

**ART NO STOP: THE SOCIAL WORLD AT THE SERVICE OF ART**  
**2020-1-ES01-KA227-ADU-095851**

# **SCENOGRAPHY**

# **MANUAL**

**CHAPTER 4: SCENOGRAPHY**



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# 01. INTRODUCTION

Stage technology and mechanisms were already being talked about in Greek theatre: it is no coincidence that the character in one of Aristophanes' comedies dialogues precisely with a stage technician.

Since then, the course of the history of the theatre and those who work for it behind the scenes has been long and ever-changing until the period of affirmation of Italian-style theatre, after the 17th century.

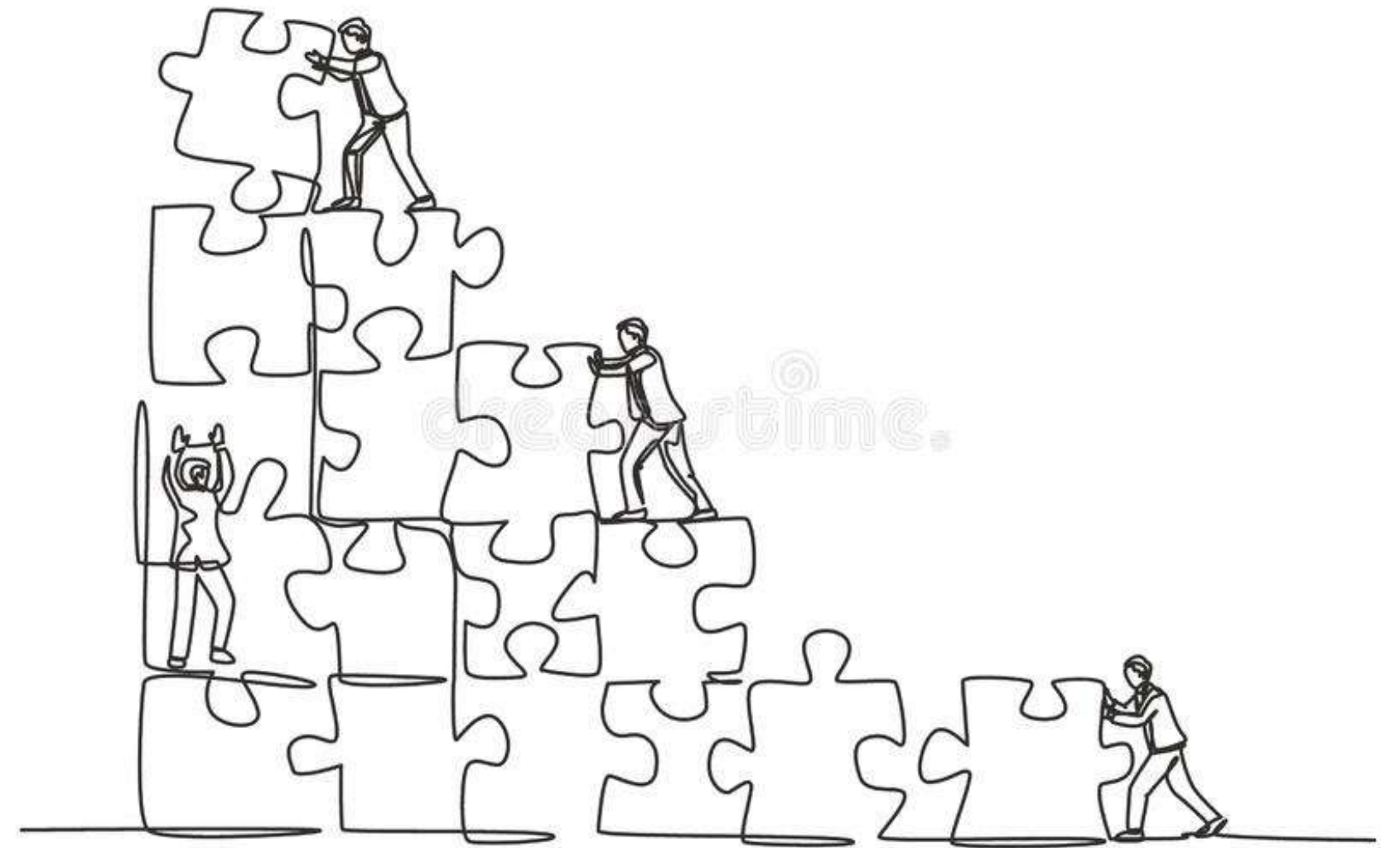


A scenographer does not dance and does not write texts, a scenographer designs and plans, translating the ideas and feelings of a director regarding the text he will stage into an image that from sketch becomes drawing, then model, technical board and then real object in a stage space.

**The set design is an  
expression of what  
the director and set  
designer feel about  
the text.**

# 02. STAGECRAFT

If scenography means the art of conceiving a scene through the creation of a sketch, stagecraft concerns that complex set of technical stages that allow the realisation on stage of the set designer's spatial and lighting suggestions, elements and values of which the direction must be the animator. Because direction can only operate through the collaboration of all the formative elements of the performance: authors, actors, set designers and technicians. Indeed, in the interpretation of a play, just as the actor creator of the character has his weight, so does the set designer, creator of the stage setting.

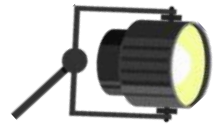




It was precisely the stagecraft that clarified the technical and poetic terms of this evolution; it was the stage designers who, identifying themselves with the stagecraft, solicited, suggested and solved the problems inherent in the development of stage design. The history of theatre teaches us that the fundamental contribution of the scenotechnician is in the spirit and practice of our tradition. The binomial scenography - stagecraft is latent but active when, from the pagan open-air events, to the sacred mysteries of the Middle Ages, to the tournaments, triumphs and festivals of the Renaissance, we move on to "events" in closed theatres, that is, when the theatre building is created, with the scenic arch and its mechanisms, with the stage and the under-stage. It is then that the first 'architect-scenographers', and 'masters of ingenuity', create scenic illusionism, i.e. the art of stage design, with their inventions.



# Stagecraft encompasses:



## Luministics

The study of lighting to illuminate the set and the actors, adapting the lights to the needs of the performance. The lighting function, as far as artistic effects are concerned, is carried out by the director assisted by the scenographer, while the realisation of the effects themselves is entrusted to the lighting technician;



## Machinery

Fixed scene or scene changes, minimal or lavish staging, ancient or modern, and so on. Finding the right key that must contain the set designer's distinctive artistic trait;



## Costumes

I.e. devising, designing and making the costumes of the characters, he is responsible for the image of the actors. On the basis of a careful reading of the script, in accordance with the instructions received from the director, he draws up a project for the actors' costumes, jewellery and accessories



