

Surface as Story: Tracing the Journey
in Theatrical Design

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CHAPTER I

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My work is about touch, texture, color and movement. It is about the dance between observation and the inner eye...between human history and the natural world. My work lives somewhere on the continuum inhabited by many artists throughout history, in a juxtaposition of fashion design and fine art, and the theatrical process that connects the individual maker into a seamless collaborative performance.

Fine Art: Objects for Contemplation

Fine art is defined for me as pieces that exists without an actor inhabiting and interpreting them, viewed as objects for contemplation. They may be wearable or not, could be viewed on a wall or displayed on a human form, and may or may not have another life as a costume in a particular show.

I have been an image and object maker for all the years I can recollect, and studied painting, drawing and ceramics up through my undergraduate years. Most often I connected with landscape as a subject matter, as a means for expressing thoughts about places of importance to me and of connecting with the natural world. I taught myself sewing, silk painting, and other fiber arts along the way as an inexorable drive to experiment and learn pulled me down one rabbit hole after another. I took unconnected narratives and brought them together, and picked apart the threads of others. These literal and figurative threads also formed a re-connection to a long female tradition in my family and culture. For the first time, this artistic path led to a professional outlet for my art as a costume and set designer for a college theatre and dance program.

Costumes: Art Meets Performance

I see my costumes as moving sculptures that have their own evocative qualities even when presented without wearers, existing in a space between the functional and the fantastic. I want the costumes to communicate something even before the performer moves or speaks, creating a heightened awareness and anticipation, enhancing the natural force of the dancer or actor. The garment must express a particular feeling or personality, not being a shell to inhabit, but an extension of what they will become onstage.

If done well, costumes can help communicate the essential message of the play or performance, revealing motivations, situations, and personalities. Costumes are emotional and intimate, close to the actor's skin, sometimes becoming their skin. Using the tools of texture, color, shape, and surface, I seek to transform ordinary reality into the supernatural that is theatre.

CHAPTER II

IN SPACE AND TIME

“As we walk or drive through any landscape, paying attention to its details and contours accentuated by light and shadow, we can fantasize (or hypothesize) about all the fences, lumps, bumps, furrows, and tracks that cross it. They may be ancient traces or very recent ones, agricultural, industrial, or natural, accidental or intentional. Ruins are rapidly created in this society of planned obsolescence. Nature’s reclamation of human neglect can be equally fast.” - Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multi-centered Society*, p.125

I have long been interested in landscape, and what can be learned by paying attention to the details, particularly where there are signs of human interaction. In my normal routine, I rarely see a view that has not been affected by generations of humans, and in this age of climate change, even the remotest places are now subject to that change. In prior years, I was primarily interested in literal interpretations of what I found inspiring in the landscape, as in this etching from Scotland:



Fig.1: *Through the ruin*, Etching, 2005

Recently, my creations have become more about my imaginings concerning the landscape. There has been a shift of focus, from a particular place and time experienced, to an almost dream-like exploration of memory and imagination around ideas of place, including going beneath the earth. Aspects of landscape that have always interested me, layers, portals, repetition, light shifts, and the effects of forces of change, have become connected with new ideas about time and space, and have become metaphorical catalysts in my art. Reading Doreen Massey's *For Space* (2005) influenced a change in my work by opening up new ways of thinking about space, time, and both individual and collective stories. Massey, a social scientist and geographer, argues for a revitalization of our understanding of space, and its relationship with social and political realms. What I connected with was her descriptions of how we perceive movement in space -- that space is not ever frozen or neutral, but changing with time, whether or not we are there to perceive it. After reading her narratives about travelling through England, I no longer see a static landscape, or see horizontal space as a surface only. Space, as Massey writes, is a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" and places are collections of these stories, or trajectories. (Massey 130) We are constantly moving through this web of trajectories and reinserting ourselves into the ones with which we relate. I recognize my desire to travel as a desire to be actively seeking out new connections in this web. My desire to record what I see visually is an act of grounding myself, situating myself in space and in memory...and "owning" a piece of the complexity. In my journey through graduate work, I have become more alive to the resonance of the multitude of histories all around us, and the myth and emotion that are embedded in the realities we think we are seeing.

