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探索戲劇舞台與自我：《意念》、《另一半》、《葬禮》三部
劇作的舞台設計過程之自我民族誌個案分析

Exploring the Theatre Stage, and Self: An Autoethnographic Case
Study on the Set Design Process for Three Plays; *Niyyat, The
Other Half, and The Funeral*

狄思璇

April Mae Panaguiton Delgado

指導教授：盧長劍 博士

Advisor: George Paul Holloway, Ph.D.

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研究生：April Mae P. Delgado 狄思璇
April Mae Panaguiton Delgado 狄思璇

經考試合格特此證明

口試委員：鍾欣志

許仁豪

蔡柏璋

指導教授：盧長訓

系主任(所長)：馮晉浩

口試日期：中華民國 110 年 06 月 18 日

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中文摘要

本論文講述了我 2021 年 4 月在嘉義縣表演藝術中心為南華大學 MFA 戲劇項目畢業作品的設計過程和開發歷程。它包括對舞台設計過程的見解, 涉及對設計方面的考慮, 包括導演關於文本分析的概念以及部劇作設計的技術元素。這還將包括由 MFA 導演專業製作的三部不同原創戲劇的製作照片和舞台設計說明。本論文將以自民族志案例研究為主要研究方法, 概述和分析作為舞台設計師的設計的創造性發展(舞台設計過程)、設計執行/舞台構建過程以及對經驗教訓和注意事項的結論。在整個過程中學習。作為南華大學唯一的先鋒劇場舞台設計畢業生, 本研究所收集的協同設計過程可以作為該機構未來舞台設計相關研究和工作的參考和指導。此外, 我還想為舞台設計領域做出貢獻, 以處理視覺上創造一個服務於戲劇、劇作家、導演和觀眾的環境的整個體驗。

關鍵詞：戲劇、舞台設計（過程和發展）、民族誌

Abstract

This thesis narrates my journey in the design process and development for the graduation production of Nan Hua University's MFA Theatre program in April 2021 at the Chiayi Performing Arts Centre. It includes insights on into scenic design processes involving the consideration of the design aspects including the Director's concept concerning the analysis of the text as well as the technical elements of the production's design. This will also include the production photos and descriptions of set designs for the three different original Theatre plays produced by the MFA- Directing majors. This thesis will use an autoethnographic case study as a primary research method to outline and analyze the creative development (set design process) of the designs as the set designer, the design execution/set construction process as well as the conclusion on the lessons and considerations learned during the whole process. As the only pioneer Theatre set design graduate of Nan Hua University, the collaborative design process that is gathered in this study can serve as a reference and guide to the future set design-related research and works of the institution. Moreover, I also wanted to contribute to the set design field in terms of my account of dealing with the whole experience of visually creating an environment that serves the plays, playwrights, directors, and the audience.

Keywords: Theatre, Set Design (processes and development), Autoethnography

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

“All the scenery, furniture, and props the audience sees at a production of a play make up the set design. The set designer's job is to design these physical surroundings in which the action will take place.” (aact.org 2020)

1.1 My views and experiences on Set Design

I am April Mae P. Delgado from Antique province in Panay Island, Philippines, and I often describe myself as "an artist by heart". I've been involved in stage performance since 2004 when I received my first classes and training for Filipino and English declamation. I also developed a passion for visual arts when I completed a two-year Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) course in dressmaking and another two-year course in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). I gained technical knowledge and creativity while designing various garments and computer skills such as the basics of graphic and digital design, which led me to choose Theatre Arts as a major in the hopes of relearning and developing the skills I've acquired. I graduated from Guang Ming College in June 2018 with a bachelor's degree in theatre arts and during those four years in college, I became more interested in the visual arts in the form of set design. In class and in various productions where I was involved as part of the production staff, I learned basic ideas and knowledge about it.

I didn't have any professional set design experience before, and only school-based experience where I did stage design with very little set construction and mostly utilized things I could borrow or recycle from the school and temple. One experience was my set for my final production in Directing class, and another school-based production, "Prince Siddhartha: The Musical" that we presented quite a few times. However, one event in 2018 boosted my love for Set Design and that was when I was given an opportunity to have a tour around the backstage area of a Broadway production of "The Phantom of the Opera" at the Solaire Theatre

in Manila and I got to interact with the performers and the production team. I was amazed at how the set pieces were built and manipulated on stage using advanced technology. I was also able to watch the show after the backstage tour and that was my first time watching a live Broadway show. Along with my passion for Set Design, having that experience was one of the turning points in my life that led me to take my Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre Set Design at Nan Hua University in Taiwan, which I am currently completing.

Set design, in my personal view, is a very complex form of art – complex in the sense that it not only requires the skills and talent of a set designer but also necessitates a great deal of collaboration among the people involved in the production. This collaboration is required in order to investigate and see the aesthetics of the visual appearance and images that are required to set the scene. The set designer is in charge of designing the stage set. No matter how simple or complex, every set has a design that creates an environment and an atmosphere that isn't complete until the performers are on stage.

I've always imagined myself as a set designer after graduating from college with a degree in Theatre Arts. I'm not much of a performer, playwright, or director. This is due to the fact that my strength and passion are in the visual arts, and I was more often exposed to backstage than onstage work. I took a number of courses in college that I believe helped me better understand the processes and aesthetics of arts and set design. I was able to take Arts Appreciation, Arts Management, and Western/Eastern Arts and Aesthetics in addition to the two stagecraft courses. Sir Ohm David was one of my professors who influenced me in my pursuit of Set Design. Sir Ohm David is a set designer and technical theatre instructor from the Philippines. As a set designer, he has worked for a number of national and international theatre companies. In addition, he worked as a resident technical director and designer for two theatre companies in Athens, Greece (Agghelon Vima and Altera Pars Theatre), as well as Dulaang UP (a theatre company affiliated with the University of the Philippines). In addition to

designing sets for theatre, he also creates sets for dance, concerts, exhibitions, ballet, and even pageants. He was my Western and Eastern Arts and Aesthetics teacher, and I learned a lot from him through lectures in the classroom, as well as through creative outputs and applying what we learned in those classes.

We didn't have much time to focus on the set design aspect because we were focusing on arts and aesthetics in general, so we made an output in the form of performances and other art and craft projects like mask-making, costumes, puppets, and so on. In stagecraft class, I learned some technical skills needed for set design, such as manual sketches (creating a rough design or drawing by hand) with the application of perspective, measurement scaling, and dimension, in addition to the historical aspect. When we were given the task of creating a maquette (a smaller scaled visual representation of an actual stage design) in class, I was able to learn how to apply all of these skills. I did not experience the set's actual construction, but I am aware that Filipino set designers typically have a construction crew that is trained to build sets for theatre. Designing a set is a difficult task because it does not just appear in the designer's mind; it usually takes time to develop and goes through a number of processes. Observing the set design process from pre-production to post-production was an incredible experience that inspired me to not only learn how to design but also to participate in the actual construction.

Because Set Design was only one of my required courses and not my major, I only had a limited amount of time to learn more about it. However, as a stage manager, I was able to participate in a few productions and gain experience working with the production team, including set designers. The FLIP¹ production of Fo Guang Shan Philippines is one of three

¹ FLIP is an annual production organized by Fo Guang Shan Philippines and is held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. It features the performances from different FGS performing groups from different parts of the Philippines.

major productions in which I was involved for three years in a row (2016, 2017, and 2018). We had our first production meeting (with the designers) months before the production day, during which the set designer presented the initial draft of the design and some changes were made based on the production manager's comments. The digital renderings of the design created by the designer, as well as the creation of a maquette that I made myself, astounded me the most during the set design process (guided by my teacher).

The very first set designer I met during my studies in Taiwan was Mr. Austin Wang. He was one of our instructors for the course "Stage, Visual, and Lighting Design". We held our class in Taipei, and due to time constraints, we were only able to cover a few aspects of stage design, including his background and works. He is best known for his set design work for theatre and other types of stage productions, particularly for Cloud Gate Dance Theatre's dance productions.² As an aspiring set designer, one important lesson that I got from him is to always start with understanding the story and searching for related images, and finally let creativity and imagination do their magic. Moreover, he also mentioned that to survive in this contemporary era in terms of set designing, it is necessary to learn the advancement of technology, which includes learning how to use computer software like AutoCAD³, SketchUp⁴,

² Cloud Gate Dance Theatre is a contemporary dance company in Taiwan founded by Lin-Hwai Min in 1973. (Cloud Gate Culture and Arts Foundation, 2020)

³ AutoCAD, unlike any other software, enables to sustain the speed of changes and processes that are used in the theater. It gives a more accurate and balanced visual imagery of what the stage is intended to be.

(Autodesk Inc., "Staging a Scene with AutoCAD", <https://autocadresources.autodesk.com/construction/oli-cooper-autocad>, accessed on 5/12/2021)

⁴ SketchUp, according to John Romeo (2017) is a guide to creating a set that is well polished and constructed in terms of its perspective and proportion. (LinkedIn Corporation, 2021, "SketchUp for

and others that will make the design more concise and clearer in terms of its visual imagery. Because I was unable to learn it, I must work on it on my own time and hope to gain more experience working with/learning from professional set designers one day.

I used to have the assumption that doing set design has a very specific list of processes that should be done in sequence, one after another. However, upon doing some online research and delving more into learning about the processes, I have learned that it varies for different designers. According to the article "Read, Render, realize: A step-by-step guide to set design", a scenic designer utilizes numerous creative approaches in designing and building a set for any theatre production. Moreover, to guide and develop a set designer's creating/design process, Christopher Dills introduced the following steps wherein some of these may or may not work depending on the designer's choice. These steps are; (1) a visual script analysis, (2) thumbnail sketches (rough models), (3) collaboration with the creative team and design revisions, (4) detailed sketches or renderings, (5) drafting/planning/ white models, (6) creating a full-color, scale model or rendering. However, these are quite a lot to take in and are not as simple as it seems. For the graduation production, I was thinking that I would strictly follow this list, but I think it all depends on the current situation. I ended up only using some of these steps (the sequence varied on actual application), which included the analysis of the scripts, thumbnail images/sketches, collaboration with the director and other production staff, and creating detailed sketches and renderings.

A Set Designer that was introduced to work with me for our Graduation Production was Mr. Chun-Wei Wang. Despite the limited time allotted for our preparations and working on the set design, I have learned a lot in terms of the processes. If I would sum up the timeline of the

Set Design", <https://www.lynda.com/SketchUp-tutorials/SketchUp-Set-Design/604228-2.html>, accessed 5/12/2021)

whole design experience with the guidance of a professional set designer, I would start it with communication and passing of initial drafts, design revisions, the first-ever production meeting, and presenting the design to everyone the day after, design revisions, following updates, actual set construction and until the day we set up the set on the venue.

1.2 Production Situation

(Background of the study, Aims, Scopes and Limitations, Significance of the study, and Methodology)

This thesis is entitled "EXPLORING THE THEATRE STAGE, AND SELF: An Autoethnographic Case Study on the Set Design Process for Three Plays; Niyyat, The Other Half, and The Funeral". Its main purpose is to narrate and document the entire set design process for the graduation production of the Nan Hua University's MFA Theatre program in April 2021 at the Chiayi Performing Arts Centre. This production is entitled "We and Our Contemporary Struggle" and is composed of three different original theatre plays written and directed by Heidi Emelo, Ralph Jade Tampal, and Wincy Ramilo.

As a set design major, I am tasked with doing the set design for the graduation production where I created the scenic environment for the three original Theatre plays. I never had the opportunity to watch my professors or any set designer go through the entire set design process (although I had experience being in the creative and production team before and had helped in the set construction during my college days as a Theatre student). So, in this paper, I'm going to discuss my design process and how it works for me, given the fact that it's my first time designing a big theatre production. The respondents of this study are; 'myself' as the

researcher, set designer, and performer, the MFA-Theatre Directing majors, Production and Technical/Creative Team, Performers, Audience, and Theatre Supervisor.

This study sought to explore and record the set design processes and creative development, to assess its relevance to the whole aspect of set design and the whole production. Moreover, this study also intends to create effective set designs for each show and to be able to create a design portfolio for the whole production. As a designer, having a design portfolio is relevant because it displays and serves as proof of your skills, ideas, work and accomplishments.

As one of the pioneering students of the Master of Fine Arts in Theatre program of Nan Hua University, this study can serve as a reference and guide to the future set-design-related research and works of the institution. Moreover, this thesis could be one of the ways that could contribute to improving the MFA Stage Design program as well as to contribute to the set design field through my personal account of dealing with the whole experience of visually creating an environment that serves the three plays, playwrights/directors, and the audience.

This thesis will use autoethnography as a primary research method to outline and analyse my artistic approach to the set design/creative development (set design process) as the set designer, the design execution/set construction process as well as the conclusion on the lessons and considerations learned during the whole process. As mentioned in the article "Autoethnography: An Overview"

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just, and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses

tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (Ellis, 2010)

As aforementioned, this thesis mainly focuses on narrating and documenting the following aspects such as the Design Process/es and Development, as well as the Considerations and Conclusion. In connection to this, the data that is needed for this study is correlated with these aspects. In gathering the data, Autoethnographic methods will be used which are the Self-reflective journals, Notes from Interviews/Discussions with the guiding teacher and the directors, Fieldwork, the Written Feedback/Evaluation, and the Set Design Portfolio.

Through my self-reflective journals, I will be able to gather general data discussing the problems or challenges I have encountered during the whole set design process and how was I able to solve them (or was I able to resolve them?). This will also be supported by the detailed and concise data I have gathered from the feedback/revisions suggestions I received from the directors and guiding teacher. To gather data via fieldwork refers to the actual purchasing and creating the set and this will be divided into two parts; one is my experiences of creating the small props and set pieces and (two) is on how my guiding teacher, Chun-Wei Wang, worked with the construction company who constructed the set pieces. Furthermore, my feedback and evaluation will also be the source of my data, wherein I am included being the set designer and a performer at the same time. Lastly, the design portfolio refers to the compilations of photographs, images (e.g. sketches, storyboards, digital renderings, coloured scale models, and technical drawings) with specific descriptions of its elements, revisions, and usage.

1.3 Outline of Chapters

The Following are the outline of the next chapters.

Chapter 2 is the Set Design Processes and Evaluation which will be divided into three parts such as (1) Pre-production/ Pre-design, (2) Design Process, and (3) Set Design Execution.

The "Pre-production" or "Pre-Design" section contains information about the production, such as necessary venue and performance stage information. It will also include synopses, script analyses, preliminary research, director's concept, scenic plot/setting changes breakdown, and all other important documents required for the production preparation.

From the visual research phase to the time the finalized plans were submitted to my guiding teacher, Chun-Wei Wang, up until the day of the production, the "Design Process" tackles and describes how I developed the set designs. The director's conceptual approach to the production is discussed in this chapter, which includes how he or she envisions the actors' performances, the lighting design, the sounds that will be used, and the set design.

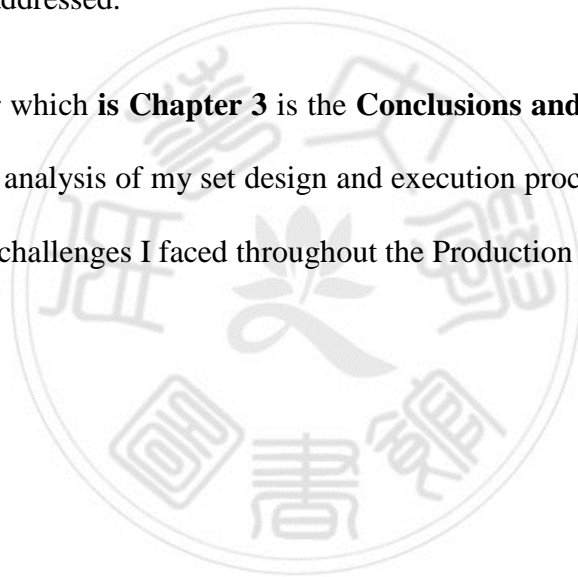
After hearing the director's initial ideas, it was time for me as a set designer to do and complete my visual research. I completed that supported the concept, and subsequently my design process. My design process included the development of preliminary designs through sketches and storyboards, and technical drawings used for the construction of the set. The other things that will also be included in this chapter are the following; (1) Research Materials, images of my research for the set, and properties. (2) Design Development, includes sketches and storyboard thumbnails, pictures of the preliminary design ideas, rough sketches, digital scenic renderings, ground plans, sections, and elevations.

The "Set Design Execution" is where I outlined in detail the practical realization of my set design. This chapter documents the period of the production process, after which the shops

have received the design until the time the set is installed in the theatre for the performance. Any changes to the design properties, scenic art, or set dressing that were made as a result of financial or production-related considerations or disagreements are included in this section.

