

# Zobeide - the Maze City

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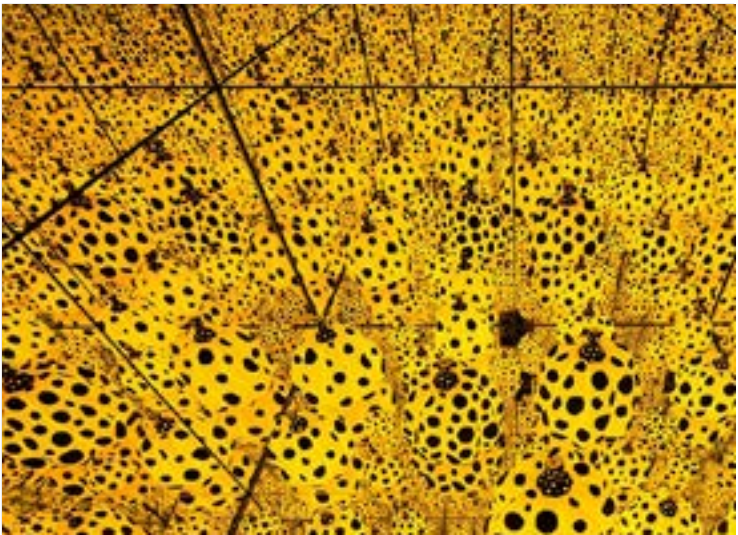


**Zobeide | Image Research**

The first time I read the piece on Zobeide, the maze city, in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, I was captivated by the dark yet beautiful description of people chasing after their dreams and desires and becoming unawaredly trapped by their pursue. After devoting years of their life to reshaping the city to trap the beautiful woman, "[t]he first to arrive could not understand what drew these people to Zobeide, this ugly city, this trap" -- even so, they never left the city. The story reminded me of metropolitans like New York and Beijing that bear the laughters and tears of the dreamers of our time.



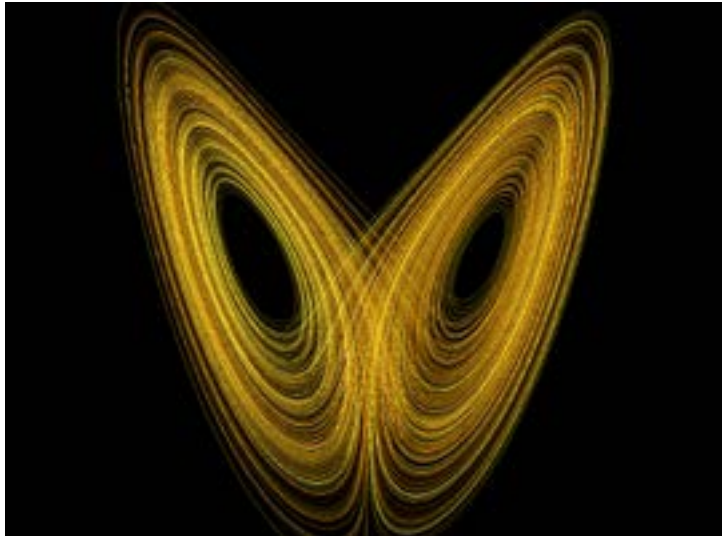
"Infinity Mirrors" by Yayoi Kusama



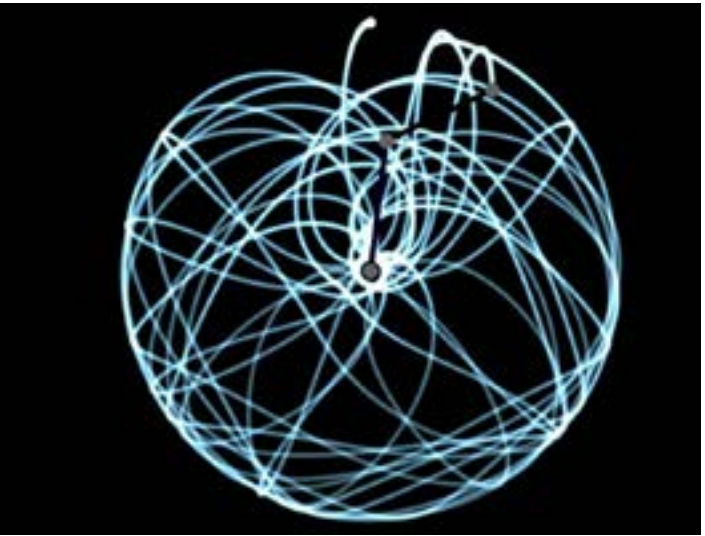
Yayoi Kusama's "Infinity Mirrors"