During my first semester, these thoughts about mapping the myths and emotions and taking them underground resulted in a series of works about fracking and ignorance of

science. Almost subconsciously I began to use materials familiar to me...recycled fabrics...to represent geological layers, unearthed.



Fig.2: *Ignorance is no defense*, mixed media, 2012

In this series, I used imagery from 19th century scientific books, altering it in humorous ways to represent the absurdity of the anti-science forces in our society. Works on paper, both drawn and printed were floated on top of “drilled pipes” and the dimensional

fabric layers. This treatment of the landscape represented a major change in my focus, as well as my medium, since I had rarely combined the materials from the two aspects of my creative life. Art and theatre still seemed largely separate. My work became less about documentation and more about translation of ideas of time, memory, and forces that shape our experience.



Fig.3: *Unearthed: a family history*, fabric and water media on paper, 2012

I also found that working with fabric on paper gave me the ability to think about domestic themes and lived experience. These works seek to evoke landscape from childhood, built on layers of color and materials that represent my ancestry. With these works, I think about connection to place, and how we hold onto those connections even as we

experience common aspects of contemporary life such as uprooting or emigration. In the case of this particular work, the maternal line is explored, and what is left when we have no tangible connections to a place, but it still looms large in collective memory. Layers of fabrics and images representing the generations of my family buried in the earth. My great-grandmother wrote and published books that were deeply rooted in a particular region of Maine, and future generations were increasingly less rooted to that region, though still emotionally connected to it, and to “the writer” of whom we all have unique perceptions. The above ground layer is in fabrics from my childhood and adult years, and represents an idealized dreamscape of the place I live thousands of miles from. This piece was an exploration of the ways that stories can build a sense of collective memory that is made more and more internal and mythological by the passing of earlier generations. Here again, this image represents a simultaneity of stories-so-far, and an alternative schema of mapping to the family tree.

“The presentness of the horizontality of space is a product of a multitude of histories whose resonances are still there, if we would but see them, and which sometimes catch us with full force unawares.” –Doreen Massey, *For Space* (p.117-118)

CHAPTER III

LAYERS OF MEANING

“If you really were to take a slice through time it would be full of holes, of disconnections, of tentative half-formed first encounters. ‘Everything is connected to everything else’ can be a salutary political reminder that whatever we do has wider implications than perhaps we commonly recognize.”
 - Doreen Massey, *For Space* (p. 107)

Mapping as Representation

I create wearable pieces that have personal and cultural meaning and history woven into them, but are also meant to be openly interpreted by the viewer and wearer. They are also about mapping, in the sense that the Aztecs knew it. Their codices were visual records of happenings, stitched together by footprints or dotted lines, as seen in this facsimile of the Codex Boturini, representing their migration from Aztlan to the Valley of Mexico. (Getty Research Institute)