"Design Process Evaluation" where I will include the set design evaluation commentary from the directors, performers and audience perspective. I will also be putting in this chapter everything that I learn from the process along with the problems I encountered. The design process evaluation will be mainly about my thoughts about whether the processes that I have gone through were effective or helpful for the play. Finally, some design and design process considerations will be addressed.

The last chapter which is **Chapter 3** is the **Conclusions and Recommendations** that will include the critical analysis of my set design and execution process, and explore possible alternative solutions to challenges I faced throughout the Production Period.



CHAPTER 2: Set Design Processes and Evaluation

(Pre-production/ Pre-design, Design Process, and Set Design Execution)

Designing sets for the three plays, *Niyyat*, *The Funeral*, and *The Other Half*, was both educational and challenging. It was both educational and challenging because it was my first set design project and I worked on three different plays throughout the production. I have limited knowledge and experience in terms of hands-on set design work, yet I was hoping for a positive outcome.

I mentioned in the previous chapter that the entire process I've gone through doesn't follow a strict and fixed sequence and isn't as simple as I thought it would be. I've divided this chapter into three phases (respectively) in the hopes of providing a thorough and understandable explanation of my exploration of set design processes: (1) pre-production/pre-design, (2) design process, and (3) set design execution. Because the plays *Niyyat*, *The Funeral*, and *The Other Half* have different processes and experiences, I will discuss them separately in each section. In discussing these phases, I hope to be able to clearly explain my processes as well as highlight the challenges I've faced and how I overcame them.

2.1 Pre-production/ Pre-design

One of the first and most important things I did before starting the design process was to learn about the venue of the production. The performance was held at Chiayi Performing Arts Center's Experimental Theater and I've been to the place before because we had our lighting design class there. But in order to get a better understanding of the space, I've gathered information and files that will serve as the foundation for this project. I wasn't just talking about general information, but rather, as much as possible, the most important and specific details that are relevant not only to me as a set designer, but also to the entire process that I'll have to go through.

The Stage Configurations is one of the information I got and it is about the different staging orientation with seating capacity. The Experimental Theater is a black box theater that can accommodate a wide range of experimental performances. The stage can be raised or lowered to up to 60cm. According to the performance requirements, the audience seating in the experimental Theater can be adjusted and rearranged into single-side stage, two-side stage, three-side stage, or surrounding stage configurations. The single-side stage has 240 seats, with a total of 514 seats available on the surrounding stage. I also gathered the details about the Acting Area Information (Size of the stage floor, off stage, apron), Floor Size and Elevation, Entrance and Exits, Loading Gate, as well as audience seating map, and the hanging system.

The next step I did was getting to know about the production by reading and analysing the scripts. Reading and analysing the script help break down what are the necessary parts of the story that need to be told during the show and to identify all of the sensory elements present in the production that are necessary for the design process. Moreover, through thoroughly studying and analysing the script a visually engaged world is being created for the audience, yet still practically tells the story in its essential notions. As a set designer, though it may seem elusive, it is important to know the life of the characters and the kind of environment they live in (including political, historical, and social environment aspects) not only the literal depiction of location, time, or character itself. Along with the process of reading the script, it is also a must to do some preliminary research which involves the consultation with the director (or the production team) about the requirements of the production and agree with the same overview, concept, and intentions. Normally, the director's notes are completed after the designer has discussed the initial design concepts, but in this unique set-up, the process was reversed for the sake of a smoother and more convenient process. A discussion with the director is relevant in establishing the story, style, colours, and period which is a big factor in visualizing the set

design. Through the aforementioned process, the creation of a scenic plot/ storyline follows, for it will be a guide for the actual design process.

2.1.1 NIYYAT

Niyyat was the first among the three shows of the graduation production “We and Our Contemporary Struggle” presented by Nan Hua University Department of Ethnomusicology, MFA in Theatre students. It was written and directed by Heidi Emelo, a Directing MFA-Theatre candidate. Emelo wrote Niyyat with the core message, “*Your intention is what makes you move forward.*” It is a 45-minute play that revolves around the story of Fatima. In the synopsis written by Director Heidi Emelo, she wrote that Niyyat is about Fatima, a Muslim girl who is a refugee of the war in Marawi, Philippines. Fatima’s main journey started with her whole family moving to Manila in the hope that they will be freed from the fear brought by the war. Adapting to the new life in Manila was quite hard for Fatima because of all the inequalities she has encountered just because of wearing her hijab as a clear indication for people to recognize her as a Muslim. To be accepted by the people around her, Fatima chose to push herself away from her Muslim identity through engaging in drinking alcoholic beverages and removing her veil. She seems to forget about her faith and her relationship with her friends and family was greatly affected. Upon losing his father to a hand of people who do not accept their belief, Fatima was in uncertainty on whether she should embrace back her Muslim identity or be carried away by what society pressured her to be. (Emelo, 2021)

Niyyat had gone through a lot of major changes in terms of its core message and plot. For me, it was the most challenging play among the three plays. The process took time because of major changes such as changing the play. When Niyyat was finally approved to be performed, it wasn’t as polished yet and the script is still in writing progress. In this play, aside from being the set designer, I was also a performer with the role of being Fatima’s mother, Melanie (her workmate), and as part of the ensemble that is why I have spent most of the time

in the rehearsals. Being a performer helps me a lot with understanding the play because I get to read the script and I gained clearer ideas whether the set I have in mind would work. However, there was no clearer idea yet because of the constant changes of the story and whether the play will be performed. Because of all the uncertainty, not only for *Niyyat*, but also for the other plays I, as a set designer, really didn't dwell much on it and just go with the flow and focus on rehearsals as a performer.

I started with reading the script a couple of times before actually analysing it. To concisely analyse the script, I have identified some basic information that will make me further understand the play which are the theme, settings (time, period, place, locale), and the general mood. The tables below show the script analysis for *Niyyat* where I made a list of the basic information (that I just mentioned beforehand) of the play and another separate table consisting of the preliminary scenic plot and the scenic transition.

Table 1. *Niyyat* Script Analysis

About <i>Niyyat</i>	
Time	Past and Present time (Fatima's Childhood in Marawi, and her present life in Manila)
Period	Contemporary
Place	Office, House, Bar
Locale	Marawi, and Manila, Philippines
Mood	Serious
Theme	Muslim-inspired play

SCENES	DESCRIPTION (Scene Changes)	PROPS/ FURNITURE	Notes
Prologue	<p>- <i>“Young Fatima enters the stage. Only her silhouette is seen on stage. She will start the ablution (washing).”</i></p> <p>-Muslim Prayer</p>	<p>Stools (Pre-set at the four sides of the stage)</p> <p>Basin for ablution (pre-set at the center of the stage)</p>	<p>The prologue does not have a specific setting, but the ambiance of the space began with a ritualistic tone and gradually intensified as the cast recited the prayer.</p>
Scene 1	<p>Fatima’s Childhood</p> <p>-Young girls playing <i>“Langit Lupa”</i></p> <p>-Zulayka’s Departure to Manila</p> <p>-Fatima and his father (prayer, and learning Islam)</p>	<p>Stools</p>	<p>This scene is set in a Muslim neighbourhood in Marawi Philippines. The atmosphere was intense and solemn at first, as if it were a continuation of the prologue. When the characters changed into kids playing "Langit Lupa (Heaven and Earth)," the tone lightened. The actors are in “heaven” if they step on the Stools, and on “earth” if they’re standing on the floor.</p>
Scene 2	<p>-Fatima along with her parents are praying</p> <p>-War Scene</p>	<p>Stools</p> <p>Flashlights</p> <p>Travelling Bags</p>	<p>The scene began with a family prayer, and Fatima's narration transformed the scene into a Marawi war scene. The flashlights represent the light emitted by bombing</p>


			explosions. Fatima and her family were in the evacuation center when she received a call from Zulayka, who advised them to seek a safer shelter in Manila.
Scene	Traveling to Manila <i>“Fatima is seen in a crowded city with people walking in and out of the stage.”</i> Fatima and Zulayka’s meeting	Travelling Bags	Fatima and her parents' trip to Manila are shown in a "scripted presentation." They traveled through movements and rhythmic singing of the places they passed through until they arrived in Manila. -Zulayka offered a job to Fatima
Scene 3	Government Office Work Scene	Office Supplies Stools	This scene takes place in a government office in Manila. By moving the stools around, the scene transforms into a work environment. The actors are dressed in their work uniforms and cramming for their jobs. The office scene is depicted through a series of "devised" movements involving office supplies.
Scene 4	-Bar Scene	-Stools -Liquor Bottles -Flashlights	-By simply rearranging the stools (which served as tables and chairs in the bar) and adding liquor bottles as


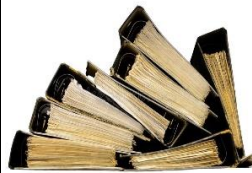




	<p>-News about the bombing in Manila</p> <p>-Work Scene (Fatima removes her veil)</p>	-Work Files	<p>props, the scene was transformed into a bar scene. The actors are also dressed in costume for the party. The flashlights represent the lights in the bar and Fatima's memories of the Marawi war.</p> <p>- To change the scene from a bar scene to a news scene, the stools are rearranged and actors dressed as newscasters stand on them to deliver the news.</p> <p>- To go back to the working scene from the news scene, the actors simply change to work uniforms on stage.</p>
Scene 5	<p>-Conversation with the father</p> <p>-Argument with Zulayka</p> <p>-Death of Fatima's Father</p>	stools	<p>Because this scene takes place at Fatima's house, the stools have been rearranged from the previous scene to indicate that the scene is taking place inside their home.</p>
Epilogue	<p>-Fatima's narration</p> <p>-Conversation with her mother</p>	Stools	<p>The final scene has a sad and solemn tone to it. As Fatima grieves for her father's death, she recalls memories of him. As they heard the call to</p>



			<p>prayer, her mother handed her the veil, assuring her that Allah would forgive her and that her late father would always understand her life decisions. The story ended with Fatima accepting the veil but without wearing it, leaving the audience to wonder whether she would return to her faith, or not.</p>
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The props and set items for Niyyat are listed in the table below. I've included all of the props that were originally listed, as well as those that were added or removed. I noted the descriptions and changes, including the detail is the prop is eliminated and the reason behind it.

Table 2. Niyyat Props Breakdown

PROPS	QTY	REFERENCE PHOTOS	NOTES
Liquor bottles/cans	5		<p>-Provided by the director</p> <p>-stored inside the cube</p>

Towel	1		Plain white	Will be used for the ablution in the prologue.
Office Supplies (Binder folders)	5		Thick Binders Any color	Will be used for the work scenes and will be stored in the cubes.
Travelling Bags	2			Will be used by the parents of Fatima during the war and travel to Manila scenes. Will also be used to store some costumes for costume changes.
Mini LED Flashlights	5			The flashlights will be small in size and could be put in the actors' pockets for easier access in
Bucket/ acrylic container				The acrylic container was the original ablution item, but since there won't be any real flowing water, the material is quite expensive, and finding the exact size we wanted is difficult. We've decided to replace it with a common basin found in most homes. It would
Washbasin for ablution				

				be more fitting for the play, especially given its significance in body cleansing in the ablution scene.
Stools			- Made of Hardwood -Dark wooden brown color	We had intended to utilize stools for the set of Niyyat, but we later thought that cubes would be a better option for storing tiny items and costumes during on-stage wardrobe changes. The actors will be able to stand or sit in the cube, which will be safer and sturdier.
Cubes			L: 35 cm W: 35 cm H: 50 cm	

The original script does not have specific scene titles and scene changes notes on it and so creating this table is very relevant to my script analysis process. The scenes listed on the table are also solely based from one script provided by the director. Moreover, through the Preliminary Scenic Plot table, I was able to note the probable props for each scene. By understanding the scenic transitions, the traffic and adjustments of props and set pieces will easily be determined. As a set designer, it is relevant for me to know these scene changes and transitions the sake of knowing how to manipulate the set and props. And through knowing it beforehand, then it will be easier for me to decide how to make props and set pieces that will be convenient and appropriate for the play.

Director's Concept/ Notes

The initial concept of the director is to have a traverse stage and to only use very minimal props on stage. We have also started rehearsing guided by this staging idea and it was a bit challenging mainly because the Experimental Theatre stage in Chiayi Performing Arts Center was originally intended for in-the-round, thrust, and proscenium staging. Overall, the initial concept was mainly about coming up with the staging idea and an agreement that I will have to start the process by actually proposing to her my set design ideas. This is to make sure that once *Niyyat* is fully permitted to be performed then we already have ideas on where to start and we just have to discuss how we are going to make it work for the play.

As a set designer, the struggle I had at first was not having a lot to say about the play as it was amid the development and all I had in mind was that the director was the one going to defend her script and all I had to do was suggest on the artistic side, such as the design ideas. One of the factors that affected my decision-making was the fact that the director has been my classmate and companion for the past seven years and we somehow unconsciously created a rule of listening and complying with each other's opinions. And when there is opposition to ideas, we just somehow try to defend them and later on decide which action must be done.

Reflection

In the process of analyzing the script, apart from identifying the props/furniture, and providing detailed comments for each scene, as a set designer, one thing that I found significant was giving my interpretation of the dramatic facts in the play, as well as the thoughts that I had about the play's theme. I love the idea that the play was based on an Islamic term, "*Niyyah*", which means the intention of doing any action for the sake of Allah (God). With regard to this, my first impression and expectation after reading were play was that the whole theme would be expressed in the same manner. Despite the fact that the script was written in direct

chronological order and realistic situations, stating both the journey of the young Fatima, who came from a conservative Muslim family, and the influence of a more liberated society, I wished for more consistency in all aspects of the play, particularly the spectacle, as well as the genre, characters, plot, and how the story was expressed.

2.1.2 THE FUNERAL

The Funeral was the second among the three shows of the graduation. The Funeral was written and directed by Ralph Jade Tampal, a Directing MFA-Theatre candidate. *The Funeral* is a 30-minute one-act play that revolves around the story of a dead student activist Rowena who was labeled by the police officers as a terrorist. The truth about her death was being manipulated and raises the question that if ‘the oppressors are those who are supposed to protect people, then, to whom should people call for help? As a playwright-director, Tampal believes that theatre could be a form of activism to be used as a tool to call for a change. Through his play (being emphasized as a way of expressing the freedom of speech and expression), he does hope and believes that the audience can be aware of the societal disputes and not be passive.

One of the major problems we have as a group (MFA-Theatre candidates) is that we have limited people to become actors. I was closely involved and familiar with the play from all its different versions because of the revisions it has gone through, therefore it was quite easier for me to process my ideas about the set design that I will be doing for this play. After reading and analyzing the script I was able to break down some basic information (same as with *Niyyat*) that is necessary to understand the play. These pieces of information include the theme, settings (time, period, place, locale), and the general mood. The figure below shows the table containing the basic information that served as my guide in analyzing the script.

Director's Concept/ Notes

The first conversation with director Wincy Ramilo regarding the set design of *The Other Half* started with her mentioning the props that she needed for her play (each of which has very specific relevance to each scene). The play has no text at all and the scenes are mainly driven by movements, props, and other elements that can convey the scenic plot visually. She also sends me photos that she would like to include in her set.






Table 3. *The Funeral* Script Analysis, Preliminary Scenic Plot, and, Scenic Transition






Time	Present Time
Period	Contemporary
Place	Funeral/ Slums/ Interrogation room
Locale	Tondo, Manila, Philippines
Mood	Serious
Theme	Funeral, Activism





SCENES	DESCRIPTION	PROPS/ FURNITURE	NOTES
<i>Prologue</i>	- This scene includes snippets from the other scenes in the play (Rowena being chased by cops, activists protesting, Rowena's mother asserting	Tables, Chairs, Guns, fake gun	-The tables and chairs are pre-set on stage. -The activists will step on the chairs during the protest. -The prologue began with Fatima's mother approaching the center of the stage and making a direct statement regarding her daughter's death. The mood

<p><i>Scene 3</i></p> <p><i>The scene within scene 3</i></p>	<p>Student activist demonstration</p> <p>Interrogation 2</p>	<p>Tables, Chairs</p> <p>Placards for protests,</p> <p>Rowena's bag,</p> <p>folders for the policemen, Crime Scene photos</p>	<p>- The surroundings in this scene are imagined to be the streets where activists hold protests. They were all holding placards.</p> <p>- Like the first interrogation scene, the interrogation room is set through the table and chairs. The cops will hand over crime scene photos to Rowena's mother, who will scatter them on the floor after inspecting each one.</p>
<p><i>Scene 4</i></p>	<p>-Eulogy of the Mother,</p> <p>-Burial</p> <p>Rape Scene</p>	<p>Tables, Chairs,</p> <p>Coffin, Coffin Table,</p> <p>Flowers, Funeral lamps,</p>	<p>The wake set will be illuminated while the rest of the stage dims. In time with the rape scene on the dim part of the stage, the mother delivers her eulogy.</p> <p>-After the eulogy, each actor makes a statement while picking a crime scene photo scattered on the floor as if it's the story they're telling.</p>
<p><i>Epilogue</i></p>	<p>Rowena's burial</p>		<p>The last scene will only be Rowena walking alone on stage near her tomb. She will end the play by singing "May Pulis Sa ilalim ng Tulay" in different tones and emotions.</p>

Table 4. The Funeral Props Breakdown

PROPS/ SET PIECES	QTY	REFERENCE PHOTOS	NOTES	
Flowers	8		Purple White Yellow	I had intended to use fake flowers for the bouquet, but when I discovered that they were somewhat expensive, I decided to construct my flowers using laces, chicken wire, and other DIY materials. I have used the same material for the hanging cross.
Cross	1		Wood base and covered with flowers	
Flashlight	2		Black	For the policeman. This is for the chasing scene, a policeman instead of just playing the patrol car sound.
Picture Frame	1		11" x 14"	On the frame is Rowena's Photo It will be displayed beside the coffin
Square frames	4		60 cm x 60cm	This frame will serve as a trap or a prison cell.

