

ABSTRACT

Titles of Dissertation:

ANTICI-
AN EXPLORATION OF FAMILIARITY
AND PROGRESS THROUGH THE LENS OF
ROCKY HORROR: A THEORETICAL DESIGN

Taylor Verrett,
Master of Fine Arts in Media Design, 2022

Thesis directed by:

Professor Jared Mezzocchi
Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies

This thesis work focuses on a hypothetical design for a production of *the Rocky Horror Show*. The subject matter of the design is inspired by classical works of art history and the connotations that come with the iconography of these images. The design utilizes assets that are familiar to the audiences to create a new visual that is approved by the cult following of Rocky Horror.

ANTICI-
AN EXPLORATION OF FAMILIARITY AND PROGRESS THROUGH THE LENS
OF ROCKY HORROR: A THEORETICAL DESIGN

by

Taylor Verrett

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Media Design
2022

Advisory Committee:
Professor Jared Mezzocchi, Chair
Professor Helen Huang
Marielis Garcia

© Copyright by
Taylor Verrett
2022

Dedication

I was 18 when I played Janet Weiss for the first time. A first-year college student, only recently removed from the preconceived notion of her high school self. I was shy and still a bit sheltered. This was to be the second musical I produced with my beloved theater troupe, The Tea Sippers. We were all between the ages of 18 and 25. We all had a love for the stage. More importantly we were all friends. These were the people I loved creating with. These people convinced me that the high of creating something beautiful with a team of people you consider family was the high I wanted to chase for the rest of my life. I was so excited to play Janet. I had never done anything so “crazy” before. No one would expect me to parade around in a corset and fishnets. *The Rocky Horror Show* broke my shell and pushed me out into the next chapter of my life. A chapter that would give me a newfound confidence in myself, my art, and my passions. My cast became my family. This production was the start of several years of incredible shows and unforgettable memories. The Tea Sippers did two more productions of *the Rocky Horror Show*. The second was a simplified concert. The third was to be a neon spectacle in my hometown’s gay bar. My good friend Andrew Vincent was our director for all three of these productions. Andrew played a huge part in awakening my passion for theater. He was the person that first asked me if I wanted to make some videos to have on stage during our production of *American Idiot*. Now, here I am, completing my MFA in Media Design for live performance.

Andrew passed unexpectedly during the rehearsal period of our third *Rocky* production.

It was a shock to all of us. He was our leader, our director, our friend. The last time I saw him was at a Monday night rehearsal. He was making plans for a movie watch party that

Friday. Pajamas, snacks, maybe a homemade meal for everyone. The next morning, he was gone.

We as a cast and crew decided to continue with the show. Andrew was not the kind to let ANYTHING halt his productions. We wanted to continue that determination and give him one final piece to have his name on. That production was so unique, vibrant, wild, and an absolute dream. Was it Broadway quality? No. Did we have enough budget to make complex costumes? No. Did we have a structural sound set? Not really. But we had thrift stores, volunteer carpenters, and some incredible local musicians for a live band. We made it our *Rocky Horror*. We came together as not only a team, but as a family. We were grieving while learning choreography. We were contemplating the meaning of life while practicing our harmonies. But we were all together and living for the moment.

To most, Rocky Horror is a silly cult following movie with some catchy tunes. For me, Rocky is a reminder to cherish those you love the most, and to strive everyday to do what you love. Life is too short not to.

Don't dream it. Be it.

Dedicated to Andrew Lee Vincent
and my Tea Sippers family



Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the incredible mentors I have been lucky enough to work with in graduate school. The following have helped shape who I am as a designer and artist:

Jared Mezzocchi
Helen Huang
Marielis Garcia
Mischa Kachman
Daniel Conway
Brian MacDevitt

I would also like to thank my fellow Media Design MFA candidates for their constant support and friendship throughout my time at UMD.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Figures.....	viii
Summary: For the Rocky Virgins.....	1
Chapter 1: The Road to Thesis.....	3
Chapter 2: Original Development.....	6
2.2 Familiarity Leads to Progress.....	8
2.3 Artistic References.....	10
2.4 Original Artworks.....	19
Chapter 3: The Concept.....	22
3.2 Applying References.....	24
Chapter 4: Costume Design.....	27
4.2 Costume Building.....	47
Chapter 5: Set Design.....	49
Chapter 6: Media Design.....	51
6.2 Design Notes / Mental Ramblings.....	53
6.3 Sweet Transvestite.....	55
6.4 My Wheels! I Can't Move My Wheels!.....	57
6.5 That Spark of Life.....	59
6.6 A Special Guest Appearance.....	60
6.7 The Floor Show.....	62
6.8 Organization.....	64
Chapter 7: Reflections.....	67

To see the full work please visit:
<https://taylorverrett.wixsite.com/taylorverrettart/mfa-thesis>



List of Figures

- 2.a O'Brien, Richard. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 197
- 2.b Wood, Grant. *American Gothic*. 1930
- 2.c Michelangelo. *The Creation of Adam*. c. 1512
- 2.d O'Brien, Richard. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 1975
- 2.e O'Brien, Richard. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 1975
- 2.f Michelangelo. *The Statue of David*. 1501-1504
- 2.g O'Brien, Richard. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 1975
- 2.h O'Brien, Richard. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 1975
- 2.i Da Vinci, Leonardo. *The Last Supper*. 1495-1498
- 2.j Tintoretto. *The Last Supper*. 1592-1594
- 2.k O'Brien, Richard. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 1975
Whistler, J.M. *Arrangement in Grey and Black No.1 (Whistler's Mother)*. 1871
- 2.l O'Brien, Richard. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 1975
- 2.m Da Vinci, Leonardo. *The Mona Lisa*. 1503
- 2.n O'Brien, Richard. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 1975
- 2.o O'Brien, Richard. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 1975
- 2.p Michelangelo. *Pieta*. 1498-1499
- 2.q Bernini, Gian Lorenzo. *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*. 1647-1652
- 2.r Verrett, Taylor. *Touch-a-Touch Me Venus*. 201

- 2.s Verrett, Taylor. *Creation of Dreaming*. 2018
- 2.t Verrett, Taylor. *Rocky A La Lautrec*. 2015
- 3.a Verrett, Taylor. *Still from Rocky Horror Thesis Presentation: Adam and Eve*. 2022.
- 3.b Verrett, Taylor. *Still from Rocky Horror Thesis Presentation: David*. 2022.
- 3.c Verrett, Taylor. *Still from Rocky Horror Thesis Presentation: Painting Girls*. 2022.
- 4.a O'Brien, Richard. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 1975
- 4.b O'Brien, Richard. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 1975
- 4.c Verrett, Taylor. *Frank's Costume*. 2020
- 4.d Verrett, Taylor. *Brad and Janet's Costume*. 2020
- 4.e Verrett, Taylor. *Brad and Janet's undergarment Costume*. 2020
- 4.f Verrett, Taylor. *Riff Raff's Costume*. 2020
- 4.g Verrett, Taylor. *Magenta's Costume*. 2020
- 4.h Verrett, Taylor. *Columbia's Costume*. 2020
- 4.i Verrett, Taylor. *Rocky's Costume*. 2020
- 4.j Verrett, Taylor. *Eddie's Costume*. 2020
- 4.k Verrett, Taylor. *Dr Scott's costume Costume*. 2020
- 4.l Verrett, Taylor. *Columbia's Floor Show Costume*. 2020
- 4.m Verrett, Taylor. *Rocky's Floor Show Costume*. 2020
- 4.n Verrett, Taylor. *Brad's Floor Show Costume*. 2020
- 4.o Verrett, Taylor. *Janet's Floor Show Costume*. 2020
- 4.p Verrett, Taylor. *Frank's Floor Show Costume*. 2020

- 4.q Verrett, Taylor. *Riff Raff's Floor Show Costume*. 2020
- 4.r Verrett, Taylor. *Magenta's Floor Show Costume*. 2020
- 4.s Verrett, Taylor. *Narrator's Costume*. 2020
- 4.t Verrett, Taylor. *Full Costume Design Costume*. 2020
- 5.a Verrett, Taylor. *Set Design Illustration*. 2022
- 6.a Verrett, Taylor. *Still from Rocky Horror Thesis Presentation: Say It*. 2022.
- 6.b See 3.a
- 6.c See 3.c
- 6.d Verrett, Taylor. *Still from Rocky Horror Thesis Presentation: Glitter Opening*. 2022.
- 6.e Verrett, Taylor. *Screenshot of Thesis Desktop File*. 2022
- 6.f Verrett, Taylor. *Screenshot of Thesis Desktop File sub folder*. 2022
- 6.g Verrett, Taylor. *Screenshot of Thesis Desktop File sub folder*. 2022

Summary: For the Rocky Virgins

I would like, if I may, to take you on a strange journey through the plot of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Understanding this movie has become vital to understanding the stage show and cult following that comes with the fandom. Led by a criminologist narrator, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* follows two young, virgin, love birds, Brad and Janet. When Brad and Janet become engaged, they decide to take a little journey. They are on their way to visit their high school science teacher Dr. Scott, the man that began it and introduced them to each other. While on the road during a dark and stormy night, they blow a flat tire. Seeking a phone and a way out of the rain, they seek shelter in a strange castle they had passed. They stumble upon a party filled with odd characters and strange dances. Riff Raff and Magenta, seemingly the butler and the maid, introduce themselves as servants to their master, Dr. Frank N Furter. They also meet Columbia, a vivacious girl swept away by the grandeur of these parties and lifestyle. Dr. Frank N Furter, a sweet transvestite from Transsexual Transylvania, offers Brad and Janet hospitality by inviting them up to his lab to see his newest creation come to life. Frank puts on a frightening display of scientific anomalies to give birth to his newest creature, Rocky, a muscular, gilded, man intended to be used for Frank's own sexual pleasure. While reveling in the scientific miracle before them, a man on a motorcycle crashes through the wall of a freezer. Columbia excitedly lets Brad and Janet know that this is Eddie, her and Frank's former lover. As Frank tells us later, he has used half of Eddie's Brain in order to create ROCKY. Frank is angered by the outburst and distraction from his own theatrics and quickly takes care of Eddie, ensuring Eddie never sees the light of day again. Brad and Janet try to remain calm and make it through their stay at the castle. They are tempted by Frank who seduces each of them consecutively,

convincing each to break their vow of chastity. Having tasted forbidden fruit, Janet seeks comfort and more pleasure in Rocky, who gladly returns the sentiment. Meanwhile, Frank, Riff Raff, and Magenta receive a visitor in the night, Dr. Scott. Dr Scott has come in search of his nephew Eddie, as he suspects that Eddie has gotten in with a bad crowd; aliens. Dr. Scott, Brad, Janet, and Columbia all confront Frank of his wrong doings for killing Eddie. Having no tolerance for an uprising, Frank freezes them all with his Transducer machine making them all into statues.

