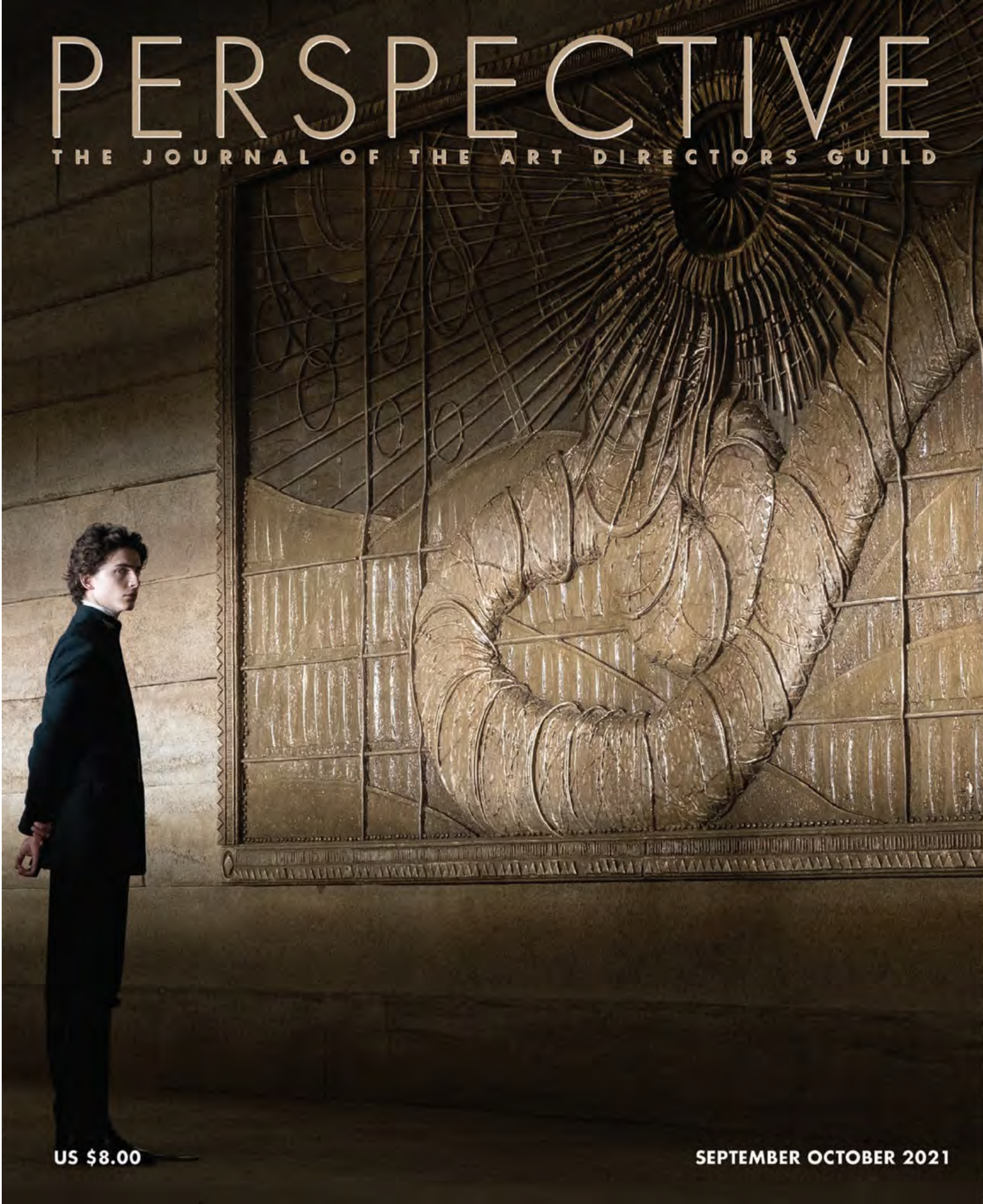


PERSPECTIVE

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WHO'S TALKING IN THIS ISSUE

Eve McCarney, *Production Designer of AMERICAN HORROR STORIES* – page 29

Every episode would take on a life of its own, with a unique palette or style driven by the script. I worked very closely with the directors of photography, costume design, set decoration and prop departments. There are many crossovers with other parts of the Ryan Murphy universe, and everything must gel and be cohesive throughout—style, palette, tone and design.

