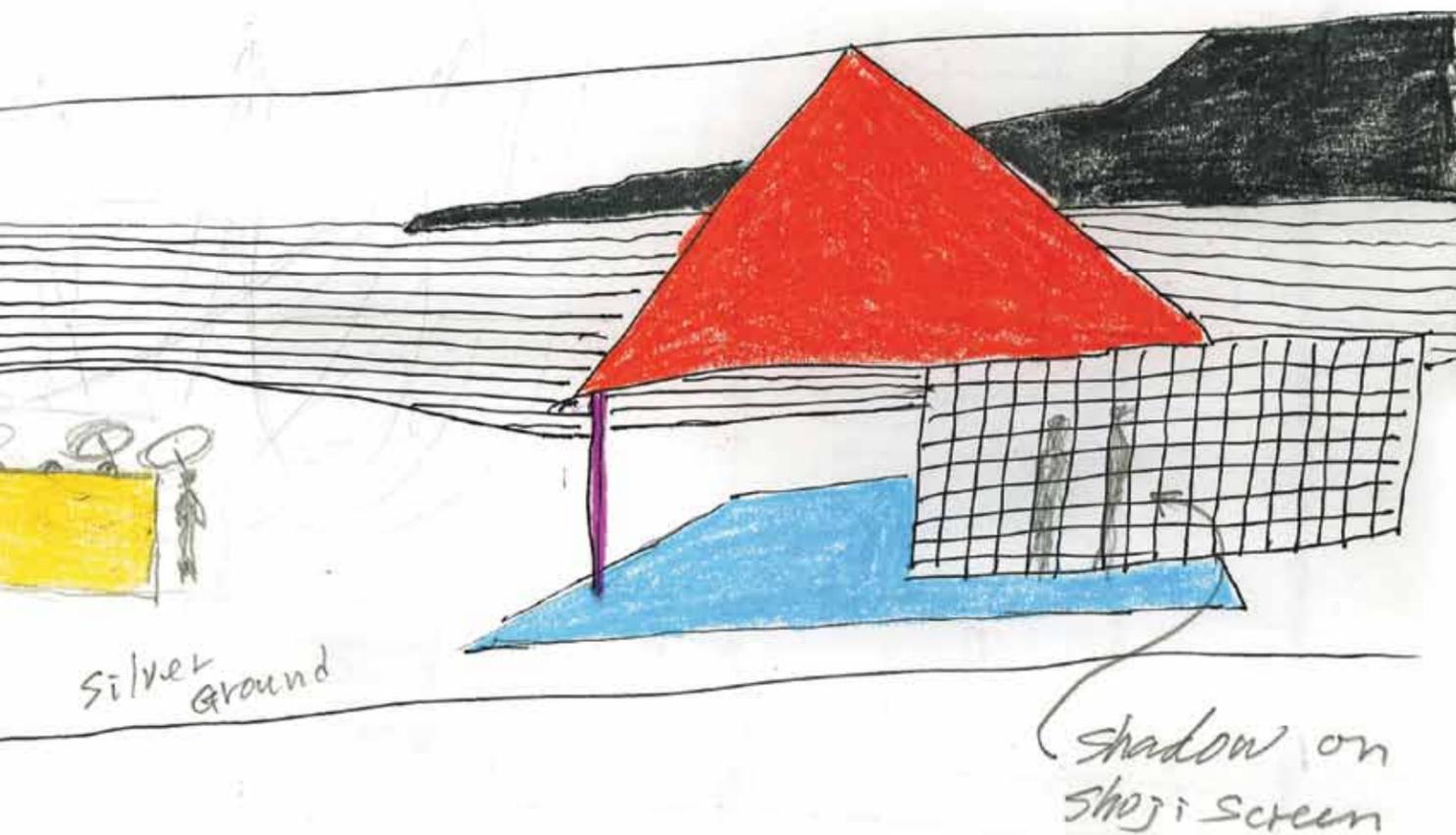
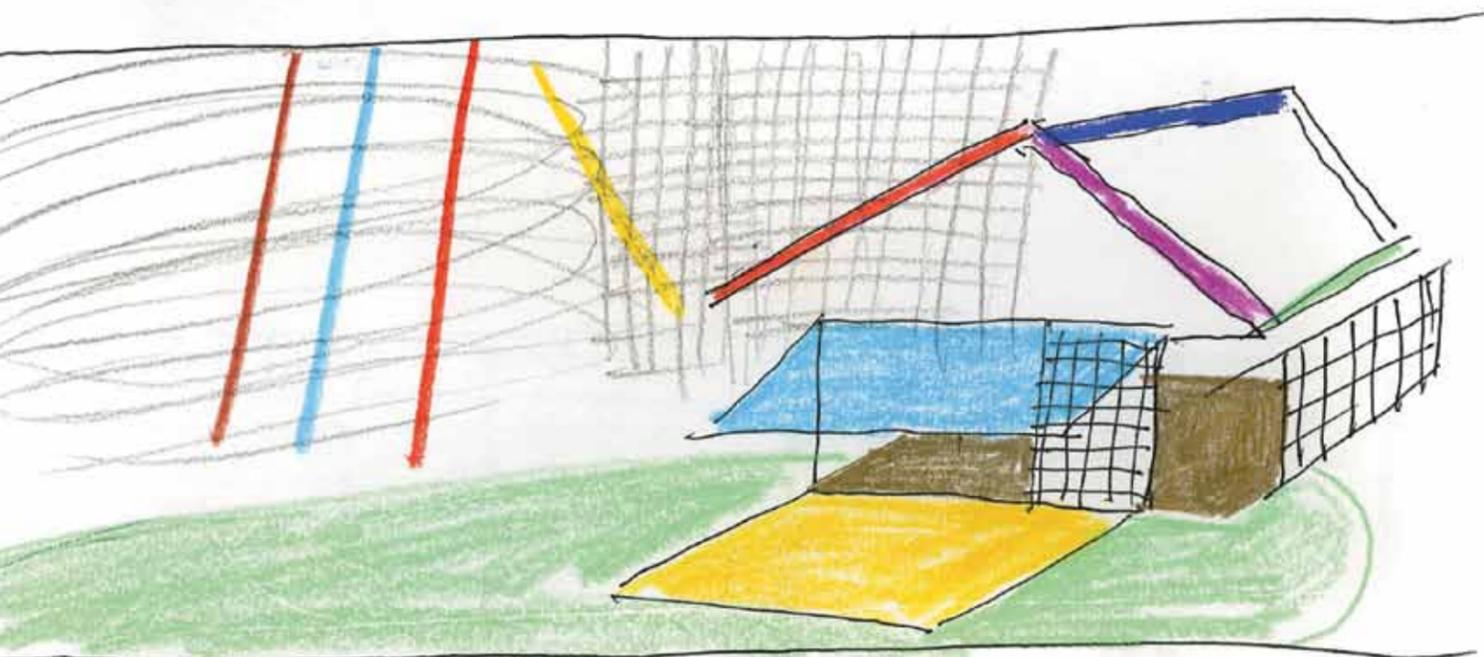


# MADAMA BUTTERFLY JUN KANEKO



MADAMA  
BUTTERFLY

JUN KANEKO



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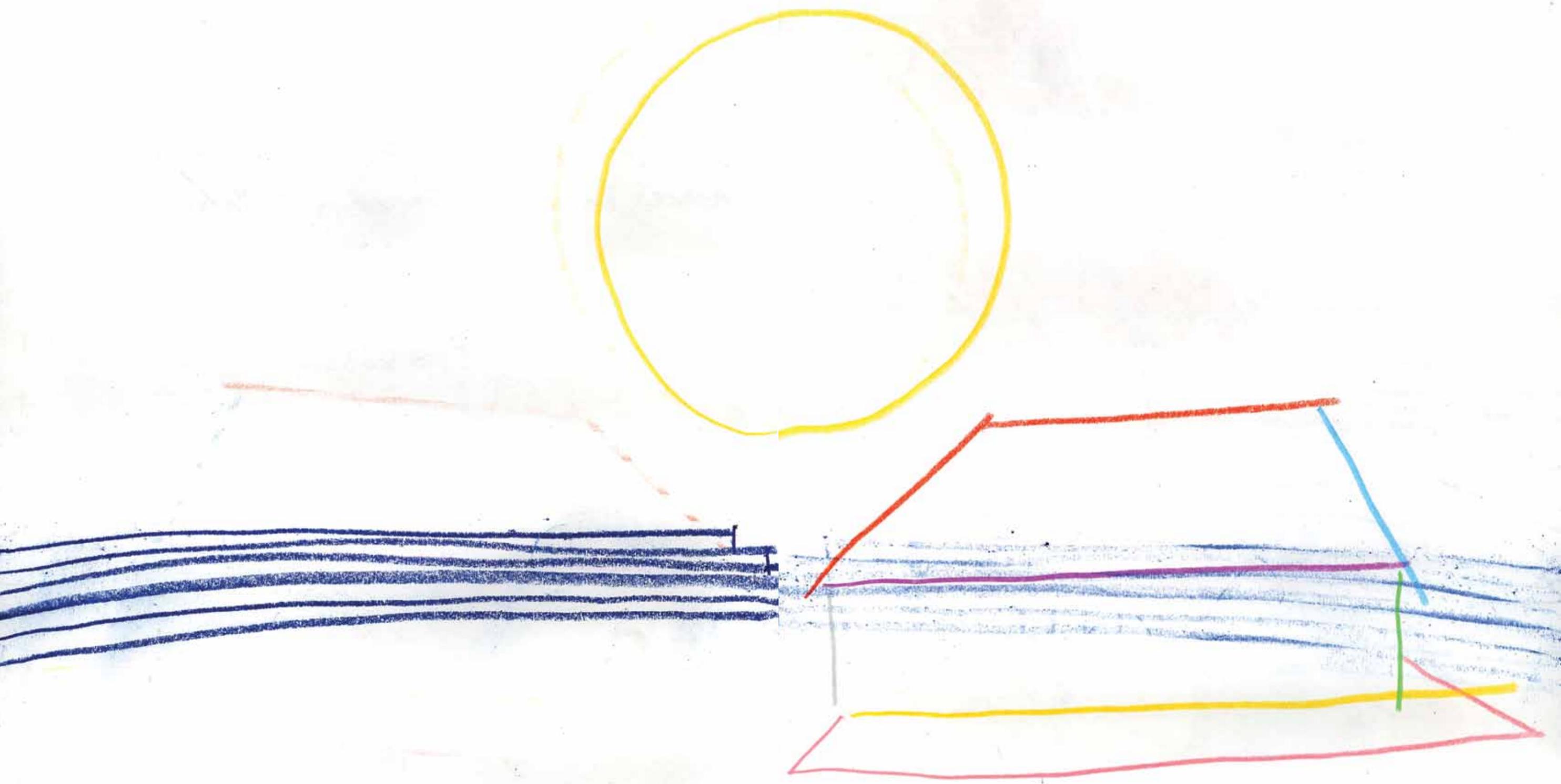
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## ART INTO OPERA ARTHUR C. DANTO

It stands to reason that successful artists must require a powerful incentive to forgo the rewards of solitary creation, and cross over into the realm of theatrical production, where in the nature of the case a measure of autonomy must be surrendered to external and often alien artistic wills, and where their own contribution serves, even in the best of circumstances, as mere means to the overall effect. One such incentive in what we might regard as the Golden Age of theatrical design by artists was the belief that a new kind of theater would help in the creation of a new social order and even a new form of humanity – an idea initially advanced by Richard Wagner and developed by Friedrich Nietzsche. When Vladimir Malevich, for example, agreed to design the costumes and settings for a Futurist opera – *Victory over the Sun* – in which the music and even the language were of an entirely novel order – too novel, as it turned out, for the audiences of St. Petersburg in 1913 – he felt that he was helping redesign a new order of humanity. His colorful geometrical costumes implied a redesign of the human body. Again, after the Russian Revolution, the entire concept of studio art yielded to a new imperative – that of “art into life” – giving artists the incentive of contributing to what they believed was to be a new social order. The avant garde painter Lyuba Popova found an outlet as a scenery and costume designer in the revolutionary theater of Vsevolod Meyerhold. Her sets and particularly the “production clothing” she designed as costumes for Meyerhold’s production of Cromelynk’s *The Magnificent Cuckold* had a freshness, an originality, and a sense of exhilaration far beyond that of the Cubist and Futurist paintings she had earlier executed as a studio artist. When Serge Diaghilev recruited such artists as Picasso, Braque, Matisse, de Chirico, and Derain as production designers for the Ballet Russes in Paris, they collaborated with performers and composers who embodied the very meaning of modernism. The artists’ participation in what was seen as the creation of a new era must have been a powerful incentive, far more so than any material reward could have been. Picasso was able to use real movement and actual time in the realization of his ideas, giving him a larger sense of redefining the nature of visual art. But the mere existence of an audience committed to modernist

values could itself have been a validation of the belief that future was already present.

The idea of new future for humankind, in which theater and opera are to have an instrumental role, has today lost much of its allure. What remains instead is an inducement as ancient as the earliest dramatic productions – the possibility of healing illusions with which the visual arts have almost completely lost touch, though it there lives on in a reduced form in the relatively recent genres of the happening and the performance. Almost certainly, the contemporary theater is a badly degraded remnant of ancient theater, which had its roots in powerful ritual practices. Still, enough of the implied magic of the site remains that certain contemporary artists are drawn to the stage, where their contributions form a serious part of their oeuvre. David Hockney’s marvelous sets for the 1975 Glyndbourne production of Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress*, for example, are so distinctive that there can be little room or reason for a rival production. The same might be said for his staging of Ravel’s *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*. His productions of *The Magic Flute* and *Turandot* as much bear the stamp of his artistic personality as his paintings do. The South African artist, William Kentridge, who might as readily have pursued a theatrical career as an artistic one, has produced, among other works, Monteverdi’s *Il ritorno d’Ulisse*, using puppets and animated drawings; while a full-length production of *The Magic Flute* is scheduled for later this year. I have seen an exhibition of the sets for German opera companies by the Catalan artist, Jaume Plensa, which were so striking that I felt demoralized by the relatively banal productions in America, where opera seems mainly a showcase for vocal virtuosity.

There is a certain problem raised when such strong artists as these engage in theatrical production. *The Rake’s Progress* is based on a famous suite of narrative engravings by William Hogarth, and these, translated through the colorful visual language of David Hockney, give the impression, when staged with real actors playing the parts of Tom Rakewell and Anne Truelove, of an animated painting – of Hogarth come to life, as it were. When the chairs, the clock, the figures in the wallpaper begin to dance and sing in Hockney’s staging of *L’Enfant*

*et les sortilèges*, the effect can at first not seem that different from the animated windows on Fifth Avenue at Christmastime. But this is a standing problem with the stage, especially when a production uses famous actors and actresses, or famous singers and dancers, and the audience feels itself in the presence of Sarah Bernhardt rather than Phèdre, to use an example that Proust made famous, or Enrico Caruso rather than Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, in the original production of *Madama Butterfly* at Covent Garden in London. A play is not a recitation, nor an opera a recital. What actually transpires is that, at a certain moment, the character in the play somehow *possesses* the actor or the singer, and the audience becomes transported, as if in a living dream, to Greece or to Japan. A transformation occurs with which Aristotle was already familiar, in which the emotions of an audience are taken up and engaged, so that they leave the theater as exalted beings. If this can happen with the living persons who play roles, it can certainly happen with the garments they wear and their painted surroundings, which come to life with the characters the actors become. Nothing like that happens on gallery walls! And that kind of magic becomes the inducement to trade the gallery for the theater where it does happen.

It is in the light of this sort of inducement that we must consider Jun Kaneko’s production of *Madama Butterfly* for Opera Omaha. Kaneko’s work, especially his ceramic sculpture, is world-reknowned. I could imagine a director wanting to install two or three of Kaneko’s imposing glazed steles – what he terms “dangos” – on a stage, as a kind of abstract or symbolic landscape. And I can easily imagine his paintings of plaid and polka dot patterns being translated into designs for textiles, to be sewn into curtains, or into costumes for dancers to wear as they move among the steles. His work would then make a contribution something like Isamu Noguchi made to the Martha Graham Dance Company. But commissioning him specifically to design a production for a work like *Butterfly*, which has definite narrative and emotional constraints as well as an established production history, is a far more radical and certainly a more challenging demand. Here he is charged with creating sets against which a powerfully emotional drama is to be enacted, and costumes that bear a significant symbolic weight. At the same time, *Butterfly* is indexed to a very specific place and time – to Japan at the end of the nineteenth century. It would be absurd to deck Butterfly and her servants

in togas, or in business suits. Despite this specificity, the action has universal human meanings of passion, love, betrayal, courage, and remorse. The incentive for Kaneko is to see if his art can be made to express all this, and at the same time touch the hearts of those who come to his production in the expectation that they will be moved by the experience.

Because the time and place mandated by *Butterfly*’s plot are axiomatic for any new production, Kaneko has freely borrowed from the traditional Japanese theater, in particular *Bunraku* – in which nearly life-size puppets are visibly manipulated by teams of puppeteers, who share the space of the stage though of course not the dramatic space of the action. The audience quickly gets caught up in the illusion. In *Bunraku*, the puppets become possessed by the characters, and the puppeteers are rendered invisible through the fact that they have no place in the drama being enacted by the dolls. Kaneko uses these external presences to rearrange scenery and, in one spectacular case, to carry the butterfly that the audience reads as part of Butterfly’s kimono, sparing the actress the weight that would interfere with her singing if she actually had to wear it. For reasons little understood, the artifices of opera intensify the power of illusion, and by combining this with a second set of artifices derived from Japanese dramaturgy, the audience is in for an exceptionally powerful *Butterfly* experience.

The costumes themselves refer to *Butterfly*’s well-known libretto. An American rents the services of a former geisha for what he sees as a temporary “marriage” and she sees as a marriage for life. She forsakes her culture and her religion and adopts his. Her powerful moral character emerges as more and more admirable. Rather than a plaything, she is a treasure, and her bravery and dedication are revealed when the sailor returns with his American wife, to claim his son. He is overwhelmed by remorse when he realizes the meaning of the love that he has lost in losing her. Kaneko’s costumes are not period pieces, but abstract inventions of a conventionalized world – Japanistic, of a past moment without a specific time, abstractly other, belonging to a world of their own. The production unfolds like a shared dream.

Arthur Danto – *Art Critic*, The Nation  
Johnsonian Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Columbia University, New York

## MAKING ART SING

JOAN DESENS

All ideas begin somewhere, and the idea for Jun Kaneko to design a *Madama Butterfly* emerged more than two years before the actual production was brought to life on the stage of the Orpheum Theater in Omaha, Nebraska.

Sometime in 2003, maybe a year after I moved to Omaha, my friend and colleague, Heike Langdon, said, "You need to meet Ree and Jun." I was still new to Omaha, and Heike sensed it was important for me to get to know this remarkable couple. I knew of Jun and his stunning, large ceramic sculptures, but I did not know the scope of his work as a painter or his great personal interest in exploring the science of creativity. That was still to come.

Heike arranged a tour of the studio with Jun, followed by lunch with Jun's wife, Ree. The tour was nothing short of mind-boggling, and since, no matter how often I enter Jun's studio, I still learn and see something I never knew or saw before. This was the first of many tours, the subsequent ones conducted largely with the artists and patrons who eventually became involved with our "Kaneko Butterfly," as we call it.

The four floors of Jun's loft building (both home and studio) ooze with the beauty of human expression. The technical expertise and the steadiness given to each step of the artistic and scientific process involved in the evolution of a Jun Kaneko work of art is, to me, almost Zen-like. Jun and Ree's understanding and appreciation of art and ideas is also evidenced in the couple's personal collection of work by artists from around the world, and in their development of KANEKO, a facility that will become an international center for creativity. They make, gather and are surrounded by beauty and imagination.

After the initial tour, I wafted back to earth for lunch with Ree and Heike at The French Café. We talked – a lot – about art and our lives, and I mentioned to Ree that I had had an idea when coming to Omaha to explore the possibility of involving one or more resident artists from the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art (which Ree, coincidentally, founded) in a collaboration with the

Opera to create designs for new productions. I added, "Wouldn't it be great if Jun could do an opera." Ree laughed her famous laugh and replied, "A Jun Kaneko *Madama Butterfly!*" I jumped in very quickly with my own signature enthusiasm, "YES! That's IT!" That was the "eureka" moment.

As we left lunch, I insisted we explore this idea. So Ree brought the thought to Jun, and we subsequently met to discuss this over dinner. Around dessert, it was time to ask Jun if the idea was of interest. In the dim lighting of the restaurant, it was slightly difficult to judge his expression as he replied: I am interested in this, because it is something I have never done, and if I decide to do it, I want complete control.

This *Butterfly* is – in every way – Jun's creation, but despite his initial wish for complete control, instead he has been a great student of the stage and a tremendous and considerate collaborator.

Jun's journey began with a study of everything he could learn about the opera and the composer. He wanted to see every possible reachable production during what turned out to be a year of study. I arranged for him to go onto the stage of a production at New York City Opera, and obtained tickets for him for productions as unique as one by Robert Wilson at Los Angeles Opera. He even attended an international conference on *Butterfly*. When our new artistic director, Stewart Robertson, joined the team, he walked Jun and the production's stage director, Leslie Swackhamer, through the score, page by page.

We hired a stage director – who was sensitive to and respectful of our mounting a design-driven production of an opera classic – to also serve as creative consultant to help Jun understand the realities of theater (an art form new to him) and find solutions to support his fullest vision. Frequently, the stage director is hired first, and that person is given the opportunity to devise the production's concept by requesting the company hire a specific design team to bring his or her vision to life via the costumes, props and scenery. Because this was

handled designs first, we felt Leslie, a generous and talented artist, was the perfect choice to partner with Jun. She was joined by our Director of Production, Terry Harper, who helped Jun evolve technical solutions for his designs.

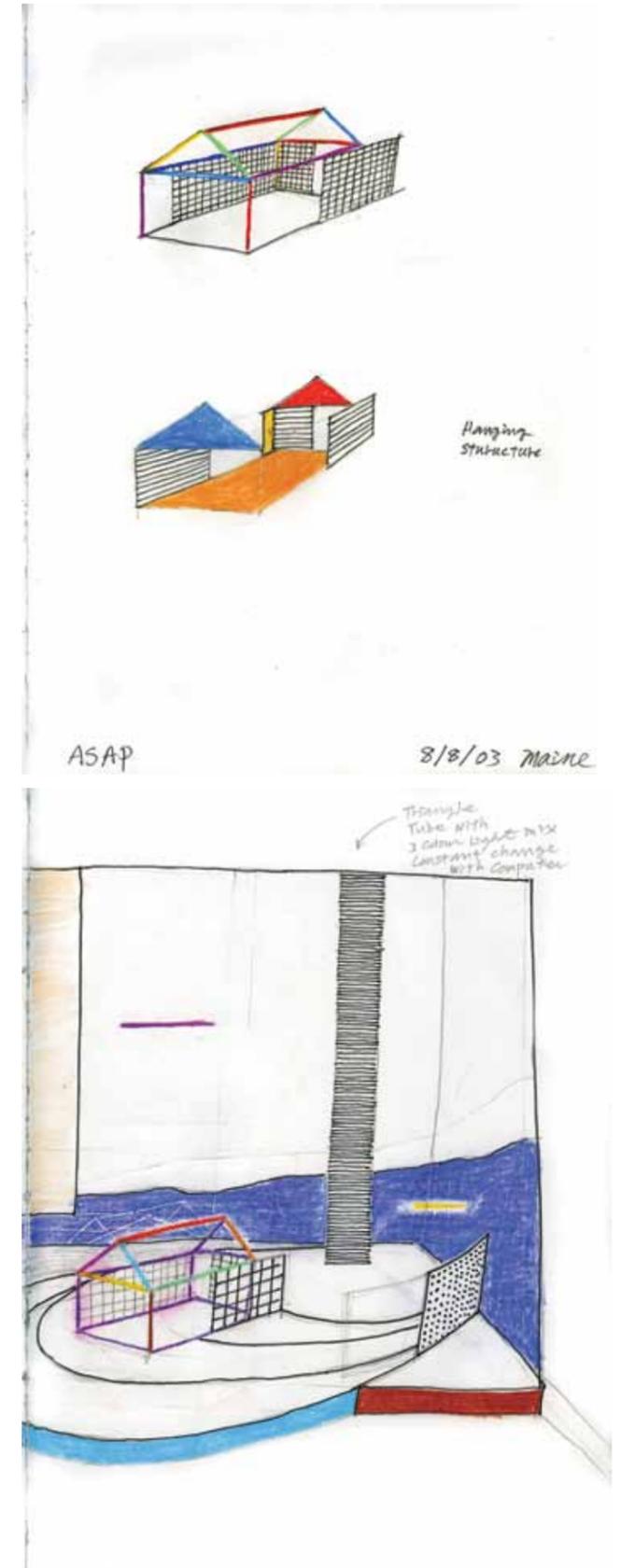
Jun started sketching complete scenes for his *Butterfly* in books that he carried with him wherever he traveled. These books have special notations on each page, indicating the date and place the image was drawn. After months of making beautiful, imaginative sketches, it seemed as if one day he woke up with a completely new picture in his head. To say the result is pure Kaneko is an understatement.