## Logistics

i.e. the material organisation of the staging of the show

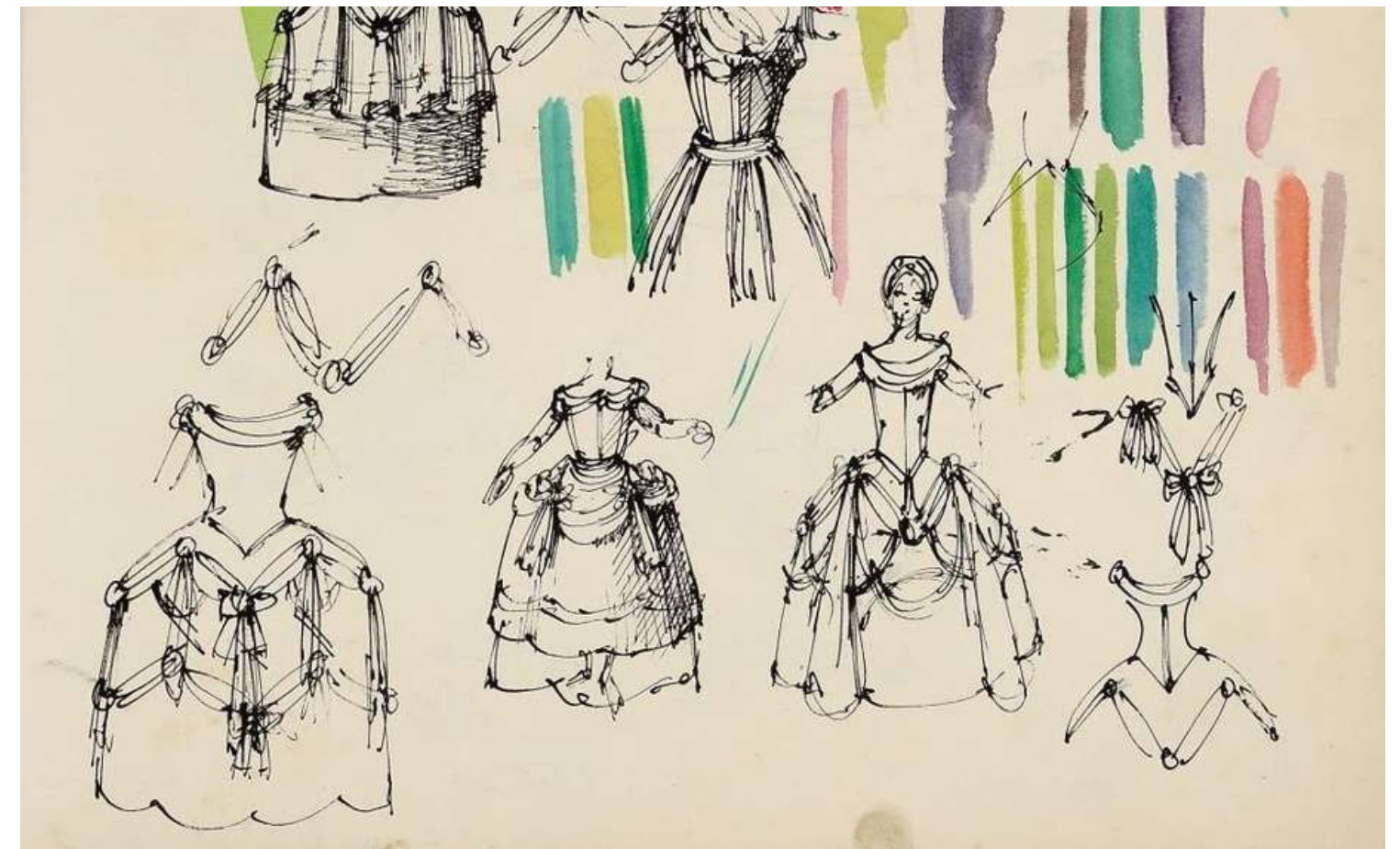


## Props

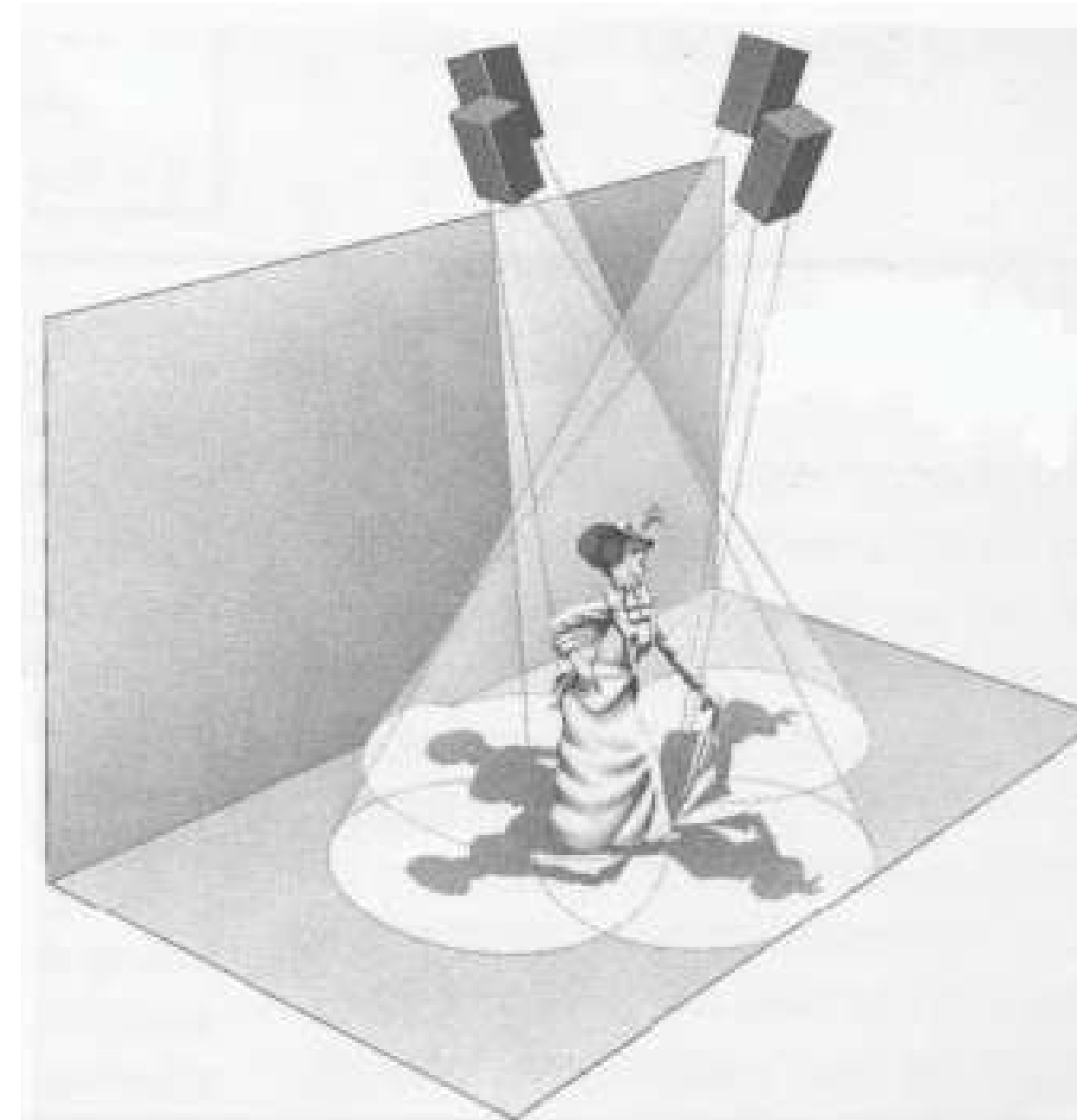
The stage hand performs the task of finding, modifying, assembling, installing on the stage and storing the furniture, objects and accessories needed to stage theatrical performances. In some cases he makes or modifies (repairs, paints) existing objects following the stage designer's and stage manager's instructions.

# After a careful study of the text by the set designer, work begins on the sketches and detailed boards, trying to convey as much information as possible so that the scene is close to the design.

It is necessary to explore the detail as thoroughly as possible and try to produce technical boards with a detailed drawing and measurements. A lot of information can be given verbally, but the more written or drawn material you hand over to the set design workshop, the more you help the makers to correctly interpret the set designer's wishes.



While the scenographer is asked for the most detailed documentation possible, the stage workshop is asked for in-depth knowledge of the trade, material technology and the potential of the team of carpenters, blacksmiths and stage painters. The persons in charge of the fabrication workshop observe the project and will ask the set designer for clarification and details regarding construction details. Clearly the more complex and detailed a scene is, the longer it will take to realise it, so a start date and a delivery date for the finished scene must be agreed.



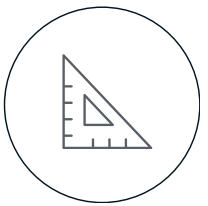
# 03. STUDYING THE TEXT

# The work always starts with a written text: there is basically a story to tell!



## What

What? We are talking about Comedy, Musical, Opera, Cabaret, Mime, etc.;



## How

Fixed scene or scene changes, minimal or lavish staging, ancient or modern, and so on. Finding the right key that must contain the set designer's distinctive artistic trait;