Ethan Tobman, *Production Designer of FREE GUY*
Tobman (center) on the set of Badass' stash house. – page 13

The greatest liberty in designing a wish-fulfillment video game is the geography and architecture can be deliberately illogical. The stash houses are dimensionally transcendent—impossibly small from the outside, impossibly vast from within.



Beth Mickle, *Production Designer of DEAR EVAN HANSEN*
Ben Platt in a production still from the film. – page 37

Somewhere between the beginning and the end of that week, the NBA announced it was suspending its season, Tom Hanks revealed unsettling news via Twitter—and by Friday, the world as we knew it, had turned entirely upside down.

Jon Carlos, *Production Designer of HACKS* – page 27

Throughout the season, I started to explore cross-contamination of their color palettes with one another. In the sixth episode, when their relationship hits a positive milestone, their palettes intermingled as seen with the hotel suite finishes. The wallpapers and curtain fabrics selected incorporated a combination of teal-like blues and soft pinks used in harmonious balance.



American Horror Stories
EXPANDING THE AHS
UNIVERSE

BY EVE McCARNEY, PRODUCTION DESIGNER

You know how there are those moments in your life where they say all the preparation and hard work you have put in will be put to the test? For me, it was a fateful day in February 2021 when my agent called to schedule me to interview for the spin-off to the widely popular series *American Horror Story*, *American Horror Stories*. An opportunity like this was unique; however, my joy quickly dissolved into panic as my agent mentioned that I would be interviewing the very next morning! Now, if you know me, I am the type of person who prepares diligently for everything in life; I genuinely believe that success is when preparedness meets opportunity. For every interview, I make it a point to understand the script and characters, cultivate a

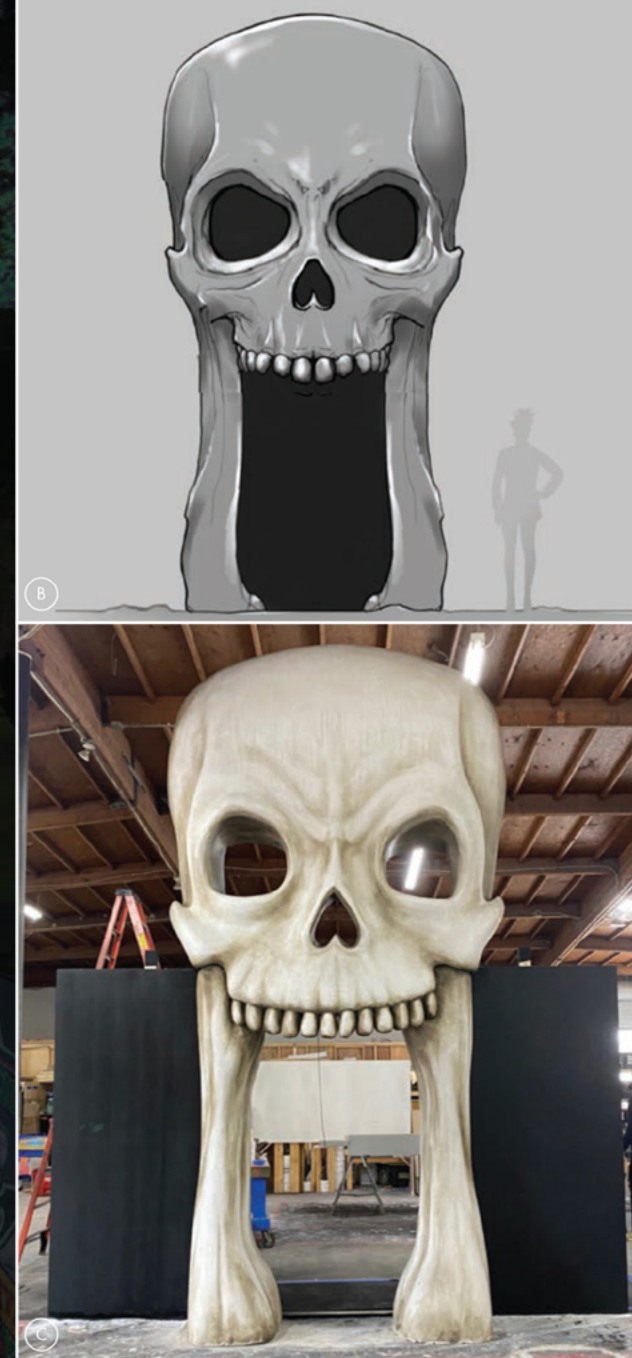
cohesive vision, and infer what story the writers are trying to tell. I then wrap all this into a presentation for my interviews. Not this time!