Luggage	1			It will be used by Rowena's Mother upon her arrival
Placards for protests	5			These placards are one of the most often used props in the play, as protest scenes and activists were shown numerous times. It was constructed from a cut-out carton box and painted with various statements illustrating the issues that these activists are fighting for.
Whistle	2			The policeman in the play used the whistle in situations where Rowena was chased and caught.
Tables	2		L: 60 cm W: 60 cm H: 75 cm	Both the chair and the table should be sturdy enough for people to walk on. This, too, will be made of hardwood and will be dark woody brown.
Chairs	6		L: 35 cm W: 35 cm H: 50 cm	

Coffin			L: 150 cm W: 45 cm H: 45 cm (including the cover)	The original goal for the coffin is to just make it with lightweight materials to be carried easily by the actors. However, it turned out heavier so we just utilize the coffin table to easily move it.
Coffin Table				
Funeral Lamp				The funeral lamps are very relevant to my design for The Funeral because it just completes the whole setup. It adds to the tone and mood of the wake scenes. To easily
Lamp Stand				move it on stage, a small table with wheels was constructed to carry it.

Reflection

Among the three plays, The Funeral is the play I can mostly relate to, in terms of its social context. The theme of the play is related to the social issues of student activism and police brutality in the Philippines and, as a set designer, I have a much clearer preconception of what the setup of the scenarios included in the play is. I wanted a fairly typical middle-class Filipino structure to be part of the stage in terms of aesthetics. Having a house structure

constructed of both wood and concrete elements, for example. All props and set components would have seemed as they would in real life because the play is written with realistic settings. The play's structure is interesting since it plays with time and the sequence of events while maintaining a clear transition. As a Filipino, I understand the entire play, and one major challenge I perceive is how to help or organize my design ideas in creating a full atmosphere that the audience can relate to. In relation to this, I was hoping for consistency in all of the elements on stage; for example, having a very specific location on stage in accordance with the specific scene-setting, and it could either be executed through set changes, or simply showing a clear division of setting on the stage, such as a specific spot for interrogation, funeral, and protest.

2.1.3 THE OTHER HALF

Along with the *Niyat* and *The Funeral*, *The Other Half* was the third of three original plays performed. Wincy Ramilo, a Theatre Directing MFA candidate, created and directed the piece. This play differs from the other two plays that were abovementioned because it doesn't have a script and consists solely of movements. According to Director Wincy Ramilo, the main concept of the play is as of the following,

A Non-text based devised project set in a dystopian world. Imagining women as brides, bound in a household filled with expectations and standards of the men. Guided by the saying "Beauty is Pain", *The Other Half*, portrays women as strong individuals whose actions are of rational choice of an active, thinking (female) adult, aware that she is living in a highly visual consumer culture. A dash of magical realism that explores the paradox of how women choose to stay in a toxic relationship with the men/society and keep up with the standards even if it involves painful procedures. (Ramilo, 2021)

Director's Concept/ Notes

A conversation with the director is important for establishing the story, style, colors, and period, all of which are important when visualizing the set design. Director Ralph Tampal has specific ideas and instructions for how he wants his stage to look for the play *The Funeral*. As the title of the play indicates, the setting is very clear and obvious that it is at a funeral, and all I have to do now is expand on that with creativity and ideas for how I can create a set that will serve the play.

The Other Half Story Analysis

Instead of doing script analysis, I did story analysis based solely on the synopsis and ideas I had as a performer in this play. Being familiar with and directly involved with the play also aided me in developing and comprehending the scenic plot and transition.

Table 5. *The Other Half* Story Analysis, Preliminary Scenic Plot, and Scenic Transition

<i>The Other Half</i>	
Time	Timeless/ Timely
Period	Here and Now (Timeless/ Timely)
Place	Fictional, Dystopian World (House, Restaurant)
Locale	Manila, Philippines
Mood	Serious, Stange
Theme	Surrealism, Dystopia, Violence,

SCENES	DESCRIPTION	PROPS/ FURNITURE	NOTES
Prologue	<p>-Marriage Proposal (Butcher and the woman)</p> <p>-Wedding</p> <p>-The kid</p>	<p>Fabric</p> <p>Butcher's Table/ Bed</p> <p>Butcher's Knife</p> <p>Telephone,</p> <p>Engagement Ring</p>	<p>-This play's backdrop is a taupe-colored fabric that will also be used for the projection design. It's framed in a wacky shape made of black mesh fabric.</p> <p>-On stage, the butcher's table is already set up. The meat slices and chunks, as well as a butcher's knife, are displayed above it.</p> <p>-At the same time, the black and white fabric will be laid diagonally. Between these two fabrics, the woman is lying.</p> <p>-The masked butcher entered and began cutting the meat as the music played. Along with the increasing music, the cutting intensity rises.</p> <p>- The other male actors are also wearing silver masks. After the butcher proposes to the woman, one of them carries the red telephone and places it on the butcher's table, which has now been cleared, covered with white fabric, and turned into a bed.</p>
Scene 1	-The gift	<p>Gift (Red Shoes)</p> <p>Telephone</p>	- Two chairs will be placed in the center of the stage for this scene. One is for the butcher, and the other is for the red telephone.




	<p>First opposition with consequences</p> <p>-Cutting Off the toe</p> <p>-Dance</p>	<p>-Butcher's knife</p>	<p>- The butcher gave the woman a pair of red shoes that were too small for her and she refused to wear them. When the phone rings, it indicates that the woman should be punished for refusing to wear the shoes.</p> <p>- To fit the shoes to the woman, the butcher cut off her toe with the help of the other masked men. Despite the woman's pain, the two simply danced together in joy.</p>
Scene 2	<p>-Restaurant Scene</p> <p>-Food Temptation</p> <p>-Second opposition with consequences</p> <p>-Putting on a wig</p> <p>-The Woman becoming pregnant</p>	<p>Table Set up</p> <p>Candle</p> <p>Placard</p> <p>Weighing Scale</p> <p>Black Fabric</p>	<p>- The setting for this scene is a restaurant. To represent the entire restaurant, there was only one table candlelit above it and two chairs. The masked men are now working as waiters.</p> <p>- One masked man appeared, holding a placard stating that only people weighing less than 50 kilograms are permitted to enter the restaurant. The woman was instructed to weigh herself on a weighing scale that was pre-set on stage. She was found to be overweight, and she was pressured to lose weight. She was tempted by foods placed on the cloth that was passing in front of her while exercising.</p> <p>- She snatched up the last of the food from the tablecloth. The masked men then used the same black cloth to trap and drag her.</p>




			<p>- The butcher reminded her of the ring that still binds them and then made her wear a wig he thought would look good on her. When the woman refused, the phone rang again, signaling the impending punishment. Despite her dislike for the wig, she put it on right before he picked up the phone.</p> <p>- The masked men wrapped the butcher and the woman with a black cloth. As they turned around them, the cloth was being tucked into the woman's belly to indicate her pregnancy.</p>
Scene 3	Shower and Birth Scene	Bath Tub Jar Candle	<p>- The set was changed, and the butcher table, which had previously served as a bed, was now flipped and used as a bathtub. A candle was lit in front of the bathtub.</p> <p>- One masked man is holding the jar and pretending that it is filled with water and is showering the woman. While the other masked man is the one assisting the woman as she gives birth. The black cloth was pulled from her belly and rolled to indicate that she was having a child.</p>
Scene 4	Surgery	-Butcher's knife -Surgery Equipment (Syringe, Suture	-To transform into a surgery scene, the bathtub was flipped back to its original position as a butcher's table and draped with a white cloth.



		<p>needle, and threads,</p> <p>-Fats from the woman's belly</p> <p>-Mask</p> <p>-Cloth bondage</p>	<p>- The woman lay down on the white cloth, and the masked men covered her body, only showing her face, to conceal the butcher's surgical procedure.</p> <p>-The butcher who is also now acting as the surgeon uses oversized surgery equipment.</p> <p>- The woman's entire face is wrapped in cloth bondage after the surgery. The woman stood upon the table, slowly revealing her new face after the surgery; she now wears a mask on her face. A representation of the face that society desired for her.</p>
Scene 5	Wedding Scene	<p>Frame</p> <p>Bouquet (made of white cloth)</p> <p>Butcher's knife</p> <p>Telephone</p>	<p>-After revealing her face, she stepped off the table, and the frame hung from the batten also came down. The woman danced with the frame, and as it rises, the scene transforms into a wedding.</p> <p>-The table, which is still covered in white cloth, has been transformed into an altar. On top of it, the phone is placed. The bondage was given to the woman by a masked man and is now rolled up like a wedding bouquet. She tosses it in front of the audience. The phone rang as she returned to the table, and the butcher asked the woman to answer it for the first time. She picked up the phone and listened to the other end of the line. She dropped</p>



			the phone after listening, and a masked man handed her the butcher's knife.
Epilogue	Mother and Child Scene	Butcher's knife	-The final scene is set up similarly to the wedding scene, with the exception that the woman's terrified child sits in front of the table. The woman is seen approaching her child with a butcher's knife in her hand. The play comes to an end as she lifts the knife.

Table 6. *The Other Half* Props Breakdown

PROPS	QTY	REFERENCE	Color/ Texture	NOTES
Syringe	4			The syringe, Bondage, and needle/thread are all the props for the surgery scene. The idea for these props is to have them in extra big sizes and make them look fancy and old. The syringe that we used for the play are real syringes that we painted in silver.
Cloth bondage	1 roll			
Needle/ Thread	4 needles (thick)			

	thread)		
Shoebox	1		Painted with silver.
			<p>One of the most significant props in this play is the red telephone. When the woman refuses to do what the butcher tells her, the phone rings. It serves as a warning to the woman that she will be punished harshly. The style of the phone is also a classic style to match the theme of the play which is dystopic and antiquity.</p> <p>Red Old style</p>
Newspaper	1 roll		In the other version of the play, there was a scene where the butcher was reading a newspaper. However, the scene was shortened and so we just decided to let go of this old

				newspaper prop.
Butcher's knife				The butcher's knife that we had was originally a laser-printed knife made by Mr. Wang. However, it broke during our final run-through in the studio and we made a solution to just use a real knife but cover the sharp edges. The knife should look rusty and scary as it is used by the butcher not just to cut off meat but to also punish the woman.
Candle		 <small>shutterstock.com • 567082486</small>	-White -Old Style	Aside from using a white candle, we used the red one because it's the only available color and we never painted it right to match the red telephone.

			<p>~Open on one side</p> <p>~It should look old</p> <p>~Texture should be similar to this (or even darker);</p> 	<p>This set piece should function as a Butcher's table, bed, bathtub, or Operation bed. It was originally wanted to have a wheel so it would be easier to drag it on stage. However, I wasn't able to note it in the previous sketch I made, which was fine because it wouldn't be easier to flip into different positions and functions if it had wheels. We just made a small opening on each side, enough for the actors to be able to lift it.</p>
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2.2 Design Process

(Preliminary Scenic Research, Preliminary Designs, and Development)

I officially started the reading and research process for the plays the moment it was approved and that was last January 2021, a month before we had our production meeting with the designers. I was also introduced to Chun-Wei Wang, a Taiwanese set designer who was my guiding teacher for this project. The first conversation with him was mainly about the three plays where I was asked to send him the scripts. Aside from the directors' notes, I have also decided to propose my idea and I have come up with rough sketches for each play and sent them to him.

2.2.1 NIYYAT

Deciding the set for *Niyyat* is the most challenging and with many adjustments during the whole process. My initial personal choice on the staging is thrust and that the set should be Islam-inspired in terms of its atmosphere, colors, lighting, and texture. I have come up with 30 reference images and some of them are as follows;



Figure 1. *Niyyat* image research on Filipino Muslim house interior. (Sultan's house with furniture design called "baor" where hardwood is decorated with Tipay Shells)

I chose this first image because I envision the stage to have a touch of a Filipino Muslim traditional Arts elements and I think by having all these colors and patterns as an inspiration for the set design, the stage's atmosphere will be as if the audience and the performers are all inside a Filipino Muslim's house. Another distinct aesthetic of Muslim Arts and Culture is their praying mats with various patterns on them and I was thinking of having these mats as part of the set will help create a visual representation of the Muslim faith which I think is what *Niyyat* is also trying to emphasize.



Figure 2. *Niyyat* image research on Muslim Theatre plays and Muslim atmosphere.

The Arabian Nights set was designed by Chien-Yu Peng. (Pinterest, accessed 2021)

Director Heidi Salih Emelo envisioned her play to be staged in a traverse staging wherein the performance area will only look like a pathway with the audience divided into two sides. This idea was rooted in the thought that the whole *Niyyat* play is about the journey of Fatima and the shape of the stage will give the illusion of a pathway she's traveling into, and enclose both performers and audience into a more intimate environment. The images below are what a traverse stage looks like, and the initial sketch that I have submitted to Mr. Wang.