As his concept evolved, Jun began drawing scene after scene, like a storybook. Jun watched the opera unfold in his drawings. Because he is also the costume designer, he was able to visualize his "characters" placed within each scene. As his concept evolved he added yet another layer, that of "projections," many animated, to create another dimension to the music and drama. The result is a total artistic statement – a multi-layered, ever-changing stage painting.

To say Jun relinquished his initial wish for complete control from the outset does not reveal the depth of his appreciation for his technical tutors and collaborators, or his respect for Puccini's score. Artistically, this *is* completely Jun's work. However, there were many ideas that he created then eliminated as soon as he learned they would impinge upon the performer's ability to move or act well, were difficult to achieve, or if he sensed or learned they would overwhelm the story or music.

I feel honored to have been part of such an important artistic achievement. Jun's recent paintings, drawings and sculpture have begun to encompass ideas inspired by his involvement in designing this *Madama Butterfly*. I am delighted that Opera Omaha can have such a special production, but I am personally most proud to have been part of an event that has impacted the creative spirit of an already great artist.

Joan Desens – General Director, Opera Omaha



## FLYING WITH MADAMA BUTTERFLY

JUN KANEKO

One sunny afternoon in early Spring 2003, I received an invitation to fly with *Madama Butterfly*. After a few months of consideration, I accepted and my journey designing scenery and costumes for Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* began.

I set out in a fog on August 3, 2003. Knowing nothing about opera production, this is how I felt, like I was moving through a heavy fog. I did as much research and random conceptual drawing as possible, and within a year I attended seven different productions of *Butterfly* across the continental U.S. Slowly the fog began to open up, and I saw some interesting conceptual directions for the opera's design.

One of the most difficult aspects of the opera for a person more familiar with sculpture and painting, which do not traditionally move around during an exhibition, is that nothing stays the same. There is constant movement in the music, singers' positions on the stage and vivid lighting variations. All of these elements have to make great sense together in each moment of the performance.

Shortly after I started to develop the costumes, I realized that working on the scenery and costumes simultaneously would make better sense for the total artistic vision, keeping my focus on the unity of the music, singers' voices, lighting design and the interpretation of the Artistic and Stage Directors. This complex collaboration with everyone involved in the production is the total opposite of my familiar experiences as an individual studio artist. It is a new challenge in making an artistic statement for me, full of unknowns.

Several months into the process, I began to have a good understanding of telling *Madama Butterfly*'s story and the Director's concept for the singers' movement on stage. This was a great turning point for me and afterwards everything started to fall into position. The design's conceptual complexity was completed by the final addition of video projections. Images moving and fading in and out gave me the opportunity to orchestrate the element of time visually on stage.

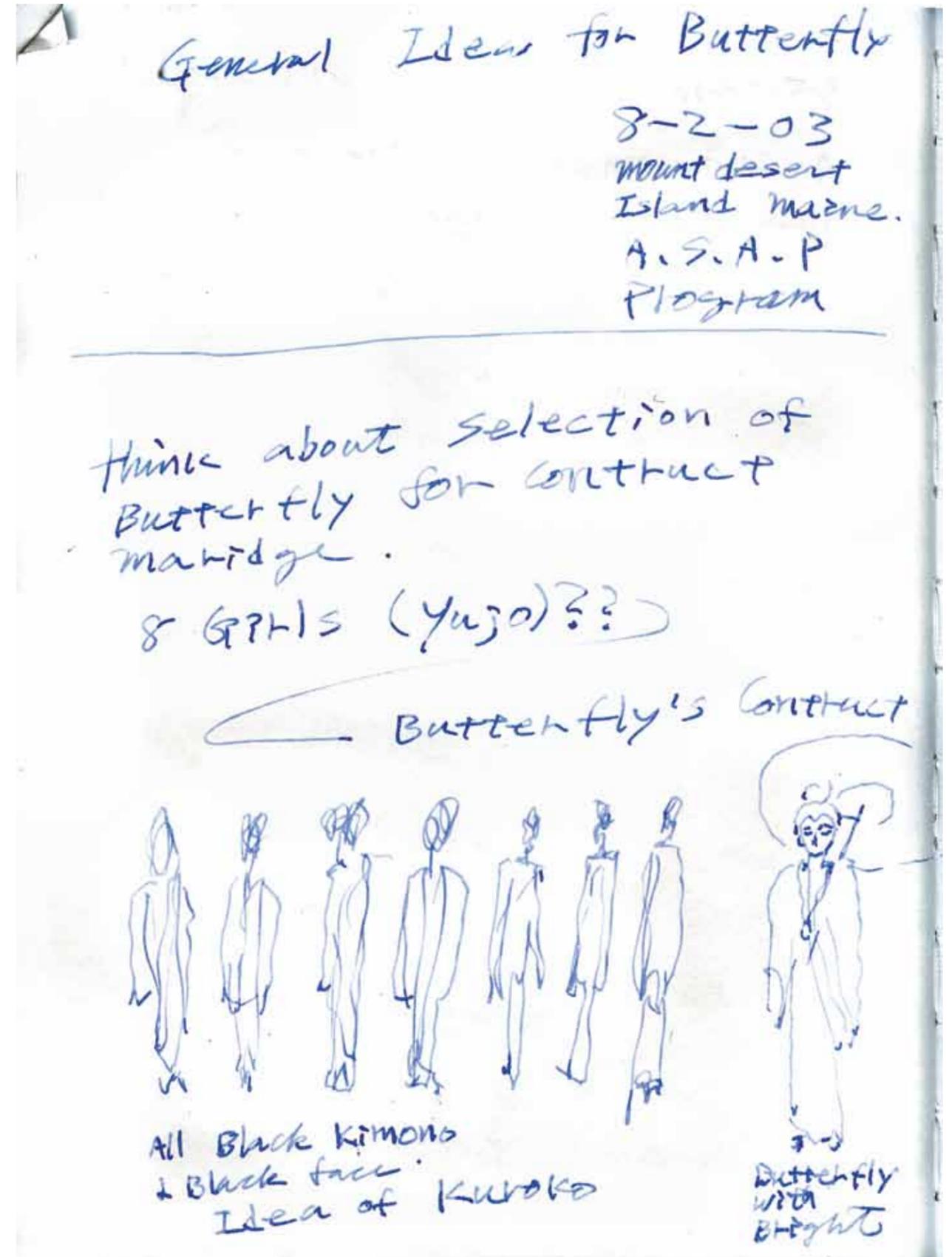
I am now 28 months into my work to develop the *Madama Butterfly* design before Opera Omaha unveils this production at the Orpheum Theater in March 2006. This has been one of the most difficult challenges and one of the most exciting creative experiences I have had in my life. Maybe I was lucky that I did not have any prior knowledge of opera production. If you have no idea, you have no fear.

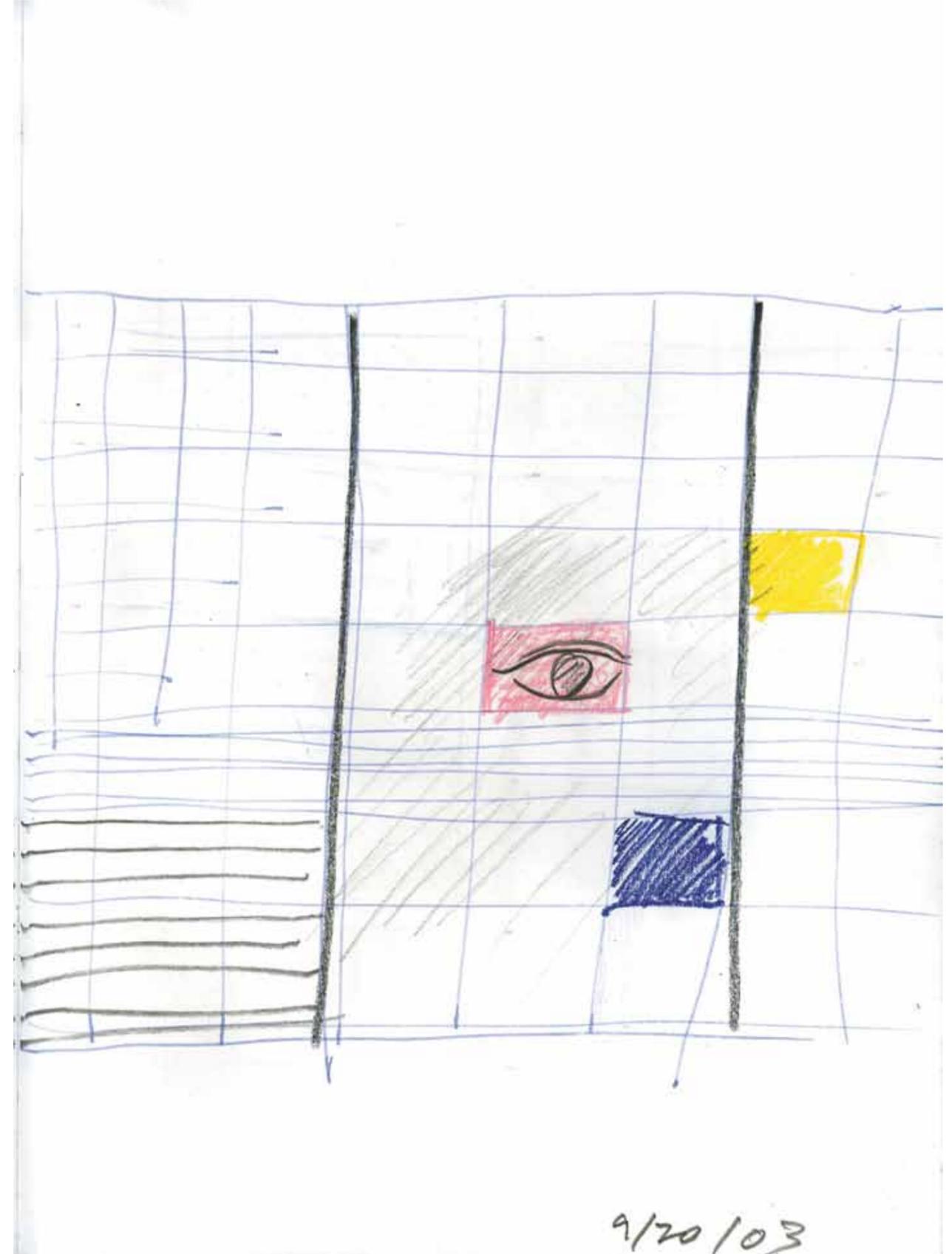
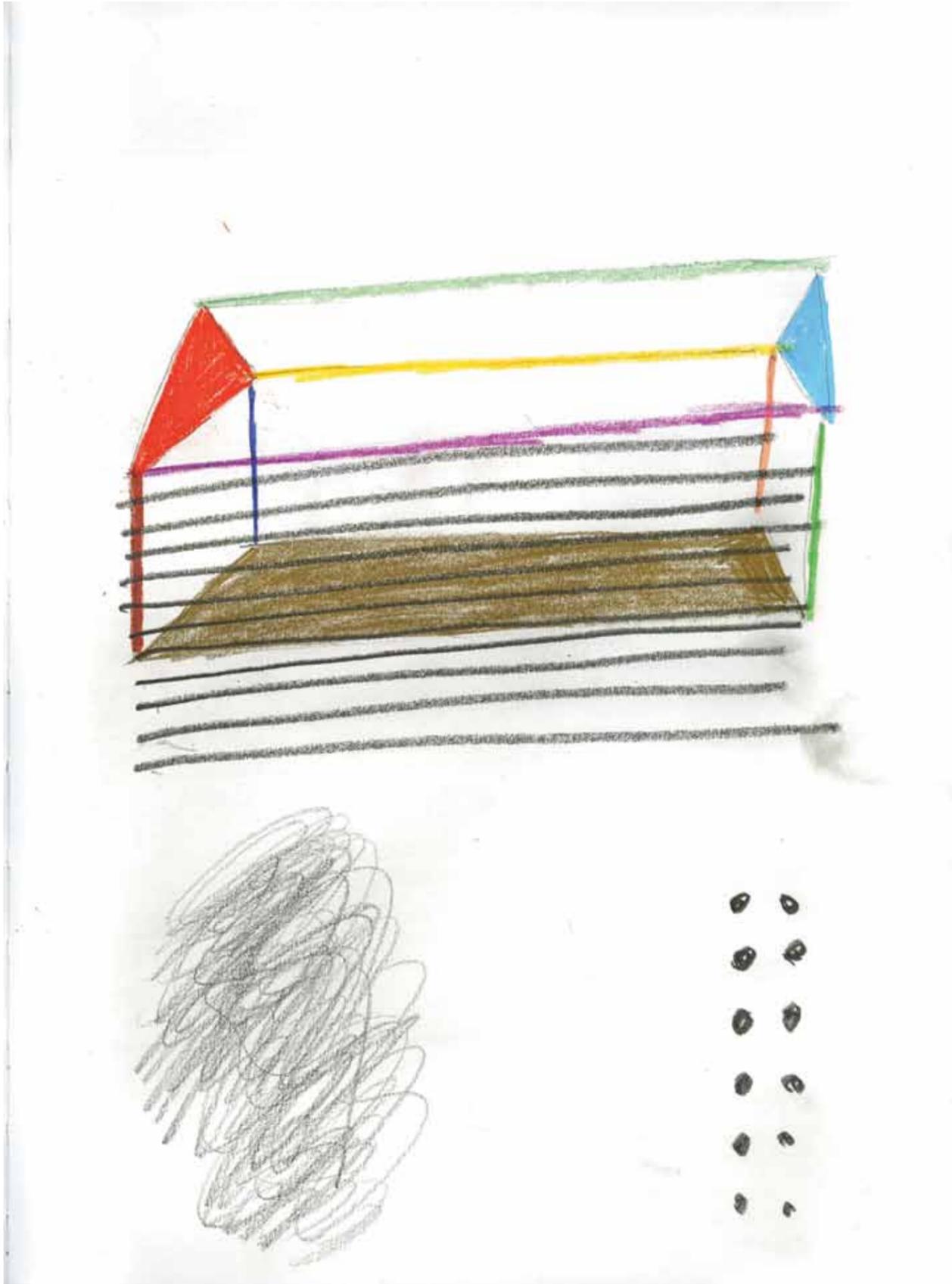
I was also fortunate to have an exceptional team with which to collaborate. I have no doubt that the success of my endeavors would not be possible without having had help from this great group of people. Thank you all for giving me this fantastic opportunity to learn additional possibilities in creativity.

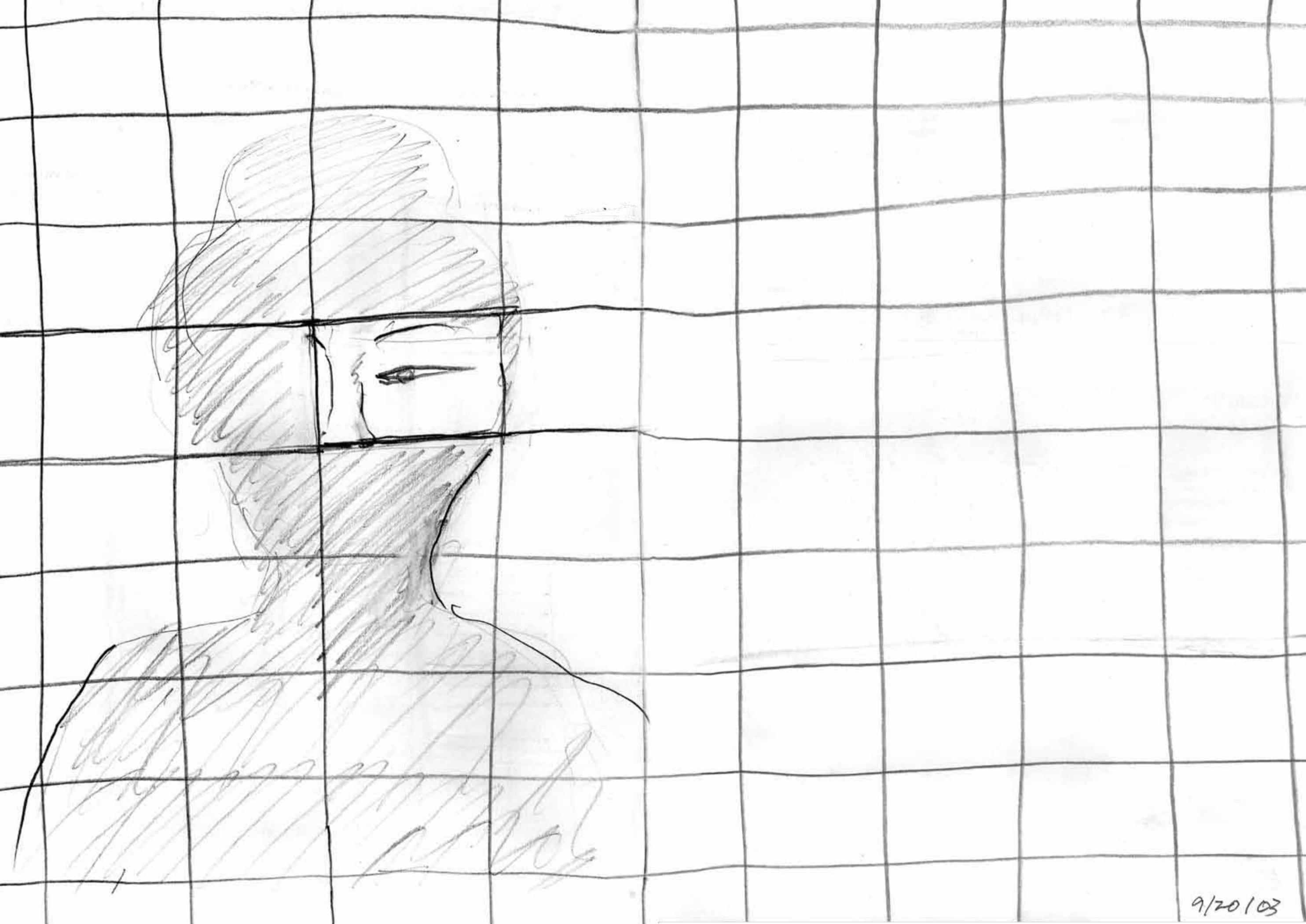
Jun Kaneko - Omaha 12/13/05



Hawaii studio, Kauai 2003



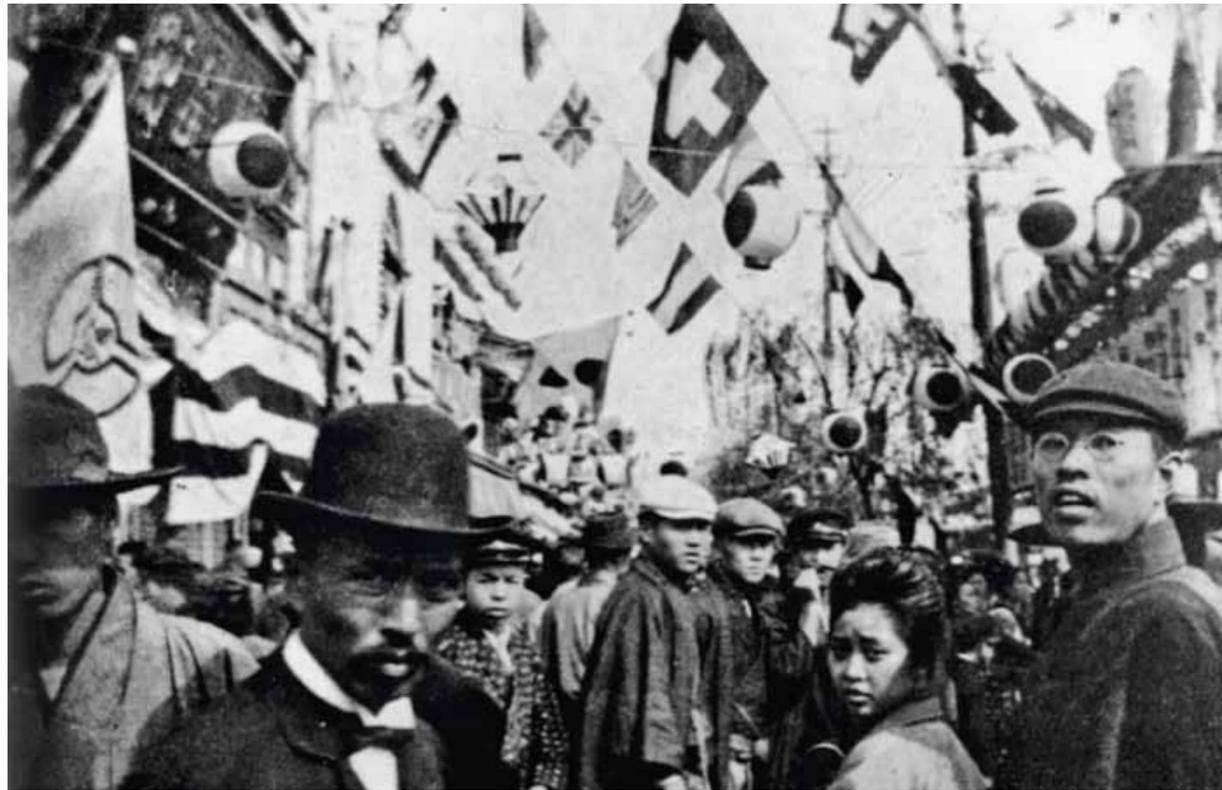




9/20/03

## JAPAN IN 1904

BARBARA CHAPMAN BANKS, PH.D.