## When

Timing is crucial and has a great influence on artistic choices



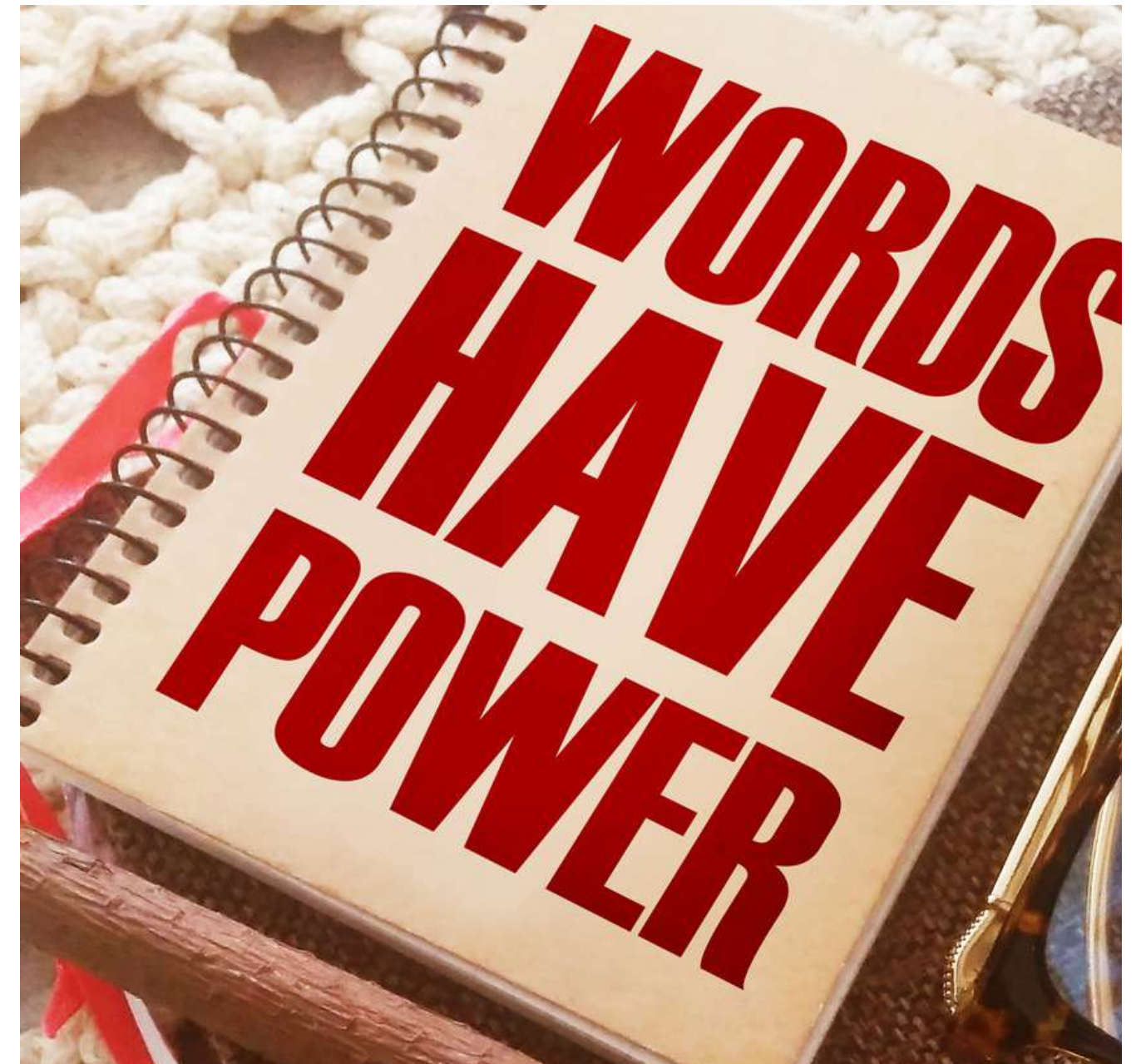
## Where

On stage, in the theatre, in the classroom, in the street, etc... It is a show that goes on tour and a transportable and reduced version must be thought of



## How much

The budget is an important aspect. If funds are tight, we reason accordingly and make cuts or changes to the project.

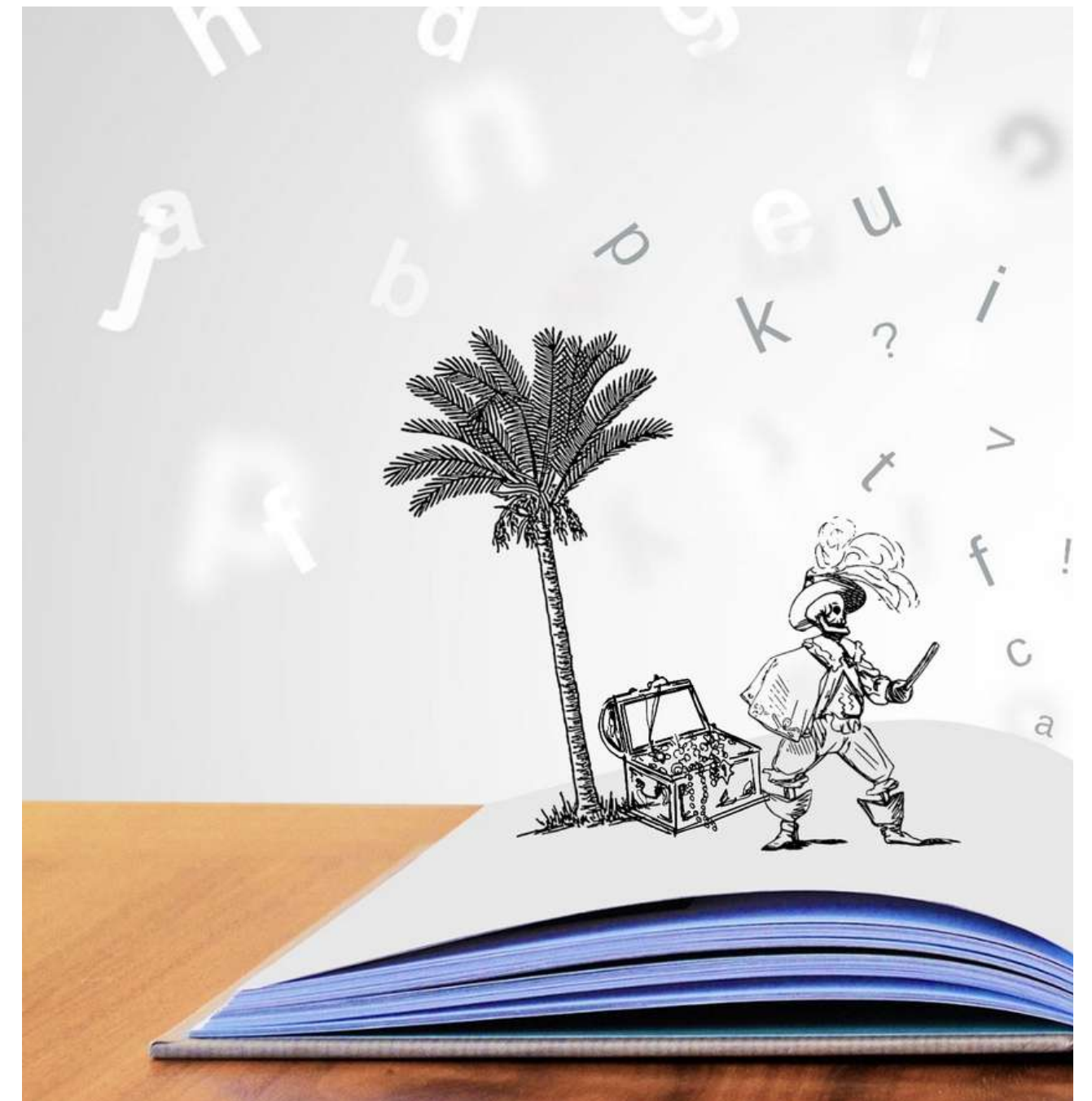


# What really counts is the idea!

It must have its own meaning and appearance consistent with the representation of the text, and not an aesthetic end in itself. To do this, a scenographer goes as deep as possible into the work, letting himself be guided by the impressions it conveys.

Alongside this, there must be something that makes a performance unique, a strong idea that sustains it, especially if we are talking about repertory operas that have been staged hundreds of times.

Precise documentation of the opera and research into iconography and sources helps the scenographer not to get lost in the infinite possibilities and to find the characterising cues for the new staging.



# 04. THE SPACE OF REPRESENTATION

# It is necessary to know the space where the show will debut

On the creative decisions depend the variables determined by space and means.

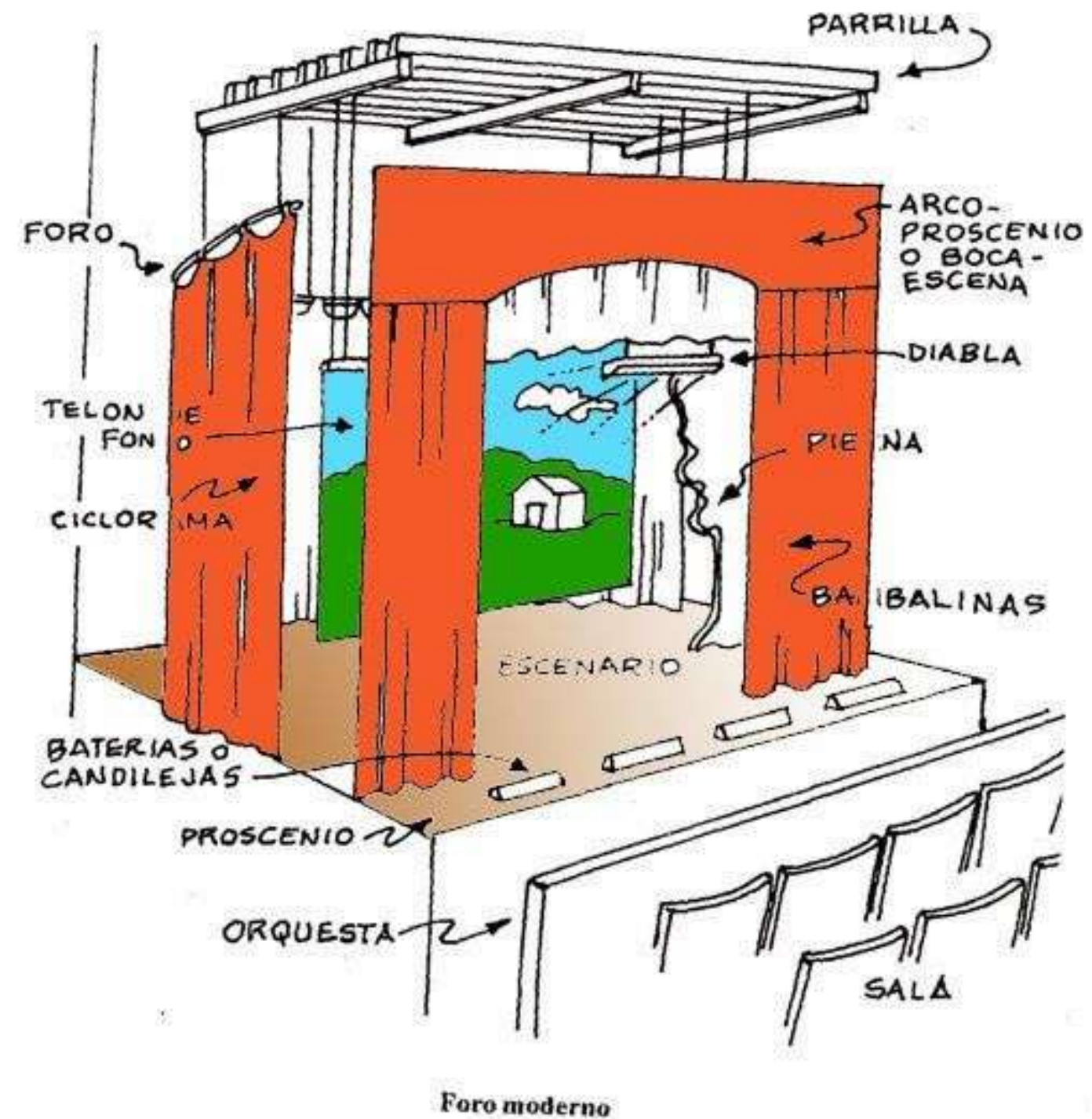
To imagine one's own scene, more concretely, it is essential to begin by seeing it within the 'theatre space'.