Dr. Frank N Furter dresses all of his statues in corsets and fishnets, and places them all on the main stage of the castle. His intentions are to perform a grand floor show inspired by the glamorous films of yesteryear. He unfreezes his performers and the floor show begins, ending in a tangled orgy floating in a pool. The fun is interrupted by Riff Raff and Magenta. They burst into the theater donned in their traditional alien apparel. It is a mutiny. Riff Raff declares Frank too extreme in his lifestyle and has failed in his mission to assimilate into human culture. They are to return to the planet of Transexual in the galaxy of Transylvania immediately. Except Frank is to remain behind on earth. Frank struggles to get away from them, but is struck down by Riff Raff's laser beam. Rocky is also killed in the struggle. Brad, Janet, and Dr. Scott quickly run for their lives as the castle is beamed into space, leaving them sifting through dust, only shells of who they were before.

Please note that there are two versions of Rocky Horror that I will reference in this project. The first is the movie, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. The second is the stage show on which the movie is based upon, *The Rocky Horror Show*. Both follow the same plot line and roughly the same script, but must be differentiated for purposes of understanding the whole.

Chapter 1: The Road to Thesis

Seeing this thesis project to fruition has been no easy task. I began my grad school experience in the fall of 2019. It was smooth sailing up until the middle of my second semester when the world shut down. In the past three years, I have seen more changes in the world than I have in my entire life. Trying to create art and continue my education during a global pandemic, civil protests, and the onset of war, has been challenging to say the least. There have been times that I have asked myself why I am trying to create art in times of crisis. Sometimes my work seems small and insignificant in the greater context of what is going on in the world. Why am I making silly videos and drawing pretty pictures when there are people dying of viruses, protesting in the streets, and having their homes bombed? How am I contributing to the greater good? Making theater sometimes feels pointless for lack of a better word; but it's not pointless.

In my second year of grad school, I coincidentally had a few projects in a row where I was required to research Busby Berkley, the great film director and surrealist cinematographer. I delved into the world of classic Hollywood and the golden age of film. It is easy to forget that these glamorous show girl spectacles were created in the 1930s. The Golden Age of Hollywood overlaps one of the lowest points in American history, the Great Depression. It was this research that reminded me why my work is not futile. Yes, in times of crisis, the world needs those that will fight for justice and help in physical and direct ways. However, in times of crisis, people also need mental escapes. It is detrimental to the soul to constantly be aware of the harsh realities going on in the world. When people need distractions, they turn to art. They watch movies, listen to music, read books, look at paintings, so on and so forth. Art is the escape from reality we as a

society so desperately need in the harshest of realities. Sometimes art allows us to perceive our reality from an outsider's point of view. Other times it helps us forget our reality all together, even if just temporarily. We need these breaks. We need this room to breathe, to rest, to grow stronger. That is why I continue to create art in what seems like an entire shift in society as we know it.

This particular iteration of my thesis project is actually the fourth iteration. The first was to be designing projections for a dance piece created by Marielis Garcia, *Un Espectro Real*. Not surprising, the threat of yet another COVID outbreak led to the cancellation of that show. It was hard to process the loss of a show our team had been designing for almost a year. What did this cancellation teach me? The world is wild and anything can happen. Be adaptable and shift my mindset to the next solution rather than dwelling on what could have been.

The second iteration of my thesis was to be designing media for a full album music video. I was very excited about this project. The music by artist Tiffany Topol really spoke to me. I could feel the music. I could visualize it. I could embody it. However, the scheduling for this project was not stable enough to rely on it to be my final project of my graduate experience. This project wasn't canceled, but merely postponed to a later time. This was a short lived iteration of my thesis, but it did remind me why I love media work so much. Being able to visualize a physical sensation like the chills from beautiful music is what my art lives for. That sensation is where I thrive as a creative.

Next came *The Lab for Global Performance and Politics* at Georgetown University; an international theater festival called *The Gathering*. My assignment was to design media for an interactive dance piece. This was surely going to be the project to see my thesis to completion. Then, World War 3 threatened to rear its ugly head when Russia invaded Ukraine in March of 2022. Being that this project was an *international* theater festival, I grew worried that this event would be canceled at any moment and I

would be left without a thesis weeks before my deadlines. Through this change, I learned that as an artist and as a working human, I need a certain level of control over my work. My mentality does not function well when too many elements of a project are up in the air, left to chance, or are in someone else's hands completely.

With this third thesis redirection, I now had less than three months to create and write a thesis that would convince my professors that I am worthy of receiving my Master's degree. I decided to ask permission to complete a paper project; a theoretical design that may never be staged, but would allow me to showcase the skill sets that I feel are my strongest assets. This would give me complete control over my deadlines and the creative flow of the project. That also means that I have no director or fellow creatives to bounce ideas off of. Creating completely alone can be liberating, but too much freedom can prove to be confusing. With a paper project I am not just a media designer, I am also a set designer, costume designer, director, and producer. This meant that I needed to work with a script I was familiar with; Something I could dive straight into without having to take the time to wrap my head around.

There is only one theatrical production I know like the back of my hand. One that I have participated in multiple times and grown with as a young adult: *Rocky Horror*. I had already used this show for a costume design project in my second year. I had already developed a design concept I was excited about. This concept was an amalgamation of ideas from my multiple iterations of being in *Rocky Horror*. Several years already in the making, this was my chance to put my own spin on a show so near and dear to my heart. Fourth and finally I had my thesis show, *The Rocky Horror Show*. I honestly couldn't think of a better way to end my time at UMD.

Chapter 2: Original Development

The Rocky Horror Picture Show. A cult classic. A wild, sexualized, sci fi fever dream. Based on the stage show, *The Rocky Horror Show*, the original film (1975, directed by Richard O'brien), is potentially one of the most memorable pieces of cinema ever created. Even if you've only seen it once, you will know the *Time Warp* for the rest of your life. The cinematic masterpiece introduced characters and costumes that would become pop culture icons for generations to come. I believe acknowledging the iconic imagery in the movie is key to a successful production of *the Rocky Horror Show*. A beautiful product of cult followings is the sense of community that the fans share. Audiences come to see *The Rocky Horror Show* to sing and dance to songs they've known for a lifetime, and to shout obscene responses to the actors that everyone in the audience has memorized. Keeping these familiar elements are not only important to the fanbase of *Rocky Horror*, but also to "Rocky Virgins" that have never seen the show before. The ability to go from the movie, to a shadow cast, to a stage show and know what to expect is half of the fun of the show.

However, this show has been produced over and over again. Many times in the exact same way as the production that proceeded. This repetition isn't uncommon in musical theater. Many shows have an expectation of how they are produced: *Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Miserables*, *The Producers*, *Sweeney Todd* to name a few. All of these shows have a preconceived idea of what they should be and what they should look like. *Rocky* is no exception. We're also talking about a show that centers around extraterrestrial transgendered people and a mad scientist creating a human sex toy for the hell of it. Given the context of the show, I believe that *the Rocky Horror Show* has a little

wiggle room in regards to its design and production. The script is wild and shocking, why not change up the visual spectacle of it all every now and again?

The goal of this thesis project is to put my own spin on the timeless classic. I hope to create a production that has never been seen before. At the same time, my challenge is to incorporate the iconic familiar elements that make *Rocky Horror* the classic that it is. Balancing a new vision with the familiar expectation is something that I strive for in my artistic endeavor.

I hope to bring a few new ideas to the table in my rendition of *The Rocky Horror Show*. Visually speaking, *The Rocky Horror Show* is usually designed around the theme of classic cinema; red curtains, buckets of popcorn, usherettes dressed as movie theater employees. I intend to bring a completely different visual aesthetic to the show; an aesthetic that is seemingly more refined and glamorous so as to challenge the audience of everything that they know of the cult classic. I pull much inspiration from classic works of art including artwork that centers around religious themes. The hope is to call attention to sexual oppression in the Christian church and the implementation of fear and homophobia through the guise of religion. In my costume design and hypothetical casting, I have casted a gender swapped cast. The only exceptions are Brad and Janet as they represent heteronormativity. My hope in this gender bent casting is to provide space and an accepting room of actual queer and transgendered people in the theater world.¹ With this casting, hopefully audiences will leave with a greater acceptance of queer identifying people and performers.²

¹ This is only a hypothetical casting based on who I would like to hear sing the music. In actual practice I would strive to cast transgendered people and actual drag performers in these roles in order to diversify the queer identity of the show.

