

THE CRUMBLING OF A FAÇADE:  
A SCENIC DESIGN FOR *ECLIPSED*

A THESIS

SUBMITTED ON THE SIXTH DAY OF MAY 2022  
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND DANCE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS  
OF TULANE UNIVERSITY  
FOR THE DEGREE

OF

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the continual support of Dr. Diana Cupsa, both over the course of this project and throughout my three years at Tulane University. Dr. Cupsa is a constant pillar of feedback and inspiration, as well as a staunch advocate for her students. Thank you for pushing me to think beyond my comfort zone and to explore the world of visual metaphor.

Thanks must also be given to Professor Monica Payne, director of *Eclipsed* and Head of Performance and Directing at Tulane. Professor Payne was a joy to work with. Her insights were always thoughtful, and her sense of aesthetic impeccably tailored. This thesis would not be what it is without Professor Payne's unique approach to design collaboration and clarity of communication.

Additionally, I want to acknowledge Professor Vlad Ghinea for his outstanding use of theatrical lighting, which brought the scenery to life. I want to thank him as well for his encouragement and mentorship in the scene shop; I am honored by his trust in my construction capabilities.

Jaime Silverman is a fellow MFA candidate, costume designer, and friend. Her overseas trip to Ireland in the midst of a global pandemic displays such commitment to the creative process. She enriched the production team as a whole with her findings, and developed an array of costumes with as much attention to research and nuance as the script itself.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....                    | ii  |
| LIST OF FIGURES .....                    | iv  |
| INTRODUCTION .....                       | 1   |
| CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT .....               | 4   |
| The World of the Play                    |     |
| The Author                               |     |
| Historical Record                        |     |
| CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPT .....               | 19  |
| Initial Inspiration                      |     |
| Preliminary Concepts                     |     |
| Director Feedback                        |     |
| CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT ..... | 36  |
| First Iteration                          |     |
| Second Iteration                         |     |
| Final Design                             |     |
| Presentation and Model                   |     |
| CHAPTER FOUR: CONSTRUCTION .....         | 56  |
| CHAPTER FIVE: REALIZED PRODUCTION .....  | 77  |
| CHAPTER SIX: REFLECTION .....            | 86  |
| APPENDIX .....                           | 89  |
| Design Drafting                          |     |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY .....                       | 101 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

### CHAPTER 1

**Figure 1:** De la Tour, Georges. The Penitent Magdalene. 1640.

**Figure 2:** O'Shaughnessy, Joe. Patricia Burke Brogan at the sculpture by Mick Wilkins to the Magdalene women. The Irish Times, 22 Nov. 2014, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/domestic-violence-refuge-planned-for-magdalen-convent-in-galway-1.2010540>.

**Figure 3:** Wilkins, Mick. Magdalene Woman Sculpture. 2009.

**Figure 4:** Price, Ryan. Magdalene penitents scrub laundry in a workroom. The Irish Post, 9 Feb. 2018, <https://www.irishpost.com/news/stories-of-magdalene-laundry-survivors-told-in-new-online-archives-149612>.

**Figure 5:** Justice for Magdalenes Research. Green markers signify laundry locations, while red markers indicate burial grounds. 2009, <http://jfmresearch.com/home/map-of-magdalene-laundries-and-grave-locations/>.

**Figure 6:** Nunes dos Santos, Paulo. The back wall of Gloucester Laundry, the last of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries, in Dublin. 6 June, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/06/world/europe/magdalene-laundry-reunion-ireland.html>.

**Figure 7:** Blake, Tarquin. Inside the abandoned Good Shepherd Magdalene Asylum. 24 Feb. 2011, <https://hrp.law.harvard.edu/sexual-and-reproductive-rights/images-from-abandoned-ireland-inside-a-magdalene-laundry/>.

## CHAPTER TWO

**Figure 8:** Kiefer, Anselm. *The Order of the Night*. 1996.

**Figure 9:** Behal, Julien. *Inside a derelict Magdalene Laundry*. 5 Feb. 2013,  
<https://www.itv.com/news/update/2013-02-05/inside-a-derelict-dublin-magdalene-laundry/>.

**Figure 10:** *A labyrinth of lanterns to celebrate the winter solstice*. 2022,  
<https://vancouverbestplaces.com/events-calendar/december/winter-solstice-lantern-festival/winter-solstice-candle-labyrinth/>.

**Figure 11:** *Votive Candles at St. John's Cathedral, Savannah*. 28 Mar, 2012,  
<https://minmaxsunt.wordpress.com/tag/votive-candles/>.

**Figure 12:** Orving, Diana. *Notch*. Beijing 2010.

**Figure 13:** Mezzanotti, Valerio. *The fall 2017 Chanel show at the Grand Palais*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/17/style/space-is-the-new-black.html>.

**Figure 14:** Johnson, Michael. *Haunted house rendering*. January, 2013,  
<http://mrjohnson23.blogspot.com/2012/07/haunted-attic.html>.

**Figure 15:** Boss, Christian. *Dark Promenade of Steam-Pipes*. 17 June, 2014,  
<https://500px.com/photo/95889219/Dark-promenade-of-SteamPipes-Part-I-by-Christian-Boss>.

**Figure 16:** McLaughlin, Kelly. *Magdalene women working in a Dublin Laundry*. 27 March, 2017, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4352372/Haunting-images-everyday-life-Magdalene-Laundries.html>.

**Figure 17:** Ghinea, Vlad. *Ground Plan of the Lupin Theater*. Architectural Drawing. 2022, Tulane University.

**Figure 18:** Scenic concept sketch for upstage pipes and crane rail. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 19:** Scenic concept sketch for downstage audience seating and set dressing. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 20:** Conceptual ground plan sketch for intersecting alleys and crane rail access. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 21:** Scenic concept sketch of the memorial exhibit. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 22:** Scenic concept sketch with suspended trusses and laundry above worktables. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 23:** Conceptual ground plan sketch for exhibit and performance space in the same venue. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 24:** Scenic concept sketch for the upstage wall and oversized portrait of Mary Magdalene above a cold fireplace. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 25:** Scenic concept sketch with emphasis on industrial pendant lights and hanging fabric. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 26:** Conceptual ground plan sketch showing offstage space for actors and crucifix-shaped playing space. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 27:** Scenography.co.uk. Diagram of a shallow thrust provided for reference by Professor Payne. 2006, <https://theatredesigner.wordpress.com/theatre-design-101/stage-types-thrust/>.

**Figure 28:** Dreamstime. Stock vector image of old album frames, provided by Professor Payne for reference. <https://www.dreamstime.com/royalty-free-stock-photography-old-photo-album-pages-image16951897>

**Figure 29:** CAHairyBear. Scanned photo of a vintage photo album, provided by Professor Payne for reference. 20 Jan. 2010, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/91173606@N00/4291711884/in/photostream>.

**Figure 30:** Postcard from Professor Payne's personal collection. 2021, Tulane University.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

**Figure 31:** 8" riser increments create poor visibility for much of the audience. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 32:** 16" riser increments significantly improve audience sightlines. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 33:** Marker sketch of developing scenic ideation, with picture frame wall openings. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 34:** Second draft Ground Plan. Architectural Drawing. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 35:** Rendering of audience view when entering the theater from the lobbyette. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 36:** Option one, with overlapping rectilinear frames. Digital rendering. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 37:** Option two, with arched wall openings. Digital rendering. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 38:** Experimental seating options; the ground row is replaced by church pews, and chairs on the risers are shrouded in red fabric. Digital rendering. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 39:** Finalized Ground Plan for Eclipsed. Architectural Drawing. 2021, Tulane University.



**Figure 40:** Elevation of the upstage focal wall with revised plaster and lath design. Architectural Drawing. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 41:** Revision to audience view when entering the theater from the lobbyette. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 42:** View of the downstage left candle table. Digital rendering. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 43:** View of upstage focal wall. Digital rendering. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 44:** View looking towards downstage right vom; note pews and candle table in background. Digital rendering. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 45:** Scale model depicting the Zimpel St (upstage) wall of the Lupin Theater. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 46:** In-progress model of upstage focal wall. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 47:** In-progress scale scenic elements, prior to painting. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 48:** Scale model near to completion. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 49:** The finished model,  $\frac{1}{2}'' = 1'-0''$ . 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 50:** View of the modeled downstage wall and statue alcove. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 51:** Photo of model, downstage left vom and candle table memorial. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 52:** Photo of model; a greenish light glows through the scrim upstage of the focal wall. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 53:** Photo of model from house left; dramatic side and back lighting create an eerie atmosphere. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 54:** Shadows create texture on the floor. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 55:** Light and shadow fills the scenic model with depth. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 56:** Design presentation materials, including model, drafting, and inspiration images. 2021, Tulane University.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

**Figure 57:** Downstage wall flats and small frames after construction. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 58:** Sample of painted plaster and lath for director review. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 59:** From left to right, picture frames, buffet, and chair sourced from local garage sales. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 60:** Water-damaged pews sourced from a local church. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 61:** The worktables after construction and puttying all holes. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 62:** The downstage wall flats after the basecoat of plaster and paper. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 63:** Sections of the upstage wall plaster drying after being sponged with paint. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 64:** The cross, made of XPS foam. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 65:** The slats of lath drying after staining. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 66:** The completed candle holders. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 67:** The house left seating bank is assembled. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 68:** The team assembles the down-center risers. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 69:** Furniture is brought into the Lupin so that rehearsals can proceed in the space. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 70:** Framing for the upstage wall is installed. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 71:** Rodriguez, Christopher. The designer stands in front of the first section of plaster. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 72:** The wooden slats are stapled into place behind the plaster. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 73:** Assembly of the wall is two-thirds complete. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 74:** Assembly of the wall is complete except for some slats in the upper third. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 75:** After sanding, each part of the pews is stained in a darker finish. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 76:** Two completed pews are installed in the theater ground row. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 77:** The alcove is cut out of the flat and plastered. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 78:** The altar table is refinished. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 79:** The alcove is complete with trim and shelf. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 80:** Kohler, Christian. A Mother and Child. 8 May, 2019.

**Figure 81:** HolyArt. Mother of God with Child Icon. 2021.

**Figure 82:** Galli, Giovanni Antonio. Saint Mary Magdalene. 1625-1635.

**Figure 83:** Sketch of seated mother and child. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 84:** Mary Magdalene with skull. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 85:** The Holy Family. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 86:** Storyboard illustration process of producing the alcove statue. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 87:** The complete statue after installation. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 88:** Compression legs are fastened to stock platforms after the voile is installed. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 89:** The candle tables are assembled. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 90:** The candle tables are installed and painted. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 91:** The floor is base-coated. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 92:** The floor drying after clear-coating. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 93:** The cross, bench, and other furnishings are integrated into the space. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 94:** In-progress photo of suspending the picture frames. 2021, Tulane University.

## CHAPTER FIVE

**Figure 95:** LED votives are turned on and ready for pre-show. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 96:** A completed candle table, lit from behind with small PARs. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 97:** Eclipsed pre-show look. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 98:** Landrum, Cat. Kathy (Grace Boseley), Brigit (Lourdes Castillo), and Nellie Nora (Genevieve Corkery) pretend to send Mandy (Maddie Ray – Understudy) on her honeymoon. 2021, 2nd Story Creative.

**Figure 99:** Brigit reads a letter on the down-right bench. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 100:** The figures of Brigit, Kathy, Nellie-Nora, and Mother Victoria appear upstage of the wall during Sister Virginia's crisis of faith. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 101:** Landrum, Cat. The Singers appear upstage of the wall for the morning call to prayer. 2021, 2nd Story Creative.

**Figure 102:** In a transition, the Singers appear upstage with lanterns. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 103:** The Singers appear from the down-left vom, the candle table glowing in the background. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 104:** Mandy, Nellie-Nora, and Juliet (Madi Bell) help Kathy stow away in a laundry cart. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 105:** Sister Virginia (Maggie Sides) is backlit as she prepares to pray alone. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 106:** Mother Victoria takes a call from the Bishop. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 107:** Mother Victoria tells Virginia, “God’s ways are not our ways.” 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 108:** Mother Victoria’s office. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 109:** Mother Victoria chastises the rebellious Sister Virginia. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 110:** The company speaks the final monologue in unison, carrying the red memorial candles. 2021, Tulane University.

**Figure 111:** The ghost of the deceased Kathy McNamara appears upstage of the wall for the final monologue. 2021, Tulane University.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

**Figure 112:** The shadow of the cross falls across the focal wall. 2021, Tulane University.

## INTRODUCTION

In fall of 2021, I developed a scenic design for painter and poet Patricia Burke Brogan's groundbreaking play, *Eclipsed*, under interdisciplinary director Monica Payne. The script was selected as part of "The Jubilee", Tulane Department of Theatre and Dance (TUTD)'s part in a national commitment to showcasing work generated by those historically excluded from mainstream productions, including women, LGBTQ+, disabled, Deaf, and Indigenous artists.<sup>1</sup> The play features an all-female cast and is centered on the tragedy of the Magdalene Laundries, exposing a misogynist practice of neglect and abuse rampant in 1960's Irish convents.

Inspired by the author's lived experience as a nun of the Laundries, *Eclipsed* tells the stories of pregnant, unmarried Catholic women who were sent to the convent by their families in order to hide the shame and scandal of their pregnancy. There, the women were made to work in the laundry facilities, which they were not permitted to leave for any reason, and when they gave birth, their babies were taken from them and adopted out to other Catholic families, often abroad. The women found moments of kinship amongst themselves, but were little more than prisoners; many would live out the rest of their lives in the Laundries.

Today, this feminist piece remains incredibly topical, as it speaks to a cultural climate in which young women are more often shamed for unwed pregnancies than given care and support, and offers a response: that this is wrong, inhumane, and unequal; one of

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<sup>1</sup> The Jubilee. "Join the Jubilee." Facebook, 23 July 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/jointhejubilee/>.

the play's so-called "penitent women" astutely points out that her male lover would experience no consequences for his part in her pregnancy (Brogan, "Eclipsed", 2.3).<sup>2</sup> This script also carries with it shades of other abuses long-concealed by church and state, such as the deaths and subsequent burial of Indigenous children on residential school land in both Canada and the United States.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, although this play is storied around events specific to a particular time and place, it continues to be relevant to today's audiences.

The role of the scenic designer is critical in bridging the gap between the audience and performers by creating an environment in which the themes and messages of the play can resonate. When exploring sensitive social issues, the artistry of the environment becomes even more important. With this production, my goals as a designer were to honor the memory of the victims and to strike a balance between visual poetry and real-world events. It was also important to me that the perpetrators of this violence be held accountable, and to not shy away from assigning responsibility. I believe the design achieved these goals, and will elaborate on them further in future chapters.

A final note must be made about the Covid-19 pandemic, which began late in 2019 and arrived in the US in January of 2020.<sup>4</sup> At the time of this writing, Coronavirus is still a matter of global concern. Tulane University has been an active combatant of Covid-19,

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<sup>2</sup> Burke Brogan, Patricia. *Eclipsed*. Fifth Edition, Wordsonthestreet, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Austen, Ian. "How Thousands of Indigenous Children Vanished in Canada." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 7 June 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/07/world/canada/mass-graves-residential-schools.html?smid=url-share>.

<sup>4</sup> "CDC Museum Covid-19 Timeline." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 5 Jan. 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html#Early-2020>.



requiring rigorous testing and vaccination for students, faculty, and staff,<sup>5</sup> and numerous regulations are still in place to help mitigate the spread of this disease. These regulations became a necessary consideration in the design of this thesis production, the impact of which will be discussed later.

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<sup>5</sup> "Testing & Tracing." Tulane University, Tulane University, 8 Feb. 2022, <https://tulane.edu/covid-19/testing-tracing>.

## CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT

### 1. The World of the Play

*Eclipsed* is a work of fiction, its characters the playwright's own invention, but the world and events it retells are very real. The first scene is a sort of prologue, set in 1992, at Saint Paul's Laundry in Killmacha, Ireland. The Laundry is no longer in operation, and a fashionable young woman, Rosa, is being given a tour by the elderly Nellie-Nora. Rosa, an adoptee from America, has come to Killmacha seeking information about her family. Nellie-Nora shows her to an old laundry basket in which resides the remaining odds and ends from the women who lived and worked at Saint Paul's. Rosa discovers a ledger book listing the "penitent women", each of them unwed, pregnant, and signed in by another. Rosa learns that Nellie-Nora was one of the penitents, as was her birth mother, Brigit Murphy (Brogan, "Eclipsed," 1.1).

As the first scene concludes, the play shifts backwards in time to 1963, where most of the remaining action takes place. The year is not incidental; Brogan chose it because at that time, Vatican II was taking place in Rome, a series of ecumenical council meetings that eased some of the traditional restrictions for nuns—an easing which took substantial time to translate to the isolated island country of Ireland. Also, John F. Kennedy visited Ireland in that year as the first Catholic Irish-American president of the United States. Furthermore, American Rock n' Roll and the influence of Elvis Presley had arrived east of

the Atlantic, and was becoming quite a hit throughout Europe (Brogan, “Memoirs”, pg. 162).<sup>6</sup> Presley and his lyrics would go on to feature heavily in the play.

This shift in time happens with music, a morning call to prayer between the nuns of the Laundry (Brogan, “Eclipsed,” 1.2), which then becomes an Elvis tune sung with enthusiasm by several of the penitents (1.3). The women, also called Magdalenes, are so named in likeness to St. Mary Magdalene, the Biblical figure who was a follower of Jesus, witnessed his crucifixion, and was present for his resurrection from the tomb. Mary Magdalene’s other roles in the Bible are difficult to discern, and she is often conflated with Mary of Bethany who anointed Jesus’ feet with her hair. She has also been frequently named by Christians as a repentant prostitute, despite a lack of clear textual evidence for



*Figure 1: De la Tour, Georges. The Penitent Magdalene. 1640.*

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<sup>6</sup> Burke Brogan, Patricia. *Memoir with Grykes & Turloughs*. WordsontheStreet, 2014.

this in the Bible (Carroll).<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, this has historically been a popular interpretation, and explains her association with the “fallen women”—unwed mothers—of Saint Paul’s Laundry. The penitent women named in the play are as follows: Brigit Murphy, Cathy McNamara, Nellie-Nora Langan, Julia Mannion (the late mother of Juliet Mannion), and Mandy Prenderville. The play also names two nuns, Mother Victoria, the Laundry’s Mother Superior, and Sister Virginia, a “white” nun of the novitiate who has not yet taken her vows (Brogan, “Eclipsed,” List of Characters).

The play continues through the eyes of the penitents, humanizing them and illustrating the ways in which they each assert their personality on an environment which seeks to strip their individuality. Brigit, Nellie-Nora, and Mandy daydream about all the different foods they would eat if they had their freedom (Brogan, “Eclipsed,” 1.3). Mandy, who idolizes Elvis, writes letters to the film star and plays dress-up, imagining their fantasy wedding (1.6). The women sing and joke and dance, doing what little they can to make one another’s lives of drudgery less miserable as they iron and scrub the endless baskets of laundry. Music is a crucial part of their world, the country rock tunes of Elvis juxtaposed against traditional Catholic liturgy.

In contrast to the camaraderie the penitents share, their treatment at the hands of the nuns is institutional and harsh. Kathy manages to escape the Laundry for an afternoon, but is dragged back when she is spotted by the drivers of a laundry van. Mother Victoria hits her over the head, allegedly to “bring her back to reality”. When Sister Virginia later tells her about Kathy’s resultant headaches and frequent asthma attacks, Mother Victoria

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<sup>7</sup> Carroll, James. “Who Was Mary Magdalene?” *Smithsonian Magazine*, Smithsonian Institution, 1 June 2006, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/who-was-mary-magdalene-119565482/>.

dismisses the concerns, saying that Kathy is “a bit of an actress”. She disregards the Sister’s requests for medicine, better food, and sunshine for the women (Brogan, “Eclipsed,” 2.1). In the second act, Brigit says of Sister Virginia, “...soon she’ll be strutting around like the others, waving her leather belt...” suggesting that the women are also beaten (2.3). Moreover, it is plain that the nuns have no sympathy for the women, and that they blame them for the pregnancies which led to their incarceration. Mother Victoria quotes Saint Paul, saying, “People who do wrong will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. People of immoral lives—fornicators, adulterers,” and goes on to add, “Women tempt men!” (2.1). This is apparently a point of view which is common among the nuns who have taken their vows, as when the orphan Juliet recounts how she was nearly assaulted by the vegetable man, Mother Joachim would not believe her, “that she didn’t lead him on,” (1.4). The novice Sister Virginia is a pivotal character in that she disagrees with this view, and is troubled by the conditions in which the women live and work.

The men of the world are absent from the stage, but are a frequent topic of conversation among the women. Each of the penitents has her own relationship with the man who made her pregnant; according to Brigit, Kathy never speaks of him (“Seven years without tellin’ anyone! Women are fools!”), but longs to be reunited with the twins she was forced to give up for adoption. Brigit likewise mourns her baby, Rosa, but unlike Kathy she speaks often of her lover, John-Joe, towards whom she is embittered but perhaps still has some feelings for; she is desperate to tell him about their baby before he marries another woman (Brogan, “Eclipsed,” 1.4). Mandy reminisces fondly about her lover, Richard, but her happy-go-lucky nature is contrasted sharply by the Mother Superior’s revelation that Mandy performed an abortion on herself in hopes she could leave the Laundry if she was

not pregnant (1.5). Nellie-Nora also says nothing about her experience, until a panic attack causes her to reveal she was raped by her employer, Mr. Percy, the same man who signed her into the Laundry (2.3). Insofar as can be told from the text, none of these men ever suffered any consequences for their actions, whereas the women are condemned to a lifetime of servitude.

Additionally, much mention is made of male members of the clergy, Bishops and seminarians and others who have business with the nuns. Their absence is equally notable, for the penitents do all of their laundry, yet the clergymen never set foot in the facility to meet the women who work on their behalf. It reinforces the same idea that Mother Victoria expresses, that the women are guilty and lesser than men. When Sister Virginia, in desperation, writes to the Bishop imploring him to come see the conditions in which the women are kept, Mother Victoria is furious, exclaiming, “A white novice takes it on herself to invite that holy man to visit those – those – !” (Brogan, “Eclipsed,” 2.4). She cannot even find a word suitable to describe her disgust for the penitents, and is appalled to imagine a man, much less the Bishop, speaking with them.

A final component of life in the Laundry is the Rule; a term which encompasses not merely Biblical Scripture, but the customs and traditions which govern the lives of the nuns. Mother Victoria quotes it as a means of exerting control over Sister Virginia, who wishes to change the inhumane practices of the Laundry, reminding her that “blind obedience” is required of her (Brogan, “Eclipsed,” 2.1). It is because of the Rule that Sister Virginia must kneel in the Mother Superior’s presence until invited to sit, and why she can forbid Sister Virginia from speaking to her brother when he comes to give Mass (2.4). The Rule is significant because it illustrates that this is not merely an isolated case, a single

Laundry abusing its power, but rather an entrenched and institutionalized practice of blind obedience to authority, resulting in the incarceration and enslavement of thousands of women across Catholic Ireland.

The play concludes once more in 1992, with Rosa questioning Nellie-Nora about Brigit and John-Joe. She invites Nellie-Nora to come and visit her sometime, but Nellie-Nora has spent nearly her entire life in Saint Paul's, and though it is no longer an operating Laundry facility, years of neglect have made her too anxious to leave. The final lines are a chilling monologue, which reads:

**SISTER VIRGINIA:** In 1992, to make place for a building development at Saint Paul's Home, the remains of Mary Kate Dempsey, Mary Jane O'Sullivan, Kitty O'Hara, Julia Mannion, Betty and Annie Gormley, Ellen McAuley, Cathy McNamara, and three hundred other unnamed penitents were exhumed, cremated, and reburied outside in Killmacha cemetery. Mandy Prenderville has not left the local Mental Institution since 1963 (Brogan, "Eclipsed," 2.6).

This monologue is no doubt in reference to the mass grave of penitents exhumed in 1992 by the Our Lady of Charity order.

## 2. The Author



Figure 2: Photo by O'Shaughnessy, Joe. Patricia Burke Brogan at the sculpture by Mick Wilkins to the Magdalene women. *The Irish Times*, 22 Nov. 2014, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/domestic-violence-refuge-planned-for-magdalen-convent-in-galway-1.2010540>.

Patricia Burke Brogan was born in Kildysart, County Clare, Ireland (1932-present). The daughter of a sergeant, she was three years old when her father was transferred to Galway and the family moved to the city. Though young at the time, Brogan mourned the rest of her life for her family's old house on the River Shannon ("Memoir", pg. 90). The painter, writer, and poet was educated at St. Louis Convent in Balla County and later through a college in Dublin. She now lives in Galway City, where she continues to write and exhibit her artwork worldwide.

In her young adult years, Brogan trained to become a nun with the Sisters of Mercy in Galway. As a novice, she spent her time teaching art and history until she was assigned to the local Magdalene Laundry for the summer. According to a piece in *The Irish Times*,

[Brogan] still remembers the whiff of Eau de Parfum when, as a young novitiate in black habit, coif and veil, she was ordered to kiss the ruby-ringed hand of her mother superior before being assigned laundry duty.

It was a contrast to the very different smells that almost overwhelmed her when she arrived at Forster Street – the stench of bleach fumes and dirty clothing and steam from “sweating” walls.

The Laundry, allegedly the “richest branch house” of the Sisters of Mercy, was a shocking experience, as Brogan was led through a series of heavy doors with double locks and bolts to a room with prison bars where women of all ages worked the washing machines. The playwright's time there affected her deeply, as evidenced by the fact she never went on to take her vows. Instead, Brogan was prompted to pen her groundbreaking play, *Eclipsed* (Siggins, “Domestic...”).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Siggins, Lorna. “Domestic Violence Refuge Planned for Magdalen Convent in Galway.” *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Times*, 22 Nov. 2014, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/domestic-violence-refuge-planned-for-magdalen-convent-in-galway-1.2010540>.



Brogan shares many similarities with her fictional character, Sister Virginia. Like Brogan, Virginia is deeply troubled by the goings-on in the laundry, the way that the women are held captive and forced to work. In her *Memoir with Grykes & Turloughs*, Brogan recounts some of her experiences not only of working with the penitents, but with the nuns. The chapter “Keys” recounts a phone call which Brogan’s own Mother Superior took with the Bishop in her presence. The same conversation appears verbatim in the text of *Eclipsed*, when Sister Virginia visits Mother Victoria in her office (2.1). Another conversation with a nun, Mother Romanus, also became inspiration for Brogan’s writing. Brogan remembers Romanus, a Mother overseeing the Laundry to which she was assigned, saying, “[The penitents] have no control, sister. They’ve broken the sixth and ninth commandments! No one wants these women...” (“Memoir”, pg. 74). Like the phone call, this dialogue was written into *Eclipsed* in the mouth of Mother Victoria. Sister Virginia’s reply was Brogan’s own: “But they are our Sisters in Christ!” (“Memoirs”, pg. 75). It is never made explicitly clear whether Sister Virginia will choose to take her vows by the play’s end; however, at the story’s climax, she surrenders her keys to the penitent Brigit, allowing her to escape (“Eclipsed”, 2.5). This poetic rejection of the nuns’ Rule places Virginia on a plane similar to that of Brogan herself, who chose to leave the novitiate rather than continue to endorse such abuse.

*Eclipsed* was first produced in 1992 by Galway’s Punchbag Theatre, going on to win a Fringe First at the Edinburgh Festival. The production toured all over Ireland, and was mounted again in 1998. In 1994, *Eclipsed* came to the United States, where it premiered at the Forum Theatre in Worcester, MA and won a Moss Hart Award. Since it initially opened in Galway, the play has received numerous productions throughout the US

as well as internationally, including productions in Australia, Italy, France, Japan, Germany, and Peru. It was *Eclipsed* which brought the scandalous history of the Magdalene Laundries into the public eye, openly acknowledging practices which hitherto were tacitly accepted by both the Irish state and citizenry. As a result, numerous documentaries, books, and movies have followed.<sup>9</sup>

Brogan's advocacy for the Magdalenes has not stopped at the writing of *Eclipsed*. In 2002, she wrote *Stained Glass at Samhain*, a sequel play told from the perspective of Sister Luke, who on the Feast of Samhain crosses over from the afterlife to promote healing and forgiveness of the Laundry atrocities. The playwright also lobbied extensively for memorializing the victims at the site of the Laundry where she worked after it was demolished to make way for a bank. On International Women's Day, 2009, her efforts paid off when a sculpture dedicated to the Magdalenes (Figure 3) was unveiled. The base of the statue is inscribed with part of her poem, *Make Visible the Tree*. She received obscene personal threats as a result of her efforts, evidence of the shame and anger this history still inspires ("Memoirs",



Figure 3: Wilkins, Mick. Magdalene Laundry Sculpture. 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Burke Brogan, Patricia. "Eclipsed". In *Irish Women Dramatists 1908-2001*, edited by Charlotte Headrick, Kearney, Syracuse University Press, 2014, pp 171-172.

pg. 118-19). Conversely, in 2014 she was awarded an honorary Master of Arts from NUI Galway as “proof that the lone individual can make a difference,” (Siggins, “Bookseller...”).<sup>10</sup>

Patricia Burke Brogan’s other credits are numerous. She has exhibited her paintings and etchings widely in Ireland, as well as internationally in such places as Barcelona, Madrid, Hawaii, Japan, and several Catalan museums and galleries. Her poems and short stories have been published in *Writing in the West*, *Living Landscape Anthology*, *Humours of Galway*, and more (The Kenny Gallery).<sup>11</sup> Brogan has also written several other plays, which include single-actor monologues—*Credo*, *Requiem of Love*—as well as two-act plays—*Yours Truly*, *Stained Glass at Samhain*, *Clarenda’s Mirror*—and a radio play, *Cell* (“Eclipsed,” Other Titles By ... Brogan).

### 3. Historical Record

In 1765, the first Magdalen Asylum for Penitent Females was founded in Dublin by the Protestant Church of Ireland. Initially, many of the women entered the facility voluntarily; some were sex workers seeking to learn a “respectable” profession, such as needlework, lace making, or laundry, with the goal of using these skills to earn a living after their release. Supported at first by both the Protestant and Catholic churches, the goal was to rehabilitate what the conservative Irish society saw as “fallen” women. However,

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<sup>10</sup> Siggins, Lorna. “Bookseller, Writer and Musician Receive Honorary Degrees at NUI Galway.” *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Times*, 22 Oct. 2014, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/bookseller-writer-and-musician-receive-honorary-degrees-at-nui-galway-1.1971999>.

<sup>11</sup> Gallery, The Kenny. “Patricia Burke Brogan.” *The Kenny Gallery*, 2014, <http://www.thekennygallery.ie/artists/burkebroganpatricia/>.

over time, the Laundries became a predominantly Catholic-run affair, and the incarceration of women lasted for longer and longer (Blakemore).<sup>12</sup>

After the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the Magdalene Laundries were operated by four religious orders—The Sisters of Mercy, The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, the Sisters of Charity, and the Good Shepherd Sisters—in ten different locations around Ireland (IrishCentral).<sup>13</sup> Life for the Magdalenes was little different than being confined to a prison.

