice for transparency of the support and visibility of the trees only, and then treated more like tapestry, with textile fabrics collated to form the trees. They were made to be in a very expressive, dramatic look, like skeletons of trees rather, beaten down by the wind, mostly serving the Wuthering Heights portion of the play (show).

I then made three large pieces of muslin wide as the stage into clouds, each piece of the three being cut in different contour, shape and size, being overlapped, moving up and down during the show. They were left with certain transparencies, (for lighting from behind, creating thus a see-through effect) painted in different shades each, in a cloud pattern patina. The first, most downstage one, was painted azul blue with shades and highlights of faint mint green, the second and middle one, in discreet purple shades with highlights of cerulean, and the third, most upstage one, in shades of discreet navy blue and pink highlights. They had the purpose to mark the tensions and climate, atmosphere changes: some more serene, some marking dramatic moments in the show.
When painting the stage, I had to first make six feet apart white discreet white marks for the actors’ safety during Covid times. These marks allowed the actors to keep the minimum safe space between them. Then I painted the floor, the fields in a gradient, to force and accentuate the perspective, from bright yellow shades downstage to deep
green upstage. It was painted in layers, in six parcels, with organic vegetation strokes. It
gave the stage extra depth and texture of a field, in a subtle way, but creating plasticity.

The director initially requested that the stage and fields to be covered with artificial
plastic grass, but I decorated the edge of the stage with different heights and colors bits of
bushes, artificial but very expressive made, painted too afterwards to be integrated in the
whole landscape, in the same world. Their purpose was besides dressing the stage, to cut
the very straight line of the edge of the stage and interrupt it, make it into a natural,
organic sinuous contour.

Fig. 4.12 Detail of Fields painting in waves
and gradient for perspective enhancing
Fig. 4.13 *You on the Moors Now* Stage with all dressing and painting on, in preparation, example of grass and foliage applied on the contour of the stage to break the line and make it more organic looking.

The horizontal line, the skyline was marked by two joint pieces of plywood on frame, wide as the stage opening, fretted into an organic line, drawing fields in perspective. These were plastered with bas relief sculpted Styrofoam “rocks” decorated then with painted foliage, fishnets of various colors and sorts, various pieces of green velvet and textile bits and accessories, all integrated and blended together to simulate bushes and fields in the distance, overlapping in depth.

Fig. 4.14 Detail of the background dressed ascending *Hill* contour

For the actors’ movement on more spaces and altitudes, we had four platforms in steps, to be dressed, painted, sculpted and decorated as levels of stone, organic and nature.
green look, again, with Ibi, our director, it was all about the green for this play. There were two fixed platforms, larger in the upstage plan, and two downstage smaller ones, mobile ones, on wheels. On top of a structure of MDF and wood, I used Styrofoam facades on the counter step, collaged textile pieces, painted fake rock textures on muslin, collated accessories of all kinds from the nature and its various colors.

Figure 4.15 Detail of Moor mobile platform SR

The set had also an interior location with large central French doors, a big wallpaper wall. I worked on the wallpaper’s patina and painted marble imitation at the five foot tall base of it, in burgundy, brown, golden and cream colors blend, and a back wall, with stucco Venetian painting effect, to imitate dark cherry red marble-like surface. I then integrated all the elements through a unifying patina all over the chandeliers, molding, off white ages French doors, pictures frames, furniture, etc.

We came up with cubical pieces that would act as more pieces of furniture such as desk, bar and DJ booth, on wheels, brought in and used different destinations, therefore my idea was to make a different treatment and look, material imitation, on each side of these cubes, to be turned on the other sides depending on the subject they were serving, in burgundy, gold and sour cherry shades in a stucco venetian patina.
One of the interesting aspects of the scenic art here is the relationship and particular setting of the interior and the exterior, in terms of colors and textures, the way they sit together. For the interior scenes, I dressed and painted some other props and elements too, such as room divider on both sides and different fabrics and colors to mark different interiors, and the easel, coffee table, fire pit and accessories, etc.

Figure 4.17 Marble imitation for the base of the French doors wall in lighter warm shades
Figure 4.18 The French doors Interior Wall with *wallpaper*, *marble* and molding paint and patina

Figure 4.19 Production Photo - *You on the Moors Now* Third Act, *Museum* Party Scene
CHAPTER 5

PROFESSIONAL INTERNSHIP AT

LAMAMA EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE CLUB

In my third year of study, the internship year, I had the opportunity to be a Scenic Design intern at LaMaMa Experimental Theatre Club, because of my main USC Scenic Design Professor Nic Ularu, who had many projects there and kindly recommended me to the people who he worked with. I was directly and mainly involved in hands-on type of work, being a stage hand many times, but my favorite aspect was the great opportunity to connect with many resident artists and designers working various projects. I was mainly working with the Technical Director and artist, Mark Tambella, and was involved in all of their projects for a whole academic year. I started in August 2021 and finished in May 2022.

