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A Scenic Design for Neil LaBute's The Shape of Things

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A Scenic Design for Neil LaBute's *The Shape of Things*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

by

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Lindenwood College, 1990

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ABSTRACT

The Shape of Things is not a play that would use a traditional box set. The biggest challenge was trying to create and then draft a non-traditional set that could be used for ten distinct locations. This paper is an analysis of the play from the perspective of a scenic designer. It includes past production information, an in-depth look at how religion affects the story and a journal following the show from design to strike. The appendices included various images rejected and/or used for the projection screens, design plans used for construction and photos from the production.

This thesis is approved for
Recommendation to the
Graduate Council

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Donnell Walsh

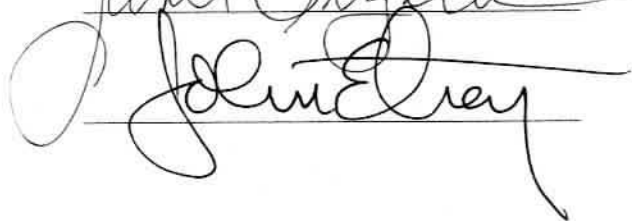
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all those who assisted in the creation of the set for *The Shape of Things*. Many of these people have been named in the body of this paper. Lyndsay Hicks, my director, was a joy to work with, allowing me the creative freedom necessary to build my dream set--a set which could not have been built without the dedication of Brian Paladin and Dustin Massie. Thanks also go to Nick Kelly for suggesting that Lyndsay and I team up in the first place. Were it not for the patience, understanding and knowledge of Tim Poertner, the drafting part of this design would have been halted before it began. And finally, thanks to my sounding boards, Kylor Greene and Drew Matney, for not only listening to my design ideas but also to my complaints and frustrations, and for reminding me that this project was worth it.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this paper and my degree to my son, Caleb. He has endured late nights, missing dinners and all my frustrations. He has sacrificed much and complained little. I did this for you, dude.

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CHAPTER ONE-INTRODUCTION

The Production

My master's thesis project began in March of 2012 when *The Shape of Things* was chosen as the play and given the first slot of the fall production schedule. The set was designed in the early summer of 2012 and was built starting in late June and finishing in September, just before performance. Rehearsals were held from August 13 until September 19, with performances on September 20-23 at the Lindenwood University Emerson Black Box Theatre in St. Charles, Missouri.

This show was the thesis project for three master's candidates. Joining me in this production were Lyndsay Hicks, the director, and Kelsey Amann, who played Evelyn. Also involved were faculty and staff members. Tim Poertner designed the lights and Donna Northcott designed costumes. Dustin Massie, shop foreman, and Brian Paladin, fellow graduate assistant in the scene shop, were invaluable as the construction crew. Undergraduates Courtney McDaniels and Danny Mauk rounded off the production team as stage manager and sound designer, respectively. Also involved were Billy Walkenhorst as Adam, Cassie Ballard as Jenny, and Josh Wolk as Phillip.

The Script

In an email sent to the student body at Lindenwood, Lyndsay Hicks described the show. She said:

“In a contemporary retelling of the fall of man, Adam is once again seduced—this time by a beautiful and sophisticated art student, rightfully named Eve(lyn). It is a true match of beauty and the geek as Evelyn and Adam embark on a tumultuous relationship which changes Adam for the better. Or does it? LuBute baits the question of art imitating life or vice-versa. At what point does creation become manipulation and the artist become an assassin?” (Hicks)

A copy of this email has been included in Appendix 6, page 78.

College junior Adam meets Master's candidate Evelyn during her attempt to deface “false art” at the museum where he works. What follows is a whirlwind romance which sees Adam changing in many ways to better himself for his new love. These changes make Adam go from awkward “English lit prick” to something far more confident and attractive. The changes also lead to a forbidden kiss with a girl he was once too shy to ask on a date and who is now his best friend's fiancée. Jenny's guilt leads her to confess to Phillip who then tells Evelyn. Evelyn in turn confronts Adam, giving him an ultimatum--give up his friends or give up her. Adam chooses to abandon his friendships and proposes to Evelyn.

The story culminates in Evelyn's thesis presentation in which we learn that her project was a “human sculpture” who she is proud to have changed inside and out through the use of clever manipulation and lies. Adam is humiliated to learn that Evelyn never truly cared for him other than as a test subject and that he gave up his friends for no reason. The audience is left wondering if Evelyn is a sociopath who truly doesn't care

about Adam or anyone else, or if the benefits given to Adam in the form of attractiveness and confidence justify the lies that she told.

Evelyn is clearly a manipulative artist, who is confident, attractive and opinionated. Throughout the show, Adam is shy and awkward, insecure and easily led from the few friends he once had. While he slowly gains confidence, his insecurities still lie underneath. Jenny is quiet and conservative, an ordinary girl who tries hard to please others. Her fiance, Phillip is loud and appears angry, overconfident and controlling, yet he seems to be a caring friend with hints of vulnerability.

The story takes place in the present day over an eighteen week time period during the spring semester at a small college in a small town. There are a total of ten different locations in the script. The show begins in a museum near the statue of God. The next scene takes place at a restaurant where Adam and Evelyn wait for his friends. The characters meet again at Phillip's apartment followed by an intimate bedroom scene. The park scene, with the forbidden kiss, is followed by the scene in a doctor's office and then another scene on the college lawn. Finally, the confrontation takes place in a coffee shop. Evelyn's thesis presentation occurs in an auditorium first, then continues in an exhibition hall.

Goals

This play was not the first choice of either myself or the director. The plays that we had submitted were turned down for one reason or another. Kelsey Amann had already been approved to play Evelyn in *The Shape of Things* and needed a production team. Since the department was still looking for a first show for the fall, Lyndsay and I were approached about doing this play. Upon reading the script, I was drawn into the show. From a scenic designer's point of view, it is a challenging piece, needing ten separate locations to be combined into a single set. It gave me the opportunity to create a non-traditional set rather than a box set. I would be able to rely more on artistic ideas rather than realism. I was glad for this chance because I was hoping for a show that would require something more challenging than a box set.

My goal for this show was to create a non-realistic set that was beautiful and artistic. It needed to be flexible enough to be used for many different settings without a lot of scene change time. I envisioned a set which was a neutral space that could use many set pieces and images to show location and time. I wanted to make something non-traditional and non-proscenium. I wanted to make a set that was different than what the school had produced in recent seasons.

CHAPTER TWO-RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

The Playwright

Morality and Mormonism in the Works of Neil LaBute

Many people who have been disturbed by the plays and films of Neil LaBute have wondered what could possess someone to write such stories. In an article written by Mary Dickson, she asks "how could a nice Mormon boy...have written this" (Dickson). The answer comes from a discovery of LaBute's upbringing and education. Equally, his relationship with his religion and his own personal philosophies must also be examined.

Beginning his life in Detroit in 1963, LaBute and his family moved to Lake Liberty in eastern Washington where he spent the rest of his childhood (Wood xi). He had a tumultuous relationship with his father, Richard LaBute, who was a long haul trucker. Richard was often away from home and created an uncomfortable atmosphere when he was there. As a result of this, the young LaBute often escaped into the world of theatre and a local non-denominational church's Bible study classes (Dehlin). While Labute insists that he doesn't get many story ideas from his family and background, he also admits that the elder Labute, who was considered by many to be handsome and charming, was possibly a model for many of his male characters (Walker, Tim; Dehlin).

Labute's escape became geographic when his high school counselor encouraged him to apply to Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. BYU is a traditionally Mormon school and, even though LaBute was not Mormon, his Mormon counselor was able to get him a minority scholarship to the school (Dickson). Labute liked going to a school that was far away from his father, both physically and spiritually (Dehlin). He

studied theatre, wrote monologues for fellow students and graduated with degrees in both literature and dramatic writing (Bigsby 4; Istel 38).

In 1981, while at BYU, he converted to Mormonism. He explained that his conversion was partially because the religion was all around him at the time. He also felt welcomed by the religion (Bigsby 5). Some people question his conversion due to what they may see as outlandish beliefs of the religion. For example, in 1823, Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, told followers that two angels came to him and led him to two golden plates on which the missing Book of Mormon was written (Bushman 19). Labute's reaction to these questions is to question ideas from other religions, such as the Ark of the Covenant or the Garden of Eden. According to LaBute, they are all equally outlandish. LaBute married Lisa Gore after his graduation from BYU. She was a devout member of the Mormon church and later would hold church office (Dehlin).

LaBute continued his education at the University of Kansas, New York University, the Royal Academy of London and, finally, back to BYU to receive his doctorate. Although he was welcomed back to the school and even honored as a promising and brilliant playwright, his works were considered scandalous and caused a lot of trouble. After school, he went on to teach at IPFW in Fort Wayne, Indiana where he began making films. He has received many awards, directed and written numerous movies and continues to write and direct for the theatre ("Neil Labute").

When asked about the scandals over his plays, Labute admits that as a Mormon, he is still "practicing" (Dehlin). In the Mormon church, stories are supposed to inspire

and teach what is right. LaBute likes to do the opposite and show what is wrong so that the audience can learn from that (Dickson). While working on his PhD at BYU, he was rehearsing his play *Lepers*. This play would later become his first movie, *In the Company of Men* (Wood 19). The play is about two men who plot to seduce and then horribly dump a deaf woman with whom they work ("Essential"). The school was so upset by the show that they cancelled the performances. They also locked LaBute out of the theatre so that he couldn't perform the show. The school only let LaBute back into the theatre to conduct an exam, which he then cut short so the play could go on (Wood 19).

LaBute's writing style has been called many things: complex, amoral, moral and misanthropic (Wood 3; "Fat Pig"). LaBute says of his audience that they are lazy and just want to watch a show, see an expected ending and go home. But he is not content to let that happen. He likes to give the audience ethical questions without giving them any answers (Wood 3). He says his job is to take a happy family or comfortable situation, poke his finger in and see what happens ("Fat Pig"). He admits that he doesn't always like his characters. They are usually extremes and are rarely people with which he would like to hang out (Dehlin). But in the end, they are just characters. His movies, however disturbing, are just movies. Labute doesn't understand why people get so disturbed by his plays or his films (Reese).

The major problem that the Church of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) has with Labute's movies and plays deals with the language and sexual content. The church is very clear about what its members are allow to watch. Labute's movies are frequently given an R-rating, a rating not allowed by Mormons ("Essential"; Dehlin). Actor Aaron Eckert, who

is a college friend of LaBute, is a practicing Mormon. He admits that he can't take his family to see the movies that he's done with his friend, yet he supports him by continually appearing in his films. LaBute's wife has also been very verbal about her opinions about his films. Not as supportive as Eckert, Lisa has been known as LaBute's biggest critic (Reese). She believes he is just trying to shock people and once begged him unsuccessfully to cancel a production of *Your Friends and Neighbors* (Reese; Dehlin). They have since broken up, something which LaBute partially blames on his writings (Walker, Tim). His children, who have been raised in the church, say they hate everything he writes (Dehlin). Another problem that sometimes makes the Mormon church uncomfortable are the ethical questioning that LaBute likes so much to make. Members are not used to being challenged by objectionable ideas, preferring to only think of good things (Rasband 217).

In 1999, Labute wrote a play consisting of three monologues. The play is called *Bash: Latter-Day Plays* and features three Mormon characters who, on the surface, seemed to be wholesome, attractive and pure. Thomas Garvey describes them as "a sparkling slice of American apple pie. Only the pie is laced with poison..." (Garvey). Each character hides an ugly secret. LaBute chose the Mormon religion because it was what he knew (Biggsby 249). He says he was too lazy to use anything else. His objective was not to discredit the church, but to show how people who seemed to be very good, moral people could still commit horrible acts (Dehlin). The problem was that most people, so the church thought, would see this as an attack on the Mormon religion, showing what atrocities happened within the church.

It was this play that led to LaBute's disfellowship from the church. LaBute was called before a committee of fifteen men who stripped him of certain rights in the church. He was no longer allowed to attend services, he could not give talks or public prayers (Bigsby 25). It was a step before excommunication. In 2005, when it became clear that excommunication was near, LaBute voluntarily left the church for good. He believed it was better for his children to have a father who used to be a church member rather than one who had been kicked out of the church (Dehlin).

Other plays have religious overtones, even if the characters are not Mormons. *The Shape of Things*, written in 2001 and turned into a film in 2003, includes two characters who are modern updates on the Adam and Eve story. Adam and Evelyn meet around a statue of God. Evelyn then literally crosses the line, causing Adam to do the same, thus starting the fall of Adam into the world of temptation (Olson par. 6). There is even a moment in the play where Adam appears with a bandage on his nose. When asked what happened, he simply replies, "I fell" (par. 16). While the traditional Christian story views Adam as the perfect man who commits the sin of eating from the forbidden tree and thereby falling from grace, the Mormons have a different interpretation. They believe in pre-mortality. We exist before we are born and must make the choice to become mortal in order to test ourselves to see if we are worthy of the higher levels of the afterlife. When God gave Adam and Eve the rules—go forth and multiply, and don't eat from that tree—the Mormons see that as a choice. Since humans cannot go forth and multiply without losing some innocence, the fruit must be eaten. This choice allowed for

all the other souls to attain mortality and ultimately paradise. Eve is seen as a heroine, not as a puppet of the devil (Riess 27-28). The Eve figure, Evelyn, of this story is not concerned with good or bad. Those are outdated morals that she feels are subjective. She believes that morality has no place in art. If you feel something is true then it is true for you. LaBute wonders whether we are more affected by surface things than by more important, deeper issues (Olson par. 19, par.25).

Break Noon, which premiered in 2010, is the story of a man who survives a mass shooting at his office and claims he was saved by the voice of God. He spends the play trying to figure out if he should tell anyone. Those he tells believe him to be either delusional or suffering from post traumatic syndrome (Kennedy; Smith). The question to the audience is not only whether the man is telling the truth but also would we believe it if the next prophet shows up. The Mormon Church was founded by Joseph Smith, who claimed to be a prophet. The character in *Break Noon* is named John Smith. That could be coincidence, but not likely (Kennedy).

The ultimate question for LaBute's works is what he was trying to accomplish with these plays and films. Rachel Weisz, actress in the play and film versions of *The Shape of Things*, believes that LaBute is a moralist and his plays are morality plays, helping us see our flaws and making us better people (Istel 38). R.W. Rashad feels that it is the duty of a writer to tell the truth, without regard for what others think (Rashad 219). LaBute sees himself as the person who simply writes down the wrongdoings of others. He explores how good people can fall into evil and shows the audience the options available to them, allowing them to make their own choice about what is good and what

is bad. He hopes this will lead people to becoming something better than what they are, though he doubts that will happen (Dehlin).

Production History

The Shape of Things premiered in May 2001 at the Almeida Theatre in London, England. A preview was held on May 24 and performances were May 30 through June 23, 2001. The play was directed by the playwright, Neil LaBute. The scenic designer was Giles Cadle. Costumes were designed by Lynnette Meyer. Mark Henderson designed the lights for the show and Fergus O'Hare designed the sound. The role of Evelyn was played by Rachel Weisz. Paul Rudd played Adam. Jenny and Phillip were played by Gretchen Mol and Fred Weller.

Whatsonstage.com's review of this premiere performance of *The Shape of Things* spends much of its time explaining the plot of the play. It mentions that the Almeida stage has changed in much the same way that the character Adam changes in the play. It briefly mentions the actors, only to say that Rachel Weisz as Evelyn is "repellent and winning" and that the other actors were "tremendous" and the evening "compelling". There is an addendum by another reviewer that complains about never really understanding Evelyn's motivations. This reviewer also mentions the unnecessary closing of curtains during scene changes. Then the reviewer praises the set designer, saying that he "made the most impact" (Shenton).

The show was nominated for many awards. Rachel Weisz received a nomination for Outstanding Actress and Fred Weller for Outstanding Actor in the 2002 Lucille Lortel Awards. The play was nominated for Outstanding Play at the same awards show. Nominations for Outstanding Play and Outstanding Director were received from the 2002

Drama Desk Awards. 2002 Theatre World awards were given to both actresses in the show, Rachel Weisz and Gretchen Mol (Lortel).