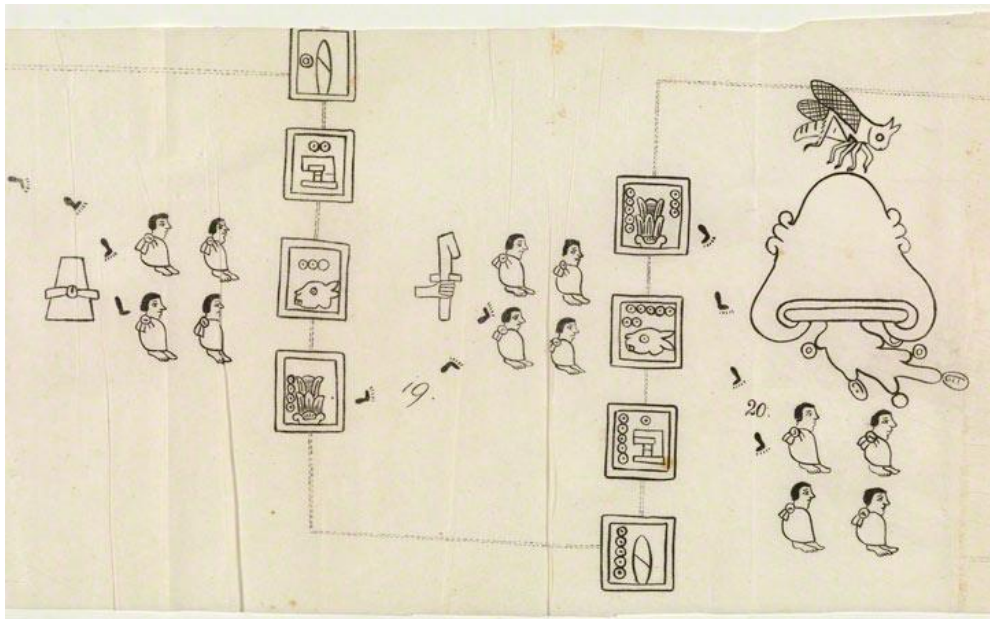


Fig.4: Facsimile of the Codex Boturini (detail), Louis Samyn after Agostino Aglio, 1839.

The Aztecs focused on things in the process of becoming something else. The viewer is meant to decipher places and events simultaneously, or as Massey calls them, “place moments.” (Massey, 108) I feel that this construct is helpful in understanding my process, because as I work, I am totally focused on that process of becoming something else, connecting to the way an actor becomes someone else when they inhabit my costumes. A map is representation. It is not space, or geography itself. (Massey 106) It is by its nature selective, and often political , as when Congressional re-districting occurs.

Mapping as Product

Mapping of multiple trajectories can produce a palimpsest. Palimpsest, from the Greek, *palimpsestos*, scraped clean/rubbed smooth again, refers to the re-using of vellum in ancient times. These documents often have traces of the older texts remaining. The term also refers to something that has changed over time and shows evidence of that change. The rusting process, which I often use in my work, is a palimpsest. It represents something that was once present, and that left a pattern in the process of change. The interpreter viewing the evidence reconstructs the story, but it is necessarily an interpretation, not a factual retelling.

The landscape around us is a palimpsest. London, for example, is a palimpsest for centuries of human living, building and design. You can stand on one street corner and see a medieval spire, a roman-planned road, an alley where Shakespeare could have walked, 19th century buildings, and a contemporary tower of glass and steel emerging in the background. As with my views of landscape, I find it interesting to contemplate the networks and layers beneath the surface, the myriad individual lives taking place behind the windows, and thoughts processing through the minds of the eclectic crowds passing by. What was going on at that corner 30 years earlier...or 300 years earlier?

Quite often, my work becomes *geography*, as I study places and the relationships between people and their environments. Art historian Kathryn Brown uses the term *geography* to describe a pictorial tradition, dating back to the Middle Ages, that attempts to provide an experience of affect or feeling through mapping... a feeling of being in a space, but one that rejects the possibility of a single, authoritative, static viewpoint. I am interested in work that exists in that world of affect, where the work itself is a multi-layered palimpsest of the processes that created it, giving visual clues to the “story” it is based on.

Recycling of consumer goods is one of the ways that this mapping shows up tangibly in my work. I am interested in the very process or act of re-use and its many historical implications. While I am drawn to the creativity and environmental aspects of the explosion of the eco-fashion culture, I appreciate more the many layers of meaning involved in the use of recycled clothing. Clothing is very “personal” to an individual. Anyone who has ever had to take care of the personal effects of a deceased loved one, or help someone through that process knows this. It carries associations through pattern, color, style, and even scent. And yet discarded clothing can also be made impersonal. Row upon row of garments hang in thrift shops, detached from their first, and maybe subsequent trajectories, awaiting a new life, or the remainder pile. Use of found objects and recycled materials is a very elemental way to speak to sustainability of practice and relationship to the environment, while representing a variety of ideas including heritage, humanity, home, industry, waste, and the play and fun of creative reuse.

I began a project in 2014 of incorporating these ideas into small, wearable works in fibers. These mixed-media pieces incorporated a variety of fiber arts techniques in addition to recycled assemblage, including silk painting, weaving, dyeing, surface printing and felting.