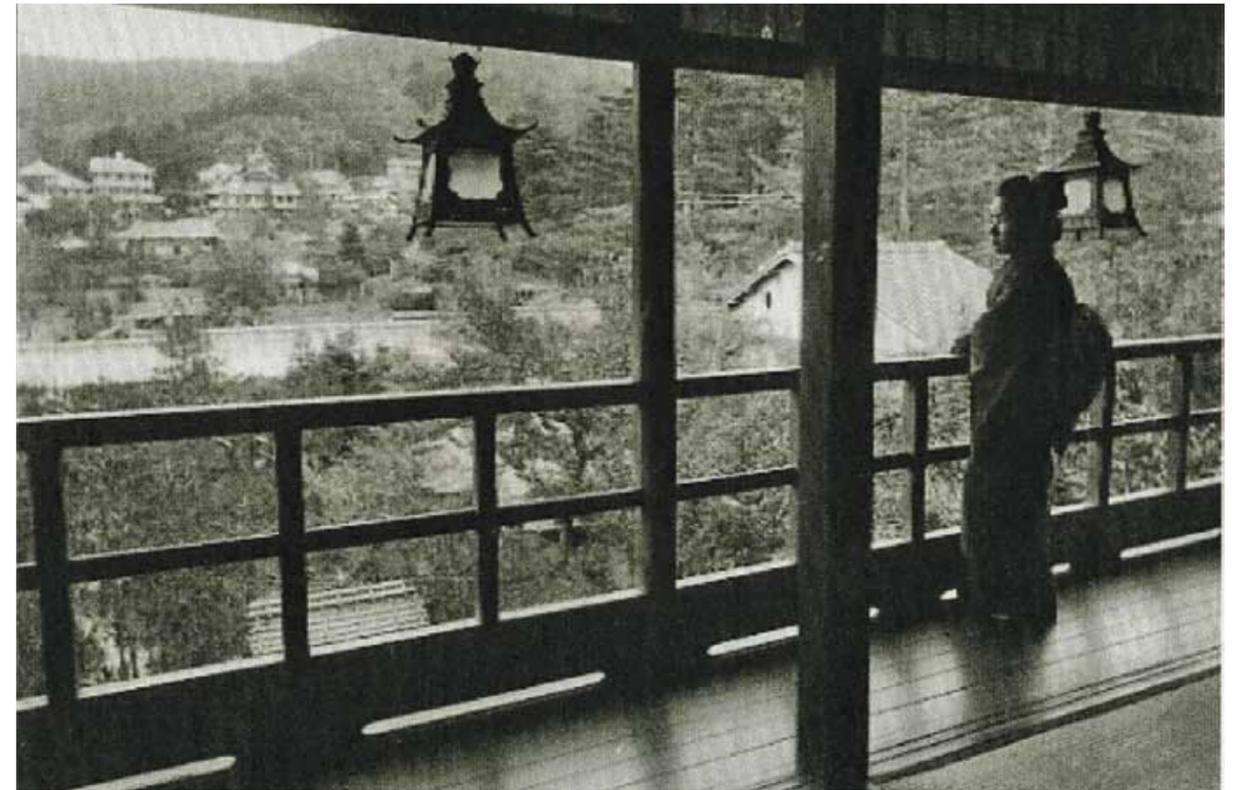


1 When *Madama Butterfly* was written by Puccini in 1904, Japan had undergone 50 years of cultural changes that were a result of internal events and the introduction of elements of Western culture. In 1853, Commodore Perry and his fleet (with promises of peaceful intentions) had forced Japan to open its harbors to ships from the United States. The Japan that existed at that time had a rice-based economy and was a country with a history of highly-organized society for well over a millennium. Since the sixteenth century, it also had a lively merchant class that patronized the pleasure quarters and theaters in the cities of Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka. Each of these had its own cultural identity. The merchants and some samurai attended the Kabuki theater and Bunraku (puppet) performances, which were advertised by widely available woodblock prints. The glamour, vitality and sophistication of this preceding Edo Period (1615-1868) are hard to overestimate.

When Japan was effectively closed to the world in 1639, Nagasaki remained a thriving international trade port

open to Chinese and European traders. For this reason, even after closure, Nagasaki was the port of entry for foreign ideas from east and west. The only Europeans allowed were the Dutch, who were restricted to the now famous island of Deshima. Japan remained closed until Perry arrived and forced the opening of ports. At that time the Japanese made the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate available. The city of Shimoda still has a cobblestone avenue named for Perry and a museum in his honor. Shimoda was described in a recent travel section article in the *Sunday New York Times* as an interesting destination for its historic importance and local hot springs.<sup>1</sup>

Chinese monks and artists entered at Nagasaki as well, and their significant community continued its development. Chinese Buddhist monks held the abbotships at the main Zen Buddhist monasteries in the area. The strong influence of Chinese artists was spread from Nagasaki by those Japanese artists who came to study with the Chinese teachers and afterward spread



2 their own artistic lineages.<sup>2</sup>

The Dutch provided many books and prints. The prints' artistic influence gave a certain realistic cast to subject matter. In addition to artistic influences, certain other fields of study had a major impact. The Japanese were most interested in scientific studies, especially those related to medicine, and found geography to be highly stimulating. The Japanese made many maps on folding screens and even on porcelain plates. Their inaccuracies notwithstanding, these maps depicted how the Japanese saw the world and their changing place in it.

With the scene set as Japan opened its doors, the country went through many internal changes and foreign influences that changed its character somewhat and its government completely. Within a few years, the British, French, and Russians had made commercial agreements with Japan.<sup>3,4</sup> This change in governmental structure came as the feudal system with the samurai warriors at the top could not withstand its own internal divisions or the growing power of the merchant class.

Initially the members of the samurai class staffed the government bureaucracy, but the weakening of their position was greatly exacerbated by the 1861 decree that no one except a policeman or a member of the regular conscript army could carry a sword. The sword had been more than a symbol to the samurai; it was an extension of their life force. This essentially said that a soldier from any background could succeed in the military, which was formerly staffed by privileged samurai. Some of the samurai found their way into other sectors. However, as they were one and three-quarters million men strong, it was not possible to accommodate all of them.<sup>5</sup>

When the new, young emperor took his place in Tokyo, a statement was made by some of the feudal lords. The final line of it states:

"Thus the country will be able to rank equally with the other nations of the world."<sup>6</sup>

Between the 1868 establishment of the Meiji Emperor in



3

Tokyo and the time of *Madama Butterfly*, Japanese history is complicated and involves its relationship with many European nations, the United States, Russia Korea, and China. Fortunately, this period is well researched by highly regarded scholars. Much of this scholarship is in English, making it more easily accessible to those who would like to pursue the subject further.

The Japanese inhabited a world of powerful and technologically advanced countries – which had fascinating things to offer – as well as strong agendas of their own. Perhaps the most interesting and relevant way to show the difficult cultural position in which the Japanese found themselves, is a brief discussion of the theater at this time.

Japanese theater has a long and vivid history starting with folk festivals and costumed dances at the Buddhist and Shinto shrines. Throughout history there are vivid costumes and a large variety of masks. The most popular form of theater at the time of the Meiji Restoration was Kabuki. Not only was it popular in major cities but also in smaller cities and rural areas. In direct contrast to this “old theater” (Kabuki) was shingeki, the new theater. At first they tried to break away from all roots and traditions and adopt the western theater of modern realism. This was awkward and complex, as the western theater used the proscenium arch stage on which the

actors talk to one another seemingly (and purposely) oblivious to the audience.

The Kabuki theater had a hanamichi or long platform extension of the stage allowing the actors to enter in the midst of the audience whom they often addressed. There was a narrator and musicians on a raised platform on the stage. It did not seem to be a forum for the kind of psychological investigation common to western theater.<sup>7</sup>

This either/or situation was indicative of the difficulty of adapting to something new while trying to show lack of connection to cultural roots. A reasonable compromise is shimpa (new school) in which modern settings and stories were used in conjunction with some Kabuki traditions such as men playing women’s roles. Shimpa became popular in the 1890s and dominant in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

Japanese theater also gained popularity as a famous geisha, Sadayakko, played to enthusiastic audiences as she and her husband’s troupe traveled to America and Europe in 1899 and 1900. They performed for President McKinley, the Prince of Wales and the 1900 World Exposition in Paris. Isadora Duncan, the famous American dancer, followed the troupe to Berlin so she could observe Sadayakko further. Praised by Rodin and sketched by Picasso, it has even been suggested that



4

Puccini met with Sadayakko in Italy, where she told him details of Japanese life that he incorporated into *Madama Butterfly*. *Madama Butterfly* triumphed as the representative “Japanese” musical work.<sup>9</sup>

The political and geopolitical concerns of the Japanese at this time were complex and were not necessarily reflected in the art world. Japan’s new (and first) constitution was established in 1890. This was a major step in the democratic process, although many terms used within the constitution did not have exactly the same meaning as their English counterparts.<sup>10</sup> Because the Japanese feared attack, they developed a more imperialistic and militaristic outlook. Although the Russo-Japanese War was on in 1904, it is important to remember that soon after in 1909, the Russian graphic artist Georgy Narbut painted “Bear” for a group of

illustrations of the Russian fairy tale “Teremok”. The influences of Japanese prints in general, and Ando Hiroshige (1797-1858) in particular, were demonstrated.<sup>11</sup> As if placed to bring this introduction to a close, this illustration was recently seen in the exhibition, “Russia’s Age of Elegance,” at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha.

*Dr. Barbara Banks - Director and Curator  
Lentz Center for Asian Culture,  
University of Nebraska at Lincoln*

#### ENDNOTES

1. New York Times, Travel section. New York City: Sunday, August 21, 2005.
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3. Storry, Richard. *A History of Modern Japan*. Middlesex, England; Penguin Books Ltd., 1960, p. 96.
4. *Ibid*, p.104.
5. *Ibid*, p.108.
6. *Ibid*, p. 105.
7. Tetsuo, Kishi, “Japan and the Modern World: Shingeki”, *Japanese Theater in the World*. New York City; Japan Society Inc. and The Japan Foundation, 1997, p. 73.
8. *Ibid*, p.73.
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## SNAPSHOTS OF REALITY

MARY JANE PHILLIPS-MATZ

Among Giacomo Puccini's popular works, *Madama Butterfly* is a hardy survivor, with dozens of performances of it given every year. In fact, it has remained on opera company programs steadily since 1904.

It is, however, a miracle that this opera exists at all, because of the difficult circumstances surrounding its creation. In 1903, Puccini was already deep into the composition of *Madama Butterfly* when he was injured in a nearly fatal car crash. This meant that work on his new project came to a dead standstill. Confined to bed and then to a wheelchair, he could not sit at the piano. Another serious health problem arose when his doctors discovered he had diabetes, so this vigorous outdoorsman, the Puccini who detested cities and lived in a tiny Tuscan fishing village, had to face unexpected medical crises every day. At age forty-five, he found himself an invalid. In such a difficult time he might easily have abandoned *Butterfly*. But he did not; instead he slogged on and finished the opera.

### THE CATASTROPHIC WORLD PREMIERE OF MADAMA BUTTERFLY

At rehearsals, Puccini coached the singers in their roles and saw everything go so smoothly that he was sure that he had a hit on his hands. After all, *La Bohème* and *Tosca* were wildly popular, so *Butterfly* should join their ranks. Unfortunately, though, his hopes for the new opera were dashed on the night of the world premiere, which took place at La Scala in 1904. That performance



turned out to be one of the worst fiascoes in the entire history of opera, a blistering defeat that was owed at least in part to raucous clagues whose uproar almost defies description. According to one morning-after account, the demonstrators,

hired by Puccini's rivals, poured out "groans, moos, laughs, bellows, sneers [and] pandemonium, during which almost nothing could be heard." Still, hoping for the best, Puccini tried to take a bow, and when he came out – still crippled and leaning on a cane – some in the audience laughed. People also laughed at the leading soprano, and in one terrible moment during the performance, there was so much noise that she could not hear the orchestra and broke down crying.

Such a clamorous failure might have made the composer abandon the opera altogether, but instead he raged against that "cruel" audience and the critics, who were despicable, heartless "dogs" and "cowards, pigs, and cretins." One astute writer, however, correctly described the opera as "snapshots," which is just what it is: an album of snapshots of a geisha's life in Japan after the opening of that country to foreign trade and navies in the mid-1800s.

In an extraordinary book on *Madama Butterfly: Japonisme, Puccini, and the Search for the Real Cho-Cho-San*, Jan van Rij gives a solid account of the life the real Cho-Cho-San would have led and tries to identify the original. As a girl she would become a geisha to support herself, as *Butterfly* says she and her mother had done. Then the geisha entered into what I will call a "Madame Butterfly" marriage, with all arrangements made through a "broker" who was hired by a foreigner to find a house and set up housekeeping. The "broker" then procured (there is no other word for it) a young geisha to become that foreigner's temporary "wife," with the understanding that the arrangement was on a month-to-month basis, with the man free to walk away any time. As van Rij shows, these situations were very much a part of the Japanese culture, so *Butterfly* was almost a slice of Japanese reality. Puccini's problem was the first-night audience, which was unable to accept the opera as he wrote it. Thus the opera was almost hissed off the stage, and the impresario almost had to bring down the curtain on it.

Undaunted by failure, Puccini began revising the opera the next day, and he launched it anew in May. Since then, *Butterfly* has always remained popular.

### PUCCINI'S POWERFUL WOMEN

Part of this opera's long-term survival is owed to the



6 strength of its title-role character. In almost all of the 1900s, however, *Butterfly* and many of Puccini's other heroines were seen simply as victims: victims of fate, of their own susceptibility, or of manipulative or dangerous men.

This is just astonishing, and it is absolutely beyond belief that anyone could have felt that way, given the strength of the composer's female characters. In general, they are strong-willed and self-propelled, the chief actors in his dramas, towers of strength. Needless to say, Puccini created them all, in every real sense, finding the raw material for his own works of art by watching the women in his life. First of all, he was the favorite son of an iron-willed and ferociously ambitious mother, the woman who really pushed him into his career and forced him to stick with it through some very difficult times. Other examples of a strong female presence in his intimate circle came from his two possessive sisters and from his mistress, the courageous Elvira Bonturi Gemignani, who Puccini eventually married. To live with him, Elvira abandoned a failed marriage, leaving her husband and young son and taking her daughter with her when she left. In Italy in the late 1800s, such an act was almost unthinkable. Under the law, it was abandonment of the married couple's home, *abbandono del tetto coniugale*, and could even be seen as a crime, quite apart from all the moral implications that it carried.

Quite understandably, Puccini's operas have many strong, independent female characters. Tigrana in *Edgar* is a prime example of a power-mad, jealous, and evil woman; and *Turandot*, the daughter of the emperor of China, has

her suitors' heads cut off and mounted on stakes on the palace walls. *Madame Butterfly* and *Mimi* in *La Bohème* are "working girls," *Butterfly* employed as a geisha and *Mimi* as a self-employed seamstress who embroiders flowers on women's dresses. And *Mimi* lives alone in her mansard apartment and is dependent on no one. Like many other women in Puccini's operas, she makes decisions for herself, choosing first to live with Rodolfo and then to abandon him to become the mistress of a nobleman. *Manon Lescaut* is equally headstrong, eloping first with Des Grieux then leaving him to become the mistress of a rich, old man. *Magda* in *La Rondine* and *Musetta* in *La Bohème* earn their living as courtesans, members of an old, old profession. *Minnie* in *La Fanciulla del West* and *Tosca* are veritable powerhouses. *Minnie* – pistol in hand – makes her entrance shooting in Act I and Act III. As for *Tosca*, she has the courage to stab *Scarpia* to death in a face-to-face struggle, killing the corrupt tyrant who virtually rules Rome.

Then there are Puccini's women-suicides: *Tosca*, who jumps off the parapet of the Castel Sant'Angelo; *Butterfly*, who kills herself with a dagger to the heart; *Liu*, the slave girl in *Turandot*, who kills herself with a knife she seizes from a guard; and *Suor Angelica*, the nun who makes a poisoned drink from herbs and takes her own life. Even in Puccini's comedy, *Gianni Schicchi*, young *Lauretta* threatens suicide if she cannot marry the man she loves. There are no fading violets anywhere in this landscape, and these women tell us all we need to know about Puccini's respect for women.

Recently a lot of critical ink has been spilled over whether the characters in his operas were based on "real historical figures." These riveting studies give us a profound understanding of what Puccini's operas are really about. And all evidence indicates that he was simply a genius at creating works crowded with unforgettable women, women who bask in the sheer beauty of the music he wrote for them.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Personal thanks to Professor Harry Dunstan, founder of the Puccini Society of America; and Professor Arthur Groos of Cornell University, author of "Madame Butterfly: The Story," in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (July 1991). Jan van Rij's fascinating book is *Madame Butterfly: Japonisme, Puccini, and the Search for the Real Cho-Cho-San*. Charles Osborne offers a careful analysis of Puccini's works in *The Complete Operas of Puccini*.

*Mary Jane Phillips-Matz – Puccini historian and regular contributor to Opera News*

## JAPONISME AND THE ADVENT OF MODERNISM

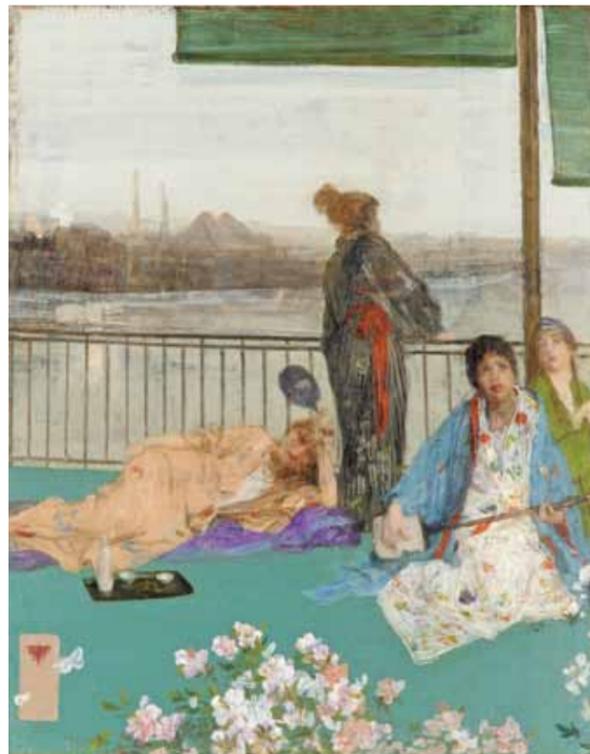
DAPHNE ANDERSON DEEDS

When Japan opened its doors to international trade in 1854, the western art world changed forever. After 250 years of isolation imposed by the policy of Sakoku, or “the secluded country,” Japanese decorative arts, crafts and fine arts flooded European markets, fostering a mania that did not subside for more than 40 years. The influence of Japanese art was soon evident in ceramics, glass, furniture, architecture, jewelry and textiles produced throughout Europe, but the impact on the fine arts was especially potent. The essential properties of Japanese art: large, flat areas of color devoid of chiaroscuro, strong contours, asymmetrical compositions, high vantage points, and an appreciation of everyday life as a valid subject, were revelations to a generation of French artists who were weary of traditional historical realism and mythological subjects. The Japanese aesthetic was hundreds of years old, and yet its immediacy and clarity anticipated modernism more directly than any other influence on western art.

The enthusiasm for Japanese art led French art critic Philippe Burty to coin the term *Japonisme* in 1872 “to designate a new field of study of artistic, historic and ethnographic borrowings from the arts of Japan.” Among the first importers of Japanese arts were the French brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, soon followed by the German-born Parisian Siegfried Bing. The Goncourts and Bing were zealous collectors of Japanese arts and crafts. But their most important contributions to *Japonisme* and to the history of modern art were their publications. The Goncourts’ nine volume *Journal* was published from 1851 to 1870, disseminating their observations about all things Japanese to fellow collectors and artists throughout France and beyond. Their novel, *Manette Salomon*, includes a passage describing the protagonist’s daydream while perusing an album of Japanese prints: “And from these albums of Japanese drawings, there dawned for him a day in this magical country, a day without shadow, a day that was nothing but light.” This reveling in the sunlight, after the dark palettes of Neoclassicism and the pre-Raphaelites, had a direct impact on the Impressionists, and their

appreciation of the singular moment in a natural setting. Bing, a porcelain manufacturer, published the periodical, *Le Japon Artistique*, which regularly included reproductions of prints that were circulated widely. Artists, collectors and dealers shared their copies of Bing’s magazine, quickly creating a thriving subculture within the Parisian art world.

Van Gogh, Degas, Whistler, Manet, and Lautrec are but a few of myriad artists whose work was dramatically transformed by their exposure to *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints of the Edo Period. These “pictures of the floating world” document daily life, fashion and diversions in urban Japan during the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries under the repressive rule of the Tokugawa shoguns. Because they were easily transportable and inexpensive, woodblock prints were enthusiastically imported to European capitals. Ironically, the Japanese considered them a lesser art documenting mundane subjects popularized by the bourgeoisie of the new merchant class. Many modern masters had access to the *shunga* books of erotica first imported by



7 - James Abbott McNeil Whistler, Variations on Flesh Colour and Green (The Balcony)

the Goncourt brothers. Bing’s publications also exposed artists to the Katsushika Hokusai’s *Manga* journals that chronicle a wide range of subjects, from the contorted expressions of Japanese actors, to women at their toilettes, to serene compositions of nature. All these images were both radical and liberating to the mid-nineteenth century French artists who were embarking on their own revolution in Impressionism.

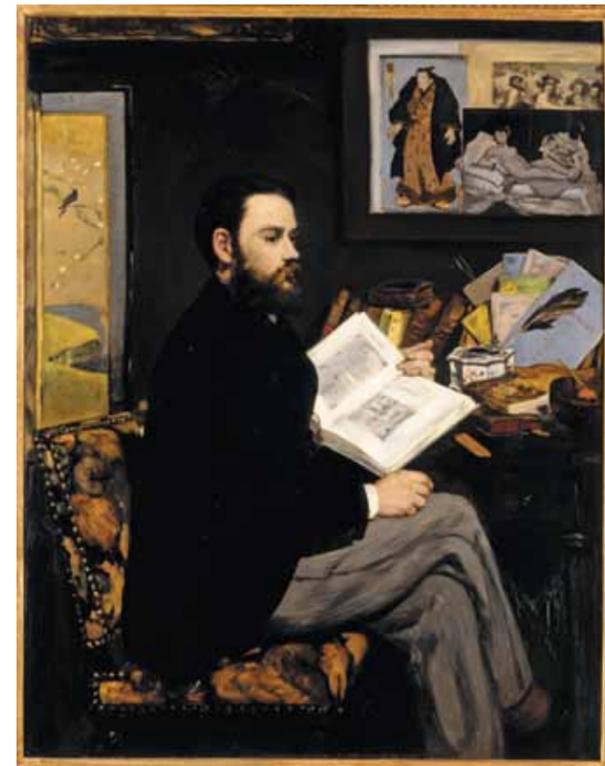
James Abbott McNeil Whistler was one of the first artists to embrace Japanese tenets. An American ex-patriot living in Paris and London, he was an avid collector of Japanese prints and ceramics through his friendship with the Goncourt brothers. Whistler’s work is replete with his appreciation of the reductivist Japanese aesthetic. *Variations in Flesh Colour and*

*Green: the Balcony*, c.1867-8,<sup>7</sup> overtly references Torii Kiyonaga’s *The Fourth Month: Gentlemen Entertained by Courtesans and Geisha at a Teahouse in Shihagowa*, c.1783<sup>8</sup>. Like the Japanese reference, Whistler shows female figures in Japanese robes sitting on a balcony. One of the women holds a Japanese fan, another plays a koto. While the setting of Kiyonaga’s print is an interior with a window looking out to the sea with sailboats, across Whistler’s river we see a contemporaneous Battersea Park. Whistler uses the horizontals of the railing and the flat screens to emphasize the flatness of the canvas, while experimenting with a variety of postures, including the standing figure that stands with her back to the viewer.



