

Symphony No. 3

Symphony of Sorrowful Songs

A performative interpretation of Henryck Górecki's
1976 composition

Designer | Elisa von Perger

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Symphony No. 3

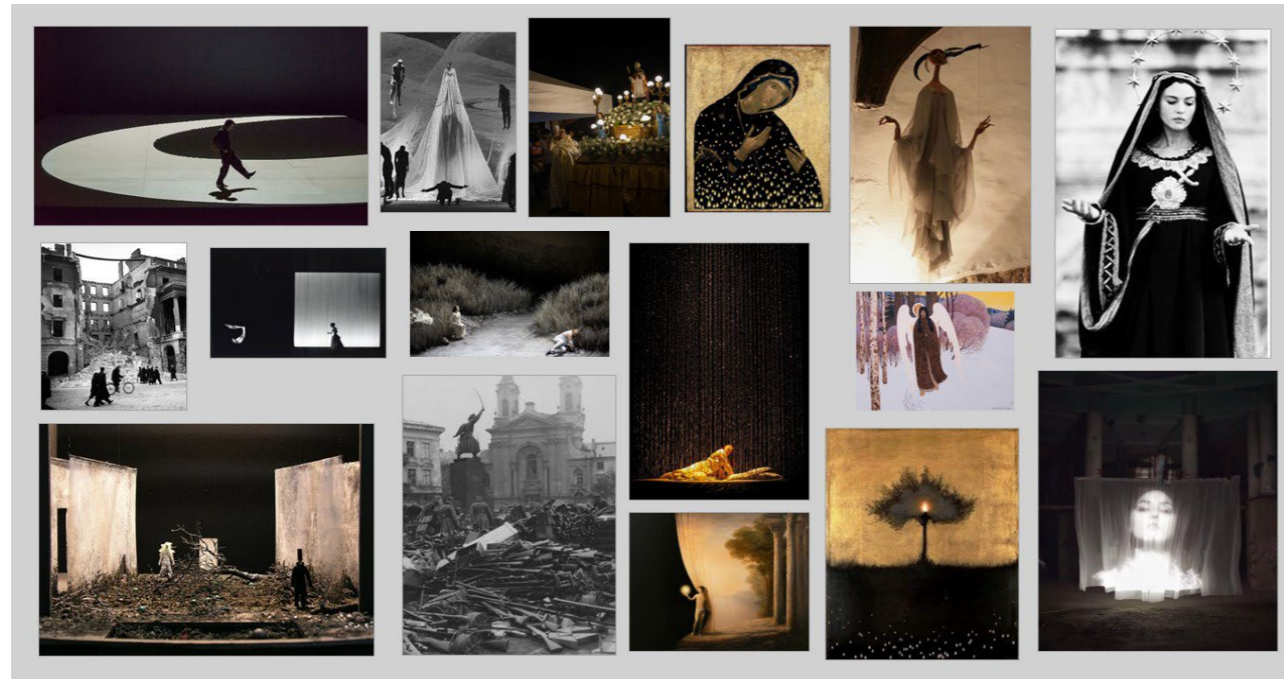
Symphony No. 3 (Symphony of Sorrowful Songs) was composed by Polish composer Henryck Górecki in 1976. A single soprano sings a song in each movement based off different Polish texts - a 15th century Marian lament, a message written on the wall of a Gestapo cell in WWII, and a traditional Silesian folk song. Each movement tells a story of the close bond between mother and child, severed by death or separation.

The work is musically minimalist and atmospheric, incorporating repetitive phrases and slow crescendos, more attune to a wave of sound than a melodic symphony. Although inspired by the Polish experience of conflict during the 20th century and the three texts, it was intended to be a cathartic expression of grief and emotion in its purest form rather than a political or social commentary.

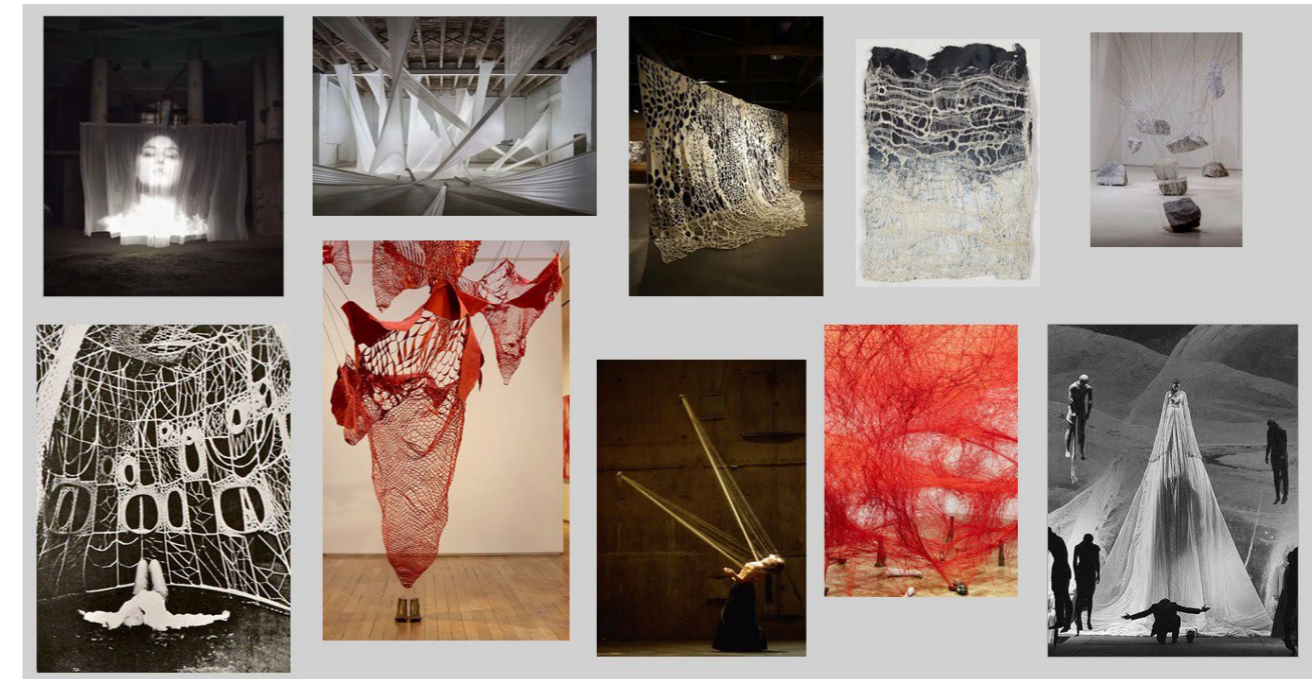
Design Statement

My design focuses on the surreal effect loss has between a mother and child, in transforming perceptions of reality and memory. The set and costume reflect the way that grief alters everything around us, how the simplest actions become strange and hallucinatory. Domestic items and actions are transformed in this piece, reflecting the particular closeness and comfort of the relationship between mother and child.