The New York Times Review of the 2001 Off-Broadway production of *The Shape of Things* would cause most readers to stay home and watch TV. Ben Brantley dislikes the script, the set, the music and all the actors, except for Gretchen Mol who plays Jenny. He says that Neil LaBute has written better scripts, better characters and better dialogue. He claims the script has hints of greatness but falls flat. The American audience didn't have the same reactions as the London audience that gasped at the surprise twist in the performance. The music was too loud, supposedly to keep the audience from discussing what they had seen between scenes. Costumes, set and acting all seemed unauthentic. The only exception was the character of Jenny which Brantley felt was disproportionately sympathetic (Brantley). Ironically, this production featured the same actors and director as the premiere.

In 2004, the play returned to London. This time the show had a different cast and director and was performed at the New Ambassadors Theatre in the West End. This time the show was directed by Julian Webber. The cast included Alicia Witt, Enzo Cilenti, Sienna Guillory and James Murray. The set was designed by Simon Higlett, lights by Adam Silverman and sound by Richard Price. British Theatre Guide's review of the New Ambassadors Theatre production of *The Shape of Things* is less than flattering. The review begins with a short history lesson of the play, recalling its premiere performance as well as the 2003 movie. Each actor in this current production, with the exception of James Murray, is listed in the review with at least one movie credit. The reviewer then

goes on to compare the current Evelyn with the original, saying that Miss Witt was unable to pull off the nastiness required of the character. None of the other actors are able to quite get into their roles either. The reviewer suggests watching the movie instead of this production, even though he admits that the play is well written (Fisher).

In 2009, a theatre from South Wales, Australia performed the show. According to the review, the show was a huge success, receiving a Best Professional Actress award from CONDA (City of Newcastle Drama Award) for Giverny Lewis who played Evelyn. This production took place November 18 through 21, 2009 at The Stooaged Theatre in Newcastle. ("The Shape of Things (2009) Review").

Researching reviews for *The Shape of Things* was not an easy task. It has only been eleven years since its premiere, so the amount of information is limited. Some theatre websites had reviews without a reference, so they were not reliable. Most reviews spend a lot of time saying that they didn't want to give away the plot but did just that in hints without actually saying what happened. Most reviews mentioned the Almeida premiere and the 2003 movie, comparing the current actors to the original actors (who were the same actors in the movie). Based on all the reviews I read, this play could be a huge success or a dismal failure. There is no guarantee just based on the play. The target audience could play a big part in the success of this play. Also, the production team and the actors could make or break this show.

The World of the Play

The following analysis of the show *The Shape of Things* by Neil LaBute includes information that is directly taken or inferred from the words of the script. The script analysis used is from *Play Directing*, a textbook by Francis Hodge and Michael McLain, and has been adapted for scenic design.

Early in the script, in scene one, we discover that we are dealing with college students in a small town. Evelyn says the leaf cluster on the statue was added because of “complaints from local townspeople” (Labute 9). From her use of the word “townspeople”, we can assume that this is not a big city. Later in the play, she says “It’s a little college town in the middle of nowhere” (34), further emphasizing the belief that this is a small town. It is not until scene nine that we learn the name of the college, Clarkson (117) The line doesn’t make it clear if this is just the name of the college or if it is also the name of the town. A quick search on google.com reveals a real Clarkson College in Omaha, Nebraska. Perhaps this is the model for the story.

There are ten scenes in this script, each one taking place in a different locations. While each scene has a heading that tells the reader where the scene is located, there are also hints in the scripts that make it clear to the audience. It’s these hints that I will be using here.

Adam works on campus at an art museum. This is the location of scene one. After he discovers Evelyn with a spray can, Adam says “paint’s not a really great thing to have in a museum” (6). This statement alone doesn’t tell the audience that the museum is on the campus. It’s not until later when Phillip mentions the vandalism happening “on

our campus” that the audience knows that the museum belongs to the college (31). Evelyn tells Adam during this scene that she is graduating in May and is just getting started on her thesis project (10-11). From this the audience knows that the scene is taking place early in the spring semester.

Most of scene two happens without knowing where Adam and Evelyn are. The audience knows that they are waiting for Jenny and Phillip to appear, but it is not clear where or why. The other couple finally shows up in the scene on page 25 when Phillip says “we’ll be eating soon” and “we should grab a table.” These two lines tell the audience that Adam and Evelyn have been waiting in a restaurant lobby. Adam mentions that he and Evelyn have seen each other “every day, so far” since they first met (17). This tells the audience that several days have passed since the first scene.

While, in scene three, Phillip clearly states “we’re at my place now” (30), scenes four and five are not nearly so obvious. Scene four takes place in a bedroom, but there is no line that says whether it is Adam’s room or Evelyn’s. Adam says “that’s why the tape’s gonna stay at my place” (42). If the actor emphasizes the word “stay” in this line, it could indicate that the characters are already at his place and the tape will stay there. However, if the word “my” is emphasized, the assumption could be that they are at Evelyn’s place and the tape will be transferred to Adam’s later. Similarly, the only indication of place for scene five is the rather cryptic line about burying their secrets in the woods (58). Jenny and Adam meet and share a forbidden kiss, but they could be meeting in any private natural setting. As for the timeline, scene three takes place a few weeks after the start of the show. This is obvious because Phillip mentions “the museum

thing, a few weeks back" (30) referring to the statue being defaced in scene one. Adam mentions that he hasn't been biting his nails for about a month, in scene five (54). The audience can tell that at least a month has passed since Adam met Evelyn.

A doctor's office is the obvious setting for scene six, since Evelyn tries to calm a nervous Adam by saying "you always wait at the doctor's office" (59). Further, the audience finds out what kind of doctor's office they are visiting when Adam makes references to having his "nose chopped off" (60).

Scene seven sends us back to the world of uncertainty. By Phillip saying "I got a three-ten" (81), the audience knows that the boys are meeting somewhere near or on campus. Presumably, Phillip is close enough to class to get there easily. The scene heading says that the scene takes place on "a lawn" (72) but there are no words in the scene to give that information to the audience.

Scene eight's location is a little clearer. Evelyn tells Adam "we got you a cocoa" to which Adam replies "you don't drink coffee" (95). These two lines tell the audience that the characters are meeting at a coffee shop or similar place. Evelyn tells Jenny early in the scene that there is only two weeks left before the showing of her thesis project (90). The audience knows now that the spring semester is almost over.

The last two scenes take place in the same building. The audience knows that Evelyn is about to present her thesis project. When Adam enters, he tells Phillip "I need to get a seat" (113). The audience knows from this that he is in an auditorium or theatre. In that same scene, Evelyn tells the audience that her full presentation "will hopefully be available in the exhibition gallery down the hall" (116-117). From this the audience gets

a better understanding of where the current scene is taken place. They also get a preview to the location of the next scene. Evelyn tells the audience that she began her project five months prior and that she met her subject on January 9 (117). This tells the audience that we are in May, at the end of the semester. She also tells Adam in scene ten that she believed he could handle everything “otherwise I wouldn't have invited you tonight” (125). From this line, the audience knows that scene nine and ten take place on the same night.

Because of the lack of information in some of the scenes, it becomes vital for the scenic designer to find a way to tell the audience where and when the characters are. Not only does the set need to be neutral enough to be the setting for numerous scenes, but there should be something unique in each scene to indicate location and time.

Meaning of Title and Philosophical Statements

The phrase “the shape of things” never appears in the play, but it almost appears twice in the script. The first time is in scene one in reference to the statue of god. Evelyn explains why the statue's genitals were covered with a plaster leaf cluster. She says of the townspeople, “they objected to his thing, the shape of it” (LaBute 9). While I doubt the meaning of the title has anything to do with god's genitalia, it could be a veiled reference to our views on sexuality and attraction. The second time the phrase almost occurs is in scene nine. Evelyn talks about the new, improved Adam as “a living, breathing example of our obsession with the surface of things, the shape of them” (122). It is this quote that better explains the meaning of the title. People seem more concerned with how things appear rather than how things actually are. We believe that someone who is attractive is a good person, a desirable person, regardless of their personality or actions. We believe that our self worth depends on how we look on the outside, not the thoughts on the inside. LaBute seems to be asking that we explore this idea and find out which is more important. Should we be more concerned with the shape of things or the contents within those shapes? This question demonstrates not only the meaning of the play's title but also one of the main philosophical statements of the play.

Rather than using the set as an exploration of this version of the title's meaning, I used the set design as a way to literally express the title. I've created the basic shapes of a circle within a square surrounded by rectangular projection screens as a play on the words of the title.

Another philosophical statement being made by *The Shape of Things* is about the role of art in the world. Adam and Evelyn both use quotes from Oscar Wilde to support their positions. When Evelyn talks about “false art,” Adam responds with the Wilde quote, “In art, there is no such thing as a universal truth.” Evelyn continues the quote, responding, “A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true” (LaBute 8). The idea is that art is subjective. It could mean one thing to one person yet something else entirely to another. Evelyn takes it further, believing that all experiences and feelings are equally subjective, even love and cruelty (129). During her monologue in scene nine, Evelyn states that “there is no such concept as religion, or government, community or even family. There is only art. Art that must be created. Whatever the cost” (122). In this belief, she echoes the beliefs of Oscar Wilde and others in the Art-For-Art's-Sake movement. The belief of this group is that practical things should never be admired for artistic qualities and art should never be practical. In fact, the quote that was later used by Adam to support his belief that none of Evelyn's work truly matters, “all art is quite useless” (134), was misused by him. Wilde intended that quote to mean that art was not practical and therefore was to be admired (Wilde, Preface).

The final Oscar Wilde quote was also misquoted, but only on a surface level. Evelyn responds to Adam “art is useless” comment by stating “insincerity and treachery somehow seem inseparable from the artistic temper[a]ment” (LaBute 134). The surface meaning is that Adam should recognize that artists are not to be trusted. He should have seen it coming. The quote is from the book *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* The book tells of the search for the elusive Mr. W. H. to whom many of Shakespeare's sonnets are

dedicated (Wilde, Portrait). The artistic temperament referred to in the quote is about the actor's ability to successfully convince the audience that they are someone other than who they truly are. When considering Evelyn's attempt to deceive Adam, the quote applies to her. We must look beneath the surface to see the connection and correctness of the quote.

Themes

There are many themes that can be pulled from *The Shape of Things*. Should we change ourselves for others? What is false art? Can TV be called art? I have chosen to look into three themes from the play that could potentially affect the design of the show. First, I will explore shapes and the symbolic meanings behind them. The idea of this play being a re-telling of the biblical Fall of Man is fascinating to me. Who exactly are Adam and Eve in various religions? Finally, I would like to find out what art really is. What defines art? How do you know when something is art or when something has gone over the line? As Adam said, there has to be a line out there somewhere (LaBute 133). Let's find out where it is.

Before doing this research, the basic design of the show had already been agreed upon. I based my design on Leonardo De Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*. The simple yet strong shapes in the drawing were one of the selling points of my design. I thought it would be interesting to look into the meaning of those two shapes, a circle and a square intertwined. What I found blended well into the meanings of the play.

A square is defined as "a plane figure having four equal sides and four right angles" (Agnes 626). A circle is defined by the same source as "a plane figure bounded by a single curved line every point of which is equally distant from the center" (119). These two shapes are so integral to the human experience that they are the basis for many symbols in many religions. The square is mostly used as a symbol of Earth or land. It symbolizes the practical, physical world. It is a masculine symbol (Kjos). The square can at the same time represent the whole world, east, west, north and south, and can be

interpreted as limited, such as the phrase "boxed in" (O'Connell 113). The circle, on the other hand, is often seen as a spiritual symbol. It represents eternity and the heavens, contrasting the earthly meaning of the circle (111). The circle is a feminine symbol (Kjos).

A circle and a square are equal parts of both the *Vitruvian Man* and the final set design for *The Shape of Things*. Even though these two symbols are truly equal in weight, the circle seems dominant in both the drawing and the set design. This ultimately reflects the characters of the play. Adam and Evelyn are seemingly equal in a relationship, but in the end, it turns out that Evelyn was a much stronger force. Even the other couple in the story follows this pattern. Jenny and Phillip are an engaged couple. They seem to have an equal partnership. If it leans to one side or the other, Phillip is the one who looks like the stronger of the two. But it is Jenny who draws in Adam, and when the engagement ends, it is Jenny, not Phillip, who makes that decision. The circle and square entwined, man and woman together as equals. But the circle dominates as do the women of the show.

In the traditional Christian story of Adam and Eve, God created Adam, gave him breath and, when he got lonely, God created Eve out of one of Adam's ribs. Later, Eve would take an apple from the Tree of Knowledge and convince Adam to eat the fruit, leading them both into sin. Eve and, through her, women have been looked down upon in many Christian sects, seen as evil and the cause of man's downfall. I have already talked about the Mormon version of this story, which make Eve more of a heroine than a villainess. Other stories from other religions vary even greater. Missing books of the

Bible are said to have given greater power to Eve. The missing book entitled *Apocalypse of Adam* suggests that Eve was created at the same time as Adam and that she was his superior. Some of the missing books suggest that Eve was the one to breathe life into Adam (Walker, Barbara 291) According to Gnostic writings, Adam was created by Sophia, a Middle Eastern goddess, after she had already created Eve (221). In *The Shape of Things*, it is Eve(lyn) who creates Adam in a new image. Interesting though all of this may be, there is not much that could be included in a set design. I did, however, take one image from all of this: the idea of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. I have included a tree in the projection images, which progresses through the seasons and ending in the death of the tree.

The final theme I want to explore is the meaning of art itself. What is art? That is a question that has been around for thousands of years. Encyclopedia Britannica Online defines art as "a visual object or experience consciously created through an expression of skill or imagination." According to this definition, Evelyn's work could be called art. Her work resulted in the visual object that is Adam and she did, in fact, use her skills of manipulation to achieve the result. Dictionary.com says art is "the quality, production, expression, or realm, according to aesthetic principles, of what is beautiful, appealing, or of more than ordinary significance." Again, by this definition, the newly made Adam could qualify as a piece of art. Evelyn produced something that is appealing and of more significance than it was previously. But was it truly art? Roger Kimball talks about the quality of contemporary art and the beauty that is lacking. He discusses the works of Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano as examples of the depth to which art has

fallen. Mapplethorpe's works were legally declared art during a court hearing because others said it was. Does that mean that Evelyn's work will be considered art if she gets a good grade? Where is that line that Adam said must exist? Kimball says that line sinks lower and lower and becomes more grotesque and aggressive as time goes on. As long as someone says it's art, it is art (Kimball).

CHAPTER THREE-THE PROCESS

Before the start of this journal

On the advice of Nick Kelly, I approached Lyndsay Hicks about the idea of us working together on our Master's Theses. I gave her a copy of both "Ondine" and "Tales of the Lost Formicans", two plays that I would love to do. She didn't much care for "Formicans" and agreed with me on the slim chance of a committee approving "Ondine" because of a rather large cast (28 characters). So we hashed out other ideas. We both wanted to do something different, Lyndsay really wanted to do Children's Theatre. She gave me a couple of pieces that she liked, I gave her a couple of mine, and we agreed on a plan of action and put together a proposal. Unfortunately, it was decided that the pieces we chose did not have enough "substance" to justify a Master's Thesis. It was suggested that we team up with Kelsey Amann who was also doing her Master's Thesis in the Fall and who had an approved play but no director or designers. Lyndsay and I were given copies of *The Shape of Things* by Neil LaBute to read. Kelsey had been approved to play the role of Evelyn. I enjoyed the play and immediately had ideas for set design. Lyndsay was okay with the play, but we both agreed it wasn't our first choice. At this point, it was better for both of us mentally to have a play decided upon and to get busy working. I was told that I had to decide between set and light designing as I was not going to be allowed to do both as had previously been stated. New people, new policies. Go with the flow. Moving on. So, we had a play.

As previously stated, I had a few ideas going on through my head. My first instinct was to focus on the idea of Evelyn trying to improve Adam through looks or

fashion. There is a part of the script where Phillip confronts Adam about giving up his ratty old jacket in favor of a Tommy Hilfiger jacket (LaBute 86-88). I thought about taking various fashion logos and using them as parts of set pieces. For instance, the CK logo for Calvin Klein could be altered to be the side of a bench. The triangle shape of the Adidas logo could become an easel. This is the main idea I carried around with me for a while.

