

OPERETTA



Feature film project
in collaboration with
Christ's College



'And a crowd of things will appear for which people will have to find new names, stone eye, great three cornered arm, toe crutch, spider jaw. And someone might be sleeping in his comfortable bed, in his quiet, warm room, and wake up naked on a bluish earth, in a forest of rustling birch trees, rising red and white towards the sky like the smokestacks of Jouxtebouville, with big bumps half way out of the ground, hairy and bulbous like onions. And birds will fly around these birch trees and pick at them with their beaks and make them bleed.'

Nausea, 1938
Jean Paul Sartre

OPERETTA

NARRATIVE WORLD

In 1976, Jocelyn Rhodes (Director of Drama at Bard College on Avon) attempted to mount an obtuse and challenging production of Aristophanes' 'The Birds'. Following the death of a student, the play, out of respect for the grieving family, and while the school community came to terms with the loss, was put on hold. Ultimately, it was forgotten.

Over two decades later, Rhodes' Drama young colleague, Kilik Egge, uncovers the long buried sets, costumes and scripts. Upon rediscovering materials from his forgotten Greek Comedy, Rhodes, is convinced by Egge to re-stage the play as his definitive gesture prior to his retirement. Supported by unknowing colleagues and students, Rhodes heads back down the same strange path trodden many years prior, in an effort to exorcise this long dormant tragedy.

Over several weeks in the lead up to the production's opening night, the commitment required to partake in this singular project, and the effects on those involved, manifests in uncomfortable ways. The narrative itself is drawn across several key moments; the recovery of the original materials, auditions, rehearsals, makeup tests, opposing creative visions and complicated interpersonal dynamics between both boys and staff. Rhodes' commitment to recreating the tonalities of the original production, slowly reveals itself to be at odds with tastes, standards and political landscape of the present day. The conflicting but equally eclipsing egos of both Rhodes and Egge, and their respective infatuation with Sebastian, a particularly talented (and arrogant) student, structures the narrative, and where OPERETTA begins as a psychodrama and portrait of the creative process, it quickly abstracts into an absurdist fever dream where the present and past fold in on each other.

Through a series of attempts to win the favour of Sebastian, the teachers find themselves increasingly compromised situations that threaten to derail both the production and their respective careers. As the narrative progresses, and eventually collapses under the weight of the protagonist's hubris, the lines between the real and constructed worlds, are erased in disturbing ways.

The film takes place between the school's large Brutalist auditorium where the play is staged, the hallways and changing rooms deep in the bowels of the theatre, Rhodes' office and adjoining townhouse, and the surrounding public gardens. Indeed the school's architecture (Brutalist and Neo-Gothic) provides the perfect lens through which to consider the film, considering notions of colonial heritage, tradition and the cyclical nature of taste and cultural production. The film's visual language moves between the built and fictitious spaces (the play, the domestic quarters, and classrooms of the school) and the natural textures of the flowering botanic gardens, the river that snakes its way through the school's grounds and the birds that call this landscape home.

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CONCEPTUAL STATEMENT

'OPERETTA' is a portrait of the artist as a boy, young and old man. It is a depiction of masculinity in crisis, a document of the creative process, and an exercise in anachronism and translation. It is a silent scream, birdsong and Evensong. It illustrates the potential in both creative and destructive acts. It is memories rescued, and repressed.

'OPERETTA' documents the downfall of an individual set against the backdrop of communal and collaborative creation. It questions the role of morality in the creation of art. It presents a complex and fluid depiction of gender and identity. It complicates questions around the agency and autonomy of children and probes taboos surrounding pubescent desire and sexuality.

Set against the milieu of private schooling in the hangover of European colonialism, 'OPERETTA' is a tragicomedy rendered in rigorous formality. It evokes a host of cinematic and literary languages from the Gothic horror stories of M.R James to Pasolini's reimagining of myth, to the narratively opaque but politically and formally incisive films of Lucrecia Martel and late Japanese Master. It is a film that shifts between the real and imagined without warning and explication, rather embracing the notion that everything is a construct, and that time, especially time experienced, is non-linear, and that the past is ever present, waiting to be remembered and reanimated.