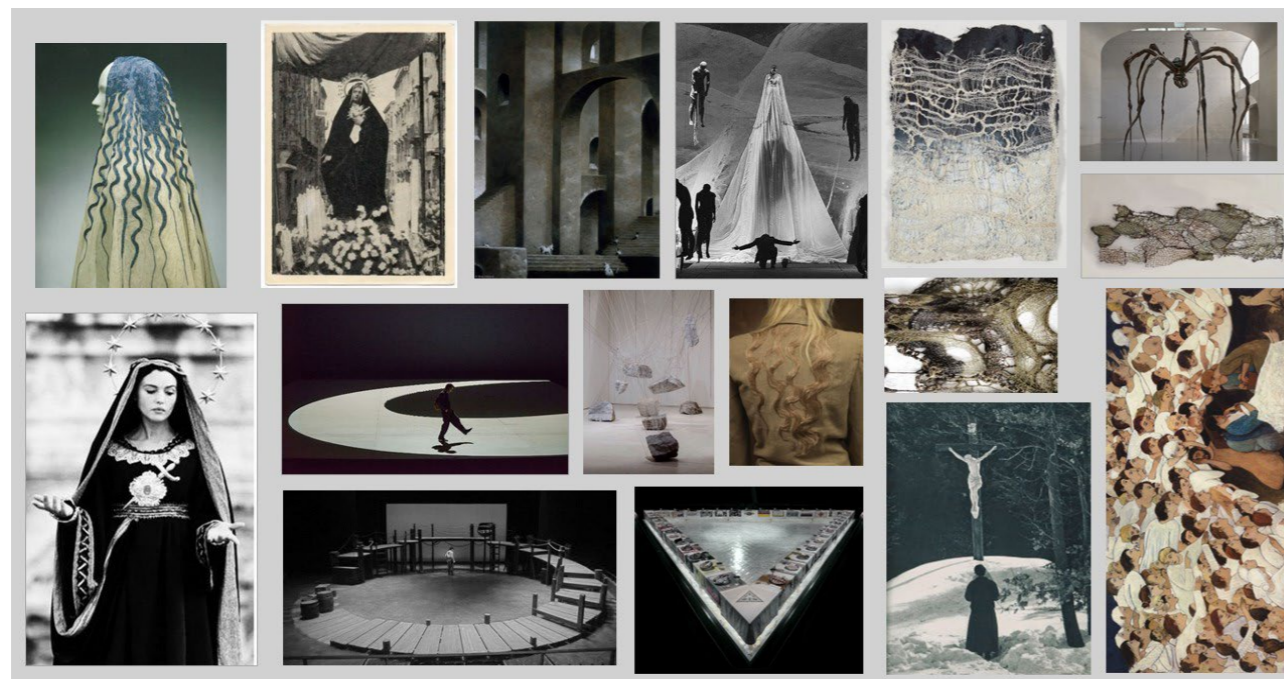
Initial Research



Moodboard 1

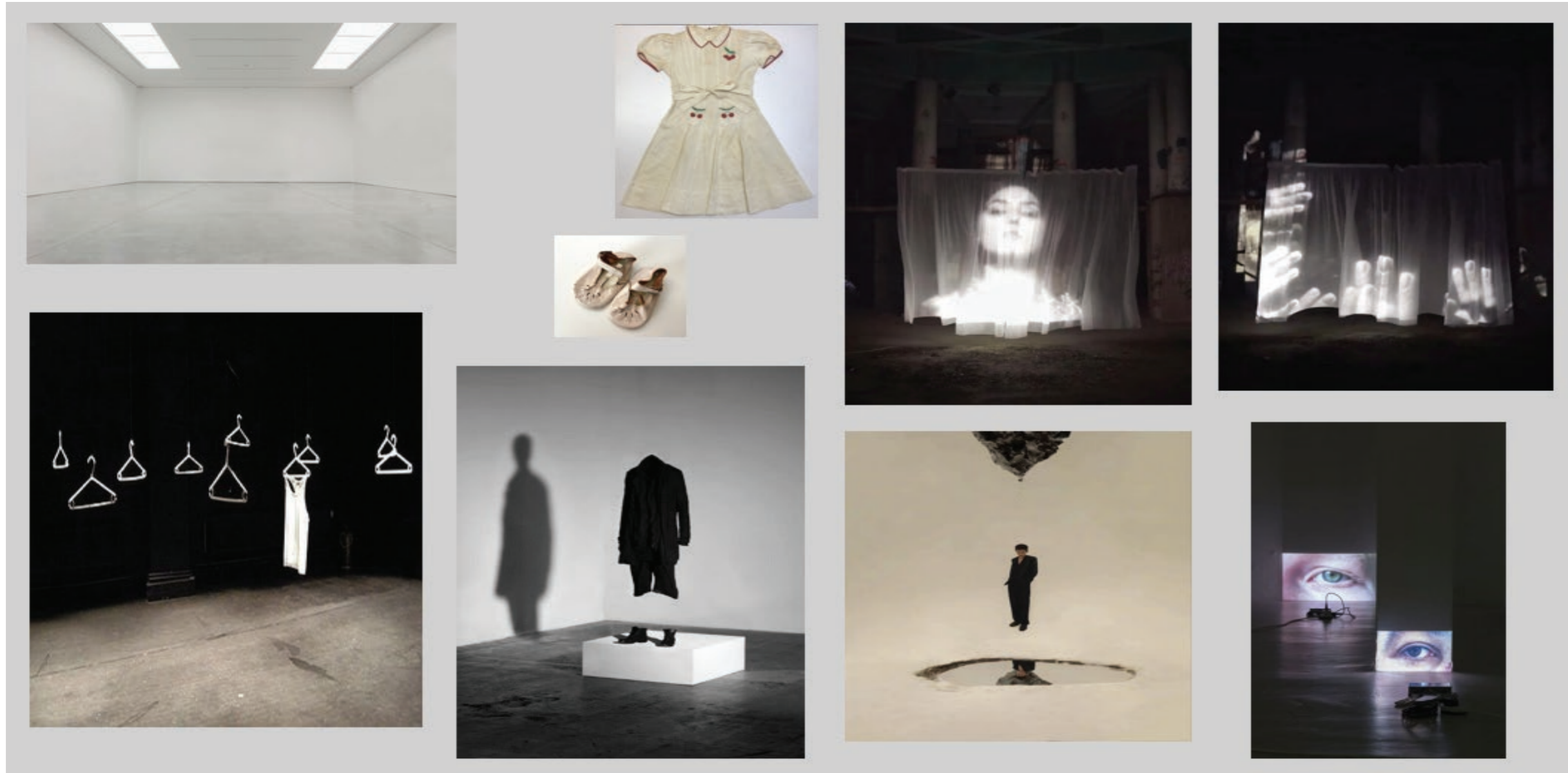


Moodboard 2



Moodboard 3

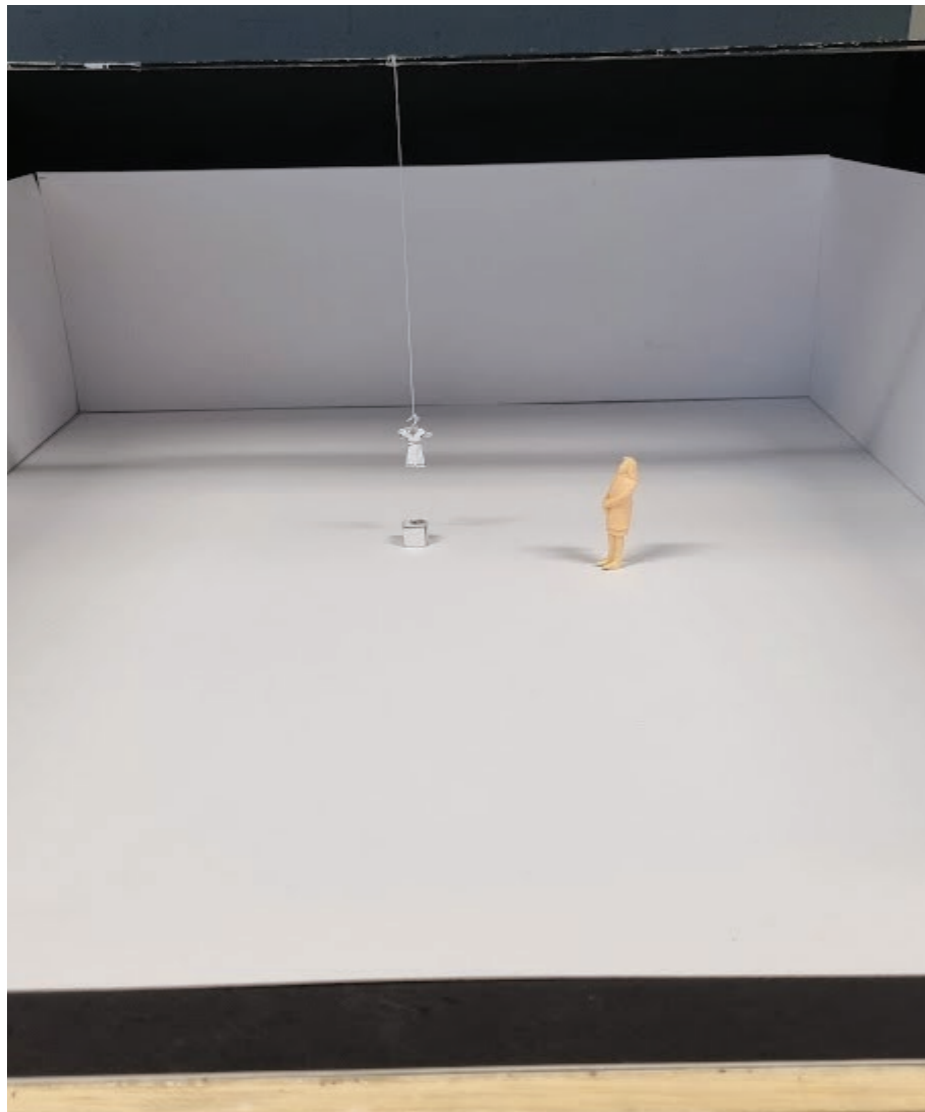
A few different design pathways I examined early on. There were a few elements I was drawn to, such as the projected image of a woman's face which appears in most of my imagery, as well as some religious iconography and scenes of destroyed cities. I preferred working these elements into a larger design, rather than focusing on one specific visual cue as the basis for the whole design. In this way I was able to explore a variety of influences without limiting myself to a recognisable style or concept.



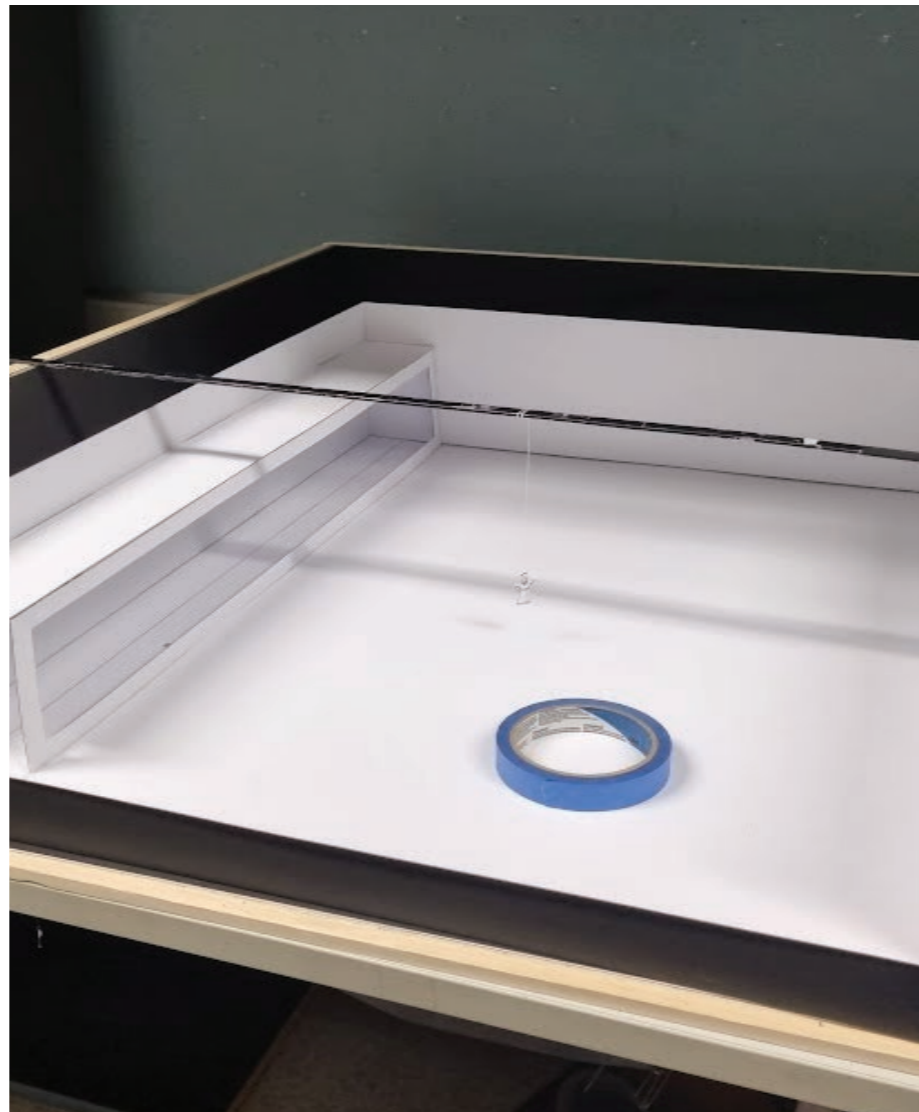
Final moodboard

The final moodboard I arrived at - I researched into empty gallery spaces and minimalist art installations as a way to create a 'blank canvas' set that I could add other elements into. Another key element I found myself drawn to from the beginning was that of clothes and their familiarity and symbolism. The rituals of dressing and hanging clothes intrigued me, especially their emptiness without their owner. As this concept evolved I included other furniture and domestic touches into an otherwise empty, liminal space. Projection was also a key element, in complementing the physical objects and props in the space. Blurry black and white imagery acts as the memories or hallucinations of the characters in the narrative.