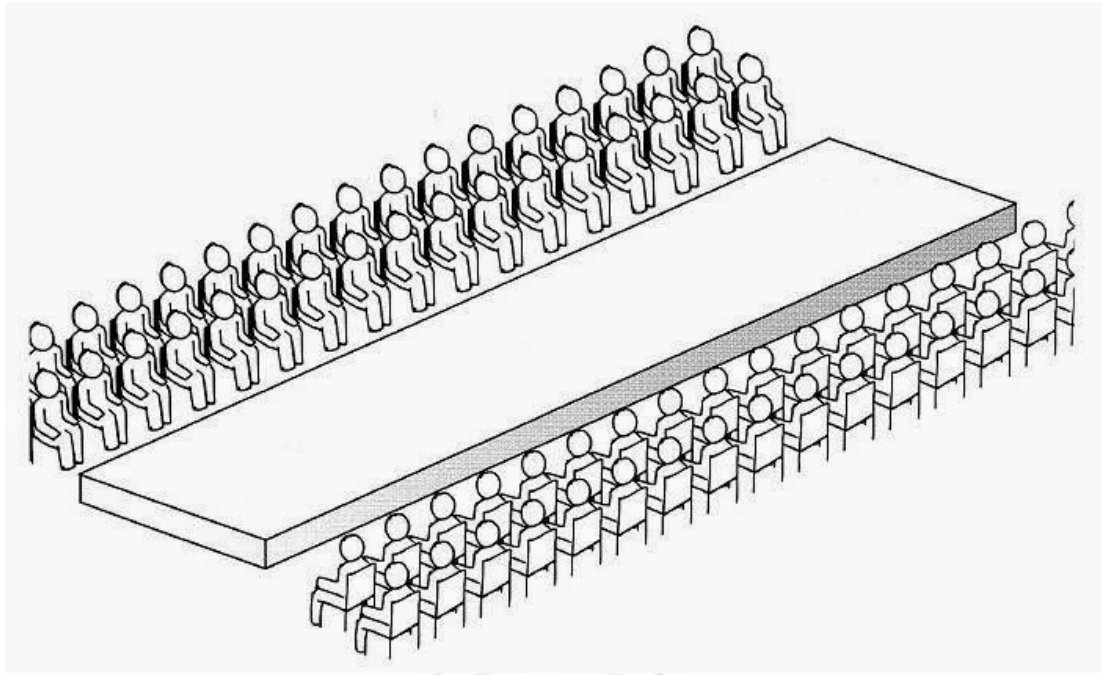


Figure 3. *Niyyat* image research, Traverse Stage, Traverse Theatre, blogspot.com, 2014

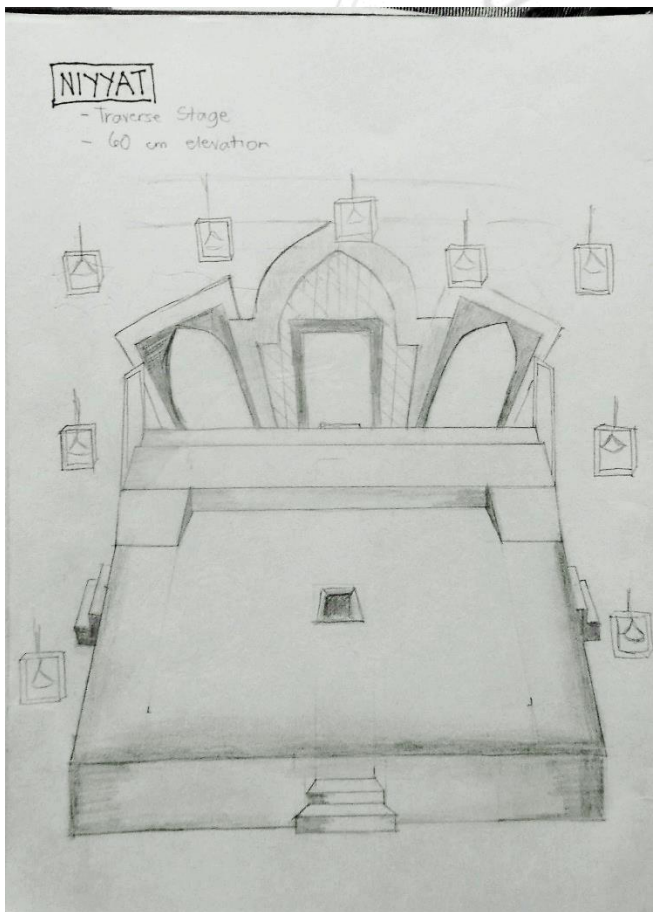


Figure 4. *Niyyat* set design rough sketch

Setting: Filipino Muslim House/ Manila
(Government Office)/ Bar

Stage: Traverse Stage

Notes:

*Will use projection for subtitles

*Will use the 60 cm elevated stage

As shown in the sketch, I have included all the ideas that I have based on the script analysis, notes from the director, and my preliminary research. In the sketch, I noted that the staging is traverse and that we will be using the 60cm elevated stage. The problem actually emerged from those two ideas because the elevated stage itself is an 8m x8m square stage and if the director would want to push through with the traverse stage, it won't be the same as how she first envisions the stage to be. But I just think that maybe it would work if the stage is still the elevated one and there will be an audience on two opposite sides. The purpose of an elevated stage is to separate the world on stage from the audience, to make them aware of the setting for the story, while also creating an intimate connection between the stage and the audience due to the seating arrangement and proximity to the stage. I included a long platform and ramps on one side of the stage that I thought would be useful for scene changes (giving the illusion of a pathway symbolizing the journey of the characters). Panels on one side of the stage, as well as two-door frames, are hidden behind the platforms. My initial motivation for placing it was to demonstrate the arc-shaped panel as one of the aesthetics of Muslim architecture. Another option is to cover it with plain white fabric, which can be used as a projection area for subtitles and other video effects. In addition, I've drawn 10 hanging lamps around it without specifying the details, such as where the batten will be placed, because I didn't know how to create the "sectioning" and "dimensions" at the time I drew this sketch. Lamps appeal to me because they could be used in a variety of scenes in the play, including those set in Manila (night-time city lights), disco lights at the bar, and lights symbolizing bomb explosions in the war scene.

The table below corresponds to the sketch that I gave Mr. Wang, and it includes the set pieces and props that I believe are required at that time. Along with these are the director's notes and questions that I'd like to ask or consult.

Set/ Props	Quantity	Details/ Notes
Tables	5	With wheels that could be locked
Lamps/ Frames	10 or more	Flying system
<p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Is it possible to have water flowing from the ceiling to the center stage area? *The director wants it to be a bare stage with only 5 tables on the platform. *The director wants the stage to be elevated only after the prologue. 		

The feedback I received on my sketch and my questions are depicted in the figure below.

Set/Props	Quantity	Details/ Notes
Tables	5	With wheels that could be locked
Lamps / frames <i>buy lamps</i>	10 Or more	flying system
<p>Notes/ Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Is it possible to have Water flowing from ceiling to center stage area? <i>Yes, but cost a lot of money,</i> *The director wants it to be a bare stage with only 5 tables on the platform. <i>Maybe buy 5 the same tables and some chairs</i> *The director wants the stage to be elevated only after the prologue. <i>impossible do it in budget. for all three plays.</i> 		

Figure 5. *Niyat* set design rough sketch (for traverse staging) with descriptions, and feedback from Chun-Wei Wang

The main notes on the sketch were why the 60cm elevated stage was necessary, the materials and use of the arc-shaped panels, and the battens for the lamps. Furthermore, in regards to the three questions raised, there was only a note on the tables (not on the sketch) that we might need to add some chairs. Also, the flow of water from the ceiling to the stage area, as well as the timing of the stage elevation during the show, may incur additional costs.

I mentioned in Chapter 2.1 Pre-production/pre-design that I had gathered the necessary files to aid me in this design journey and that I thought I had them all, but I had not. I received immediate feedback after sending the rough sketches, and I quickly realized that I was missing a lot of crucial information, such as the stage size, ground plan, and section of the Experimental Theater. To be honest, I was perplexed and unsure about these two terms (ground plan and section) at the time, so I decided to educate myself by conducting research. When I was drawing the sketches, all I wanted to do was create a visual representation of how I wanted the stage to look, and then we'd figure out how to build it. I was unconcerned about the specific details and pieces of information because I assumed the process would be simpler and quicker. With all of this new information, the next step was to look for images to help me re-visualize the set design for each play. I've gotten a lot of feedback, and one of the things I've gotten is to specify the materials and textures. Because I still don't know how to use the AutoCAD software for sketching, I only have black and white pencil sketches. Another thing to keep in mind is that I need to describe the aesthetic of each prop. Furthermore, when we presented the play in traverse staging, our adviser commented that it restricted the performers' movement. I agree because I believe that if we have to use a traverse stage, we will have a difficult time creating and implementing the set design ideas that we originally had in mind.

We have come up with another proposal and that is to have an L-shaped stage however we still have the same feedback. It was an interesting staging for me, but given that the three plays will be performed on the same stage, it will pose challenges in terms of audience seating

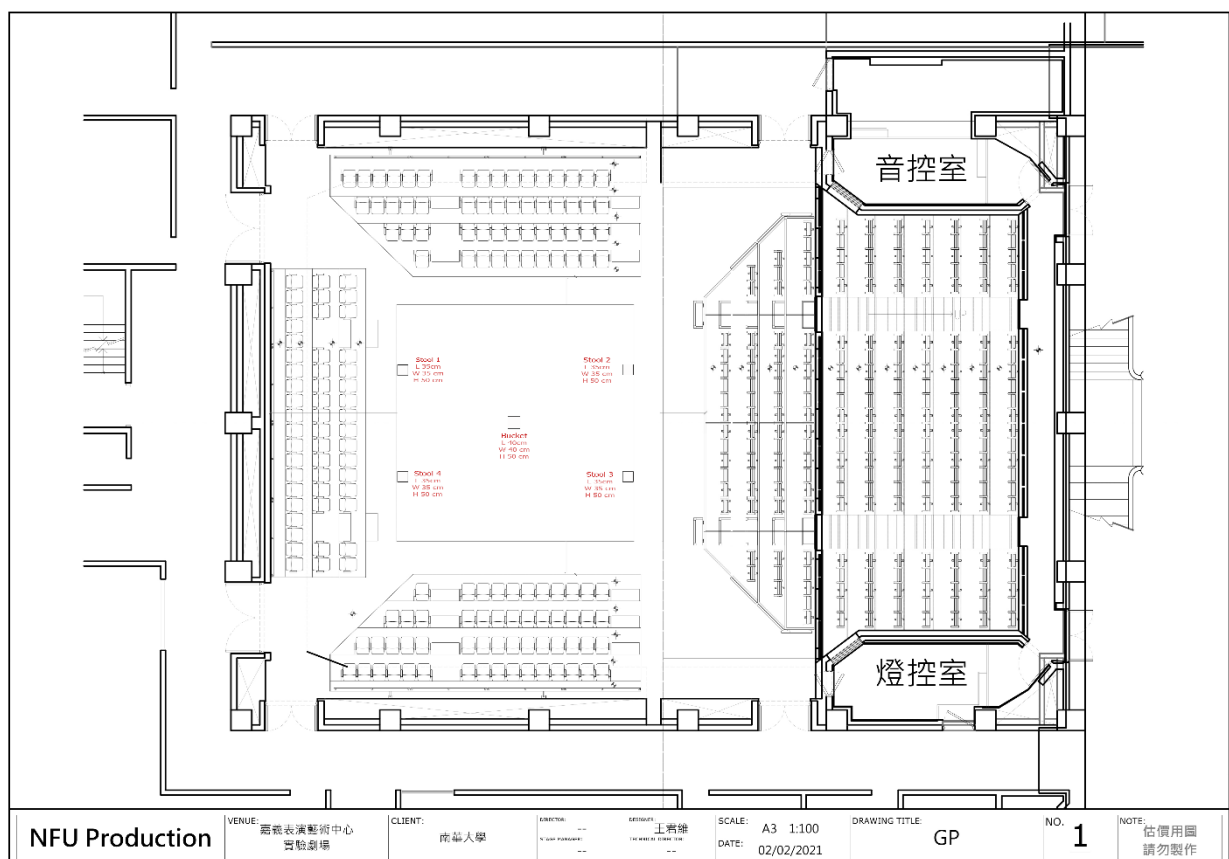
and prop traffic, and set changes during the few minutes interval between shows. Another factor to consider is that we will be projecting the subtitles, which would be inconvenient to do in this type of staging, especially given the limited time prior to the date of the show.



Figure 6. *Niyyat* image research, L-shaped stage
New York Fashion Week Set Design, (Bizbash media, 2021)

I was able to discuss the rough sketches with feedback and solutions with my guiding teacher on the day that we had our meeting with the designers. We discussed how to combine the three different designs using the reference images I provided. The meeting was extremely beneficial because I articulated all of my ideas with the directors, as well as exchanged ideas about what would be best for the set design in terms of texture, colors, props, and so on. Mr. Wang taught me some basic drafting and budgeting skills, which I am extremely grateful for. I was able to understand the significance of understanding how to do a ground plan, sectioning, and dimension. I was given the task of providing all of these for each play and it wasn't easy

for me. I did the manual work where I printed the scaled ground plan and section of the Theater and hand-drawn the scaled set and props on stage using the ruler to measure it. However, it took me a lot of revisions because of problems that I have encountered like printing the file wrongly because the size is scaled and the printed one is a bit smaller. The file I received is in CAD and PDF format, and when I printed it on A3 paper, the lines covering it made it impossible for me to sketch on it. I tried erasing it with a correction pen, but it didn't work out because it was messy. Because I was too embarrassed to admit that I was spending time figuring out how to fix the printed paper so I could start drawing on it, this problem caused some miscommunication and misunderstanding with my teacher. It took me days to realize that I could fix my problem using my Adobe photoshop and illustrator skills, and the results are as



shown in the images below.

Figure 7. *Niyyat* Ground Plan

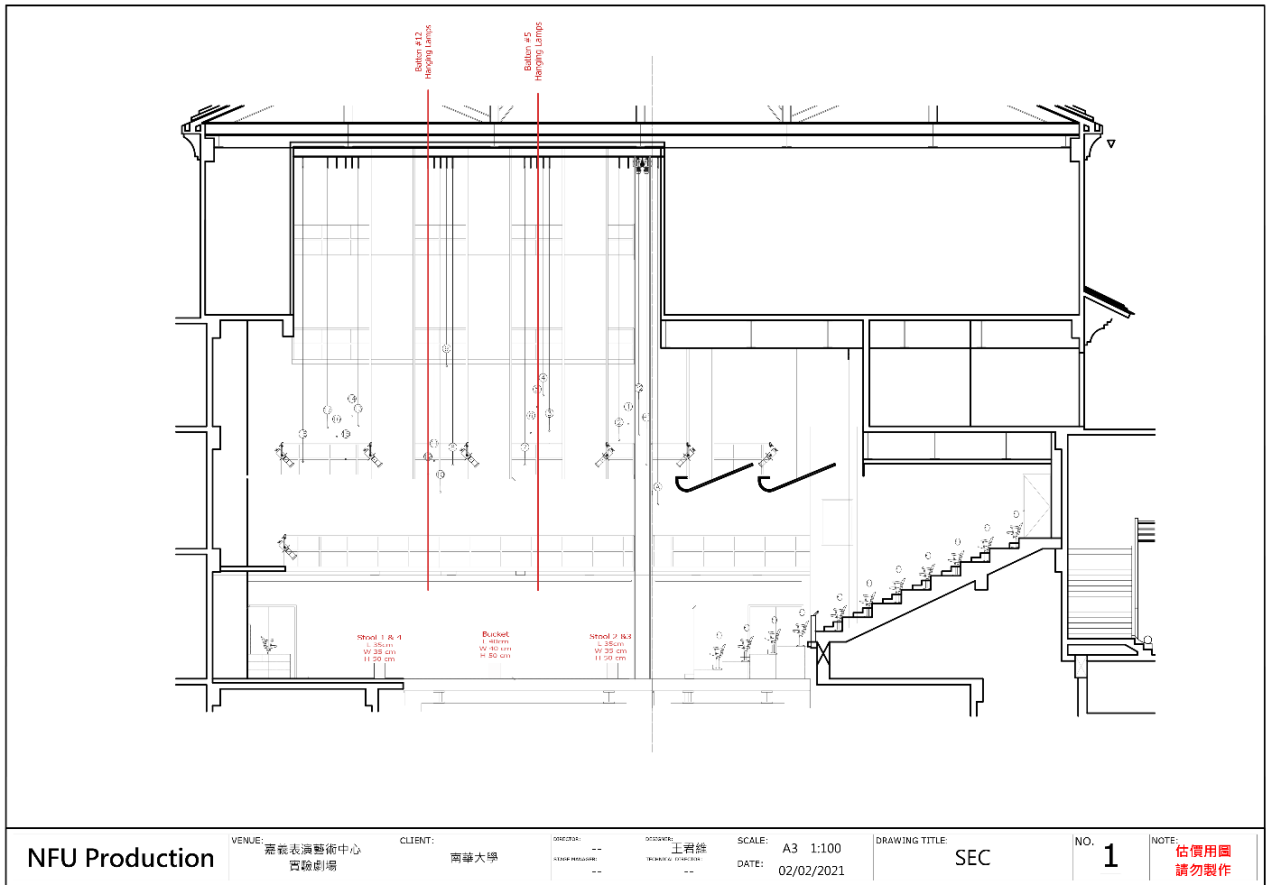


Figure 8. *Niyat* Sectioning

I scaled the size and distance of the props and set pieces for the ground plan. In the same way that I specified the sectioning, I also indicated the actual sizes and the batten numbers for the props that need to be hung, as well as the other descriptions that go with them. After that, I made lists (in the appendices) for all of the props, fabric, and fly before drawing a colored sketch. Mr. Wang redrew all of these using AutoCAD and added more details (in Mandarin) for clarity when sending the information to the construction company that will construct the set pieces.

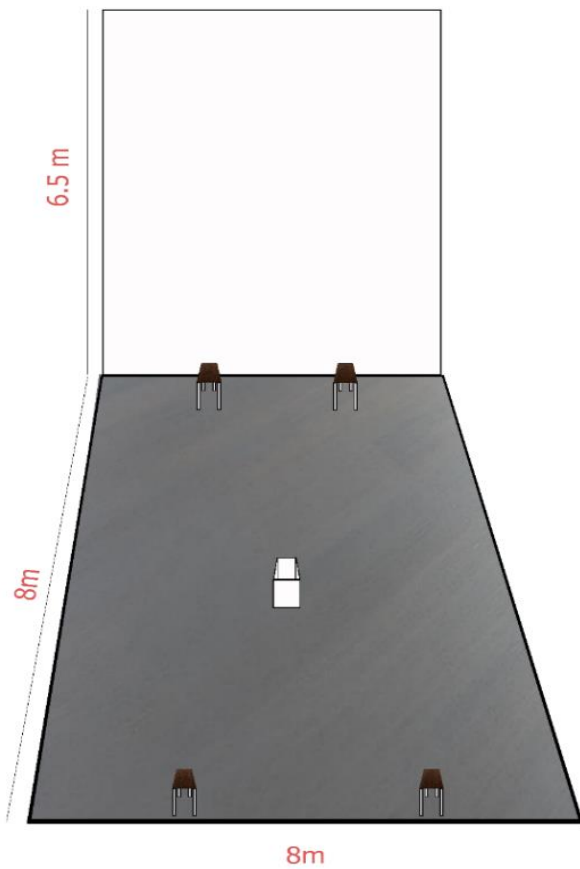


Figure 9. *Niyyat* Updated Sketch

This is the last sketch I submitted to Mr. Wang. A stage with just 4 chairs and a container for ablution. During this time, we were still discussing about the backdrop for *Niyyat* because we don't want the audience to see the backstage. We also have to adjust the backdrop according to the position of the fly system.