Yayoi Kusama's "Infinity Mirrors"



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Chaos Theory Visualized

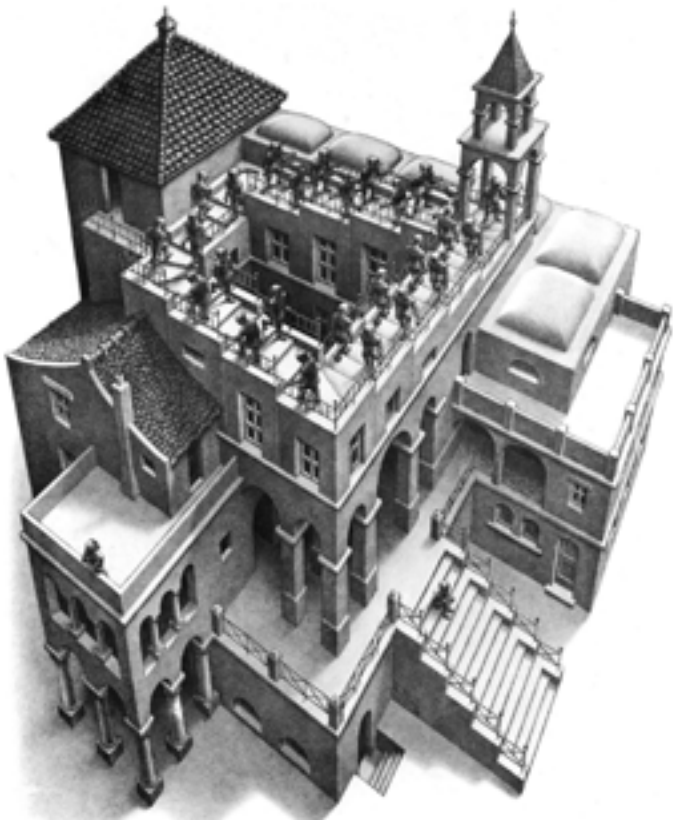
In my image research, I looked for things that seems chaotic but have some underlying common principle and things that seem simple but with added subtle complication.

In the first category, Yayoi's "Infinity Mirrors" and chaos theory patterns are all example of using simple devices, e.g. mirrors or mathematical equations, to create chaotic phenomena. The most intriguing part of these phenomena was that with slightly different initial conditions, you can arrive at drastically different outcomes, which seemed fitting with that people come for Zobeide for the same dream but all have their own course of actions.



In the second category, M. C. Escher's mathematically inspired work and the mobile game Monument Valley (Escher was one of the most important inspiration for this game as well) illustrated space that seems straightforward but contains unexpected twists. The final model I created resembled more with these images in its physical form.

In addition, Es Devlin's Mirror Maze sort of falls in between the first and second categories; it provided inspiration for my initial model that used a lot more reflective surfaces than the final model.