Whitecard Process



Whitecard - minimal elements, empty room

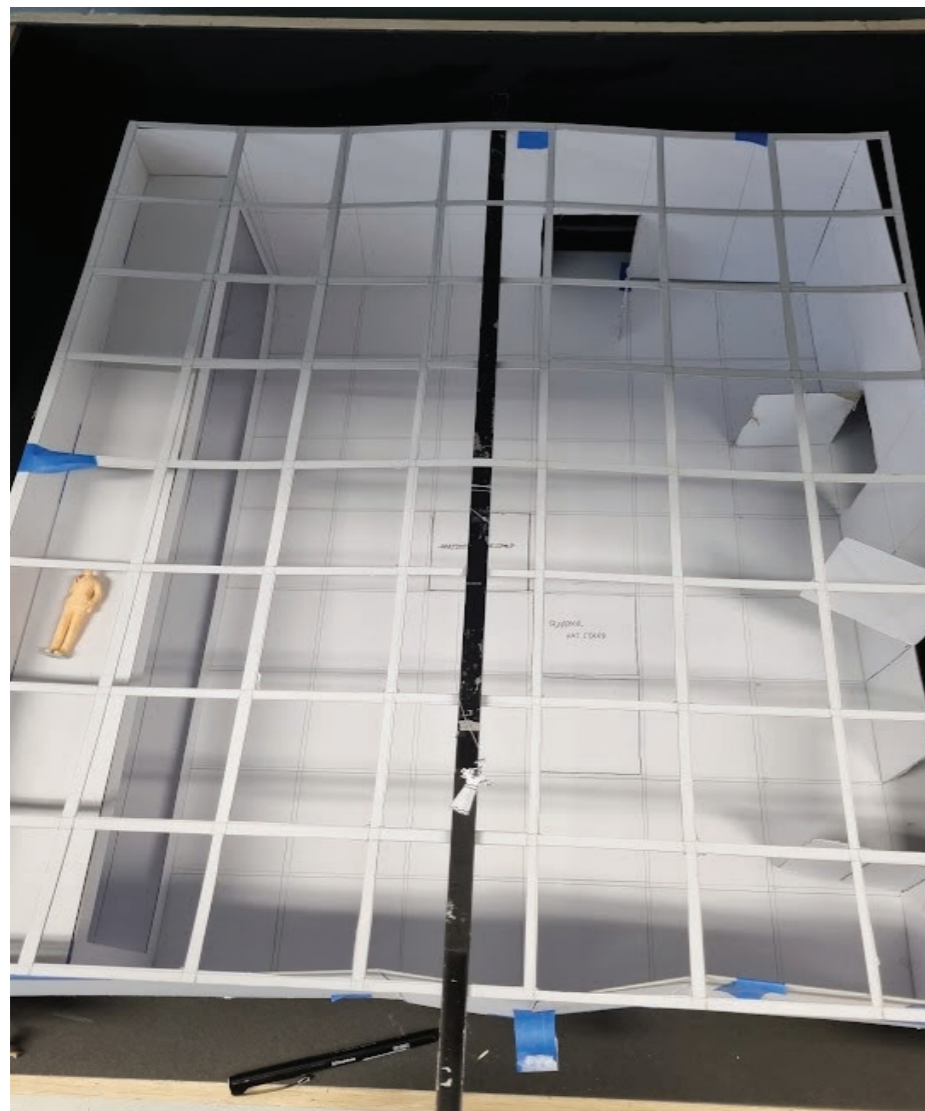


Including an audience seating area



Experimenting with a false grid ceiling

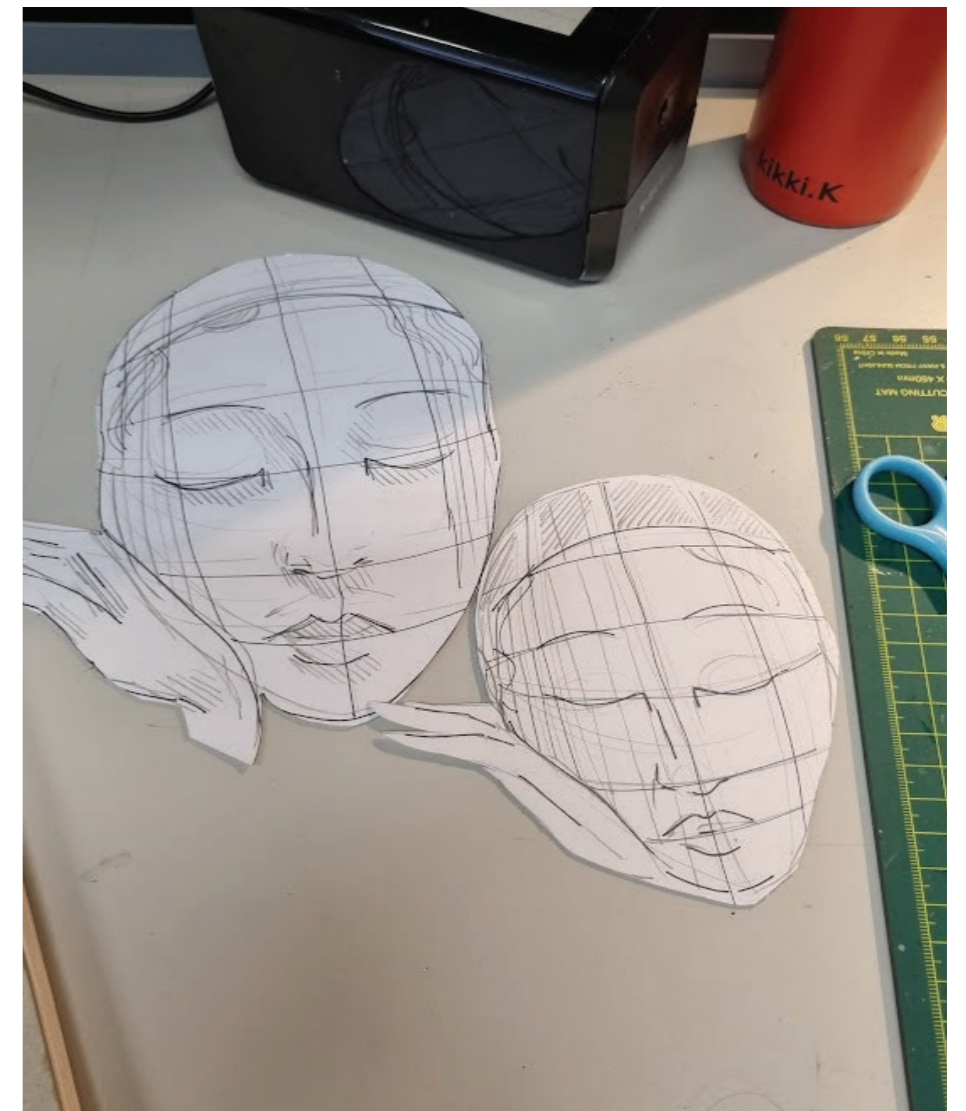
During the whitecard process I started with an empty white room, with only a child's dress hanging on a coathanger. I added in other elements, as well as the necessary audience seating bank and a false grid. I also played around with a framing device to separate the audience from the action - I felt this was a good way to create a seating bank integrated into the space while keeping the sanctity of the performance area. The floors and walls had a panelled finish in a grid pattern, so secret trapdoors and doors could be hidden from audience view. This grid pattern was repeated in the ceiling, which I decided to make as an open coffered ceiling to allow lighting and projection effects from the venue grid above.



Plan view of reworked whitecard



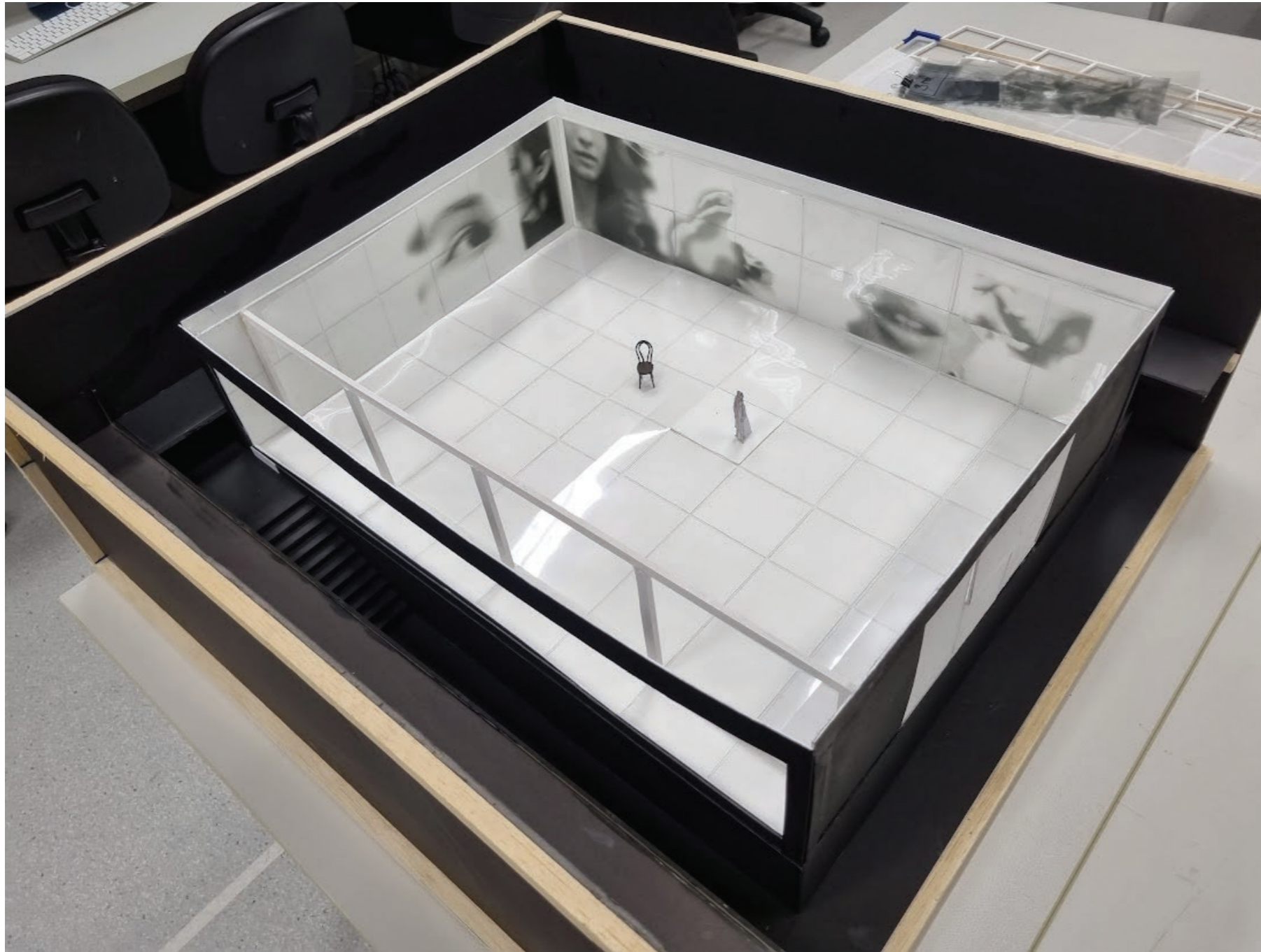
Different openings in the wall panelling



Mockups for the puppet head

Further whitecard experimentation - during this process I also planned out my interpretation of the narrative and what sort of elements would be added for each movement. This included entry and exit point for performers and set pieces. I decided on a different focus for each movement with unique pieces and unexpected reveals. The second movement was to include a puppet introduced - I experimented with the design, and played with size and positioning before deciding on the head and hands of a woman, designed to look like the character of the mother.