The next morning, a few minutes into the Zoom call with executive producer John Gray and director Loni Peristere, I knew that they were my kind of people, and any preconceived nerves quickly dissipated. I was hired the next day, and one of my most challenging and exhilarating adventures had begun. Every episode was a new story with new characters, new sets and new locations. As a designer, I was inspired and thrilled to create so many realities; as a pragmatist, I wasn't sure how the crew would pull it off.

American Horror Stories as planned was made up of one-hour episodes shot in eight days with a two-day hiatus in between. It was a tall order for such an ambitious series. The Art Department was tasked with staying true to a script that was often revised and added to as we prepped the episodes. As it turns out, only one episode was shot in eight days, with the others ranging from nine to fifteen. Once the production started shooting, we had about ten days to prep the next episode.

Every episode would take on a life of its own, with a unique palette or style driven by the script. I worked very closely with the directors of photography, costume design, set decoration and

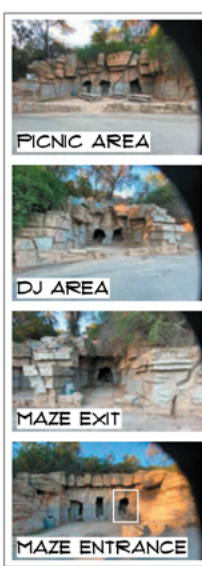
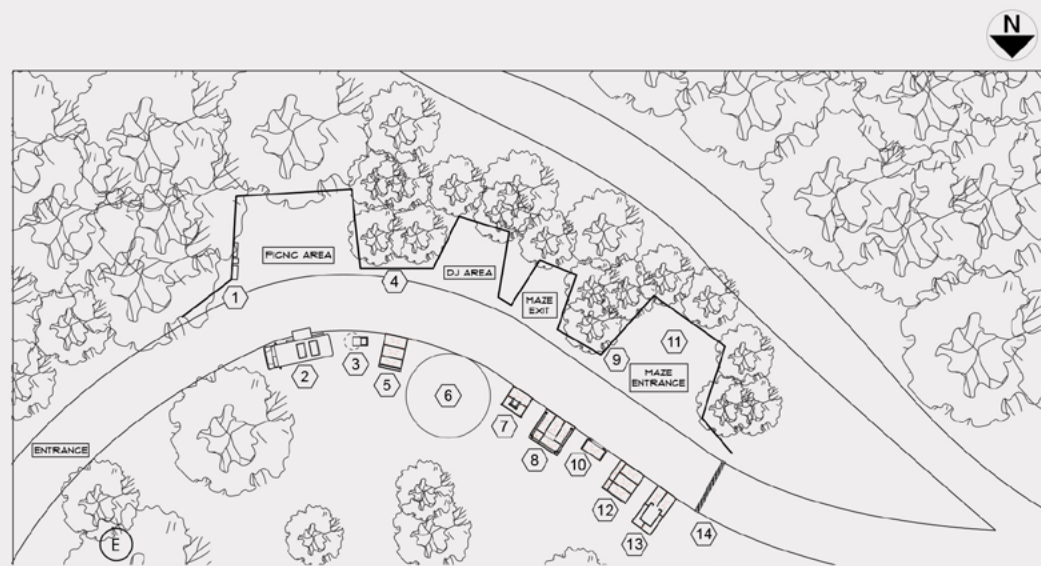
prop departments. There are many crossovers with other parts of the Ryan Murphy universe, and everything must gel and be cohesive throughout—style, palette, tone and design. Several meetings were held to discuss the vision, what colors to lean on, which to avoid, and any other themes or inspirations used for the overall design aesthetic created within each story. What I love about this series (and all of Ryan Murphy's shows) is how much design plays into it—the core aim being to create these disturbing and highly elevated environments meant to reflect the characters and enhance the story. As a designer, it's exhilarating to focus so heavily on style, nuance, color and character.