M. C. Escher



*Infinite Relativity*

M. C. Escher

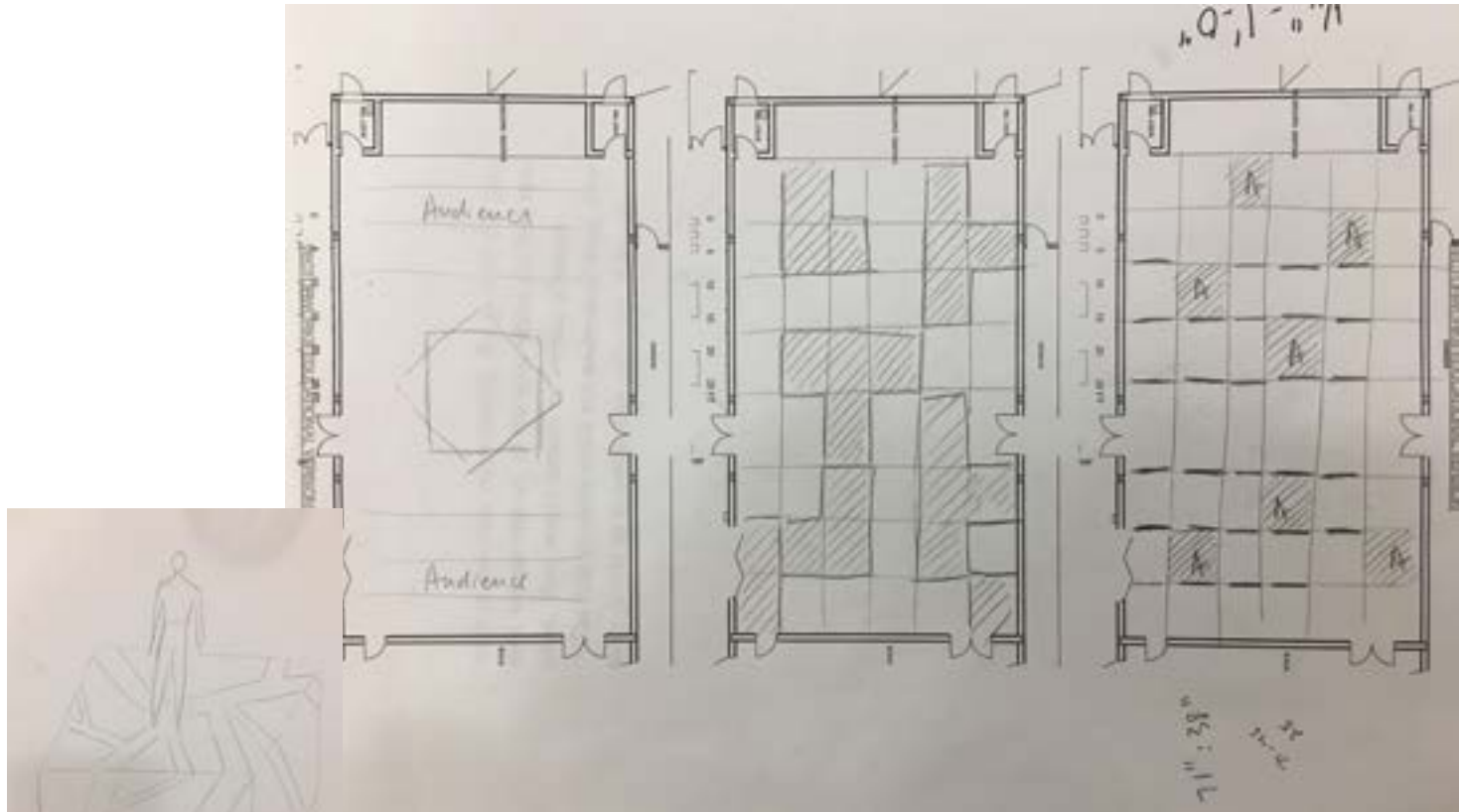


Graphics from Monument Valley

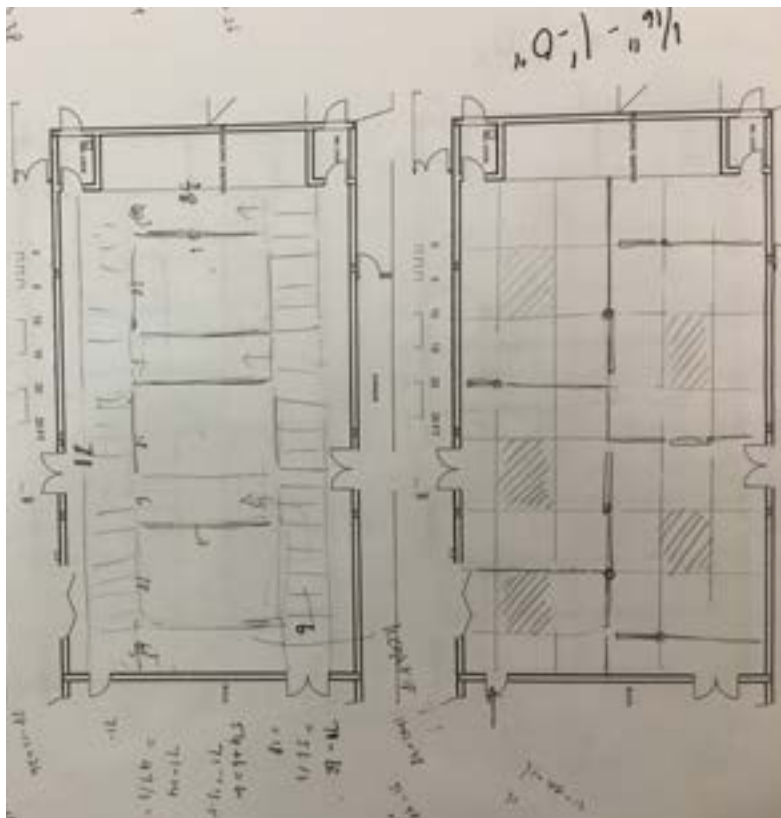


Es Devlin's Mirror Maze