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A personal note from Oscar Enberg

I'd like to take just a moment to introduce myself, and thank you for giving your time and attention to this project.

My name is Oscar Enberg. I am a visual artist and filmmaker based in Berlin, where I have been living since receiving the Creative New Zealand Artist Residency in 2017. Over the the last decade I have exhibited extensively throughout Australasia and Europe. My sculptural work is held in private and public collections including Toi o Tamaki, Auckland Art Gallery and the Chartwell Trust, and my short films have been internationally presented in museums and film festivals including Kunstverein Munchen, Staatliche Museum für Aktuel Kunst, Gent, Oberhausen Film Festival, Auckland Art Gallery and the Govett Brewster, New Plymouth.

Between 2001-06 I attended Christ's College as a day boy, in Harper House, and I can and do, trace much of my creative and intellectual DNA back to time inside the Neo-Gothic and Brutalist walls of the school. Over the course of these five years, many of my waking hours were spent between the Art and Drama departments, guided, supported and challenged by Darryn George, Phil Price, Robyn Peers and David Chambers. The work of Robert Gober, De Chirico, Beckett, Brecht, Bergman, the early work of Jane Campion, Kafka - all these great artists and makers were first introduced to me during this formative time, and continue in different ways to colour my thoughts about Art's role in the world, its power to communicate complex ideas and ask fundamental questions.

In 2025, Christ's College will celebrate the 175th year since its founding. It will be, I'm sure, a year to reflect on the past, look forward to the future, and above all celebrate the countless, often times invisible ways it has shaped, and been shaped, by the many thousand boys that have passed through its gates.

Late last year, I approached the school with an ambitious, and (to my knowledge) unprecedented project. The proposal is to produce a feature length narrative film that will be developed over the next year, shot in the summer of 2023/24 and finished in time for the 2025 Anniversary celebrations.

The production will involve the school in a myriad of challenging and rewarding ways, both as a backdrop for the film itself, and through the collaboration with teaching staff and, most importantly, students.

The working title for this film is 'Operetta' and, as the title suggests, it is a portrait of a boy's school mounting an ambitious theatre production

OPERETTA

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It documents the inherent highs and lows, creative tensions, professional discretions, interpersonal dynamics and ultimately the complex and singular experience of working together to create fiction.

In the world of the film, the private boy's school, Bard College on Avon, is preparing to enter rehearsals on a tired production of Gilbert & Sullivan's 'HMS Pinafore'. But upon the discovery of decades old costumes and set designs from a never-staged production of the Greek Comedy Aristophanes' Birds, deep in the bowels of the school auditorium, the drama department, led by the retiring Drama teacher, Mr Rhodes, and supported by junior colleagues, set out to stage this obscure and challenging adaptation.

Concurrent to its charting of the rehearsal process (including a cast of 20-30 boys); building to the climax of Opening Night, the film draws a portrait across three central protagonists; each of whom might be understood as the same person in three different stages of their life. These three protagonists (Mr Rhodes, his assistant Drama teacher and one talented senior student) form a constellation of ego, ambition and privilege, that structures the narrative, drives the story forward and ultimately tears it apart.

As might be expected, the staging of a Greek Comedy demands a chorus, and, for 'Operetta', this chorus will be divided into a 'Dance' chorus, and and 'Choral, or sung' chorus. Working with my composer here in Berlin, several pieces of choral and instrumental music are being written, that will be performed in play, and act as 'score' for the final film.

The film will make the most of College's long and rich relationship with Choral music, giving a selected group of choristers the opportunity to sing newly composed and existing music.

Ensuring that as many boys from Christ's College can be involved as possible, these instrumental pieces are being written with the intention that the school Orchestra/music groups, will be able to contribute to the production of the film.

Further to this, as well as the cast of acting students, the film's production will offer a smaller group of boys an opportunity to work behind the camera, mentored by professionals in various departments including: Camera, sound, lighting, art direction and costume.

In light of this, I am happy to introduce several key members of the creative team that will be leading the production, though development, pre-production, the shoot itself and finally post-production in 2024.