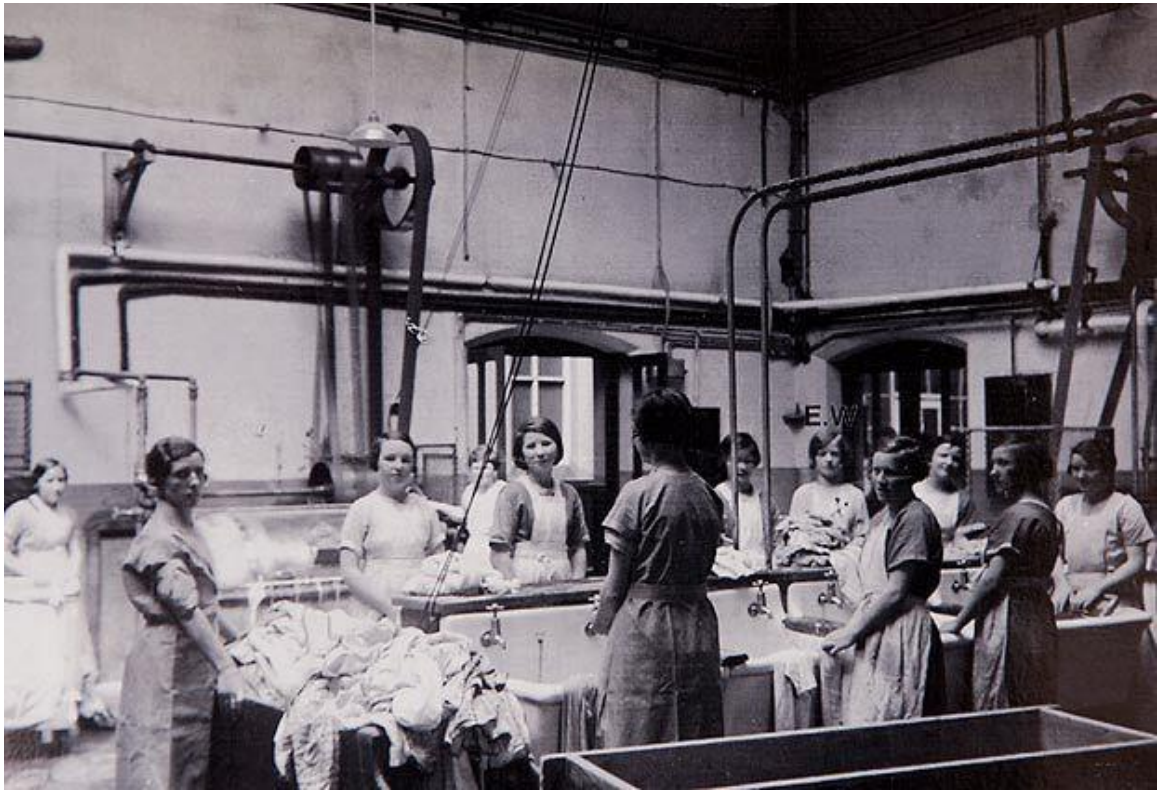


Figure 4: Price, Ryan. *Magdalene penitents scrub laundry in a workroom.* *The Irish Post*, 9 Feb. 2018, <https://www.irishpost.com/news/stories-of-magdalene-laundry-survivors-told-in-new-online-archives-149612>.

<sup>12</sup> Blakemore, Erin. "How Ireland Turned 'Fallen Women' into Slaves." History.com, A&E Television Networks, 12 Mar. 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/magdalene-laundry-ireland-asylum-abuse>.

<sup>13</sup> IrishCentral Staff. "On This Day: Ireland's Last Magdalene Laundry Closes in 1996." IrishCentral.com, IrishCentral, 25 Sept. 2020, <https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/irelands-last-magdalene-laundry>.

According to historian Helen J. Self,

“Redemption might sometimes involve a variety of coercive measures, including shaven heads, institutional uniforms, bread and water diets, restricted visiting, supervised correspondence, solitary confinement and even flogging,” (pg. 22).<sup>14</sup>

The not-for-profit Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR) adds that,

“The girls and women were forced to work from morning until evening – washing, ironing or packing laundry, and sewing, embroidering or doing other manual labor. These Laundries were run on a commercial, for-profit basis, but the girls and women received no pay. No contributions ... were paid on their behalf to statutory pension schemes. The laundry they washed came not only from members of the public, local businesses and religious institutions, but also from numerous government Departments, the defense forces, public hospitals, public schools, prisons and other State entities such as the parliament, the Chief State Solicitor’s Office, the Office of Public Works, the Land Commission, CIE and Áras an Uachtaráin (the President’s Residence) to name but a few.”<sup>15</sup>

These practices were explicitly sanctioned by the state, as the Irish government paid into the system in exchange for laundry services. The Laundries likewise became a place to house those the state considered undesirable, including orphans, the mentally ill, women with physical or developmental disabilities, and victims of rape or sexual assault (Blakemore). Survivor Mary Smith was incarcerated in the Sunday’s Well laundry in Cork after being raped. Once there, she was forced to cut her hair and take on a new name. She was not allowed to talk, and nuns routinely beat her for minor infractions and forced her to sleep in the cold. Often, the women were not referred to by name, addressed only as “child” or “penitent”. Some pregnant women were transferred to homes for unwed mothers, where they would give birth and have their babies taken away to be adopted out to other families. In 2014, the remains of at least 796 babies were discovered in a septic tank at the Bon

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<sup>14</sup> Self, Helen J. *Prostitution, Women and Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve*. Frank Cass Publishers, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> JFMR. “About the Magdalene Laundries.” Justice for Magdalenes Research, 13 June 2017, <http://jfmresearch.com/home/preserving-magdalene-history/about-the-magdalene-laundries/>.

Secours Mother and Baby Home in Tuam. The facility is still undergoing investigation today (Blakemore).

It is difficult to estimate accurately how many women went through the Laundries, in no small part because of religious orders' reluctance to release their records. As many as 300,000 women are believed to have been victimized, at least 10,000 of them between 1992 and 1996. In 1992, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity decided to sell a plot of land and applied to have 133 bodies moved from an unmarked mass grave on the property. However, only 75 death certificates existed, and the remains of 155 women were found. The discrepancy of records led to significant public outcry as the public began to take seriously the word of survivors about the abuse they endured (Blakemore).

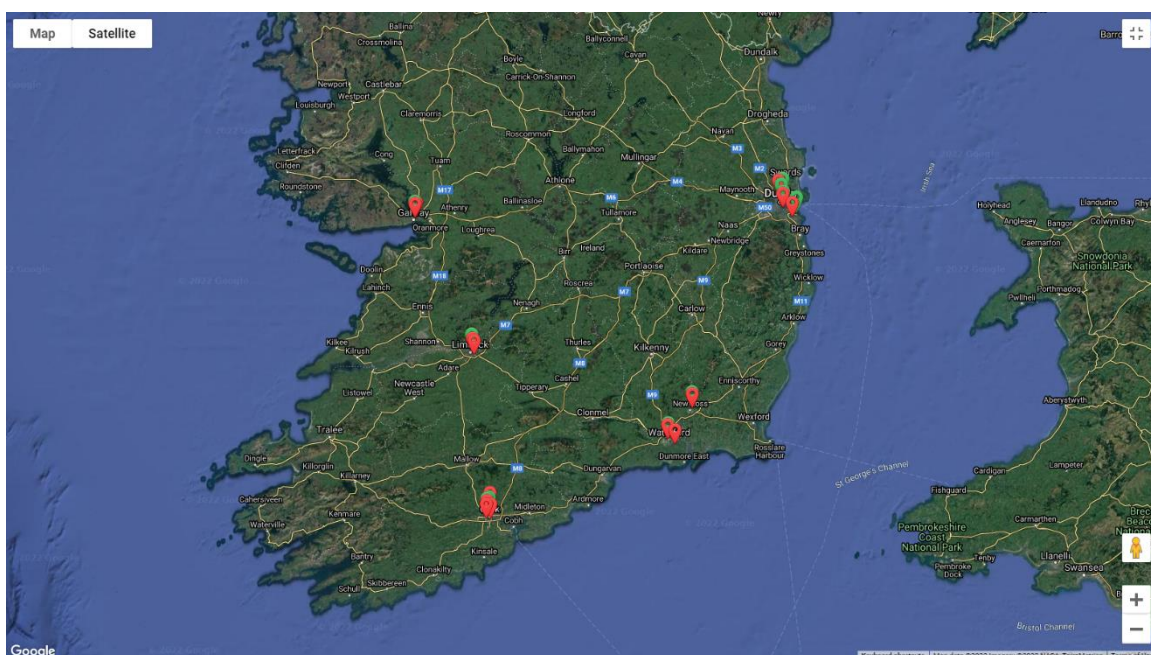


Figure 5: Justice for Magdalenes Research. Green markers signify laundry locations, while red markers indicate burial grounds. 2009, <http://jfmresearch.com/home/map-of-magdalene-laundries-and-grave-locations/>.

Not until September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1996 did the last Magdalene Asylum, Our Lady of Charity, finally close in Dublin. Only in 2001 did the Irish government acknowledge that the women imprisoned in these institutions experienced abuse, but it took until 2013 for

the Prime Minister to publicly apologize before Parliament. In August of 2018, Pope Francis took the unprecedented step of meeting with survivors of the Laundries in Dublin, in order to help ensure that such a history does not repeat itself (Murphy).<sup>16</sup> Still, many survivors continue to struggle to find closure and compensation. Mary Cavner, a survivor of the Sunday's Well Laundry, was incarcerated at age 11 after the death of her father, and was forced to work until she was nearly 18. During that time, she did not receive an education or wages from the nuns, an experience which has affected her throughout her life. Only now, more than 70 years later, has Cavner received acknowledgement and financial compensation, following an extensive legal battle in which she had to fight for eligibility under the government's redress scheme. As of 2019, the Irish government said



*Figure 6: Nunes dos Santos, Paulo. The back wall of Gloucester Laundry, the last of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries, in Dublin. 6 June, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/06/world/europe/magdalene-laundry-reunion-ireland.html>.*

<sup>16</sup> Murphy, Michael. "25 Year Anniversary of Last Magdalene Asylum Closing in Ireland." *The Irish Post*, The Irish Post, 26 Sept. 2021, <https://www.irishpost.com/history/on-this-day-in-1996-the-last-magdalene-asylum-closed-in-ireland-220746>.

770 former residents of the Laundries had been awarded more than €29.8m, but there are undoubtedly thousands more women whose stories have gone unheard (BBC News).<sup>17</sup>



Figure 7: Blake, Tarquin. Inside the abandoned Good Shepherd Magdalene Asylum. 24 Feb. 2011, <https://hrp.law.harvard.edu/sexual-and-reproductive-rights/images-from-abandoned-ireland-inside-a-magdalene-laundry/>.

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<sup>17</sup> BBC News. "Magdalene Laundries Victim Mary Cavner to Get Compensation." BBC News, BBC, 21 Aug. 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-hampshire-49393418>.



## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPT

### 1. Initial Inspiration

The design process began in July of 2021. After a first meeting with Professor Payne and costume designer Jaime Silverman to establish the overall goals and tone of the production, the next step was to gather research images from which to distill a more concrete concept direction. While in total I presented approximately 60 images to Professor Payne—a combination of historical photographs, abstract artwork, materials inspiration, etcetera—the following images are a curated selection representing those which were ultimately the most fruitful for the design discussions that came after.



Figure 8: Kiefer, Anselm. *The Order of the Night*. 1996.

Figure 8, *The Order of the Night*, by German artist Anselm Kiefer, depicts a man lying as if dead under a field of enormous, dead sunflowers. This piece expresses themes of grief and loss, and the texture of the layered acrylic paint suggests decay and deterioration.



Figure 9: Behal, Julien. *Inside a derelict Magdalene Laundry*. 5 Feb. 2013, <https://www.itv.com/news/update/2013-02-05/inside-a-derelict-dublin-magdalene-laundry/>.

Figure 9 comes from inside a now-derelict Magdalene Laundry in Dublin. The contrast between the decrepit surroundings and the tranquility of the statue in the alcove is very striking; the statue alone is sufficient to site the viewer in a religious context, despite that the rest of the image could suggest any abandoned place.



Figure 10: *A labyrinth of lanterns to celebrate the winter solstice*. 2022, <https://vancouverbestplaces.com/events-calendar/december/winter-solstice-lantern-festival/winter-solstice-candle-labyrinth/>.



Figure 11: Votive Candles at St. John's Cathedral, Savannah. 28 Mar, 2012, <https://minmaxsunt.wordpress.com/tag/votive-candles/>.

Candles are a prominent feature of many religions and Catholicism is no exception. Figure 11 depicts tables of votive candles, a common sight in many Catholic churches and cathedrals, as places where the faithful can light a candle when praying to a particular saint, honoring a deceased loved one, or otherwise showing reverence to God. Father William Saunders describes the lighting of these votives as “a symbol of faith, truth, wisdom, virtue, grace ... and the sacred presence which flow from Christ Himself,” (EWTN).<sup>18</sup> By contrast, Figure 10 takes a less traditional approach, placing lit candles in paper bags and using the luminaries to line the pathway of a labyrinth. Both images were useful tools for discussing ways in which candlelight could play a role in the scenic design.

<sup>18</sup> Saunders, William. “Shedding Light on Use of Votive Candles: EWTN.” EWTN Global Catholic Television Network, The Arlington Herald, 14 July 1994, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/shedding-light-on-use-of-votive-candles-977>.



Figure 12: Orving, Diana. *Notch*. 2010.

The above fabric art installation, titled *Notch*, was created by textile artist Diana Orving for an exhibition in Beijing. I was drawn to the dimension and depth created by the folds of overlapping fabric, as well as the way it simultaneously suggests something soft and feminine, and human skin. It is both ethereal and slightly unsettling, which felt appropriate for this production.

Figure 13, a photograph from “Mission to Mars”, the 2017 Chanel fashion show, takes a unique approach to the concept of a catwalk. In our first meeting, Professor Payne indicated that she was interested in directing in an “alley” or “promenade” orientation, with audience on two sides and the actors in the center playing space. The standard alley orientation can be very interesting from a design standpoint, but it was important to explore

multiple options, and this X-shaped catwalk preserves much of the feeling of an alley set while allowing for a more dynamic path of circulation for the actors.



Figure 13: Mezzanotti, Valerio. The fall 2017 Chanel show at the Grand Palais. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/17/style/space-is-the-new-black.html>.



Figure 14: Johnson, Michael. Haunted house rendering. January, 2013, <http://mrjohnson23.blogspot.com/2012/07/haunted-attic.html>.

*Eclipsed* begins and ends in 1992, after the fictional Saint Paul's Laundry has closed. Therefore, it was important to design a set which could transform from abandoned building to active workplace and back again. The sunlight shining through the window slats of the artist's rendering in Figure 14 was an influential image, as it prompted a lot of discussion over the marriage of set and lights to transition between past and present.



Figure 15: Boss, Christian. *Dark Promenade of Steam-Pipes*. 17 June, 2014, <https://500px.com/photo/95889219/Dark-promenade-of-SteamPipes-Part-I-by-Christian-Boss>.

The amalgam of industrial machinery and steam pipes above (Figure 15) provided inspiration for abstracting laundry equipment into something looming and malevolent. The intersections of pipe are reminiscent of the arteries of the heart, and I began exploring the concept of the machinery suggesting a kind of terrible, living creature taking part in the women's imprisonment.



*Figure 16: McLaughlin, Kelly. Magdalene women working in a Dublin Laundry. 27 March, 2017, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4352372/Haunting-images-everyday-life-Magdalene-Laundries.html>.*

Finally, the above historical photo of a Magdalene Laundry provides a lot of context for what these buildings looked like as functioning workplaces. The machinery and steel trusses overhead are all very industrial, reminding the viewer that these are modern events rather than a long-ago tragedy. The windows are small and admit little natural light or views of the outside world. On the back wall, the statue of a Catholic saint surveys the scene.

## 2. Preliminary Concepts

From these and other research images, as well as feedback from Professor Payne, three distinct scenic concepts were developed. In every iteration, the relationship between the environment and the penitent women was paramount, though it manifested in different ways. The venue selected was The Albert Lupin Memorial Experimental Theater, located in Tulane University's Elleonora P. McWilliams Hall. The Lupin Theater is a blackbox measuring approximately 44'x49', and was initially intended as a TV studio. As a result, the space contains a crane rail which can move on an electrified track from the lighting catwalk to the opposite end of the theater.