May 7, 2012

We had our first design meeting today. I re-read the script earlier in the day, taking some notes, but mostly to refresh my memory about the show. Lyndsay, the director, talked about her ideas for the show. Based on her ideas, I don't think my fashion logo thing will work. Her focus is a little different—art, intimacy, exploration of love and psychopathy and acceptance of self. I did come across another interpretation of the show in some of my research that I'm going to discuss with her. The comparison between the characters in this play to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But that's for later.

Anyway, I've got a few new ideas. I'm starting to lean towards the $\frac{3}{4}$ round stage instead of the arena stage. Lyndsay says she's not tied to the arena stage idea if something will work better. I'll come up with a few different ways to do this and see what works.

Idea number one, the fashion thing, may still work. I'll play with it. Number 2 deals with the tree idea. I started with the torso "god" statue on a pedestal. The torso is

removed and another layer is added, maybe making the thing into a "mint bowl" at the restaurant. Then another layer is added, maybe including branches that becomes a coat rack or something. In each scene, something is added to the tree until it expands into the tree of knowledge (may need to be tied into the Adam and Eve thing. We'll see).

Idea #3--Lyndsay talks about fluidity, set pieces being easily removed and changed from scene to scene. What if the set pieces were part of the set? If we have multi-leveled platforms, one section of a platform can pull out, legs drop down and wah lah! a bench. Another section can be pulled up from the floor and becomes a tree (like those newspaper trees you made in school). The second highest platform can become the bed with the addition of a comforter, while the highest platform next to and behind that one becomes the headboard. This idea will only work on a $\frac{3}{4}$ round stage.

Going back to Idea number one for the moment, part of the fashion idea was not just that logos become set pieces, but also that those set pieces interact to form other set pieces. The bottom of the statue becomes the base for the table in the coffee shop. The bench can be folded out to become the bed, sort of like a futon bed frame. Other set pieces can be used in various ways. So the idea isn't complete yet, but this idea can be used for either arena or $\frac{3}{4}$ round.

So I've gathered images of god statues and torsos (app. 1.a.), though it would be fun to dress someone up as a statue and have them stand there motionless for 15 minutes. I also gathered images of trees (app. 1.b.), interesting set ideas and fashion logos. Not real "up" on high fashion but I gathered logos from companies that I know are fashionable. That's about all I've done for now. Except start this journal. More later.

May 8, 2012

So I talked to Lyndsay today after costume class. I told her about the Adam and Eve thing. Briefly, Duane Olson wrote an article about the movie version of *The Shape of Things*. In it, he compares the story of the play to that of the biblical story of Adam and Eve. The idea is that Eve leads her Adam into temptation just as Evelyn does in LaBute's play. Reading the article was like being slapped in the face. Why didn't I catch that before? When I told Lyndsay, it blew her away just like it did me! She said she's going to rethink her intent section. She also loved the ideas I had, so I told her I would continue playing with them and give her a few options for the next meeting, including both arena and $\frac{3}{4}$ round designs. That's it.

May 21, 2012

Been toying around with set ideas. Trying things out, moving things around. Not really having any luck. I'm just not liking anything. I had talked to Brian Paladin about Idea #3. Brian is a fellow Graduate Assistant in the scene shop with a lot of experience in carpentry. He said it could be done but would be expensive, trying to make all those parts. We do have a budget for this thing, benefits of being a Black Box show rather than a Jelkyl show, but I don't know what the budget is yet. Anyway, I've totally thrown out Idea number one. The fashion aspect is just not going to mesh with Lyndsay's ideas. So, I'm trying to go with the fluidity. Not working. I've tried drawing it on paper and Vectorworks, a computer software program for lighting and scene design. I'm not very

good with curves on Vectorworks. My original paper drawing isn't horrible, but then I realize that we're going to have a four foot high block of wood in people's faces on the edges of the audience (app. 2.a). Not nice.

So, I'm sitting there at lunch talking to my friend Kylor about the design and all my frustrations. Really good sounding board, that one. When into my head pops another idea. Lyndsay asked for the image of the Vitruvian Man to be worked into the set at some point. You know the one, the Da Vinci thing with the man in the middle of the circle surrounded by the square (app. 4.13). Ya, that one. So what if my whole set was the Vitruvian Man? How would that work? So, I did a quick sketch and then tried it out on Vectorworks. Big circle, big square. Hmm. What if the circle were cut into pie shapes and each shape was a different level? That could totally work! So I put together a better version on Vectorworks to show at the meeting tomorrow. I added some flats in the back. Not sure what to do with them yet, but I'll think of something. I'm really starting to like this. Has the flow, we could use different levels as benches, beds, etc. Definitely has the Vitruvian Man that Lyndsay wants. And it could be either Arena or $\frac{3}{4}$ stage. I still think she should go with $\frac{3}{4}$. But I promised Lyndsay that I would have choices for her. So I'll still bring in the other drawings. Maybe make a couple variations of the Vitruvian Man set.

May 22, 2012

First Production meeting. Came up with one more design before the meeting. A variety of skewed platform shapes, various sizes, levels, some raked, some flat, some on

top of others. More to show the awkwardness and irregularity of the show (app. 2.b).
You know, something is off with Evelyn, something is off with these squares. It's an idea.

At the meeting, everyone seemed to really like the Vitruvian Man set best. I really think I do too. Must keep the skewed squares in my mind though for something else. That one has potential. So, I'm going to extend the top platform to go all the way back and not have a tree for his head. The tree is out. We'll use ropes to show where the statue is but not have a statue. Let the audience use their imaginations. The flats that I have standing in back are now going to hang and become projection screens. Still making them flats, but we'll throw up images of the tree on the two side flats and the middle will be to show where they are, something simple to indicate place. Time to get to work on more changes.

In Between Meetings

I altered the big platform, argued with Vectorworks, added stairs that are also circular. I tried rectangular stairs, just regular things, but they didn't look right and took up way too much space. Ding! Keep with the circle, Pip. Oh yeah. So that works. I went to Tim Poertner, Technical Director, to figure out seating. Just work, work, work. Not sure if I'm doing all this right in Vectorworks. Not sure I know what I'm doing. Oh, well. Looks nice. Wonder how to make it look solid?

June 4, 2012

2nd Prod. Meeting. Altered design is a hit. Going to make the screens wider and

need to start looking for images to use but that's about it. Gave initial design pictures to everyone, including Dustin Massie, the shop foreman, so he can start figuring out budget. It's weird how that's done here. Apparently, he works out a budget and they OK it. They don't say "here's your budget" before things get started. Isn't that how the real world does it? Anyway, it's not a huge set, so the cost won't be crazy. I really don't do crazy budget sets. Never have. Maybe some day I'll go nuts with a set design, but not for this show. Not a Black Box show.

June 19, 2012

Been working like a crazy person on Vectorworks. The "design" portion is pretty much done, now I'm working on the technical part of it. Started working on the platform break up. How each section is going to be built. I've gone to Tim's office a LOT, to figure out how things are done. Learning little tricks of the trade as far as Vectorworks is concerned. Undoing a lot of things, re-doing a lot, chucking a lot of stuff I've done wrong only to redo it again the right way. It's a tedious process, but it's good to learn it this way. I spend a great deal of time trying to figure it out myself, only to go to Tim and have that "Aha!" moment when I learn an easier way to do it. I also learned how to make my design solid (had to redo all the platforms that I thought looked good. Sigh.). So, platforms are done on Vectorworks, working on skis (also known as knee walls or stud walls). Need to add points to the designs so people know where to stop cutting. Also need to add more measurements. Just little things now. Need to save things as PDF files so I can email them to Lyndsay and Courtney, the Stage Manager.

Yesterday, I had a discussion with Tim on whether the back flats should be taller (yes, they should. Changed that already) and whether they should be Broadway flats or Hollywood flats. I have designed them as Broadway flats. Thought they looked pretty good in Vectorworks. I knew we'd be hanging them so I thought it would be better to make them lighter. We also never build Broadway flats around here. Would be nice for a change. But then Tim comes along and asks "Are you sure you want Broadway flats?" Of course, this statement just gets my mind double guessing itself and I became unsure of my decision. He said he never builds Broadway flats and that even the ones I designed wouldn't need the braces if we are covering them with lauan. He also would like to have some stock 12 foot flats, we only have ten foot. So I mentioned this to Dustin before I left yesterday. His comment was that I shouldn't let Tim change my mind and that he, Dustin, would support me if I choose to do Broadway. I really think I'd rather do the Broadway flats. I need to stop being such a wuss and make a decision and stick with it.

So talking it over with Donnell Walsh, my mentor, he agrees with Tim. But he also was able to explain WHY. Because the middle flat is going to be 12 feet wide, Broadway flat might tend to bend and wave more than a Hollywood flat. That is true, and as he was saying it, my mind was sort of going that direction. So maybe Hollywood is the better option. I'll play around with it and see. Back to drafting for now.

June 21, 2012

And frustration sets in. I feel like I am so close to having this thing done. But there are so many little bugs to work out, so many little pieces of information to add into

each drawing, so many little things I'm sure I keep forgetting about. Part of the frustration comes from knowing that this, my first time drafting a whole show, is going to be used to build the set that my master's degree will be judged from. I feel I should have been able to practice on a theoretical set before I had to do this. I mean really, a box set, walls, squarish platforms and maybe a couple of steps would have been easier to tackle than this thing with its round plats and hanging flats. Should learning and doing for performance be the same class? It's like the stage management class, you shouldn't be stage managing a show before you learn how to do it. Well, just a few months to go before I'm done. I didn't have this class before and NEED it before I hit the real world. So stop your bitching and start doing.

June 22, 2012

Back again. Been "doing" all day. Got the skis nearly done. Know what I have to do to finish the platform drawings. I started looking online for pictures to use for the projections. As I was looking, I kept remembering "Chess" last summer, where we had all the different locations indicated on the screen. I thought that was pretty lame back then and still do now. So why am I doing a show with the same idea? What can I do to make this not lame? Art. Can I find paintings of all the various locations? If not famous art, then at least something that resembles good art. I found some really cool trees, but they may be too bold for the show. I did find paintings of museums, parks and college looking buildings as well as inside of a coffeehouse and outside of a restaurant. This could be do-able. Got my budget from Dustin too. Very workable, considering it's not a

huge set design. Wood and paint supplies, that's about all I need. (For finished designs, see Appendix 3.)

Week of July 31, 2012

We started building the set this week. I was excited to get the supplies and somewhat nervous to think all that planning comes down to this. The skis have all been built now. It's pretty cool to watch my design come to life. Brian suggested that next time I include a cut list in the design. Oh yeah. Good idea. We also started on the platforms. The top circle has been cut out. Had to adjust the layout of the platforms a little. Nothing major. I'm on vacation next week, so Brian and Dustin will be doing a lot of the work without me there. I trust them completely to get all this accomplished.

Week of August 13, 2012

I got back from vacation to find that all the platforms have been built. They aren't yet covered in lauan, but that won't happen until they are in the space. The flats have also been built. Dustin did a bit of a compromise. The flats have been built in the Hollywood style, but they are made out of 1x4s instead of 2x4s so that they are sturdy yet still lightweight. Works for me! We won't get to start loading in the set until next week, so I just get to wait for now.

Week of August 20, 2012

The horror! Started putting up the set on Monday. Things weren't quite fitting

like they should. I realized (a little late) that I should have included a bit of “wobble room” in my design. I didn't take into account the width of the boards when I designed the skis, so there was a moment of frustration when things didn't go as smoothly as anticipated. Of course, by moment of frustration, I mean that I had a near meltdown, questioning my ability to do this. All those self confidence issues rose to the surface and I felt Failure poking its ugly head around the corner to laugh at me. When reality returned, some adjustments were made to get everything into place. A few skis needed to get cut down and others needed to get moved a few inches to get things to fit properly. By the end of the day, all of the skis and platforms had been installed and the minor confidence crisis had passed (app. 7.b.). By the end of the week, all the platforms had a topping of lauan and facing had been installed (app. 7.c.).

Rehearsal reports-the director has requested escape stairs for easy access to the upstage platform. There shouldn't be any problems adding those. As long as I make them lower than the platform, the shape of the stage won't change drastically. Also, I got a scene breakdown from Lyndsay that included the setting and the season to help with locating good projection images. That helps.

August 23, 2012

Production meeting. Lyndsay approved most of the projection images. She loved the museum picture, though we may have to remove the image of the lady and the ghostly man shape (app. 4.1). We will keep looking for images for the restaurant, but the one I have will do if nothing else is found. The bedroom and the living room pictures are

a no-go. I may try to find concert posters and photoshop them together for the living room scene. Still art, just poster art. I gave her three options for the park image. Even though the scene takes place in late winter, early spring, we both liked the look of the tree with the full set of leaves (app. 4.5.). The colors in that picture better fit the scene than the others. Lyndsay loved the sterile pen drawing for the doctor's office just as much as I did (app. 4.6.). She thought the coffee house image was perfect (app. 4.8) and she really loved the trees (app. 4.10 & 4.12). We will use them to show the passage of time. We'll only need to use the winter and spring tree images though, because the summer scenes take place in the auditorium. We will use the Vitruvian man halves for the outer screens instead of the trees. We decided to call Evelyn's presentation "A Modern Vitruvian." Just sounds cool.

Week of August 27, 2012

Painting is the name of the game. Step number one, the base coat. We used the base paint from the paint room. I was a little concerned because the set will eventually be painted to look like the pages of Da Vinci's notebook, so shade of browns and tans. The base paint is a drab olive green. Unfortunately I didn't get a picture of that day, so I can't include it. The first company meeting took place on my set, painted olive green. Hope no one thinks that the set will really be this color.

The following day, the next coat was added. I laughed because it is now band-aid colored. You know, that awful tan color that is supposed to be "flesh tone" but has never been the color of anyone's skin (app. 7.d.). We've got a lot of new kids in the shop. I

don't know if any of them have a lot of experience doing scenic painting. I going to have to teach a few of them some new painting techniques.

August 29, 2012

Production meeting. It was decided that we will used two small, two medium and one large black box boxes for all the furniture in the show. The number of boxes is the only thing that was changed at this point. I have already started painting the boxes to look like the set. That was the plan all along. Just didn't know how many. Now I do. The Van Gogh picture (app. 1.c.14.) was approved as well as the concert posters (app. 4.3.) for the living room and the basement picture (app. 4.4.a.) for the bedroom. I promised to add a Dave Matthews Band poster as an inside joke for Lyndsay and her friends.

August 30, 2012

Lyndsay changed her mind. The Van Gogh picture is out. She sent me an email of the picture she wants to use (app. 4.2.). Fine by me. But we're going to have to photoshop this picture together because it's in two pieces. Shouldn't be a huge deal, but then I've never used photoshop. Tim says he can show me how.

Week of September 3, 2012

Taught three of the Work and Learn students to scumble today: Billy (who plays Adam in the show), Sam and Benjamin. None of them had even heard the word before

and now they have successfully scumbled the set. Scumbling is when you blend paint colors together while you are painting on the surface. It looks really good (app. 7.e.)! I'm very proud of them. And the result looks a lot like the model (app. 5). I also had one of the girls (one of the Katelyns) dry brushing the lines on the boxes while I did the line on the stage facing. Everything looks nice. It looks a lot like I envisioned it.

The flats are getting muslin put on them this week. There was no problems with the smaller ones. But when it came time to paint the large flat, disaster struck. The flat is 144 inches wide. The muslin only comes 140 inches. So when we put the fabric on, we were not able to fold it over the edges and attach it. The fabric was stapled to the front, thinking that a frame was going to go around the edges to make it look like a museum painting. But the muslin shrank. The stage right side of the muslin pulled in a good ten inches from the edge of the flat. Now, instead of having a four inch frame, we are going to need to have about a foot wide one. I'm not sure how that going to look.

When I built the flats for the model, I already knew about this problem. I put a wider frame on the center flat to see what would happen. It doesn't look too bad. I hope it goes as well on the real thing.