8 - Torii Kiyonaga, The Fourth Month: Gentlemen entertained by Courtesans and Geisha in Shihagowa from the Series Twelve Months in the South

By the mid-1860s, a truly cultivated Frenchman would have more than a passing awareness of Japanese culture. Édouard Manet's *Portrait of Émile Zola*<sup>9</sup>, epitomizes the image of the urbane aesthete. Zola, the famous naturalist author, had learned of Japanese prints through the Goncourt brothers, and his own collection rivaled theirs. Zola, whose novels contributed to the new realism in France, championed Manet's paintings, then often considered scandalous, such as the infamous *Olympia* or *Dejeuner sur L'Erbe*, as expressions of a kindred spirit. The portrait shows us the novelist in his study with his papers and books. Above his desk are several prints: a reproduction of *Olympia*, a print by Velázquez, and a woodcut showing a Sumo wrestler by Kuniyaki II. A Japanese folding screen is seen to the left behind Zola's chair. Manet has constructed the scene on shallow parallel planes, in contrast to Renaissance one point perspective. The patterns of upholstery, papers, and prints surround the flat blacks and greys of Zola's costume, much as the layered fabrics in shunga woodcuts create a near-abstraction. Manet's personal relationship with Zola gave him license to depict an intimacy encoded with personal references similar to the representations of family life in Ukiyo-e prints.

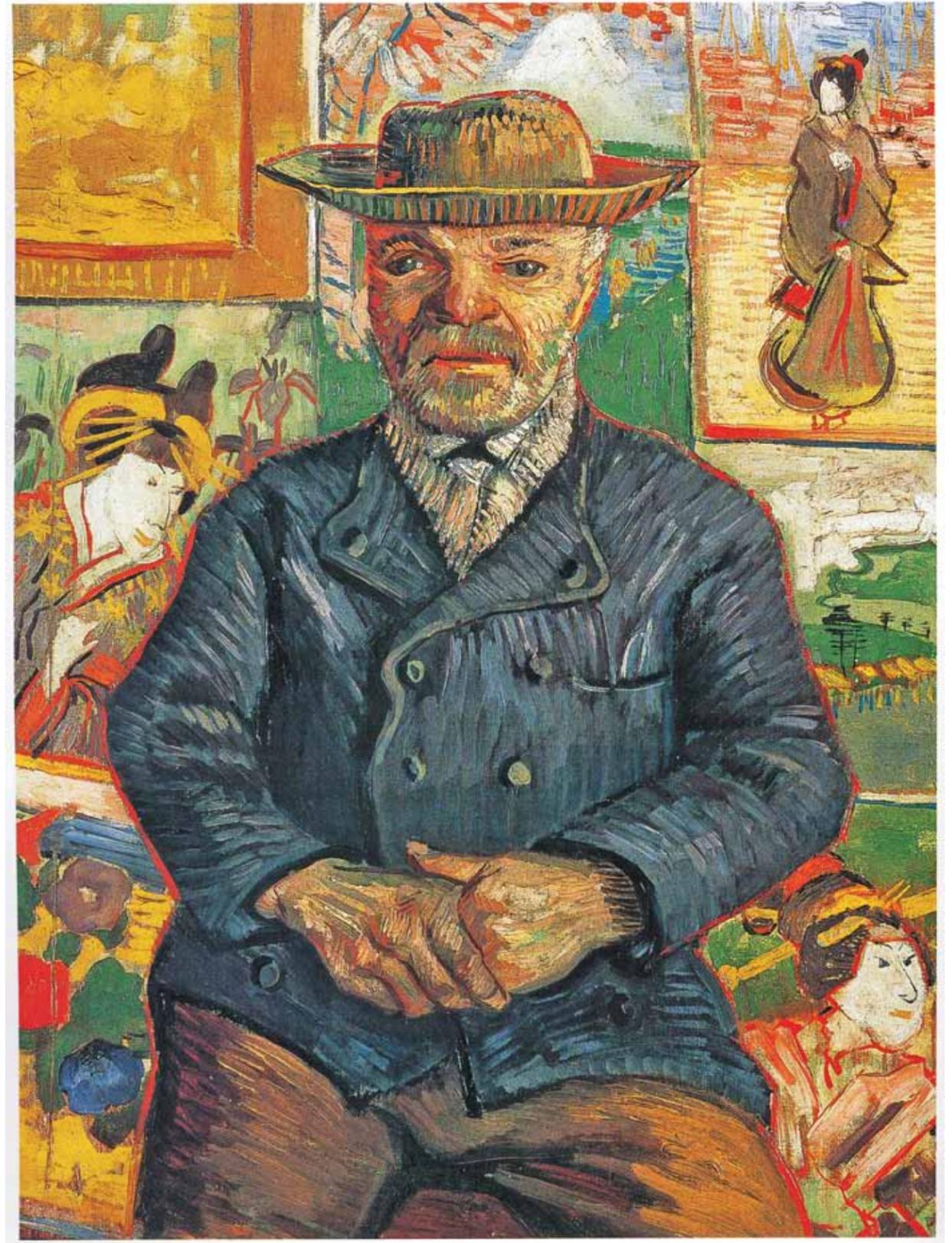


9 - Edouard Manet, Portrait of Emile Zola

Van Gogh's reference to Japanese woodblock prints was often more explicit than the implied familiarity of Manet's portrait of Zola, or Whistler's transposition of a Japanese format. In a letter to his brother Theo, Van Gogh describes his new home in Arles: "A little town surrounded by fields all covered with yellow and purple flowers; exactly – can't you see it? – like a Japanese dream...you see things with an eye more Japanese, you feel color differently." His 1887 *Japoniserie: the Bridge*<sup>14</sup> is an explicit copy in oil of Ando Hiroshige's woodcut, *Ohashi Bridge in the Rain*<sup>13</sup>, 1857, to which he has added his signature impastoed strokes. A serious student of Japanese prints, Van Gogh felt they offered him a new world of creative precepts. He soon incorporated Japanese color, composition and conciseness into all his work. In Van Gogh's portrait, *Le Père Tanguy*<sup>10</sup>, 1887-8, we see that the artist has covered his walls with woodblock prints. Tanguy, a traveling color pigment salesman, is celebrated with the brilliant array of images behind his Buddha-like presence. It is as though Van Gogh has deified Tanguy as his personal emissary of color.

The lessons Edgar Degas learned from Japanese prints are perhaps the most radical. His use of the truncated figure, the curtailed space, and the asymmetrical composition were truly progressive. In a painting such as *The Tub*<sup>17</sup>, 1886, Degas focuses on form and volumes. Like the Japanese precedents, he uses the toilette as a powerful subject, elevating the colloquial to an almost monumental moment, but countering the intimacy of the scene with the anonymity of the subject. In this small, constructed space, Degas used a high vantage point to see the squatting figure as a rounded form within the curved tub. These voluptuous contours are dramatically cut by the strong diagonal of the shelf on the right, destabilizing the traditional perspective while including the viewer in the implied voyeurism of the scene that continues beyond the edge of the page. Degas' "slice of life" devices were directly inherited from the Japanese and influenced generations of progressive artists.

If Degas was the artist's artist, then Toulouse Lautrec was the artist who brought Japanese techniques to the people. A student of the famed lithographer and poster



10 - Vincent Van Gogh, Le Père Tanguy

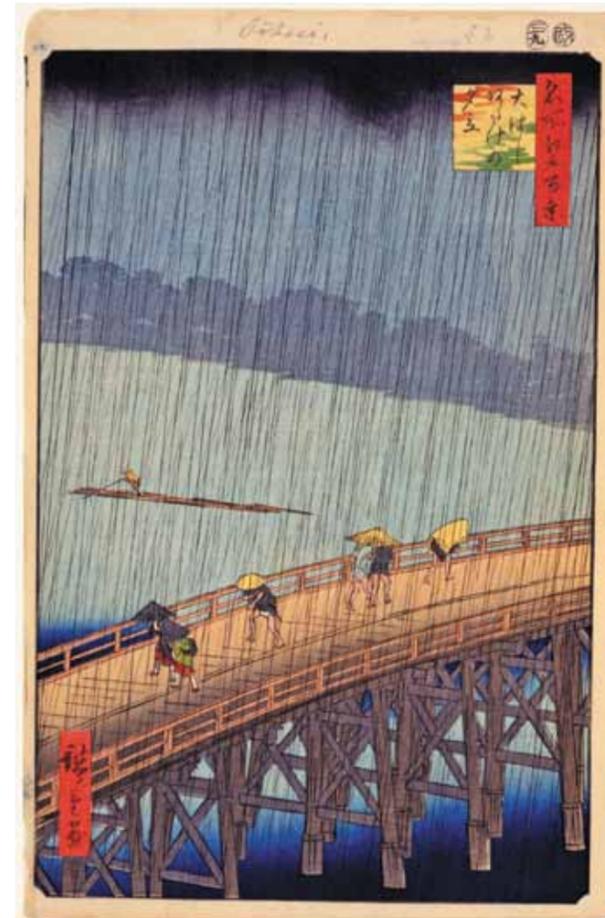


11 - Kitagawa Utamaro, Servant on the Verandah

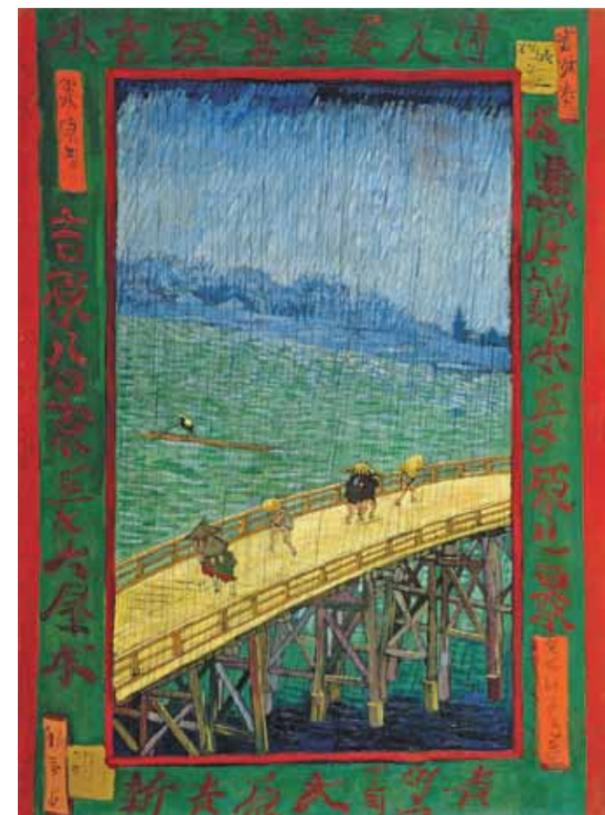


12 - Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, Divan Japonais

designer Jules Cheret, Lautrec used the technical lessons he learned to become the foremost poster artist of Paris. His bold imagery conveys the intended message with an immediacy that was ahead of its time. Like his peers, Lautrec collected Japanalia, including woodblock prints. A lithographic poster such as *Divan Japonais*<sup>12</sup>, 1893, uses silhouette to dramatic advantage. Japanese artists like Kitagawa Utamaro used monochromatic prints with saturated blacks and graduated mid-ground greys in their woodblock prints, especially when depicting geishas and courtesans, as in his *Servant on the Verandah of the Restaurant Nakataya*<sup>11</sup>, a woodblock of c.1794. Lautrec's defined black shapes of the red-haired woman's costume approach abstraction in their graphic contours and flat surfaces. The other elements of the scene, the orchestra, the chorus girls, and an admirer are rendered subordinate to the compelling black in the foreground. Lautrec's posters communicate with a directness that was unprecedented in western art, and inconceivable without the models that Japanese woodblock prints provided.



13 - Utagawa Hiroshige, Sudden Shower Over Shin-Ohashi Bridge and Atake



14 - Vincent Van Gogh, The Bridge in the Rain

Japanese fashion was all the rage by the 1880s, and many western artists used kimonos and other colorful silk costumes as the true subjects of their portraiture. Claude Monet painted his blonde wife gaily twirling in a red brocaded robe<sup>15</sup>. Whistler designed wall paper, furniture and frames with Japanese motifs, most famously his "Peacock Room," now installed at the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C. Countless artists included Japanese fans, screens, fabrics and ceramics in their paintings of domestic scenes and interiors. From France the craze quickly spread throughout Europe, and by the late nineteenth century, many American artists began to study in Europe, or they gained access to publications like Bing's *Le Japon Artistique*.

Arthur Wesley Dow was one of the foremost teachers of Japanese woodblock technique<sup>16</sup>. After studying at the Academie Julien in Paris and traveling through Europe, Dow opened a school in Ipswich, New York, where he promoted Hokusai's work as his primary influence. Marsh Creek, 1905, epitomizes his mastery of the woodblock. His students included Georgia O'Keeffe, Max Weber, and Gertrude Käsebier, among many early modernists in America. As these students evolved they paved the way for the abstractionists known as the New York School.

The reference to Japanese aesthetics continued into the twentieth century. But as early as 1868, Edmond de Goncourt complained about the popularity of Japanese culture. Bing capitalized on the craze, opening his famed Paris shop in 1888, and organizing exhibitions of private collections of Japanese arts and crafts throughout the 1890s, events that delivered Japan's woodblock prints, ceramics, furniture, fabrics and numerous domestic items to the mainstream, and secured the huge transition from realism to decorative art. As is often the case, the visual arts evolved toward modernism before music and literature.

Though the western world would have found the way to abstraction, the influx of Japanese art clearly accelerated the process. By the early twentieth



15 - Claude Monet, La Japonais (Camille Monet in Japanese Costume)

century, the floodgates were wide open. Freud had revealed the unconscious, Einstein explained that space was curved, the Theosophists claimed that thoughts were tangible, and Joyce wrote a novel that recorded the protagonist's thoughts as he thought them. The reductivist qualities of Japanese prints activated this confluence of ideas, directing artists away from the realist tradition while propelling them into the uncharted territory where art is defined by ideas rather than illusions.

*Daphne Anderson Deeds – Fine Art & Museum Consultant, Litchfield Connecticut.*



16 - Arthur Wesley Dow, Japanese Color Prints

**SOURCES**

- [Japonisme, Cultural Crossings between Japan and the West](#), Phaidon Press Limited, London, 2005
- [Arthur Wesley Dow and His Influence](#), Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, 1990
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17 - Edgar Degas, The Tub

## DIRECTING BUTTERFLY

LESLIE SWACKHAMER



When I first met Jun, he was on a ladder with clay up to his elbows, working on a gigantic head. He joked that the piece might take two years to dry, and then he wouldn't be able to say whether it would crack when it encountered the incredible heat of the kiln. I knew then that we would have a rich collaboration! As with one of Jun's large clay pieces, we have worked for over two years to create the world that will be our *Madama Butterfly*. It has been an incredibly rich creative and collaborative process born out of deep respect for Puccini's masterpiece and its resonance within Jun Kaneko's beautiful and profound aesthetic vision.

My background is heavily weighted toward the development of new work and I approach any play or opera I am working on as if it is a new piece. I start with the story. Yes, I of course research how its been done before, what traditions exist and such. But, I really strive to find a way to strip away traditions and find what speaks at the core of the piece to today's audience. I am not seeking to be new for the sake of new. I am seeking to find the inner essence of the piece – what leapt out of its creator's pen, fueled by an original intent

and passion – and connect that impulse and essence to a contemporary audience. When Puccini originally presented *Madama Butterfly*, the West was in the thrall of a fascination with all things "oriental," and most audiences had few preconceived images of things or places Japanese. They would be able to see Japan through Pinkerton's eyes as something new, exciting and highly seductive. For today's audience, images such as fans, hanging lanterns, parasols, lovely as they are, have become clichés. How could we help our audience brush away the veil of these clichés and once again enter the exotic world of this opera with fresh eyes? And so, as Jun and I began to work together, we focused on that very basic thing that is at the center of all theatre and opera: the story and the impetus to tell it.

What is the story you want to tell with *Madama Butterfly*?

The answer to this dictates every subsequent decision. In one of our first meetings, I brought Jun an image I had found from a book on Butoh, the revolutionary form of Japanese dance born out of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the picture, a woman in simple red robes is crouched, hugging herself, alone on a gray rock in the

midst of a seemingly endless gray sea. Ripples emanate from the rock into infinity. Her face, covered in the characteristic white rice powder, is distilled in grief. The image is a disturbing mix of the serenity and inexorability of the sea and the passionate rawness of this woman's grief. For me, it captured the essence of the Butterfly I wanted to create. This woman could well be Cio-Cio-San at the end, just before her final act of ritual suicide. This is not some delicate little victim. This is clearly a woman who has embraced something fierce, huge and elemental. She could be Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, Antigone or Medea. For us, she is Madame Butterfly.

In our approach to *Madama Butterfly*, Jun and I have focused on the story as more closely related to Greek Tragedy than to a civilized ornate opera. We sought to create a setting with an elemental power that would reflect the vortex of passion that sweeps the characters into the abyss. The story that Puccini creates through his opera is stripped of any real subplots or unnecessary detail. What would happen if we, too, stripped the design down to what was simply and absolutely necessary to tell the story?

Jun's set creates a powerful metaphor for the emotional journey of the opera. A curving, downwardly spiraling ramp pulls the characters into the space. Behind them, a sweeping cyclorama, also curved, saturated with color. The playing space continues a feeling of spiraling inward to an off-center raised disc, which represents the epicenter of emotion, as well as Butterfly's house. As in a Zen garden or the rippling sea, circles radiate from that disc. The imagination of the audience is a powerful thing, and we trust that a simple sliding shoji screen will instigate a world of creative imaginings of Butterfly's house. As the story progresses, other less literal screens will dissect the space, and projections upon these screens will mirror and provoke the emotional landscape. Jun's art is the unifying element. When Butterfly and Pinkerton sing of the stars and the moon, traditionally most productions actually have a stardrop and some sort of moonbox. Instead, we approach this through the projection of painterly images. Hence, for example, Jun's trademark polka dots embellish a dark blue screen, becoming the stars and the night sky.

The costumes must also be within the world of Jun Kaneko's aesthetic, while reflecting the story and its

characters. The cultural differences between East and West are central to the story, and are reflected in the contrast in silhouette between the Pinkerton-Sharpless-Kate triad and all other characters. Goro, who mediates between East and West, represents a synthesis of these styles, with his fedora-ish hat, western trousers and hybrid jacket. The Japanese characters have elements of traditional dress reflected in the tabi on the feet, cut of sleeve and drape of clothing. All are rooted in traditional dress extrapolated into Jun's aesthetic. The choice for Yamadori, a cutaway coat with top hat, derives from research into Japan at the turn of the last century, where we found many Japanese people of wealth adopting this style. As the opera progresses into the final act and Butterfly's hope washes away, so too will the color gradually bleach out of the costumes and set until what once started as a colorful rainbow of joy and hope will stand starkly in hues of black and white. The final punctuation will be through the color red.

Leslie Swackhamer – Stage Director and Theatrical Consultant, *Madama Butterfly*



## THE VISUAL ASPECT OF MUSIC

STEWART ROBERTSON

The fascination of one artist's work for another artist working in a different medium is sometimes difficult to comprehend. This might well have been the case with Puccini's first encounter with David Belasco's play, *Madama Butterfly*, particularly as the play was written in English, a language with which the composer had little fluency. Puccini, however, was quick to grasp the outline of the plot and was immediately struck by the opportunities offered to create atmosphere, paint colorful musical pictures and portray an emotional journey born out of the collision of two disparate cultures.

One aspect of Belasco's play in particular we know to have held a special fascination for Puccini. On realizing that Pinkerton's ship has returned, Cio Cio San keeps vigil during the night while awaiting her husband's visit the following morning. In the original production of the play, Belasco staged a much admired scene showing the passage of dusk to dawn, all the more impressive given the relatively limited lighting possibilities of the period. When writing the opera Puccini created a substantial orchestral interlude describing this "dark night of the soul." We see and hear Cio Cio San veer from listlessness and anguish through optimism and confidence in belief in her husband's constancy. With the coming of the morning light and the birds' dawn chorus, the heroine becomes increasingly ecstatic and her spirits rise higher and higher in a series of violin arpeggios that disappear unresolved into the clear morning air. This most visual of music is one of the chief glories of Puccini's miraculous score.

At the outset of the opera, the composer again gives us a graphic description of the hilltop house Pinkerton has leased for himself and his new Japanese "wife." Little scurrying passages in the orchestra give us the sense of the bustling life of Nagasaki, while the suspended timeless quality of the house itself is suggested by two clarinets playing repeated notes over and over again – a sonic image so real that one can almost touch it. By contrast the business-like conversation of Pinkerton and Sharpless, the American Consul, takes place over a portion of the American national anthem, a quotation that ends on an unresolved chord, suggesting that perhaps the American mercantile confidence might, in this context, be misplaced.

Again a strong sense of atmosphere and the visual comes to the fore through Puccini's use of Japanese folk melodies. The humming chorus at the conclusion of Act Two vividly paints a picture of dusk and Suzuki's preparations for night, while the wordless offstage calls of the sailors at the beginning of Act Three give us a marvelously three-dimensional sense of the house and the harbor far off in the distance.

Puccini's score abounds with detailed descriptions of the stage settings, and while modern directors and designers choose largely to interpret these in their own ways the very presence of these descriptions show us just how much the composer was concerned with the "look" and "feel" of his opera. Two portions of Act II in particular demonstrate Puccini's fascination with the visual. The first, the so-called flower duet, describes Cio Cio San and Suzuki gathering flowers to decorate the house in preparation for Pinkerton's return. As the music modulates warmly from one key to another, we sense that the blossoms they have gathered are being scattered into every available corner in order to create a floral paradise. The second portion, by contrast, is the aria sung by Cio Cio San when Sharpless asks her what she would do if Pinkerton were not to return. By way of reply she says that perhaps she might return to her former occupation of geisha, or better still – die! The music of this aria takes on the angular melodic and harmonic qualities of traditional Japanese music. It is in fact this same music that returns to close the opera after the death of Cio Cio San. This time the music is played stridently in unison by the whole orchestra with no trace of harmony until the last note, an unresolved chord that commentators have described as a musical scream or cry of anguish.

As a master composer such as Puccini can respond to a story in such a visual way, it seems to me not only appropriate but necessary and exciting that an artist of the stature of Jun Kaneko can translate the sound of the score back into visual images of strength and great beauty. This interpretation for me completely captures the spirit of Puccini's original intentions.

*Stewart Robertson – Artistic Director and  
Principal Conductor, Opera Omaha*



## THE FABRIC WORKSHOP AND MUSEUM

LILA KANNER

The history of collaboration between Jun Kaneko and The Fabric Workshop and Museum (FWM) is nearly as old as the Workshop itself. Since 1977, The FWM in Philadelphia has enabled the finest artists of the day to work with new materials to expand the frontiers of contemporary artistic practice to innovative and dynamic ends. Each year, FWM invites 10 to 12 artists to collaborate with its staff of Master Printers, Construction Technicians, and apprentices to create new work in experimental media. Jun Kaneko as a repeat Artist-in-Residence at The Fabric Workshop and

Museum has each time produced unparalleled elegant work in textile design. In 2004, Kaneko first approached The Fabric Workshop and Museum to collaborate with him to develop the fabrics for this production of *Madama Butterfly* – to consider design possibilities and costume elements that were appropriate to the opera and consistent with his artistic practice.

Kaneko first came to FWM in 1979 as an artist best known for his ceramic and glasswork in Nagura, Japan.



First introduced to Founder and Artistic Director of FWM, Marion Boulton Stroud in New York City at Clayworks, he soon worked with the studio staff at FWM to master repeat patterning and silkscreen printing with his incomparable eye for material simplicity and elegance. Jun's residency resulted in gorgeous garments and bags of both a positive and negative version of repeat yardage. It has been a great honor and privilege to work with Jun Kaneko again, more than 20 years later, on the costumes for *Madama Butterfly*.