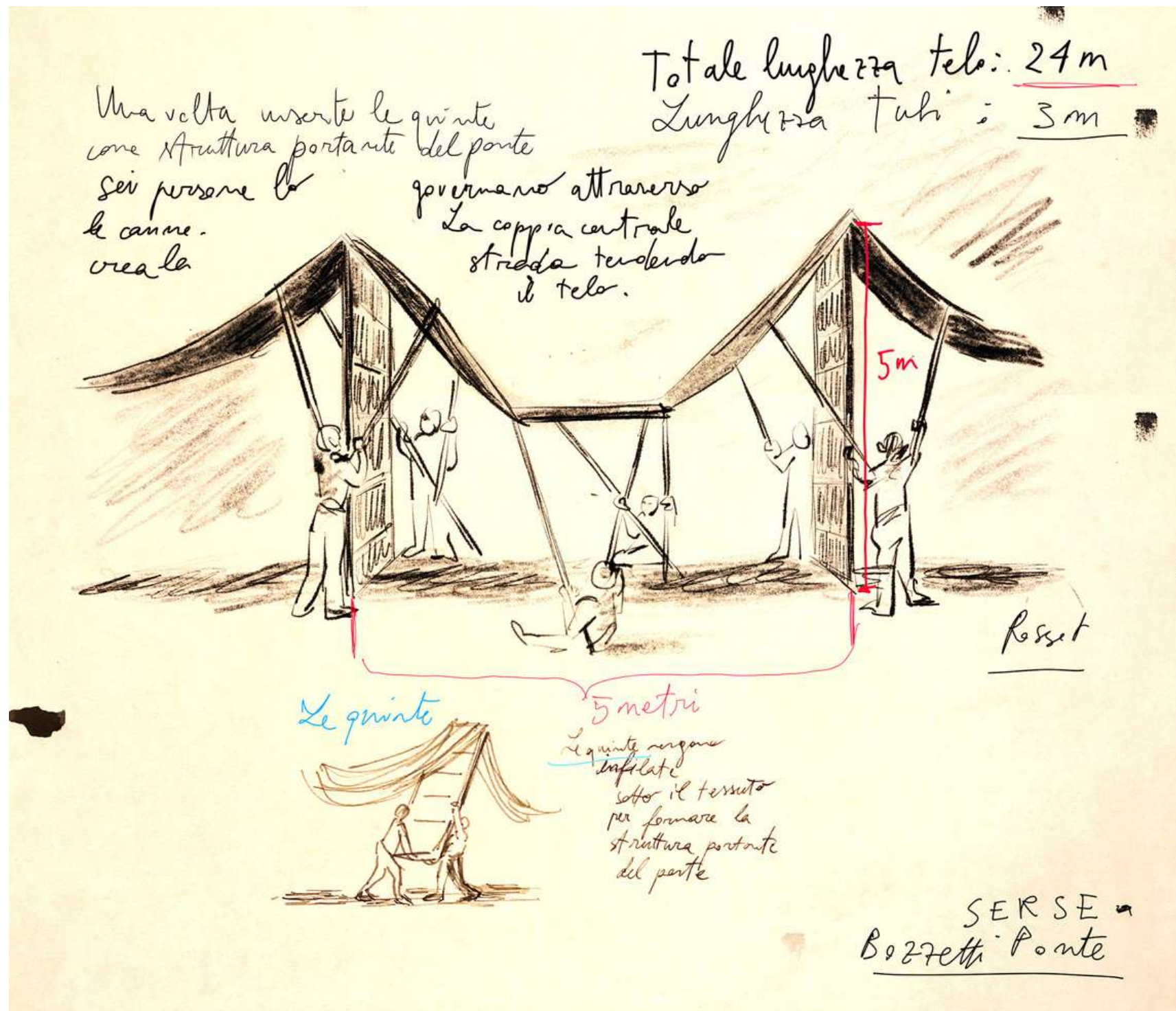
You make an inspection, you visit the space, and you observe and begin to imagine. When you return to the design studio, you have with you a plan and perhaps some photos of the space. Now you can start the manual work from the sketch.



# The Italian Theatre

The Italian-style theatre is the type of theatre structure characteristic of Italian architecture that was particularly widespread between the 18th and 19th centuries. The model of the Italian-style theatre, in the wake of the success of melodrama, was soon imported and imitated throughout Europe until well into the 20th century, becoming in fact one of the main types of theatre structures built and at the same time becoming a symbol not only of the theatre as a building but also of the conception of theatrical art and its fruition: the reflections of contemporary theatre theorists profoundly modified this idea, freeing theatrical events from the conventions imposed by the Italian-style theatre. The performance can be conceived and designed to debut either in an indoor space known as a 'theatre box' or outdoors.





The sketch is simply the drawing, as close as possible to what one has in mind. It is basically an illustration of what a spectator sitting in the middle of the stalls sees. Once the technical boards have been delivered, another fundamental part of the set designer's work begins: the realisation. One's own idea passes into the hands of others to be built and set.

# 05. THE STREET SHOW



The urban space, be it a square, a street or the courtyard of an ancient castle, becomes a natural setting and an integral part of the show, where the street artists manage to hold the audience, transporting them into a magical world and letting them experience unrepeatable moments.

The stage instruments are spartan and reduced to a minimum: a costume, a hat and a mask. The spectators are in constant flux, as passers-by and onlookers arrive, stop and leave.

The scenographer's job is first of all to carry out inspections and choose a suitable location for the performance, based on the choice of "circle show" or "frontal direction show".

In the first case, it is convenient not to close the scene with backdrops but to reduce to one or more central stage elements; in the second case, the backdrop, the scenography is given by the background that is chosen, an old church, a garden, a simple wall, etc.

Subsequently, his work is reduced to identifying a few elements that characterise the entire performance, fixed scenic elements, and concentrating on the requirements necessary for the performance of the artist's actions and at most providing a backdrop that can be useful for the "change of action".



# 06. EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS

**The basic materials of traditional stage design are wood and fabric, and all that is needed for assembly and construction: nails of various types, screws and glue.**