² I would also like to state that I myself do not identify as queer, but as an ally of the LGBTQIA+ community. In actual practice I would bring people on to the creative and casting team that could better represent the community and struggles that need to be identified.

Chapter 2.2: Familiarity Leads to Progress

Growing up in the South was sometimes difficult as an artist and young creative. While I was lucky to grow up in a cultural bubble that supported local artists and fostered creative growth, the range at which one could create with acceptance was rather shallow, especially in the theater arts. Most theater goers were/are wealthier patrons that expect to see clean cut, wholesome entertainment. I remember receiving backlash from many members of the community after doing a production of *Spring Awakening*. The community would rather see *Singing in the Rain* over and over without variation than to see a more demanding subject matter that may not subscribe to their own outlook of the world.

Rocky Horror seemed to be the exception. Everytime I participated in a production, we had a packed house filled with patrons from every corner of the community. Not just theater goers, not just LGBTQ+ members, not just cult followers. *Rocky* seemed to attract everyone. I realized through *Rocky Horror* that those that are skeptical of theatrical arts, will become patrons when presented with the proper level of familiarity. Having a sense of what to expect when walking into a theater decreases the intimidation of theater. *Rocky Horror* presents this comfort through the knowledge that the audience is allowed to sing, dance, curse, yell, and throw things. They are expected to act foolish. Compare this to the formal environment of an opera, or a Shakespearean work where the audience is expected to sit quietly in their seats and calmly clap when appropriate.

The comfort of familiarity is the key to drawing in a new audience that may not approach theater otherwise. The comfort of familiarity is also the way to draw the consistent patrons into a work that may challenge their point of view without scaring

them off. Everyone knows what to expect from *Rocky Horror* on some level or another. The script does not change, the music stays consistent, but the message the audience walks away with can be different every time depending on the development of the production. Familiarity and nostalgia can invoke challenge and progress.

That being said, my challenge with this design is to maintain a level of the expected production while still challenging audiences with a new take on the show. I plan to maintain the familiarity of the well known shadow cast productions by using clips and references from the movie. Normally in a design process, I try to stay away from taking in any preceding design or content involving the show that I am designing for. However, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* has become essential to understanding *The Rocky Horror Show* (at least if one truly wants to be a part of the cult following). This works in my favor because I can reference the movie as a part of my design without the fear of design counterfeit.

Chapter 2.3: Artistic References

The original movie makes reference to many iconic artistic masterpieces. Some references are quite obvious such as Riff Raff and Magenta dressed as *American Gothic* during “Damn It Janet”. Other references are sprinkled throughout the decor of Frank’s castle, like the *Mona Lisa*, Michelangelo’s *David*, and *The Creation of Adam* lining the bottom of the pool. There are also cinematic compositions that mimic Renaissance and Baroque techniques, using contrapposto silhouettes, wheel like compositions, and chiaroscuro lighting. The castle is an amalgamation of distorted masterpieces that create the quirky setting of the film. This idea of referencing classic works of art inspired my own artworks and poster designs from previous productions of *Rocky Horror*.