Different ideas of creating a physical maze on stage

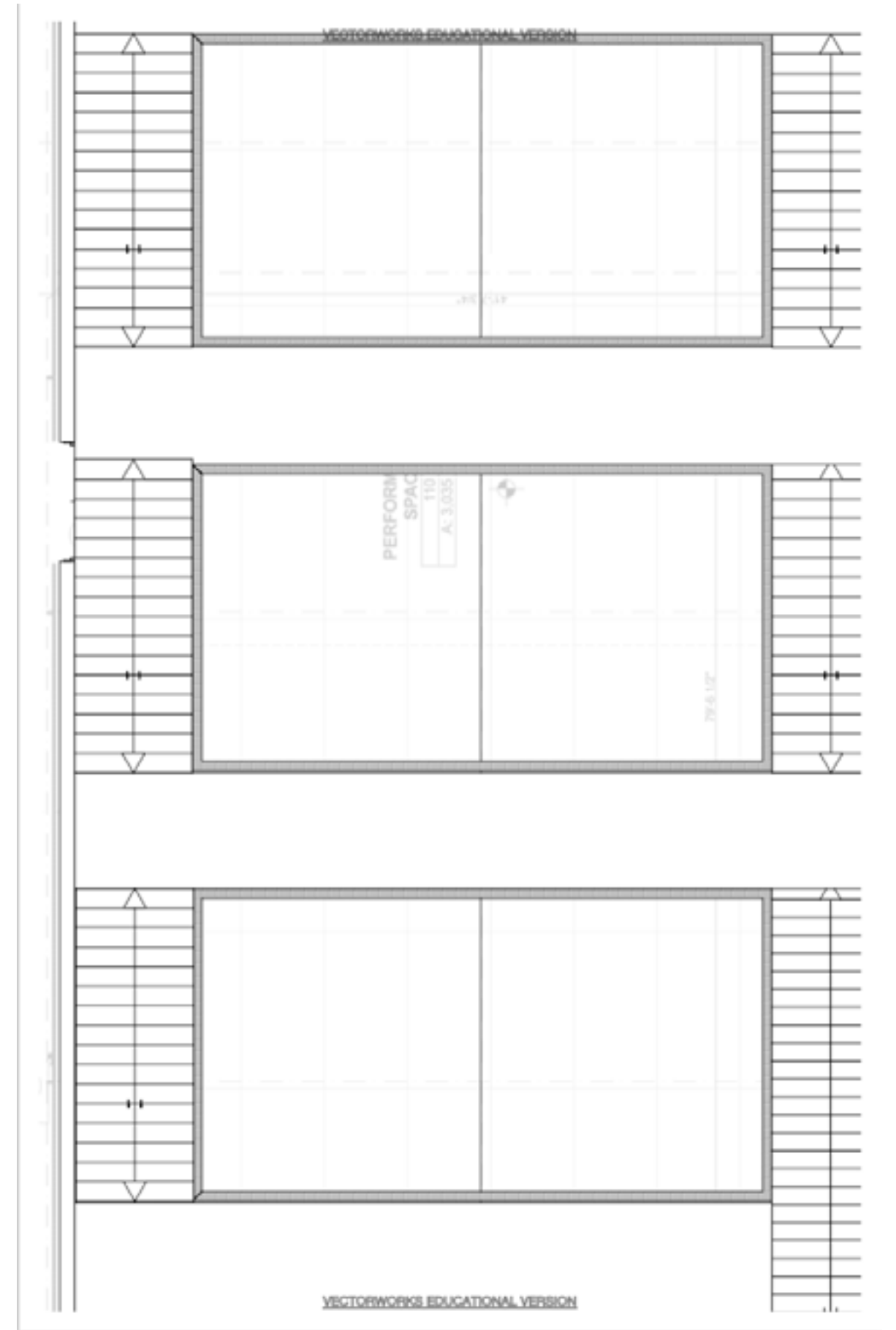


Left: the design that was chosen for further development;  
Right: another maze idea with actors elevated to the second level