Final Model



Final model photographed inside Studio Underground model box

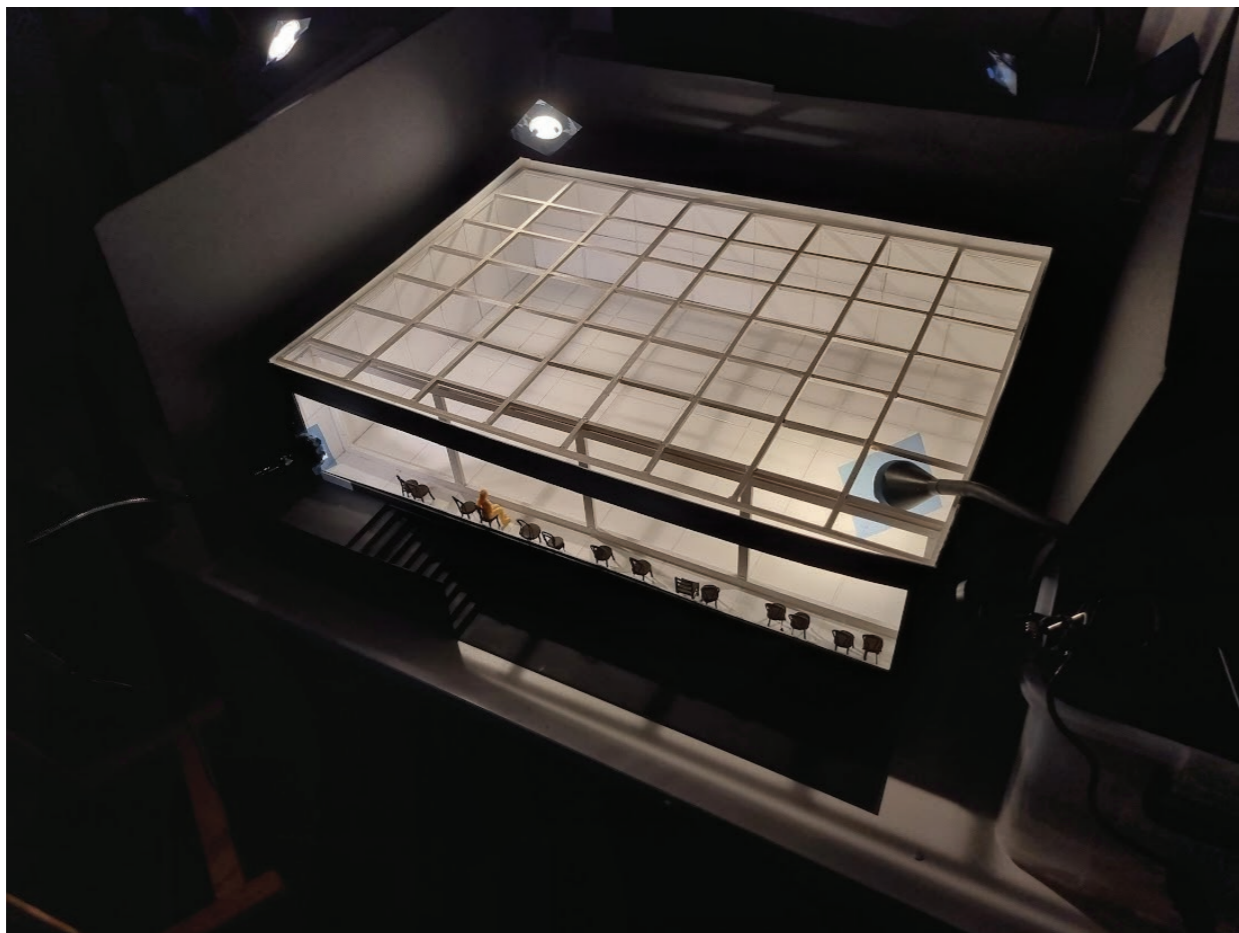
- The final model - the performance takes place within an empty white gallery space, that acts as a magic box, with surreal events occurring for each movement.
- Symbolic domestic objects such as clothing and furniture are distorted and placed within the box. Their scale and representation reflect the mother/child relationship torn apart by death or separation in each movement.
- The performance may be interpreted as a hallucination, capturing the strangeness and aching emptiness of a domestic space now missing a key part. The characters and fragments of their lives are displaced and isolated against a blank background, allowing the audience to focus on the raw emotion and rhythm of the work.



Audience seating area

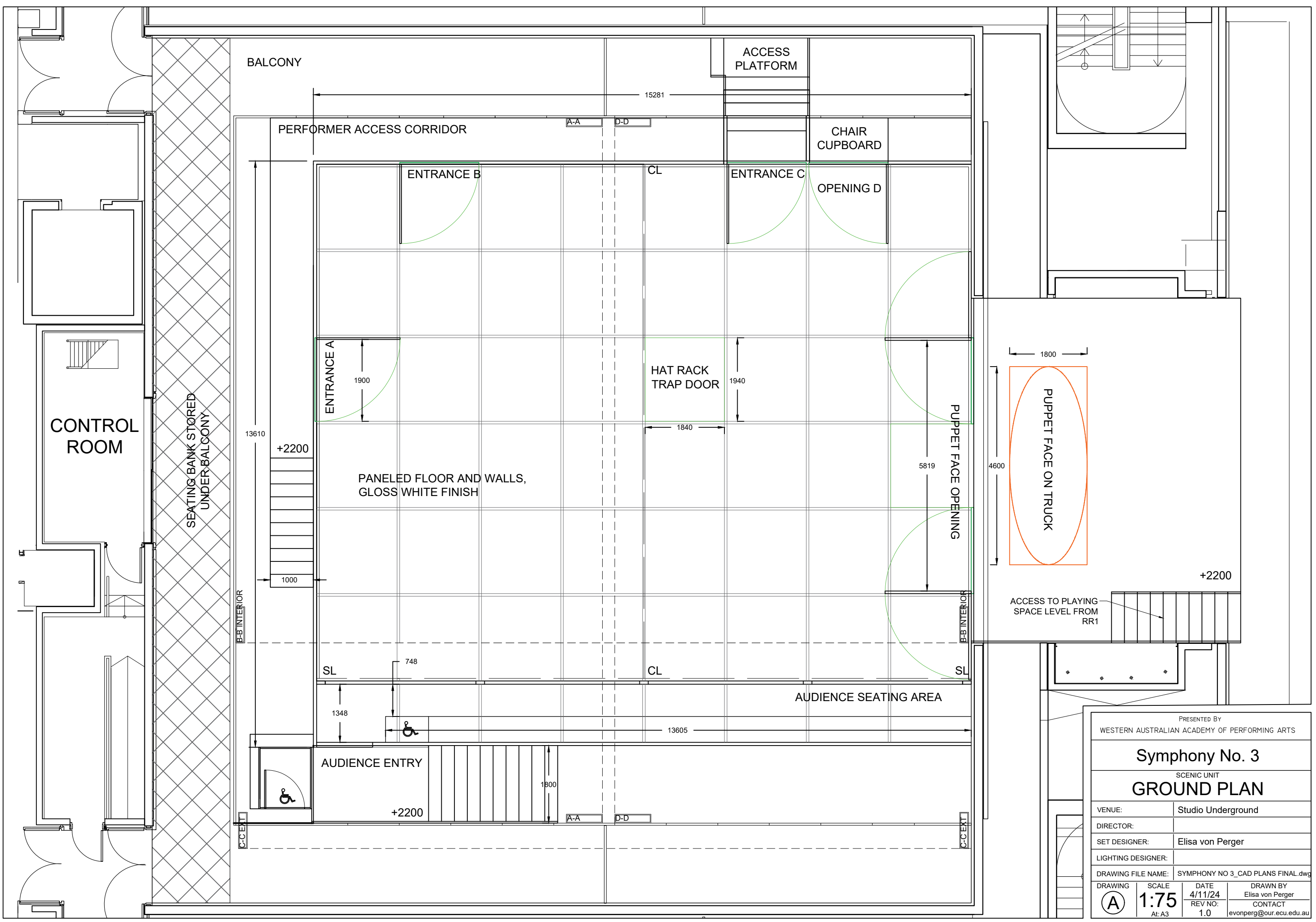


View through cutaway wall



Final model with view of ceiling

- The set is built as an entire room within the Studio Underground, including audience and performer access point around the perimeter of the box.
- The room is raised up from the stage level by 2.2m to allow for a substage base housing telescopic set elements.
- The audience is seated on a variety of wooden chairs in a seating area separated from the action by a frame.
- An open coffered ceiling allows for lighting and projection elements.
- The entire set has a panelled, satin-gloss white finish.
- See plans over the next pages.