A. HALLOWEEN CARNIVAL CONCEPT ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MOREAU. DRAWN USING BLENDER AND PHOTOSHOP.

B. SKULL SCULPTURE. PHOTOSHOP CONCEPT ILLUSTRATION BY ANDRES PARADA.

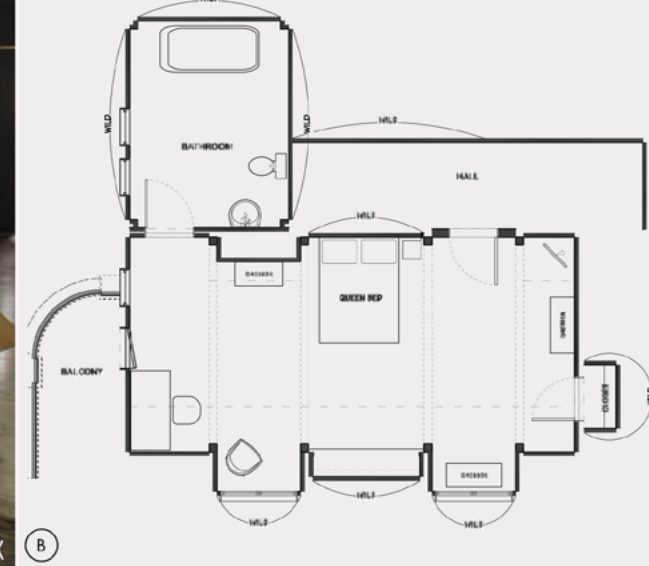
C. FINISHED SKULL SCULPTURE. PHOTO TAKEN IN THE MILL AT LA HANGAR STUDIOS.



G. HALLOWEEN CARNIVAL. PRODUCTION STILL.

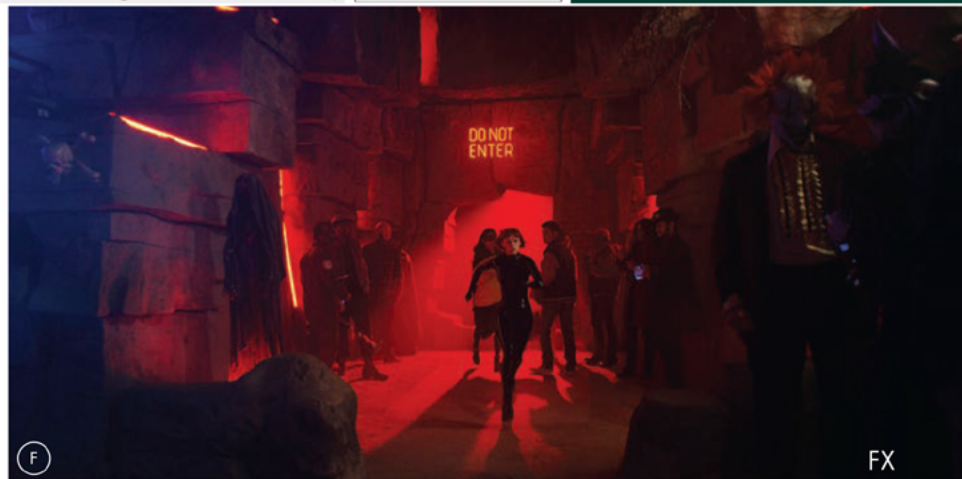
H. HALLOWEEN CARNIVAL MAZE. PLAN DRAWN IN VECTORWORKS BY KIEL GOOKIN.

I. HALLOWEEN CARNIVAL MAZE DOCTOR'S OFFICE, LOOSELY INSPIRED BY THE BASEMENT OFFICE FROM THE 1929 FLASHBACK IN AHS SEASON 1. PRODUCTION STILL.



rules was hectic. I count myself fortunate to have had such a stellar rigging grip crew alongside the very hardworking art team.