### Zobeide | Sketches & Floor Plan

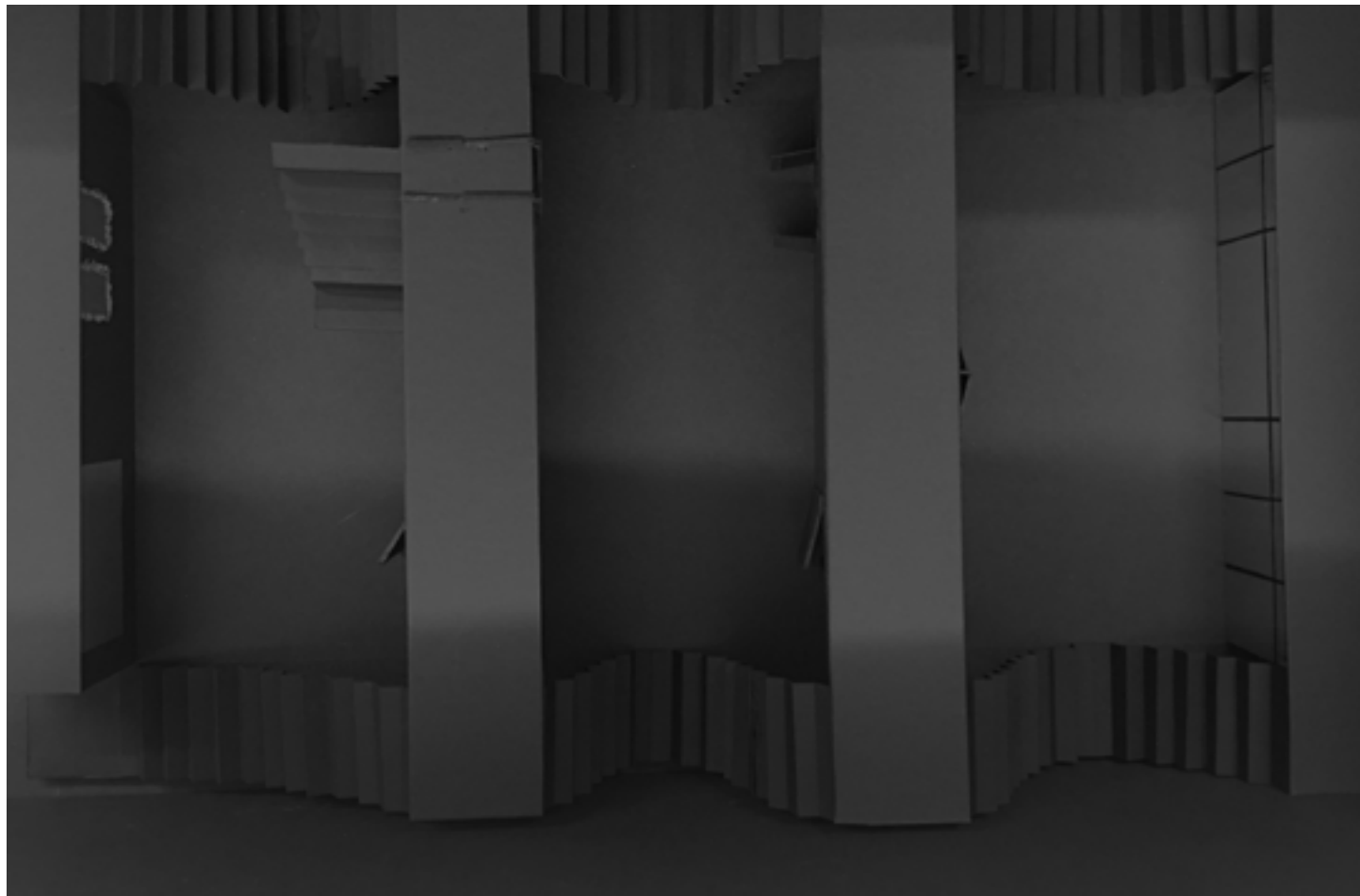
I wanted an immersive experience for the audience where they can wander through the space as if they are travelers visiting Zobeide. My initial ideas to turn the entire stage into a maze limited actors' movement too much. Eventually, I came to the iteration where the theater is transformed into a cross section of an apartment building where audience can peak into lives of Zobeide residents.