BALCONY

ACCESS PLATFORM

PERFORMER ACCESS CORRIDOR

CHAIR CUPBOARD

ENTRANCE B

CL

ENTRANCE C

OPENING D

ENTRANCE A

1900

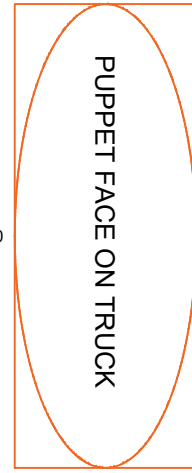
HAT RACK TRAP DOOR

1940

PUPPET FACE OPENING

5819

1800



PUPPET FACE ON TRUCK

4600

+2200

PANELED FLOOR AND WALLS, GLOSS WHITE FINISH

+2200

ACCESS TO PLAYING SPACE LEVEL FROM RR1

CONTROL ROOM

SEATING BANK STORED UNDER BALCONY

B-B INTERIOR

B-B INTERIOR

SL

748

CL

SL

1348

AUDIENCE ENTRY

+2200

1800

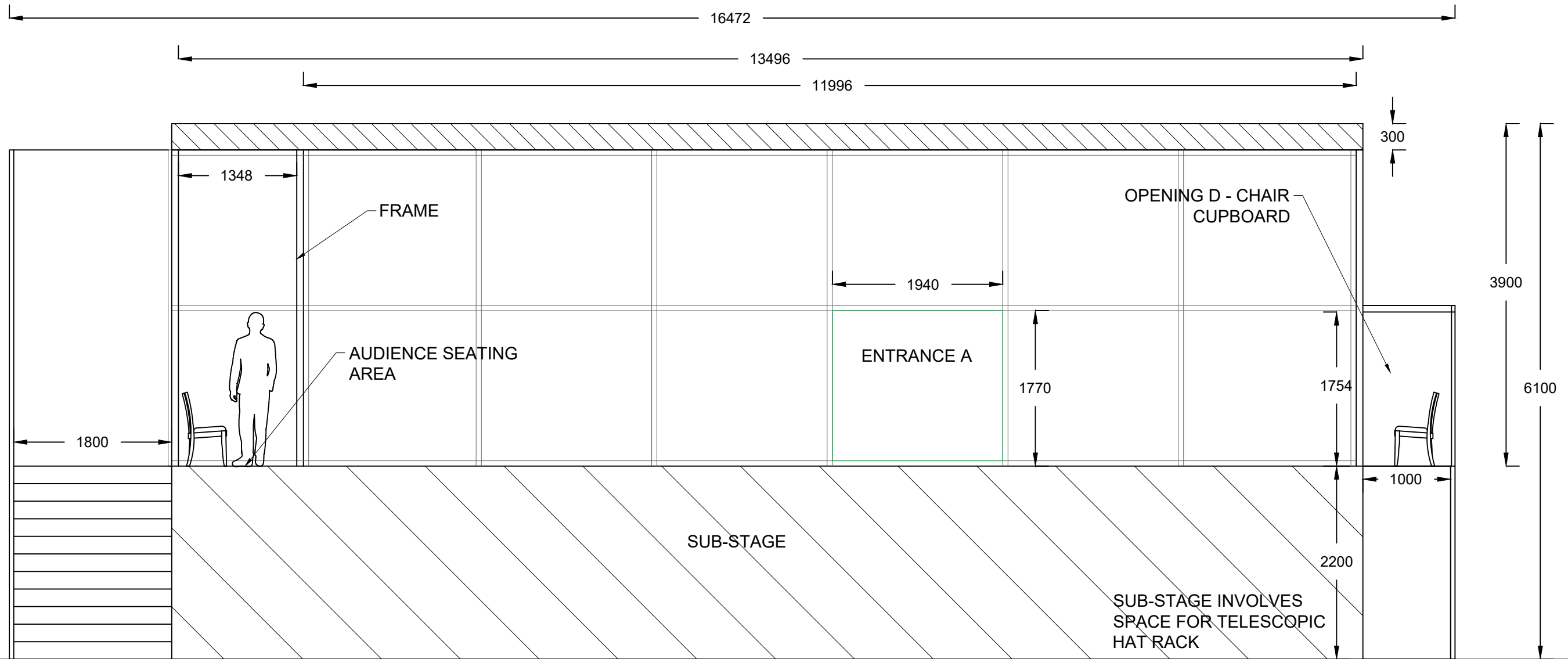
A-A

D-D

AUDIENCE SEATING AREA

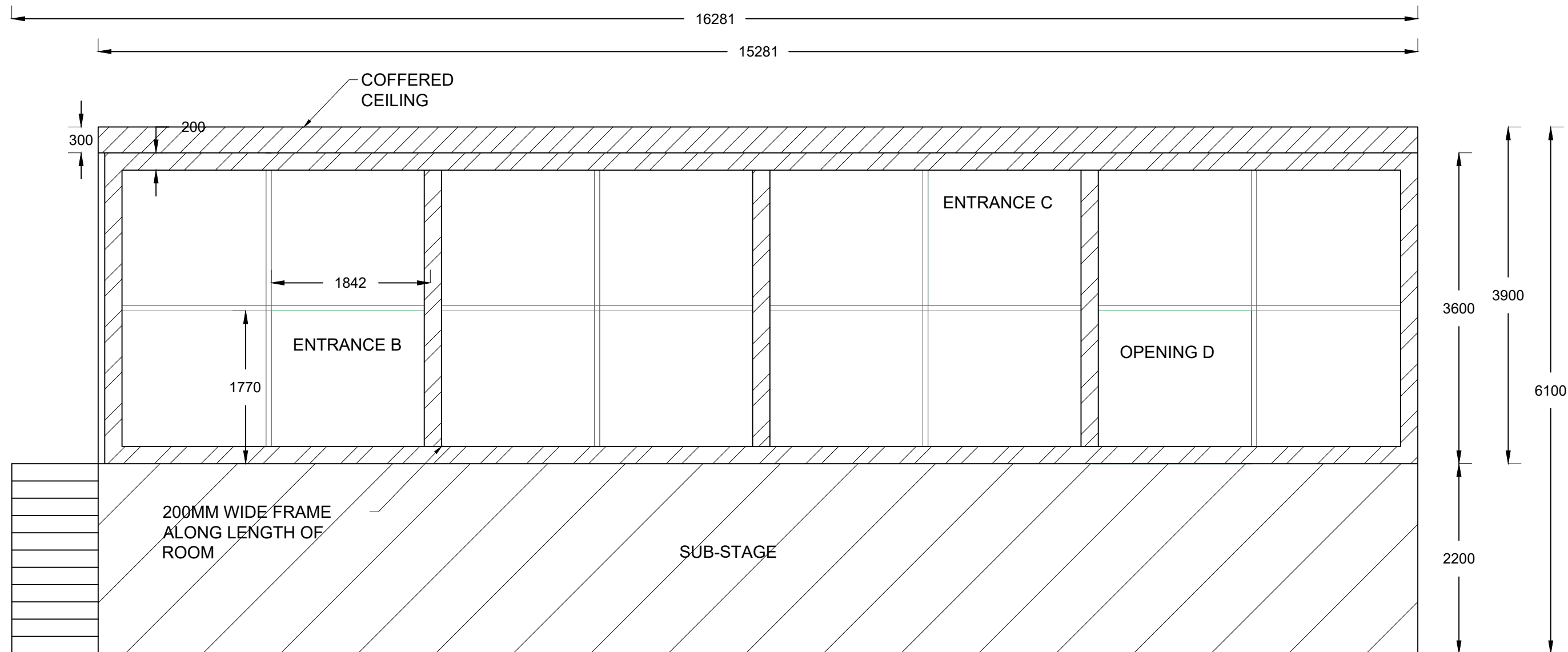
13605

PRESENTED BY			
WESTERN AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS			
Symphony No. 3			
SCENIC UNIT			
GROUND PLAN			
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DIRECTOR:			
SET DESIGNER:	Elisa von Perger		
LIGHTING DESIGNER:			
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DRAWING	SCALE	DATE	DRAWN BY
A	1:75	4/11/24	Elisa von Perger
	At: A3	REV NO:	CONTACT
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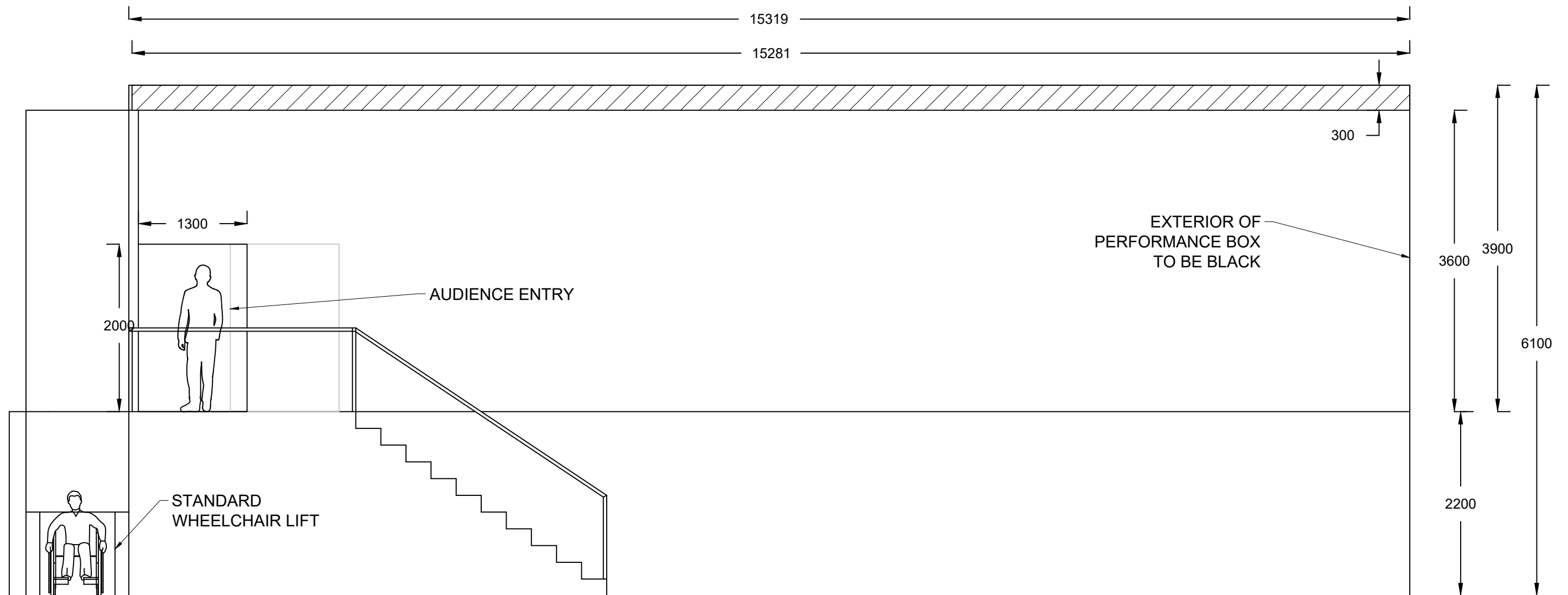
SECTION A-A

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Symphony No. 3			
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DIRECTOR:			
SET DESIGNER:	Elisa von Perger		
LIGHTING DESIGNER:			
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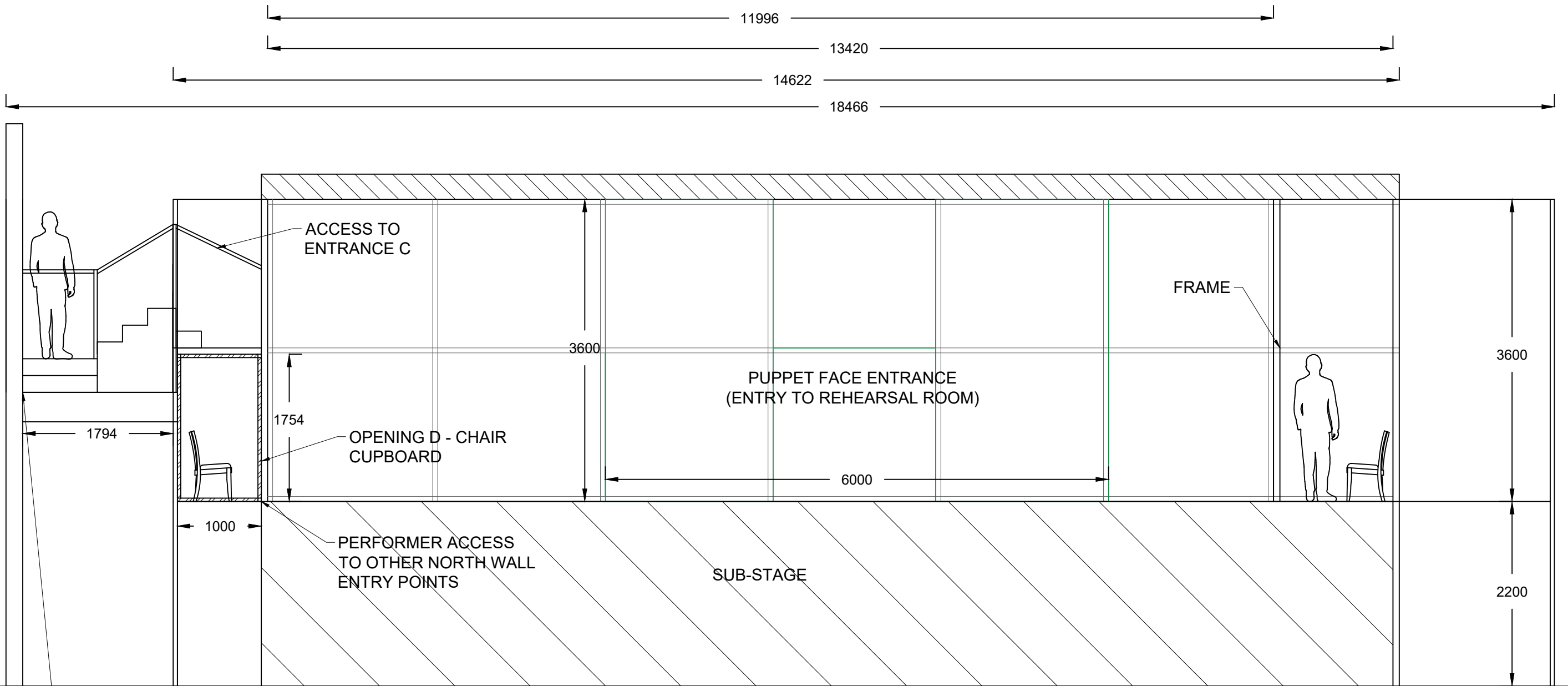
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DIRECTOR:			
SET DESIGNER:	Elisa von Perger		
LIGHTING DESIGNER:			
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DRAWING (A)	SCALE 1:50 At: A3	DATE 4/11/24 REV NO: 1.0	DRAWN BY Elisa von Perger CONTACT evonperg@our.ecu.edu.au