3

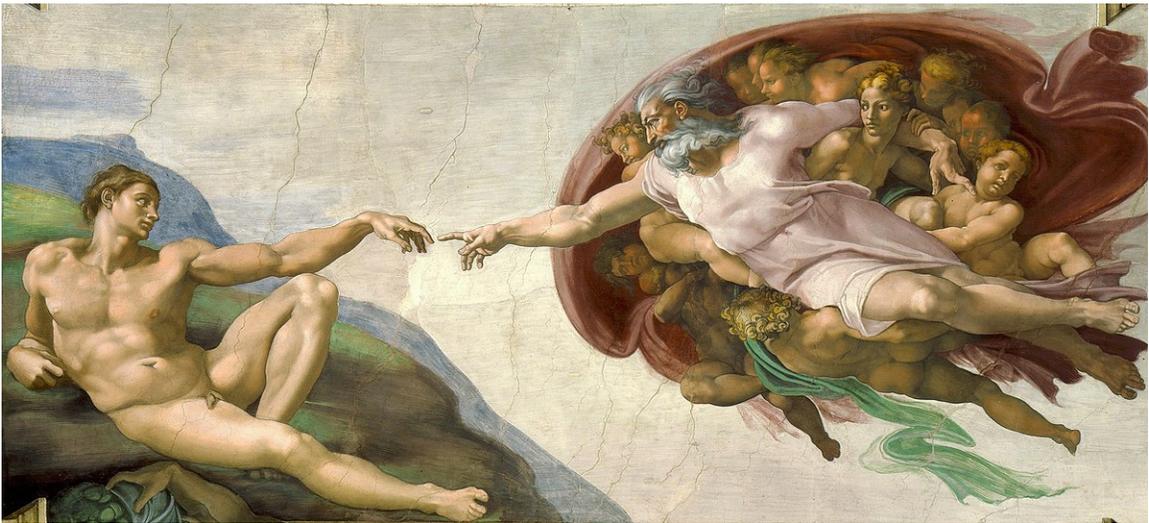


4

³ Figure 2.a
⁴ Figure 2.b



5

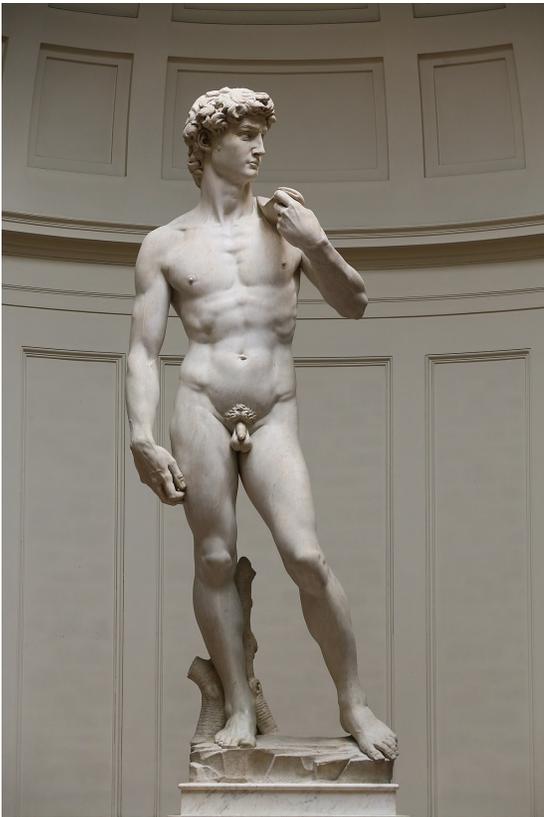


6

⁵ Figure 2.c
⁶ Figure 2.d



7



8

⁷ Figure 2.e
⁸ Figure 2.f



9



10

⁹ Figure 2.g
¹⁰ Figure 2.h



11



12

¹¹ Figure 2.i
¹² Figure 2.j



13



14

¹³ Figure 2.k
¹⁴ Figure 2.l



15

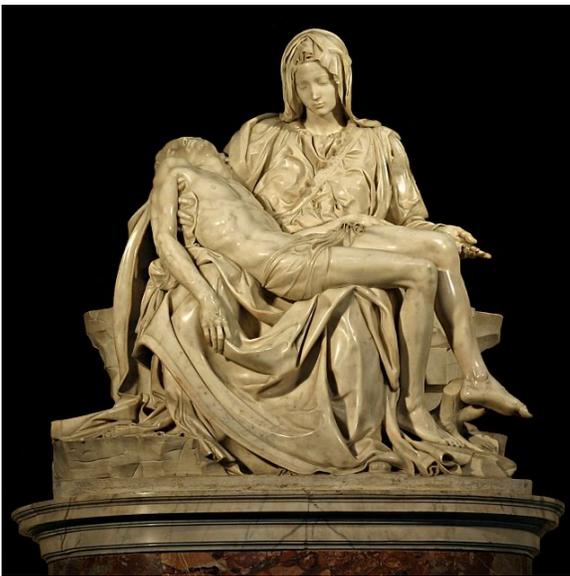


16

¹⁵ Figure 2.m
¹⁶ Figure 2.n



17



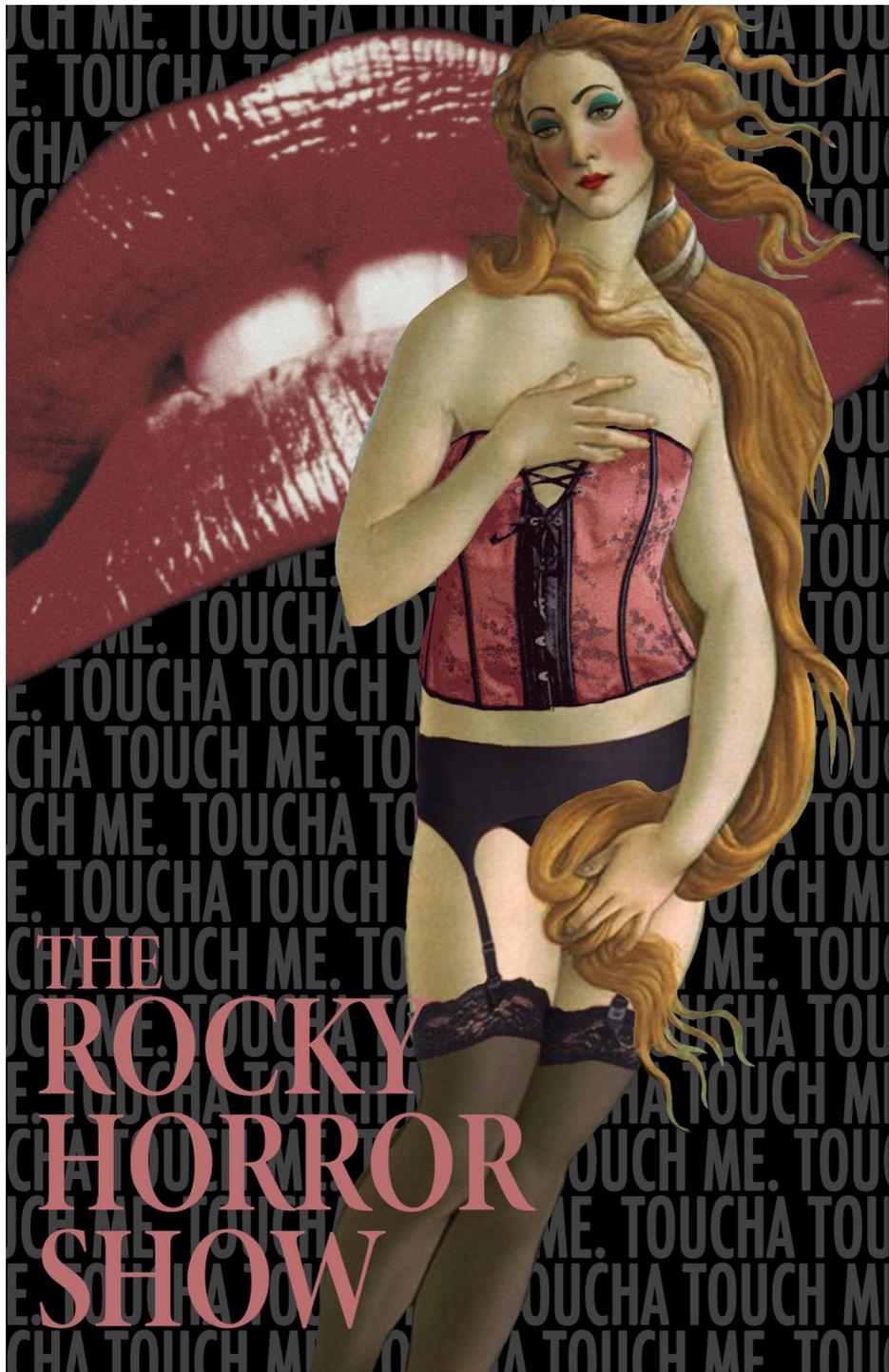
18



19

-
- 17 Figure 2.o
 - 18 Figure 2.p
 - 19 Figure 2.q

Chapter 2.4: Original Artworks

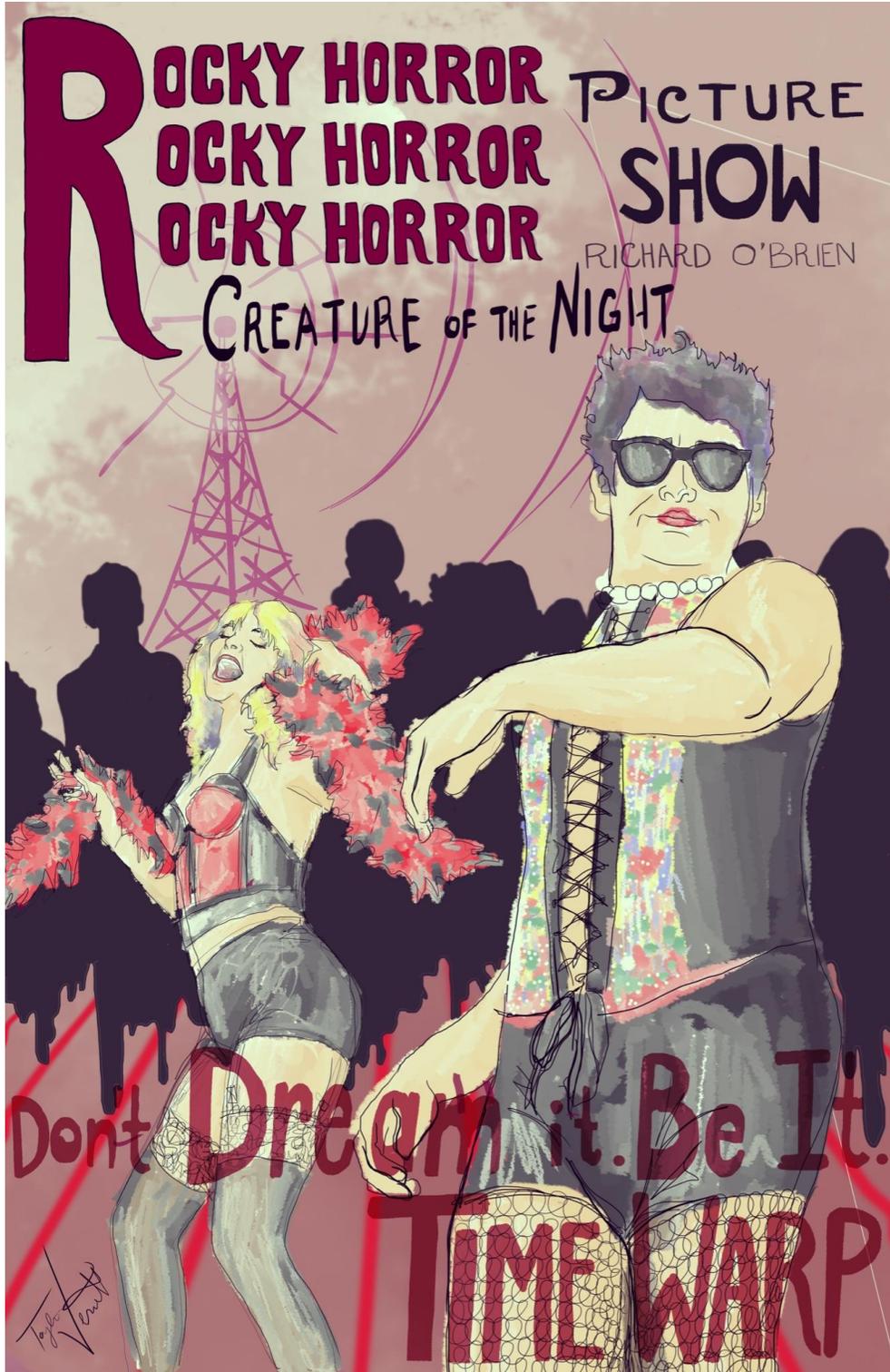


²⁰ Figure 2.r



21

21 Figure 2.s



22

22 Figure 2.t

Chapter 3: The Concept

These classical references are what inspired me to take my approach to the media design and costumes of *Rocky Horror*. I imagine that Frank and his team landed on earth knowing they would have to assimilate into human culture. The first thing they find to use as reference for their human disguise is perhaps a textbook; more specifically an art history textbook. Of course this is not true cannon to the plot of *Rocky*, but merely my own imaginings. Dr. Frank N Furter is a flamboyant and narcissistic creature drawn to beauty and extravagance. Upon searching this art history textbook, Frank is immediately captivated by the godlike figures of the renaissance, the over the top lavishness of Elizabethan costume, the dark and mysterious luxury of the baroque period, and the whimsical flamboyance of the Rococo era. This must be what humans are all about. How could they not relish in such beauty and drama? Frank adorns his castle with “replicas” (maybe they’re stolen) of the finest masterpieces the world has to offer. He adorns himself with costume pieces inspired by these periods. His posse follows along and dresses themselves as if they’ve stepped out of a time machine. They’re strange apparel feels as though they have melded antique garments with pieces from the local thrift store they happened upon.

I would like to recognize that the artworks that I reference are primarily western works and heavily influenced by colonization. While these works are considered iconic and classic to many, there are plenty of people that may not be familiar with these works. The success of this concept rides on the audience's knowledge of western art and Christian and Greek iconography. Being that I have a well rounded artistic background with a decent knowledge of art history, it is sometimes easy for me to forget that not everybody understands the cultural significance of the *Mona Lisa* or *the Creation of*

Adam. My design needs to use these elements lightly without heavily relying on them completely for dramaturgical understanding. These references should be recognizable for those in the audience that may recognize them, and visually sensical for audience members that may not have a preconceived knowledge of these artworks.

Chapter 3.2: Applying the References

As I've delved into the artworks referenced in the movie, the common theme of religion, and god-like status continues throughout. This research has lead my design into the realm of sexual oppression through the guise of religion. I don't think this is anything new in the analysis of *Rocky Horror*, however it is a theme that is not fully explored in most productions. The opening scene (right behind the floating lips) brings us to a church wedding in small town America. The icon of religious upbringing. Being the innocent younglings they are, Brad and Janet take on a similar identity to Adam and Eve of Genesis in the Bible. Neither have sinned, nor tasted the forbidden fruit. If we continue further with the Genesis reference, that then makes Frank the temptation, aka the snake aka, the Devil. One might think that Frank is representative of God being that his goal in the movie is to create life. However, as is revealed during the floor show, Riff Raff is the one that has been in charge the entire time, sitting back in order to watch Frank's downfall, making Frank the fallen angel. The story of Genesis and other Biblical stories are common themes amongst classic works of art ranging from pre Renaissance to the Rococo period.