Jun approached The Fabric Workshop and Museum in 2004, knowing that there was specific technical dyeing and printing which he wanted to do at FWM to create original fabrics for some of his costume designs for the opera. The artist was matched with Project Coordinator Kate Abercrombie who as a skilled printer and studio technician (and opera lover) was able to respond to Jun's particular direction, aesthetic decisions and technical needs.

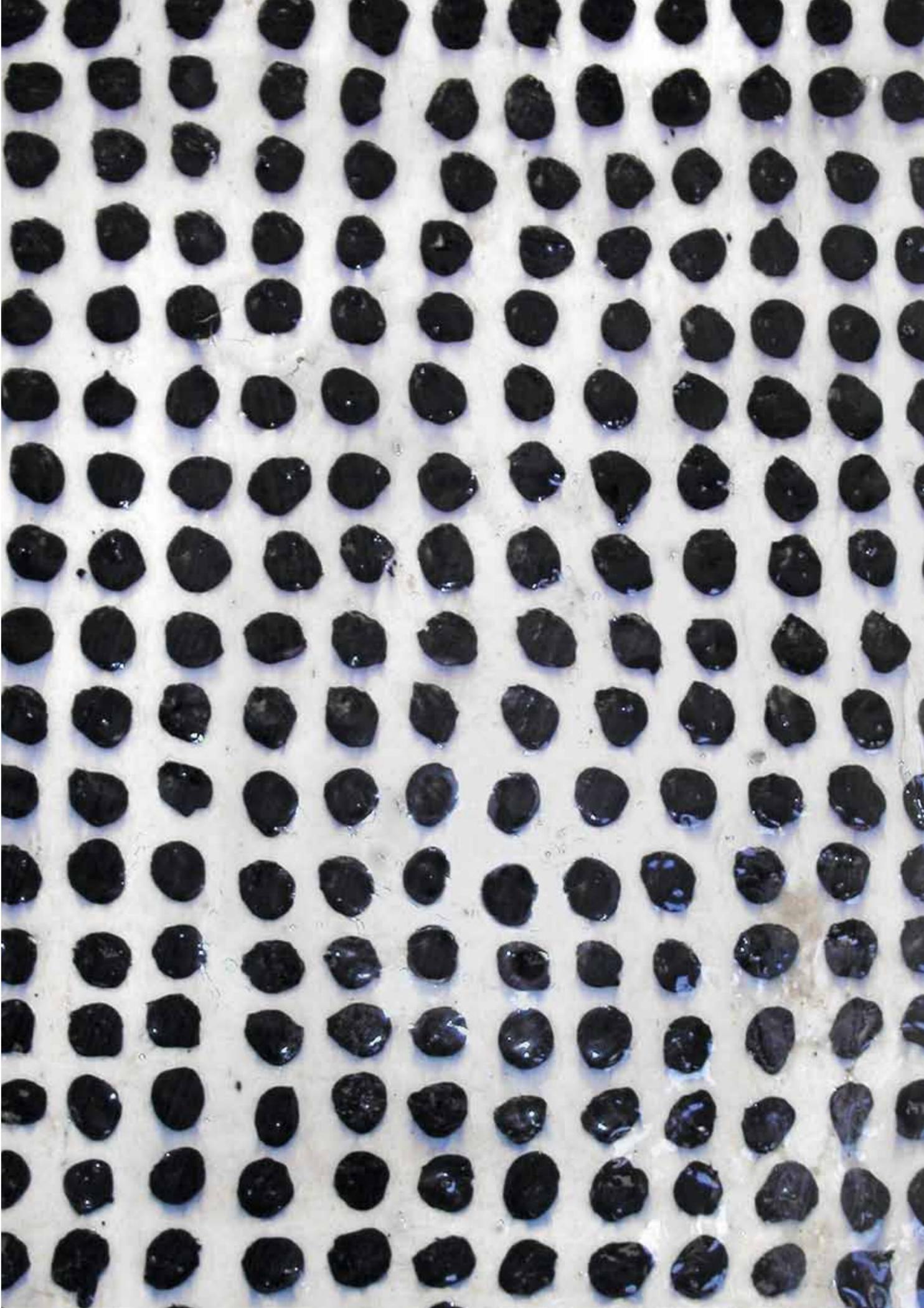
At a March 2005 meeting at Kaneko studio in Omaha, FWM staff and Artistic Director Marion Boulton Stroud worked with Jun and Rose Brown, Costume Shop Manager at The Utah Symphony and Opera, to determine which fabrics would be produced at FWM. The group decided that designs incorporating Kaneko's

signature mark making – the brush strokes and hand-painted polka dots that appeared in both his first FWM project and in his ceramics – would be produced at FWM, while solid-color and woven fabrics would be commercially produced. The fabrics printed at the Workshop appear largely in the opera's first act – their bright colors and active patterns echoing the romance and joy of *Butterfly* and Pinkerton's "wedding" and their Love Duet – while darker, monochromatic fabrics would be used leading up to the story's tragic ending.

Jun Kaneko's collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum allowed him to maintain a sense of personal handiwork in a large-scale undertaking. The artist's hand is visible in the non-uniform circles and brush strokes of his designs. It is fitting that Kaneko returned to FWM – the site of his first experimentation with silk screen printing. *Madama Butterfly* with all its magic and ceremony is a fitting and elegant site in which Kaneko's hand and vision flourish.

*Fabric Workshop and Museum - The Fabric Workshop and Museum (FWM) is the only non-profit arts organization in the United States devoted to creating new work in fabric and other materials in collaboration with emerging, nationally, and internationally recognized artists*







## UTAH SYMPHONY & OPERA, COSTUME SHOP

ROSE BROWN

Utah Opera's Costume Shop has been building costumes for 28 years, and with the acquisition 10 years ago of both our Opera Production Studios and Rose Brown as Costume Shop Manager, Utah Opera began renting its costumes to other opera companies. During the past decade, Utah Opera has built an excellent reputation as both a construction and rental house. For this reason we were approached by Opera Omaha to execute Jun Kaneko's designs for its 2006 production of *Madama Butterfly*.

When the project was proposed, Rose was intrigued, especially since Mr. Kaneko was an internationally-renowned artist but one who had never designed costumes before. Jun created a design for each character, and selected precise colors by means of a universal color chart often used in graphic design.

The first charge for Rose and Ken Burrell, UO's Cutter/Draper, was to estimate yardage needed for each costume and then shop for fabrics that matched the precise colors. They spent four days in Los Angeles in the fabric district selecting fabrics with the intense colors Jun wanted. Fabric was also shipped in from The Fabric Workshop and Museum of Philadelphia, where the special design elements, Mr. Kaneko's signature dots and lines, had been added.

Ken was the highly-organized color expert and made the women's costumes come to life from the designs. He worked very closely with Jun to insure a correct

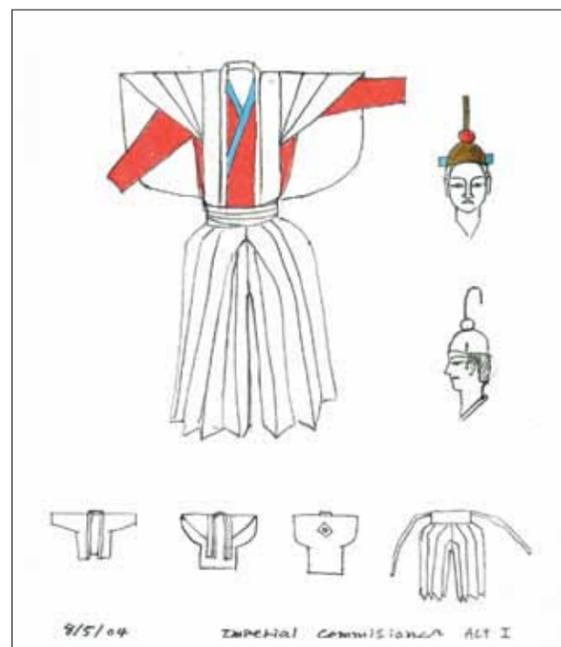
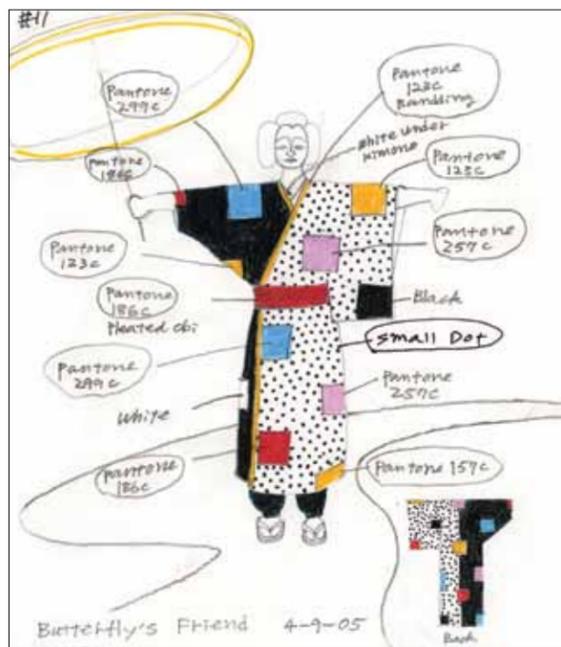


interpretation of Jun's designs. Gloria Pendlebury, the Head Tailor, made the men's patterns; and Milivoj Poletan, Tailor's First Hand, did the actual construction of the men's costumes. The Opera Omaha production of *Madama Butterfly* came to life through the wonderful talents of Utah Opera's capable stitchers: Louise Vanderhoof, Susan Young Ure, Melonie Mortensen, Rachel Campos, Jennifer Jenkins, LisaAnn DeLapp, and Vicki Raincrow.

Utah Opera's work in interpreting Jun Kaneko's designs and constructing his costumes was complete in December 2005. Opera Omaha's costumers will do the final fittings on its performers in January and February, and the world will see Jun Kaneko's vivid new conception of *Madama Butterfly*, an opera generally conceived much more traditionally, in March 2006.

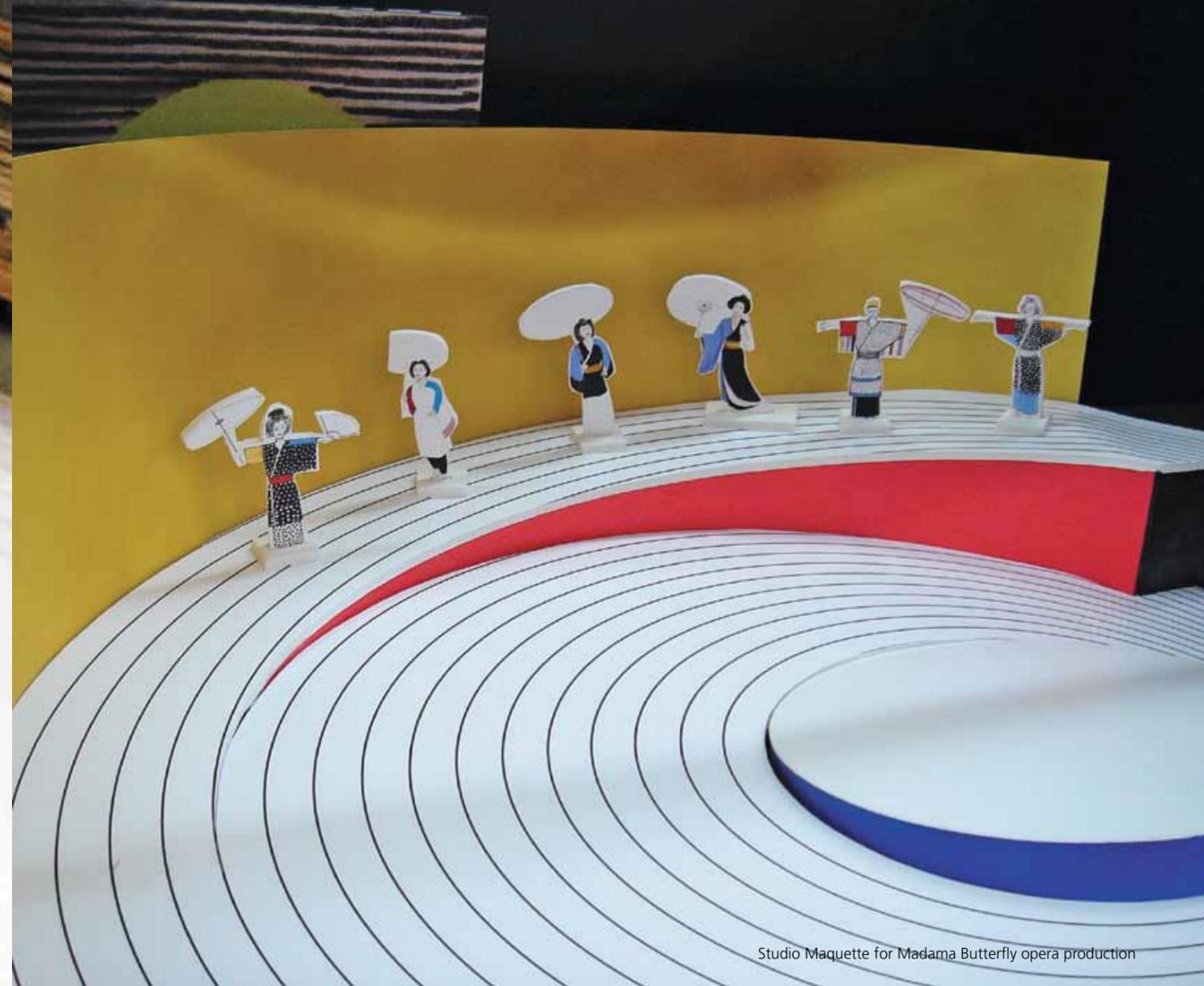








Drawing concentric oval pattern for the stage floor



Studio Maquette for Madama Butterfly opera production



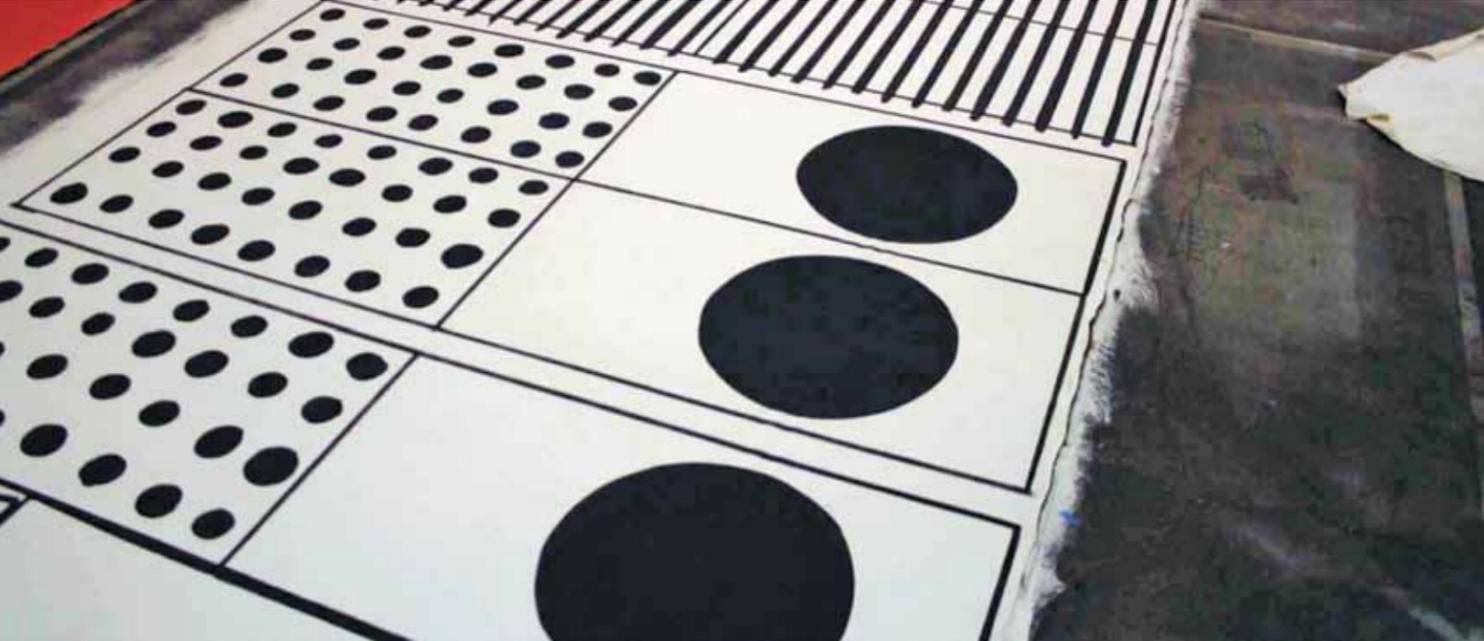




Image of Flower Shower video projection

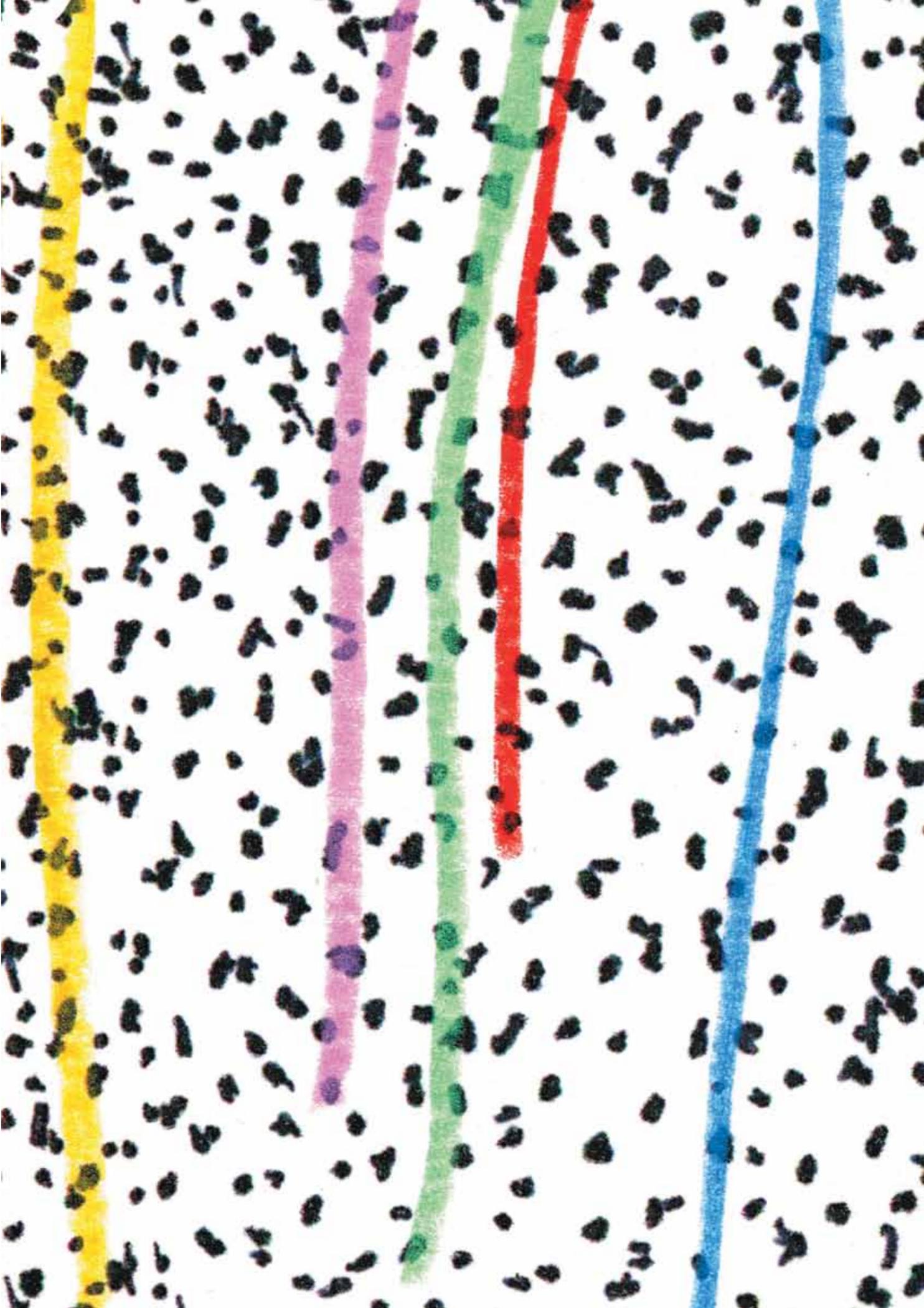
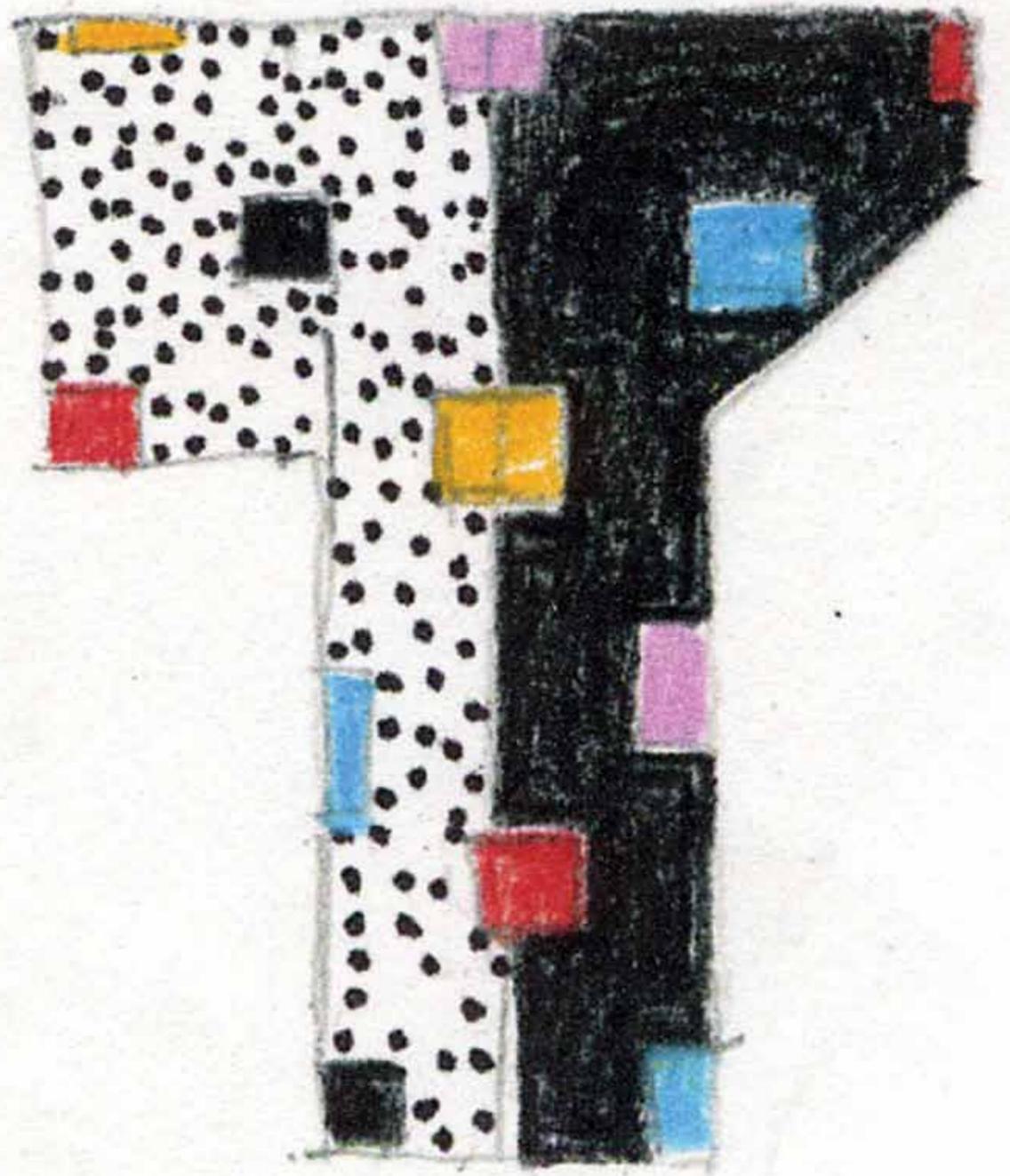
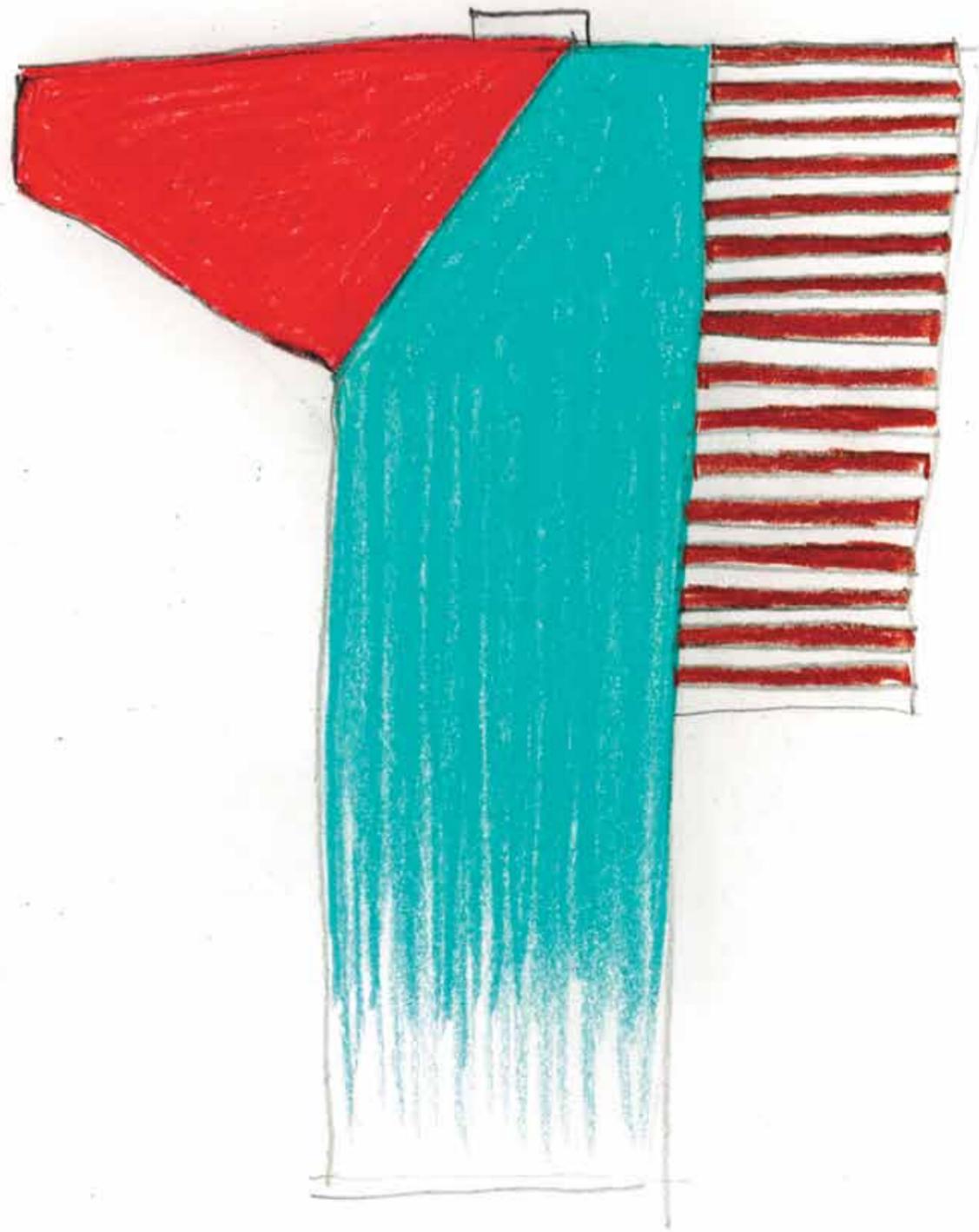


