ABSTRACT

Title: THE PHYSICISTS BY FRIEDRICH DURRENMATT - SCENIC DESIGN

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The purpose of this thesis is to provide record of the scenic design process for the “The Physicists”, produced by the University of Maryland Theatre Department and performed in the Kogod theatre at the Clarice Smith Performing Art Center from November 1\textsuperscript{st} to November 11\textsuperscript{th} 2007.

This document contains visual elements used for the development of the scenic design. The quote “A shabby interior with a prestigious past” and the director’s concept lead me to explore period architecture, the structure of past healthcare facilities, and unusual interiors. I created an interior inspired by research into traditional interiors and tweaked it to suggest the madness that the play called for. I utilized tile to symbolize the doctor’s madness, progressively erasing the history of the room. All the aesthetic choices were selected to create a balance between the antique quality of the villa and the antiseptic feel of an asylum.
THE PHYSICISTS BY FRIEDRICH DURENMATT - SCENIC DESIGN

by

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1 Research Images:

This is one of the first steps of the process. Visual research is really important and is used as references, historically and/or stylistically, and as a source of inspiration. They are sometimes realistic and specific, and at other time simply emotional, representation of mood and atmosphere or an informative idea.
In this case they are a variety of realistic period interiors, functional health care facilities interesting furniture pieces, and abstract spaces. These last one, as mentioned above, depict mood, emotion, idea or a surreal evocative environment.

1.1 Period interior:

The concept the director and I agreed on called for a non-specific time period. The play would take place in the present, in an old French style villa, which have been renovated numerous times in the past. We wanted to mix styles and breaking the usual and expected structure of an interior. The interior research illustrates this decision. There is a strong mix between classic and Victorian interior, panel mouldings, chair rails, and arch and square doorways.

Elements of interest:
- The arch entryway.
- The thickness of the molding.
- The height of the doorway.

Elements of interest:
- The arch entryway.
- The columns.
- The minimal coloration and variation in value.
- The thickness of the molding.
- The height of the doorway.


Elements of interest:
- The arch entryway.
- The thickness of the molding.
- The height of the doorway.
- Crown moulding.
- Chair rail.
- Base moulding.

Elements of interest:
- The arch entryway.
- The thickness of the molding.
- The height of the doorway.


Elements of interest:
- The window shapes.
- The height of the ceiling.
- The fireplace.

Elements of interest:
- The location of the windows in relation to the rest of the room and the fireplace.


Elements of interest:
- The height of the room.
- The windows.
- The coloration.

Elements of interest:
- Even if it is an English interior, the quality of the wood of the parquet floor.
- The rigid feature of the fireplace.

Elements of interest:
- The scale.


1.2 Fireplaces:
The fireplace became a central part of the design early in the process. It anchors a room and create a focal point. If joint with decorative elements, it can dominate the room. Fireplace were studied in previous images but the following were mainly chosen for the interesting shape, size, dimension of the their fireplace.

Elements of interest:
- The size of the fireplace.
- The curve element of architecture.
- The height of the shelve. It became clear this fireplace was too high for my concept due to my interest in juxtaposing a oversize portrait.


Elements of interest:
- The minimal style.
- The fireplace.
- The height of ceiling.
- The size of molding.

Elements of interest:
- The arch entryway.
- The thickness of the molding.
- The height of the doorway.


Elements of interest:
- The panel molding.
- The fireplaces.
- The frames.
- The size of the crown molding.

Elements of interest:
- The fireplace details.

1.3 Furniture

The furniture choice followed the concept that the mansion was build and than renovated many time. The furniture would be an accumulation of modern and antique pieces. I chose a lot more antiques due to the old nature of the mansion but also to create a between the time period of the characters played by the physicists and the object the doctor choose for their space. It also created unity within the room.

Elements of interest:
- Possibility for the side table next to the couch. Victorian/Georgian in style.
- The possibility to have a music stand to bring a little bit of Einstein into the drawing room.

Elements of interest:
- The style, the mass of space it takes.
- The visual weight.


Elements of interest:
- The style, the mass of space it takes.
- The visual weight.
- The weight of the top of the table.

Elements of interest:
  • The minimal style.
  • The couch.


Corbis. "victorian" file AALQ001756.  

Corbis. "victorian" file LX004270.  
1.4 Hospice and asylum

Researching the mood of hospice facility was important. I wasn’t interested in the modern institution. Even if the play was set in the modern era, the institution was old, the installations were old, and the subject had an old characters. I directed my researches toward various types of hospices from various time periods. I wanted to look at the hospices were patient are free to move and go and the one in which they are clearly caged and limited. I discovered texture, surfaces, motif, and mood.