Other than Christian iconography, the movie makes reference to several Greek and Roman figures including Venus, the goddess of Beauty. Janet's character arc can be represented by the two opposing female icons. Eve, innocent yet curious of the knowledge that lies within temptation, and Venus, the goddess of love and affection that is well aware of the effects she has on those around her as she recognizes her own bodily influence. The transformation from innocent to god status is an arc I am interested in exploring through each character with Frank being the exception as he goes from God like status to humanesque failure.



23



24

²³ Figure 3.a
²⁴ Figure 3.b



25

²⁵ Figure 3.c

Chapter 4: Costume Design

While I strived to make this costume design unique and new to the fandom of *Rocky Horror*, there are elements that are essential to identifying certain characters. Frank's grand reveal in the movie involves a cape with a high Draculian collar. Taking the cape off, Frank reveals giant pearls and platform shoes, two pieces I deem to be important to the character. Other characters' iconic pieces include Columbia's tap shoes, Magenta's maid uniform, Rocky's golden speedo, and Eddie's bloody scar. Incorporating these pieces into my design was integral to keeping true to the familiar spirit of Rocky Horror.

My process for incorporating these pieces into my design started with breaking things down to their simplest form. Frank's leather jacket is just a leather jacket. The pearl necklace is just pearls. Once I identified those basic garments, I was free to rebuild them as I saw fit into my design.

To build these pieces into my concept, I needed to find parallels between the classic design and designs of the time periods I was referencing. Frank's robe reveals a tall collar. The Elizabethan period is where the collars of all collars are found. The tall collar represents royalty, power, intimidation, and certain peacock-like confidence, perfectly embodying Frank's pompous attitude.