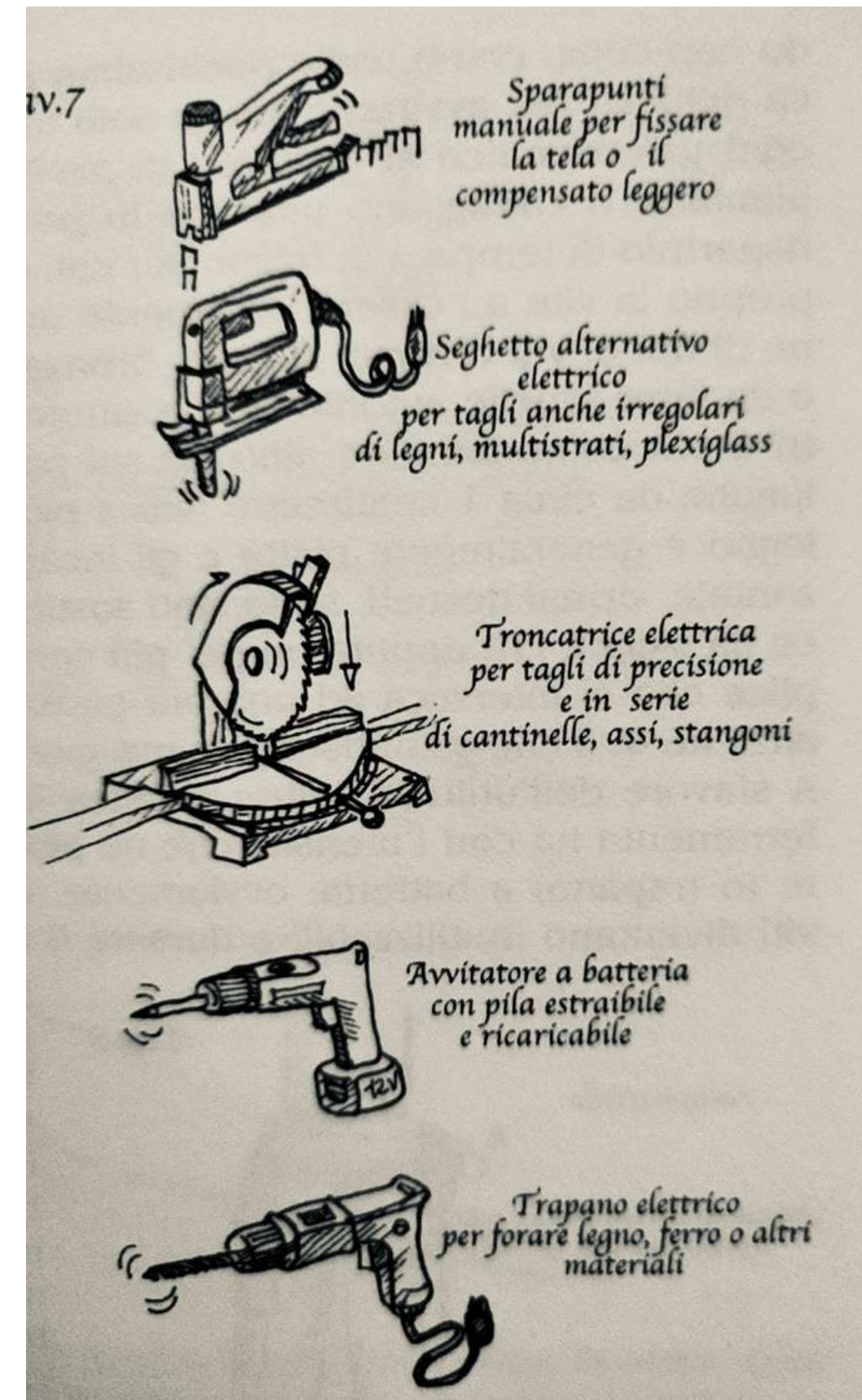
## Wood

Spruce for canting should be well seasoned, planed and above all free of through knots that would compromise its hold;

5 by 2.5 cm cross-section lath (in some cases 4 by 2 cm), originally 4 metres long, which is cut to the size required to build a frame.

## Useful alternatives

Another type of timber that has long been used in the theatre is 4 mm plywood and plywood of 1 cm or more; plywood comes in standard sheet sizes of approximately 200 by 300 cm, but also 120 by 240 cm





# 07. THE FRAMES

Scenography frames are mainly divided into two groups: those that will be covered with canvas, cloth or other types of fabric and those that are made of plywood, thus a rigid, albeit unstructured, material.

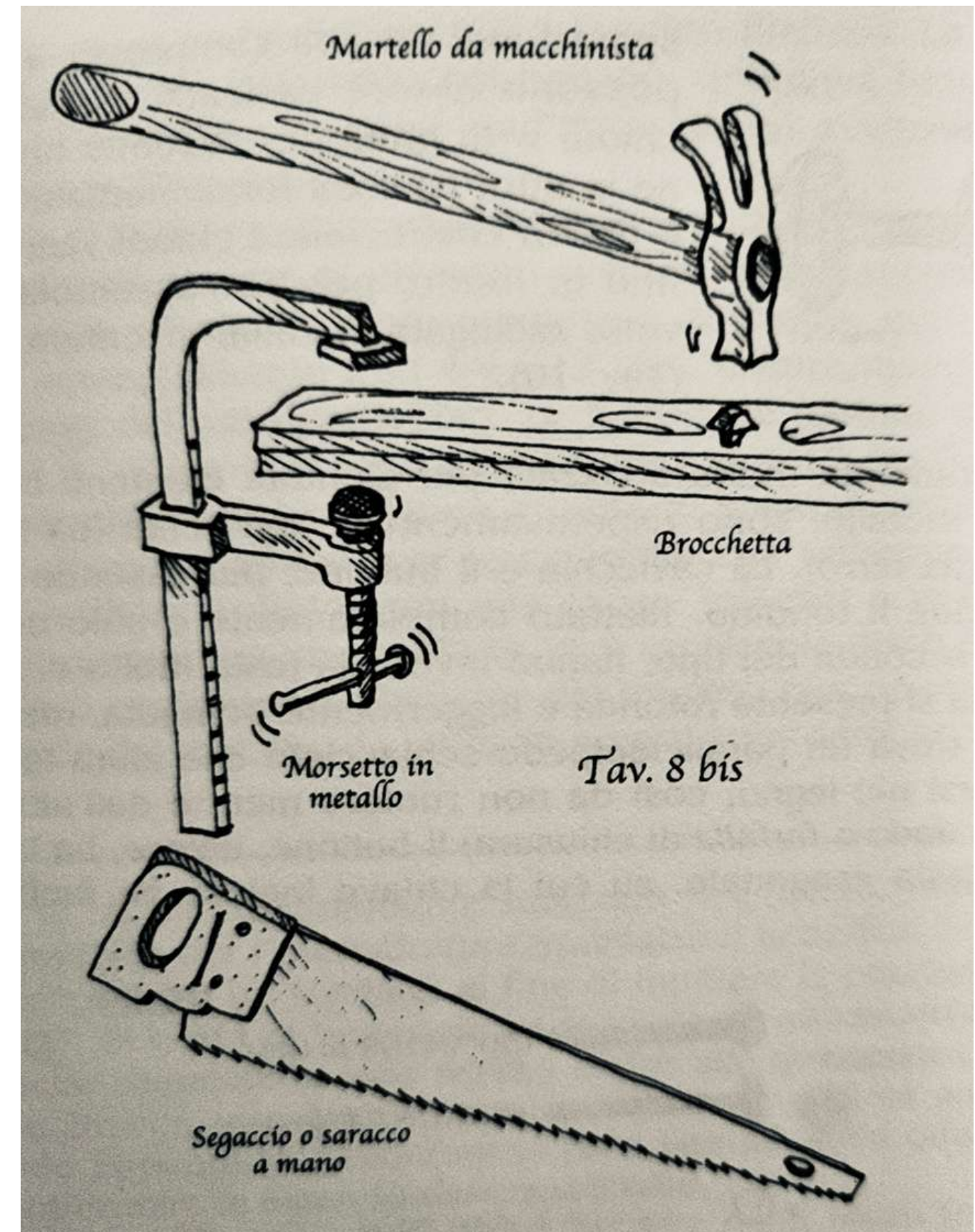
In order to provisionally fasten the wooden elements, iron nails with a flat head are used, especially those 5 cm long: the measure, not coincidentally, of two coupled canes. This type of assembly, without glue and therefore reversible, requires that the nail not be hammered in all the way, but that the head remain raised from the piece by a few millimetres, so that the feathers of a hammer can be driven in to undo it.

The two side uprights, of cantinelle or stangoni, are prepared, and then the two diagonals or saucers are placed, at least three quarters of the height of the two side uprights, forming a 'V'. The two diagonals are essential to maintain the 'square' of the piece. Obviously, these oblique pieces will have the ends cut diagonally, to fit perfectly on the two vertical sides and not protrude from the foot.



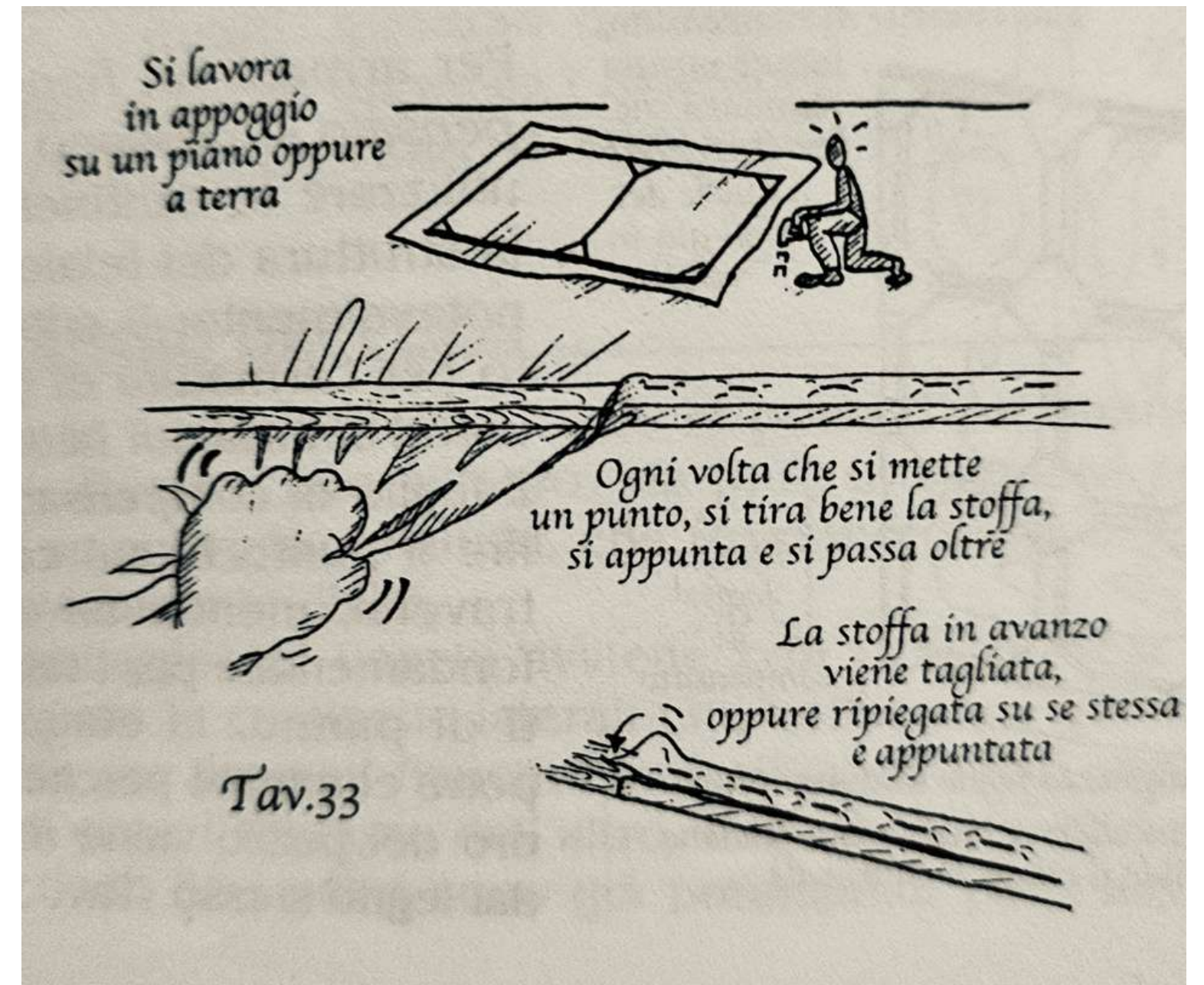
# Realisation and installation

In order to provisionally fix wooden elements, iron nails with a flat head are used, especially those 5 cm long: the measure, not surprisingly, of two paired canners. This type of assembly, without glue and therefore reversible, requires that the nail is not hammered in all the way, but that the head remains raised from the piece by a few millimetres, so that the feathers of a hammer can penetrate to undo it.



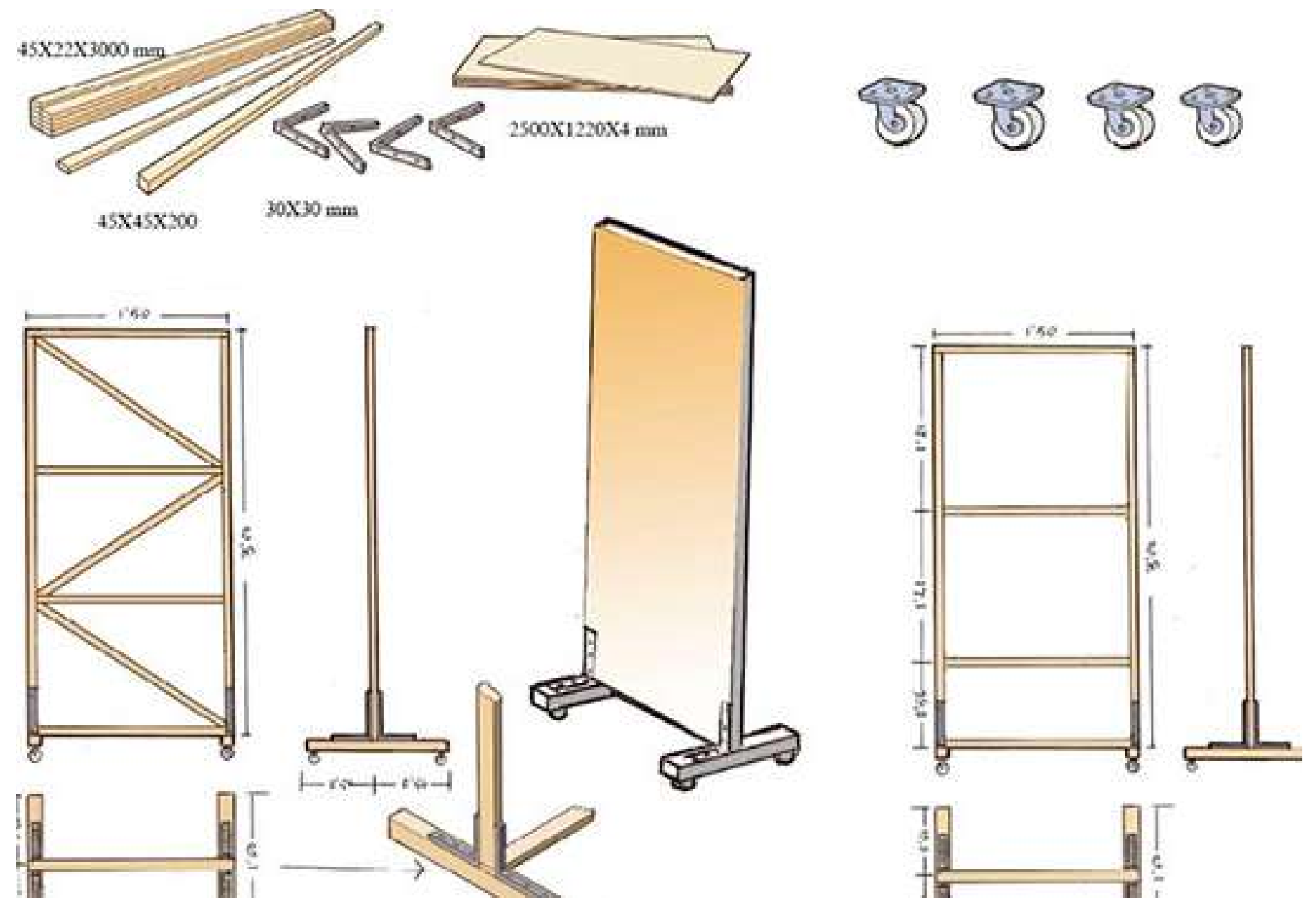
# A good alternative could be canvas

A commonly used type of cloth is cloth, black, which is used mainly for side wings plus a backdrop. Should one prefer a white backdrop and paint it, the choice could also fall on an old sheet, fasten it to the cantinas, a layer of cementite is applied, and once dry it is ready to be painted.



# Implementation and Installation

4 mm plywood is used for the front of backdrops, doors and other vertical scenic elements, which are then reinforced on the back with a frame of cantinelle to size. Using this same material, triangular gussets of approximately 30 cm side length are prepared, which are glued and nailed to the back of the frames where a cantinelle joint needs to be reinforced and protected from distortion.



# Realisation and installation

The fabric should be wider than the sides of the frame by at least 10 cm on each side, to allow the worker to stretch the fabric by grasping it with one or two hands. Start by pinning the centre of one of the two long sides with three or four stitches, then move on to the upright in front. It is completed, moving from the centre towards the two corners, trying not to stretch the fabric too much, then move on to the mirror side and repeat the operation, trying, this time, to stretch the fabric as much as possible both long and wide. Having completed the long sides, repeat the same operation on the short ones.



# 07. PROPS

Props are responsible for communicating and framing a narrative, they deliver a message and a precise intention.

## The function of objects

- Objects can advance the plot,
- specify certain characteristics of a character
- narrate a phenomenon without showing it or by showing something different
- create suspense
- make us laugh or cry
- give us a false clue or reveal a mystery
- deliver a direct involvement in the action





For the street show, as we have already mentioned, the material to be brought on stage, both for convenience of transport and because the scene is given by the location one chooses, is minimal but essential.

The choice of these could be given by different solutions: realistic, created or abstract. Taking an example where, for the realisation of the performance, one act stages a suitcase, the solutions could be different. Bringing a real suitcase onto the stage; building it out of cardboard or recycled material; giving the idea of presence only through the artist's movements.

To be able to create props out of readily available and more sustainable material, we turn to recycling, old cardboard, plastic, cans, etc..... The tools needed for construction are also easy to find and use, glue, tape, scissors, tempera or acrylics.



# Cardboard suitcase

Material needed:

- cardboard;
- vinyl glue;
- scissors;
- paintbrush;
- acrylic paints;
- ruler;
- pencil.

Construction time: 30 minutes.