2.2.2 THE FUNERAL

The design process for Ralph Tampal's *The Funeral* was clearer compared to the rest of the plays because of the realistic approach to most of its parts. The play has gone through a lot of story and script revisions and as one of the actors, I found it easier to point out changes and exchange ideas even months prior to the approval of the final script. In general, the director had a great influence on my decisions because of his clearer vision of what his stage should look like. Generally, our conversations are clearer and the ideas are matched to what we envision the stage would look like. The idea of a Filipino funeral set-up (wake), student activist/theatre activism, narrow slums of Tondo Manila, police brutality, and intimacy are the

main concepts that we had in mind regarding the visual images of the play. With “*The Funeral*” as its title, I started with my preliminary research by collecting thumbnail images and pegs (as shown below).



Figure 10. *The Funeral* image research, A typical setup of funeral wake in the Philippines.
“Filipino Funeral Traditions” Earlie Pasion, 2021

The first image above depicts how a typical Filipino wake is set up. The coffin, the funeral curtain (which usually comes in a very specific color combination), the bouquet of flowers, funeral lamps, and a chair for a prayer leader or a family member who will guard the coffin all night are the main items included in this. With all of these elements incorporated into the set design, I am comfortable knowing that the play's intended environment and mood will be conveyed to both performers and the audience.



Figure 11. *The Funeral* image research, Interrogation Room, detective aesthetic on Pinterest

The interrogation scenes, which cover the majority of the story plot, are another important scene in *The Funeral*. This is a very specific setting that I believe I should integrate with the wake setup that was previously mentioned. Because of the realism, I sought for the entire set's appearance, I already had ideas in mind before searching for images.

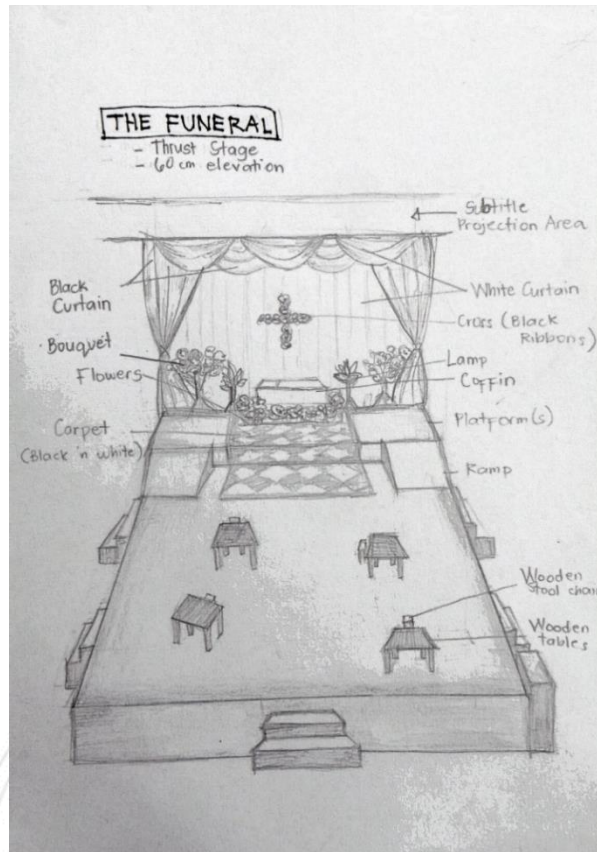


Figure 12. *The Funeral* set design rough sketch (for thrust staging)

The stage is elevated to 60cm in the sketch and is intended for thrust staging. Director Tampal wanted his stage to be completely black and white, so I tried to reach a compromise by placing items on the stage that will appear in black and white colors. In the feedback that I received regarding my sketch, Mr. Wang have quite almost the same questions and that is about the specific details of the elements that I drew. One thing to keep in mind is the budget constraint; we must stretch the funds as far as possible to meet the needs of all three plays. Our solution is to share props or set pieces such as tables and chairs, as well as fabric.

Moreover, we gave up the idea of the elevated stage because of reasons concerned about the flow of the play. Without the elevation, the props could be moved easily on stage and the

movements of the performers wouldn't be limited and constricted. There were running and fast scene changes and having the elevation would be inconvenient.

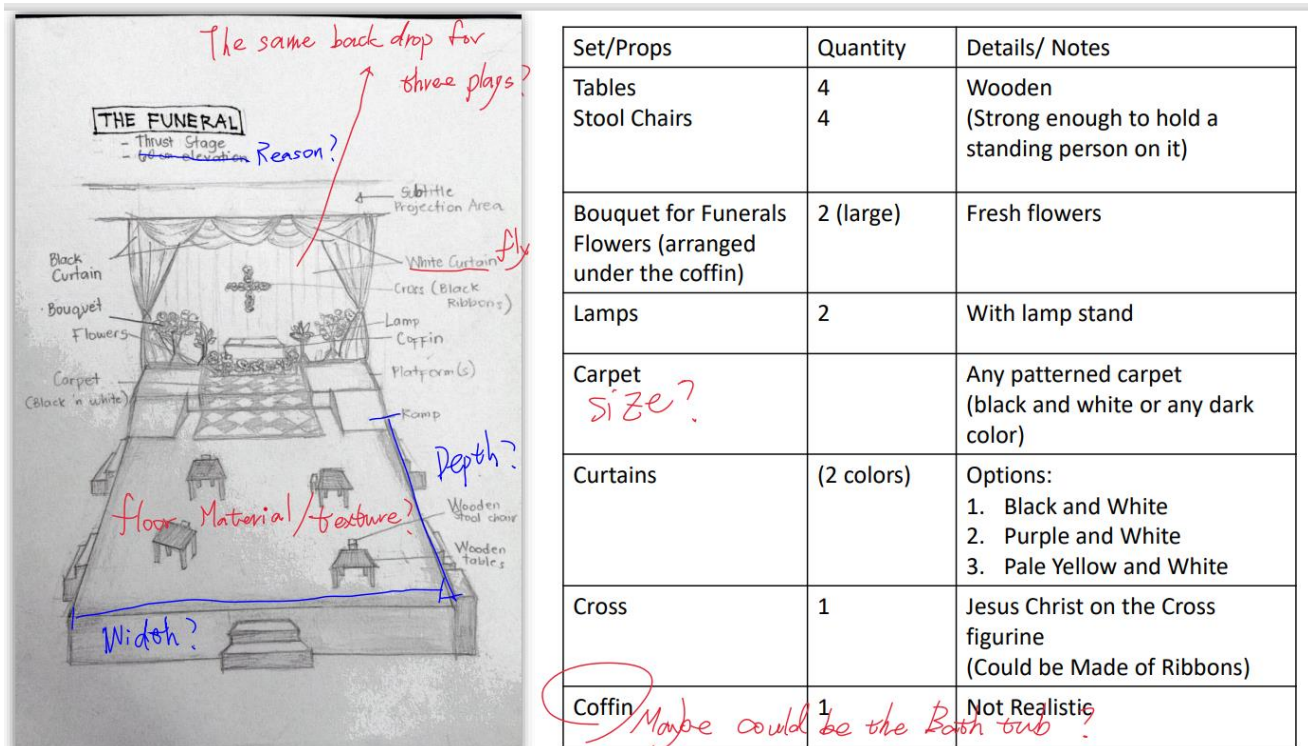


Figure 13. *The Funeral* set design rough sketch (for thrust staging) with notes from Chun-Wei Wang

After receiving feedback, I followed the same procedure as with *Niyyat* and *The Other Half* in creating the ground plan and sectioning. The fly list, fabric list, and props list are all included. Mr. Wang actually gave me some templates to aid in the organization of the props list.

Moreover, I have made some changes to the set design based on the aforementioned reasons and considerations.

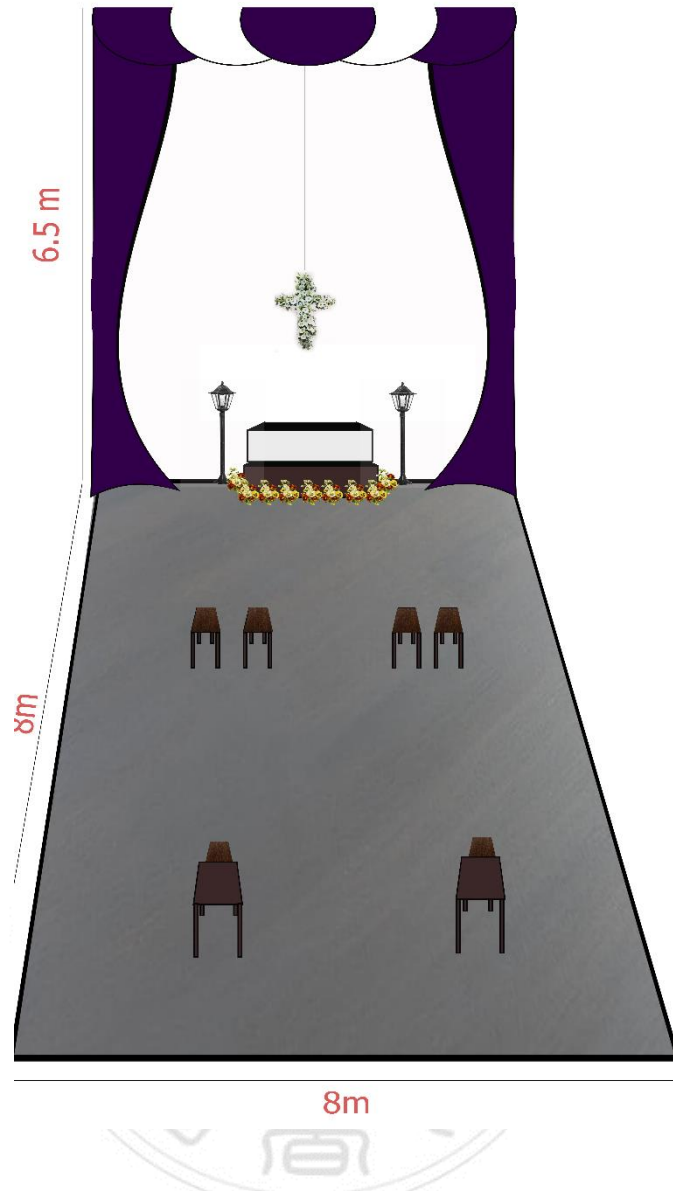


Figure 14. *The Funeral Updated Sketch*

In the next sketch that I submitted to Mr. Wang, I kept the funeral curtains, the cross, tables and chairs, the coffin, coffin table, the bouquets of flowers and the funeral lamps. I changed the color of the Funeral curtain to white and purple from black and white because I wanted it more to look like the colors of the usual funeral curtains in the Philippines. (For the changes regarding the other set pieces, I have included it in the next section of this chapter, the final renderings, and the set construction)

During the process of generating a ground plan and sectioning based from the previous sketch, I actually learned a lot by comparing my work to Mr. Wang's. It became evident to me that what I understood from his instruction was not what it was supposed to be by merely organizing the facts and labels. I've understood how vital AutoCAD is for producing set designs, and that if I want to stay in this area, I'll have to put in the time to master it.

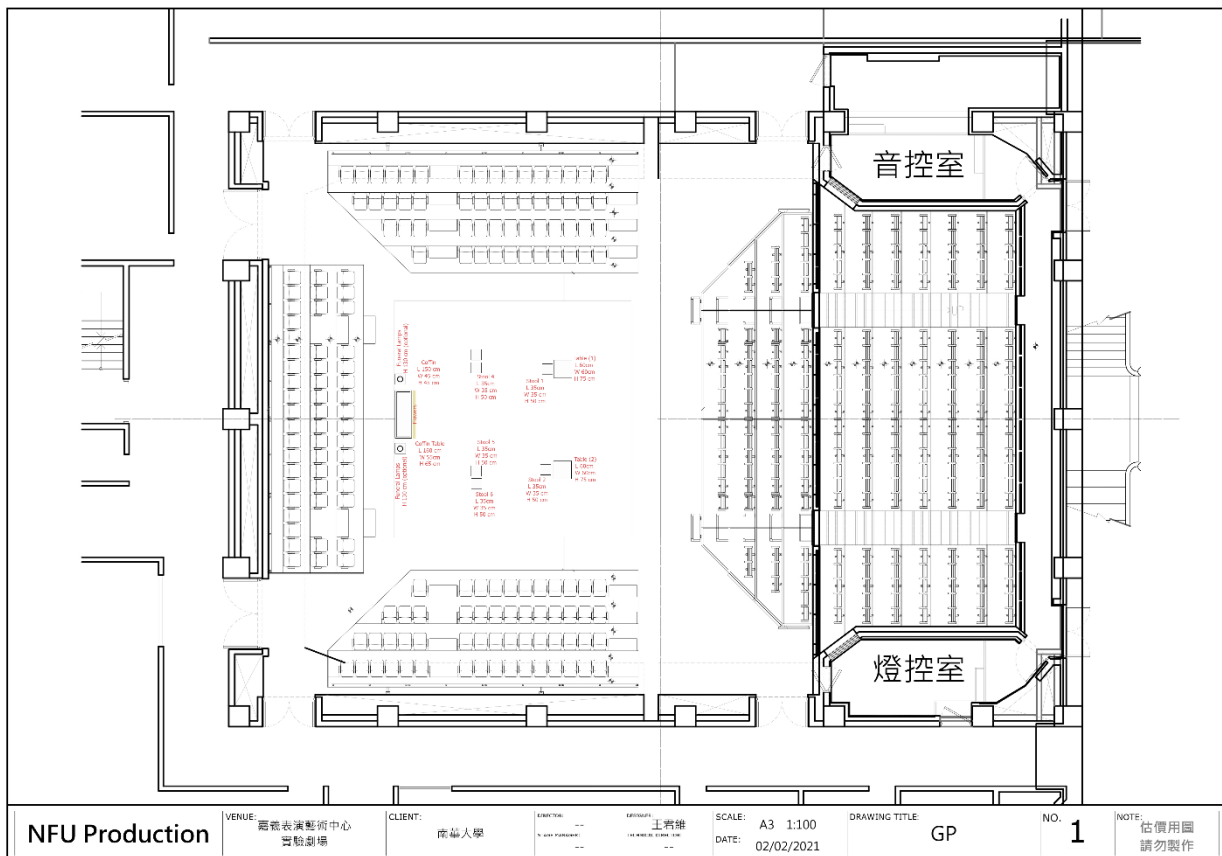


Figure 15. *The Funeral* ground plan

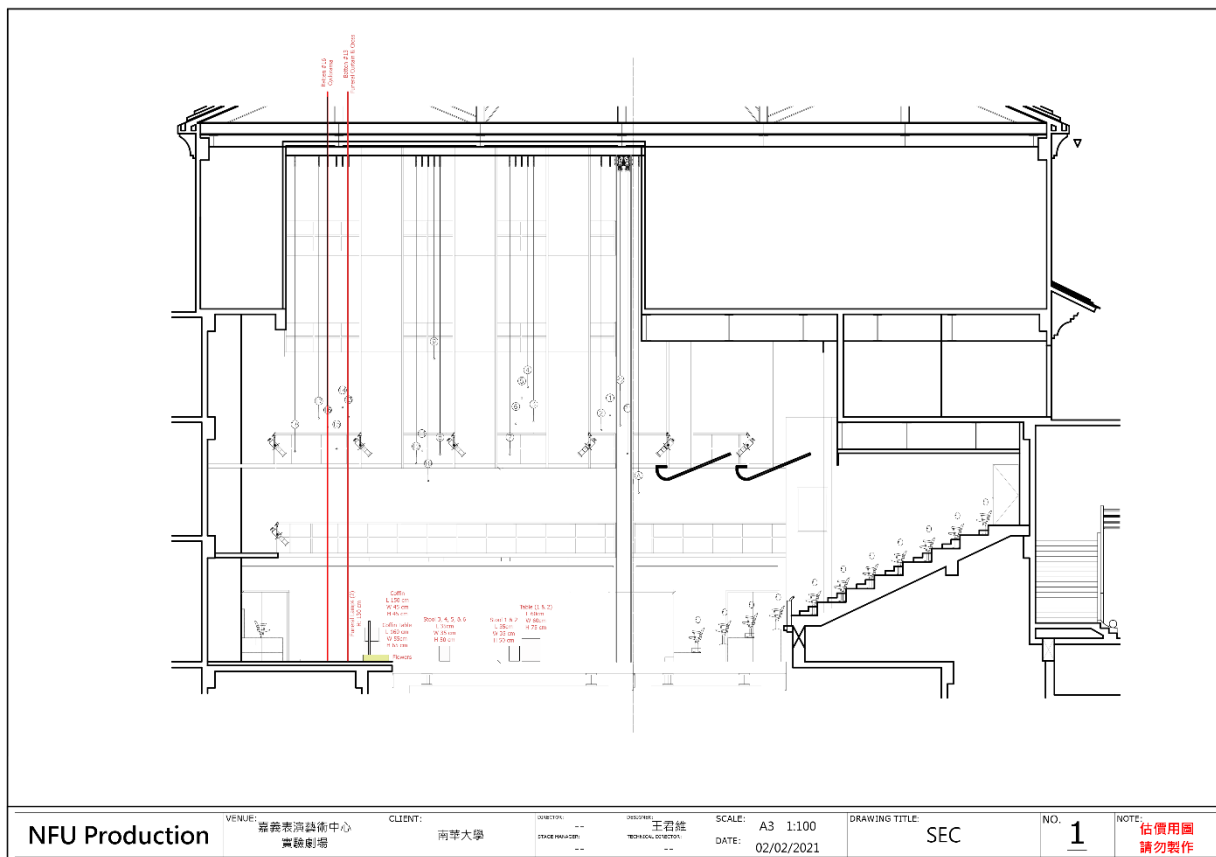


Figure 16. *The Funeral sectioning*

I actually learned a lot from comparing my work to Mr. Wang's work (ground plan and sectioning on the last rendering process) during the process of creating a ground plan and sectioning. By simply organizing the details and labels, it became clear to me that what I understood from his instruction was not what it was supposed to be. I've realized how important it is to know AutoCAD for creating set designs, and that if I want to stay in this field, I'll have to put in the effort to learn it.