26



27

²⁶ Figure 4.a
²⁷ Figure 4.b

Dr. Frankfurter

The Rocky Horror Show



BARRETT WILBERT
WEED



28

28 Figure 4.c

Brad & Janet
The Rocky Horror Show



ASHLEY PARK



BEN PLATT



29

²⁹ Figure 4.d

Brad & Janet
The Rocky Horror Show



30

³⁰ Figure 4.e

Riff Raff
The Rocky Horror Show



CYNTHIA ERIVO



31

³¹ Figure 4.f

Magenta

The Rocky Horror Show



TODRICK HALL



32

³² Figure 4.g

Columbia

The Rocky Horror Show



BRENDON URIE



33

³³ Figure 4.h

Rocky

The Rocky Horror Show



REBECCA NAOMI
JONES



34

³⁴ Figure 4.i

Eddie

The Rocky Horror Show



KATIE KADAN



35

³⁵ Figure 4.j

Dr Scott

The Rocky Horror Show



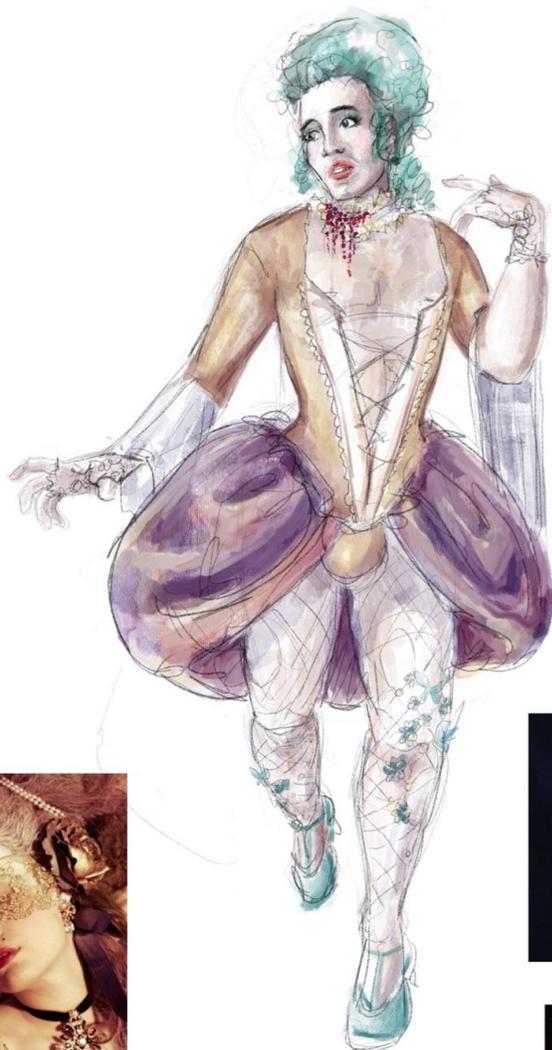
BERNADETTE PETERS



36

³⁶ Figure 4.k

The Floorshow
COLUMBIA
The Rocky Horror Show



37

37 Figure 4.1

The Floorshow
ROCKY
The Rocky Horror Show



38

³⁸ Figure 4.m

The Floorshow
BRAD
The Rocky Horror Show



39

³⁹ Figure 4.n

The Floorshow

JANET

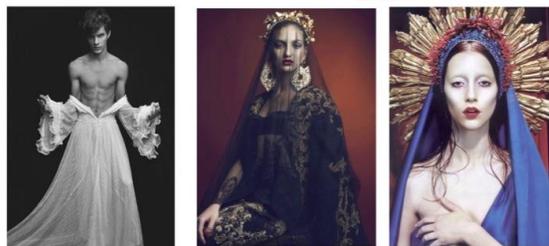
The Rocky Horror Show



40

⁴⁰ Figure 4.o

The Floorshow
DR. FRANKENFURTER
The Rocky Horror Show



41

41 Figure 4.p

The Floorshow

RIFF RAFF

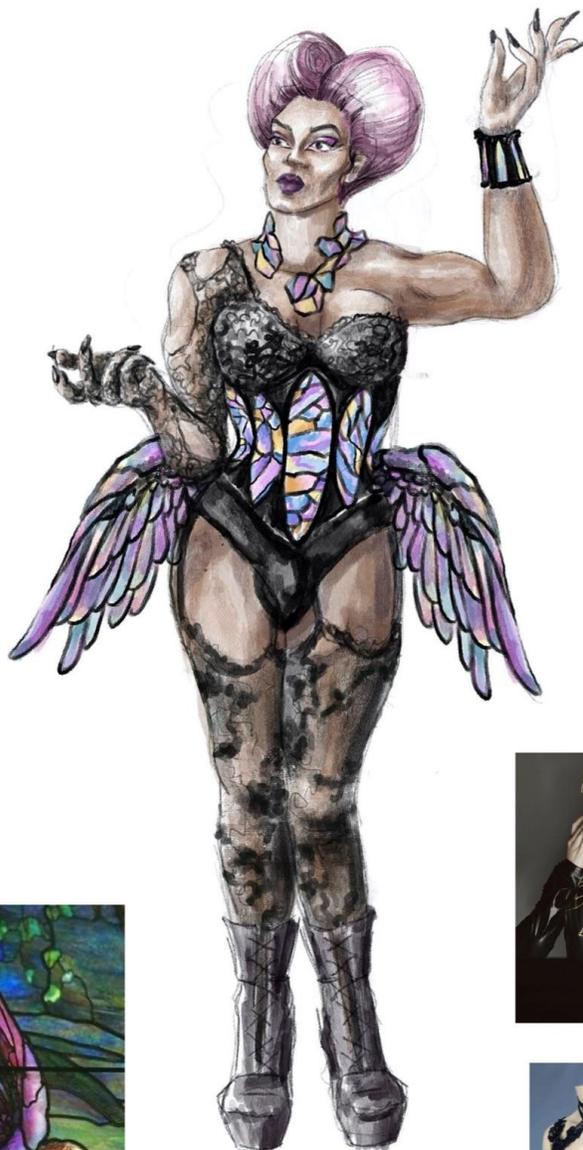
The Rocky Horror Show



42

⁴² Figure 4.q

The Floorshow
MAGENTA
The Rocky Horror Show



43

⁴³ Figure 4.r

The Narrator
The Rocky Horror Show

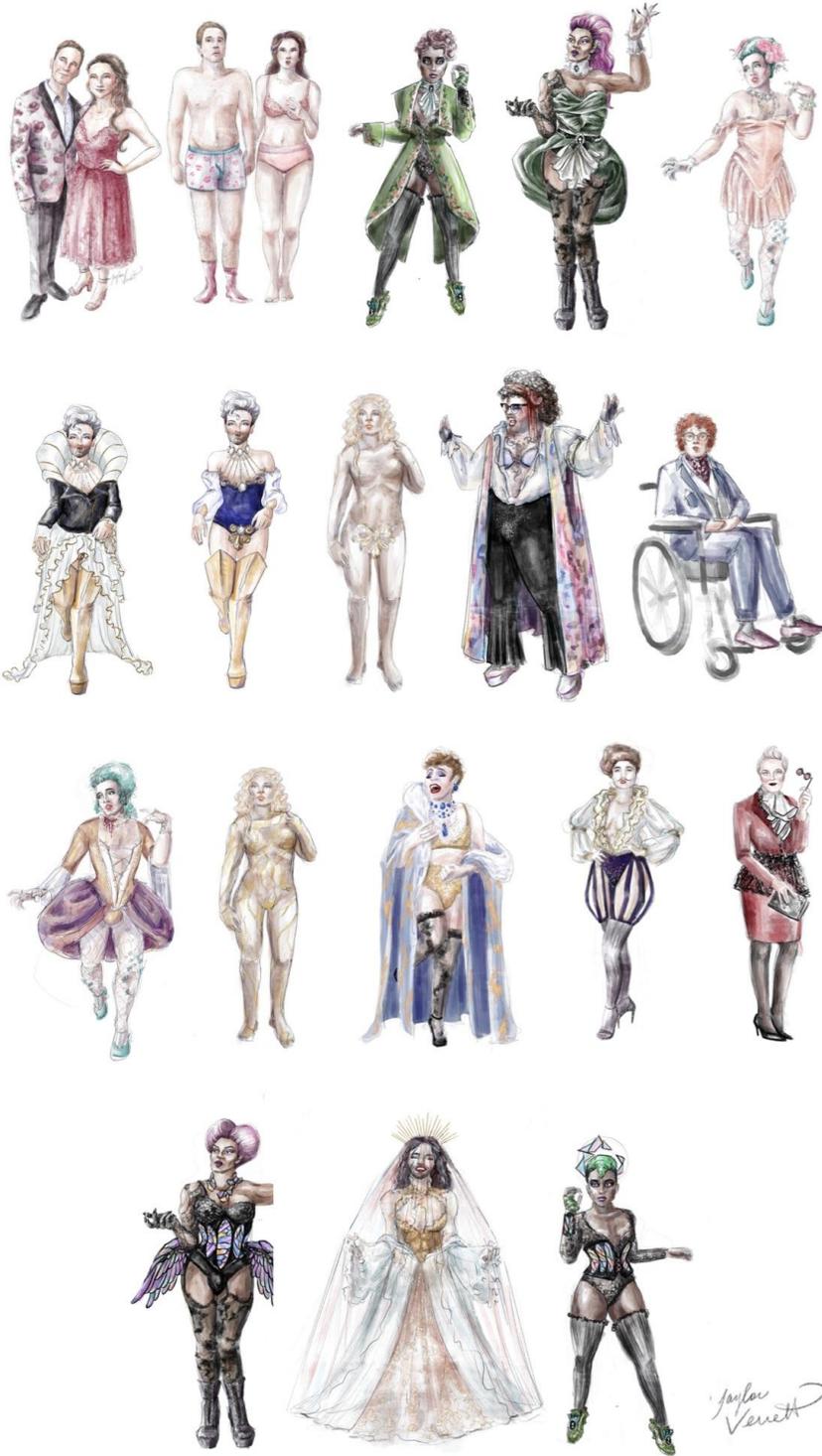


JULIE ANDREWS



44

The Rocky Horror Show



45

⁴⁵ Figure 4.t

Chapter 4.2: Costume Building

Building Frank's coat was an interesting endeavor. While I have a great appreciation and interest in costume design, I've never actually built a costume. I can do a basic stitch and create minor alterations on a garment, but building an elaborate piece such as this one was completely new to me. I chose Frank's coat as my build piece because I knew the main piece, a leather jacket, would not need to be built from scratch. I would only be adding fabric in the form of the train and sleeve embellishments. The hardest part to tackle would be the neck piece.

A goal of mine for this build was to thrift as much of the costume as I could. I have a practical and dramaturgical reasoning behind this. The practical reason is for monetary purposes and personal philosophy. In recent years, I have been trying to thrift more of my everyday shopping. Second hand shopping is both beneficial to the environment and the wallet. The jacket and the material for the neck piece and outer skirt piece were thrifted. The patterned material is actually a set of curtains. I strive to reduce, reuse, and recycle in any project I physically build.

Dramaturgically speaking, *Rocky Horror* generally has a grungy feel and aesthetic. With my original concept being that the aliens have created their own version of human life, I'd like to show that they've stumbled into thrift stores looking for pieces to create their "human" attire.

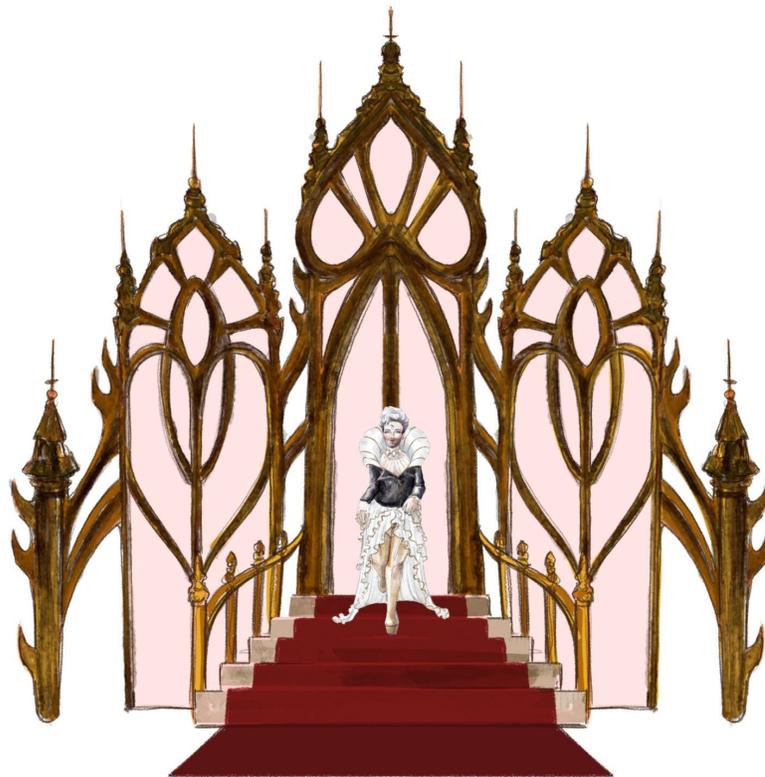
A lot of the process of building this garment was trial and error. I really only had the time for one shot at this piece. There were many moments I realized that I was spending time doing something that could have been done in a faster or simpler way. I could have used fabric glue or hot glue instead of hand stitching everything, but that is all a part of the learning process. For example, something learned is the importance of

material choice. When searching for the material for the bottom layers of the skirt, I didn't know exactly what criteria to look for. I knew I wanted white, flowy, and semitransparent material. The chiffon-like fabric I chose fit these needs and was budget friendly. However while working, I quickly realized that this fabric was easy to snag, tear, and wrinkle. This is especially true if you are working with a cat in the room that likes to try to help. (My furry studio assistant is quite cute, but does more harm than help), but as my costume professor and committee member, Helen Huang, says "it adds texture". This material would not be viable for an actual production for it is nearly impossible to cleanly repair in case of rips. I consider this costume to be a prototype of what the actual costume could look like.

I don't consider myself a costume designer by trade, but I did discover that I really enjoy the process of designing and building a piece into reality. Costume design and building is definitely something I will continue to learn throughout my upcoming career.

Chapter 5: Set Design

Throughout my collaboration experiences in my time in grad school, I've learned that as a designer, I work best when I have a physical space and surface to act as my design jumping point. I knew that I needed at least an idea of a set or set piece to get this design on its feet. I am no carpenter so I knew this set piece needed to be something I could conceptualize in a 2D fashion. Even though the set currently lives in the digital realm along with the media, it is still helpful to have an idea of physical space to act as boundaries and a guide for the design.



46

⁴⁶ Figure 5.a

The set piece was inspired by the gothic architecture referenced in the movie and by the format of religious triptych paintings. Sticking with the underlying theme of religion and godlike status, my set evokes the visuals of a grand church with stained glass windows and large overpowering imagery of gods and angels.

In a less serious sense, the actual shape of the three sections were inspired by elements more true to the fashion of *Rocky Horror*; a penis flanked by two vaginas. I think this idea turned out a bit more subtle than I would have liked, but others may disagree. I'm sure someone in the audience would notice and think it was humorous.

Chapter 6: Media Design

Media in my *Rocky Horror* design serves multiple purposes as listed below:

1. Media acts as the familiarity I've been referencing throughout my process.

Projections allow me to insert elements and clips of the movie into the throughline of the design. This gives the audience the nostalgia they crave when coming to see *Rocky Horror*. The addition of the movie characters in my design poses a challenge in keeping the identity of the known movie characters separate from those that are performing on stage. By placing the images of movie characters Frank, Riff Raff, Magenta, and Columbia in the window surfaces of the set and above the set entirely, places them on an even higher godlike status than the characters on stage. The movie characters are the gods the audience has come to pay homage to and complete their ritualistic experience in honor of. The characters on the stage are similar to a reenactment of Bible stories or myths and legends of ancient gods.

2. Media is camp. *Rocky Horror* is a bit absurd. If the storyline and characters weren't insane enough already, the media allows those limits of insanity to be pushed.

3. Media is the ritual of the experience. A huge part of the *Rocky Horror* experience is the audience callbacks and participation. A goal of mine is to make every audience member feel that they can participate regardless of if they've already seen the show or not. I accomplish this through projecting an audience "script" throughout the media design. In "Sweet Transvestite", when Frank sings "So I'll remove the cause," the audience can read the caption before them that says "But what about those nasty

symptoms?”. Frank then responds with the final line of the song “but not the symptom.” In this hypothetical full production of *Rocky Horror*, this script would show itself throughout the production emphasizing callback moments like calling Brad an asshole and Janet a slut.