LaMaMa ETC., being an experimental theatre, and one of the biggest of its kind, was founded by Ellen Stewart in 1961. Stewart was a fashion designer that turned into a manager, producer and director of the theatre. She bought the two buildings on East 4th Street in Manhattan and started in the basement of one, surrounded by great artists like Sam Shepard. The enterprise started initially as a theatre café and after slowly developing and growing with connections in America and Europe, started travelling abroad with many shows and inviting theatre companies back to the States. The theatre accommodated many accomplished guests artists. It initiated a new movement of
improvisation and experimental underground theater, where everyone that came with a new or good idea was welcome and supported with the common resources of the community talents ready to jump in. What first started as a café, under the LaMaMa Café name, developed as a black box theater and then escalated to the main stage, set in the two buildings obtained and developed by Ellen and her artistic community. It then travelled outside the states, in Europe and other continents, establishing the LaMaMa name.

It hosts many shows that already come in a completed artistic shape, therefore I have worked sometimes as a stagehand for shows, and sometimes only in the technical preparation of a show, such as for the one month long Puppets Festival, created by the Jim Henson Foundation, (since 2004, a biannual festival show showcasing new contemporary adult puppet theatre.) I had the pleasure and opportunity to work on different aspects of shows.

I did Vectorworks lighting plots and set files, puppets or set arrangements or painting for a shows in the Puppet Festival. I worked on shows like Lunch with Sonia, Dreaming, The Tall Keyaki Tree, When I put on Your Glove, Body Concert. Other opportunities included stagehand work, stage paining, puppets and also 2D and 3D Vectorworks drafting for sets and lights. For a good number of shows I had the opportunity to create, get involved in artistic work, such as: numerous canvas and mural paintings for in the play The Indigo Room by Timothy WhiteEagle. He wanted to create a circus-looking like installation for the stage and the hallway before the stage, where audience would interact with the show, reminiscent of a town fair, with multiple games and art installations for people to walk into before the actual show on stage.
Figure 5.1 *The Indigo Room - The Whale*

Figure 5.2 *The indigo Room - The Monster that eats everything*
Figure 5.3 *The Indigo Room* - One of the two parallel *Sunlight* black and white murals for the hallway installation
After that, later that year came again the opportunity for a more notable involvement, with artistic implication, doing Set Art and Set Assistance, painting Paper Mache puppet heads and assembling the set for Theodora Skipitares's show, called *Grand Panorama*.

Figure 5.4 *Grand Panorama* - Big Papier Mache puppet head, Frederick Douglass’s head in the show

Figure 5.5 *Grand Panorama* - Frederick Douglass Puppet head detail
Regarding my involvement in other shows, I can mention doing Set Art and Assistance for *Cannabis! A Viper Vaudeville*, set Design by Nic Benacerraf, helping to make props and set pieces and set painting, etc. I also did Set Decoration for the Christmas Show *Christmas in NickyLand*, by Nicky Paraiso, where I designed ornaments and decorations for the background panels.

![Figure 5.6 Christmas in NickyLand background panels with decorations](image)

Later on I helped designing and making the Exhibition Arrangement for *History/Our Story, Trail to Tulsa*, directed by James E. Reynolds, and made a mini exhibition point in the area before entering the stage, where the audience got to be introduced to the historic part of the play, in photographs displayed as an exhibition on various walls and separations.
An amazing opportunity was also working as Costumes Assistant under Gabriel Berry as Costume Designer for *Balkan Bordello*, by Jeton Niraj, where I had the chance, besides working with Gabriel, who is a legend in LaMaMa’s history, being one of the original designers discovered by Ellen Stewart and who got famous for designing costumes in great shows like *The Trojan Women Project*. I had the liberty to compose some elements for the costumes, to source them and paint them and choose or assemble elements, when the costumes had missing parts or when they had to be rearranged, this being a travelling show, on the road, in the Balkans, in between Kosovo and New York.

Figure 5.7 Production Photo for *Balkan Bordello* at LaMaMa ETC., New York
Other involvements to mention would be as a Costume Assistant for *Flowers for Kazuo Ohno* and Leonard Cohen), by Alvaro Restrepo, also Set, Costumes and Puppets Assistant for *LaMaMa Kids* and *LaMaMa Seniors*, etc.

Maybe the most complex and intense involvement was doing 2D Vectorworks Drafting, Co-Set Design, Costume Design, Hair and Make-up for *Misdemeanor Dream* by Spiderwoman Theatre. For this show and some of my involvement in it, I had the immense joy to be mentioned a few places in the New York Times review for Costumes Design.