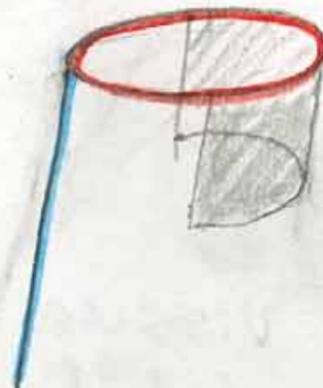
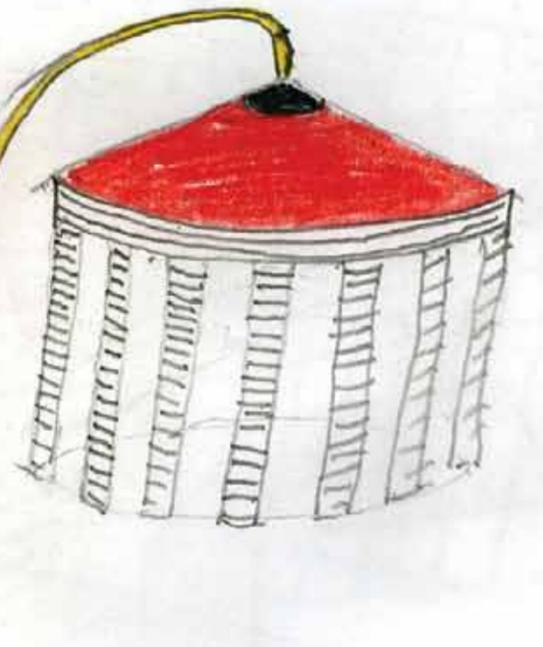
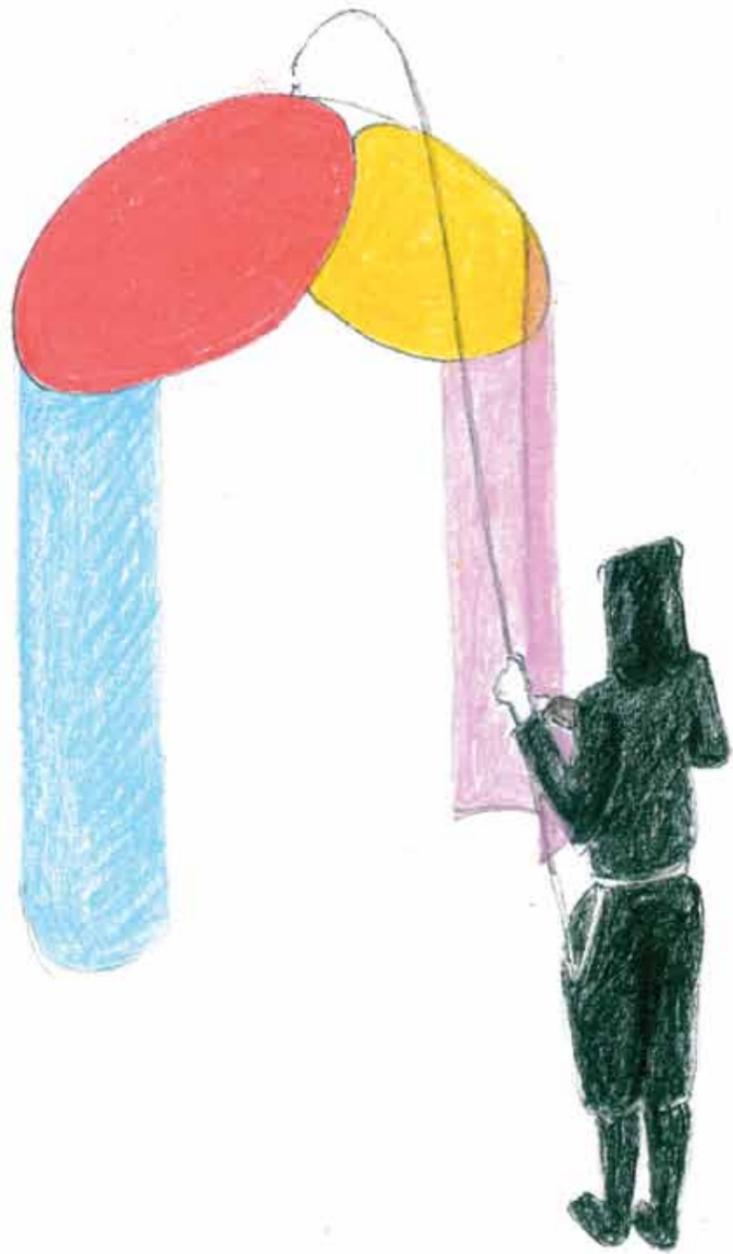
Image of Flower Shower video projection



Goro's Hat

ACT II



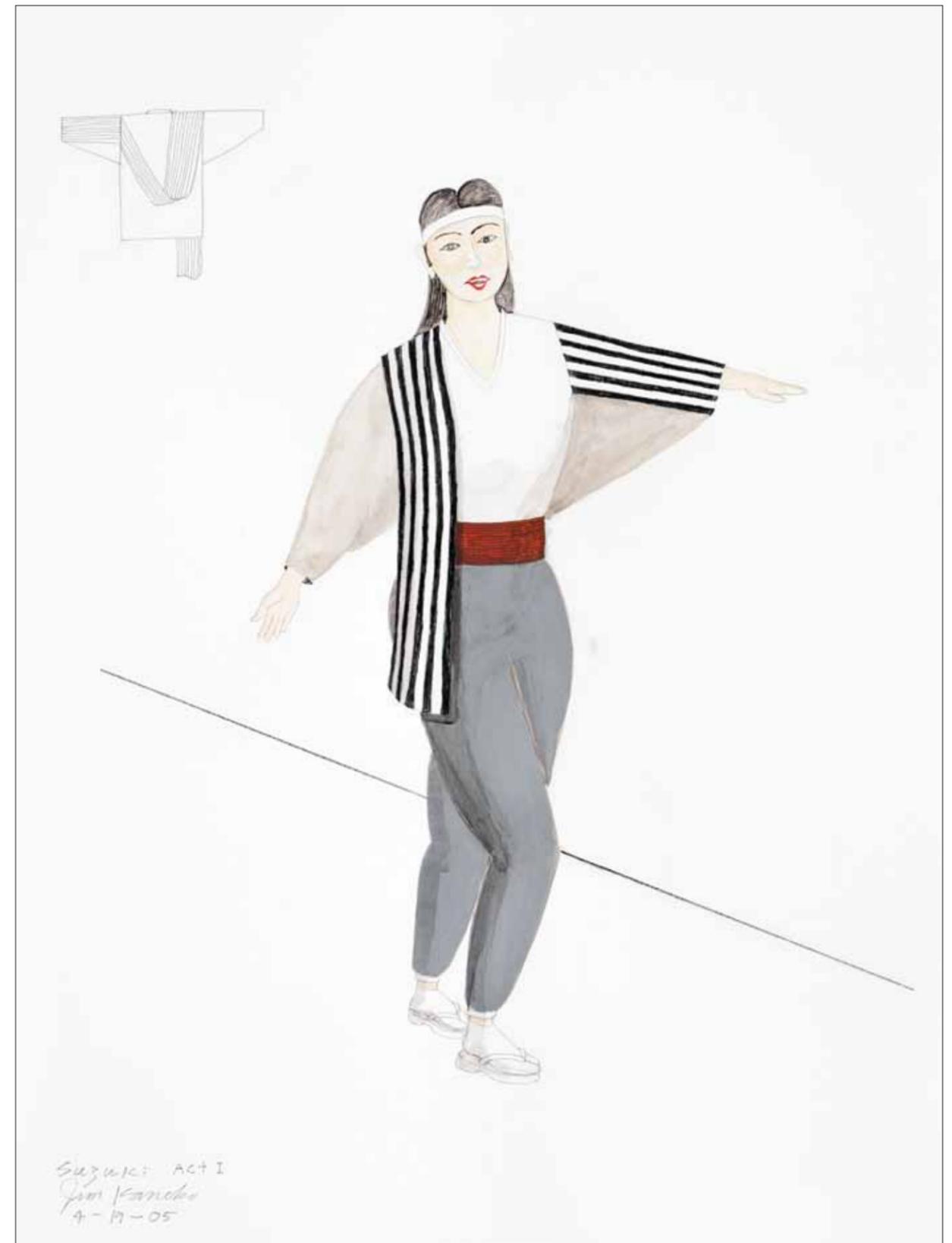


8/16/04

Butterfly's umbrella

**COSTUME SKETCHES**











Mission Clay studio, Pittsburg, Kansas 2005



Picaro studio, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico 2005

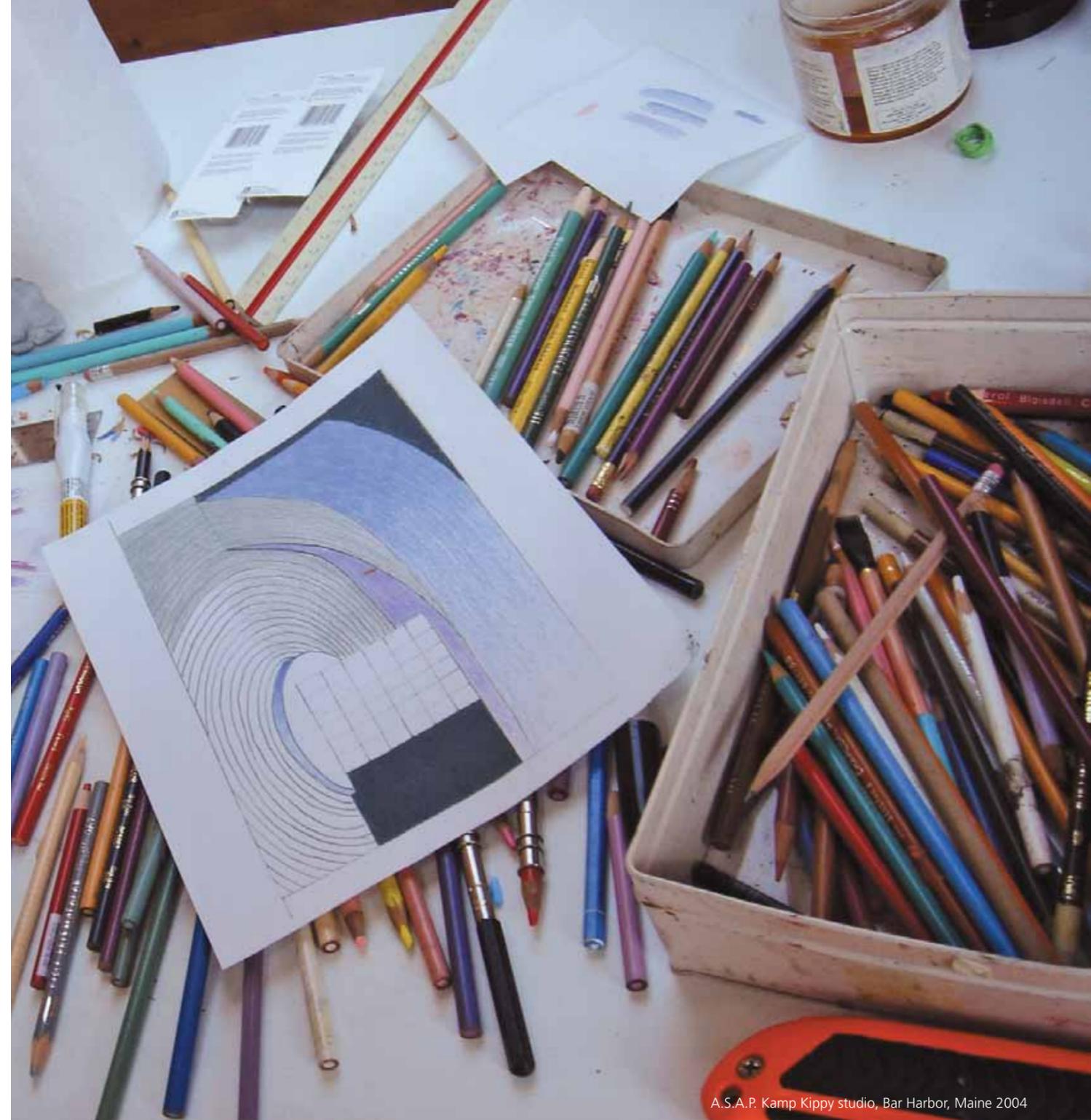




Picaro studio, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico 2005



A.S.A.P. Kamp Kippy studio, Bar Harbor, Maine 2004

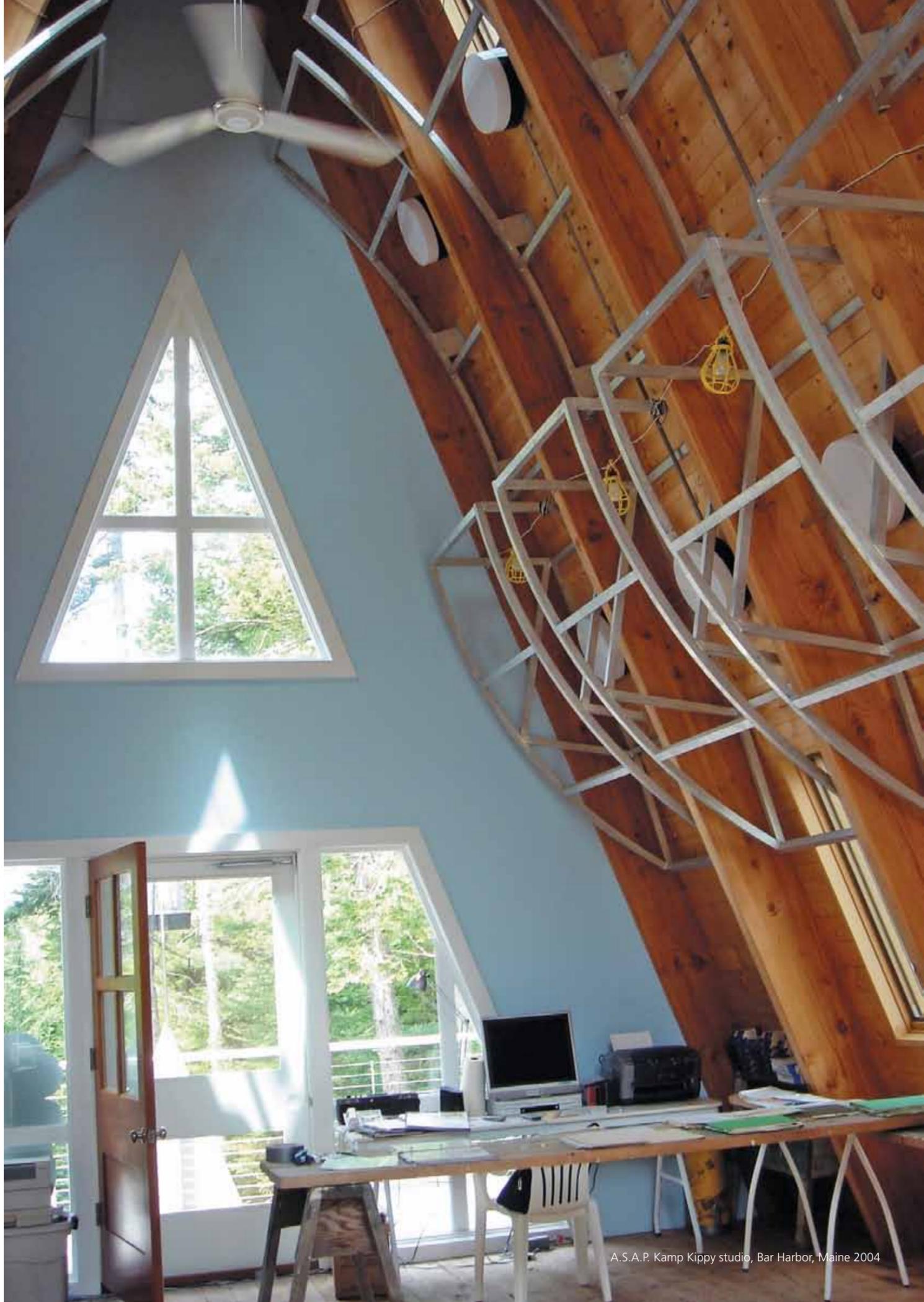


A.S.A.P. Kamp Kippy studio, Bar Harbor, Maine 2004

A.S.A.P. Kamp Kippy studio, Bar Harbor, Maine 2004

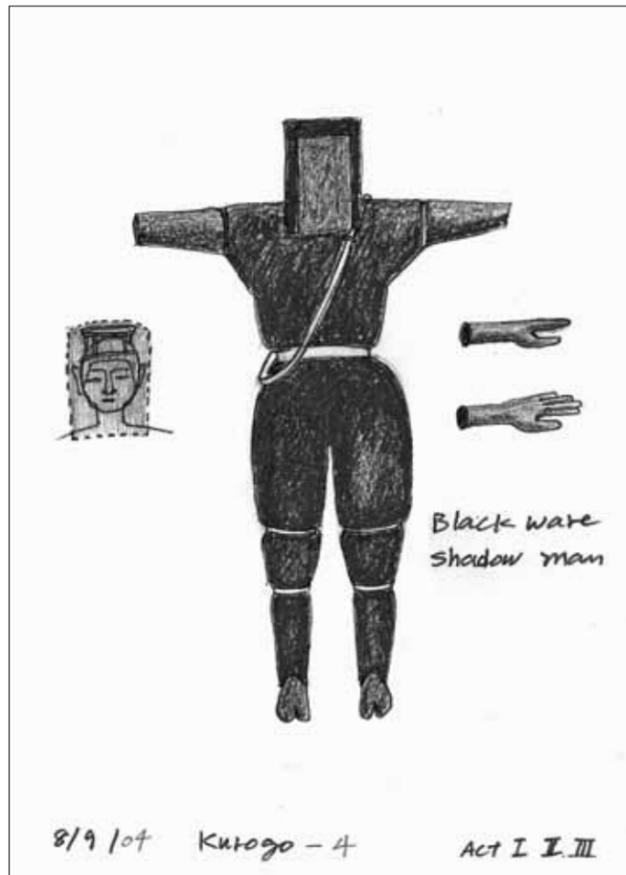
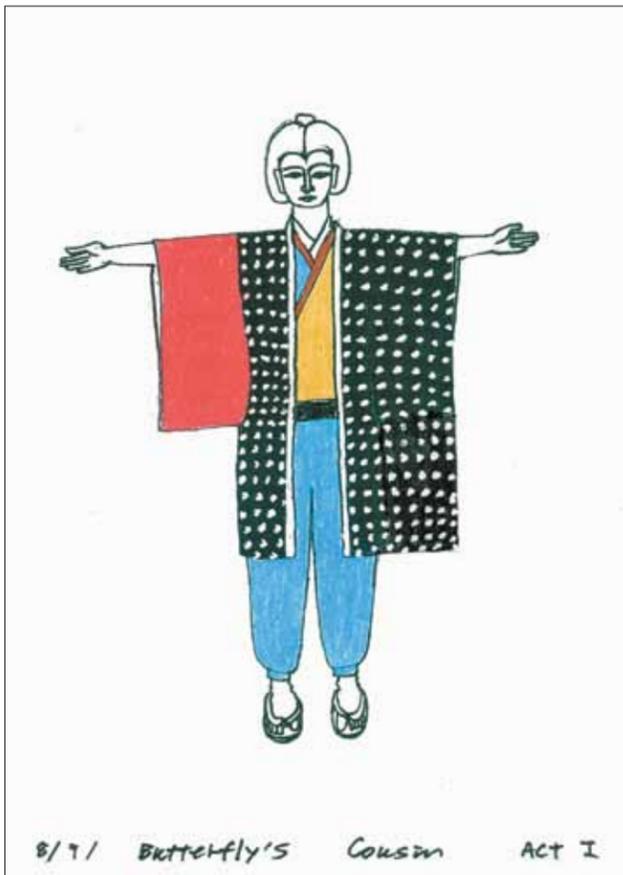
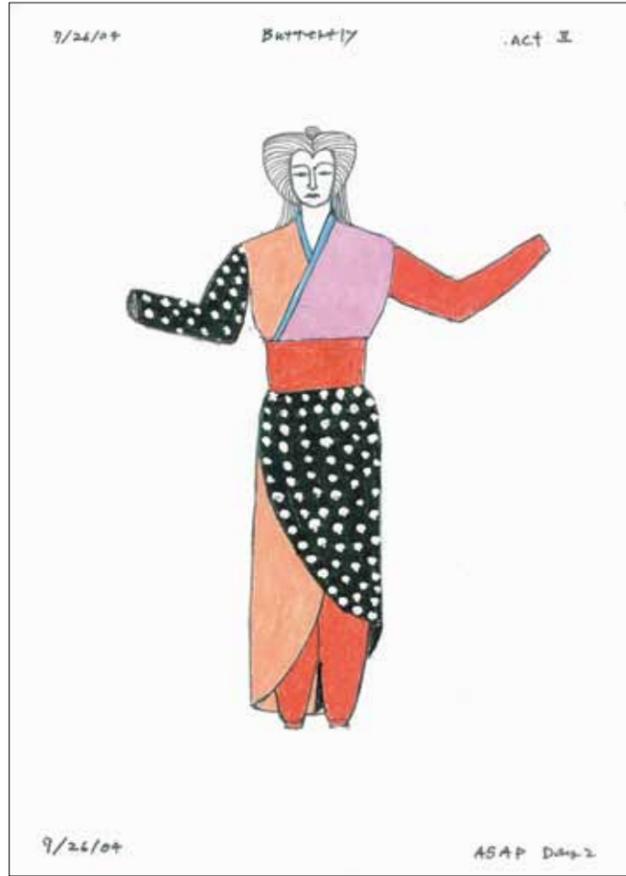