Week of September 10, 2012

Had a bit of a crisis this weekend. One of the rehearsal reports asked for a circular step to be added to the stage left lower platform, similar to the one of the stage right side. Since the platform heights had been constructed to be their own steps, this new step shouldn't be necessary. Not only that, adding a step in that location would put

the step at the same height at the center platform, changing the look and shape of that platform. For that reason, I was determined to veto this new request. I sent a text to Lyndsay asking to meet her sometime during that day to discuss it. I also talked to Courtney about it that day. She said the reason the additional step was needed was because the actors weren't using the platforms as steps and were instead going straight from high platform to low platform, making a horrible clunk when they dropped the 16 inches between them. When I talked to Lyndsay about it, she agreed that this was the problem. Ultimately though, she stated that my design was more important and that she would remind the actors again to follow their blocking which included using the middle platform as a step. I'm so glad we get along.

Frames are built, painted and hung. The 12 inch wide frame on the center flat actually looks rather nice. I'm pleased at how the painting came out. I base coated them brown, then added a layer of gold metallic paint. On top of that, I used really watered down black paint to stain the frames. Quick swipe of the paint followed by a rag to wipe off most of it. The outcome is a tarnished gold look, like an old museum painting's frame. When they were added to the flats, the frames looked mostly brown. But when stage lights were added, they looked authentic (app. 7.f.).

I built a circular table that can be added to the boxes during certain scenes. This became a huge headache. Again, wiggle room. I really need to learn wiggle room. The table top was built too well. It fit so snugly over the boxes that it didn't come off easily. That whole fluidity of scene changes tends to come to a screeching halt when you can't get things off. So I sanded down the insides of the top to make it less snug. I got it to the

point that, if you put the top on correctly, it can easily be put on and taken off. The problem now is that it isn't actor-proof. Yes, it works if you do it right, but in the dark, during a quick scene change, right isn't always achieved. So now, I had to completely take off the base of the table top and rebuild it, using smaller pieces of wood, placed slightly further apart. I gave them a good half inch of room. It should work now.

It was during this week that I put my signature fairy on the set. This is a tradition that started when I was teaching. All my students knew that when a set was officially finished I would paint a fairy somewhere on the set. For this fairy, I used only the colors that I used on the set. I hid her above the circular stair on the stage right lower platform. She blended into the set so well that if you didn't know to look for her, you wouldn't see her.

September 13, 2012

I attended my first rehearsal today. Should I have come to one earlier? I will be at all of them from now on. I took a few notes. For one thing, we put the title "A Modern Vitruvian" on the slide with Evelyn's presentation. Oops! She clearly states in her presentation that it is untitled. I will have to change that. I also have to change the name of the college. I couldn't remember the college name when I made the slide, so I put a temporary one in there. I'll fix that tonight and send Tim the updated one. I am going to look for some abstract pictures for pre-show and post-show slides. All the rest of the slides indicate where the scenes are taking place. I figure, since there is no location for the pre- and post-show, then the images should be abstract. I will also use

the fall tree for the pre-show outer slides. I really like that tree the best and it seemed a shame not to use it. Now this gives me a reason to. Since the play starts in Winter, the Fall tree (app. 4.16.) would be perfect for pre-show. I wonder if I can find a good tree for post-show. I don't want to use Summer. I didn't like that tree. Maybe I can find a picture of a dying tree. Or switch to a realistic tree in the end. I like the dying tree idea. A dying tree as all of Adam's hopes and dreams die. So sad.

September 14, 2012

Argh! Must fix the front of the stage. It broke tonight. Not a lot, but Billy's foot caught the edge as he was sitting on the front edge. We really should have built this so the lauan covered the top of the facing, not the facing covering the edge of the platform. I wondered about this when we were first building it. I should have said something then. There's that wuss factor again. Stop second guessing and stand up for how you think things should be. You know more than you think you do. Build some confidence!

I also need to find a way to take out all the creeks in this stage. The circular step is creaky, the stage right escape stairs are creaky and the top platform is too.

Tech Rehearsals Sept. 16-19 and Performances Sept. 20-23, 2012

So, most of my work is done. Now, I just sit back and watch the show get better. I helped out in little ways—fixing broken facing (again), bringing in Kool-aid for the wine, etc. I made a few more adjustments to the projections. Tim did some photoshopping on the cigar lounge photo so that it is one picture rather than two. He did

an amazing job turning the basement picture into a night time scene (app. 4.4.b.). I'm still not so good with photoshop so I'm glad he volunteered to fix that one. I tried, but I'm just not experienced enough with the program.

I did use the Fall tree for pre-show and found a beautiful abstract in a similar color scheme (app. 4.15.). For the end of the show, I found a black and white abstract that I really liked (app. 4.17.). I also found that dying tree (app. 4.18.). Its style is so similar to the other trees that it was hard to believe it's a different artist. Lyndsay loved them, too.

The first night I watched the performance, the projector decided to reboot during preshow. The whole audience got to watch the projection screens as Windows updated and shut down. Whoops. Seems that someone forgot to disconnect the internet from the board when they were fixing the bugs in the system. No big deal. The projector was running fine before the show started.

The last night I watched the show, I looked at the screen during pre-show and there was nothing. Hmm, I thought. Maybe I should let someone know. So I sent a text message to Courtney making sure everything was okay. Luckily the problem was fixed before the show started and everything went smoothly.

Strike-The End

People kept asking me all during strike if I was sad to see my set being destroyed. Honestly, I wasn't. I've been around theatre long enough to no that nothing here is permanent. I was pleased that the set came down as easily as it did. It wasn't a long strike at all. My only regret was that I didn't get a picture of the fairy.

CHAPTER FOUR-EVALUATION

So this is the section where I evaluate my design process, the build process and the performance of the show. Since there was not a Post Mortem for this show, nor is there a formal evaluation form for faculty, mentors, staff or students to fill out, this part of the analysis will mostly be just my thoughts and feelings on what I did. Hopefully, I am able to look at my performance with at least some impartiality.

When it comes to the design process, I think I did a good job. I did all the things I was supposed to, read the script, briefly analyzed it, figured out what was needed and what the director wanted. I tried out various ideas and gave options to the director. I was able to use inspiration to come up with an idea and then use my creative and technical skills to make it work. I was really happy about the resulting plans. I know I fussed and fought over the drafting part, but I think it was nicely done. I even had a few people tell me that it looked like a professional design plan. That made me feel really good! I will admit that I need to become more familiar with the Vectorworks program and there are a lot of little tricks that I need to learn. But I listened to what the other technical theatre people need on the drawings and filed that information away for the future.

During the building process, I found out a lot of things I still need to learn. Mostly it's drafting issues: adding cut lists, including certain measurements while leaving some out, giving the design a little wiggle room, etc. I also needed to include some side elevations of my platforms, showing the construction of them with the top layers of plywood and lauan. I think the painting process is where I really shine. I had a plan of action for the painting and was able to teach others to use the correct techniques. I didn't

order enough of one of the colors (something else to improve on) but was able to mix other paints together to get an almost perfect match.

One area in which I think I can improve is the confidence area. This is nothing new to me. It's not a huge revelation. I need to learn to not let other people's ideas override my own. I realize sometimes it's okay to give in to others' opinions, but not always. Sometimes I just need to assert myself a little bit and I will find the other person willing to let me have my way. For example, the extra step on the stage left side. I really didn't want to add that step. But I worried that if I tried to say no that there would be a conflict. In fact, when I talked to the director, she easily accepted by reasons and agreed with me. So why all the fear and pressure? I don't know. Personal issues, perhaps. I'll get better as I gain experience...I hope.

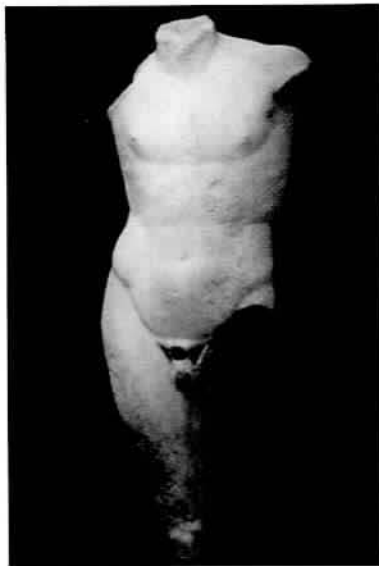
Overall, I am pleased with the results of this project. Numerous people told me after the shows that they liked the set. The framed screens were a big hit and the projection images received many compliments. I was happy with how closely the actual set resembled the elevations and the model. I feel that after this experience, I am ready to take on the professional world of theatre. I hope that I can gain the confidence I need to be in charge of this kind of project and teach young people to love the technical side of theatre as much as I do.

Appendix 1
Research Images

The following images were found on the internet and used as inspiration during my early research. In the end, none of the images in this section were used in the final product. Early research images that were used in the show have been added to Appendix 5-Projection Images.

- a. Statues of Gods, Broken statues, Greek/Roman statues. Scene 1 begins around a naked torso of God whose genitalia had been covered with a plaster grape leaf cluster.

Image #1



[http://
grhomeboy.wordpress.com
/2007/06/14/swiss-hand-
back-to-greece-stolen-
statue-of-apollo-from-
crete/](http://grhomeboy.wordpress.com/2007/06/14/swiss-hand-back-to-greece-stolen-statue-of-apollo-from-crete/)

Image #2



[http://www.kaccents.com/
For_Home/Garden/
Roman_2.htm](http://www.kaccents.com/For_Home/Garden/Roman_2.htm)

Image #3



[http://
www.marbleclassics.com/
male-torso-statue.shtml](http://www.marbleclassics.com/male-torso-statue.shtml)

Image #4



[http://www.museumsinflorance.com/
musei/museum_of_archaeology.html](http://www.museumsinflorance.com/musei/museum_of_archaeology.html)

b. Trees-it was during my tree searching time that I came up with the idea of using only paintings and drawings for projection images.

Image #1



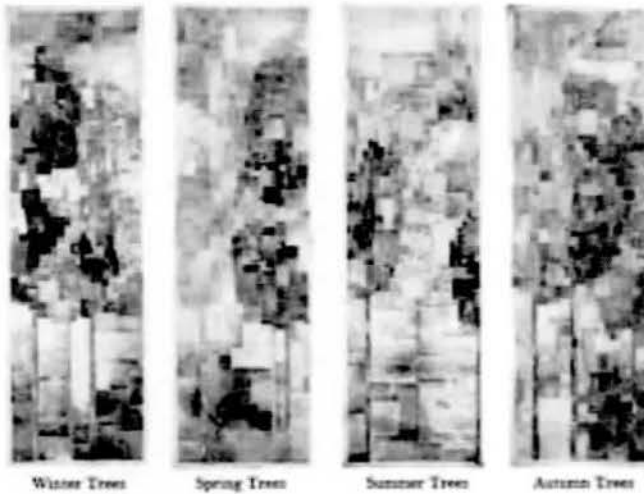
<http://www.lpnnrd.org/cgi-bin/commerce.exe?preadd=action&key=TREE-CBAP>

Image #2



<http://www.ebsqart.com/Artist/LUIZA-VIZOLI/13656/Art-Portfolio/Gallery/COLLAGE-ART-WOOD-PAINTING/4-SEASONS-TREES/481220/>

Image #3



[http://
davidcastleart.wordpress.com/
2009/01/29/which-should-i-
frame-vote-on-your-favorite/](http://davidcastleart.wordpress.com/2009/01/29/which-should-i-frame-vote-on-your-favorite/)

- c. Restaurants, bedrooms, parks and other places to be used for projections images.
These images were all rejected for one reason or another.

Image #1-Museum option-rejected in favor of another picture



[http://
www.dailypainters.com
/paintings/76667/Art-
Museum-Exhibit-Oil-
Painting-by-k-Madison-
Moore/k-Madison-
Moore](http://www.dailypainters.com/paintings/76667/Art-Museum-Exhibit-Oil-Painting-by-k-Madison-Moore/k-Madison-Moore)

Image #2-Museum option-rejected in favor of another picture



<http://jonellesummerfield.blogspot.com/2010/09/louvre-interior-iii.html>

Image #3-Park option-rejected because it was the wrong season



<http://ivanaguirreart.blogspot.com/2010/05/park.html>

Image #4-Park options-rejected because of night time look



<http://en.artscad.com/A.nsf/Opra/SRVV-86LEBJ>

Image #5-Coffeehouse Option-rejected in favor of another picture



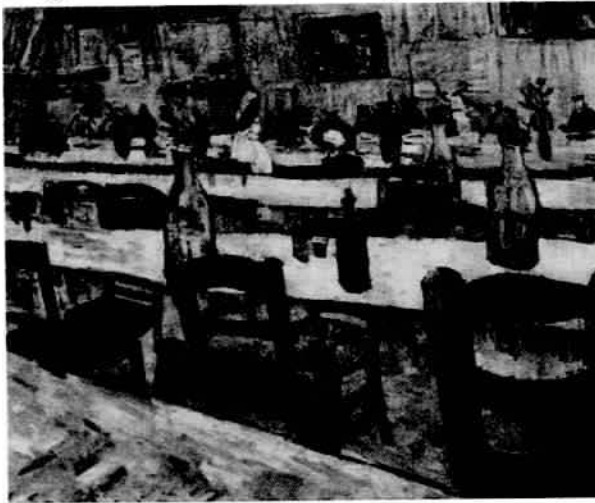
[http://
www.victorsantosart.com/
large-view/all/71395---/
Painting.html#](http://www.victorsantosart.com/large-view/all/71395---/Painting.html#)

Image #6-Restaurant option-rejected because we needed indoor image



[http://
www.jeffpittmanart.com/
galleryhtml/
salsas_asheville.html](http://www.jeffpittmanart.com/galleryhtml/salsas_asheville.html)

Image #7-Restaurant option-rejected in favor of another picture



<http://www.vangoghgallery.com/catalog/image/0549a/Interior-of-a-Restaurant-in-Arles.jpg>

Image #8-Restaurant option-rejected because we needed indoor image



<http://services.flikie.com/view/v3/android/wallpapers/33574887>

Image #9-Bedroom option-rejected in favor of another picture



<http://www.headforart.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Van-Gogh-Bedroom-at-Arles.jpg>

Image #10-Bedroom option-rejected because image is too feminine, wanted male bedroom



[http://images.fineartamerica.com/
images-medium/the-master-
bedroom-sarah-wharton-white.jpg](http://images.fineartamerica.com/images-medium/the-master-bedroom-sarah-wharton-white.jpg)

Image #11-Living room option-rejected because it was too gaudy



[http://images.fineartamerica.com/
images-medium/living-room-4-
nick-piliero.jpg](http://images.fineartamerica.com/images-medium/living-room-4-nick-piliero.jpg)

Image #12-Doctor's office-rejected in favor of another picture



[http://images.fineartamerica.com/
images-medium/waiting-room-
patrick-mills.jpg](http://images.fineartamerica.com/images-medium/waiting-room-patrick-mills.jpg)

Image #13-Living room option-rejected because another picture by same artist already chosen



<http://ex-chamber-memo.up.seesaa.net/image/07-1a3be-thumbnail2.jpg>

Image #14-Restaurant option-rejected in favor of another picture



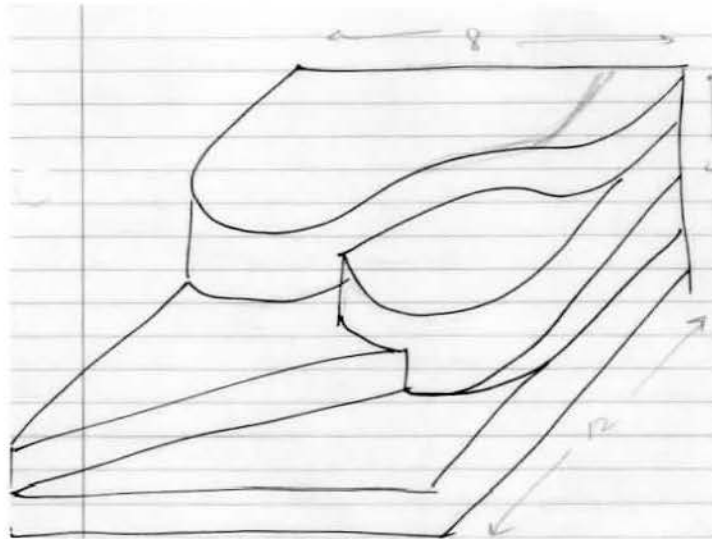
<http://www.wilsonpictureframes.com/VanGogh/vg3B.jpg>

Appendix 2

Early Scenic Sketches and Vectorworks designs

I created three different sketches in the early stages of this design process. The first was a quick sketch on paper in which I tried to play with flowing lines and various levels of platforms. It was a strange idea that ended up resembling a bird more than anything else. It was quickly rejected.