The last piece to the carnival puzzle was the maze interior which was built on stage. My aim was to create something unique and familiar. Incorporating the old zoo caves into the maze seemed like the right plan. One cave was used as the entrance and another as the exit, so a bunch of rock walls were rented to develop the transition into the maze. It took a bit of planning to fit these varied rocks together in a way that felt organic and real. The fantastic paint team finessed the crevices to help seam them in problem areas. The next part of the maze featured palette walls—a holdover from the school maze and something standard for haunts. I had the idea to rotate them to look more like jail bars which created interesting shadows as the light filtered through. After passing by the palettes, the visitor is led into a black void filled with mannequins, Astera LED tubes, and featuring two floor-to-ceiling mirrors angled for more depth and confusion. The last stop was the



A. MURDER HOUSE DEN. PRODUCTION STILL.

B. SCARLETT'S BEDROOM. SET PLAN MODIFIED FROM AHS SEASON 1 TO INCLUDE A BATHROOM. DRAWN IN VECTORWORKS BY KIEL GOOKIN.

C. SCARLETT'S BEDROOM WALLPAPER SOURCED FROM GERMANY.

D. SCARLETT'S BEDROOM. BUILT ON STAGE AT LA HANGAR STAGES DOWNTOWN. SET PHOTO.

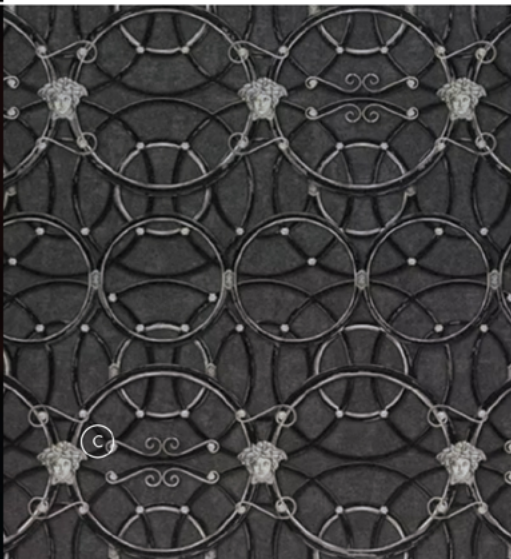
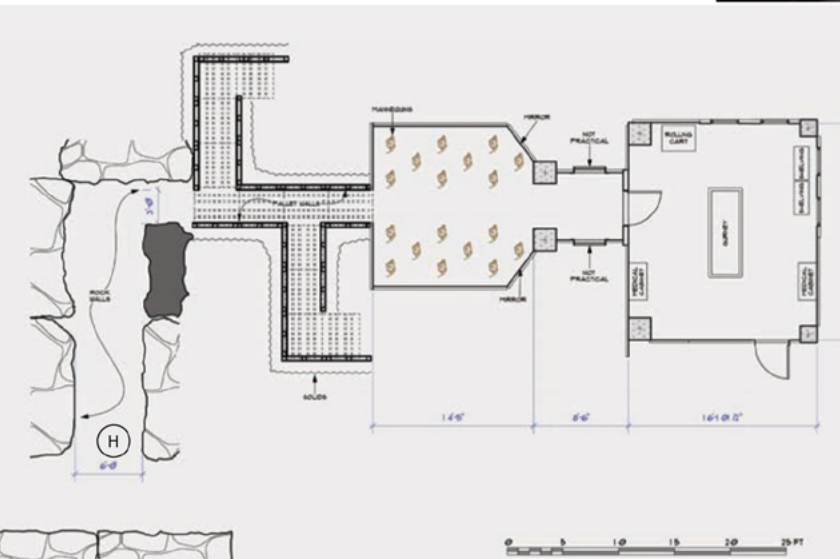
E. CARNIVAL MID-WAY LAYOUT. DRAWN IN VECTORWORKS BY KIEL GOOKIN.