SECTION C-C
EXTERIOR OF BOX

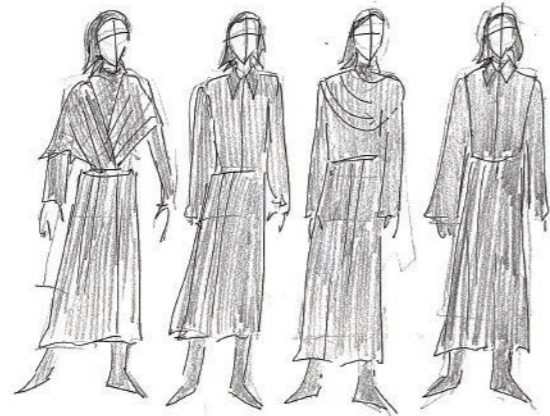
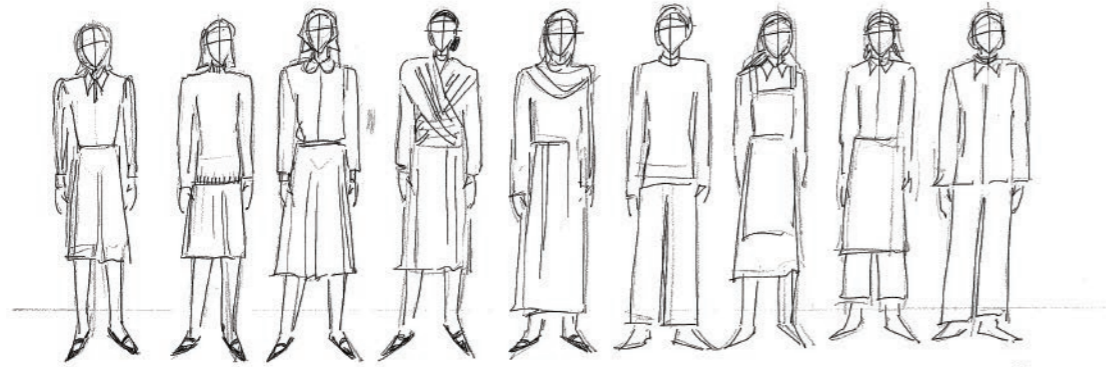
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Symphony No. 3			
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DIRECTOR:			
SET DESIGNER:	Elisa von Perger		
LIGHTING DESIGNER:			
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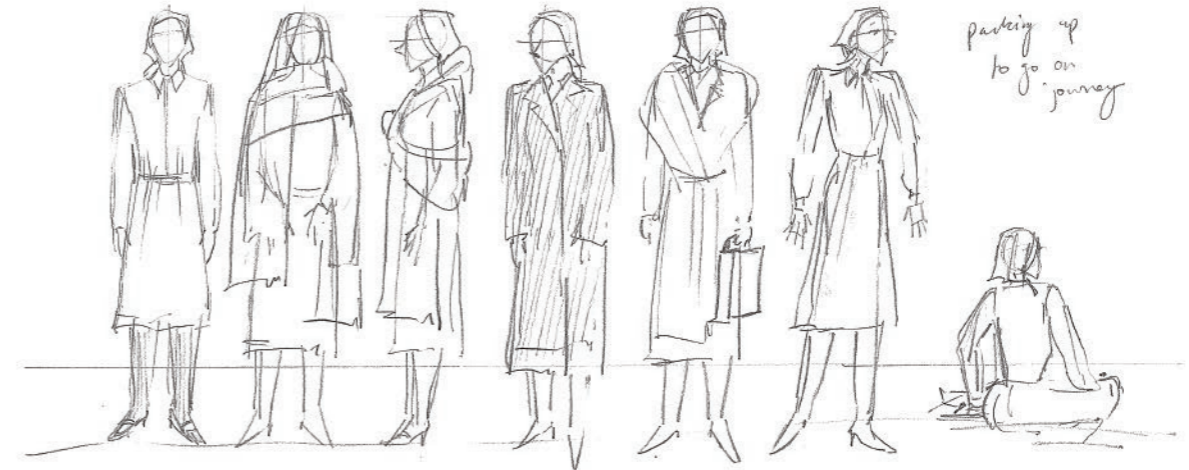
SECTION D-D

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DIRECTOR:			
SET DESIGNER:	Elisa von Perger		
LIGHTING DESIGNER:			
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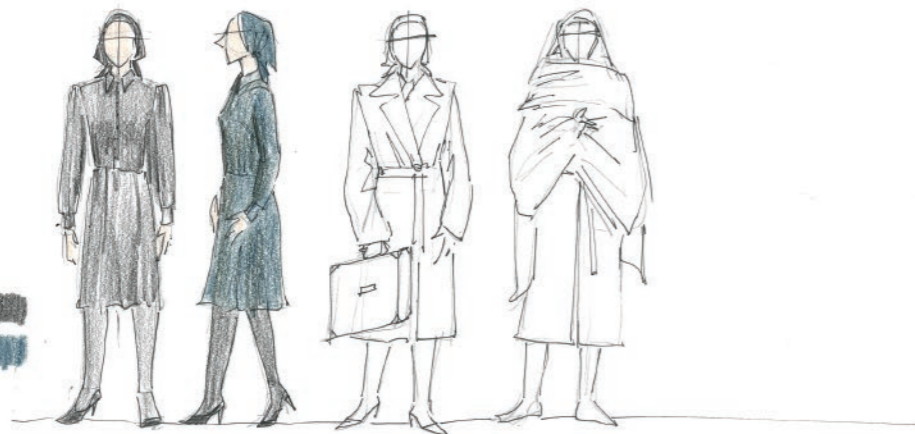
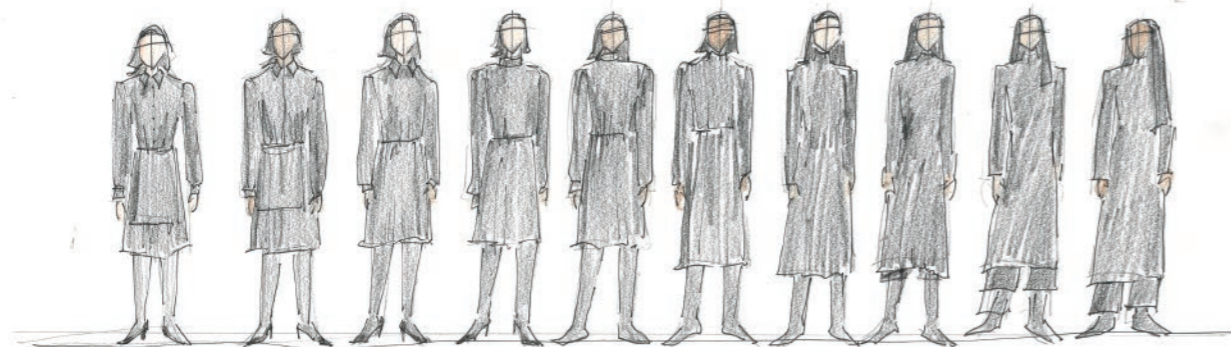
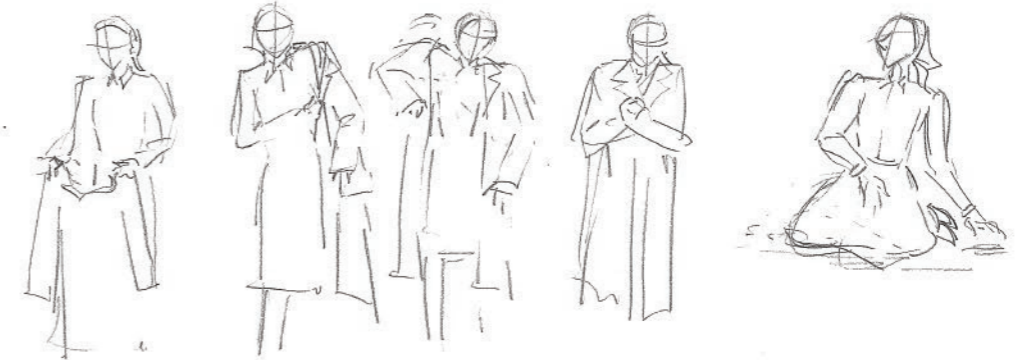
Thumbnail Sketches



- Historical?
- Abstract w/ historical elements
- No shoes
- Bundled up in layers
- Movement?
- Charcoal
- progression



packing up
to go on
journey



SYMPHONY NO. 3

SYMPHONY OF SORROWFUL SONGS

SOLOIST A - MOTHER

Composed by Henryk Górecki

Designed by Elisa von Perger

BASE COSTUME

- Soloist wears a simple charcoal grey knee-length dress, cut in a 1940's style, with dark stockings and low heels.
- Headscarf in matching colour covers head, tied at back of neck.

FIRST MOVEMENT

- Soloist enters in base costume, unpacks 1940's-style navy blue overcoat from suitcase with other clothing.
- Dresses in coat and exits room with empty suitcase in hand as though preparing for a journey in an outside environment.

THIRD MOVEMENT

- Soloist enters wrapped in two varying navy blue blankets, on top of open overcoat. Shoes missing. Effect should be as though she is disoriented and frightened, having wandered in from a cold, hostile, chaotic environment.
- Blankets may fall/be pulled off by chorus members during choreographed movement.
- Soloist may cling to blankets, uses them to shield herself.



SYMPHONY NO. 3

SYMPHONY OF SORROWFUL SONGS

SOLOIST B - CHILD

Composed by Henryk Górecki

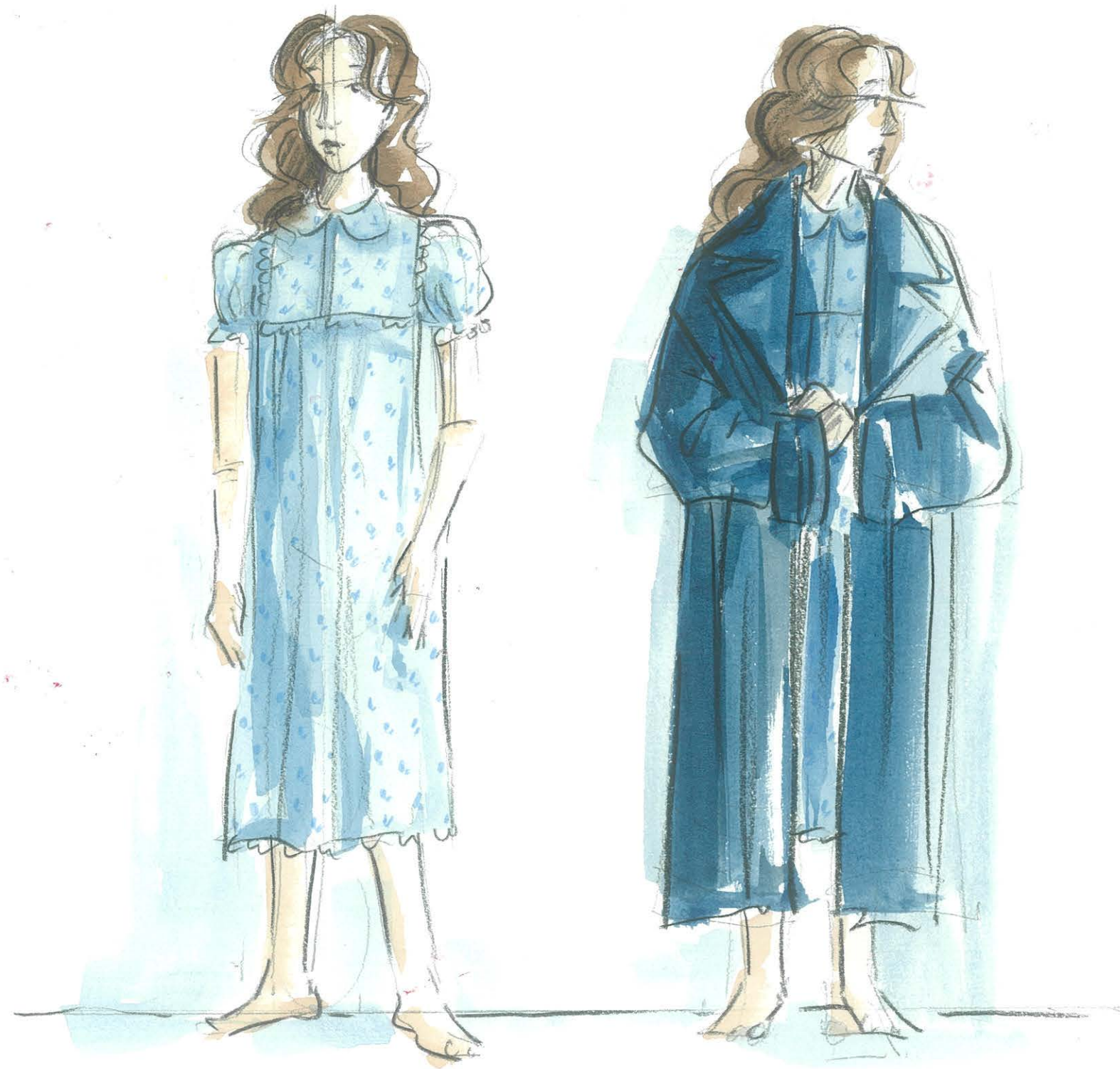
Designed by Elisa von Perger

BASE COSTUME

- Soloist wears a pale blue-grey 1940's-style nightgown with short gathered sleeves and a frill detail around yoke. No shoes.
- Hair loose, as though she has just awoken from bed.

SECOND MOVEMENT

- Takes pre-set navy blue overcoat identical to the Mother's coat from hat stand and dresses in coat as part of action.
- Coat to be oversized, Child uses it to wrap herself in as though warming herself from the cold.



SYMPHONY NO. 3

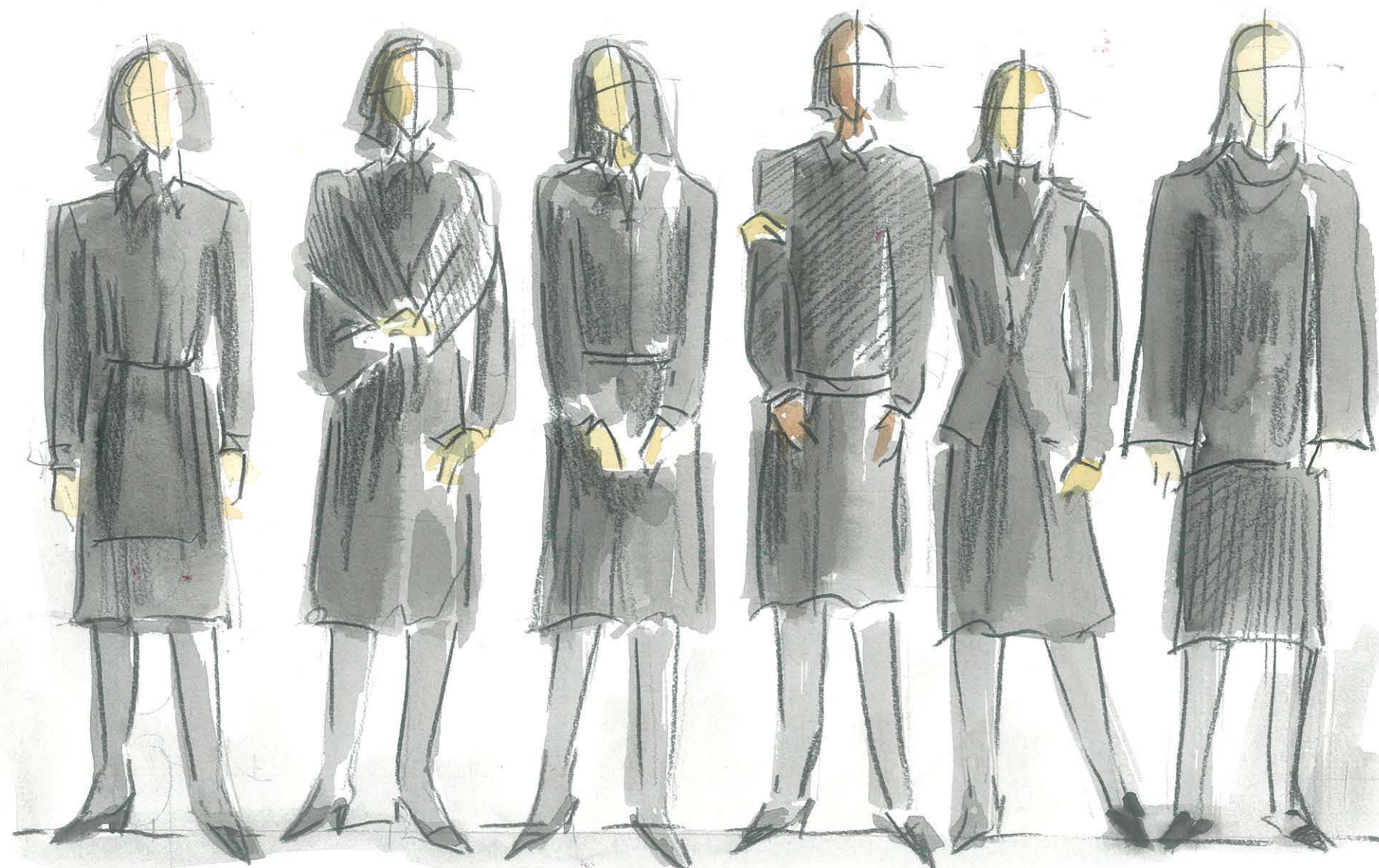
SYMPHONY OF SORROWFUL SONGS

CHORUS #1-6

Composed by Henryk Górecki

Designed by Elisa von Perger

- There are 15 chorus members in total, only seen during the Third Movement. Enter from various hidden doorways built into the panelling, action includes choreographed movement and interaction with the Mother, as well as various props such as the chairs and hanging garments.
- Chorus members dressed in monochromatic charcoal grey dresses akin to the Mother's, with stockings and headscarves.
- Progression in styles - ranging from 1940's-styled outfits including aprons and heels, which grows more and more abstract along the line.
- Skirts and headscarves are lengthened, shoes disappear, wide-leg pants appear beneath the skirts.
- Dresses become less structured although still form-fitting.
- Accessories reminiscent of a range of women from different contexts and geographies, e.g. aprons, jewellery, scarves.
- Overall effect is an abstraction of clothing from the Mother, tying into historical and contemporary global silhouettes and influences.

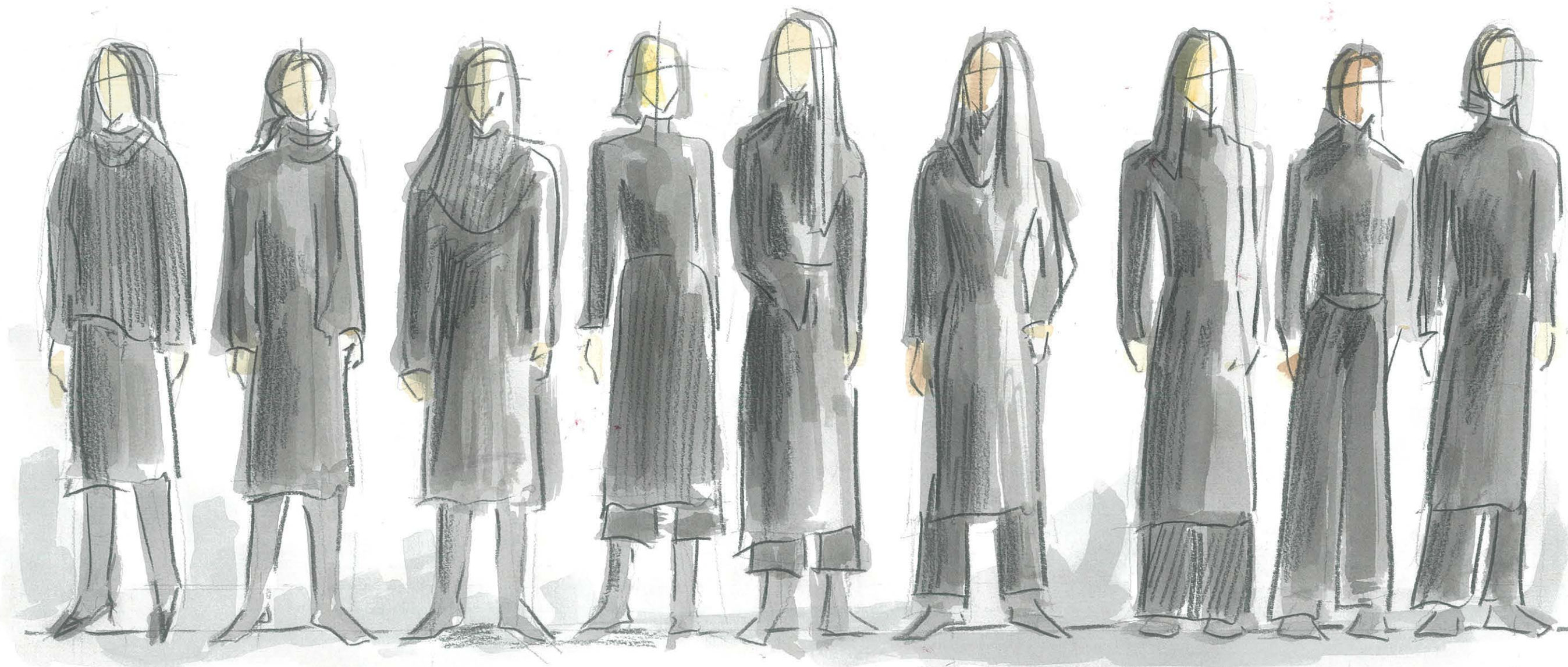


SYMPHONY NO. 3

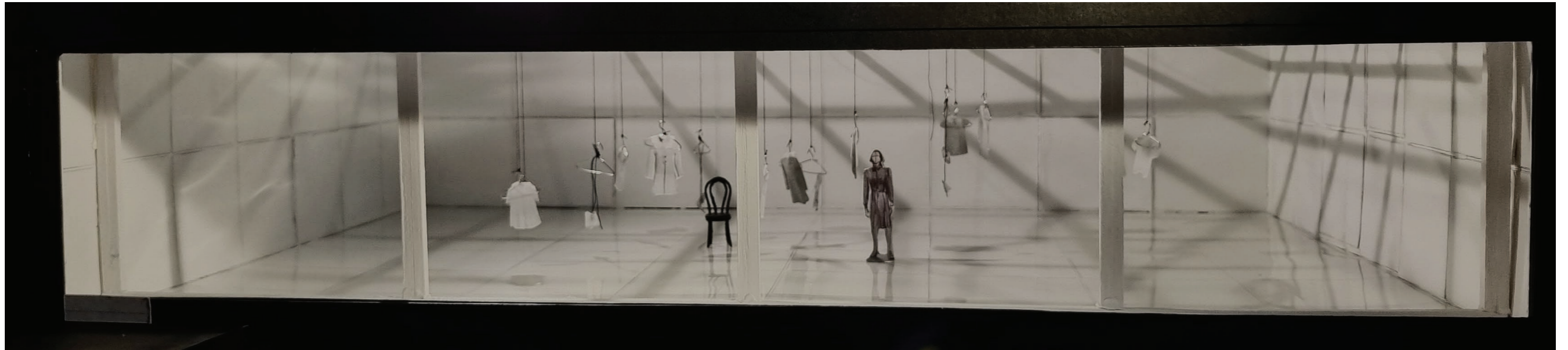
SYMPHONY OF SORROWFUL SONGS

CHORUS #7-15

Composed by Henryk Górecki
Designed by Elisa von Perger



First Movement



The first movement is based on a 15th century Marian lamentation, written from the point of view of Mary grieving her son Jesus during his crucifixion and death. In this performance, the first movement represents a distortion of the daily rituals of dressing and hanging clothes. The mother is lost in her struggle to leave the remnants of the past behind, as she prepares to leave her home and embark on a journey.