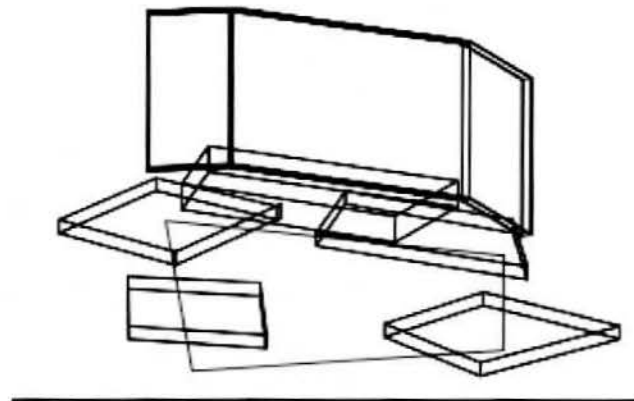
a.



After that I developed a Vectorworks set that was based on the shapes of the Vitruvian Man by Leonardo Da Vinci. The basic shapes didn't change in the development of the design but the heights of the platforms changed. Since I used only the one file when creating this design, the original drawing no longer exists. Sorry.

The third drawing was also a Vectorworks design. Tilted platforms in awkward shapes, supported by each other, some standing alone. Meant to show the awkward, uncomfortable relationships between the characters on stage.

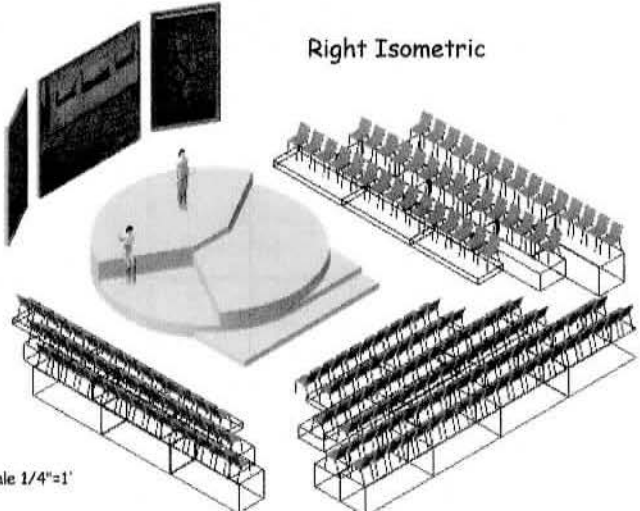

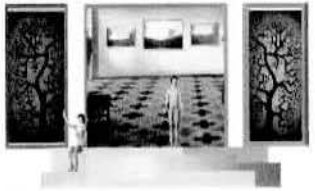
b.



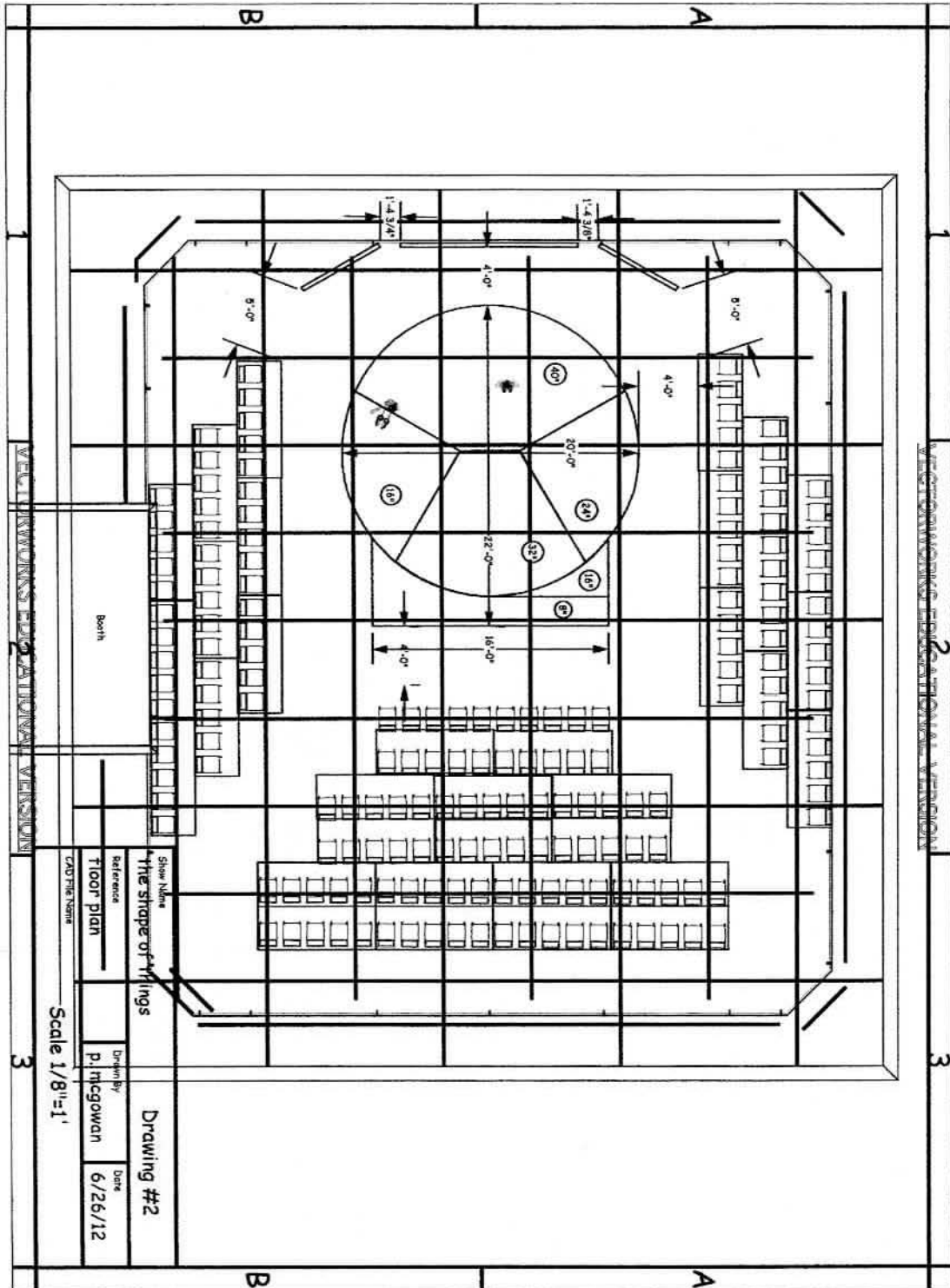
Appendix 3

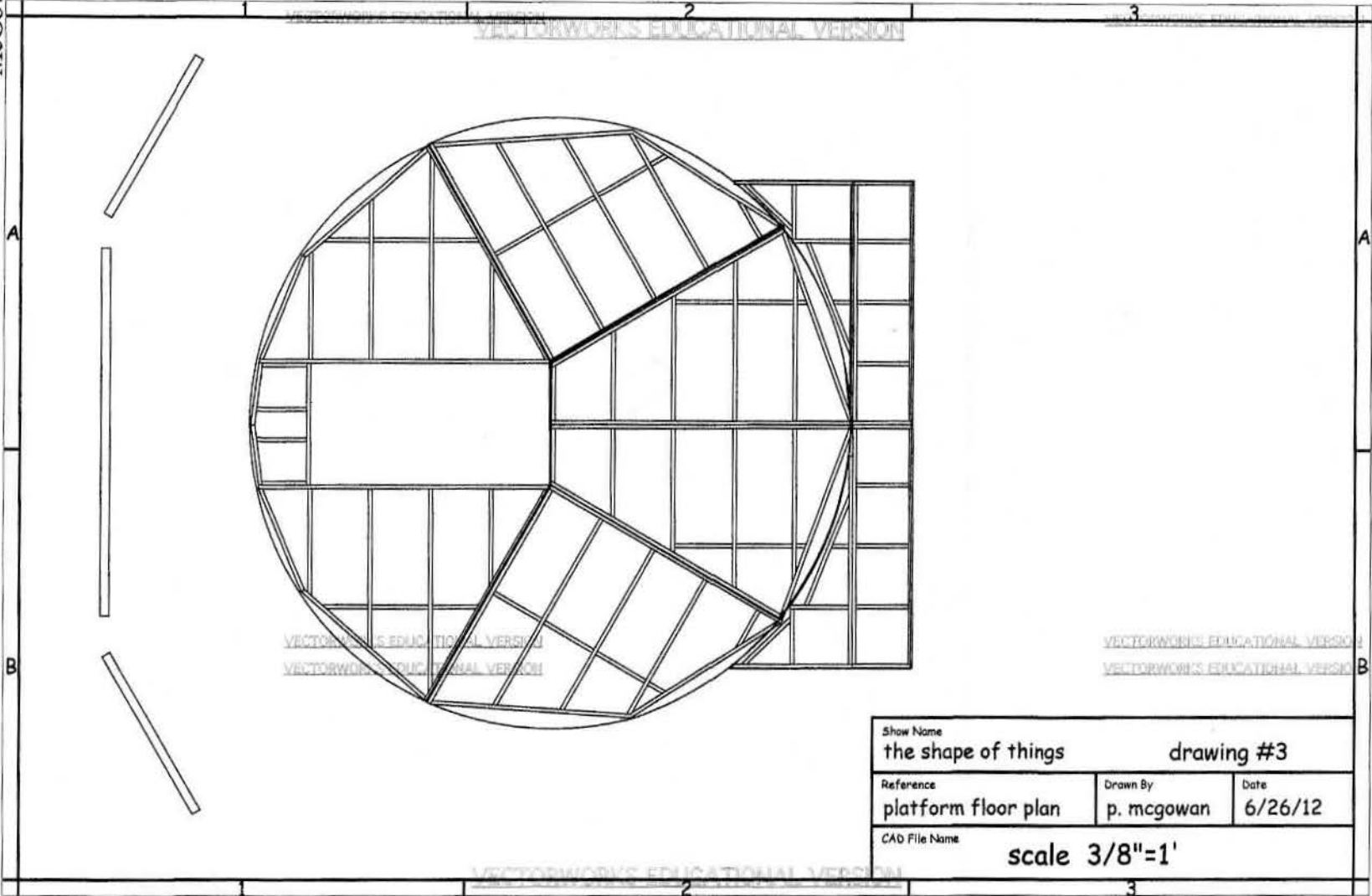
Renderings/Drawings/Ground Plans

This section contains all ten pages of my Vectorworks design for the show. Renderings, platform construction as well as skis, projection flats and a ground plan. The original drawing were on 11x17-inch paper and were drawn to scale. The smaller versions that have been included in this appendix are no longer in the scale listed on the drawings.

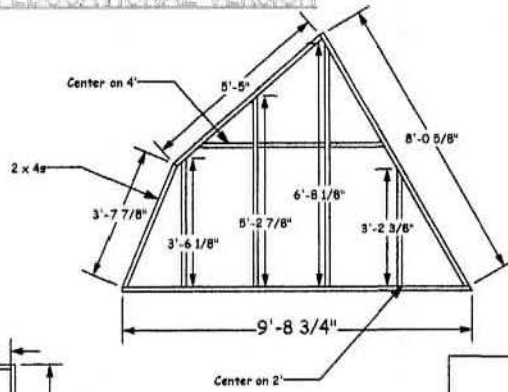
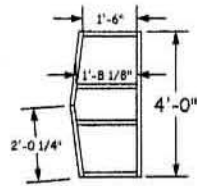
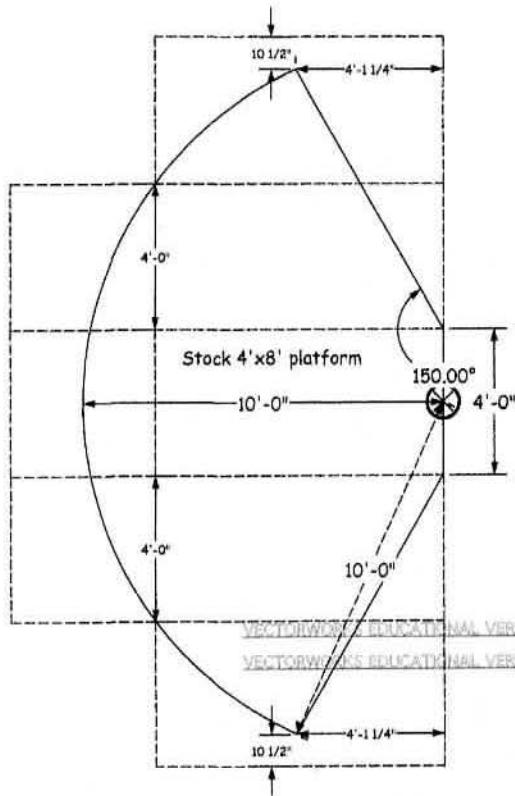
1	2	3
A	<p>Right Isometric</p>  <p>Scale 1/4"=1'</p>	A
B	<p>Side Elevation</p>  <p>Scale 1/8"=1'</p> <p>Front Elevation</p> 	B
1	2	3

Show Name		drawing #1	
Reference		Drawn By	Date
3d elevation		p. mcgowan	6/26/12
CAD File Name			

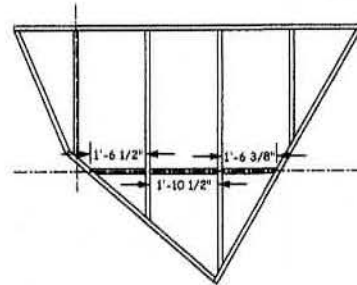




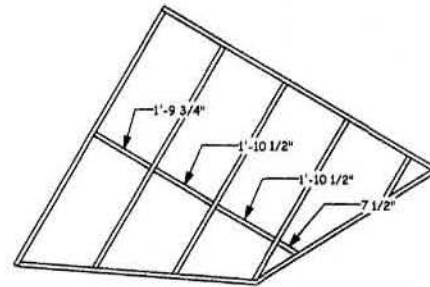
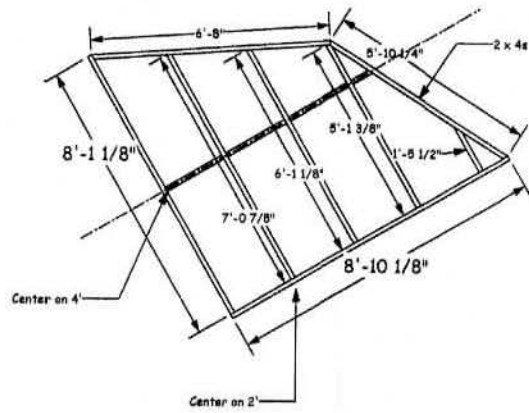
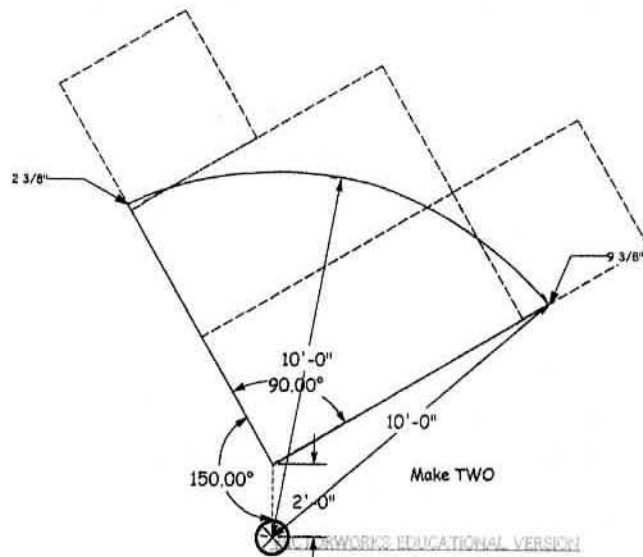
Show Name	the shape of things		drawing #3
Reference	platform floor plan	Drawn By	p. mcgowan
		Date	6/26/12
CAD File Name	scale 3/8"=1'		