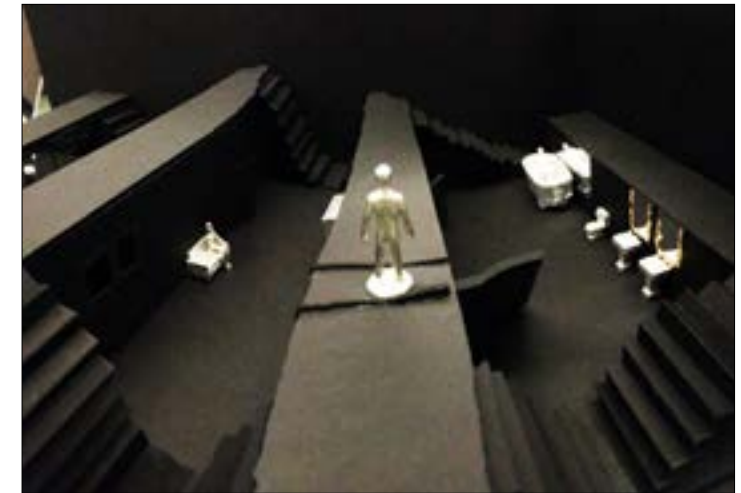
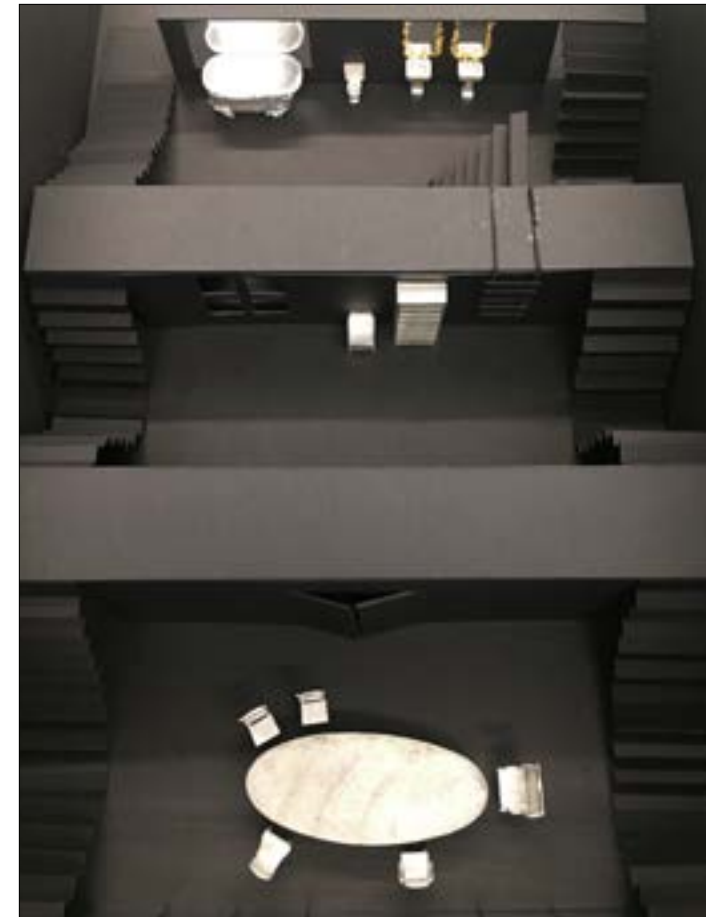
Floor Plan

### Zobeide | Model Design

The style of the final room was inspired by the opening quote in Qian Zhongshu's *Fotress Besieged* -- "Marriage is like a fortress besieged: those who are outside want to get in, and those who are inside want to get out. (Le mariage est une forteresse assiégée, ceux qui sont dehors veulent y entrer, ceux qui sont dedans veulent en sortir.)" To illustrate the idea of traps and fotresses, this design encourages movement in the audience (the 6 feet wide stairs that barely allows two people standing shoulder-to-shoulder and the concurrence of three different stories requires the audience to move around) while contains the actors' actions within the three pits. At the same time, to allow for interactions and drama among all the actors, doors, windows, stairs, and ladders were added to the dividers.