2.2.3 THE OTHER HALF

Each of the three directors had their own preferences for how their plays should be staged. Heidi Emelo (director of *Niyyat*) had originally envisioned a traverse stage, and she had rehearsed the play in accordance with this staging concept (long before we even talked about the set design). Director Ralph Tampal, on the other hand, wanted the play *The Funeral* to be staged in a thrust format at first. In the case of the play *The Other Half*, the initial plan is to stage it in a proscenium. Director Ramilo was also very particular about what she wanted her stage to have. She sent me photos of exactly what she wanted to see on stage as well as the specific props and fabric she needed.



Figure 17. *The Other Half* image research on a dystopian environment
(The Suncoast Center for Fine Scale Modeling, accessed on 2021)



Figure 18. *The Other Half* image research on a dystopian environment

Finding reference images is especially helpful in this play because the setting is surreal, a dystopian world. This first image is what I believe would best capture the mood of the play, as well as having elements that the directors have requested, such as a bathtub, a tiled floor, and an old, unkempt room with a creepy ambiance.



Figure 19. *The Other Half* image research for stage reference

This image is the exact photo that Director Ramilo sent me. She wanted the stage to look like this image, a blue-tiled bare stage with a big mirror. To add details to the stage, she wanted all the props to be pre-set on stage.

To meet the director's requirements, I applied what she requested to the initial concept and then added my thoughts to it.

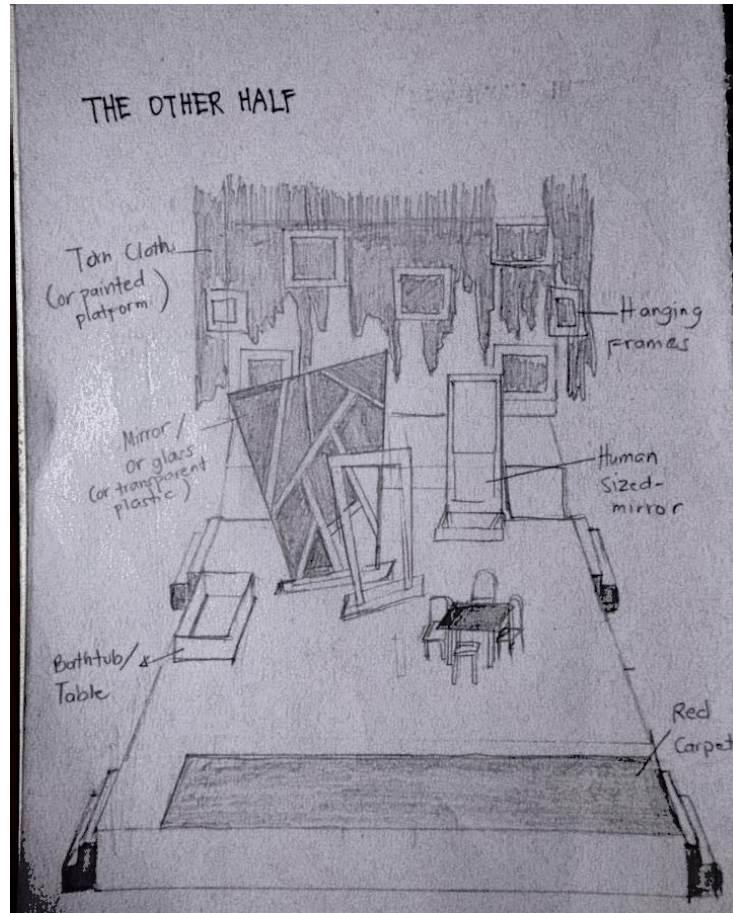


Figure 20. *The Other Half* initial sketch

In the sketch, I have noted that the stage will also be elevated like the two other plays. The same reason that I wanted the world on stage to be separated from the viewers. I wanted them to see the setting from an outer perspective. One of the key points I made was that this play is situated in a dystopian environment, and to convey that, I imagined tattered black cloth and little frames hanging from the stage's battens. I also included a human-sized mirror that the director requested, as well as another large panel composed of broken glasses or mirrors. This play will have all of the props indicated in the script analysis to be pre-set on stage.

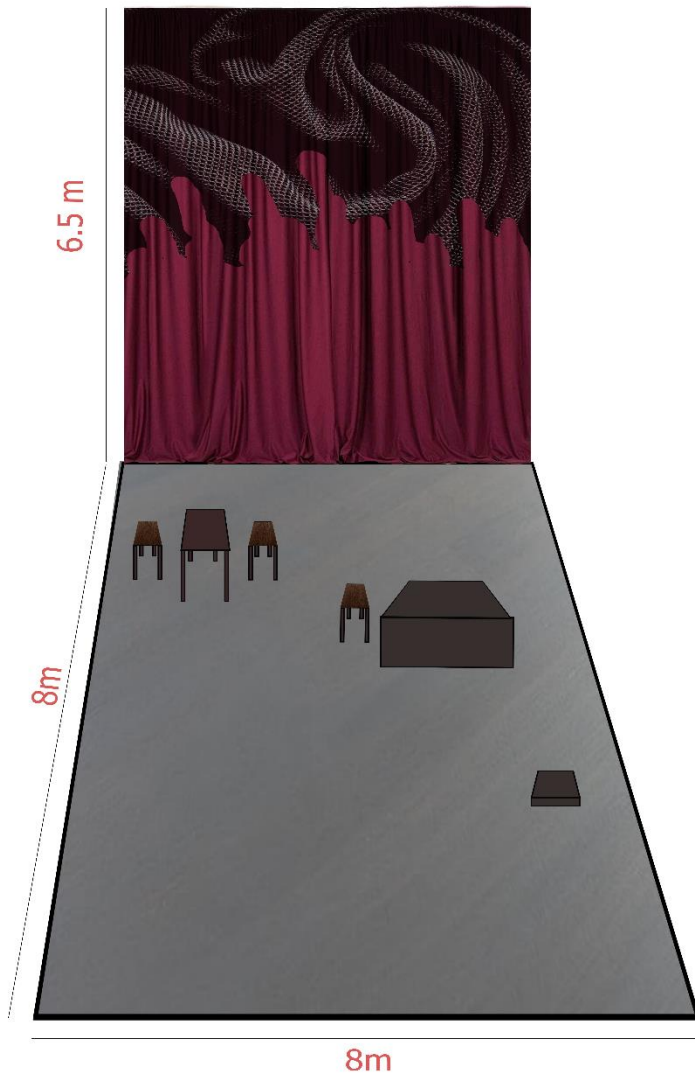


Figure 22. *The Other Half* rendered sketch

When I presented my last sketch to Mr. Wang, I only included the set components that were required for the version of the play at the time. The table and chairs (for the restaurant scene), a weighing scale, and a rectangular prism with an open-top will serve as a butcher's table, bathtub, surgical table, and bed. I didn't put the minor props in the sketch; instead, I included them on a list of props that I gave to Mr. Wang.

The backdrop was planned to be Maroon, but we subsequently discovered that it was not ideal to be projected with the projection design, so we switched it to Taupe color fabric (which will be further discussed in the set construction process) provided by Mr. Wang himself. The tattered black mesh fabric that framed the top of the backdrop remained as part of the set. The ground plan and the sectioning as shown below are based on this sketch.

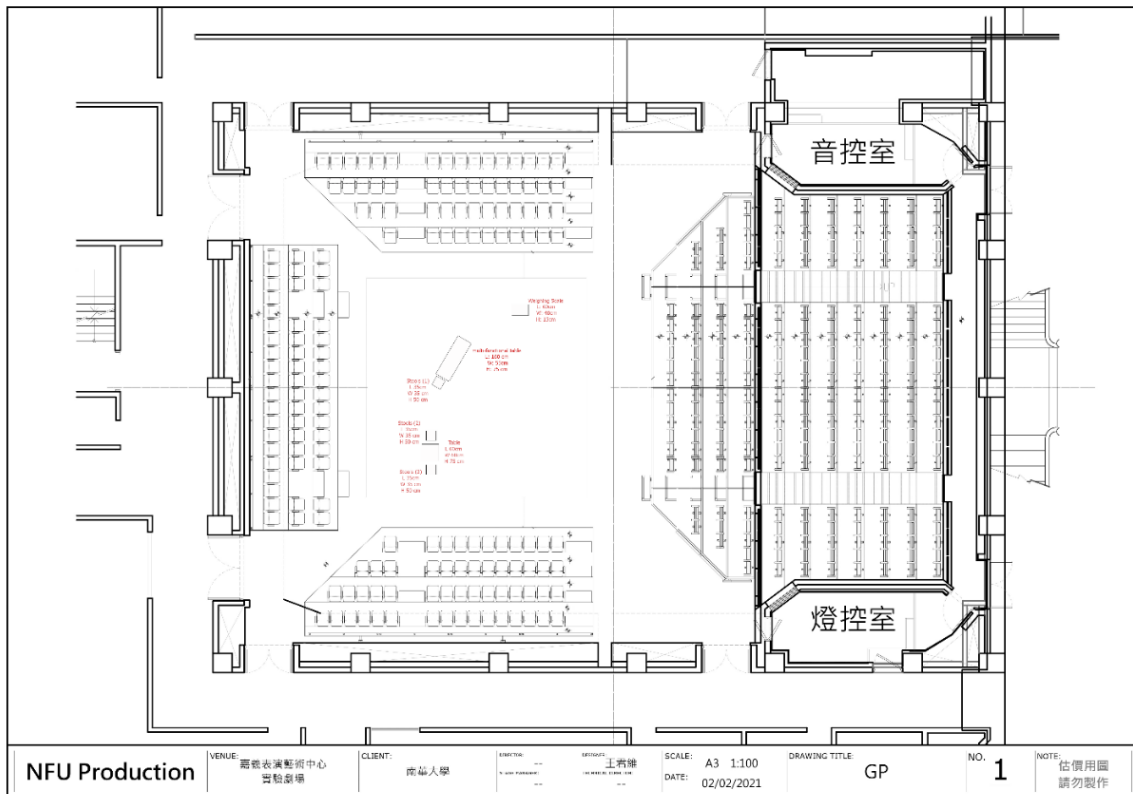


Figure 23. The Other Half Ground Plan

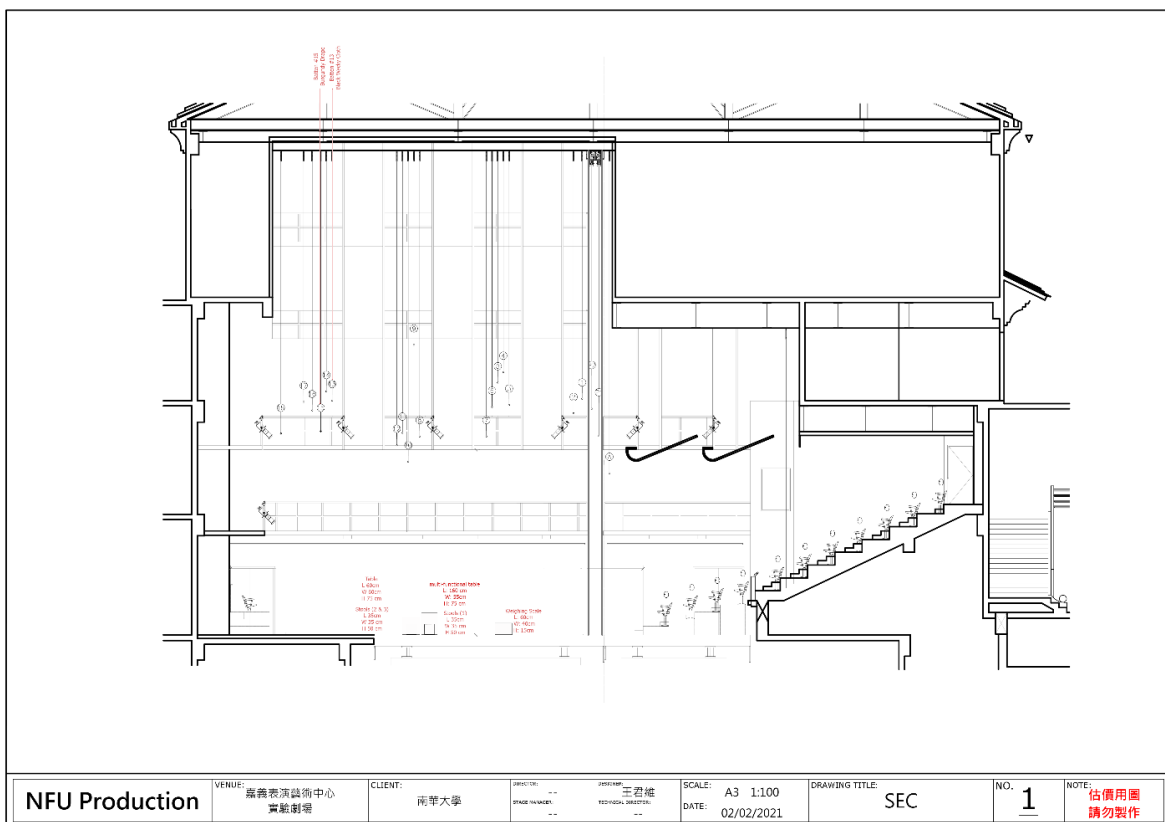


Figure 24. The Other Half Sectioning

2.3 Final Design Renderings and Design Execution

Following Mr. Wang's approval of the sketch, ground plan, and sectioning, I proceeded to create the final props, fabric, and fly list. Mr. Wang also worked on the final digital renderings of the set design for all three plays, including all the props to be constructed. Before he sent it to the construction company, we went over the sizes, textures, colors, and other key details for each prop and set-piece. The fundamental idea for all three plays is to use neutral colors because I believe they all fit the tone that these plays were trying to express. For me, neutral hues on stage created the impression of being on a blank canvas waiting to be painted. As a result, I'm implying that neutral colors would work well with other elements such as lighting, projection, clothing, and even the narrative. I proposed to the directors that the floor be a dark grey stained wood in color and texture since I believe it would be more relevant for all three plays. The Experimental Theater's floor is black, therefore I wanted a dark grey color to stand out against it, especially because there will be no more elevation.