Fig.5: Details of *Homeland*, New and recycled fibers, newspaper, painted silk, findings, 2014

This piece, titled *Homeland*, incorporates these notions of mapping, altered landscape, the palimpsest, and “place moments”. Newspaper has been torn, painted over, rearranged, sealed into fabric, sewn back together, and partially obscured. New and recycled fibers, separated in origin by decades, have been mapped together. The viewer simultaneously views close up detail with a birds-eye view of cultivated farm fields. I often

incorporate these different perspectives in my work to provide different ways of presenting an experience or “truth”.



Fig.6: *Wetland*, Mixed fibers, felted wool, painted silk, findings, 2014

This mantle, *Wetland*, explores the idea of the wetland and its relationship to cultivated land. The materials are meant to walk a line between what is familiar and domestic (a cable sweater), and what maybe unfamiliar or wild (free-painted silk). Just as these pieces have been formed by human hands, we are constantly altering and shaping geography and space so that it is difficult to find anything truly untouched by our kind. Truly, space is always under construction, in the process of being made. I keep my process open and improvisational in order to allow for the unexpected result.

Layers of Meaning in Costume Design



Fig.7: *A sprite*, Costume: rusted silk, new and recycled fibers. 2014

The work that I was doing in textile arts naturally began to work its way into costume design. This piece, for *Hush: An Interview with America*, was for a character named “A sprite.” The sprite is a figment of the active imagination of Maggie, a blind girl who is the protagonist. Maggie lives alone with her father. She interacts with three imaginary characters, including a lion and a lamb. My concept for all three costumes was that they would have very tactile qualities, and be made of domestically available materials, like

sweaters, crocheted shade pulls, spools and buttons. Parts of the costumes made sound as the actors moved. Being blind, Maggie would map her world by the senses that were heightened for her, like touch and hearing. I imagined that she would also have memories of her mother based on these senses, and the characters did represent comfort to her. For sighted audience members, I also wanted them to be visually rich. The sprite's costume involved rusting on silk that evoked bark wrapped around her in a tree like form. There are spools that dangled and made soft noises as she danced. A woven collar, like a traditional rag rug, incorporated clothing from Maggie's family.



Fig.8: *Lion and Lamb*, Costumes: new and recycled fibers, rusted silk, 2014

The lion and lamb are both made primarily of recycled clothing and fibers, inspired by a series of designs by Japanese clothing designer Issey Miyake, in which he used a variety of textures pieced together in almost an awkward way in relation to the body, but one that called forth notions of movement. These costumes for *Hush* had the desired effect of making people want to reach out and touch them. For the actors, they were performance-enhancing because they were an extension of their character development work.

Identity and Space Around the Body



Fig. 9: *Costume for West African Dance*, dyed cotton, new and recycled fibers, 2015

I also explore costume as identity in my work. Recycled and surface-designed fibers were melded together in a series of dance costumes for a multi-cultural African dance group in a performance titled *Furaha (Happiness)*. A tied-on mesh technique developed for the lion head was very effective in creating the desired movement for this piece, which was also inspired by the exhibition of performance and costume artist Nick Cave's sound suits at the St. Louis Art Museum in 2014. In particular, the movement of the pieces were inspired by the video installation "Drive-by" in which jubilant figures seem to be in perpetual motion in

their raffia covered suits. For Cave, these “alternate skins” are like an armor, shielding the wearer from pre-judgement on the basis of race or gender. (Miller) The mixing of fabric types, patterns from several cultures and everything from painted silk to shower curtains, became a part of the statement this group was making by coming together from their variety of races and backgrounds to celebrate cultural traditions of some of the members.