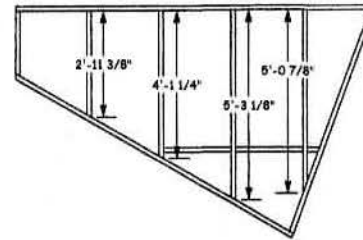
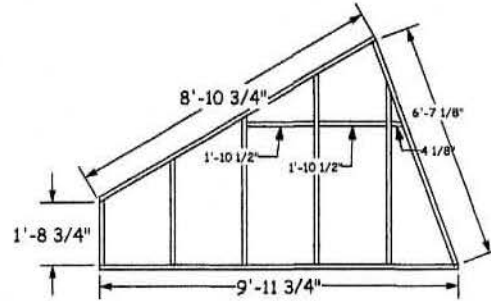
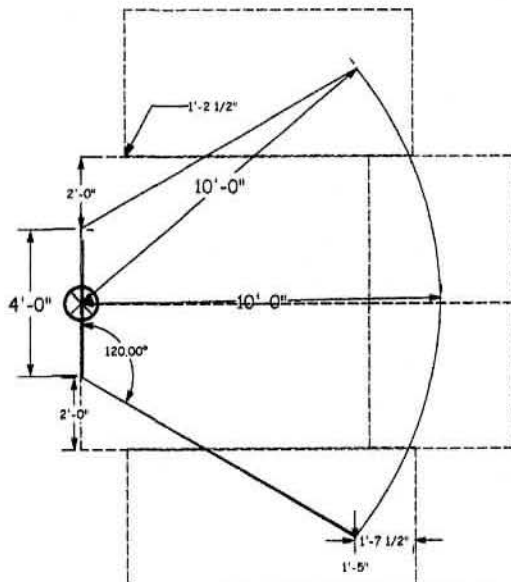
Stock 4'x8' platform



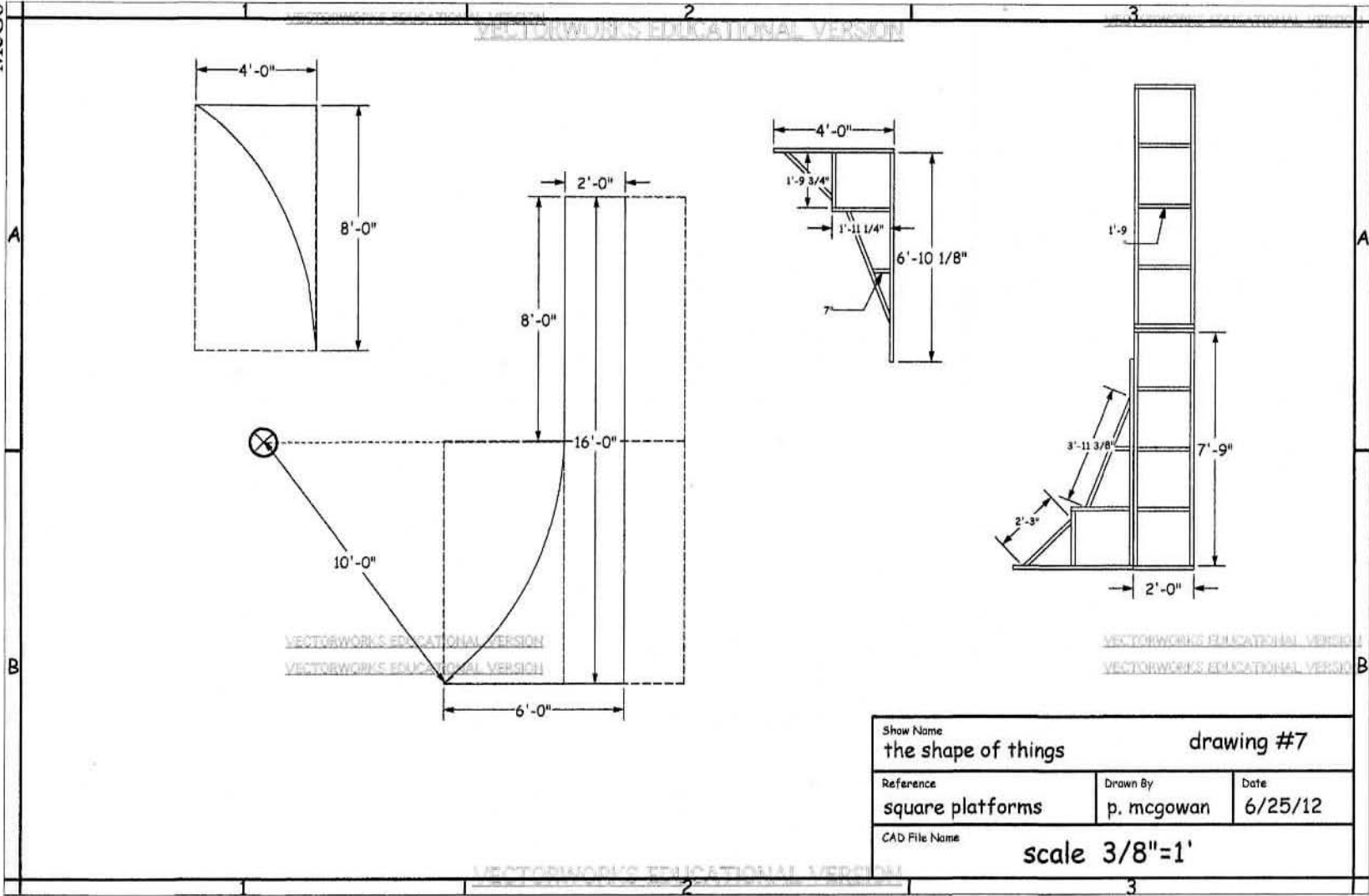
Show Name		drawing #4	
Reference	Drawn By	Date	
40" platform	p. mcgowan	6/21/12	
CAD File Name		scale $3/8"=1'$	



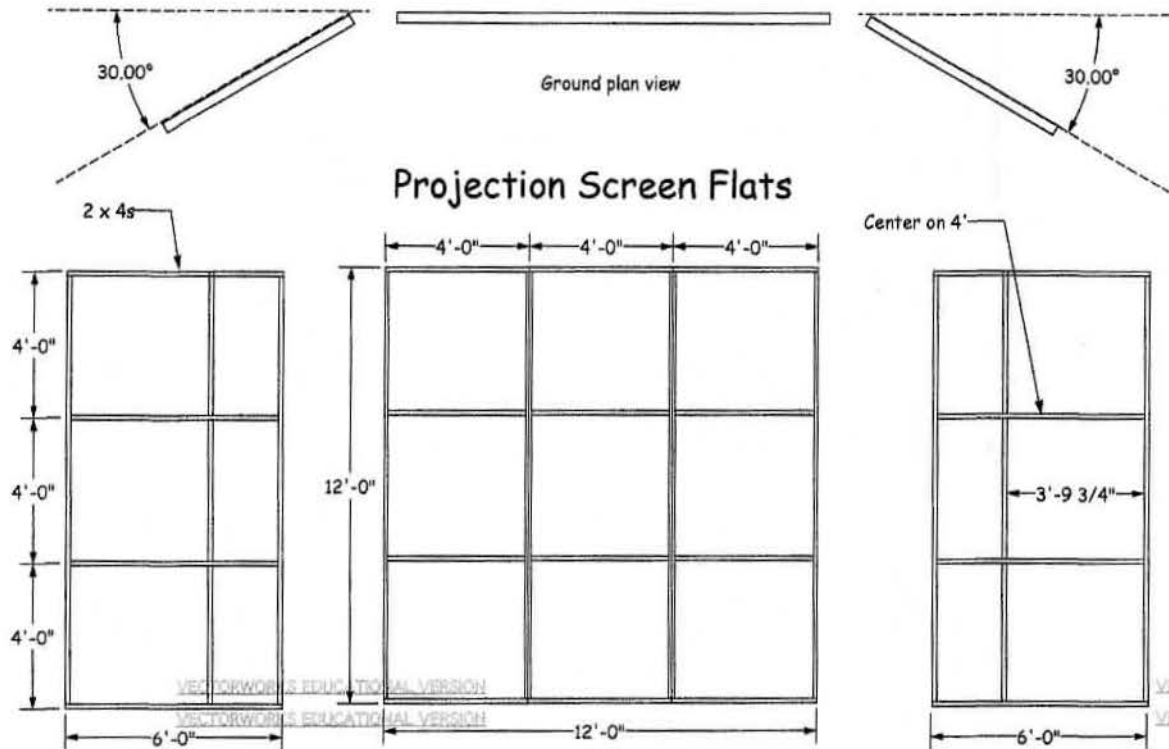
Show Name		drawing #5	
the shape of things			
Reference	Drawn By	Date	
90 degree platforms	p. mcgowan	6/25/12	
CAD File Name		scale 3/8"=1'	



Show Name		drawing #6	
the shape of things			
Reference	Drawn By	Date	
32" platform	p. mcgowan	6/25/12	
CAD File Name		scale 3/8"=1'	



Show Name		drawing #7	
the shape of things			
Reference	Drawn By	Date	
square platforms	p. mcgowan	6/25/12	
CAD File Name		scale 3/8"=1'	



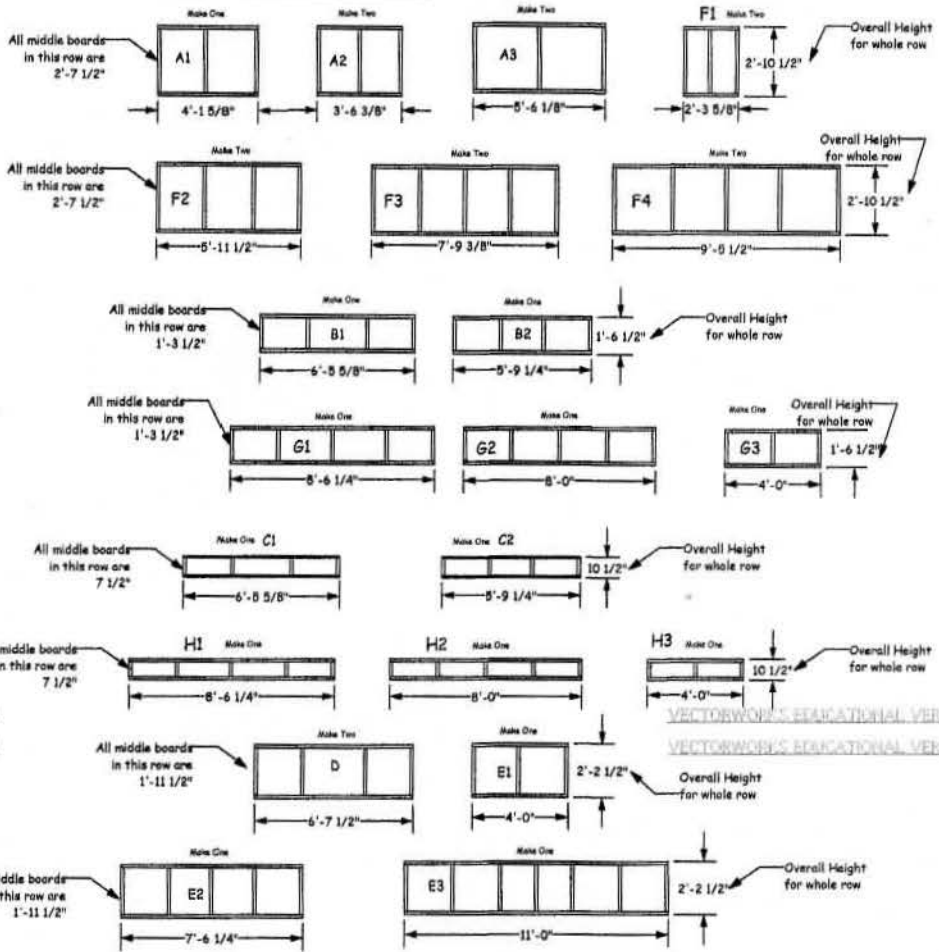
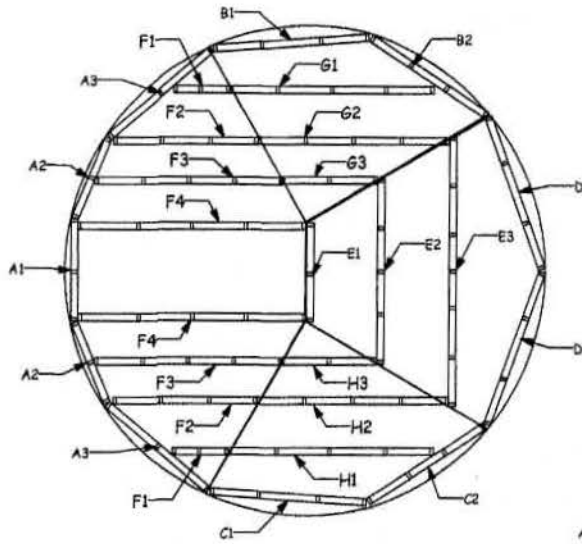
NOTE: Cover in 1/8" Lauan and stretched muslin.

Add decorative framing to each.

To be hung 3 feet off the ground.

Show Name		drawing #8	
the shape of things			
Reference	Drawn By	Date	
projection flats	p. mcgowan	6/25/12	
CAD File Name		scale 3/8"=1'	

Skis Layout

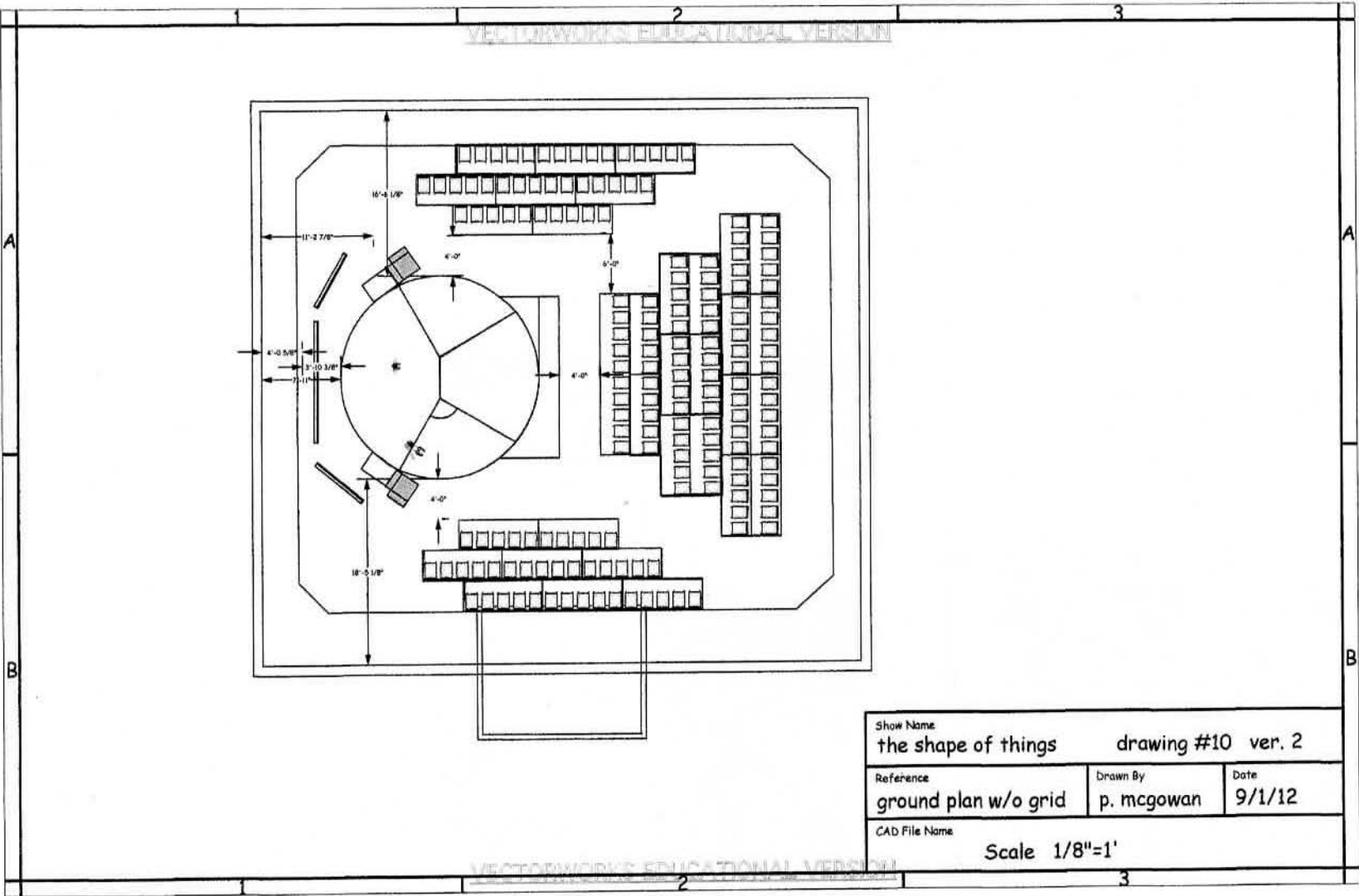


VECTORWORKS EDUCATIONAL VERSION

VECTORWORKS EDUCATIONAL VERSION

Show Name		
the shape of things drawing #9		
Reference	Drawn By	Date
skis and ski placement	p. mcgowan	6/26/12
CAD File Name		
scale 1/4"=1'		

VECTORWORKS EDUCATIONAL VERSION



Appendix 4 Projection Images

The following images are the ones that were used during to performance of *The Shape of Things*. I decided that all the projection images would be images from the art world to emphasize Evelyn's influence over Adam world. Adam becomes the object of Evelyn's thesis project, a human sculpture. Each projection image gives the audience a clue to where each scene is taken place. The tree images on the outer screens tell the time of year.