2.3.1 NIYYAT

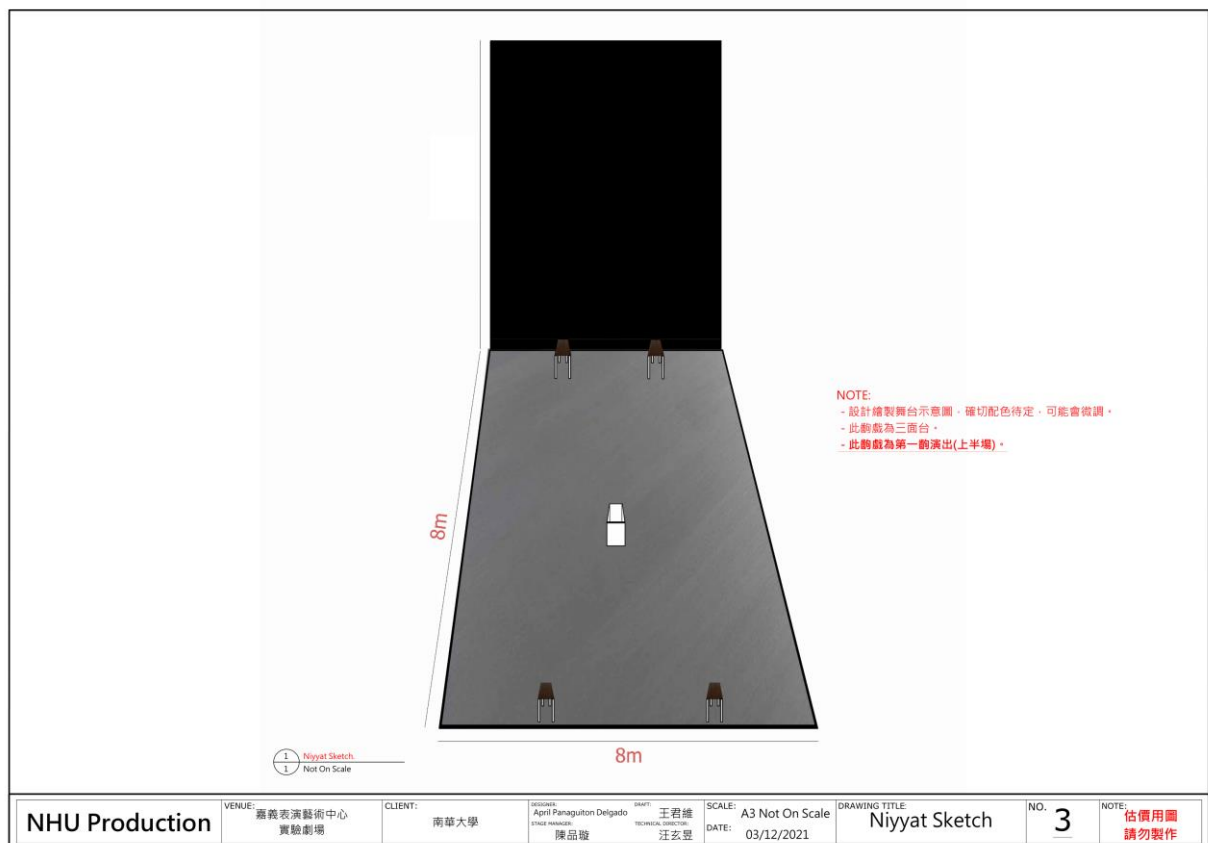


Figure 25. Niyyat Final Sketch

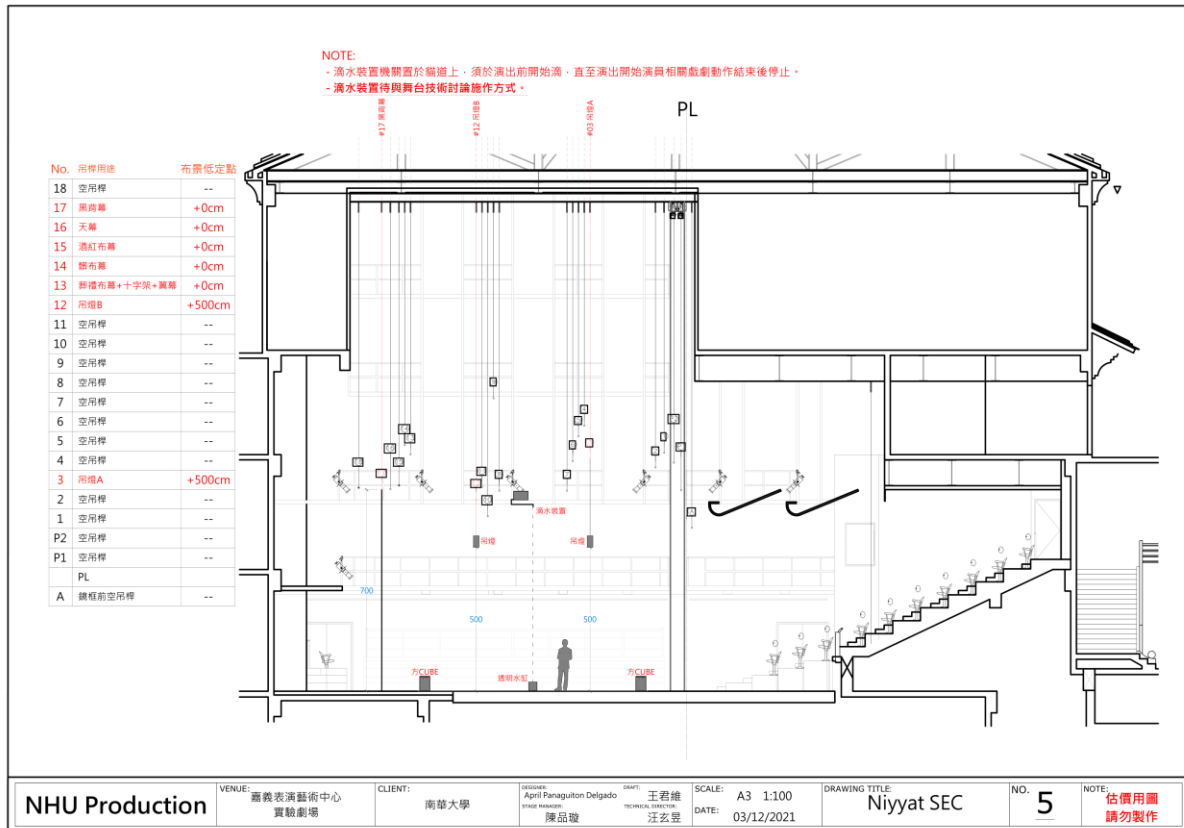


Figure 27. *Niyyat* final Sectioning

I was assigned to purchase small props for each play while Mr. Wang was the one making sure the props were being constructed and also buying some props that I didn't know where to access. Even after the design was finalized, there were still some alterations. Achieving a final stage design and result that complements the play's core message while staying under budget is a difficult task. The outcome was attained by maintaining a minimalistic stage and ensuring that all of the elements we set up on stage, as well as the props, were relevant and will be used. The majority of the set is made up of versatile tables and boxes; each set piece may change its function to create a new environment as the scene changes. Just as I had assumed that the obstacles and challenges would only arise during the design and building process and would pass after we completed the technical and dress rehearsals in the Theater, I was wrong. *Niyyat* had a problem with the subtitle projection the day before the

performance. The stage manager and Mr. Wang have devised a solution in which a cloth is hung and projected with subtitles instead of a backdrop. There was no backstage, and all the entrances, exits, and costume changes were visible to the audience. Despite these issues, the stage was completed, and no substantial adjustments to the set placement on stage were made, except for the traffic of props and scenes, as well as the traffic of the performers, which I also had to adjust to.

The following photos are taken during the cue to cue rehearsal, showing how the stage was arranged. Because there was no backdrop, the actors who are not yet included in the scene on stage are standing by in their assigned seats at the back part of the stage where their other costumes and props are also placed. The projection fabric is a portion of a cloth that was intended to be used for the MFA-Dance majors' dance show.



Figure 28. Photo taken during *Niyyat* “Cue to Cue” rehearsal



Figure 28. Photo taken during *Niyyat* “Cue to Cue” rehearsal

2.3.2 THE FUNERAL

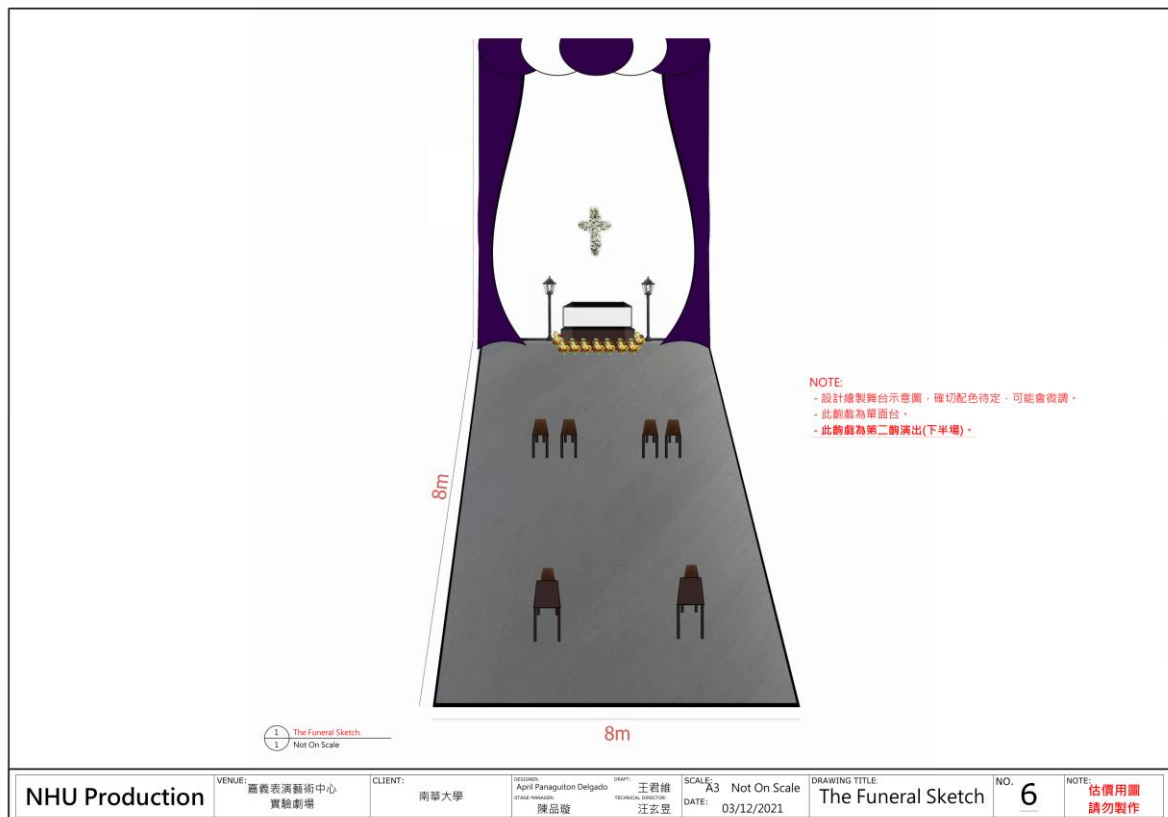
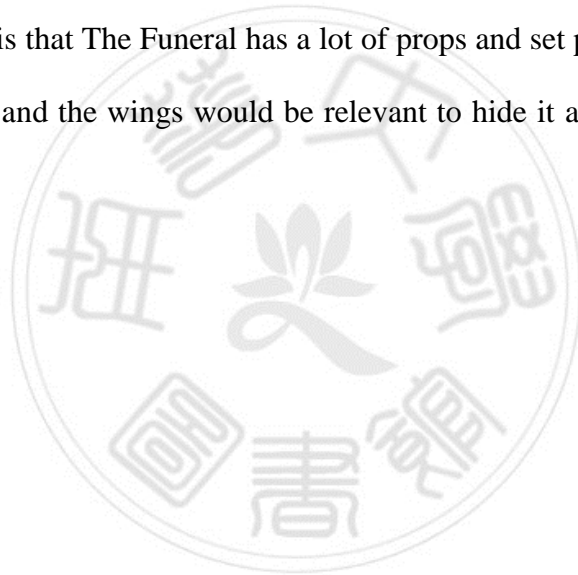


Figure 29. *The Funeral* Sketch (rendered)

In this last sketch for The Funeral (Figure 29), it was mentioned that the play will be staged in Proscenium Staging rather than thrust staging, as previously planned. One of the key reasons is the order in which the three plays are presented. The first play, Niyyat, is performed in the first half of the show, while The Funeral and The Other Half are performed in the second half. The Other Half is blocked in a proscenium staging, and the director has requested stage wings. Since the Funeral is also in the second half of the act, it will need to be altered for a smoother flow of the show. After Niyyat (a 45-minute show), there is a 10-minute break, which is the only time when the wings can be set up. The sole reason why it is better to compromise with the stage changes is that The Funeral has a lot of props and set pieces as well as costume changes for the actors, and the wings would be relevant to hide it and manage the entrances and exits.