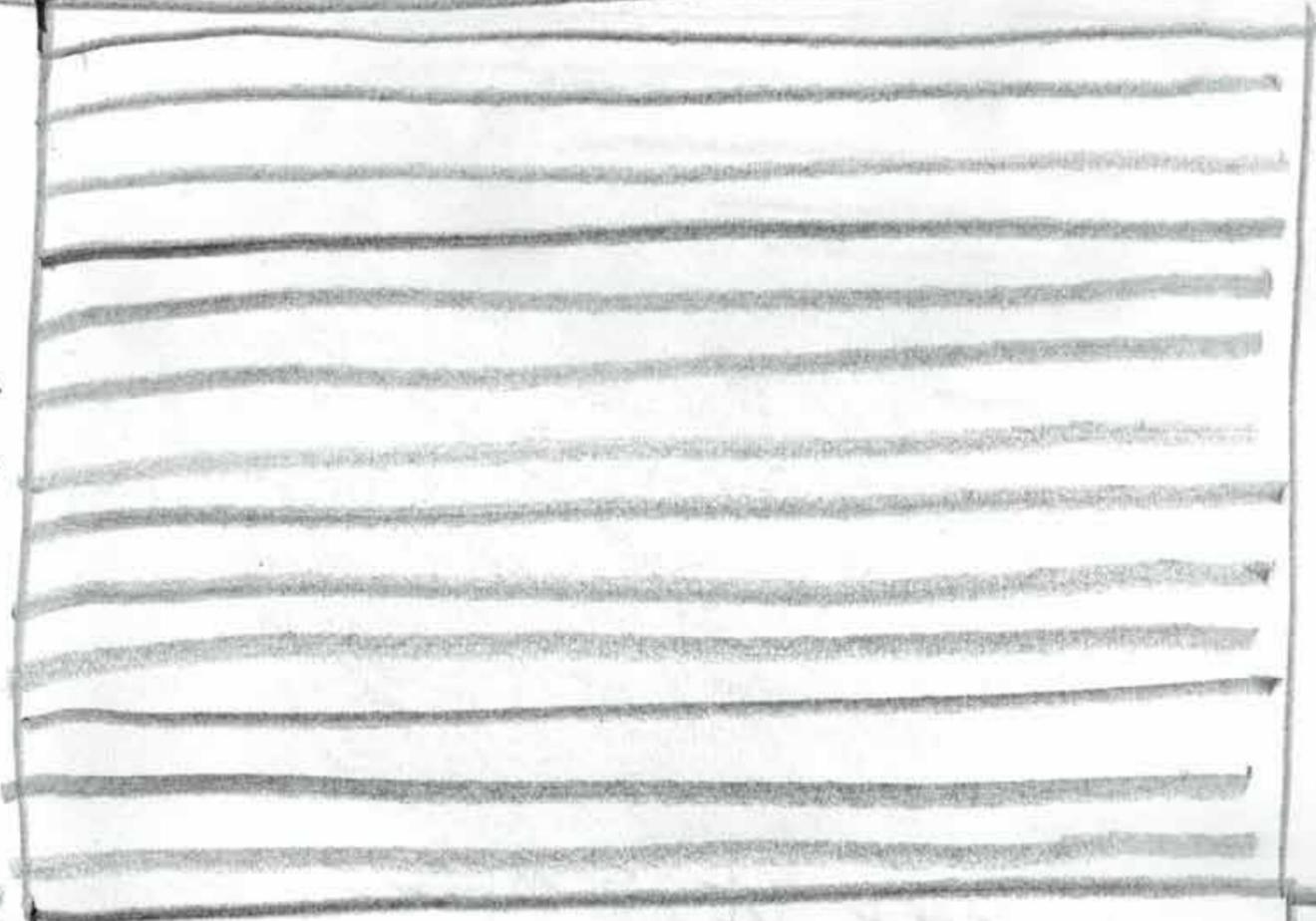
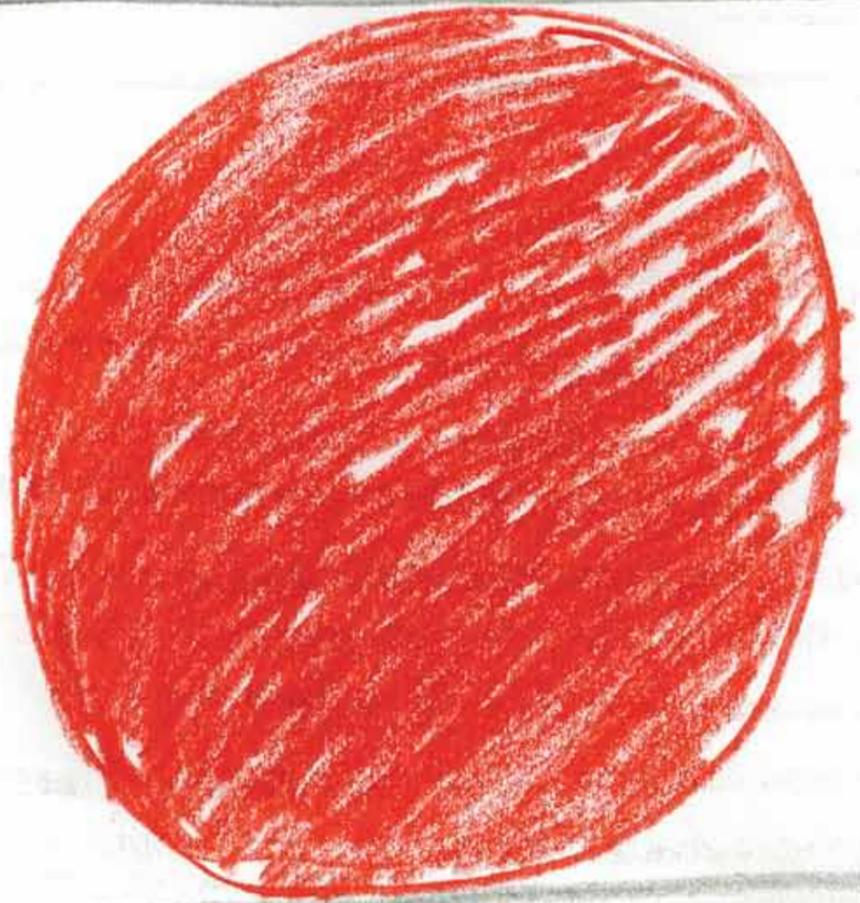


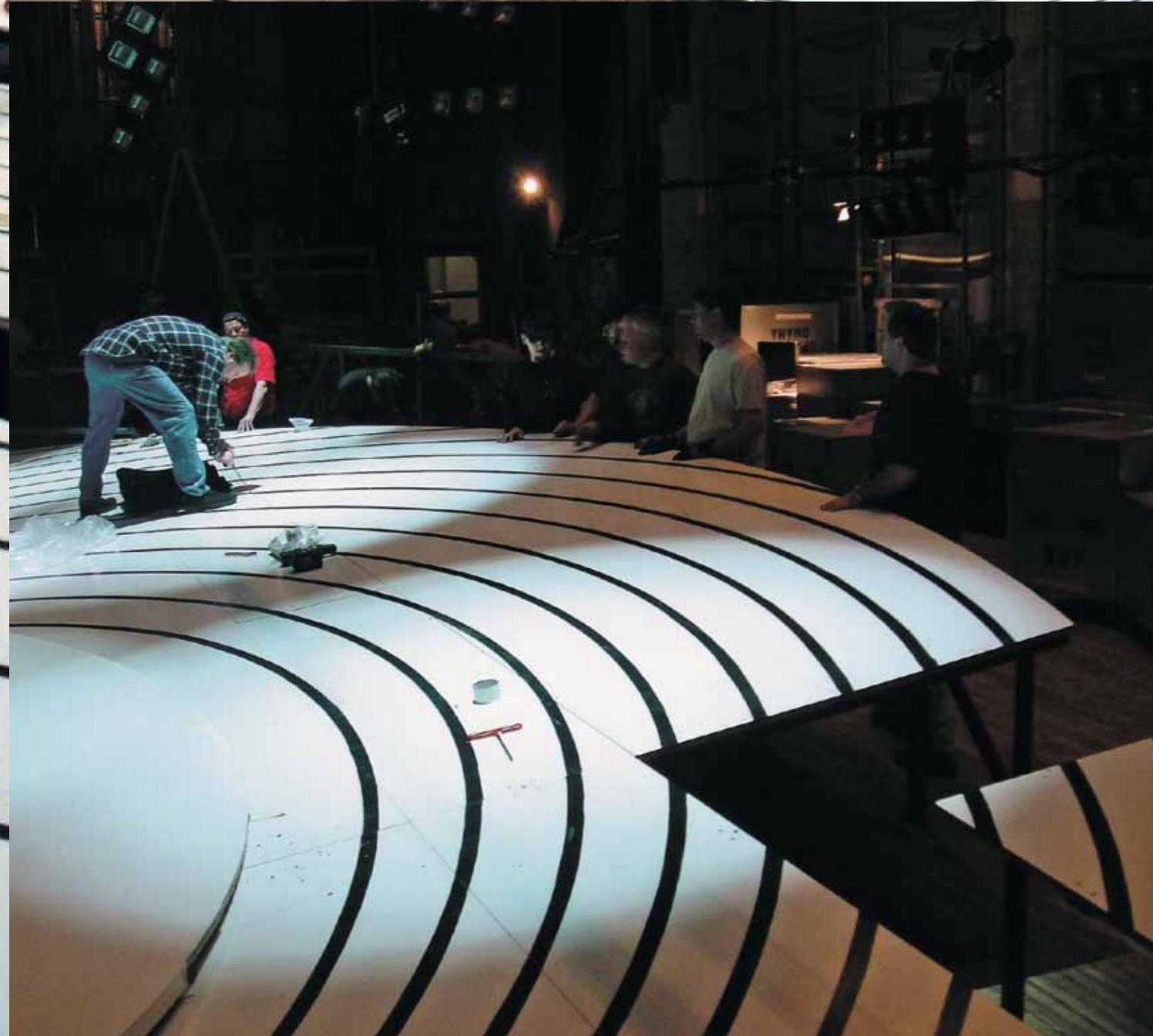
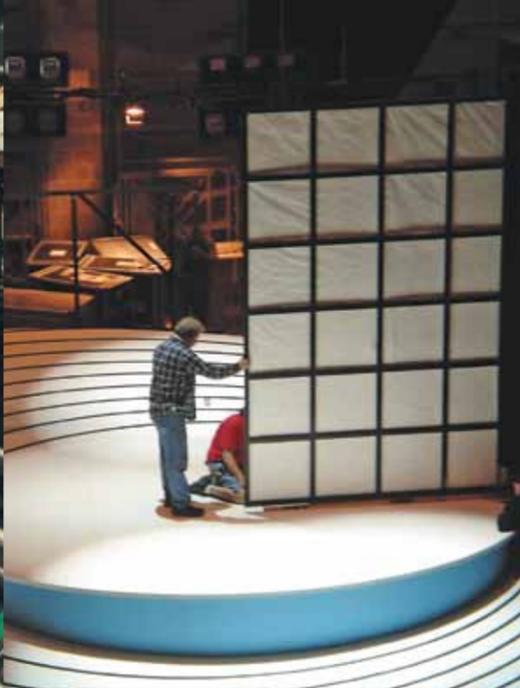
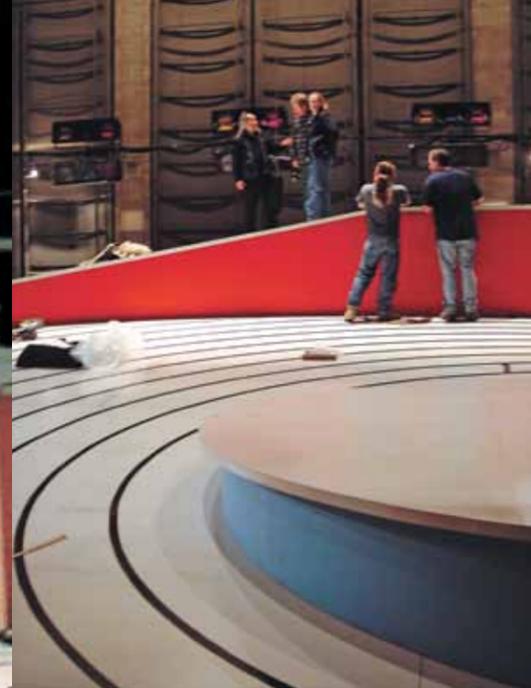
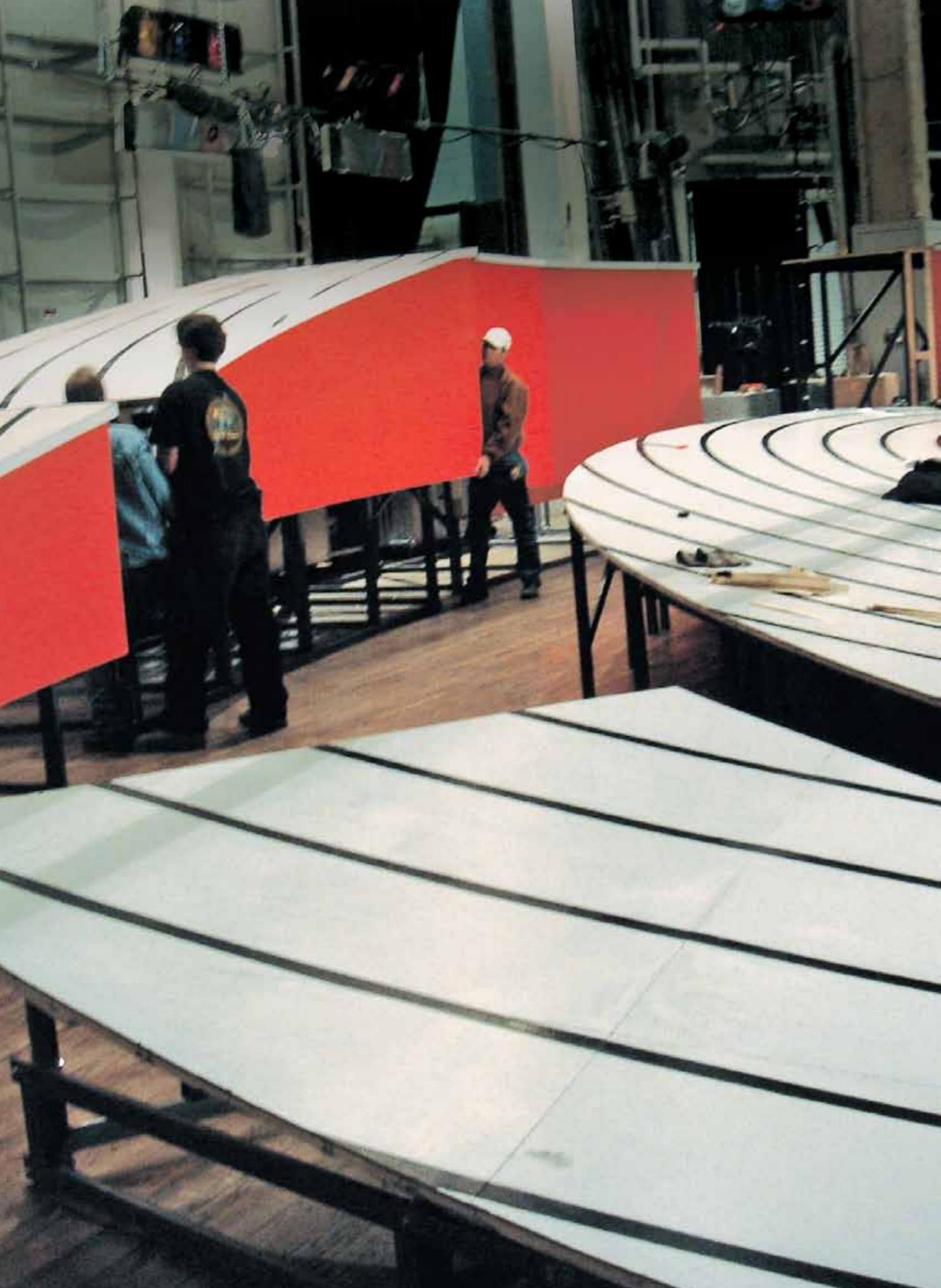








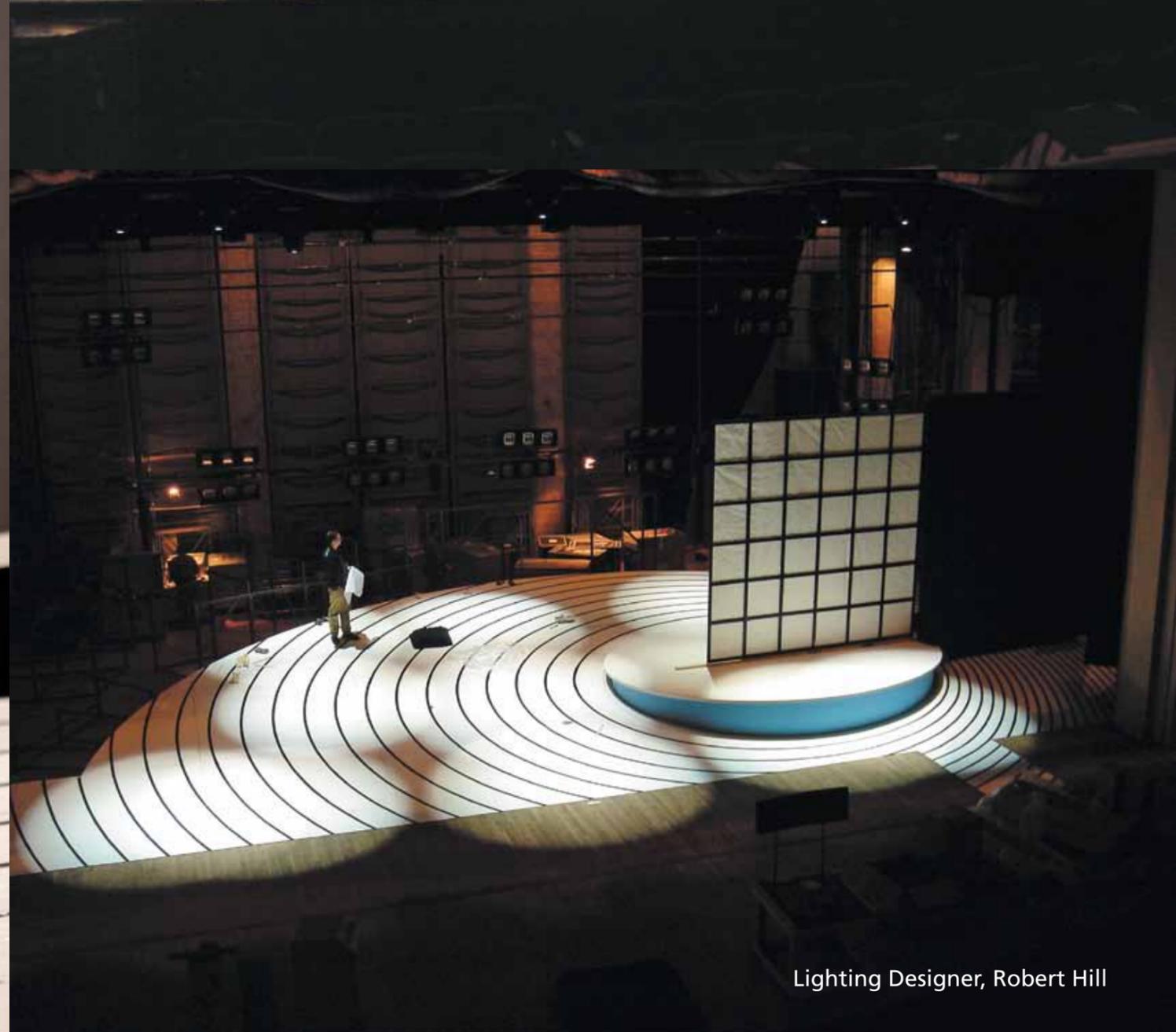
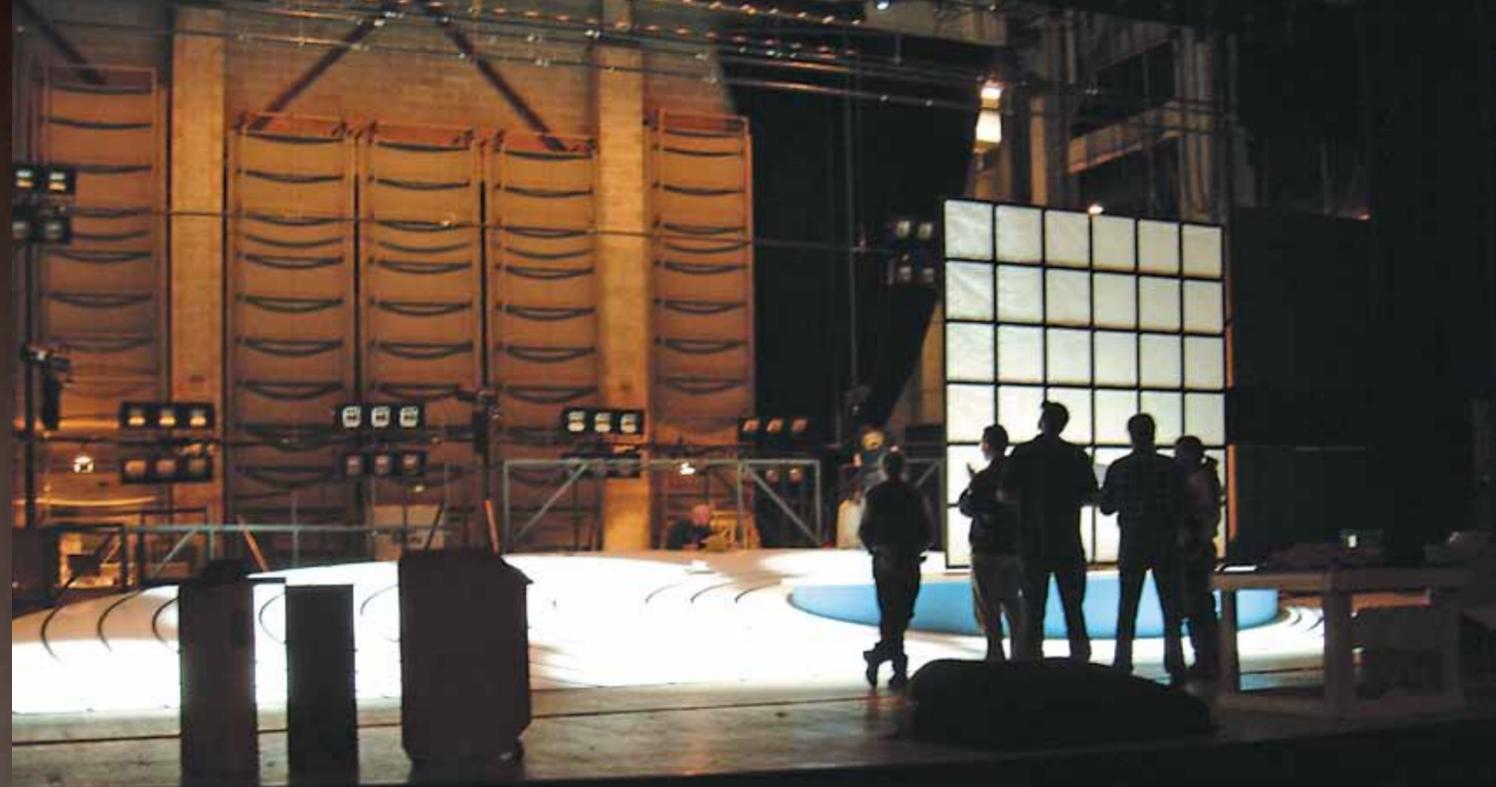