47

⁴⁷ Figure 6.a

Chapter 6.2: Design Notes and Mental Ramblings

The following section is an example of some brainstorming notes taken while trying to decipher the core of my media design. I begin my ramblings with statements of “media is...”. My advisor, Jared Mezzocchi, would call this my “super objective”. Super objective refers to the purpose of your design and what you want your design to invoke. Writing down these statements helps me to narrow down what kind of content I need and where I need it throughout my design. I also took notes on my main character’s super objective. What does Frank want from this number? What are Frank’s intentions? How can the media support those wants and needs of the character?

Notes

- Media is cult following
 - Media is camp
 - Media is familiarity
 - Media is luster
 - Media is ritual
 - Media is Frank’s acknowledgement
 - Media is religious iconography
 - Media is religious vs cultural iconography
 - Audience participation is emotional catharsis.
-
- Superheroes could emulate similar imagery with Michelangelo's rendition of Adam and Eve being exiled from the garden of eden?
 - *Sweet Transvestite* acts as an introduction to Frank but also to his doings. The song hints at the awareness of Frank to Brad and Janet’s misfortune. The theme of temptation is solidified. Frank as the Master is imparted.
 - Frank is aware of the flat tire. “How about that”
 - Frank demands an audience
 - Frank wants to be hospitable and fit in with humans
 - Frank yearns for awe

- Frank lives for the drama
- Frank wants play toys to bring back to Transylvania
- I want to incorporate the familiarity of the original movie into a new view of Rocky Horror in order to lull audiences into a nostalgic comfort while still exposing them to a version of the show they have never seen
- I want to expose the audience to a new version of Rocky Horror by lulling them with nostalgic comfort.
- Janet- Eve
- Brad- Adam
- Frank- thinks he's god but is actually the fallen angel
- Riff Raff- God?

Chapter 6.3: Sweet Transvestite

Obviously designing an entire musical in two months while also writing a thesis paper is a bit too much for one person to do. Therefore, the media design portion of this thesis focuses on a design for a single number in order to offer a sampling of the full idea. It was hard to narrow down the entire soundtrack to one song, but ultimately I decided that “Sweet Transvestite” would be the song I would focus my project on. This song is very recognizable and introduces the main character of the show, Dr Frank N Furter. Given that I decided to build Frank’s reveal jacket, this number seemed to suit my purposes.

Opening the number “Sweet Transvestite” with images of Adam and Eve on either flanking door with Frank in the middle introduces Frank as the snake, the apple, “God”, and temptation. It also places Frank between man and woman. Frank is neither male nor female, hinting at the song and introduction soon to come.



48

⁴⁸ Figure 6.b

One of the most challenging parts of any design is finding cohesion amongst all assets being used. I used many styles of assets from artistic references, to film clips, to stock video. In my work, I find color is the easiest place to start when developing cohesion of a design. I centered the visuals for this song around the color purple. Historically, purple is the color of royalty and nobility as it is a very rare and expensive pigment in its natural form. Since Frank in this song gives off the appearance of the highest power in the cast, purple helps enforce his perceived power. Purple is also the product of mixing pink and blue. Pink and blue in a societal sense, usually represent the gendered binary of male and female. Since Frank neither identifies as male nor female, purple signifies the gendered inbetween and Frank's nonbinary identification.

Chapter 6.4: My Wheels! I Can't Move My Wheels!

The following section is a continuous train of thought I wrote while feeling stuck in my design process. When I feel overwhelmed by daily tasks, I find it helpful to write down everything I need to do in a list format. This makes the upcoming tasks feel more manageable and tangible. The same goes for mental noise becoming overwhelming. Writing down the questions and doubts I have allows me to decipher what of those concerns are actually worth exploring and which are just second guessing myself.

Free Write

What do you do when you feel stuck with a design? I've found it challenging to create an entire design concept while only visualizing a single number. Trying to embody the whole with a piece. Trying to give a taste of the entire 6 course dinner with a single bite. Taking a week to work on another show in a new place has been more refreshing than I thought it would. Being able to step back from my thesis and see new work with new faces allows my brain to reset and process. I don't know that it's provided me with any answers to the questions I've been asking, but it's given me the excitement and motivation back to keep this project going.

Being in the space and getting the design on its feet will provide a new life to the design. It is sometimes difficult to fully understand a lifesize piece when you are staring at it on a small computer screen. One thing I've learned as I grow my artistic process is that often, when you feel stuck in a design, it's because you are overthinking. Getting tangled in concept and idea is easy to do and hard to work your way out of. Concept and idea throughlines are imperative to good design, but at the end of the day, the audience will only receive what you tell them visually. They won't hear your thoughts that are racing through your head. They will only interpret what you allow their eyes to see. Step back. Forget everything. Start from scratch. Simplify. Go back to the initial impulse.

That first impulse of an idea you get for a design may not be the final answer, but there is always something within that idea that leads to the end. Impulse leads to action leads to answers.

Delving into art history of the renaissance to rococo period has lead me down a path of revealing religious trauma and sexual oppression through the fear of god. I think it's an exciting path, but much further from where the concept began. I think I have dug myself too far into the religious parallels and am assuming that the audience won't make those associations themselves. Bringing in

15th-18th century aesthetics and themes (at least to me) already conjures ideas of religion and purity. Am I being too obvious trying to call attention to the parallels of Janet and Brad to Adam and eve? Frank to Lucifer and Riff Raff to God? Does any of that matter?

Chapter 6.5: That Spark of Life

I was feeling stuck in my design as I approached my deadlines. I realized I was overthinking every detail. Sure, I want to bring underlying themes in my design to the surface, but *Rocky Horror* isn't about politics and bold statements. It centers around fun and silliness. My AHA moment was when I realized I just needed to have fun and make myself laugh. If the audience isn't laughing and having a good time, then I've failed at producing *Rocky Horror*. So I made Adam and Eve dance. A pelvic thrust was all it took to bring this number back to its roots and bring my design back on track in a direction I could follow. Why stop the absurdity there? Let's bring in the *Mona Lisa* and *the Girl with Pearl Earring*. Let's make them bop along to the song too. Besides the Time Warp, *Sweet Transvestite* is one of the most upbeat songs in the show. It introduces Frank, the most flamboyant character in the cast. This number needs to be utterly ridiculous. Forget the serious implications that come with using classical imagery from the artistic masters. Find the humor in the familiarity.

Chapter 6.6: A Special Guest Appearance

Getting a fresh set of eyes on the project is always a helpful tool. I asked my friend and fellow designer Andrés Poch to take a look at the number. I was growing numb to the imagery I had curated and needed an outsider's perspective. His main critique was that he was craving more of the grunge aesthetic that *Rocky Horror* is usually associated with. At the time, the design was too clean and felt like “princesses on ice” rather than *Rocky Horror*. With a laugh, I agreed with him and set to work. My first strategy to add in the grunge feel was to dirty the movie clips. They didn't feel a part of the design for lack of texture. They were too clean and felt like I was just playing the movie on top of my content. Adding old warped film textures on top of the clips helped to distort the videos and give them a little more life. With the film textures being a visual success, I began taking those same textures and adding them throughout the number as general texture overlays. The consistency of textures helped to tie the piece together from section to section.

Before this round of edits based on Andres's critique, I only had the film clips in very specific moments of the number. I discovered that adding more of the film clips did not take away from the overall design and feel like watching the movie when I had these texture overlays. So I added more clips. My design is walking the edge of a shadow cast production, but I think in a way that is not detrimental from the hypothetical performance.

During the design process I found myself questioning “is this too much?”. I am a firm believer that if you are going to make a choice in your design, you need to make a CHOICE. All or nothing, especially when the piece you are designing for is already absurd. I realized that my design wasn't too much. It simply wasn't enough. I was

designing the bare minimum for fear of overwhelming the stage. I had to remind myself that it is always easier to take elements out than it is to keep adding things in. Start big. Start bold. Refine from there. When I decided to fill the whole projection surface with glitter and vibrant colors, I found my design coming together. These huge moments of chaos earned me moments of silence and minimal media. Finding the extreme of the design helped me to find the balance between.

Having another person to bounce even the smallest of ideas off of is so important to any design process. It is very easy to drown in your own work when you do not have a mental break or new opinions flowing in. When you drown in your work, it is very easy to doubt every decision you make. Is this good? Is it only good for me? Does this even make sense? Questions of doubt are easy to come by and hard to get rid of, but having a trusted colleague to reveal the truth is invaluable and so helpful when battling self deprivation.

Chapter 6.7: The Floor Show

Most of my design process was created on my office desktop. While I have a decent sized monitor, the size is nothing in comparison to actually making my design life size. In order to get a real sense of what this might look like on a stage, I set up a projector in the Clarice Smith lightlab.

Getting this piece on its feet taught me a few things. I first realized that the set piece I had been designing my media around was too big to accurately display in the lightlab. The lightlab dimensions only allowed me to see what the set would look like at about half of its actual size. Regardless, seeing it bigger than a computer screen was still very telling. When blown up to life size, I was able to see that the work I had been doing was actually not as visually overwhelming as I had originally thought when looking at it on my computer screen. I realized that I could go bigger and bolder without fear of overwhelming the space.



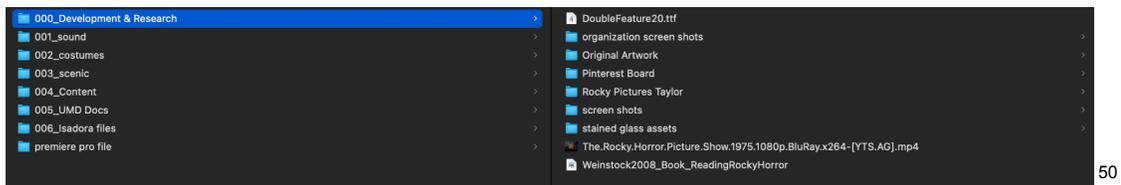
49

I did face some technical difficulties involving aspect ratio being off from my original file save from my computer. I was able to rectify this situation in Isadora by adjusting the stage setup and creating user actors for every scene with a “Get Stage Image” actor. This allowed me to manipulate the full image of each scene to adjust the aspect ratio without having to adjust each asset individually.