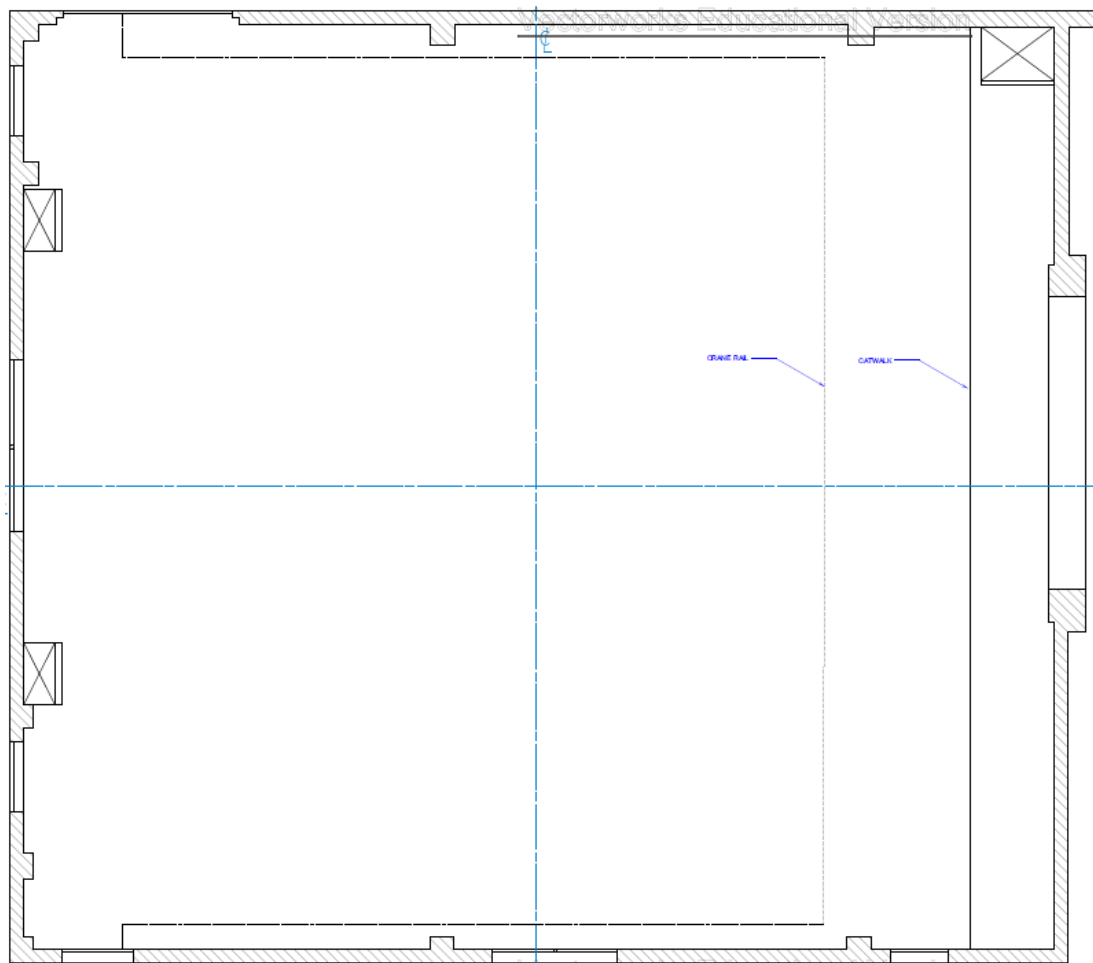


Figure 17: Ghinea, Vlad. Ground Plan of the Lupin Theater. Architectural Drawing. 2022, Tulane University.



In concept one, three keywords were Arterial, Industrial, and Trapped. The design called for two intersecting alleys with audience on three sides. The fourth side was occupied by an interwoven series of pipes and machinery, as well as a spiral staircase which led up to the crane rail. The goal was to make the stage floor the main workspace for the penitents. The crane rail would then become a vantage point from which the nuns could observe, placing them literally as well as metaphorically above the “fallen women”.



*Figure 18: Scenic concept sketch for upstage pipes and crane rail. 2021, Tulane University.*



Figure 19 (Above): Scenic concept sketch for downstage audience seating and set dressing. 2021, Tulane University.

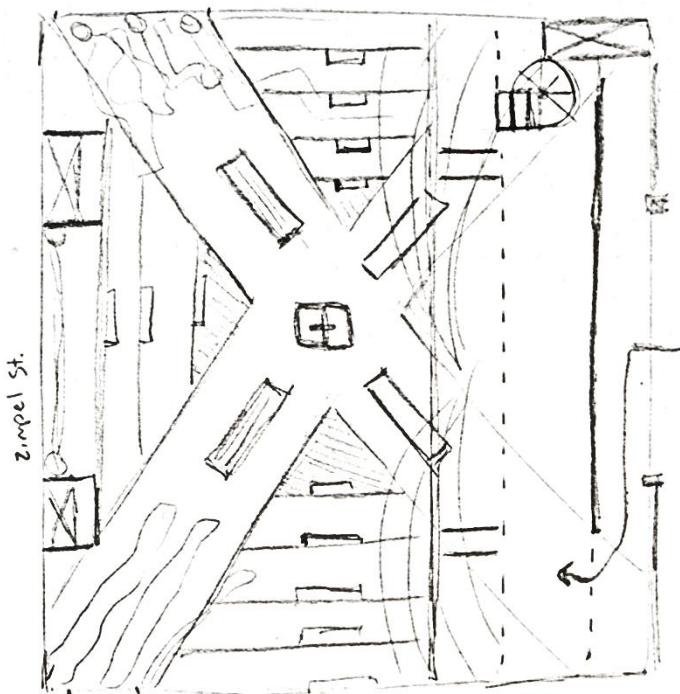


Figure 20 (Left): Conceptual ground plan sketch for intersecting alleys and crane rail access. 2021, Tulane University.

The keywords for concept two were Memorial, Decay, and Grief. The goal of this design was to create an immersive experience for the audience, inviting them to walk through an exhibit of historical data and survivors' testimony before entering the actor playing space. The exhibit would be styled after the current condition of the abandoned Laundries, and the floor would be lined with glowing luminaries to create a somber memorial to those who lived and died there. The audience would then emerge into the acting space, a diagonal alley with seating on either side. Above, trusses and window frames would be suspended from the lighting grid along with pieces of laundry to suggest the architecture of the space. On the floor, worktables and laundry carts create the women's workplace.



Figure 21: Scenic concept sketch of the memorial exhibit. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 22 (Above): Scenic concept sketch with suspended trusses and laundry above worktables. 2021, Tulane University.

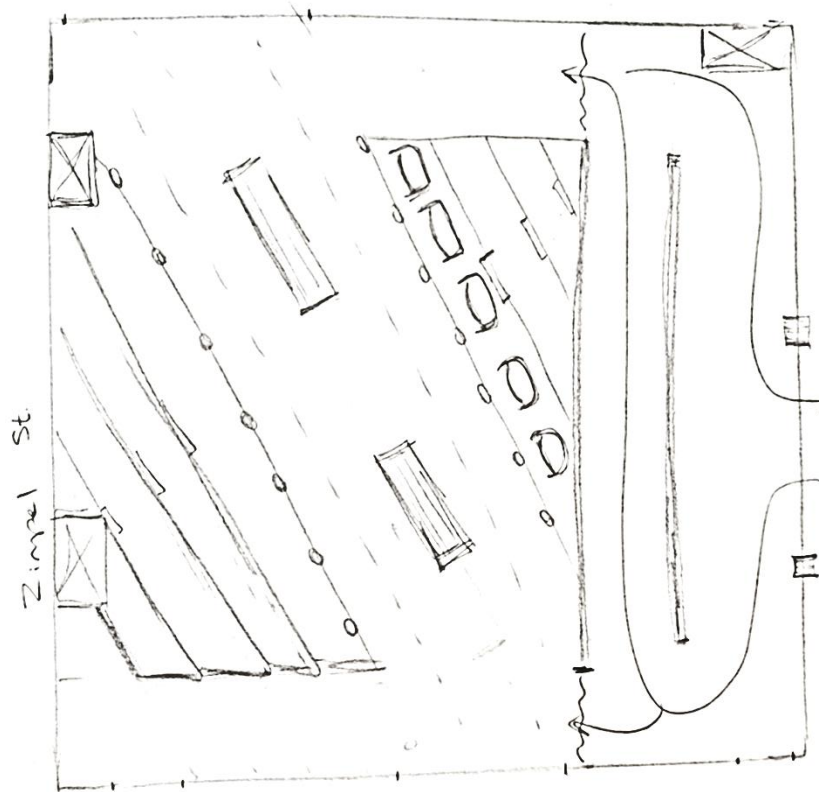


Figure 23 (Left): Conceptual ground plan sketch for exhibit and performance space in the same venue. 2021, Tulane University.

Concept three was centered on the keywords Oppressive, Feminine, and Sterile. Patched-together swags of fabric hung from the grid, while industrial work lights lined the playing space. On the upstage wall, an oversized portrait of Mary Magdalene loomed over the penitents in judgement or perhaps absolution. As in the other concepts, the playing space was occupied only by worktables and laundry carts. The Ground Plan takes the shape of the cross, a nod to traditional Catholic cathedrals which are often laid out in the same manner, while also serving as a constant reminder of the Church's role in these events.



*Figure 24: Scenic concept sketch for the upstage wall and oversized portrait of Mary Magdalene above a cold fireplace. 2021, Tulane University.*



Figure 25 (Above): Scenic concept sketch with emphasis on industrial pendant lights and hanging fabric. 2021, Tulane University.

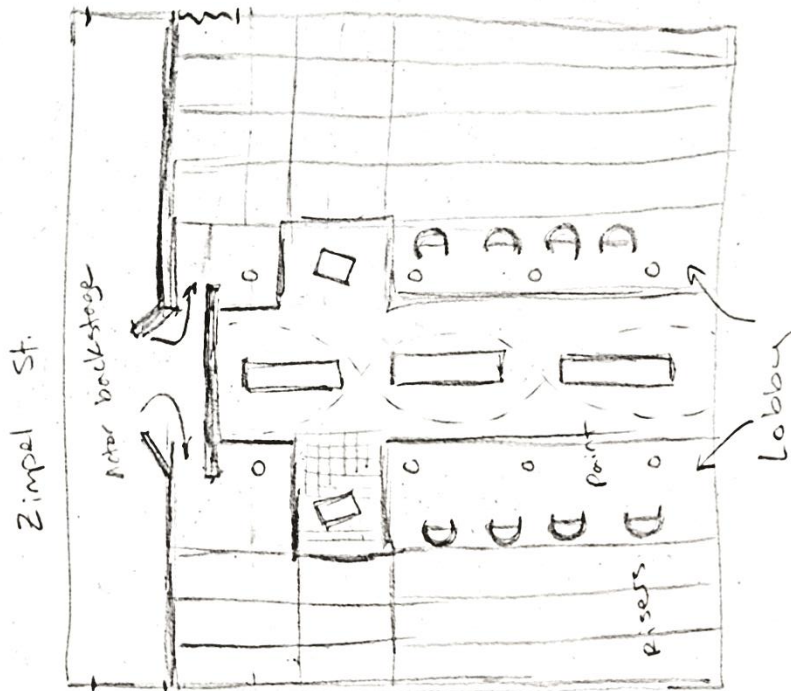


Figure 26 (Left): Conceptual ground plan sketch showing offstage space for actors and crucifix-shaped playing space. 2021, Tulane University.

### 3. Director Feedback

Following a presentation of the preliminary concepts, Professor Payne had a lot of substantive feedback. First and foremost, despite her initial desire for a promenade-oriented set, the Delta variant of Covid-19 was causing significant health concerns in New Orleans and across the country; initially there were hopes that actors could go unmasked for the performance, but this was looking less likely, and it would become far more taxing on their voices to project through a mask on a long promenade. As a result, it was agreed that we would shift to a shallow thrust orientation for the audience to better hear the performers.

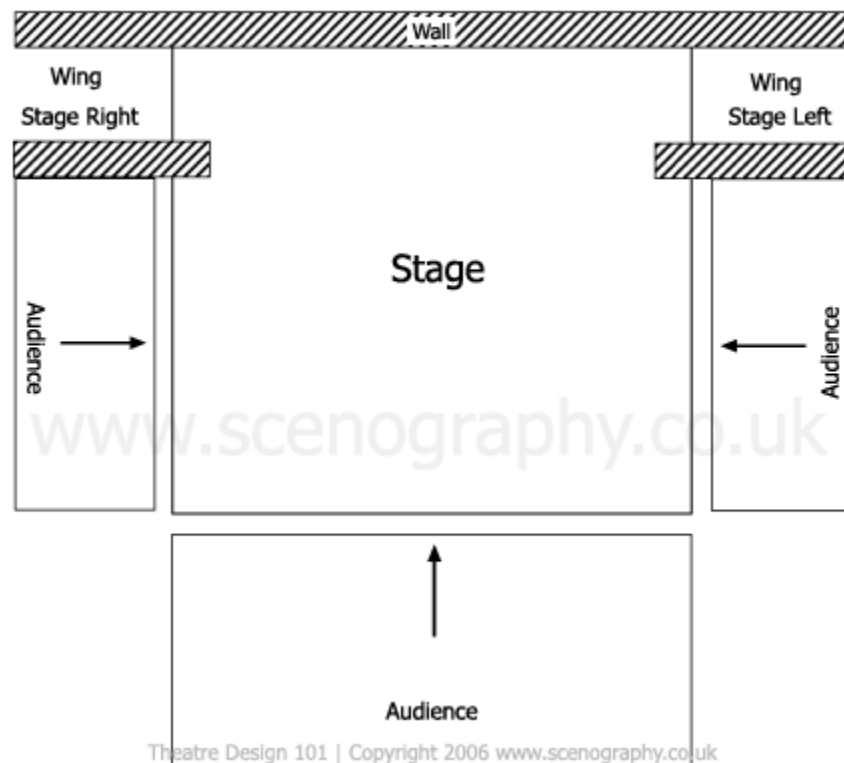


Figure 27: Scenography.co.uk. Diagram of a shallow thrust provided for reference by Professor Payne. 2006, <https://theatredesigner.wordpress.com/theatre-design-101/stage-types-thrust/>.

Professor Payne was most in favor of concept two. She liked the immersive element, the way that it invited the audience to feel a personal connection to the Magdalenes. However, she felt that creating a full exhibit could occupy too much of the theater and not

leave ample enough space for actors and audience. As a result, she proposed a compromise; the new focal wall created by the thrust orientation could suggest portrait frames, as in an old photo album. The photos would be missing, a nod to the thousands of unnamed Magdalenes of whom we have no record. The thrust stage would also create two downstage vomms, one each on house left and house right, in which to create an interactive display for audiences to engage with as they enter.



Figure 28 (Left): Dreamstime. Stock vector image of old album frames, provided by Professor Payne for reference. <https://www.dreamstime.com/royalty-free-stock-photography-old-photo-album-pages-image16951897>

Figure 29 (Right): CAHairyBear. Scanned photo of a vintage photo album, provided by Professor Payne for reference. 20 Jan. 2010, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/91173606@N00/4291711884/in/photostream>.

Both Professor Payne and I agreed that candles needed to play a role in the design, being both so evocative of Catholic liturgy and also a symbol of memorial and remembrance. The question which remained was how best to incorporate them; due to fire code, having real flame onstage was simply not a viable option. Light Emitting Diode (LED) candles seemed like a possibility, but required further exploration.

Aesthetically, Professor Payne was on the same page with where the world of the play seemed to lead. Decay and deterioration resonated well with a script whose purpose was to expose the moral decay of Ireland's institutions. In conjunction with the research images we favored, she also provided the below photo, a postcard in her collection



depicting a heavily textured room full of peeling paint and plaster. This postcard became another crucial reference image as the design developed.