Cave states that, “It takes time to establish a relationship with a piece....It’s about the shedding of the existing being. I’m interested in spirit and myth, and the space around the body.” (Miller) I find this relates closely to my costume art process that my work about the earth could be tangibly expressed through wrapping the environment around the body. The pieces take time to create, and my relationship with them, and the connections within them, and to other works build slowly as part of the process. I hope that an experience with wearing these pieces, or seeing them worn, will help connect the human spirit back to the natural world we depend on. The pieces evoke qualities and notions when they exist without a wearer that are brought to full fruition when encircling a person. I hope to engage the viewer in stopping to look at the visual and technical complexity of the works in order to take time to think about the complexity of nature and our place in it. By making an environment wearable, I am asking the question about what our relationship to the environment going to be?” The landscape or seascape, as in the examples shown here, is not literal, but delves into a mythical space, including the depths below the earth or ocean.



Fig.10: Views of ocean costume, Mixed Fibers, 2016





Fig.11: Views of fiber works in Wagner gallery by the author, 2016.

There is now a growing dialogue in my work between pieces that are wearable, and meant to be viewed on a wall. The pairing of the landscape dress and *Confluence*, a 2015 mixed media wall hanging, was a recent example. Both addressed the shaping of landscape by humanity, but invited the viewer to think of themselves in different perspectives in relationship to the earth, from without and within. As I have begun working on built environments in my set design, I see more of a connection between what is worn, and the surrounding environment, and that similar ideas can be explored simultaneously, in connection to the body, and in a more “objective” format.

CHAPTER IV
PROCESS-DRIVEN ART FOR THEATRE

Essentially, space is potential.”

– Bruce A. Bergner, *The Poetics of Stage Space* (p.9)

A theatrical project is multidimensional, continually under construction, with multiple trajectories of human interactions and artistic outputs that form layers and pathways that leave traces of themselves in space, time, memory. Space (in this dimensional and temporal theatrical/performance art meaning) is a contemporaneous plurality. To bring in mapping again, it is often the artistic byproduct of ideas explored, and processes followed. The idea of map as representation of stories is explored by Massey, who writes “the dominant form of mapping...does position the observer, themselves unobserved, outside and above the object of the gaze.” (p. 107) I am interested in the more complex views of mapping that she engages. Theatre collaboration is a blending of individuals’ practice and artistic processes. An actor and their art interacts with a designer and their art, forming new trajectories with every production, every engagement with the work, and even every moment... multiplied for each member of the group. The theatre professionals I work with regularly are process-oriented, which means they take time to establish characters, moods, emotions through exercises not necessarily related to the script or specific stage directions. Ideally that work is retained as an underlying basis for the specific textual work that follows. To outsiders this initial work often looks like “playing.” My best work for theatre starts from a similar process of generally establishing mood, emotion, themes to bring out, simultaneously with playing with materials and physically working with them in an improvisational way.

Viewers of our work are constructing their own experience and meaning as they witness the revealing of this complex network of sights, sounds, and interactions. Theatre art is always an unfinished process, as these multiple trajectories come together to coexist in space for a time. The show opens, the telling of the story is shaped by the actors' own movements through the space, and through the stories of the characters they portray. When the curtain falls, the experience is still not static, as it continues to play out in the way it has shaped the memories and thoughts of the audience.

I think of my set design as creating a space where the most open unfolding of these trajectories can occur, and my costume design as an extension of the multiplicity of stories told visually. It is a common practice for theatrical designers to start with finding a central metaphor or image to represent the core idea of a production. Whenever possible I like to use methods of production that link with and bring out this metaphor.

For a recent production of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, the metaphor was ice melting into spring. There were two distinct locations within the show -- one that was metaphorically cold, and one that Shakespeare called "Bohemia," with all the implied warmth and color that the present day "bohemian" calls up. I decided that the costumes and the dominant set materials would be produced through ice-dyeing. The process of this creation directly correlated to the central metaphor. It was not necessarily important how obvious this was to the audience, but the actors were aware of it, and the audience was informed through designer's notes. In this project, the costumes became a palimpsest of a multi-dimensional space-time process, which is my favorite way to work.