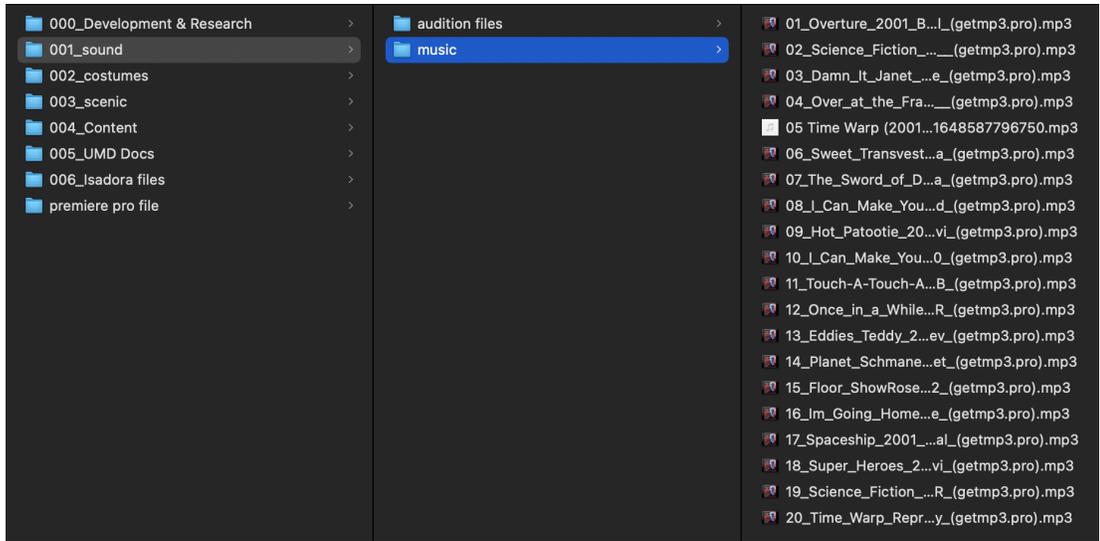
⁴⁹ Figure 6.d

Chapter 6.8: Organization

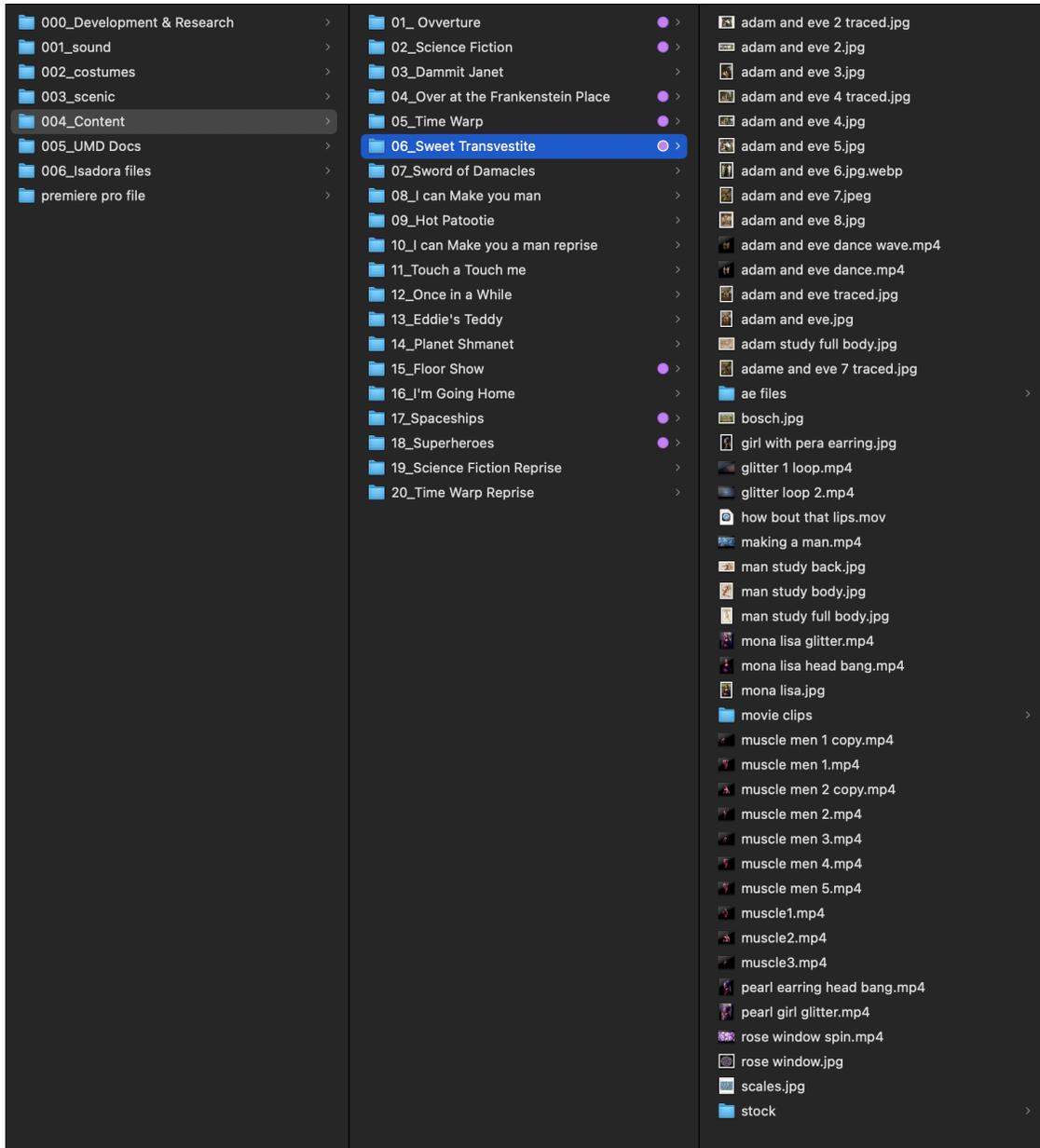
Organization is an area of my work flow that has always been a struggle for me. My brain and hands move faster than I can place files into specific folders. For this project, I aimed to create a folder structure that allowed me to work quickly, but still keep files in a tidy manner. I created levels of folders that allowed me to separate content by area of medium and by song. Once in the content folder of the individual song, I created a folder for specific types of content such as movie clips and stock footage. The rest floated freely as I dropped in new content and renders quickly while working. Personally, my work flow slows down significantly when I am constantly going through levels of folders to find a single item. For my chaotic brain, having an organized content dumping ground is the most efficient strategy.



⁵⁰ Figure 6.e



51 Figure 6.f



⁵² Figure 6.g

Chapter 7: Reflections

I originally thought using *the Rocky Horror Show* as my thesis project would be a straightforward design attempt for me. However, I ended up feeling more challenged in my design process than I thought I would be. I assumed that knowing the show forwards and backwards would allow me to easily glide through design ideas and make visual connections. There were plenty of moments though that I felt like my concept was muddied by my preconceived ideas of *Rocky Horror*. There were times that I felt it was difficult to separate my ideas from ideas I had already run across in other productions. Oftentimes, I found myself overthinking my concept and getting lost in my own tangle of design information. Not to mention that attempting to recreate a show that is so beloved by a huge fan base comes with its own pressures of seeking approval.

I've realized that creating something new does not always mean creating from scratch. Taking inspiration or directly from preexisting works to use in your own work is nothing new. Collage work, pop art, remixes, and movie remakes are all examples of taking what already exists and putting a new spin on it. Looking at a concept through a new lens can be more effective in getting a point across than trying to create a new concept entirely. Using the familiar to lull audiences into a new idea can be the quickest way to mental reset.

I am proud of the design work that I was able to construct in such a short amount of time. In a perfect world, I would have liked to have more time to fully develop this idea through more than just one number. Perhaps one day I'll be able to see this rendition of *Rocky Horror* on a stage with an actual cast and design team with it.

The ups and downs of creating my thesis project has reinforced an idea that has been brought to my attention multiple times throughout my grad experience: Have

confidence in your work. As an artist, you are responsible for selling your work to other people. If you don't have confidence in your own work, why would anyone else? Self doubt is inevitable in any creative medium. There are no right and wrong answers in art. This is a liberating concept sometimes. Most of the time, it is intimidating and conjures ideas of apprehension and confusion. I've learned a few actions that can help combat these negative mental conjurings.

1. Step back from your work every now and then. Take a break and look away.
Come back with a clear mind and fresh eyes
2. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Take others' opinions into account
3. Have confidence in your abilities. Imposter syndrome is real, but it is merely mental fog.
4. Find your fun. Find the things that make you crave creativity. Keep those things in mind during any and every project you tackle.
5. Remember that art is subjective. Not everyone will like your work all the time, but someone will like it everytime.
6. Go back to what inspires you. Find the sparks that make you want to create and use those sparks to light the fire.

I now take these learnings into my upcoming career as a designer and artist, and into my everyday life as a human being. *The Rocky Horror* show has launched me into multiple chapters of my life. Here's to the next one.

-pation.