*Figure 30: Postcard from Professor Payne's personal collection. 2021, Tulane University.*

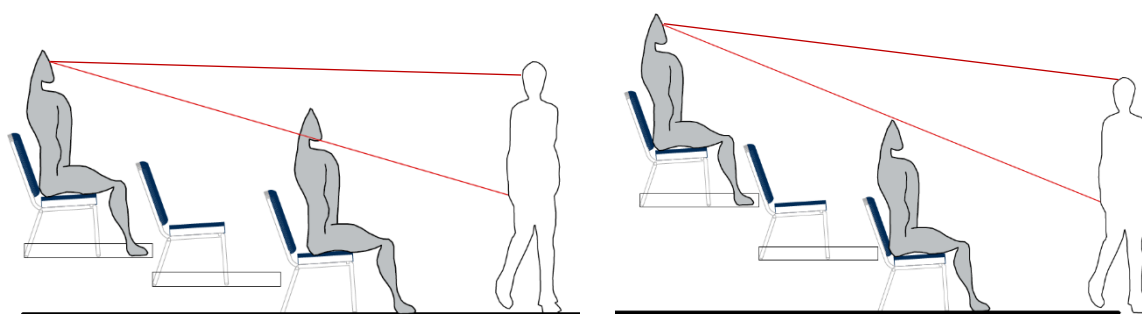
## CHAPTER 3: CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

### 1. First Iteration

Building on the feedback from Professor Payne, the chosen concept was developed into a more cohesive first draft. Because the design was shifting from an alley to thrust arrangement, a factor which had to be accounted for was actor entrances and exits. While some entrances would come from the downstage left and right vomms, upstage entry points were also needed to provide actors and director with the most dynamic options for movement. There was also a question of which wall in the Lupin Theatre would become the focal wall of the design. It was decided that the wall bordering Zimpel Street would be used for this purpose, because it allowed for upstage left and right entrances from either the dressing room hallway or the scene shop. In short, actors would be able to enter and exit from any of the four corners of the set.

Another major subject for consideration was the laundry which the women needed to move on and offstage. Professor Payne and I decided early in the process that a combination of rolling laundry carts and handheld baskets would be used to transport materials; the carts were a necessity, as according to the text, one of the Magdalenes decides to escape by stowing away in a large cart (Brogan, "Eclipsed," 2.3) The choreography of these moving elements meant that the action of the play needed to occur on the stage floor rather than on elevated platforms. It would have been neither safe nor practical to push carts up an incline, and the chance of wheels slipping over a platform edge

was deemed too risky. While keeping the action entirely at floor level simplified certain decisions, it also necessitated thoughtful planning of others. Principally, the height of the audience risers had to be adjusted; the standard 8" riser increments do not create suitable sightlines when actors are not elevated. As such, the riser height was adjusted to 16" increments, raising the audience to a steeper angle that improved views (Figures 31-32). This had the added effect of placing the actors in a 'pit', not unlike in a courtroom, which was fitting for this play that deals with themes of social judgement. A variety of levels still needed to be achieved to create interest in the overall stage picture, so it was agreed that stools and benches would be added for actors to sit or stand.



*Figure 31: 8" riser increments create poor visibility for much of the audience. 2021, Tulane University.*

*Figure 32: 16" riser increments significantly improve audience sightlines. 2021, Tulane University.*

Beyond the more pragmatic aspects of the set, I also experimented with Professor Payne's idea of empty, frame-like portals spread over a wall (Figure 33). With a sheer, scrim-like material behind them, the portals could be dramatically transformed with light, an effect which is both beautifully theatrical and helpful in transitioning from scene to scene. To reflect the drab, utilitarian environment of the Laundry, the walls and floor would be painted to suggest a blue-grey stone. Also painted on the walls were water stains and other signs of decay, a visual metaphor for the neglect rampant in the Laundry environment.

A crucifix centered on the upstage wall served as a constant reminder that the Church endorsed and perpetuated the mistreatment of the Magdalenes.



*Figure 33: Marker sketch of developing scenic ideation, with picture frame wall openings. 2021, Tulane University.*

Professor Payne was in favor of this overall direction, particularly the color scheme, the decaying walls, and the use of scrim. However, she felt the portals would be more unified if they all took the same shape. We also agreed that hanging laundry from the lighting grid was likely redundant, as there would already be so many sheets and articles of clothing on the work tables. With this feedback in mind, the second draft began to take shape.

## 2. Second Iteration

In the second draft, several key aspects of the design came into fruition. First, because a primary goal was to make the production as immersive as possible, I wanted the audience to feel drawn into the story from the moment they entered the space. In the thrust orientation, with the main focal wall on the Zimpel Street side of the theater, the audience's first view would be the back side of the downstage seating risers, which was undesirable. To remedy this, I envisioned backing the risers with a smaller downstage wall. As the audience entered, they would see the crumbling wall of an abandoned church. An alcove in the center housed a statue, while in front sat an altar table (Figure 35). After much discussion about how the audience could physically interact with the space, with ideas ranging from

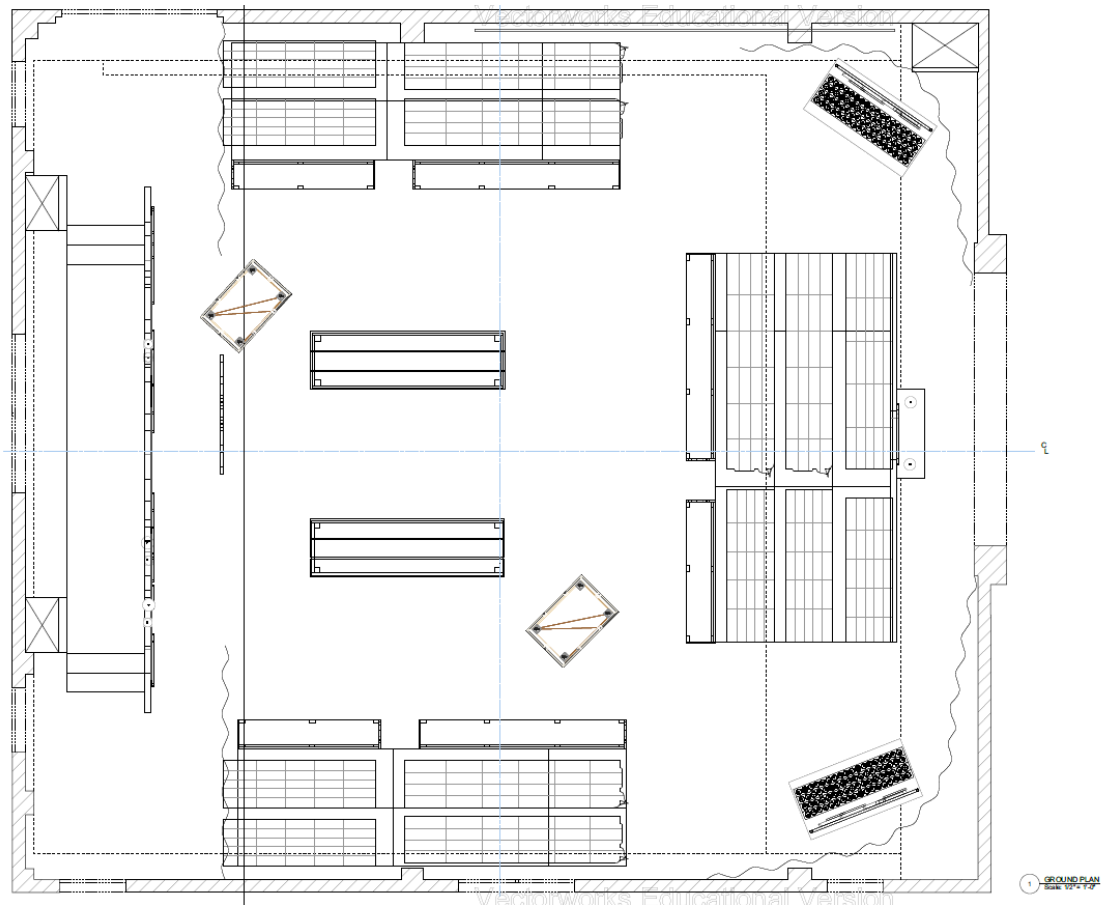


Figure 34: Second draft Ground Plan. Architectural Drawing. 2021, Tulane University.

interactive sculptures to lists of women's names, we kept returning to the image of candles. I proposed a scenario in which actors could hand an LED votive candle to each audience member as they entered. They would then carry these candles to the far downstage left and right corners of the theater and place them on a stand, as with prayer votives in a church. The candles would flicker there throughout the show as a memorial to the victims.



*Figure 35: Rendering of audience view when entering the theater from the lobbyette. 2021, Tulane University.*

Regarding the focal wall, I proposed two different versions, one with rectilinear openings and one with arches (Figures 36-37). I also suspended the crucifix from the grid rather than mount it to the wall to create a more ethereal, floating effect.



Figure 36: Option one, with overlapping rectilinear frames. Digital rendering. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 37: Option two, with arched wall openings. Digital rendering. 2021, Tulane University.

In Figures 36 and 37, the upstage ‘focal wall’ stands 13’-0” high, a measurement which was arrived at out of consideration for the crane rail. As noted in Chapter 2.2, the crane rail moves the full length of the theater, and is the primary means by which the lighting designer hangs and focuses instruments from the grid. The bottom of the crane rail is at an elevation of approximately 16’-0”, which means scenery can be no taller than that in order for the machinery to safely clear. However, the focal wall did not feel looming enough; it needed to be much taller to achieve the imposing presence the concept called for. After consulting with lighting designer Vlad Ghinea, it was determined that the wall was located far enough upstage that he would not need to move the crane rail past it to hang or focus. This meant that for the final design, the wall could stretch the entire height up to the grid, or 22’-0”, the tallest piece of scenery built in this venue to date.



*Figure 38: Experimental seating options; the ground row is replaced by church pews, and chairs on the risers are shrouded in red fabric. Digital rendering. 2021, Tulane University.*



Another crucial decision made at this juncture was in regards to audience seating. As discussed above, one major goal of the scenic design was the creation of a fully immersive environment; the standard blue-upholstered theater chairs were a major detractor, particularly on the ground row where they would be highly visible during the show. In keeping with the play's location in a convent, I chose to replace the ground row chairs with church pews (Figure 38). I also experimented with covering the rest of the chairs in a shroud of fabric, but after discussing with Professor Payne, it was decided that this was unnecessary as those chairs would become much less visible with audience seated in them. The church pews however would become an elegant addition to the ground row, maintaining the seat count without compromising on design.

### **3. Final Design**

Following the second iteration, the focal wall still felt lackluster. In order to come up with something truly fresh, I set the existing designs aside and returned to the research images. In the end, it was Figure 14 which held the key; Professor Payne and I both wanted the dramatic transformational qualities of light passing through scrim, but the window openings in the wall were too rigid and architectural. However, the slats over the window in Figure 14 immediately evoked the image of plaster lath. Rather than a wall with structured openings, I quickly sketched a crumbling, disjointed wall and knew intuitively that this was the direction to go. Visually it is poetic, and the metaphor of a façade falling away reflects so well the way in which *Eclipsed* peeled back and exposed this disturbing piece of Irish history to the world. Professor Payne agreed; with scrim behind and dynamic lighting, the wall would become a truly transformational piece of scenery, appearing solid when lit some ways and translucent when lit in others. The chaotic diagonals of the lath



reflect the discord of the penitents' environment, and legs of the same scrim material on either side allow for actor entrances which are hazy—both visible and invisible to the audience's eyes (Figure 40).

Other changes included moving the crucifix so that it hangs center stage like a chandelier. The work tables were also made smaller and put on wheels so that they could easily transition on and off stage with the laundry carts. Rather than paint the floor with a more realistic flagstone, it was decided that keeping the walls and floor in the same plaster-like paint treatment would heighten the surrealism of the stage picture. As is 3.2, the concept for the audience's entry remained the same, but there were a few aesthetic tweaks, including the incorporation of some sticks of lath and roughening the profile of the downstage wall so that it too appeared to be broken. The notion of the alcove with the altar remained unchanged.



*Figure 41: Revision to audience view when entering the theater from the lobbyette. 2021, Tulane University.*

The concept of the candle tables in the corner vomms also remained in the final revision. To better place them in the same visual language as the rest of the set, broken lath protrudes from the table, and sheer scrim material drapes down behind it like a veil. The scrim calls attention to the vertical plane, providing a similar sense of height and scale to the upstage wall. To further emphasize this verticality, empty picture frames are suspended in mid-air above the candle tables, a symbolic memorial to the thousands of unnamed penitents imprisoned in the Laundries.



*Figure 42: View of the downstage left candle table. Digital rendering. 2021, Tulane University.*

In no small part due to its height, the upstage focal wall has a powerful, overwhelming presence in the space. A short platform bridge in back of it allows actors to cross from stage left to right at a slight elevation, visible to the audience through the scrim as hazy, dream-like impressions. This was used to great effect during scene transitions, and created a poignant visual in Act 1 Scene 5 when Sister Virginia hears the penitents' voices in her memory; the women appeared on the platform upstage of the wall like ghosts.



*Figure 43: View of upstage focal wall. Digital rendering. 2021, Tulane University.*

Custom church pews on the ground row of the audience seating complete the design. The candle tables are just visible in the vom, a memorial which continues throughout the course of the play.



*Figure 44: View looking towards downstage right vom; note pews and candle table in background. Digital rendering. 2021, Tulane University.*

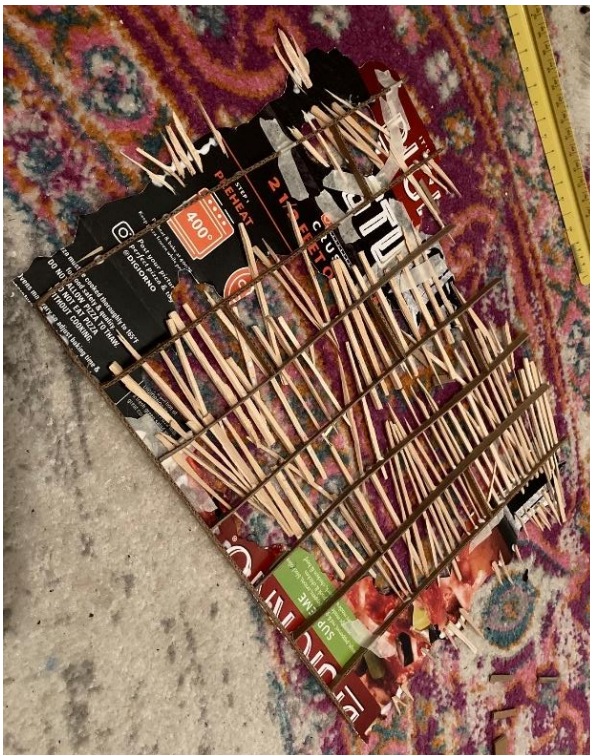
#### **4. Presentation and Model**

With the design finalized, the next step was to create a scale model of the scenery. Scale models play several key roles in the design process, including communicating detailed information about color and texture that digital materials may not show. They can also be a tool for facilitating conversation with the lighting designer about how the scenery should be lit. Furthermore, not all actors or directors are trained to read and interpret technical drawings, so a model can convey information about the three dimensional space much more concisely.

First, a model of the Lupin Theater was assembled out of foam core. Only the upstage wall was needed to understand the design, though small sections of downstage wall were later built to represent the vomms.



*Figure 45 (Above): Scale model depicting the Zimpel St (upstage) wall of the Lupin Theater. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 46 (Left): In-progress model of upstage focal wall. 2021, Tulane University.*

The upstage wall was modeled from a combination of thin cardboard for the vertical supports, recycled chipboard for the base of the plaster sections, and slivers of craft sticks for the slats of lath. The “plaster” was then created on top of the chipboard with a mixture of gesso and small cotton ball tufts, the combination of which produced a thick paste which was easily spread and sculpted. Once the components were all modeled, the pieces could be painted and assembled. In-progress scale scenic elements, prior to painting. 2021, Tulane University.



*Figure 47: In-progress scale scenic elements, prior to painting. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 48: Scale model near to completion. 2021, Tulane University.*



The final model was a precise 1:24 representation of the design. Photos with theatrical lighting were taken using a variety of flashlights and pieces of lighting gel.



Figure 49: The finished model,  $\frac{1}{2}'' = 1'-0''$ . 2021, Tulane University.