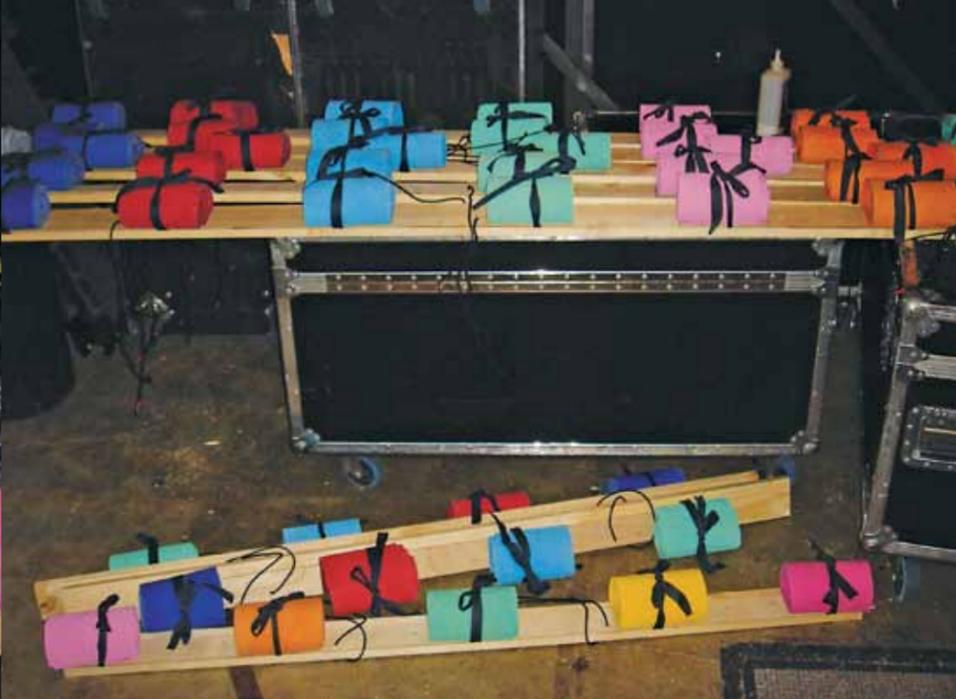
STAGING AND FINAL PRODUCTION: BUILDING AND INSTALLATION OF THE STAGE SET



Director, Leslie Swackhamer



Lighting Designer, Robert Hill









Jason Ferrante as Goro;  
Dennis Bergevin, wig & makeup designer  
Elsen Associates Inc.

Mihoko Kinoshita as Madama Butterfly



Mika Shigematsu as Suzuki



Dear friends, I answer the call of love.



Come, my love.  
Do you like our little house?



- Uncle Bonzo! - Curses on the kill-joy!  
Good riddance to that nuisance!

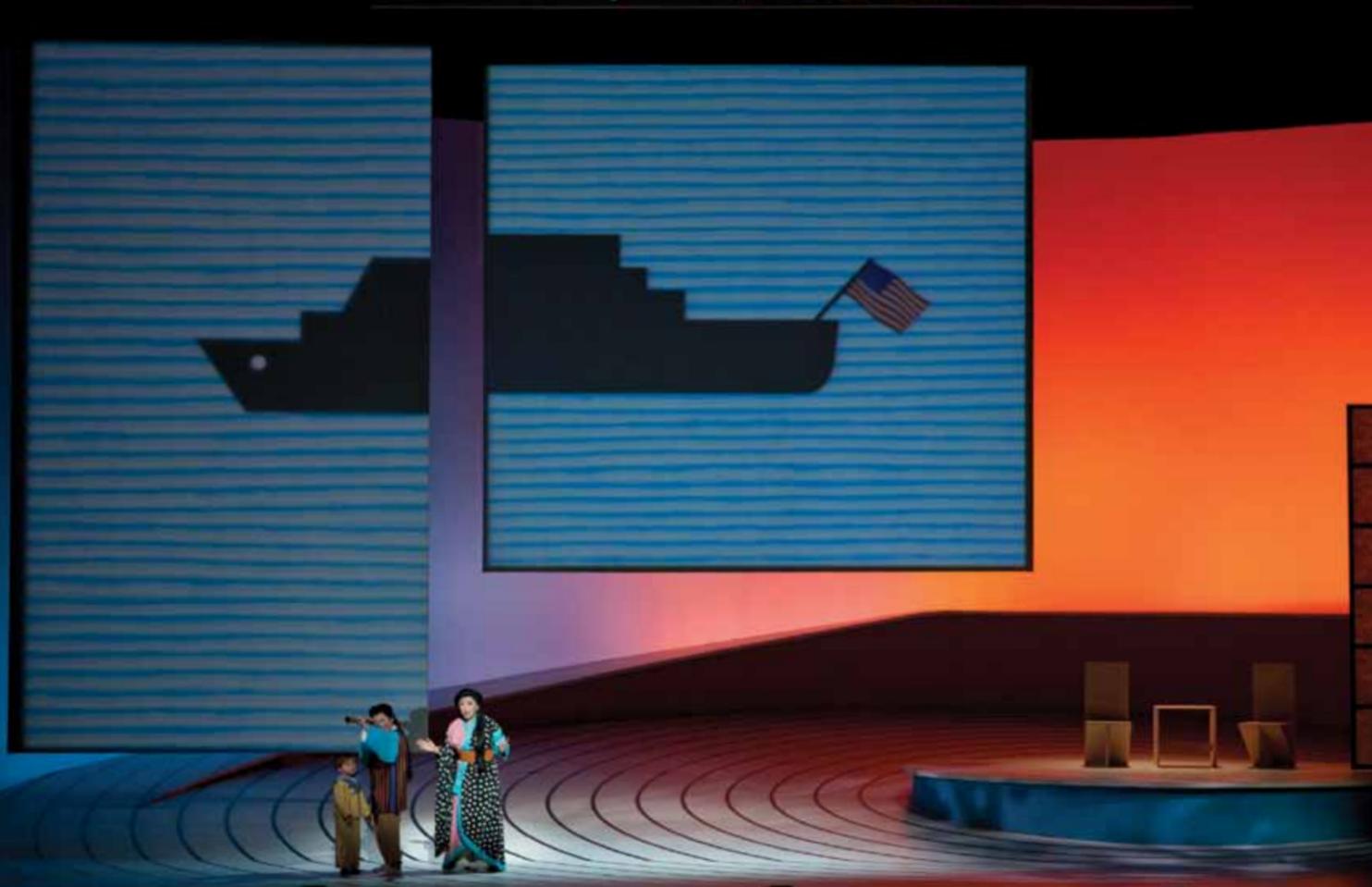


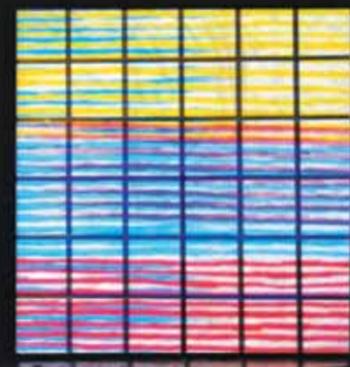
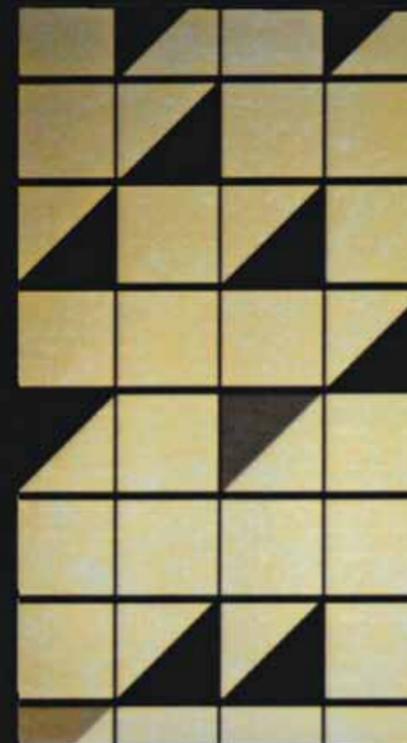
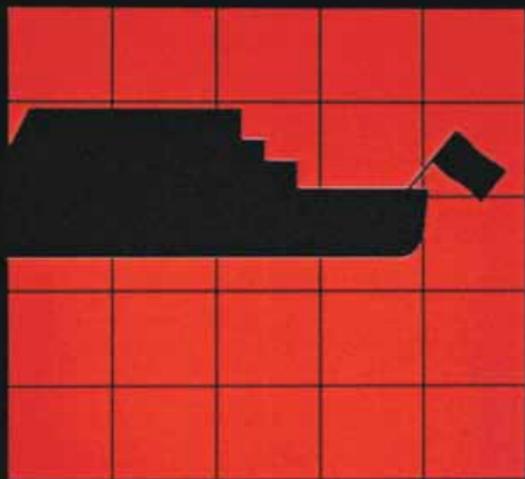
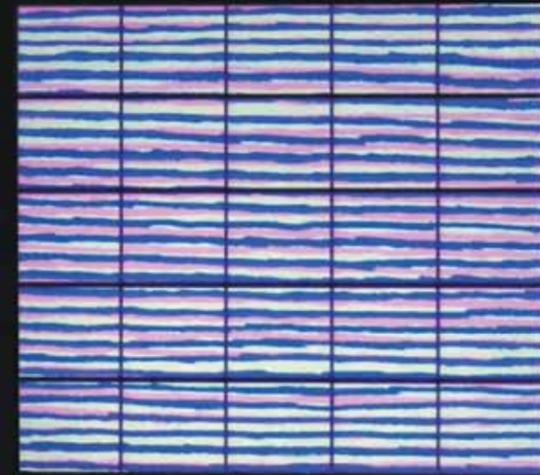
Punishment upon your tainted soul!



(To think that this little doll is my wife!)

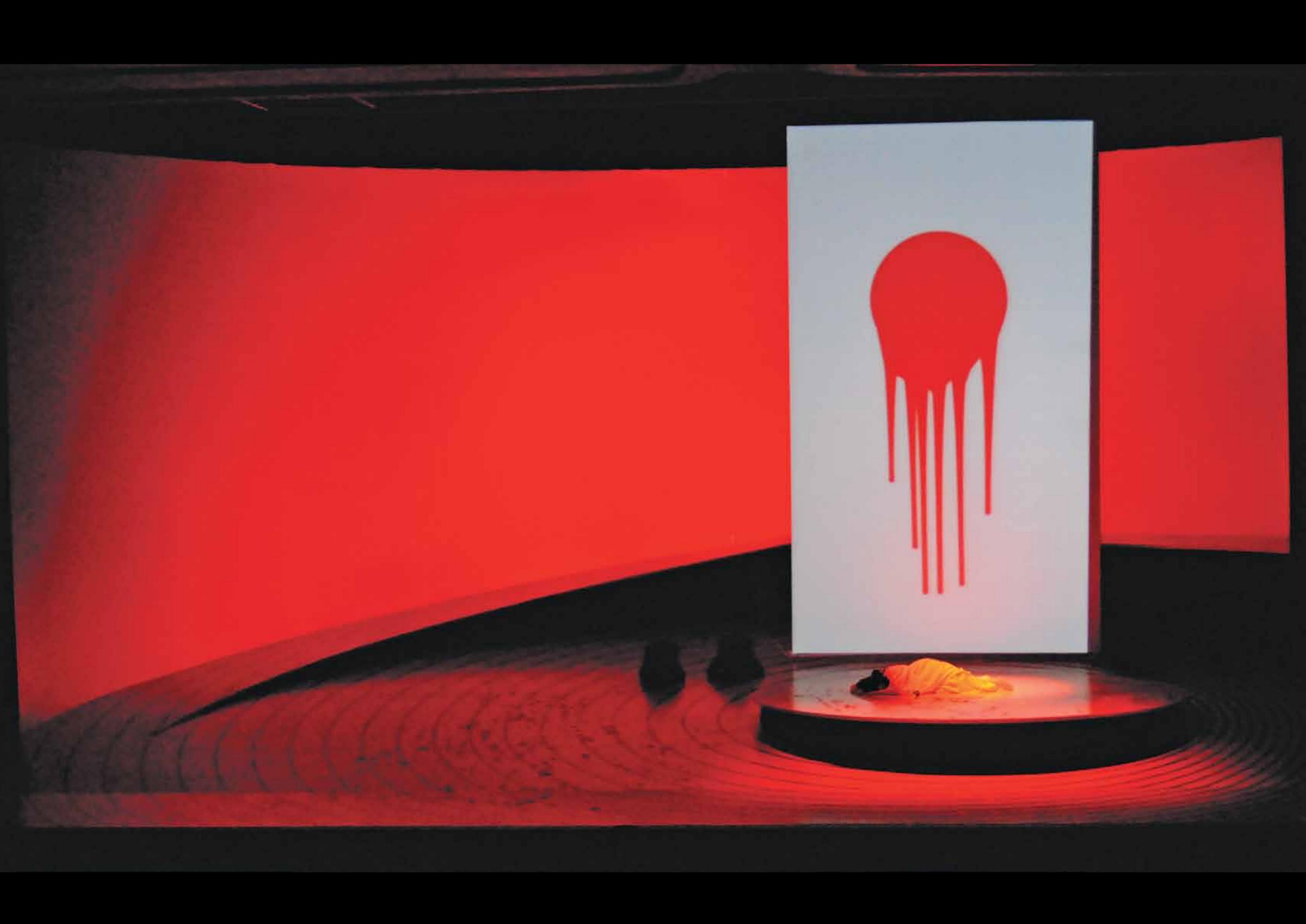












## JUN KANEKO

### ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Jun Kaneko was born in Nagoya, Japan in 1942. He studied painting with Satoshi Ogawa during his adolescence, working in his studio during the day and attending high school in the evening. He came to the United States in 1963 to continue those studies at Chouinard Institute of Art when his introduction to Fred Marer drew him to sculptural ceramics. He proceeded to study with Peter Voukos, Paul Soldner, and Jerry Rothman in California during the time now defined as The Contemporary Ceramics Movement in America. The following decade, Kaneko taught at some of the nation's leading art schools, including Scripps College, Rhode Island School of Design and Cranbrook Academy of Art.

His artwork appears in numerous international and national solo and group exhibitions annually, and is included in more than seventy museum collections. He has realized over thirty public art commissions in the United States and Japan and is the recipient of national, state and organization fellowships. Kaneko holds honorary doctorates from the University of Nebraska, the Massachusetts College of Art & Design and the Royal College of Art in London.

Based in Omaha since 1986 and establishing his current studio there in 1990, Kaneko has worked at several experimental studios as well including European Ceramic Work Center in The Netherlands, Otsuka Omi Ceramic Company in Japan, Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia, PA, Bullseye Glass in Portland, OR, Acadia Summer Arts Program in Bar Harbor, ME, and Aguacate in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Independently he pursued industrial collaborations to realize larger-scale hand-built sculptures, the first in 1982-1983 at his Omaha Project, the second in 1992-1994 at his Fremont Project in California and in 2004-2007 at his Pittsburg Project in Kansas, the former with Omaha Brickworks and the latter two with Mission Clay Products.

Recent notable public art projects are the installation of three Pittsburg Project Heads on Park Avenue in Manhattan in 2008 by invitation of the NYC Parks and Recreation Program, completion in 2009 of Rhythm at the Mid-America Center in Council Bluffs, IA, a composition of 19 large-scale ceramic and bronze sculptures, two architectural tile wall structures on a 22,600 sq. ft. granite paver plaza design, installation in 2008 of an expansive series of fused glass windows at Temple Har Shalom in Park City, UT and in 2007 a plaza design with 7 large-scale ceramic sculptures and a multi-panel painting on canvas overlooking the lobby for the Bartle Hall/Convention Center in Kansas City, MO.

Jun is currently finalizing his production design of Mozart's *Magic Flute* for the San Francisco Opera to premier in June 2012 and proceed to touring engagements. From 2003-2006 Jun designed a new production of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, which premiered at Opera Omaha in March of 2006 and continues to tour nationally. From 2006-2008 he designed a new production of Beethoven's sole opera *Fidelio* that premiered in 2008 at the Opera Company Philadelphia.

In 2000 he and his wife, Ree Kaneko, formed a non-profit scholarly and presenting organization in Omaha, Nebraska called KANEKO, dedicated to the exploration of creativity in the arts, sciences and philosophy. For more information please visit [www.thekaneke.org](http://www.thekaneke.org).

For an unabridged resume and more information, please visit [jumkaneko.com](http://jumkaneko.com).



Leslie Swackhamer & Jun Kaneko viewing the opera rehearsal from the balcony, 2011, Orpheum Theater

## MADAMA BUTTERFLY TOUR PERFORMANCES TO DATE

For more information, contact Opera Omaha at [operaomaha.org](http://operaomaha.org).

Opera Omaha (2006-2007)

Dayton Opera (2006-2007)

Hawaii Opera Theater (2007)

Maui Arts & Cultural Center (2007)

Madison Opera (2008-2009)

Atlanta Opera (2008-2009)

Opera Company of Philadelphia (2009-2010)

Opera Memphis (2010)

Vancouver Opera (2010)

Opera Omaha (2011)

Opera Carolina (2012)

## CREDITS

*We would like to thank Karen and Robert Duncan for supporting the production of this catalog which documents the creation and process of making this new Madama Butterfly by Jun Kaneko.*

*We would like to recognize the contributions of the following people, who gave their support by providing studio space in which the conceptual drawings for Madama Butterfly were created.*

David and Carol Kuraoka for the use of their studio in Kauai, Hawaii 2004

Marian Boulton Stroud, A.S.A.P. Arcadia Summer Art Program, Kamp Kippy, for studio space in Bar Harbor, Maine 2004 & 2005

Karen and Robert Duncan for the use of the Picaro Studio in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico 2005

Bryan and Joy Vansell and Mission Clay Products, studio space in Pittsburg, Kansas 2005

*We would like to thank the following people who gave their assistance, ideas, skills and energy in the creation of this new production of Madama Butterfly by Jun Kaneko. Without the help of these people this production would not have been possible.*

### OPERA OMAHA

Joan Desens, Executive Director

Stewart Robertson, Artistic Director and Principal Conductor

Hal France, Guest Conductor, 2006

Joseph Rescigno, Conductor, 2011

Leslie Swackhamer, Stage Director and Theatrical Consultant

Terry Harper, Technical Director and Production Manager

Karen Federling, Director of Artistic Administration

Carol Wisner, Properties Master

Robert Hill, Lighting Designer, 2006

Gerald King, Lighting Designer, 2011

Peter Harrison, Assistant Scenic Designer

### KANEKO STUDIO

Stephan Grot, Graphic Artist

### KANEKO

Heike Langdon, Development Coordinator

Shannon Walenta, Special Projects

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Kate Abercrombie, Project Technician and Printer

Nami Yamamoto, Project Technician and Printer

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Rose Brown, Costume Shop Manager

Ken Burrell, Draper/Cutter

Gloria Pendlebury, Tailor

Milivoj Poletan, First Hand Tailor

Louise Vanderhooft, First Hand

Susan Young-Ure, Stitcher

Jennifer B. Jenkins, Stitcher

Vicki Raincrow, Stitcher

Melonie Mortensen, Stitcher

Rachel Campos, Stitcher

Pamela Offre, Stitcher

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Hope Ardizzone, Painter

Donald O'Connell, Carpenter

Nate Steele, Carpenter

Elvis, Mascot

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Daryl Anderson, Creative Director

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Kevin Reiner, Video Editor

### PHOTO CREDITS

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Takashi Hatakeyama

Ree Kaneko

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- 1 Foreign flags and bowler hats denote the ‘internationalization’ of Japan. Courtesy of Richard Tames (pg. 16)
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- 3 View of Nagasaki. Courtesy of Wonders of Japan, The Hobart Company (pg. 18)
- 4 View of Nagasaki in the late 19th century. Courtesy of the Toa Trading Company (pg. 19)
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- 6 Puccini and “Little Elvira,” his step-granddaughter, in yachting clothes. Courtesy of G. Magrini and the Opera News Archive (pg. 21)
- 7 *Variations on Flesh Colour and Green (The Balcony)*, James Abbott McNeil Whistler. Courtesy of Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC; Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1892.23a-b (pg. 22)
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- 14 *The Bridge in the Rain* (after Hiroshige), Vincent Van Gogh. Courtesy of the Van Gogh Museum (pg. 27)
- 15 *La Japonais (Camille Monet in Japanese Costume)*, Claude Monet. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (pg. 28)
- 16 Japanese Color Prints, Arthur Wesley Dow, Courtesy of the Art and Architecture Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallace Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations (pg. 29)
- 17 *The Tub*, Edgar Degas. Courtesy of Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY (pg. 29)

1920's Hand-painted Japanese paper party favors.  
Geisha girls with umbrellas.