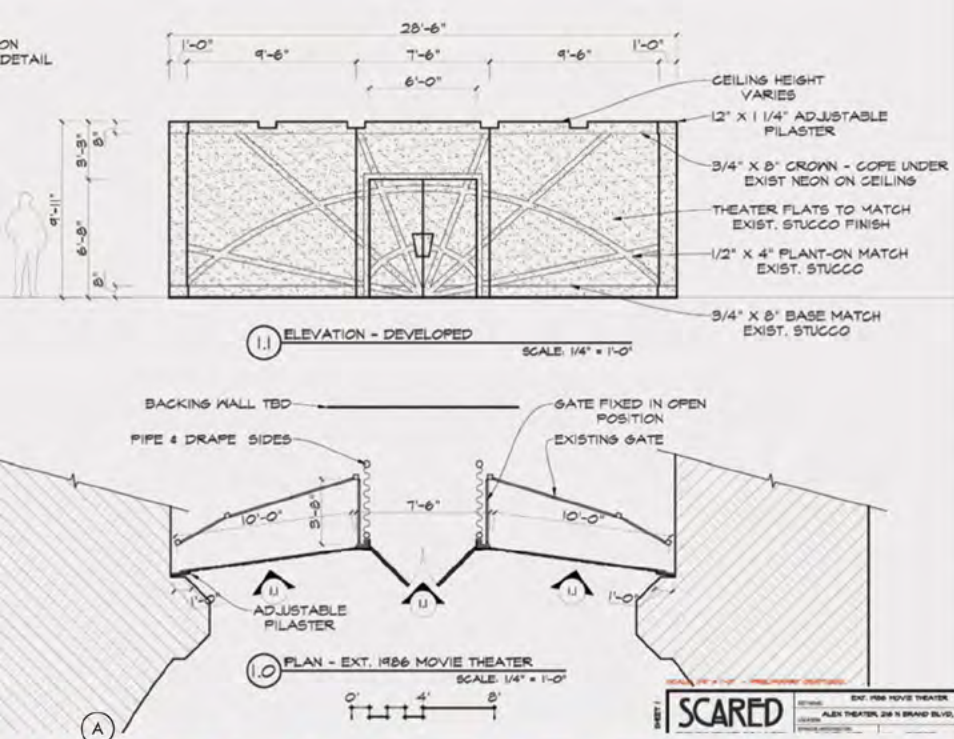
F. HALLOWEEN CARNIVAL MAZE EXIT. COMBINING OLD ZOO CAVES WITH THE SET BUILT ON STAGE. PRODUCTION STILL.

In the first two episodes, “Rubberwoman” (part one & two), the iconic Murder House from season one of *American Horror Story*, is revisited. My aim was to find ways to lean into the nostalgia of that first season while creating a new aesthetic for the house that incorporated the new family’s unique style. The couple’s teenage daughter Scarlett moves into Violet’s old room, which was built on stage. By the second episode, she has transformed the space, providing an opportunity to reflect her dark spirit and inner struggle with her ongoing metamorphosis into Rubberwoman. I opted for a black wallpaper adorned with silver geometric shapes and small faces. It felt so suitable for Scarlett—a subtle nod to her emerging bondage fantasies and new murderous streak. Butterfly collections were also used as a metaphor for her emerging new self and identity.

The biggest challenge of the first two episodes was the Halloween carnival. Initially scripted as a high school Halloween dance with a small maze, the crew was informed three weeks out from shooting that it would now be the best Halloween

attraction in Los Angeles. In thinking about the right atmosphere for the carnival, I remembered an area that I had shot during one of my very first features, the old zoo in Griffith Park. It’s so iconic and visually stimulating. I felt it was the perfect venue, so I pitched the idea to the director and executive producer, and we had our new locale. Now all I had to do was design the event’s features and theme. Ryan Murphy did not want to use any of the standard tropes—games, pumpkin carving, apple bobbing, so I looked to other seasons of *American Horror Story* for inspiration and found it in *AHS* season four—“Freak Show.” I spent the next two weeks pitching ideas on what type of freaks could be featured and designing all the vignettes for them to perform in, the one directive being, do not repeat any freaks from season four. I designed eight vignettes in total for the performers using cemetery fencing, chain link, metal grates, a peep show booth with alligator wallpaper, a mausoleum set piece and neon accents. The crew also installed a thirty-foot cage for the fire breathers to perform in. Having only three days to install the entire event due to park