*Figure 50 (Above): View of the modeled downstage wall and statue alcove. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 51 (Left): Photo of model, downstage left vom and candle table memorial. 2021, Tulane University.*



Figure 52: Photo of model; a greenish light glows through the scrim upstage of the focal wall. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 53: Photo of model from house left; dramatic side and back lighting create an eerie atmosphere. 2021, Tulane University.



*Figure 54 (Above): Shadows create texture on the floor. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 55 (Left): Light and shadow fills the scenic model with depth. 2021, Tulane University.*

On October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the cast and production team of *Eclipsed* met for the first read-through of the script. Before the read-through began, both the scenic and costume designs were presented to the cast. The group was very engaged throughout the presentation, and were particularly excited about the immersive, interactive nature of the scenic design.



Figure 56: Design presentation materials, including model, drafting, and inspiration images. 2021, Tulane University.

## CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTION

Construction of *Eclipsed* began on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Typically, the first step of a build in a blackbox theater is to arrange the seating risers in the desired positions. However, due to the impacts of Hurricane Ida, Tulane University's production of *Trouble in Mind* still required use of the venue, as their performances had been delayed to November and *Eclipsed* to December. This meant that the two shows were being built in parallel, a significant challenge for the scene shop due to a lack of readily available storage space for completed scenic elements. Credit for overcoming this and other construction challenges must be shared with Shop Foreman Anthony Contello, and Technical Director Vlad Ghinea. Credit must also be shared with third year graduate student Christopher Rodriguez Jr., first year graduate students Kaeanne Louks, Alexandra Robinson, and Sarah Chatelain, and the Fall 2021 Production & Design Practicum students for their assistance in building this show.

Because the team could not begin with placing the risers, the build began instead with constructing the flats for the downstage wall. These were built as standard 4x11 Hollywood-style flats out of 1x4 lumber and luan sheets, modified only so that the vertical supports continued past the top rail to provide structure for the jagged profile of the wall (Figure 57). The team also built an assortment of small Broadway-style frames, which would ultimately become the structural supports for the candle tables.



*Figure 57: Downstage wall flats and small frames after construction. 2021, Tulane University.*

One of the most important visual components of the design was the plaster, so early on I created a paint sample on a piece of scrap luan. After mixing a combination of white joint compound, blue and black paints (to achieve a blue-grey color), water, PVA glue for elasticity, and wall texture, I plastered the surface of the luan, using my hands to create roughness. I then poured on some larger globs of plaster as though a hole had been patched, and even dipped some paper scraps into the mixture and applied them to the sample surface for added three-dimensionality. When the sample was dry, I sponged over it with watered-down black and brown paints and added some splatter in the same colors to create the look of a very dingy, moldering wall. The final touch was to add some vertical drips of paint, as if caused by water damage. Professor Ghinea had indicated he planned to make the slats of

“lath” out of 1½” strips of luan, so I also made a few small sample strips and stained them with a very watery brown paint to create an aged effect. When this was complete, the sample was reviewed by Professor Payne. She approved the look, and particularly liked the use of the paper elements. This would become the same technique used to plaster all of the walls, using larger torn pieces of craft paper.



*Figure 58: Sample of painted plaster and lath for director review. 2021, Tulane University.*

An additional step which needed to be completed early was the acquisition of picture frames and stage furniture. The design called for several mobile tables, picture frames in an array of sizes, the downstage altar table, as well as furnishings for the Mother Superior’s office. Budget was a concern, so it was determined that as much of the set dressing as possible would be thrifted. I had already spent some time scoping out local thrift stores and had not had luck finding pieces which fit both the look and the price point.



However, good weather in October led to numerous weekend yard sales where I was able to find inexpensive picture frames in bulk, a beautiful Victorian chair, and a buffet piece which was the perfect size to become the altar in front of the downstage wall.

Another fantastic find were the church pews. Anthony Contello was able to source them from a local Baptist church over Craigslist, and we got a fantastic deal on a set of six



*Figure 59: From left to right, picture frames, buffet, and chair sourced from local garage sales. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 60: Water-damaged pews sourced from a local church. 2021, Tulane University.*

solid mahogany pews with almost the exact shape and size I had designed (Figure 60). They required a bit of repair, as well as sanding to remove the yellowed varnish, but the bones of the pieces were excellent and much higher in quality than could be feasibly built with scene shop materials.

The one furniture element I was unable to source via thrifting was also the most important: the tables. In the end, because a uniform style and appearance was desired, we opted to build the work tables. Three longer tables were built instead of the four square ones indicated in the ground plan, as this was most conducive to the actors' blocking. One table was kept at standard table height to vary the levels and also function as the Mother Superior's desk, while the other two were at work table height (Figure 61). Small locking casters on the legs made them easy to move, and heavy duty construction with bolts rather than screws meant the tables could stand up to a lot of action.



*Figure 61: The worktables after construction and puttying all holes. 2021, Tulane University.*

With the flats built and the furniture able to be incorporated into rehearsals, the main focus shifted to plastering and painting the walls. The downstage wall was straightforward, but as a result of the upstage wall running from floor to grid, it was simply too large to assemble in the shop. Therefore, Professor Ghinea drafted a plan of the wall layout which broke it down into +20 different pieces of luan that could be individually plastered and then assembled in place (Figure 63). This approach worked well, and after about two weeks, all of the pieces were finished and ready for install.



*Figure 62: The downstage wall flats after the basecoat of plaster and paper. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 63: Sections of the upstage wall plaster drying after being sponged with paint. 2021, Tulane University.*

Several other scenic elements were also completed in the shop while waiting for access to the venue. The cross was created from layers of blue expanded polystyrene (XPS) foam glued together with Liquid Nails (Figure 64). The slats were ripped from numerous sheets of luan and stained (Figure 65), and the terraced holders for the audience's candles were built much like a miniature staircase. They were then painted with a dark wood grain texture (Figure 66).

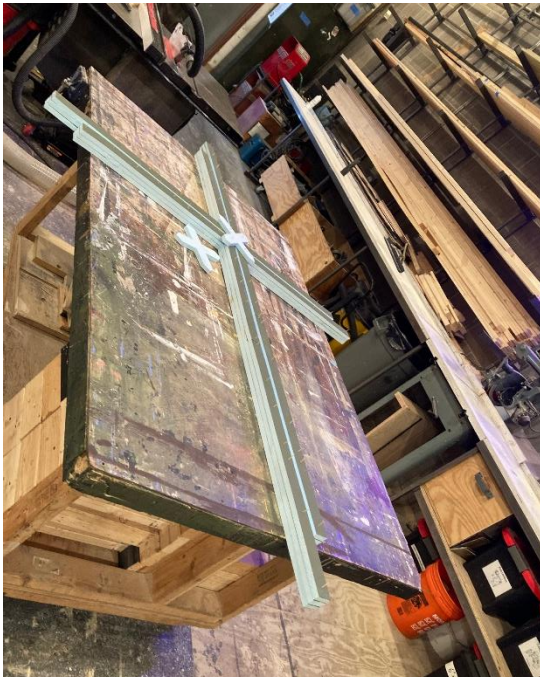


Figure 64: The cross, made of XPS foam. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 65: The slats of lath drying after staining. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 66: The completed candle holders. 2021, Tulane University.

TUTD's production of *Trouble in Mind* closed on Sunday, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021. On the following Monday, the team immediately began re-setting the risers for *Eclipsed* and moving the downstage flats into the theater.



Figure 67: The house left seating bank is assembled. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 68: The team assembles the down-center risers. 2021, Tulane University.

Props and furniture were also transferred from the rehearsal room into the space. Two small stools and a bench were pulled from storage, as were three canvas hampers.



*Figure 69: Furniture is brought into the Lupin so that rehearsals can proceed in the space. 2021, Tulane University.*

With the risers complete, installation of the upstage wall could begin. Lumber was scabbed together with plywood to create 22'-0" sticks, which were anchored to the grid and to the floor in 4'-0" increments. Horizontal bracing was also added for additional support (Figure 70). Then the plastered panels could be added one at a time, joined together with wooden blocks as needed (Figure 71). A combination of ladders, scaffolding, and the crane rail were used to install the panels all the way to the top of the wall. The seams between panels were quite noticeable, which was not unexpected, and it was determined that leftover plaster could be used to cover the seams for a smooth transition. The wooden slats were stapled in behind the plaster and completed the look (Figure 72).



Figure 70: Framing for the upstage wall is installed. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 71: Rodriguez, Christopher. The designer stands in front of the first section of plaster. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 72: The wooden slats are stapled into place behind the plaster. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 73: Assembly of the wall is two-thirds complete. 2021, Tulane University.





*Figure 74: Assembly of the wall is complete except for some slats in the upper third. 2021, Tulane University.*

In tandem with the wall installation, several pieces of furniture needed to be refinished to suit the aesthetic goals of the production. Foremost among these were the church pews, which after being dismantled and repaired had to be painstakingly sanded down to remove the old varnish and yellow maple stain. Once the plain wood was exposed, they could be stained the desired worn mahogany with water-based paint (Figure 75). The paint was left to dry overnight, after which the pieces could be given a final coat of a water-based clear sealant (Figure 76). The buffet purchased from a yard sale was refinished in the same manner, as was the small bench borrowed from the TUTD Lab Theater.



*Figure 75: After sanding, each part of the pews is stained in a darker finish. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 76: Two completed pews are installed in the theater ground row. 2021, Tulane University.*

With the downstage wall installed and the seams patched, the next step was to finish the alcove. The opening was cut into the flat and lined with bendy board to achieve the

arched profile. Because the downstage wall was faced with luan on both sides, it was a simple matter to adhere plaster to the recessed face. Custom trim and a shelf were cut from plywood, stained, and screwed into place. The refinished buffet could then be set below it.



*Figure 77: The alcove is cut out of the flat and plastered. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 78: The altar table is refinished. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 79: The alcove is complete with trim and shelf. 2021, Tulane University.*

The completion of the alcove spurred the finalization of the statute design intended to sit inside it. Discussions with Professor Payne had prompted such ideas as images of Mary Magdalene, mothers with children, or women of a more nebulous identity. Research images from religious iconography and traditional oil paintings were also influential, and led to the development of three possible directions (Figures 83-85).



Figure 80: Kohler, Christian. A Mother and Child. 8 May, 2019.



Figure 81: HolyArt. Mother of God with Child Icon. 2021.



Figure 82: Galli, Giovanni Antonio. Saint Mary Magdalene. 1625-1635.



Figure 83: Sketch of seated mother and child. 2021, Tulane University.

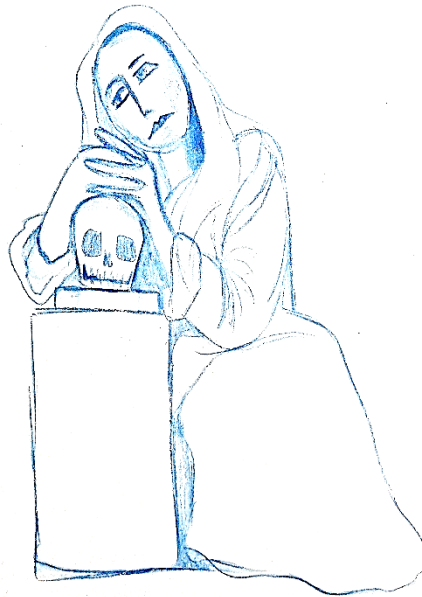


Figure 84: Mary Magdalene with skull. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 85: The Holy Family. 2021, Tulane University.

Ultimately, Figure 84 was the selected sketch: a depiction of a seated Mary Magdalene, resting her head on a skull. In Catholic iconography, Mary Magdalene is often depicted with a skull as a symbol of human mortality,<sup>19</sup> which has an ironic resonance with the tragedy of the Magdalene Laundries.

Construction of this statue was a mixed media effort. First, for structure and stability, the general form of the body and podium were created out of scrap wood. Then, the figure was bulked out with paper towel and tape. A Styrofoam ball was carved into the rough shape of the face, and another layer of paper towel was Papier-mâchéd over the form



*Figure 86: Storyboard illustration process of producing the alcove statue. 2021, Tulane University.*

<sup>19</sup> Shore, Andrew. Saint or Sinner? How to Spot Mary Magdalene in Art, Art UK, 3 Apr. 2021, <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/saint-or-sinner-how-to-spot-mary-magdalene-in-art>.

with an adhesive of watered-down PVA glue. Thin muslin was dipped in the same adhesive and draped over the body to imitate the appearance of finely-carved fabric. The entire statue was covered in a layer of plaster for stiffness and to unify the texture, and once everything was dry, it could be painted. A combination of spray paint and standard theatrical paints were used to evoke the appearance of a statue long abandoned, the details faded by time and decay.



*Figure 87: The complete statue after installation. 2021, Tulane University.*

The final component to complete the upstage wall was the fabric backing. Though scrim had been the initially-discussed material, sharktooth scrim is very costly and would have put the design significantly over-budget. However, scrim is also very specific in its applications; after consulting with Professor Ghinea, it was determined that for the shifting transparency we desired, true scrim was not necessary. Instead we were able to purchase black voile from Rosebrand, a product which arrived pre-fire treated and cut to our specifications. This was stapled to the back of the wall, and then the stock platforms and stairs could be installed behind it (Figure 88). The candle tables were also assembled at this time, with custom-cut trapezoidal tops for a more decorative finish (Figure 89). They were painted with a faux wood grain, and positioned in the corners of the downstage vom (Figure 90).



*Figure 88: Compression legs are fastened to stock platforms after the voile is installed. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 89: The candle tables are assembled. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 90: The candle tables are installed and painted. 2021, Tulane University.*

To reduce the chances of the stage floor being visibly scuffed by actor wear and tear, it was painted the weekend before moving into tech. The entire theater floor except for those areas upstage of the focal wall were base-coated a pale blue grey. Layers of texture were then built up, first with a layer of black and brown dabbed on with strips of cloth, and then with a heavily speckled texture combining black, brown, and the basecoat color. After multiple layers, the floor took on a similar appearance to the walls, and was sealed with a clear top coat. This process took about three days to complete, and therefore was scheduled around rehearsal dark days.





*Figure 91 (Above): The floor is base-coated. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 92 (Left): The floor drying after clear-coating. 2021, Tulane University.*

Set dressing was the final step in the build process. Legs of the same black voile were hung to mask the upstage left and right entrances, and in the downstage voms, more voile was draped from the railing of the lighting catwalk to cascade down behind the candle tables. The cross was hung from the grid center stage, though once Professor Payne reviewed the space, she agreed its original position closer to the upstage wall was preferable for audience sightlines. The picture frames were also hung at this time, cantilevered off the catwalk with a board and suspended with tie line.



*Figure 93: The cross, bench, and other furnishings are integrated into the space. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 94: In-progress photo of suspending the picture frames. 2021, Tulane University.*

## CHAPTER 5: REALIZED PRODUCTION

*Eclipsed* ran Friday December 10<sup>th</sup> through Tuesday December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Designers took many of their own photos, and the production was also professionally shot at the second dress rehearsal. Although the mask mandate had been lifted at the university for many weeks prior to opening, and actors are pictured unmasked below, worsening Covid-19 cases due to the Omicron variant caused the requirements to be reinstated mere hours before opening night. This was a disappointment for the actors, but the show continued as scheduled and all performed admirably.

Over 140 LED candles were purchased for the production with matching red glass votive holders. They were distributed as planned to audience members by the actress portraying the Mother Superior, Michaela Brown. The candles were turned on as part of the pre-show setup so that audience members were greeted immediately upon entering by flickering candlelight (Figure 95). The votives created lovely arrangements in the downstage voms, an effect which was aided by the black voile, lit from behind by several miniature PAR lamps (Figure 96). The hanging picture frames were ultimately cut from the design at the director's discretion, but several small empty frames remained dispersed upon the candle stands, fulfilling their intent as a memorial to the unremembered.