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KEY INDIVIDUALS

PRODUCER

Niamh Peren is a producer, film maker and founder of the environmental advocacy campaign Tino Pai Aotearoa/Thumbs Up New Zealand. Her films have screened, and won awards, at multiple international film festivals including Cannes. She was a winner of the President's Scholarship, and the John L. Tishman Scholarship for exemplary commitment to sustainability and graduated in May 2022 with a Master of Science in Strategic Design and Management at The New School, Parsons School of Design; where she also works as an Adjunct Professor.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Adam Luxton is a New Zealand born cinematographer and filmmaker. He has worked extensively on short and feature length films and has written and directed two feature length documentaries that have screened both nationally and internationally, including the prestigious Visions du Reel in Switzerland. Since returning to New Zealand in 2016, Adam has quickly become one of the country's most sought after cinematographers.

COSTUME DESIGNER

Luka Mues is a Christchurch born Costume Designer based in Berlin. Over the last 6 years he has worked on countless music videos, short films and feature productions. His work has been featured on Kendrick Lamar videos and large Hollywood productions (including John Wick, the Matrix Resurrections, Charlie's Angels and more), as well as smaller scale, independent films.

ART DEPARTMENT

Oliver Perkins is a Christchurch based artist and Christ's College Old Boy. Since receiving a TANZ scholarship and graduating with a Masters in Painting from Chelsea School of Art, London in 2007, Perkins has exhibited internationally and his work is held in major public and private collections including Zabłudowicz Collection, University of the Arts, London, The Saatchi Collection and the Chartwell and Auckland Art Gallery collections. Oliver will be producing a new series of large painted structures that function as set pieces for the film's production of Aristophanes' Birds.

COMPOSER

Lorenz Dangel is a classically trained German composer, working across film, theatre, ballet and choral music. Over the last decade he has written music for numerous feature films (premiering at Cannes, Berlinale) and has won several major awards, including the Max Ophuls Film Score Award, and a German Film Award for his score on the film 'Tides'. In 2021 his first full length ballet 'Der Schneesturm' had its first run with the with the Bayerisches Staatsballett.

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CASTING

Aristophanes' production has a total of 30 characters plus a traditional Chorus ranging anywhere from 12 - 50 players.

The film production will present a portion of these roles, those both central to the play's narrative (Pisthetairos, Euelpides, Tereus, Procne, Sycophant and Poseidon), as well those that articulate important thematic and formal concerns.

In total then, the film aims to cast up to 30 students in both chorus and leading roles. Some students will be chosen for their talents that apply to the fictitious theatre production; singing and dancing, others might be chosen because of a particular quality that the camera captures in them.

Working closely with the Christ's College Drama department, the film production aims to make the most of what the school has to offer in performing arts, and so, both song and dance will feature in the film.

As part of the film's production ethos, OPERETTA will look to bring together 15-20 boys for whom the technical side of film-making is more interesting. Students interested in working behind the camera (operating, sound, lighting, production, costume, art department etc.) will be mentored by 'Department Heads' whom will lead the production on both an educational and practical level. In some cases, it might be that a boy expresses interest in working both in front of and behind the camera.

Further to this, it is the production's intention to engage with the Music Department. Musicians will be featured in front of the camera, the film's award winning German composer Lorenz Dangel (a composer for film, opera and ballet) is writing a score that is to be performed by various College musical groups (orchestra, chamber groups). This added musical collaboration could conceivably bring the number of boys involved to somewhere in the range of 60-70.

Finally, there will be a small suite of adult's cast in central and supporting roles. These actors will be cast from both professional actors, and perhaps, any teacher (eg. Drama Department, choir or Music Department) whom has expertise and interest in partaking in the film.

**It should be noted that these numbers are all subject to further production development, logistical constraints and, most crucially, interest from students.*

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PRODUCTION TIMELINE

Working towards a 2025 premiere, coinciding with the Christ's College 175th Anniversary celebrations, OPERETTA will go into pre-production in late 2023, followed by a 4-5 week production period around January, 2024.

In late December and early January, production will begin with a smaller crew and cast (mostly adult cast members). Principal photography will take place in the last two weeks of January prior to the new school year commencing, and it will be during this period that the students are most fully involved.