The sixth episode, “Feral,” is a nod to the Bigfoot lore and all the people who disappear each year in national parks. The production had been scouting around Los Angeles for various locations that could be cobbled together to create the park, but quickly became aware we couldn’t get everything we needed, so off to Big Bear we went! There we found the exterior ranger station location on the very first scout. It was perfect—high up on a ridgeline overlooking the forest below. It was quite large, significantly larger than what had been planned, so I redesigned the interior to match the architecture and scale of the exterior, and we started building. I wanted to create a space that felt authentic but spooky. I opted for dark wood paneling and stain with a rich forest green accent wall in keeping with the tone and palette. I was inspired by various photos where the aesthetic is eclectic—vintage appliances, wood-burning stove, old metal sink unit, first-aid boxes, file cabinets and wood furniture—and the set decoration department nailed it.

The finale of episode six revolved around the parents finally locating their long-lost son. In the early draft of the script, the parents find themselves in a clearing backed up against a bone totem—a monument to past victims and a larger-than-life trophy. In the early phases of the design, it was conceived as a thoughtful and intentional totem. After I delved into the character more with writer and director Manny Coto, I



felt this feral tribe would not have something so neat and thought out. It should feel organic, a bit messy, cobbled together haphazardly with an odd silhouette. The plan was adjusted accordingly, and the special effects shop, Anatomorphex, began the build. The first step was welding a thin metal frame in an organic shape for the base—no straight lines. Then they began layering the bones. It was a fun process, and I stopped by the shop often to check on things and give notes. About a week or so later, I got a note from Ryan Murphy to make it a throne instead of the totem. Art Director Joe Pew and I discussed designing a chair that could be added to the structure but still seem part of it, keeping with the organic flow. After some discussion with the effects shop, we hatched a plan and implemented it beautifully.

This season was full of late nights, early mornings and challenges which brought me to the edge, but it was all worth it. I had the honor of leading one of the hardest working Art Department teams, that consistently got the job done and taught me many things along the way. I feel truly blessed to have been part of such an experience and work with so many talented and creative people. Here’s to the next random agent phone call! **ADG**

Eve McCarney,
Production Designer
Chad Dellinger, Joe Pew,
Art Directors
Kiel Gookin, Jean Harter,
Set Designers
David Moreau, Andres Parada,
Concept Artists
Sharon Weaver,
Graphic Artist
Sandy Skora,
Set Decorator

D. INTERIOR RANGER STATION BUILT ON STAGE AT LA HANGAR STUDIOS. SET PHOTO.

E. INTERIOR RANGER STATION. PLAN BY JEAN HARTER DRAWN IN AUTOCAD.

F. BONE TOTEM. CONCEPT ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MOREAU USING ZBRUSH/ BLENDER/UNREAL/ PHOTOSHOP.

G. FINISHED BONE THRONE FEATURING MODIFIED DESIGN. SET PHOTO.

H. BONE THRONE ON LOCATION IN BIG BEAR. PRODUCTION STILL.

A. ALEX THEATER ENTRANCE WALL. DRAWN IN AUTOCAD BY JEAN HARTER.

B. ALEX THEATER ENTRANCE WITH ADDED WALL. 1986 PERIOD FLASHBACK. PRODUCTION STILL.

C. EXTERIOR RANGER STATION. LOCATION IN BIG BEAR. PRODUCTION STILL.



D. INTERIOR RANGER STATION BUILT ON STAGE AT LA HANGAR STUDIOS. SET PHOTO.

E. INTERIOR RANGER STATION. PLAN BY JEAN HARTER DRAWN IN AUTOCAD.

F. BONE TOTEM. CONCEPT ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MOREAU USING ZBRUSH/ BLENDER/UNREAL/ PHOTOSHOP.

G. FINISHED BONE THRONE FEATURING MODIFIED DESIGN. SET PHOTO.

H. BONE THRONE ON LOCATION IN BIG BEAR. PRODUCTION STILL.