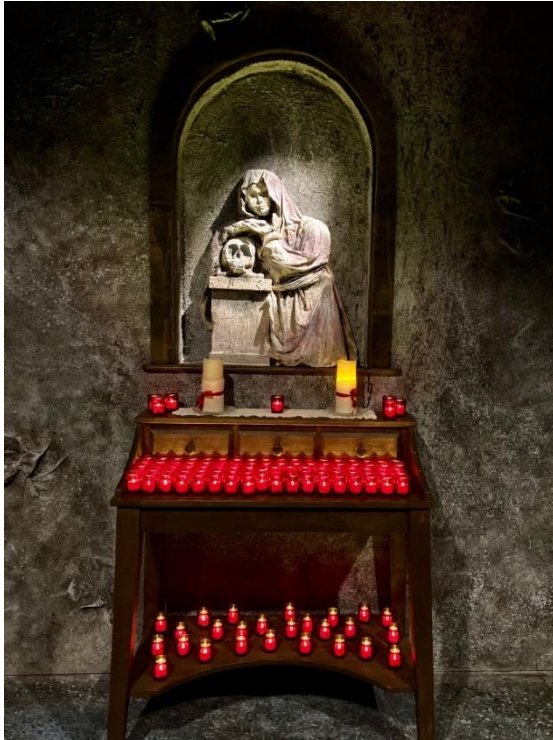


Figure 95: LED votives are turned on and ready for pre-show. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 96: A completed candle table, lit from behind with small PARs. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 97: Eclipsed pre-show look. 2021, Tulane University.

A blend of tables, benches, and stools permitted multiple actor levels while the action took place entirely on the stage floor (Figure 98-99). The sturdiness of the table construction allowed them to even be climbed upon while the wheels were locked.



Figure 98: Landrum, Cat. Kathy (Grace Boseley), Brigit (Lourdes Castillo), and Nellie Nora (Genevieve Corkery) pretend to send Mandy (Maddie Ray – Understudy) on her honeymoon. 2021, 2<sup>nd</sup> Story Creative.



Figure 99: Brigit reads a letter on the down-right bench. 2021, Tulane University.

The combination of lights with the black voile worked exactly as hoped. As seen above in Figure 97, front light rendered the material opaque, a solid black void behind the focal wall. However, when lit from behind, as in Figures 100 and 101, the voile became immediately transparent, revealing any actors positioned upstage of it. This was used to great theatrical effect during transition scenes—Professor Payne had cast three women as “Singers” to provide live music for the transition cues notated in the script—and at moments of remembrance and memory. Professor Ghinea’s lighting design was a tremendous asset to the scenery, as his use of color and texture continued to enhance and transform the set. Without such skilled lighting, much of this effect could have been lost.



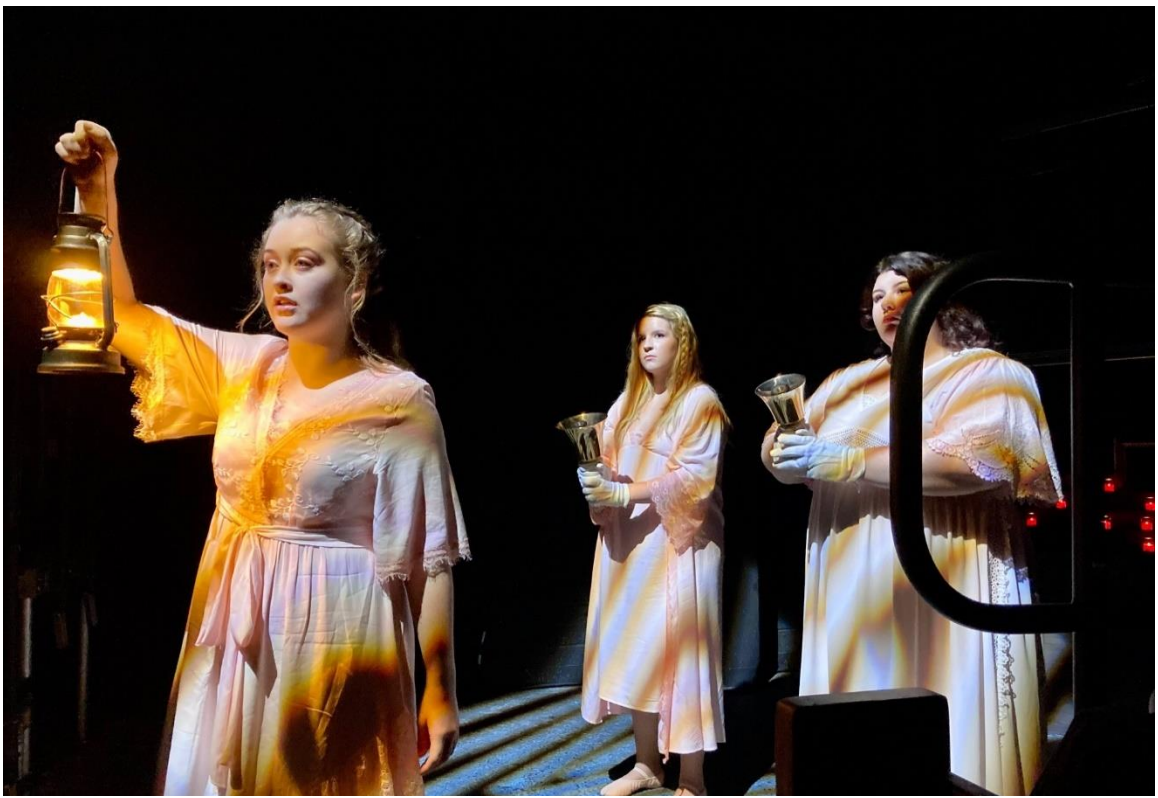
*Figure 100: The figures of Brigit, Kathy, Nellie-Nora, and Mother Victoria appear upstage of the wall during Sister Virginia’s crisis of faith. 2021, Tulane University.*



Figure 101: Landrum, Cat. The Singers appear upstage of the wall for the morning call to prayer. 2021, 2<sup>nd</sup> Story Creative.



*Figure 102: In a transition, the Singers appear upstage with lanterns. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 103: The Singers appear from the down-left vom, the candle table glowing in the background. 2021, Tulane University.*





*Figure 104 (Above): Mandy, Nellie-Nora, and Juliet (Madi Bell) help Kathy stow away in a laundry cart. 2021, Tulane University.*



*Figure 105 (Left): Sister Virginia (Maggie Sides) is backlit as she prepares to pray alone. 2021, Tulane University.*

Other than the Laundry, the only other location in the play is the Mother Superior's office. For the scenes occurring there, two of the three tables were struck, and the third was cleared of workroom props. Several small accessories, including a battery-operated oil lamp and rotary phone, demarcate the space as an office while maintaining the austerity of the rest of the set. The pale blue glass of the lamp picks up on the other blue tones in the walls and floor, and was a unique, period-appropriate find.



Figure 106: Mother Victoria takes a call from the Bishop. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 107: Mother Victoria tells Virginia, "God's ways are not our ways." 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 108: Mother Victoria's office. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 109: Mother Victoria chastises the rebellious Sister Virginia. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 110: *The Company* speaks the final monologue in unison, carrying the red memorial candles. 2021, Tulane University.



Figure 111: The ghost of the deceased Kathy McNamara appears upstage of the wall for the final monologue. 2021, Tulane University.

## CHAPTER 6: REFLECTION

The experience of designing *Eclipsed* was an incredible opportunity for growth both academic and personal. The collaborative process was effective, the design was ambitious but achievable, and the history behind the story spoke to me as a creator. Ultimately, I found the whole process from design to execution very successful.

One-on-one collaboration with Professor Payne was highly rewarding. At times, it can be challenging to merge multiple designers' creative visions into a cohesive whole, but Professor Payne was able to provide exactly the right amount of guidance to keep everyone in the same aesthetic "world" without stifling creativity. Although our personal tastes are very different—Professor Payne is a minimalist, whereas I love to get lost in color and detail—we were able to make compromises and end with a finished product we were both incredibly happy with. As the build progressed, there were elements such as the suspended picture frames which she was firm about cutting, while others she was initially unsure about she was nevertheless willing to defer to my discretion on. It was gratifying to know that she trusted my judgement, and once all elements were under stage light we both agreed that it had turned out exceptional.

There can be no doubt that the scenic design was ambitious; to create a truly immersive environment required treating every square inch of the venue. Between the multiple candlelit stations the audience would pass on their way to their seats, the ground row of authentic church pews, and a floor-to-grid focal wall, there were dozens of elements which had to be painted, sanded, and plastered, all with the knowledge that the audience

would be much closer to many of the pieces than is typical of standard scenery and would be able to see any imperfections. Were that not enough, the construction phase was happening in parallel with *Trouble in Mind*, which meant that the timeline had to be carefully managed for everything to be completed on schedule. I was fortunate to have an outstanding team working with me in the scene shop, and despite these challenges, I was able to delegate effectively and meet all our deadlines. This also meant that we had to work very little overtime; the graduate students met one night for paint call (a necessity, due to dry times and rehearsal schedules), and I stayed late another night to build the alcove statue and do other small touch ups, but for the most part everything was able to be completed during standard shop hours. This production was a great lesson in time management and delegation, both necessary skills should I be hired as a technical director in the future.

From an academic standpoint, I found this script fascinating. As a person with significant interest in both religions of the world and human rights issues, I was genuinely surprised that prior to reading the play I had not heard of the Magdalene Laundries. This was of particular interest to me because the events were so recent; I was born six months before the closing of the last Laundry in Dublin. There are thousands of women today still living with the emotional scars of their forced incarceration, and it was both educational and humbling to learn about what they went through. It was also very interesting to be studying the work of a still-living playwright; I was able to access not only her scripts, but also her memoir, and because Brogan has a large body of work outside of plays, I was also able to view some of her poetry and artwork, all of which informed my picture of why she approached *Eclipsed* in the way that she did. Researching the context of this play broadened the scope of my understanding of feminist issues and global human rights concerns.

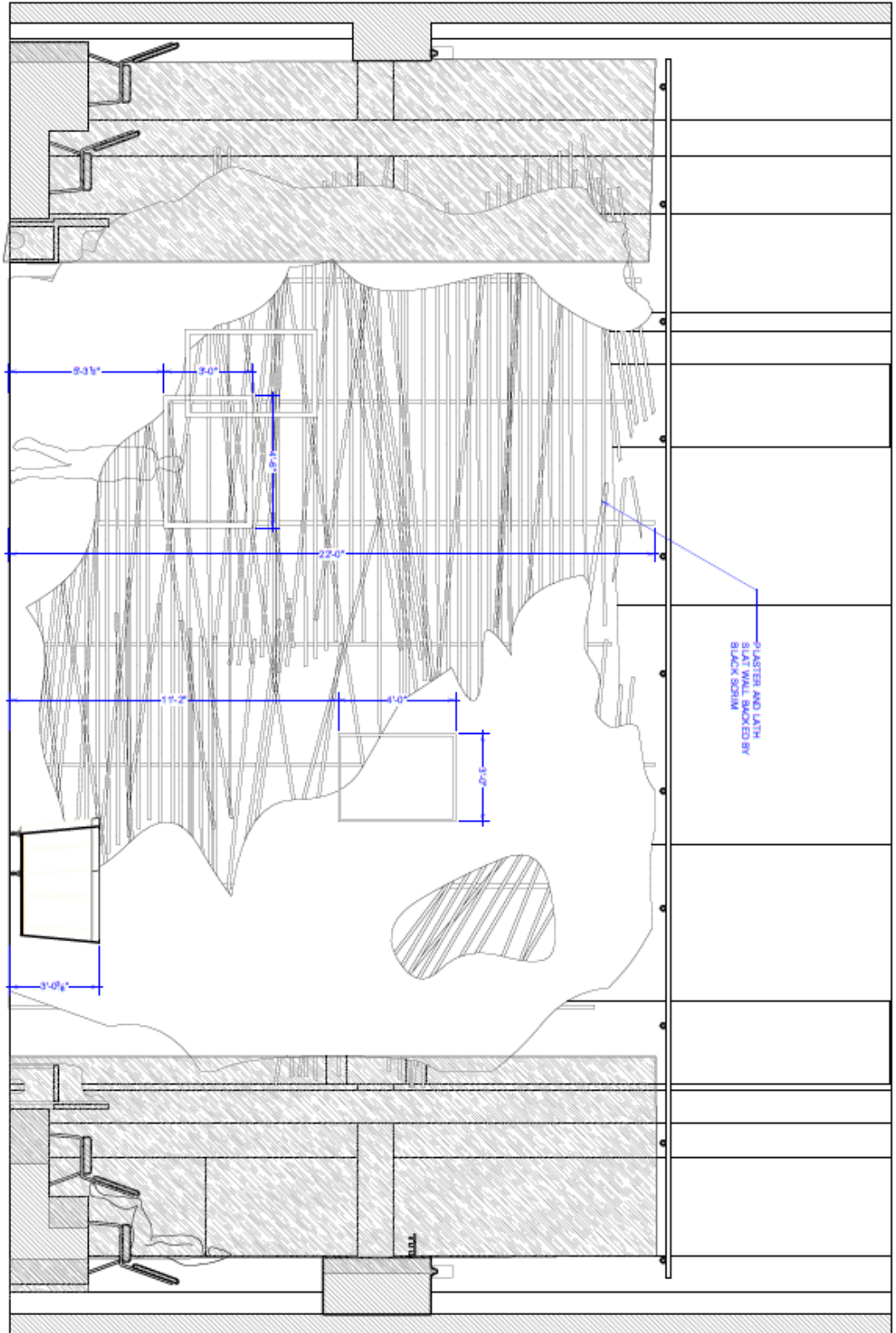
Overall, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to design and write my thesis on *Eclipsed*. Though in hindsight there were undoubtedly elements which could have been even further polished and refined, I am proud of what I put forth and the way it unified with the work of the other designers. Given the opportunity, there is very little I would change. I only hope that the production was as educational and thought-provoking for other members of the Tulane community as it was for me.



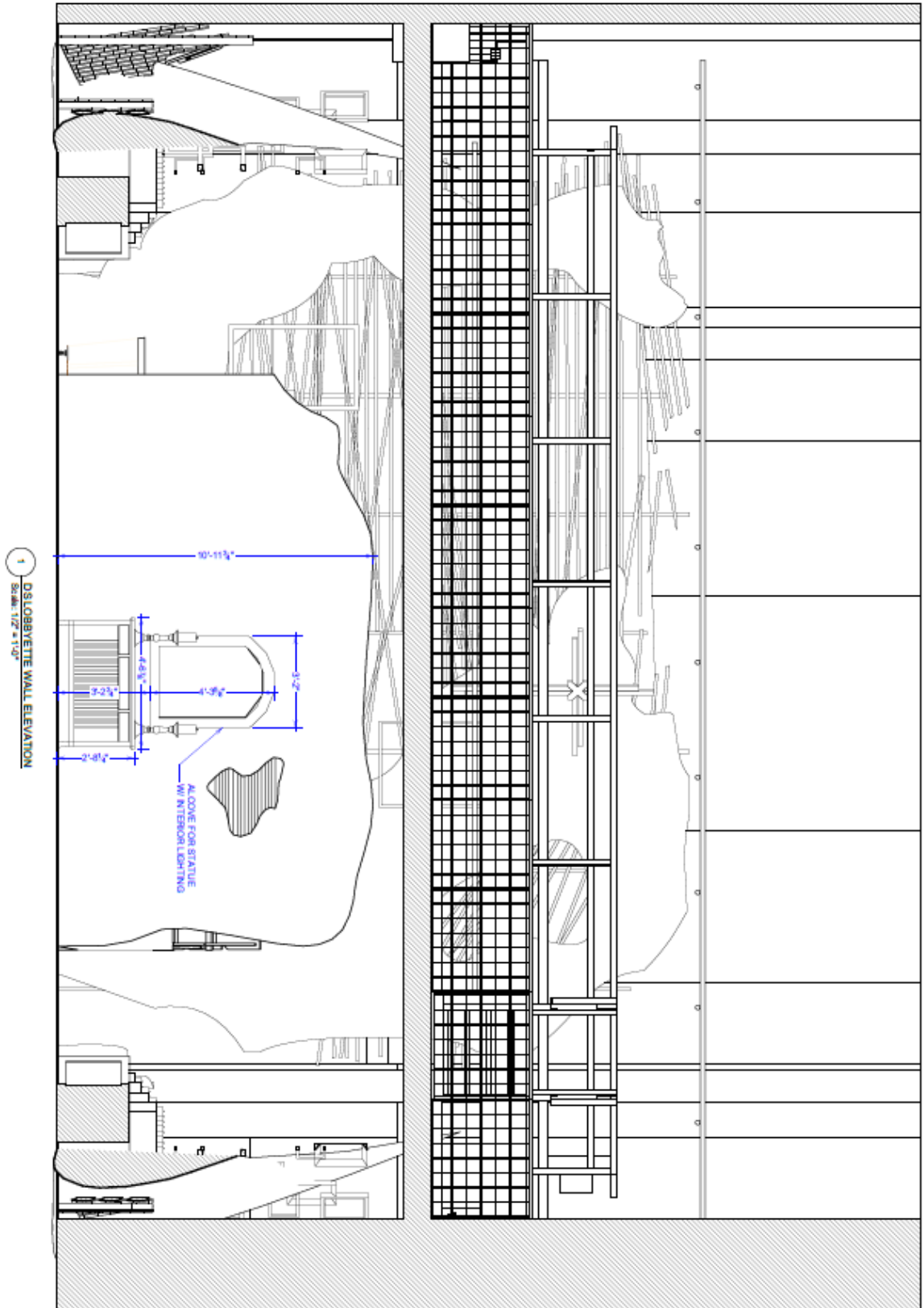
*Figure 112: The shadow of the cross falls across the focal wall. 2021, Tulane University.*