Image #1-Scene 1-The Museum-We decided to leave the people in this painting and not try to photoshop them out. I rather liked the look of the people and didn't think they would distract the audience.



[http://
en.nicholaschistiakov.com/
2006-art-painting/
museum.htm](http://en.nicholaschistiakov.com/2006-art-painting/museum.htm)

Image #2-Scene 2-The Restaurant Lounge-This image is actually two paintings, one of the man and one of the woman. Tim was able to photoshop them together so that it looks like a single picture.



[http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Cigar-Bar-
Posters_i1676314_.htm](http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Cigar-Bar-Posters_i1676314_.htm)

[http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Cigar-Bar-
Posters_i1676314_.htm](http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Cigar-Bar-Posters_i1676314_.htm)

Image #3-Scene 3-Phil's Living Room-For this image, I found five concert posters and photoshopped them to put them at angles and then gathered them together in a Keynote file (like Power Point only for Mac) and gave them a background. This became Phil's living room image. Is this art like the other images? There is a certain creativity involved in poster art. So, I think it qualifies.



<http://s3.media.squarespace.com/production/451085/5065973/files/2009/05/methane-dave-matthews-band.jpg>

<http://www.pacificgrids.com/skull/Grateful-Dead-Cornell77poster.jpg>

<http://www.onetonnemusic.com/mt-static/archives/>

<http://milwaukeeerockposters.com/images/posters/>

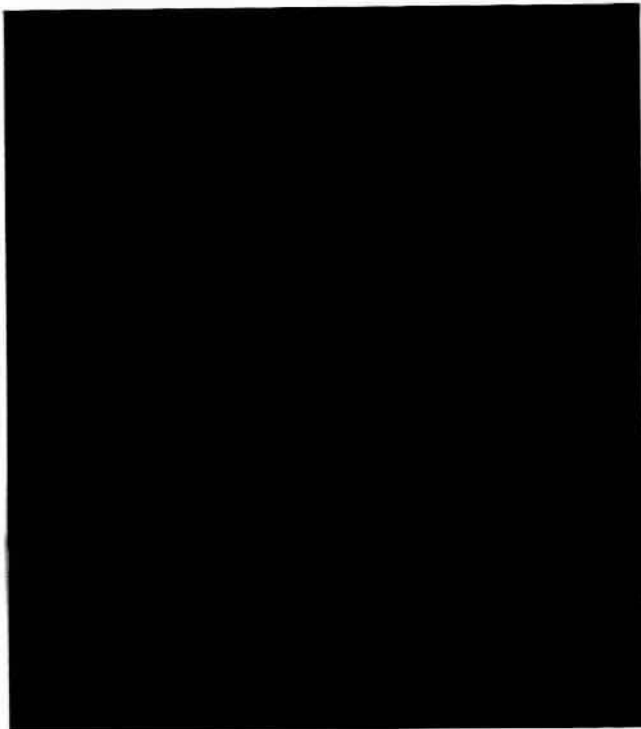
http://imagecache2.allposters.com/images/pic/38/002_943~Led-Zeppelin-Posters.jpg

Image #4-Scene 4-Adam's Bedroom-I found a great picture to use for the bedroom scene, but it was a daytime picture. Tim was able to photoshop the picture to make it look like a night time scene instead.



a. Original image

<http://ex-chamber-memo.up.seesaa.net/image/06-bfa12-thumbnail2.jpg>



b. Photoshopped version. Night time look.

Image #5-Scene 5-The Park-Technically, this is probably a summer tree, not a spring tree. But the cool colors of the painting reflected the feelings of the scene so well that we decided to overlook the seasonal difference. Perhaps it is a strange type of evergreen.



[http://
susquehannavalleypleinair
painters.blogspot.com/
2010/12/view-of-willow-
park-by-cecelia-
lyden.html](http://susquehannavalleypleinairpainters.blogspot.com/2010/12/view-of-willow-park-by-cecelia-lyden.html)

Image #6-Scene 6-The Doctor's Office-This is the only picture we used that is a ball point pen drawing. The scene is obviously a waiting room of some sort and I thought the sterile feel of the black and white image went well with a doctor's office.



[http://lifeartist-
davidablog.blogspot.
com/2012/01/in-
waiting-room.html](http://lifeartist-davidablog.blogspot.com/2012/01/in-waiting-room.html)

Image #7-Scene 7-The College Lawn-This is a painting from a real college. It looks and feel like the quad of a college because it is one. Perfect.



<http://www.1st-art-gallery.com/William-Matthison/Radcliffe-Quad->

Image #8-Scene 8-The Coffeehouse-The quiet feel of a community coffee house, mixed with the pouring rain in the background, is a perfect match to scene 8. What should be a relaxing time for Adam turns into something uncomfortable and life-changing.



<http://fineartamerica.com/featured/1-coffee-house-savannah-ga->

Image #9-Scenes 9 & 10-The Auditorium and Exhibition Hall

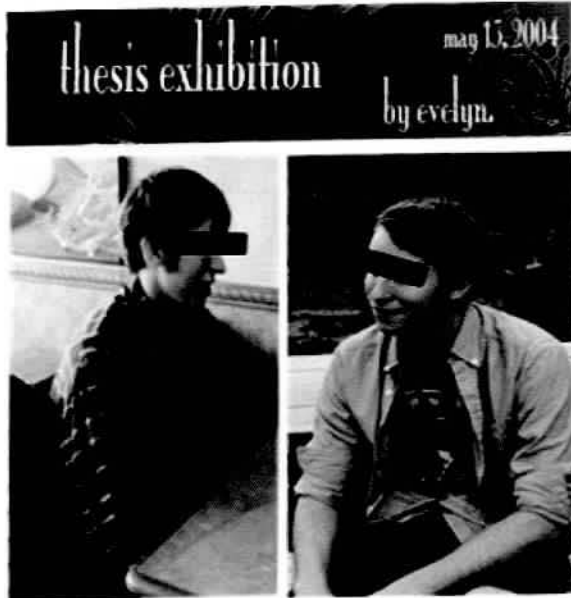
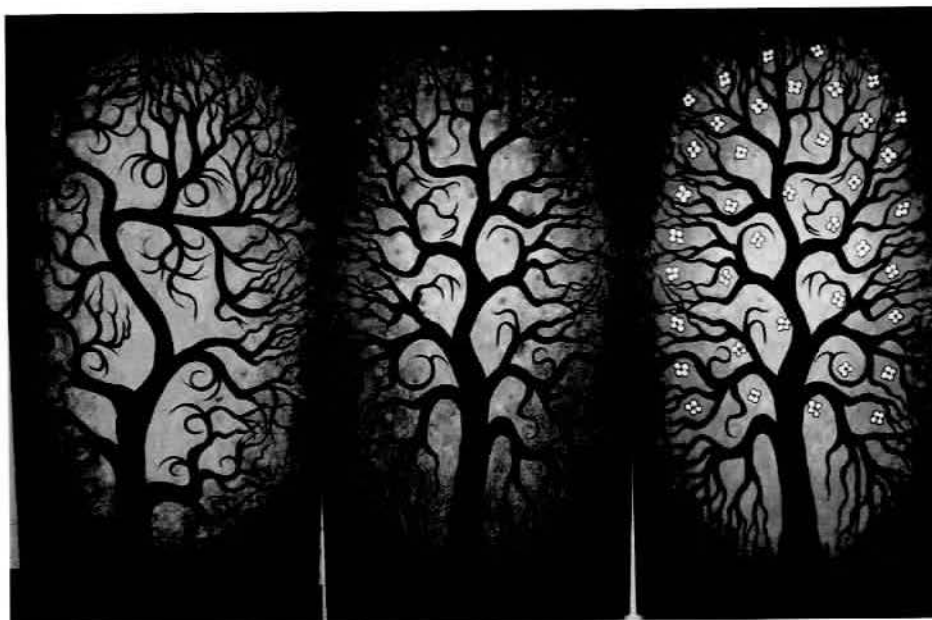


Image #10-Winter Tree-This image was used to show that the first four scenes took place during winter.

Image #11-Early Spring Tree-This image was photoshopped from the Spring tree for scenes 5 and 6.

Image #12-Spring Tree-This image was used for scenes 7 and 8.



Winter

Early Spring

Spring

[http://
www.etsy.co
m/listing/
26052570/
trees-original-
acrylic-
painting-by](http://www.etsy.com/listing/26052570/trees-original-acrylic-painting-by)

Image #13-The Vitruvian Man by Leonardo Da Vinci-This image was cut in half and placed on the outer projection screens to surround Evelyn and the images of Adam during scenes 9 and 10. A negative version of this was shone on the floor of the stage during the last two scenes.

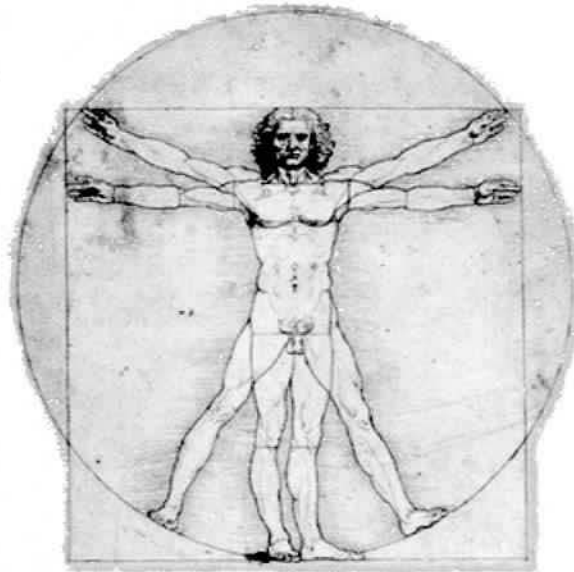


Image #14-Evelyn's presentation programs-This image that I created was used for the cover of the programs that Phil, Jenny and Adam held as they walked into the Auditorium for Evelyn's presentation.

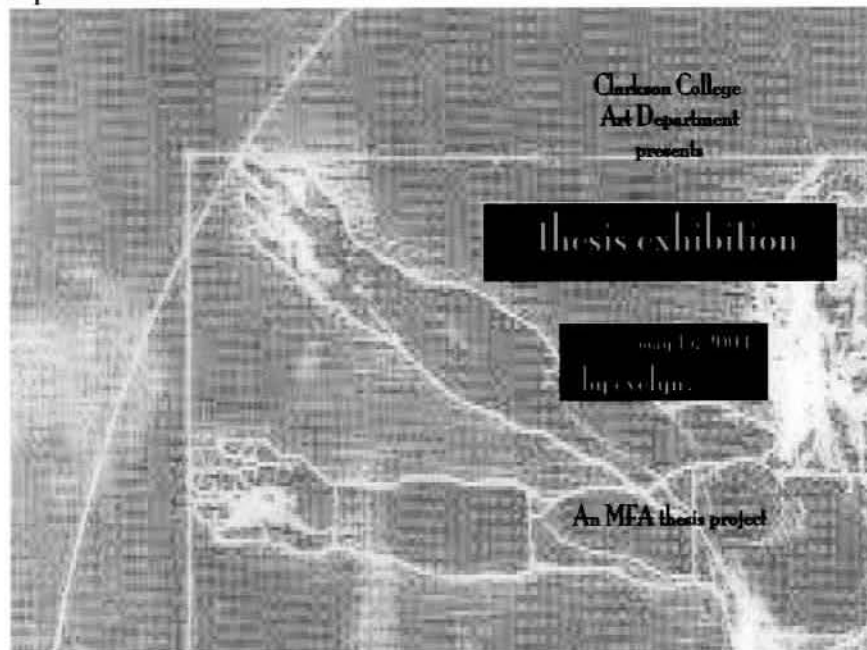


Image #15-Preshow center-I used an abstract picture during pre-show to purposely not show a location. This image matched the Fall tree beautifully.



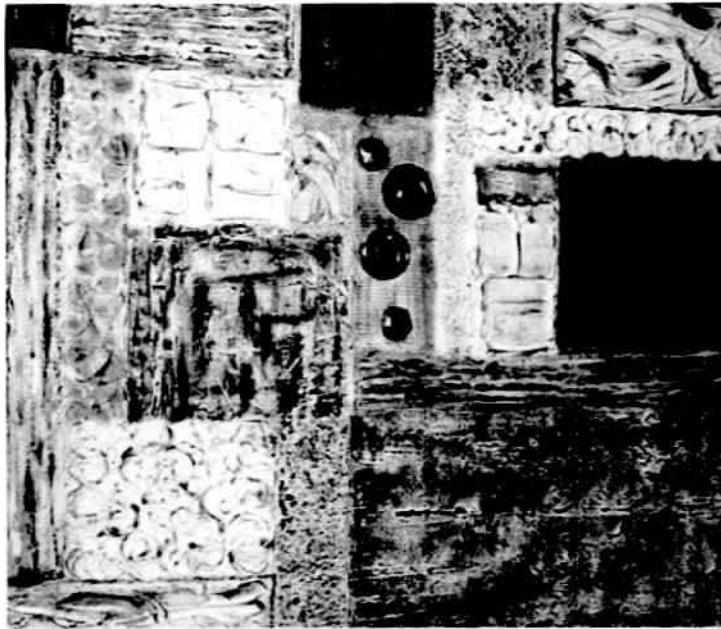
<http://abstract-art-watercolor.abstractartpaintings.co.uk/abstract-art-shapes/>

Image #16-Preshow tree-This was my favorite of the four seasonal trees. I was glad to find a reason to use it.



<http://www.etsy.com/listing/26052570/trees-original-acrylic-painting-by>

Image #17-Bows and Post-show center-I went with a black and white theme for post show. This abstract matched that theme.



<http://www.zhibit.org/hollyandersonart/artwork/modern-abstract-shapes-in-black-white-metallic-s>

Image #18-Bows and Post-show tree-I chose the black and white theme based on this tree. It was of the same style as the other trees even though it is a different artist. I called it the dead tree and decided that the tree was dying just as Adam's hopes and dream were.



<http://images.fineartamerica.com/images-medium-large/black-and-white-tree-angelina-vick.jpg>

Appendix 5
Model

This is a picture of the model that I built for this show. The escape stairs are missing but everything else is there. The model shows the scumbling that needed to be done on the floor of the set. The flower detail on the sides was left out of the real set.



Appendix 6
Production Poster and Email

This is a copy of the flyer that was sent out about the show. I have also included the email that was sent to the student body.