Decoration time: 30 minutes

In our example we use a 300g Bristol board measuring 30cm by 28cm. We start by dividing the longest part, the 30 cm part, into 5 parts: the first 5 cm (A), the second 8.5 cm (B), the third 5 cm (C), the fourth 8.5 cm (D), the fifth 3 cm (E). The shortest part being 28 cm, we select 5 cm at the ends. Fig. 1

FIG. 1

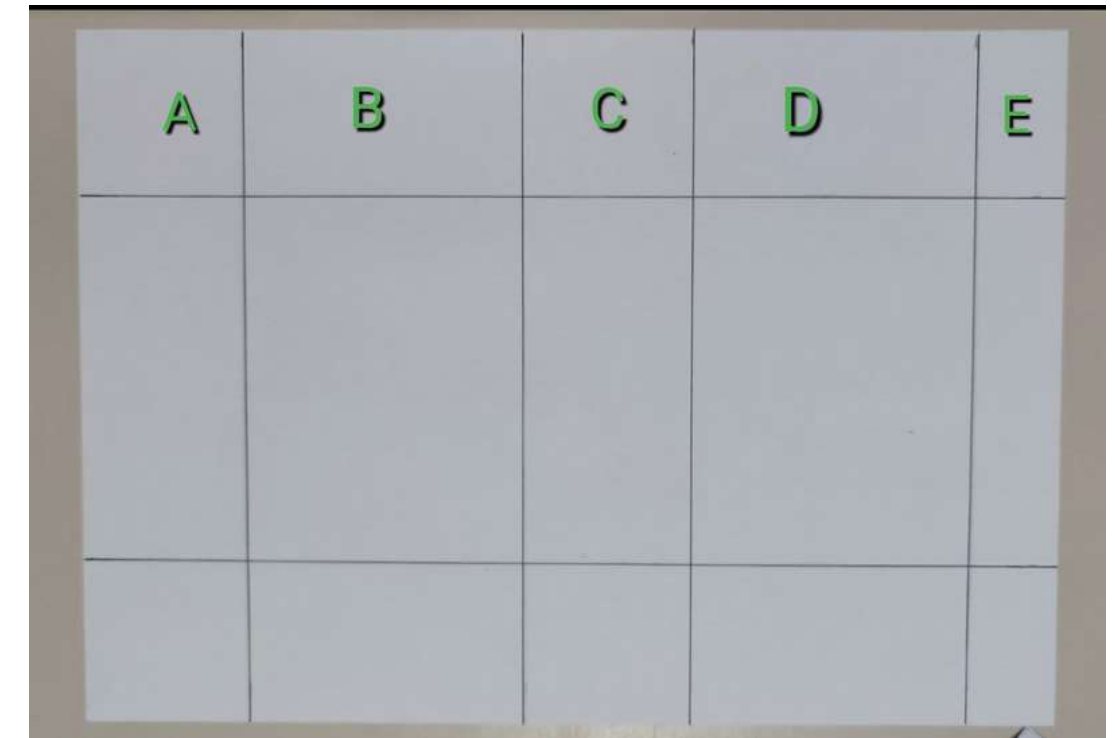


FIG. 2

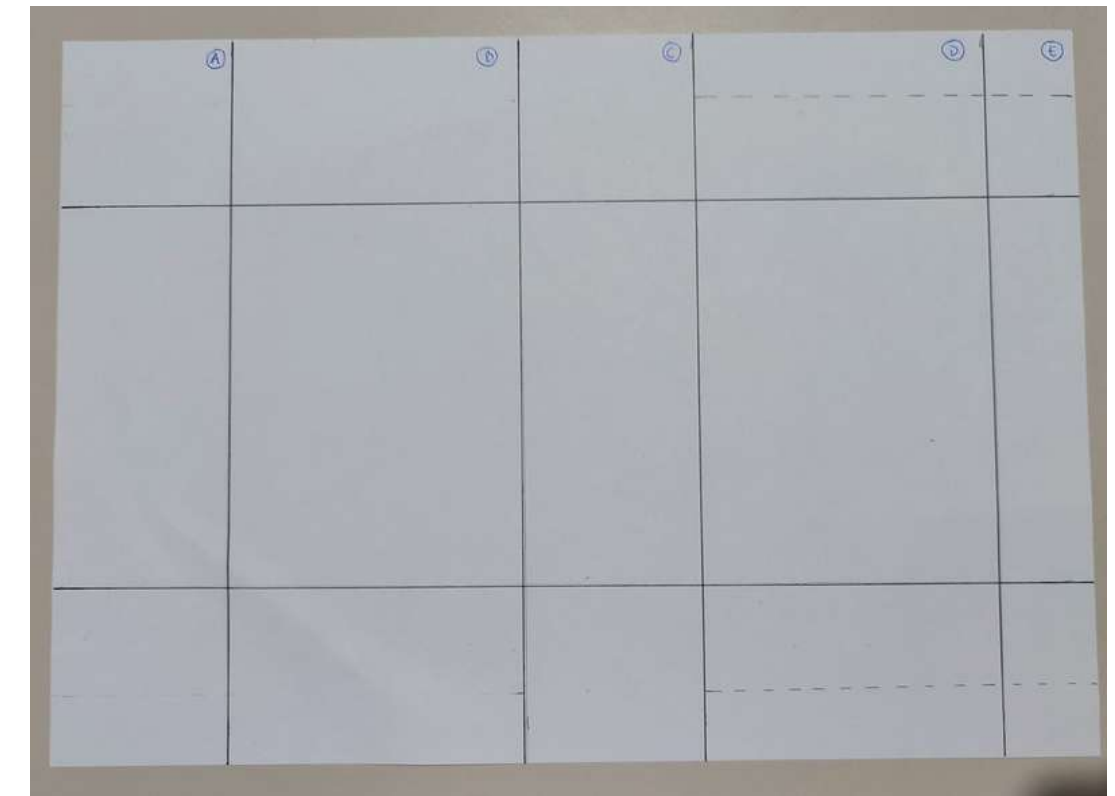


FIG. 3



In the upper and lower rectangles D and E, we draw lines 2 cm from the edge and then cut them out. Fig.2

Also cut out the flaps and fold them. Fig. 3.

After folding all the lines drawn, fig. 4,  
glue A and C to B internally with vinyl glue.  
and the same operation with E and D. Fig. 5 and fig. 6