Ice Dying Process

Fabric is folded, bound, and treated, and then powdered dye is placed on top of ice that is covering the treated fabric. The process of melting works the dye into the fabric slowly, somewhat unpredictably, and with a watery, or “melting” effect. The result of this process is a form of mapping the path that these physical processes take. Through the choices I made as an artist, the colors and unique results reflected and enhanced the multiplicity of individual stories and trajectories that played out in each performance. The color choices also physically mapped for the audience the two locations in the play, and the attendant atmospheres of those locations. In a few cases, costume changes were also indicators of individual personal and psychological journeys of the characters. For example, the king went through tragedies caused by years of icy darkness in his psyche, reflected by the somber blue tones in his costume and those of his courtiers. At the end of his journey through grief and repentance, he wears lightened tones.



Fig.12: Ice dying process and end result, 2014.



Fig.13: Costume images for *The Winter's Tale*, Principia College, 2014

Set Design: Creating Space

My work in set design developed half-way through the MFA program at SIUE, and two of the courses I took outside my major were about lighting design and set design. I began to realize that this work was a natural expansion of my ability to create a seamless environment for stories to unfold in. The *Winter's Tale* project was my first opportunity to work with a comprehensive set and costume design process. I enjoyed being able to connect the materials and color schemes between set and costumes, as enhanced by the lighting designer.

The set design for *The Winter's Tale* allowed for multiple locations and storylines to be played out in one unit set. Fabric was the dominant visual element, and it was created through a modified Japanese folding and binding, or *shibori*, process using the same type of dye as was used in the costumes, to achieve a unified look. Three columns of fabric were raised and lowered, and used as “solid” columns or spread apart to create tents and draperies, as well as sails on a ship. There were lanterns that could be raised and lowered or removed. These simple elements indicated locations as diverse as a king’s palace, a country town festival, and a shrine enclosing a “living statue.” With a set that transforms but fundamentally stays the same, we experience new spaces, but the memory of the old spaces is still there, like the palimpsest, scraped clean, but with traces of memory building up a rich theatrical journey. The ideas about mapping that I had been exploring were played out in a project that required the story to be mapped for the audience through multiple visual cues and prior memory connections. On a practically bare stage we know we were on a stormy ocean when the columns act like sails, and we know we are in a safe and warm part of the world when the lighting and the costume colors change to give us those references. The dais in the town square still reminds us of what has transpired on that same dais in the cold palace, so

that the threat of the earlier, darker times is a visual as well as a textual presence. The set fabrics and costumes all bear traces of a process of melting, which is a powerful and sometimes unstoppable force of nature. All of these actions and forces play out on stage toward the inevitable but miraculous conclusion of a queen “melting” from marble into life.



Fig.14: Set Design images for *The Winter's Tale*, Principia College, 2014

CHAPTER V IN THE THEATER

My Thesis exhibition took place in two parts: a theatrical production, and an exhibition of works in the SIUE Gallery that presented costumes from the production as objects of contemplation. The theatrical production was a culmination of the artistic costuming and creative research I have been engaged in for the past five years. I wanted to find a theatrical work in which I could continue to explore a humanist theme, emphasizing the agency and value of humans individually and collectively, while continuing my explorations of mapping, recycling, and the environment. I teamed up with a director, Trish Brown, with whom I have worked several times in three different theatre organizations, to produce *Godspell* at Principia College in Elsah, Illinois.

As we travel through life, we alter space. We participate in its continuing production. We make and break links all the time, to others, within ourselves. When we arrive in a new space, it is already made of an interwoven collection of stories. We link up, weave threads into our own feeling of what it means to be here, now. We constantly see others, driving past in cars, rioting in a news clip, and they are easy to caricature, because for us they are in a timeless instant. We have to make a constant choice if we want to imagine and see them as real people with on-going stories. Theatre is one way that we can engage with others' trajectories, and change our perspective by opening ourselves to others' stories.