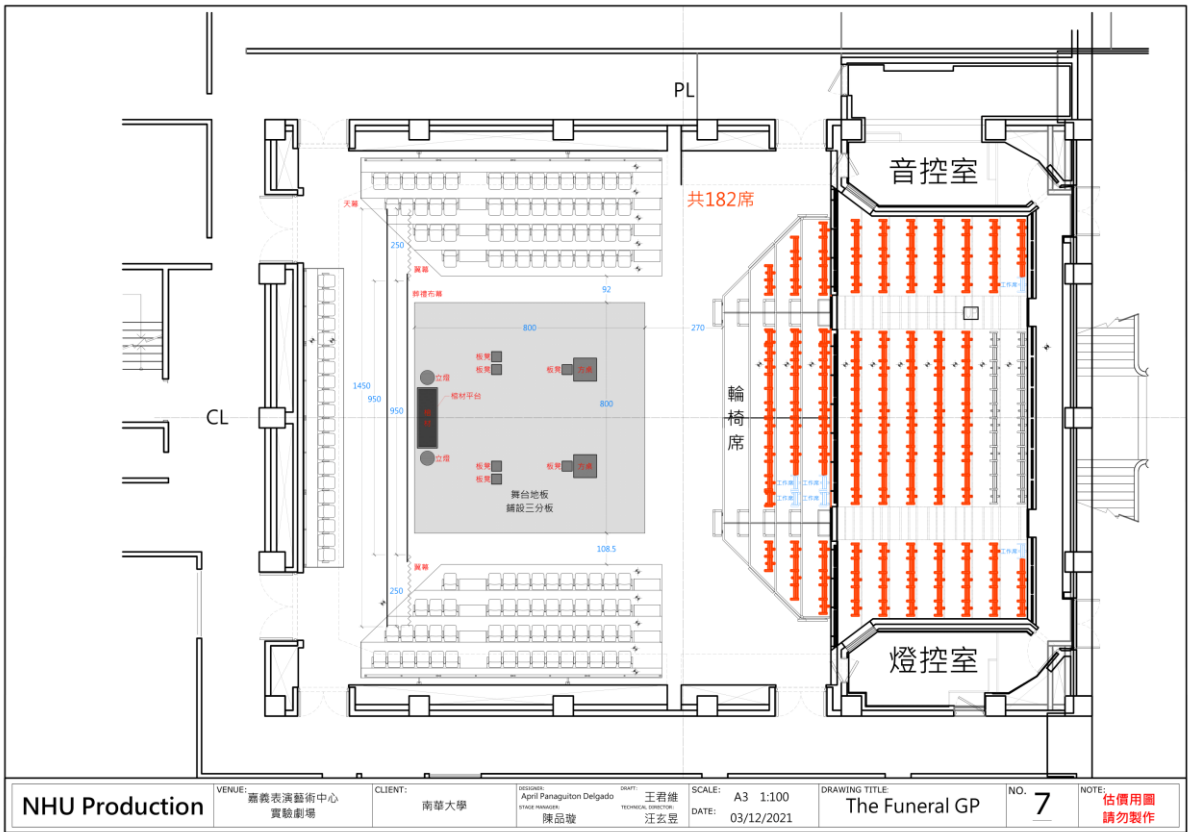


Figure 30. *The Funeral* final Ground Plan

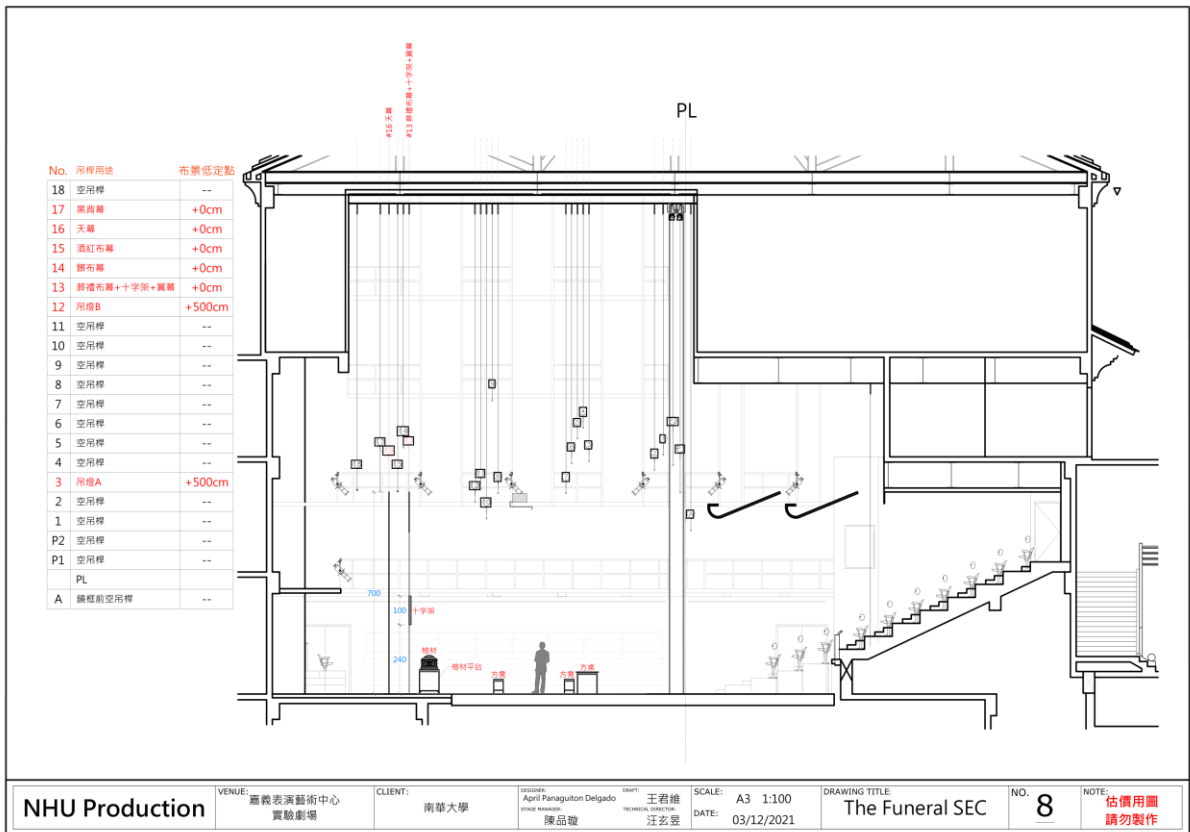


Figure 31. *The Funeral* final Sectioning



Figure 32. Photo taken during *The Funeral* “Cue to Cue” rehearsal



Figure 33. Photo taken during *The Funeral* “Cue to Cue” rehearsal

2.3.3 THE OTHER HALF

There were not many changes in the stage of *The Other Half* except for the maroon backdrop that is changed into taupe color. The tables and chairs are the same as what we used at the *Funeral*. In terms of props, we were able to obtain all of the necessary props. The majority of it was constructed by the director herself, some were purchased by me and then painted to match the play's setting and theme, and some were provided by the costume designer. Although there is a significant difference between the first design concepts and the outcome, we were able to agree to maintain the backdrop. Aside from staying under budget, one of the factors that influenced these revisions were "major" changes in the storyline from the time the initial idea was developed to the time the final design was completed. I can state that we all reach a compromise with one another and use what is easiest to obtain or produce to favor the budget and other problems in terms of completing the set and props.

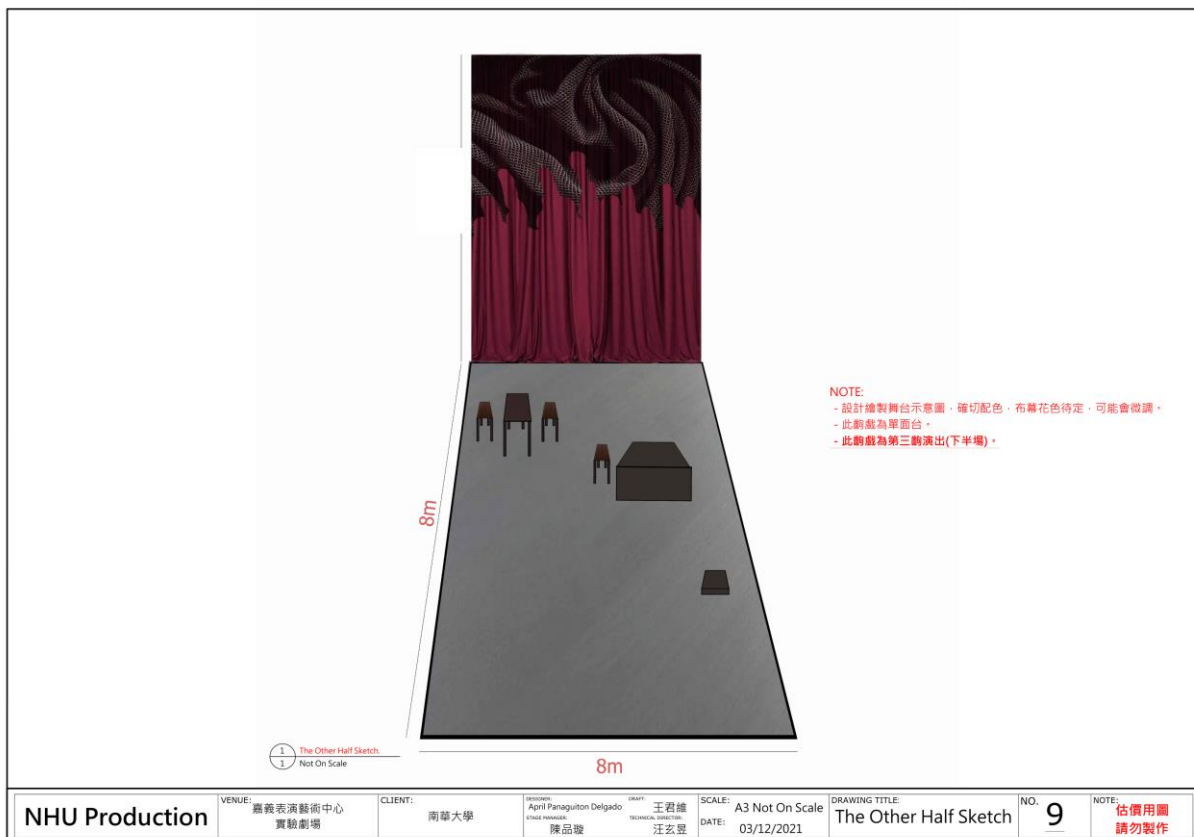


Figure 34. *The Other Half* final Sketch

The following photos are taken during the technical dress rehearsal at the Chiayi Performing Arts Center, Experimental Theater.



Figure 35. Photo taken during *The Other Half* technical dress rehearsal



Figure 36. Photo taken during *Niyyat* “Cue to Cue” rehearsal

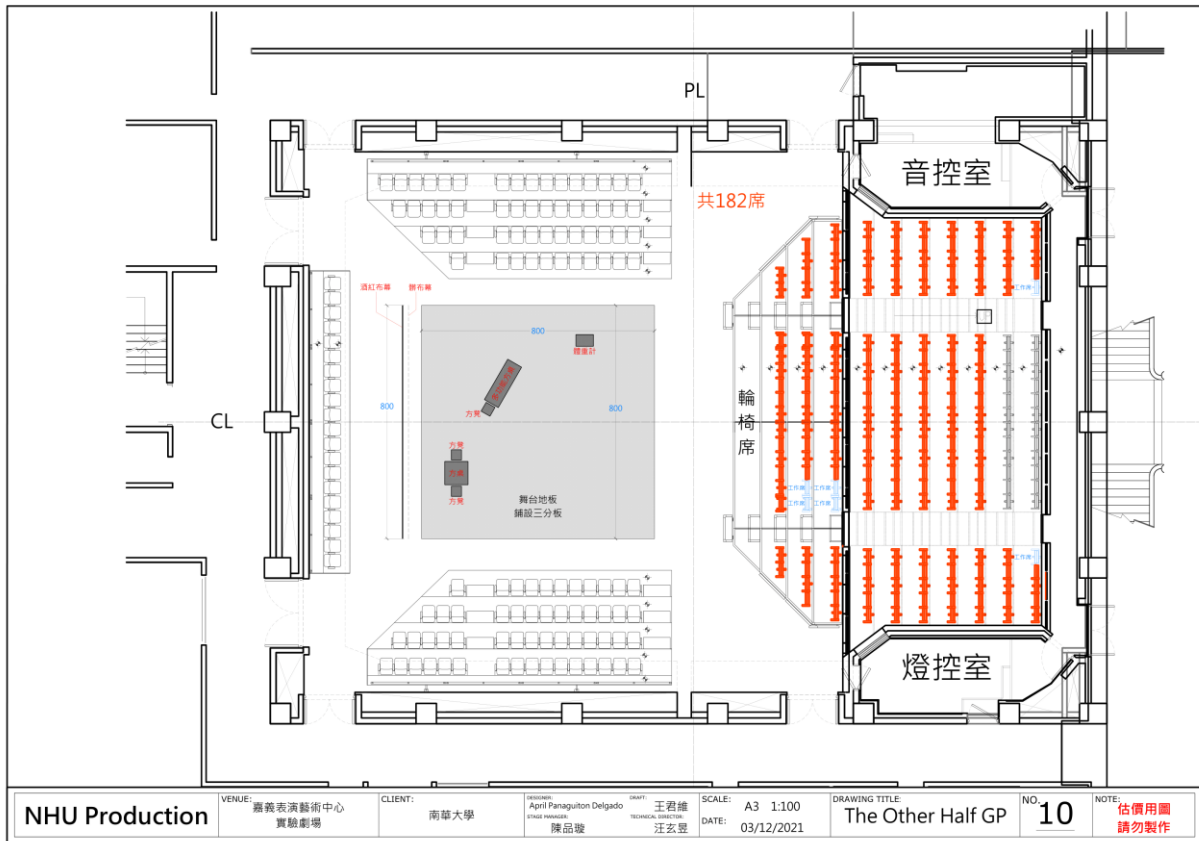


Figure 37. *The Other Half* final Ground Plan

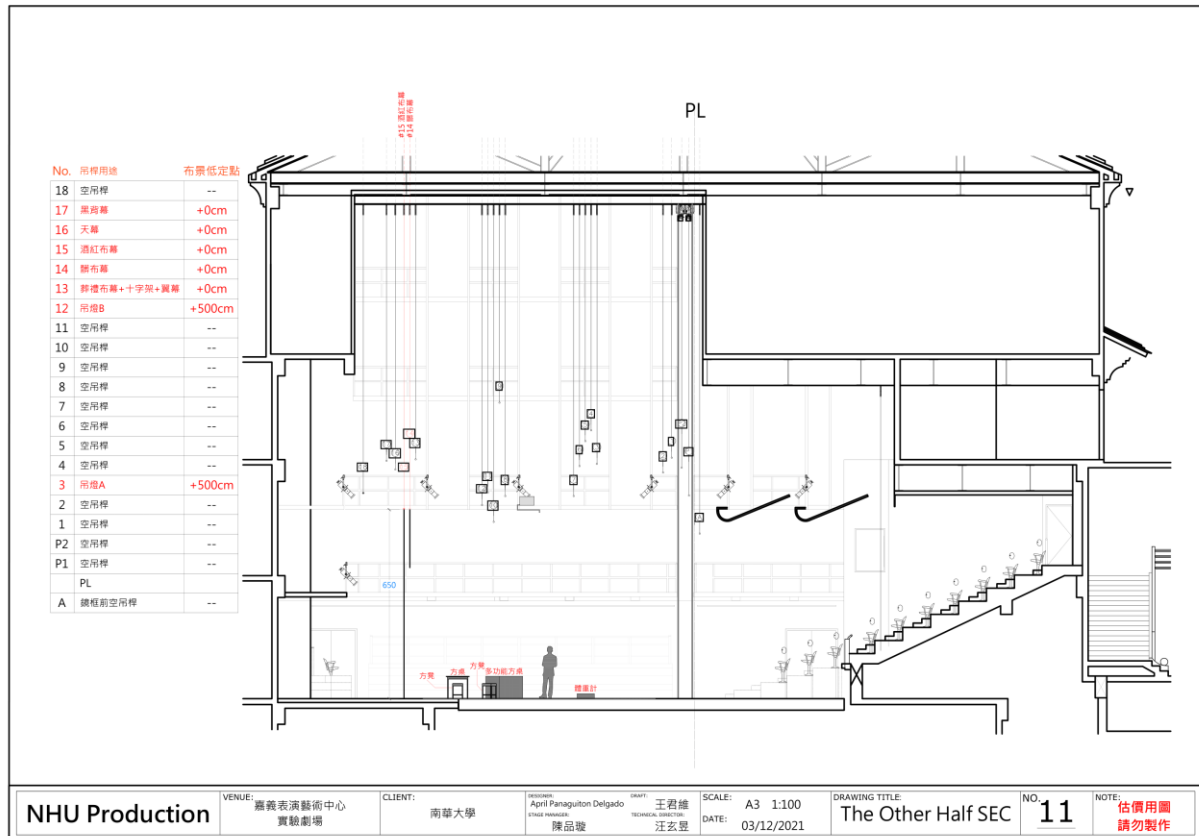


Figure 38. *The Other Half* final Sectioning

Reflection

Going through all of the technical stages of design has been a huge challenge, and it has constantly reminded me of what it means to be a set designer for this entire production. Through all these, I have come up with various artistic skills which are lacking in me and made it difficult for me to cope during the process. These things that I have to improve are the basic digital design rendering skills, the attention to design details, the knowledge of basic design and fine arts, and the initial skills in terms of communicating my design ideas. I believe and recommend that these skills be included in the program because it will greatly improve the process and outcomes of young set designers like myself. I want to develop my artistic skills, and if I had the opportunity to study more of those essential talents, I would take the time to do so.

One of the most common questions I get is which of the two types of set designers I am: the one who has the final say and initiative in her insights and design plans or the one who follows everything the director says. Well, in this particular production, I saw myself as both. In terms of my difficulties, there are two major situations that I would like to highlight. First, there were three different plays directed by three different directors, all of which were performed in the same production and venue. Second, I considered myself in two different roles in the production: outsider (set designer) and insider (actor) (performer). Every decision I had to make was based on this scenario. Each of the three plays is distinct, with its own set of differences. Each play has a unique theme and plot, and each director communicates with the designers in different ways. But, what I think I lacked as a designer was the ability to locate the thread or ground that would connect all three plays discreetly. Despite the fact that the play sequence is designed to complement the staging and the audience, and all three share some

props, I have not considered how these three could be better integrated in terms of design, especially given they are all in "one" show. I've learned a lot, and if I ever find myself in a similar scenario again, I believe I'll do better than I did this time, and I'll be better and well-prepared to deal with the obstacles in terms of both technical and artistic aspects.



CHAPTER 3: Conclusion

With the goal of improving myself in numerous ways, I opted to pursue an MFA in Theatre Set Design. I remember battling with what I was expected to achieve because I had inadequate experience and expertise in even the most basic aspects of set design. I get the idea that as a set designer, I'm constantly reliant on the director's vision for his or her stage. I assumed that they would provide the basic ideas and that all I would have to do would be to assist in the creation of a design from it, combining it with my own. Working closely with the director has been beneficial to me during this process, despite the fact that it has been difficult. My adviser gave me one piece of valuable advice: it must always be based on my initiative to bring out my ideas and submit them to the director, and I must learn how to defend my ideas to see whether they are appropriate for the play. Through this set design experience for the graduation production, I learned a lot in terms of crafts and collaboration with other people. For me, the overall experience of working on the set design process was incredible. I went through three design phases in my life, each of which taught me something new.

The first phase, which I regard to be the core of a set designer's work, is pre-production. It necessitates extensive investigation and effort. From learning all of the general knowledge to learning the tiniest pieces of information that are relevant to set design. For the second phase and the third phase, which is the main design process and the set execution, I had a lot of flaws in terms of the technical drawings and I was caught up with the instructions and tasks given by my guiding teacher. One valuable lesson this experience made me realize is the essence of communication and collaboration with the people that are involved in the production. I did hope that I was able to learn and experience set design, and I hope I will still have opportunities to learn it after my Master's journey. One thing I am grateful for is that I had teachers that guided me and made me realize a lot of things in terms of work ethics and technicalities.

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