FIG. 4

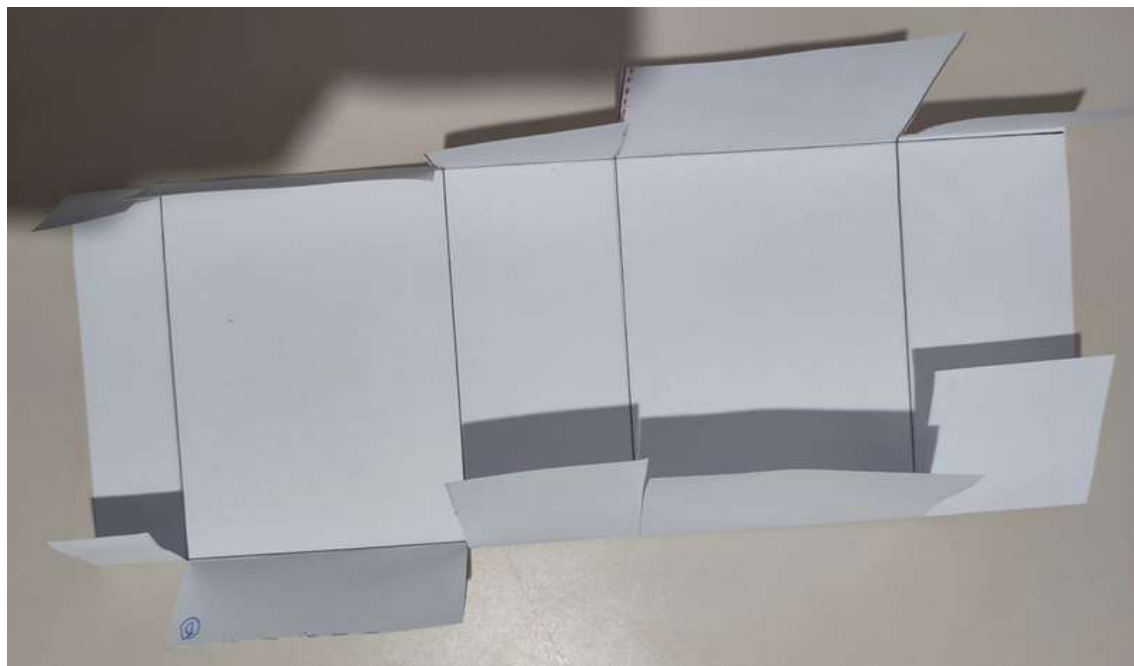


FIG. 5

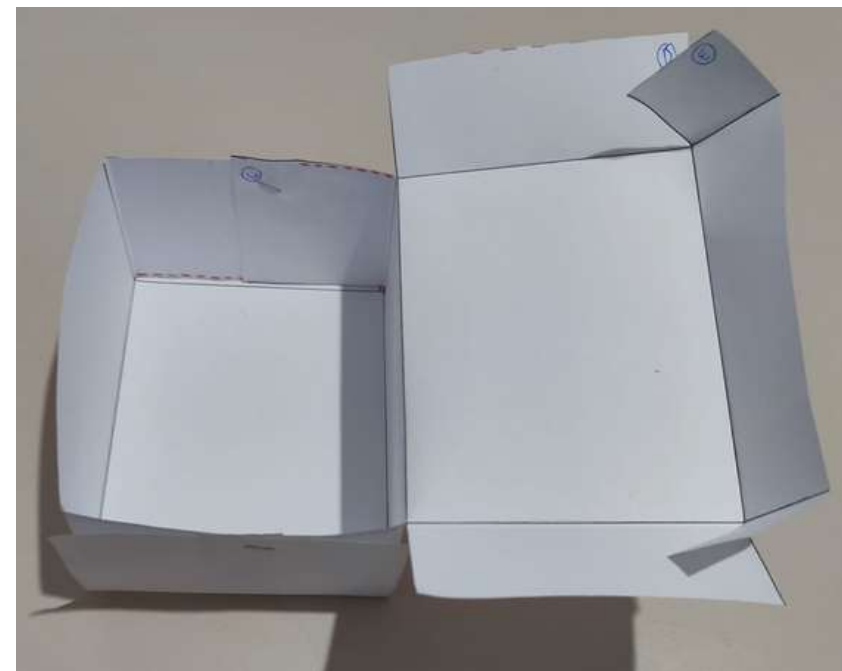


FIG. 6

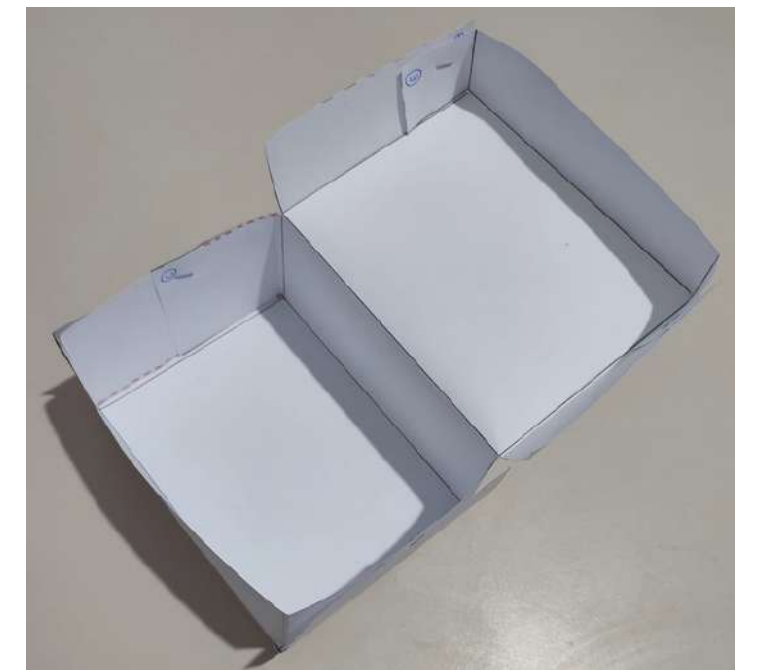


FIG. 7



To construct the handle of the suitcase, we cut out a 10 cm by 2 cm strip of cardboard, we make two folds for each edge of 1 cm each and glue them to the opening of the suitcase. Fig. 7

For decoration there are various possibilities, leave it as it is, paint it the colour of your choice using acrylic paints, or cover it with newspaper sheets with the help of vinyl glue, or after colouring it, glue pictures of places from around the world in random order.

# Cardboard tree

## MATERIAL NEEDED

- CARDBOARD
- SCISSORS
- ACRYLIC PAINTS
- RIGA
- BRUSH
- PENCIL
- VINYL GLUE

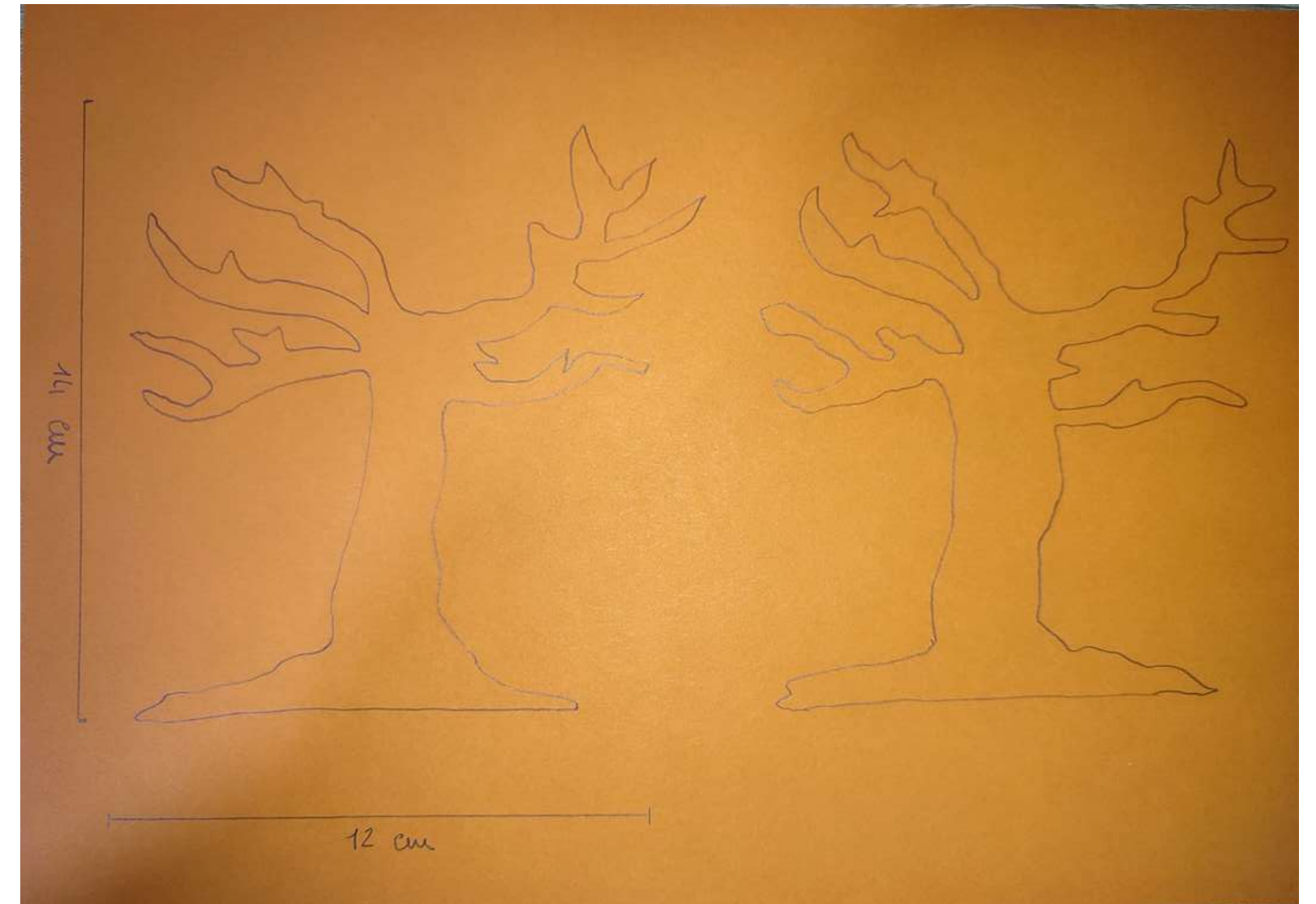
REALISATION TIME 30 MINUTES

DECORATION TIME 30 MINUTES

**THIS EXAMPLE IS FOR A TREE SIZE 14CM HIGH, 12CM WIDE, YOU CAN BUILD IT THE SIZE YOU WANT.**

**IN OUR EXAMPLE WE USE A 300 gm Bristol board size 30x28cm.**

FIG. 1



Create two tree trunks with branches and cut them out. Make sure the trunk is wider at the bottom, as if there are roots going into the ground. This will help the tree to stand. Fig.1

FIG. 2



Cut a line in one of the trunks from the top (where the branches begin) to the middle of the trunk. Then, on the second trunk, cut a similar line from the base to the middle. Fig. 2

FIG. 3



Now you can slide one of the logs into the other!  
The tree cut from the bottom should stand in the one cut from the top. Now the tree can stand. Fig. 3

FIG. 4



Draw some leaves on a card and cut them out, apply some glue in the centre and stick it on one of the branches of the tree. Continue until you think the tree is complete. Fig. 4

The tree can be painted any colour you like, including the leaves, you can use different shapes and different colours.

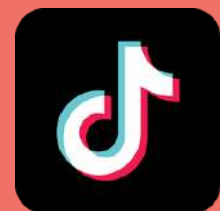
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