1.4.1 The comfortable hospice

Elements of interest:
- Large window.
- Large empty space between the furniture.


Elements of interest:
  • The television.


Elements of interest:
  • The institutional chair.
  • The colors.

Elements of interest:
• The television.

1.4.2 The asylum; the caged space.
The following images are a collection of health care facilities that are less comfortable. They tend to look more like prisons or Army hospitals.

Elements of interest:
• Large room.
• The tiled floor.


Elements of interest:
- The shadows.
- The tiles on the walls and the large tiles on the floor.


Elements of interest:
- The colors.
- The style.

Elements of interest:
- The reflection from the tiles.
- The varied type of tiles.


Elements of interest:
- The reflection from the tiles.
- The colors.

Elements of interest:
- The glossiness of the wall.
- The division line.


Elements of interest:
- The tiles.
- The division line.

Elements of interest:
• The tiles on the walls and on the floor.
• The creation of texture by the tiles.


Elements of interest:
• The tiles on the walls and on the floor.
• The creation of texture by the tiles.

Elements of interest:
• The radiator.

Corbis. "Asylum and hospice" file DWF15-510210

Elements of interest:
• The cart and the doors.

Encyclopedie de l'architecture; Hopitaux maisons de sante, 1994.
1.4.3 Inspiration:

The following images were chosen for their use of scale, texture and/or mood.

Elements of interest:
- The distance between the ceiling and the floor.
- The proportion between the furniture and the room.


Element of interest:
- The tiles.
- The height.

Elements of interest:
- The scale.


Elements of interest:
- The line created by the 2 colors on the wall.
- The radiator.
- The mix of modern and old icons.


Elements of interest:
- The animals against the tiles.

1.4.4 Portraits:

Elements of interest:
- The cold but yet not menacing expression.
- The official attitude.

Elements of interest:
- The expressive gesture.
- The dirty colors.
- The structural line quality.
- The tension expressed by the lines.

1.4.5 Color Inspirations

The following images were chosen for their subject but also for their colors. The main interest was mainly to study the color palette used in a medical institution.

Elements of interest:
- The colors.
- The glow.


Elements of interest:
- The colors.

1.4.6 Landscapes and windows

Here is illustrated how the window needed to be dressed.
2 printed landscape where situated 2’6” behind the windows. Those were than remove in the second act to reveal the brick walls, symbolizing the confinement of the asylum.
2 Sketches and Renderings

The following images illustrate various steps of the creative process. They are organized in chronological order and vary from line sketches to quick renderings and pictures of the model. They are exploration of shape, style, space, lines, directions and colors.

2.1 Various lines studies.
shabby present day
realities of war
Crisis
harmonious and Conflicts of all kinds
Balance of terror
2.2 Renderings:

Renderings of the early concept, that illustrate dilemma between the use of the slanted or straight wall. The quantity of set dressing varies but is constant in style. The existence of the outside hallways is also suggested but not decided. The form of the header is also questioned, and explore. The large proportion of the room is explored. It creates an unbalance in power between the possible comfort of the space and the power the physicists might be able to exercise on their environment.
This is one of the final rendering before the model phase. The space enlarged, the hallways are more visible but still in the background. The space and the header were simplified. There are still some elements of style been explored which are finalized in the model and draftings.
3 Model

View 1

View 2
4 Paint Elevation

The scenic designer creates the paint elevations. They are the representation of the paint treatments that need to be applied on the scenery. For The Physicists it consisted in an elevation of the main walls, and representations of the main textures. They were all created from acrylic and glued paper elements.

4.1 The Walls:

Wall A-B and C1
Wall C1, C and C2
Wall D, E1 and E
Wall E with bench.
Wall E2, F and G
4.2 Texture or Elements.

Tiled wall, paint treatment.
Wood mouldings, paint treatment.

Floor tiles, paint treatment
Brick wall and chimney, paint treatment.
Marble piece at the foot of the fireplace, paint treatment

Hallway’s door paint treatment
5 Draftings
6 Production Photos

These pictures represent the end result. They are a testimony of the work done by the designer and the shops.

Preset of the show.
Beginning of act 1

Beginning of act 1
Newton and inspector Voss smoke in front of the fireplace and portrait.

Mobius and nurse Monica talk about their future.
End of Act 2, Nurse Monica was murdered and rests on the chair SR.

Beginning of Act 2, the inspector is back after the murder of Nurse Monica. The male attendants introduce themselves.
Mobius, Newton and Einstein reveal their real identities and argued about their social responsibilities as physicists. Mobius convinces them to stay forever in the asylum. They celebrate their decision.

The Fraulen Doctoc reveals her master plan and locks the physicists in.
Bibliography