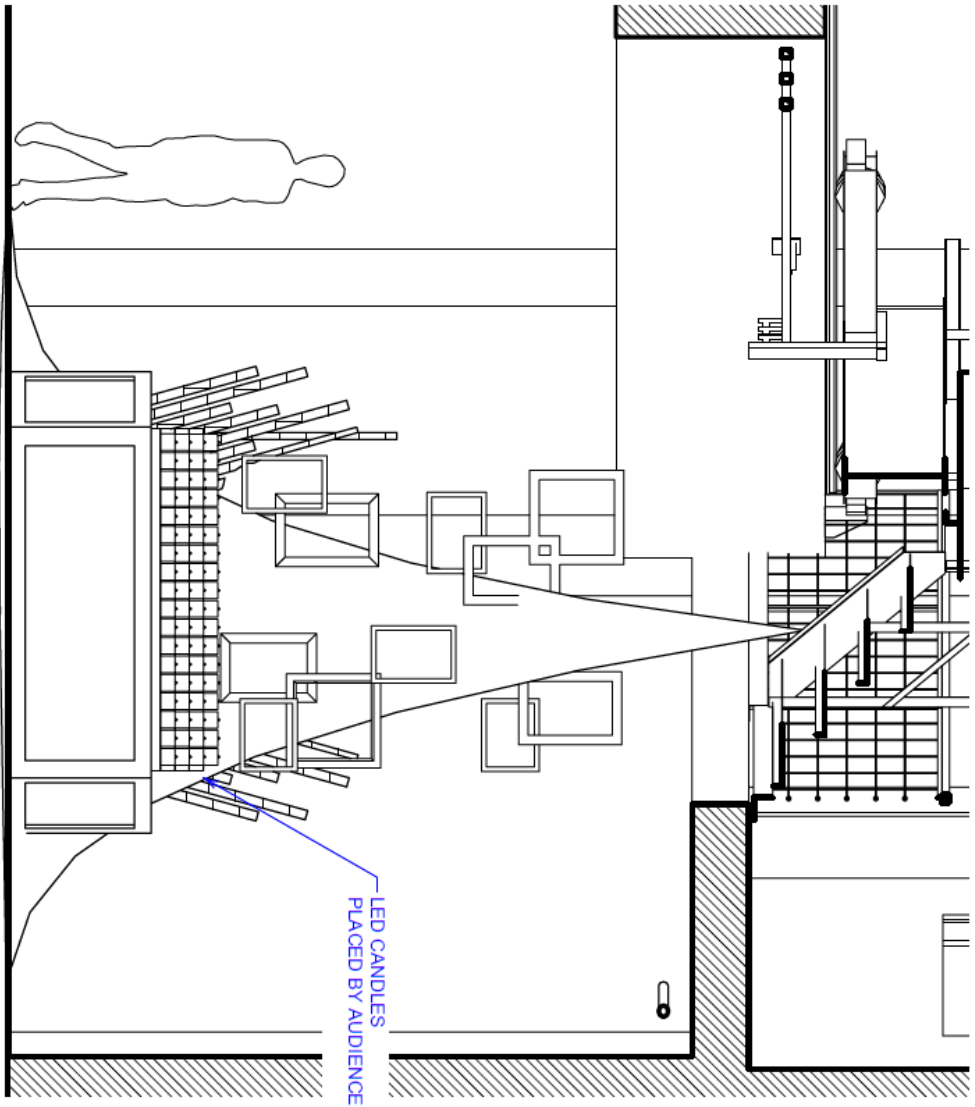


1 ELEVATION US  
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

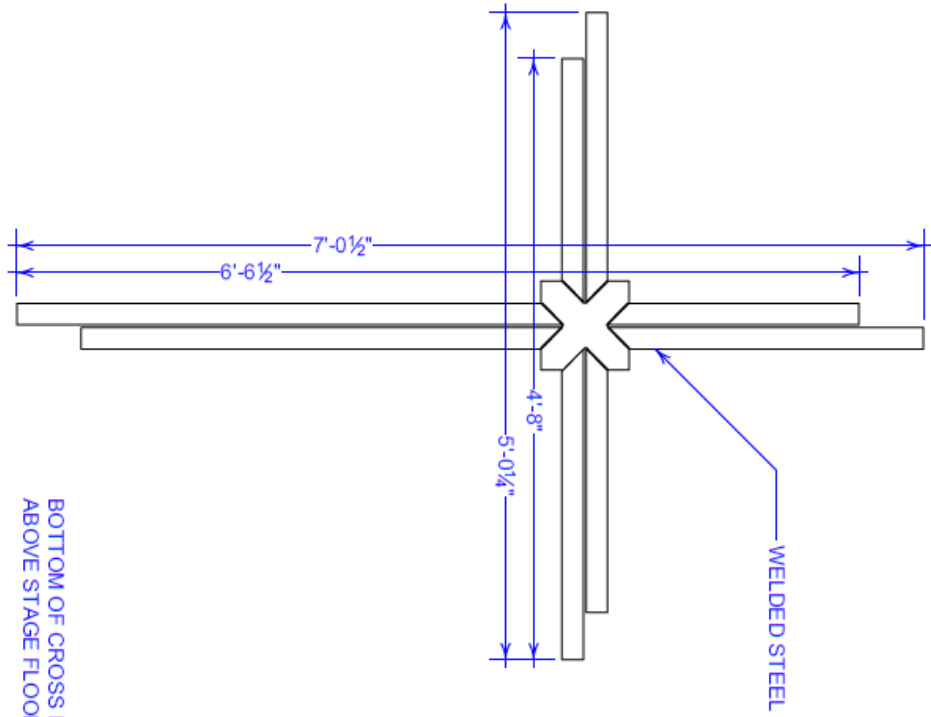








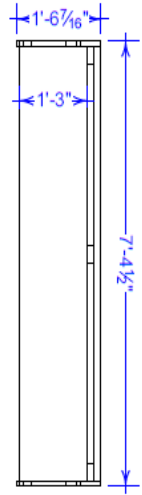
1 INSTALLATION CORNER ELEVATION  
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"



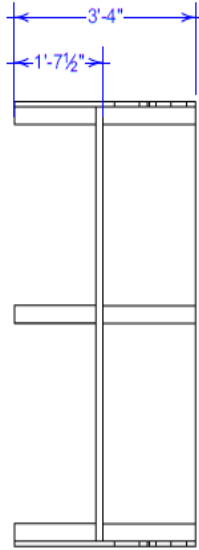
BOTTOM OF CROSS HANGS 13'-8"  
ABOVE STAGE FLOOR.

1 HANGING CROSS DETAIL  
Scale: 1" = 1'-0"

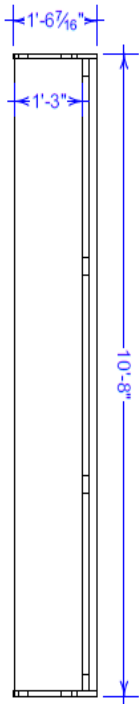
W S K U W U I N S E U U A U U I U I W S U U I I



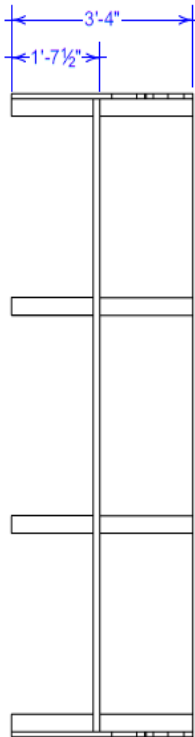
1 BENCH A - TOP  
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"



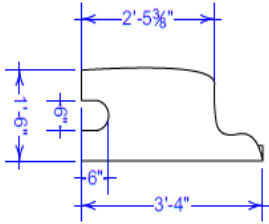
2 BENCH A - FRONT  
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"



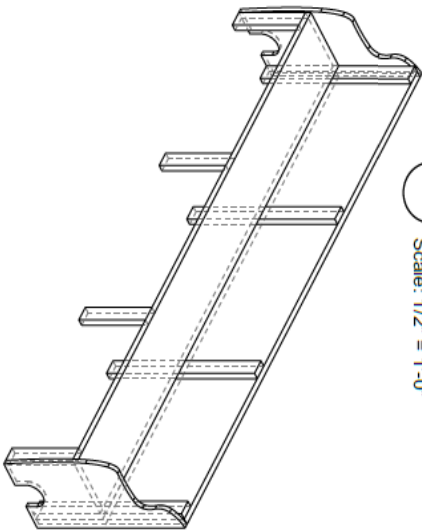
4 BENCH B - TOP  
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"



5 BENCH B - FRONT  
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"



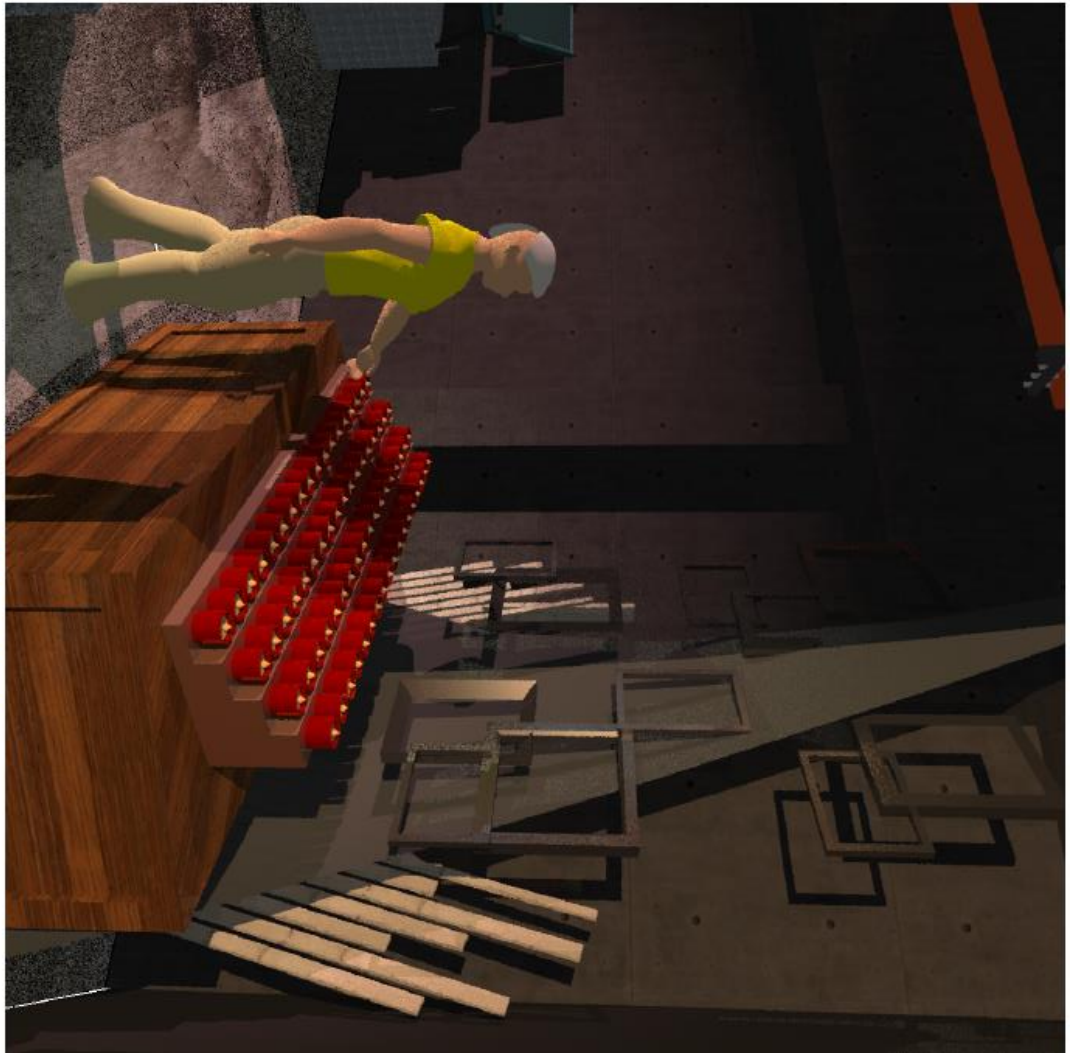
3 BENCH A & B - SIDE  
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"



6 BENCH B - ISOMETRIC  
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"



1 LOBBYETTE



1 CANDLE TABLES



1 VIEW UPSTAGE

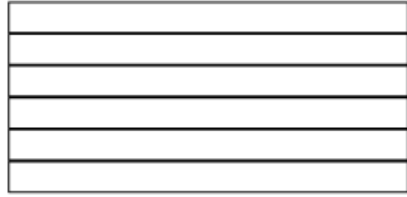


1 HOUSE LEFT VIEW

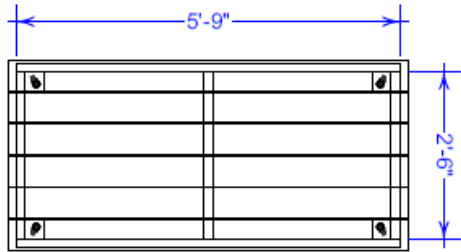




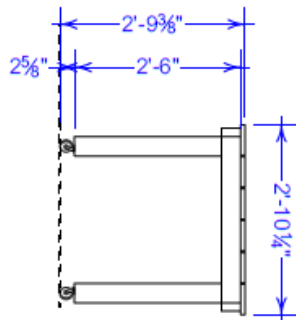
1 DOWNSTAGE



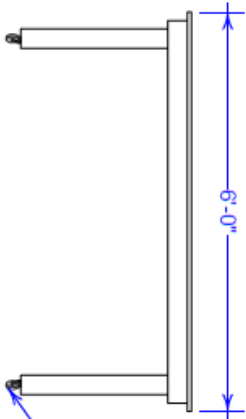
1 WORKTABLE - TOP VIEW  
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"



2 WORKTABLE - STRUCTURAL WIREFRAME  
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"



3 WORKTABLE - SIDE VIEW  
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"



4 WORKTABLE - FRONT VIEW  
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"

2" LOCKING CASTERS  
360 DEG SWIVEL

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## BIOGRAPHY

A native of Streamwood, IL, Emmalie graduated Summa Cum Laude from Southern Illinois University Carbondale with a BS in Interior Design and a minor in Theatre (May 2018). She spent the next year working at Design Inside, a residential firm catering to clients in Chicagoland and Milwaukee. Her role included client-facing design work, communications, and administrative functions. Now, she pursues her MFA in Scenic Design + Technical Direction (expected May 2022) through Tulane University's Department of Theatre and Dance in the cultural epicenter of New Orleans, LA. Emmalie's hobbies include creative writing, traditional and digital art, and forgetting to finish knitting projects.