![Review: In 'Misdemeanor Dream,' Speaking to the Unseen](image)

The costumes are showy, though if one of the performers could be voted Best Dressed it would be Gloria, Muriel Miguel’s sister and one of the co-founders of Spiderwoman. At a spry 95, she is a dazzling participant, wearing a cosmic star-spangled dress with sleeves adorned with what look like tiny wind chimes hanging from her wrists; every movement of her arms is accented with an airy tinkle and chime.

Figure 5.8 Bits of New York Times review, parts in which the *A Misdemeanor Dre* costume Design's mentioned
The written and interpreted characters and the birth of the costumes, inspired by nature, dictated the essence and the symbolic elements in the costumes. *Tiger Badger* was a human animal hybrid embodied in one creature, with fur vest and leather apron and other Native American elements on, as well as an animal tattoo like make-up on his face. *Super Badass Senior* was a scarred fierce senior superhero, with wired cape on the back that looked like flying, super hero vest and motor biker trousers. *Root* was a mix of elements derived from earth and fauna, (such as actual roots and patches of leather composing her skirt and top, etc.). Another one had bird elements referenced on the costume, then a Pop Diva-Wanna-Be fairy, with pop pointy bra, with chains, wings and tiara, as well as lid shoes. *The Star* had a glow in the dark starry dress, with chimes hanging from her sleeves. They all lived on the border of natural and supernatural, fantasy, dream or fairytale and real, material existential, day to day life.

Working for the set entailed coming a bit later in the show, most of the set already having been conceived in Canada by the team, (Sherry Guppy, Penny Couchie, Sid Bobb) set on stage for previous shows that they had. So it was a matter of rearranging and 2D
drafting in Vectorworks and adapting it for the stage of LaMaMa, also collaborating from
the distance, the designers team being and staying until the opening and the duration of
the shows in Canada. I collaborated on Zoom with the design team located in Canada for
the set. It was all together an amazing experience, a great exposure to the Native Culture,
world and traditions, and a great complex work opportunity that I maybe wouldn't have
had if it wasn't for this amazing project. Besides being a part of a fantastic team and
contributing to a complex work, it also allowed me to practice all I learned as an MFA
student in Theatre Design at USC.

Figure 5.10 A Misdemeanor Dream - Tiger Badger
Figure 5.11 *A Misdemeanor Dream* - Tiger Badger

Figure 5.12 *A Misdemeanor Dream* - Production Photo
Figure 5.13 A Misdemeanor Dream, Root costume

Figure 5.14 A Misdemeanor Dream, Root make-up and costume detail
Figure 5.15 Senior Badass SuperHero with back cape in action

Figure 5.16 The Bird make-Up detail and costume
Figure 5.17 *The Star* and *Pop Diva Fairy*, on the right

Figure 5.18 *A Misdemeanor Dream* Vectorworks - Groundplan with Section and Elevation
Figure 5.19 *A Misdemeanor Dream* Vectorworks File – Elevation

The most influential and significant gain as an intern at LaMaMa ETC was their openness to introduce me to various theatre productions. I had the opportunity to meet and work with many directors and designers, a diversity of worlds that artistically collided and definitely changed and broadened my vision and perception of contemporary American theatre.

This internship with a theatre company in New York City taught me a lot about the making of production in a professional environment. Besides my design collaboration, I also participated in LaMaMa Family Show Winter Exhibition at LaMaMa Galleria with a pastel chalk costume rendering, among other 50 resident artists of various styles and mediums.
Figure 5.20 *The Brother* costume rendering exhibit

Figure 5.21 Me with my work at the *LaMaMa Family Show*
CONCLUSION

I see and appreciate this wonderful and meaningful experience gained at the University of South Carolina as an MFA, as a Set Designer MFA Candidate, going through old and new territories, like Scenic Art, Stage Design and all it entails, Costume Design and Costume construction process, and introduction to Lighting Design, learning important software like Vectorworks, Pedagogy, Text Analysis, working in the theatre shop, stage hands etc. I came to be even more fond as well as aware of all aspects of theatre and seeing the importance of everything that makes the theatre, all aspects in the industry, also being an intern in an extraordinary place like LaMaMa and getting to work with meaningful companies due to it. I definitely think that having gone through all these contributed heavily to shaping me into a better, more profound artist.

My plans now are to continue working in theatres here and hopefully get back to my big first love, film industry, therefore to continue my theatre and film experience as well as degrees that I gathered back in Europe, to continue my development as an artist, set designer, costume designer, etc. To exhibit more, individually and groups, to enhance and enlarge my horizon, cultural experience as a foreign artist and to eventually find my place and hopefully bring something new and different, influence and be influenced, inspire and be inspired, as we all merge whilst we bring our flavor and color, style and unique mark in the middle of these beautiful mixed cultures in America. I strongly believe that’s partly the advantage and the purpose of functioning as a native of a
different nation and culture placed in a foreign land as well as art context and scene, that being the very true form of cultural exchange, taking in the best ideas from this new place I exist in and bringing the best ideas from home, combining together the two worlds successfully.
REFERENCES