Model Topview



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I wanted each room to have a distinct female personality reflected through the lighting and texture design. The first room is a spacious living room of someone who lives by herself. In both the pastel and color pencil drawing and the photo, I chose ambient luminescence to show the texture of the room and her eclectic collection of chairs. Two of the chairs are of the same style kept from the time when she either was sharing her life with someone else or believed in buying things in pair to prepare for sharing your life with someone else. Then she has the rolling office chair for doing work and the metal chair for eating. Finally, she has the vibrant pink chair to make her feel like a queen. This is someone who lives in this “trap” but is very much aware of what her life is and what she wants for her life.

At first, I also tried other lightings (see images on the next page) with cooler colors and focal glow to make this room appear more lonely. Then I wanted more contrast with the potential stories in the other rooms, so I changed the personality of room and the lighting choice.

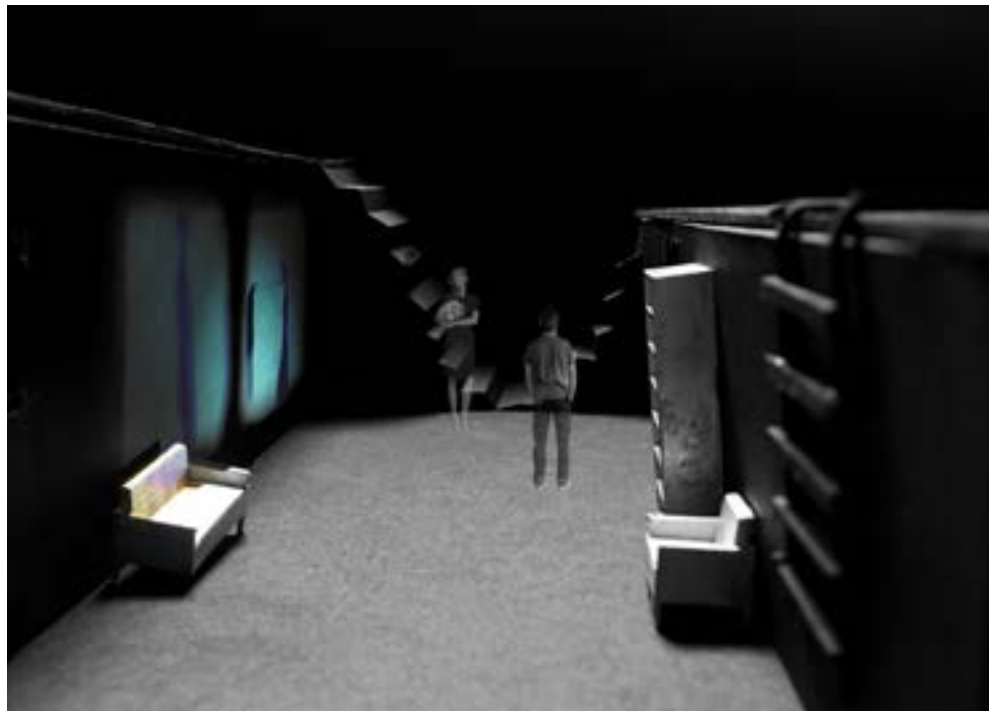






The women of the second room shares the space with her partner. In addition to window opening into the common hallway with the third room, the ladder in this room allows the actors to climb up to the audience platform and connects to the stairs going down into the third room. Because of the second “secretive” passage, I imagined interactions between the man in this room with the women in the third room that can introduce tension into this relationship (or stemmed from tension in this relationship).

When I took photo from the audience’s perspective, I realized the platform height could make it hard to see the actor’s faces (if the actors are standing too close to the wall, the audience may be able to see only the top of their heads). And if the two actors are facing each other, they are bound to have their back facing some audience. Thus, in this rendering, I focused on using focal glow to create dramatic shadows on the wall using light coming from the window.



Finally, the third room is a luxurious bathroom with two sinks but usually only one woman. It is unclear if there is another person who routinely uses the second sink. With two options to exit the room, the stairs to the platform and the door to the hallway, she can have very different interactions at the different levels. The very intimate part of her life is shown to the audience. With three mirrors in this room, she is bound to catch glimpse of herself often.

For the pastel drawing, the bathtub is in this soft warm light and the door also let in warm yellow light. Even though I wanted this room to be the lonely room at first, the choice of the colors did not convey this feeling. Thus, in the photo, I used a cooler light of purple and did not have any light coming from the outside of the room and had only the woman be in the spotlight.



*“The first to arrive could not understand what drew these people to Zobeide, this ugly city, this trap.”*  
 -- *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino