

Methodologies in Approach to Concept

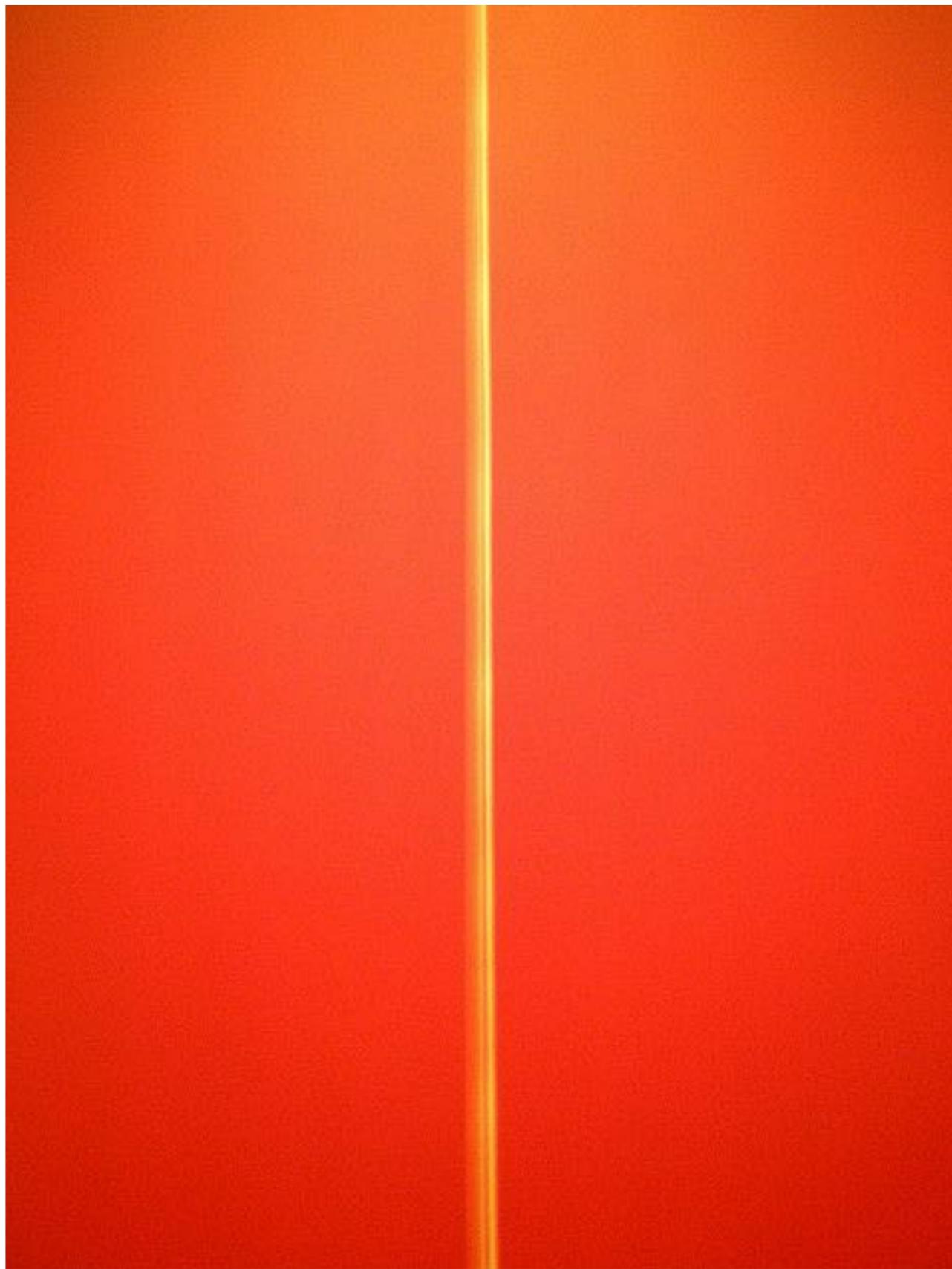
Alex Meyer, Scenic Designer

Godspell, Okoboji Summer Theatre '18

This is a quick look at my visual and contextual research process for our very unique production of *Godspell*. A community developed in storytelling and prepared to be sent off into the world is united by love and empathy. The people of Burning Man enter the site with open eyes and arms, and foster creativity as a pinnacle mode of expression and connection. As we begin to explore these modes of connectivity as a team, I present the relationships I've discovered through imagery, art, and ideas.



Carol and I had some great discussion regarding our conceptual approach to a *Godspell* a la Burning Man. Her images of mandalas as a diagram of the universe made me think of how the layout of Burning Man is designed centrally around the Man, and how we might utilize space to indicate a temporary cosmic axis of sorts that exists within this community. Additionally, our discussion of the aesthetics of *I Dream of Jeannie* made me do a bit of research into her bottle, and I just found the temple-like approach to her abode was intriguingly suspended in space.



Perhaps at the axis of this mandala exists Jesus' sacrifice for humankind, (or more pointedly, the cross). Barnett Newman, a painter of the 20th century, believed his 'zips' among his color fields could tell more about spirituality and sacrifice than any imagistic representation of Jesus or the cross. As we progress toward the end of the show, Jesus reveals a sort of clarity as to his purpose with the caravan of followers. Carol and I had discussed a sudden moment of absolute clarity that exists among chaos at the end of the show. Newman's paintings begin to explore this theme visually.



Firstly, in researching the Burning Man festival, I found several poignant images that resounded with me visually. I am interested in the layering of tent structures, and like the fleetingness of them existing on sandy ground. I found the sham stage to be an interesting potential answer for our questions regarding the show in its presentational moments. The silhouette of the framework of the heart structure I found to be interesting, and I look to the structure in flames as a manifestation of how this space transforms throughout the show.



One of the more pertinent installations I found at Burning Man was this dock. A burner from the documentary I was watching noted “a dock in the middle of the desert. The only thing missing was the water.” I like to pair this with the quote from Jesus, “I did not come to abolish but to complete.” I was also interested in the way space was sectioned off by things like buses and motorhomes in the additional photo.



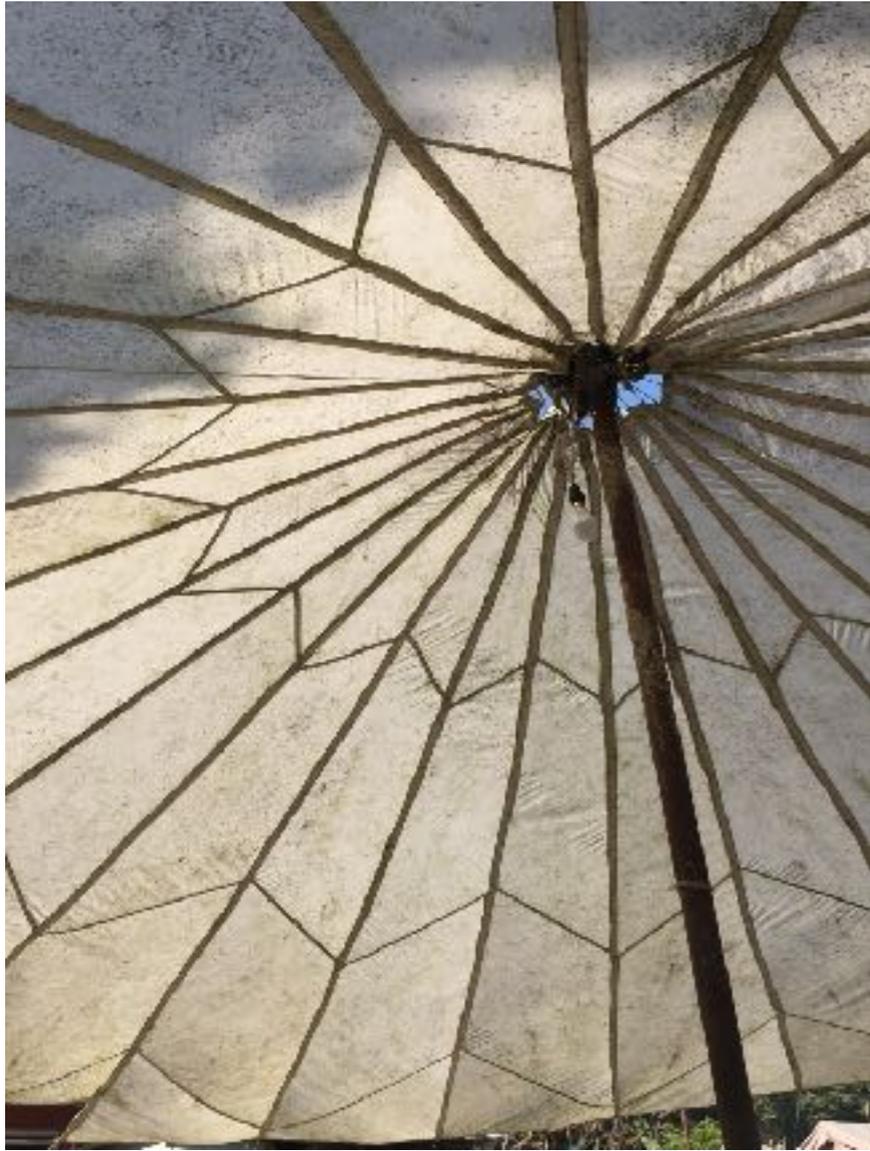
Then came images of the desert and its color. I enjoy the temporary barrier between the earth and human feet in the left image, and like the symbolism involved in the rainbow touching down as if it were an axis of rotation in the landscape on the right.



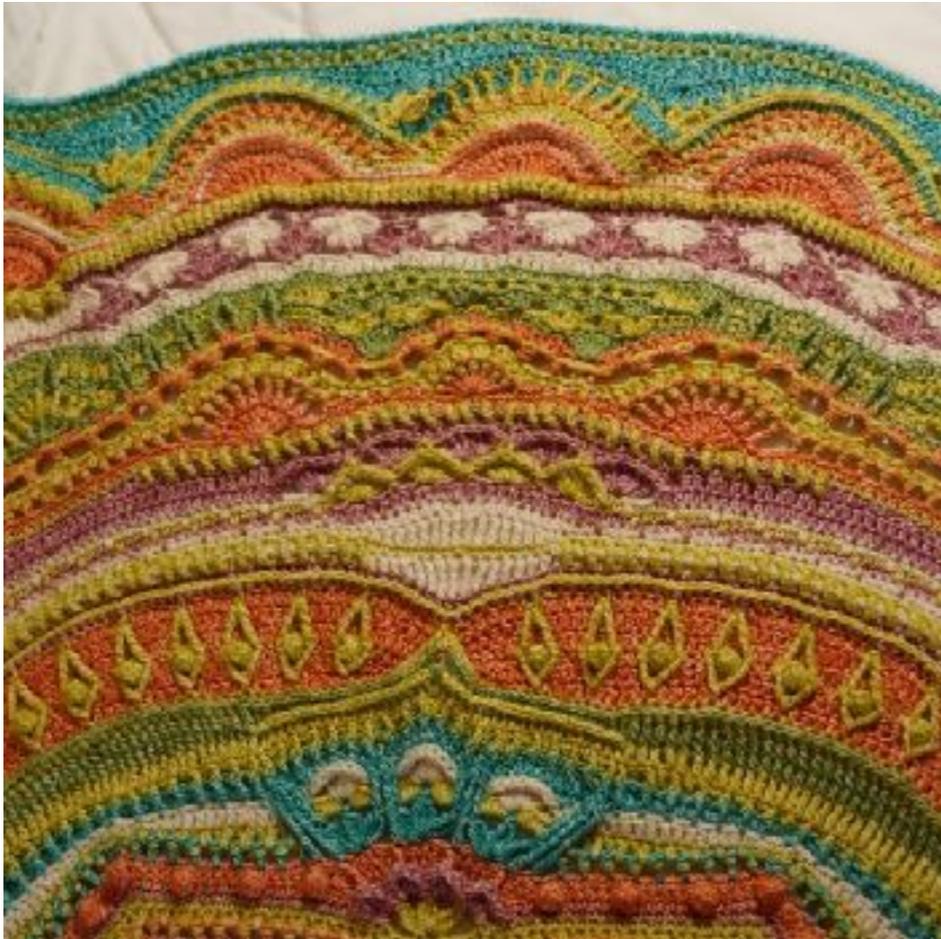
These are images of other types of settlements within the desert and their relationship with the environment.



I also began to look at how this space might evolve throughout the course of the show. There's a newness with which the space is approached at the beginning of the show that I feel could start with an action similar to wiping off dust on old cars.



These are images that have distinct textures and palettes I'm drawn to.



While the left image is a simple beginning look at physically a mandala in a different material way, the image on the right has more to do with desert landscape. As a work of Western Desert Art (encompassing a broad range of Australia), “it is a story of contact, conflict and survival, of exodus and return, seen through Aboriginal eyes, and interpreted through their voices, art and new media.” This relationship with God’s creation I think is especially important in our approach to *Godspell*.



This piece, titled *Our Country*, is an example of Martu Art, a facet of Western Desert Art. What outsiders may see as “harsh, desolate and inhospitable,” the Martu people reflect in high color and contrast. In fact, the desert is a place highly reflective of diversity, and the artists of the region “present an intimate vision of a place that is beautiful, revered and complex.”



How will we, throughout this process, function as a community? Perhaps there's a way to manifest that physically or visually on the stage. At this point, I am open to something along the lines of a communal weaving that would be able to exist as part of the stage environment.