With *Godspell*, I was interested in the environment as one that is in a process of deconstruction, and the characters living contemporary lives of displacement, even as they share the common human drive for creation and belonging. The show has been produced in many different styles and settings over the years, from a circus troupe to homeless people

under a train trestle. The characters are meant to represent disciples as the story of Jesus unfolds in a modern setting. A new version came out in 2012 that played up social commentary by referencing real people and contemporary issues like the “Occupy” movement. For example, Donald Trump is the rich man in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. Our version accepts the political overtones of the script, and sets the scene in 2022 in a fictitious slum behind a wall that has been built to keep “others” out of the world that xenophobia has created. The people who Jesus comes to, as with the historical story, are the outcasts. We have a challenge in presenting this because our cast is Caucasian, so we can’t speak to race, but we speak to “otherness” by addressing how poor people, and those of other religions, abilities, and sexual orientation would be treated by the alt-right. As in many areas of the world, these people are living with nothing, and making what they can...and sometimes amazing beauty...out of others’ trash.

The costumes map the character’s personal stories, told in colors, materials, and found objects from their urban environments that have been thrown away by others who have more material abundance. As works of art, the costumes are statements about the human condition in our contemporary world where people are affected by environmental forces, migration, and poverty. The concept was inspired by an NPR story about the Landfill Harmonic, an orchestra that grew out of a slum built on a landfill in Paraguay, in which the children use instruments made out of garbage. One of the students, Bebi, is quoted as saying, “People realize that we shouldn’t throw away trash carelessly. Well, we shouldn’t throw away people either.” (Tsioulcas)

I enlisted the community, on Facebook and on the internal communication portal of Principia College, to help collect small, repeatable recycled objects. I also scoured recycling centers with department members to collect interesting debris. Items collected range from

bottle caps and pop tops to electrical wire and parts of electronic equipment. When I felt I had a critical mass of materials to work with, I began to take the character research and measurements and begin looking for “base pieces.” I then took descriptions of characters in the show, and sometimes the “back story” created by the actors or director, and began to improvise sewing with the materials. Each costume is very unique, but designed to have cohesiveness as a group that speaks to their shared conditions and humanity.



Fig.15: Costumes for *Godspell*, Principia College, 2017

Surface treatment of these costumes was an extension of the work I had begun in shows like the *Winter's Tale*. In some cases, the process itself was central. For example, Carson is bullied as the show begins is seen to be nervously threading soda can pop tops onto ribbons of fabric as a coping mechanism. These ribbons are incorporated into his garment, as if he had put them there to wrap and armor himself...but in a clearly vulnerable attempt.



Fig.16: Costume for *Godspell*, Principia College, 2017

In other designs, the surface became much more elaborate as a map of the story of the character. Sara is an activist who is seeking and finding her voice. She puts on a garment that she has been fashioning that speaks for her through found-object written words.



Fig.17: Costume for *Godspell*, Principia College, 2017

The set is a space that defines and determines how these characters live. They are constrained by the wall and fence, and have limited resources to build with. While it is clearly a decaying and deconstructing world, the characters are constantly creating their own spaces to inhabit, and in a sense redefining their own experience.



Fig.18: Set for *Godspell*, Principia College, 2017

For example, this is Tyler's world. He was torn away from a high tech career and put into this place because of his "outsider" religious status. He collects all things technical and builds them into his space and even into what he wears.



Fig.19: Set and costume for *Godspell*, Principia College, 2017

I thought of this set-space in terms of the palimpsest, with traces of history and social change visible in the variety of architectural and consumer culture materials incorporated. There was a multitude of detail in both the set and costumes, and it was not necessary to the experience of the viewer that they see or understand it all to get their own sense of the story and map our world for themselves. Some details were as much for enriching the actor's work as for the audience. One example is the U.S. Flag that is supposed to be a creation of Tim, an ex-soldier, and how it lives way back in his "cave," as seen in this image.



Fig.20: Set detail for *Godspell*, Principia College, 2017

This detail is from the later exhibition, where one person who had seen both shows told me he was seeing it for the first time, having not been in the right audience position to notice it before. However, Tim had it as a backdrop as he worked through his scars of war, and rejection from the country that he still very much identified with and loved.