The audience enter on an empty white room, save for a chair, suitcase, and several wire coathangers dangling in space. Blurry black and white projections of a child running and playing fill the walls. A projection of a white bird swoops across the walls and floor.



As the music starts, the mother enters and approaches the suitcase. She slowly unpacks a variety of child's clothing - dresses, blouses, coats, shoes - and hangs these on the coathangers.



The hangers gradually fly up and out of the room one by one as the mother completes her solo. Eventually, there is only a single white nightgown hanging in the middle of the room.



As the lights dim and the nightgown flies out, the mother unpacks a navy blue coat from the suitcase and puts it on. White feathers start to fall from the grid as she slowly leaves, suitcase in hand.

Second Movement



The lyrics of the second movement are taken from an inscription on the wall of a Gestapo cell, written by an 18-year old girl to Mary, Queen of Heaven. This movement acts as a shorter dream-like interlude, of a child having awoken from a nightmare, seeking the comfort of her mother. The child is vulnerable, delicate and lost within the empty room, while the mother is represented to gigantic symbolic objects and fragmented projection - an omniscient, comforting presence that forms the child's whole world.



The child enters and is amazed at the space and the feathers on the ground. The lighting state shifts to a slightly darker tone, casting blue and purple shadows around the walls. The child wades through the feathers while singing - the projections have shifted to show blurry fragments of a woman's face and hands.



A trapdoor opens, and an enormous hat rack rises telescopically like a tree from the ground. There is a coat identical to the mother's hanging on it - the child takes the chair and to reach it and put it on. The child may also sit on the edge of the trapdoor opening, legs dangling into the void.



Near the conclusion of the movement, the prompt side doors hidden within the walls open - these lead to the rehearsal room - and an enormous puppet figurine enters on a truck. The puppet is a wooden sculpture of the mother - see puppet render on next page. The child walks up to the puppet and follows as it withdraws into the darkness. The lights dim, and the second movement concludes.

Puppet Render



The puppet is a wooden sculpture of the head and hands of the mother, operated by unseen puppeteers. The head is hollow, allowing puppeteers to manipulate the eyelids and fingers to twitch, as though the puppet is experiencing a restless sleep. The puppet is rendered as an icon-like figure in dark polished wood boards, and a blue veil.

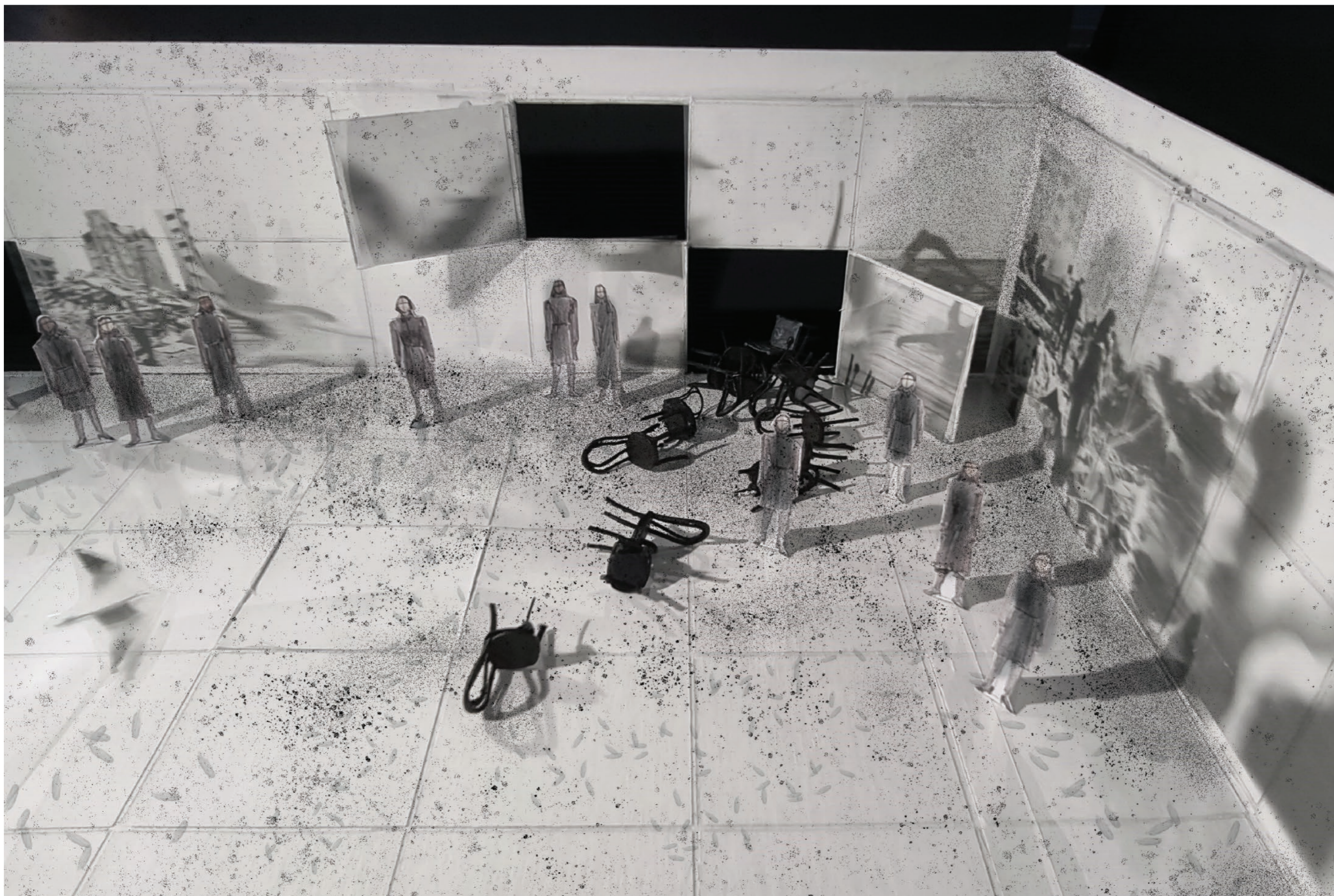
Third Movement



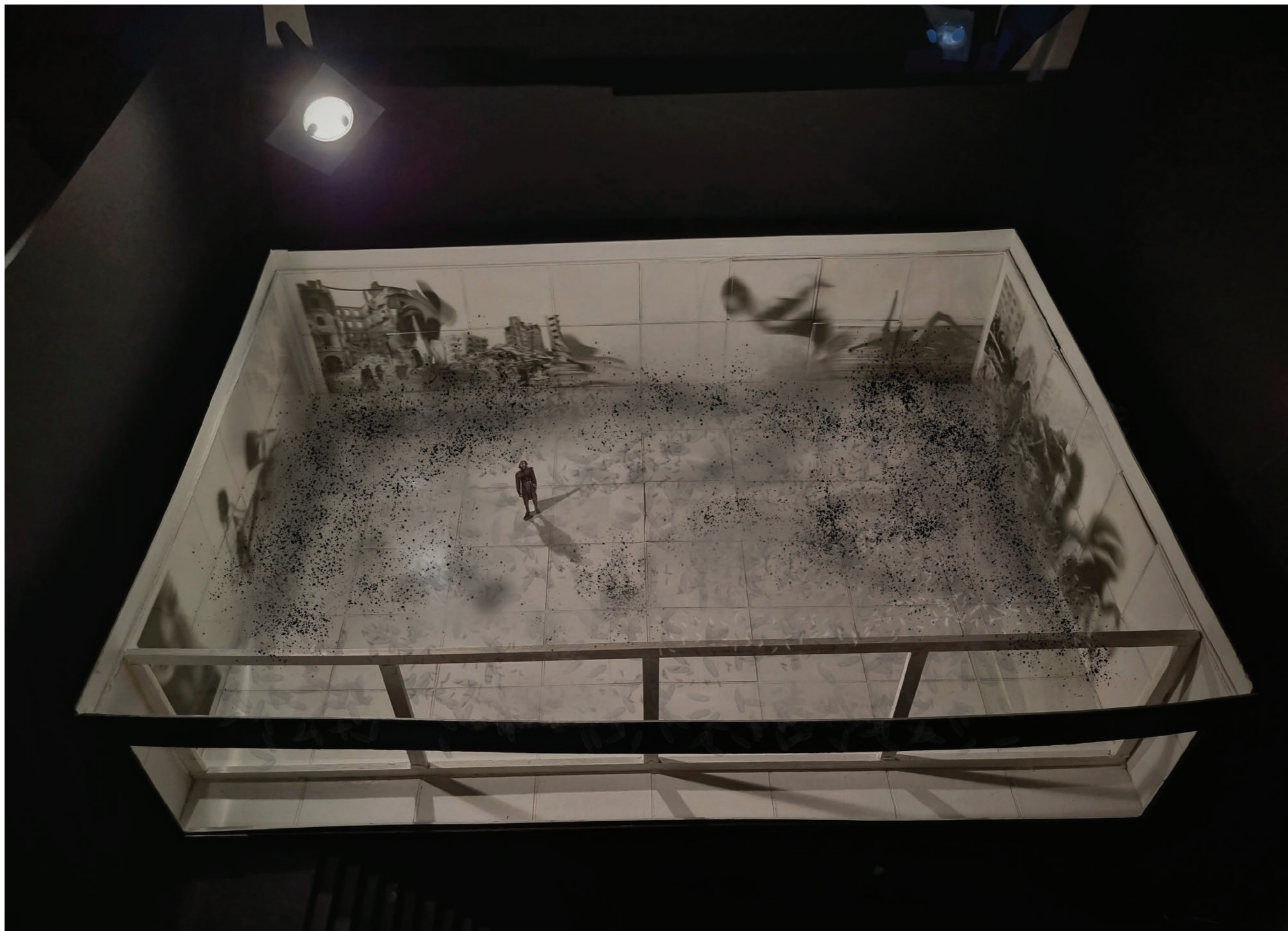
The third and final movement is based on a traditional Silesian folk song, telling of a mother searching for her fallen son on the battlefield. In this piece, the separation of mother and child is explored in a wider, global context. The mother re-enters in a dishevelled state, failing to find her child or accept her grief. The space becomes chaotic and fragmented, as mirror-imaged performers enter with their own stories of grief and loss. Conflict, pain and violence are expressed from a range of contexts and experiences.



The mother enters - time has passed, she is disoriented, tired and afraid. The projections shift again, interspersing images from the previous movements with scenes of violence and conflict inside and outside of the house. Suddenly, various doors open with each change in the music's rhythm, and the chorus enter. Choreographed movement occurs around the mother, who continues to sing.



One of the doors reveal a flood of wooden chairs that spill onto the floor and are incorporated into the movement, creating a sense of destruction. Ash begins to fall from the grid and mix with the feathers, dirtying the walls and floor. The bird projection reappears and flutters around the space.



There is a point at which the music has a sense of a 'reset', and starts anew - at this moment, there is a blackout, and the chorus exit. The mother is alone in the room, and tries to repeat the movement by herself, attempting to order the chairs, trying to clean the feathers and ash from the ground. In the final moments, the projections gradually fade and the prompt side doors open on darkness. The mother stands and exits, as the lights dim and the piece concludes.