The Lindenwood University Department of Theatre presents:



written by neil labute
directed by lyndsay hicks

SEPTEMBER 20-22, 2012 | 7:30 PM
SEPTEMBER 23, 2012 | 2:00 PM
THE EMERSON BLACK BOX THEATER
BOX OFFICE: (636) 949-4433
LINDENWOODCENTER.COM



LINDENWOOD

"The Shape of Things"--Graduate Thesis Play

Lindenwood University - J. Scheidegger Center for the Arts
 <csnider@lindenwood.edu>
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Wed, Sep 19, 2012 at 3:49
 PM

"The Shape of Things," a Graduate Thesis Play, Sept. 20-23 at Emerson Black Box Theater

In a contemporary retelling of the fall of man, Adam is once again seduced—this time by a beautiful and sophisticated art student, rightfully named Eve(lyn). It is a true match of beauty and the geek as Evelyn and Adam embark on a tumultuous relationship which changes Adam for the better. Or does it? LaBute baits the question of art imitating life or vice-versa? At what point does creation become manipulation and the artist becomes an assassin?

**The Shape of Things**

By Neil LaBute

Directed by Lyndsay Somers Hicks**Sept. 20-22 at 7:30 p.m.****Sept. 23 at 2 p.m.**

The Emerson Black Box Theater

Two free comps are available, which may be reserved in advance but must be picked up on the day of the performance. If not picked up by 15 minutes before the start of the performance, they will be released for resell.

Must present your valid LU ID to place reservation.

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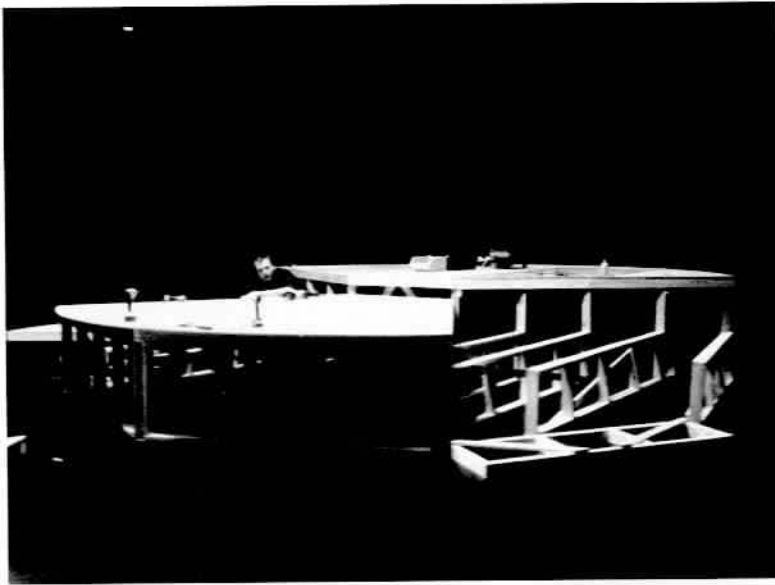
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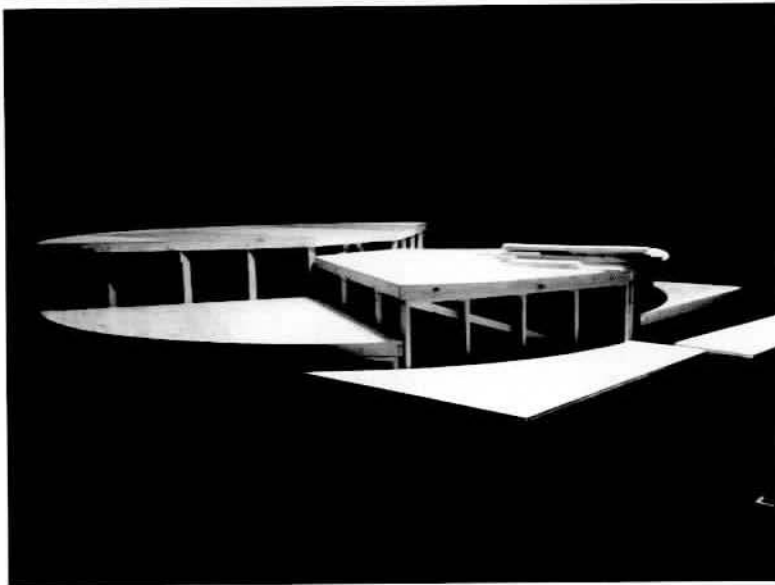
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Appendix 7
Production Photos

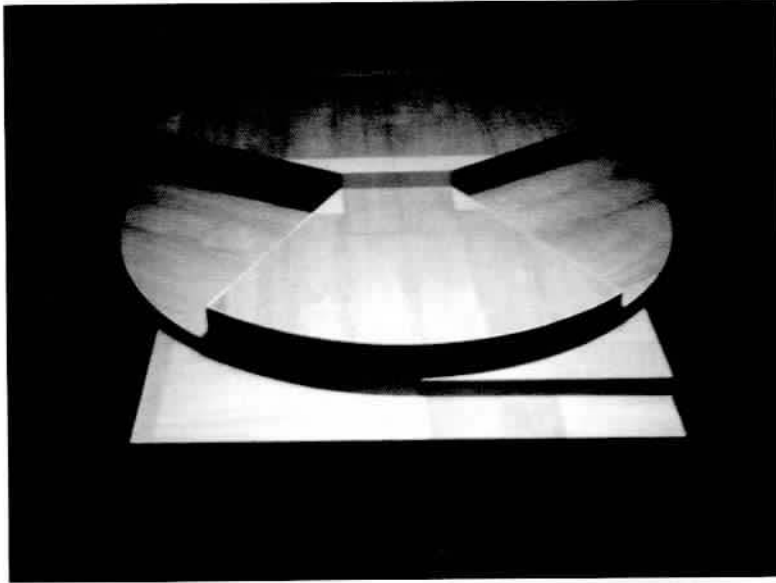
The Build Process



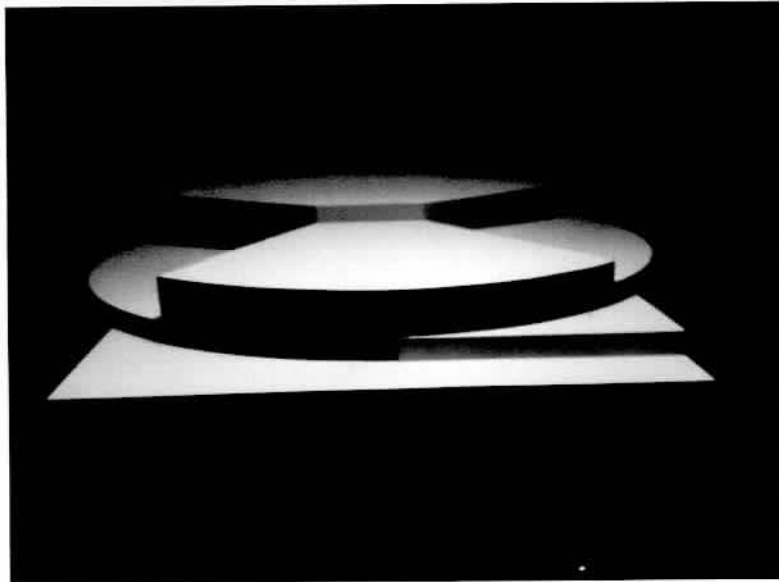
a. Brian peeks out from behind the set. One of the most difficult things about this set was having to crawl around underneath the platforms.



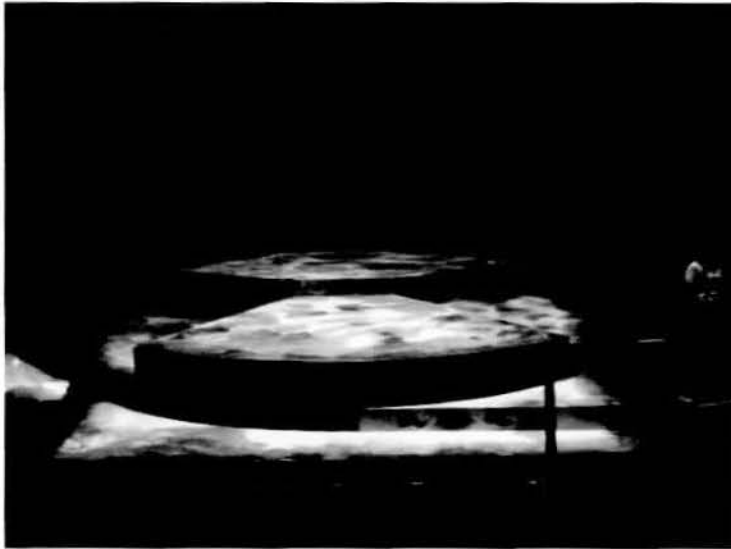
b. This is what the set looked like at the end of Load-in Day One. 20 August 2012.



c. By the end of the week, the platforms had lauan tops and facing. Time to paint! 23 August 2012.



d. By the end of the following week, the set had been base coated and the projections screens covered in muslin. Notice the shrinkage on the large screen. Just another obstacle to overcome. 31 August 2012



e. This week I taught three students to scumble. I taught another one to dry-brush the facing. 4 September 2012.



f. Aside from minor details and repairs, the set is done! Notice the framing that covers the problem with the center screen. 7 September 2012.



g. This is the first time the projector is used on the screens. 11 September 2012.

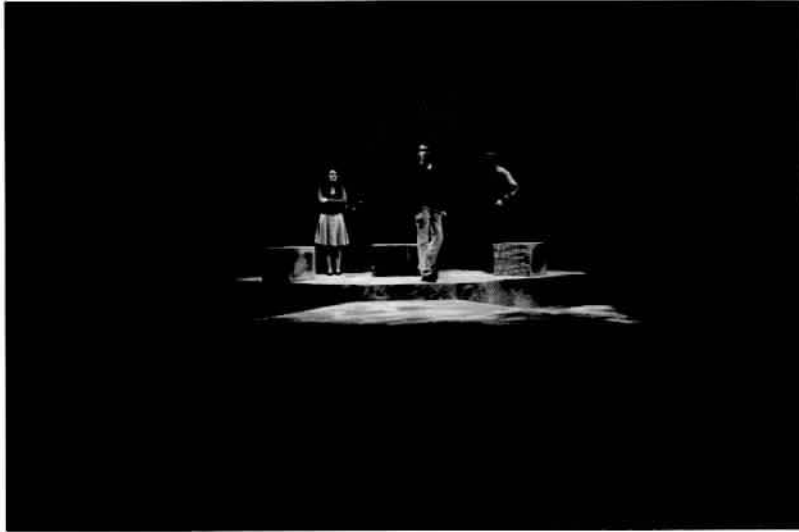
Performance Photos



h. Scene one
The Museum
Adam and Evelyn
meet.



i. Scene 2
The Restaurant
Evelyn meets his
friends.



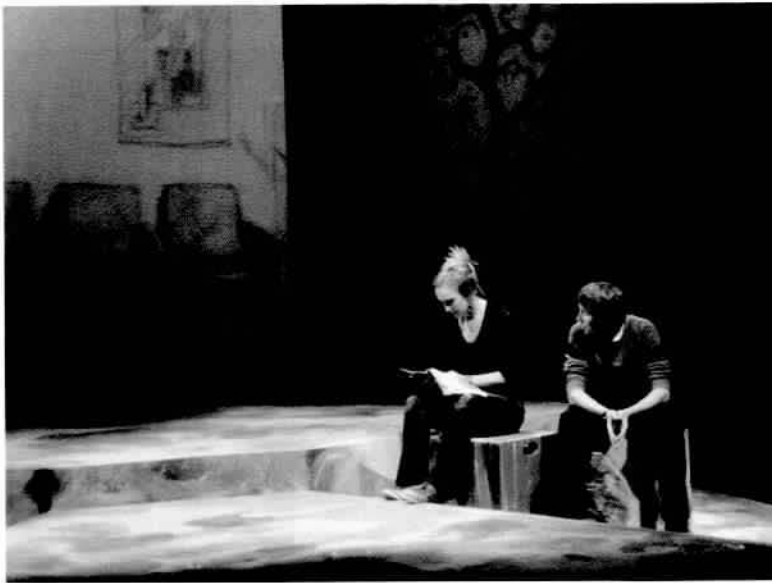
j. Scene 3
Phil's Place
Evelyn storms off,
leaving the others
behind.



k. Scene 4
Adam's Bedroom
Sex for the camera.



l. Scene 5
The Park
Jenny waits to talk to
Adam.



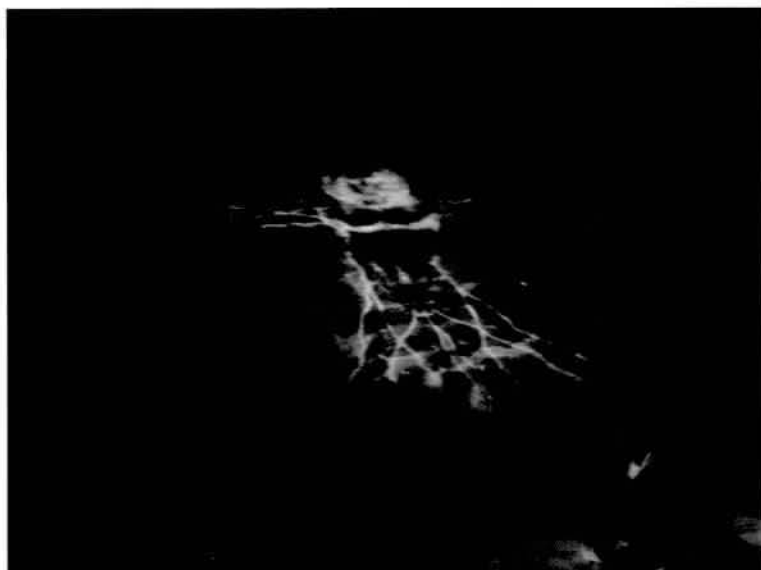
m. Scene 6
The Doctor's Office
Adam waits to talk to
the plastic surgeon.



n. Scene 7
The Lawn
Phil confronts Adam
about all the changes.



o. Scene 8
The Coffeehouse
Evelyn confronts Adam
and Jenny about the kiss
in the park.



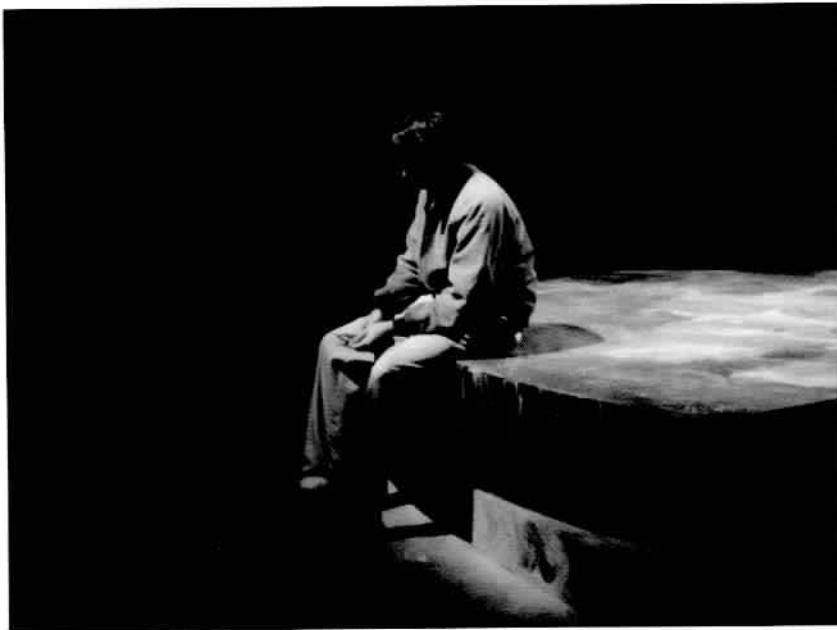
p. Scene 9
The Auditorium
Adam enters, the Vitruvian
Man appears.



q. Scene 9
The Auditorium
Evelyn reveals the
truth.



r. Scene 10
The Exhibition Hall
Adam confronts
Evelyn.



s. Scene 10
The Exhibition Hall
Adam regrets his
actions.



t. Post Show
Dying Tree and
Dying Dreams

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