Fig.21: Flag for *Godspell*, Principia College, 2017



Fig.22: Set and costumes for *Godspell*, Principia College, 2017

The writing on the set was another layer of information, conveying messages from the characters to the world at large, and to each other, the way graffiti has always done in the human experience. The words spoke to the audience about a tension between unity and resistance even before the actors set foot on stage, and added to the mapping of the literal space as well as to the structure of the story.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE GALLERY

The final part of my thesis show was a group exhibition of five artists in the Art and Design building at SIUE on April 7, 2017. I wanted the costumes to be viewed both as individual art objects, and a collection with relationships. I brought in part of the set as a background, and photographs of the costumes as worn in production, to give the viewers a sense of their origin. These materials were positioned to be viewed after the costumes, so that the initial experience would be with the objects themselves.



Fig.23: Costumes for *Godspell*, Wagner Gallery, SIUE, 2017



Fig.24: Set remnant collage, *Godspell*, Wagner Gallery, SIUE, 2017

People who came to both of the shows appreciated the opportunity to see the costumes up close and understand the detail. In some cases, the exact nature of the re-use was not clear without this close perspective.

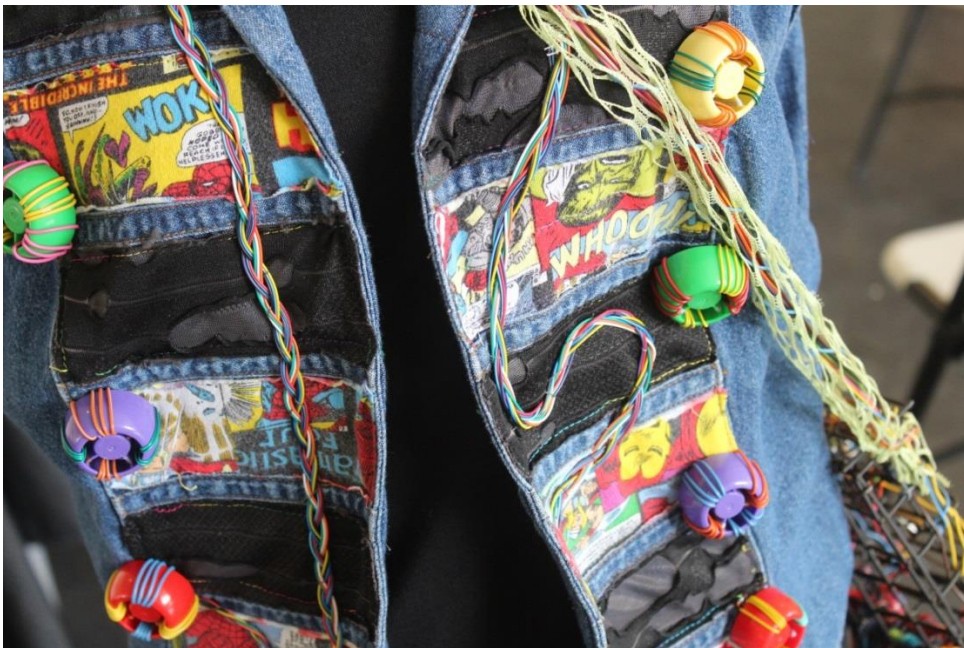


Fig.25: Costumes for *Godspell*, Wagner Gallery, SIUE, 2017



Fig.26: Costume detail, *Godspell*, Wagner Gallery, SIUE, 2017



Fig.27: Costume detail, *Godspell*, Wagner Gallery, SIUE, 2017

Godspell contains a prostitute character, in keeping with the Biblical story. This particular outfit drew upon visual, historical references to card-playing and “the game”. It also used men’s ties and measuring tape in the surface that was meant as a simultaneous expression and constraint.



Fig.28: Costume detail for *Godspell*, Wagner Gallery, SIUE, 2017

The character in *Godspell* who most resembles Mary in her devotion to and connection with Jesus wore this garment that signified, through its communication wires, both that connection and her deafness, or reliance on senses like sight and touch.

Having an exhibition with other visual artists was an incredible opportunity to view my work in relation to other media and conceptual styles. This thesis project was a means of taking to full fruition the ideas I had been working with throughout this MFA program: building layers of meaning, creating story-telling surfaces, mapping the process in the product, and speaking to environmental and humanist themes.

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