There will be rehearsal periods (both in the holiday period and, depending on school commitments and co-ordination with the Music and Drama Departments, during term time).

Regarding this, the composing period will begin in early 2023 so that music can be shared with Christ's College in the second half of the year.

The core production team (director, producer, cinematographer) will travel to Christchurch first in early 2023 to meet with the school, location scout potential filming possibilities, and perhaps introduce the project to students (if and when the school deems this appropriate). Following this, in the second half of the year, official casting would begin, both remotely through video submissions and in person. Casting of key acting roles will be carried out enough in advance to ensure the Costume department has sufficient time to produce the more elaborate garments in Berlin before flying out to Christchurch.

Following the shoot in January, the 16mm film stock will be developed in Australia then transferred to digital files for the editing process to begin in Berlin. Further score will be written in Berlin and then, it is our intention to send this back to Christ's College for the orchestral/music groups to learn, perform and record as part of the post-production process.

Once complete in late 2024, early 2025, the film will enter into the arthouse festival circuit, premiere as part of the anniversary celebrations, and ideally screen in selected cinemas throughout NZ and further abroad.



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PRODUCTION TIMELINE

YEAR	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
2023	Script development Funding application	Script development Funding application	Funding application Meeting with Christ's College - location scouting etc.	Music score composition begins	Advanced development work in Berlin continues	Initial Casting Call for students.	Advanced development work in Berlin continues	Final location scouting and CASTING BEGINS	Potential Dance and Music conversations/rehearsals begin.	Production team arrives in Christchurch to begin pre-production prep and rehearsals.	Rehearsals Logistics Pre-prod. Art department etc.	Preliminary shooting begins/ Rehearsals continue.
2024	Principal photography	Production closes in Christchurch	Film stock developed		Post-production in Berlin	Post-production in Berlin	Post-production in Berlin Music sent back to Christ's College	Post-production in Berlin	Post-production in Berlin	Post-production in Berlin Music recording in Chch.		Final Cut.
2025	Mixing & Grading		F I	L M		P R	E M	I E	R E	S		

OPERETTA

PROPOSITIONAL BUDGET

OPERETTA is currently working towards a budget of \$500,000.00NZD.

This modest budget includes all pre-production, production and post-production costs. It does not include marketing costs or costs associated with national and international exhibition of the film. After the production of a successful film, it is anticipated that the New Zealand Film Commission will come on board to support in tail-end exhibition and distribution costs.

The most expensive single cost in the budget is the purchase, development and scanning of 16mm film stock. At somewhere in the region of 150,000NZD, shooting on film will account for almost 1/3 of the budget. The remaining two thirds will be spread across wages, material and labour costs, equipment, catering and incidentals etc.

The industry professionals will be paid (low-end) industry rates, whilst the boys both in front of and behind the camera will be paid in a yet to be determined payment structure.

Catering will be provided during entire the shooting schedule.

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DEPARTMENT	Budget Allocation (NZD)
CAMERA, FILM STOCK AND DEVELOPING	150,000.00
CINEMATOGRAPHY COSTS	20,000.00
PRODUCTION COSTS	40,000.00
EDITOR	20,000.00
COMPOSITION AND MUSIC CREATION AND RECORDING	30,000.00
LIGHTING DEPARTMENT	20,000.00
KEY GRIP	20,000.00
SOUND	20,000.00
ART DEPARTMENT	30,000.00
COSTUME AND MAKEUP	20,000.00
POST PRODUCTION (grading/sound/mixing)	50,000.00
CATERING, TALENT AND MISCELLANEOUS	80,000
TOTAL	500,000

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ACHIEVING THE BUDGET

How can this budget be raised?

In order to realise the project in its full capacity, a minimum of 500,000NZD needs to be raised.

This budget places the film at the low end of the production scale for films that are working towards theatrical release in cinemas (Aotearoa and abroad) and participation in International film festivals. While we might term this a low budget independent film, there is no question that this is a hugely ambitious project for a Secondary School body to partake in, both in terms of finances, and the scale of resources involved. The funds for ‘Operetta’ will come from a combination of Governmental funding bodies, production/distribution companies and private backers (both individuals and businesses).

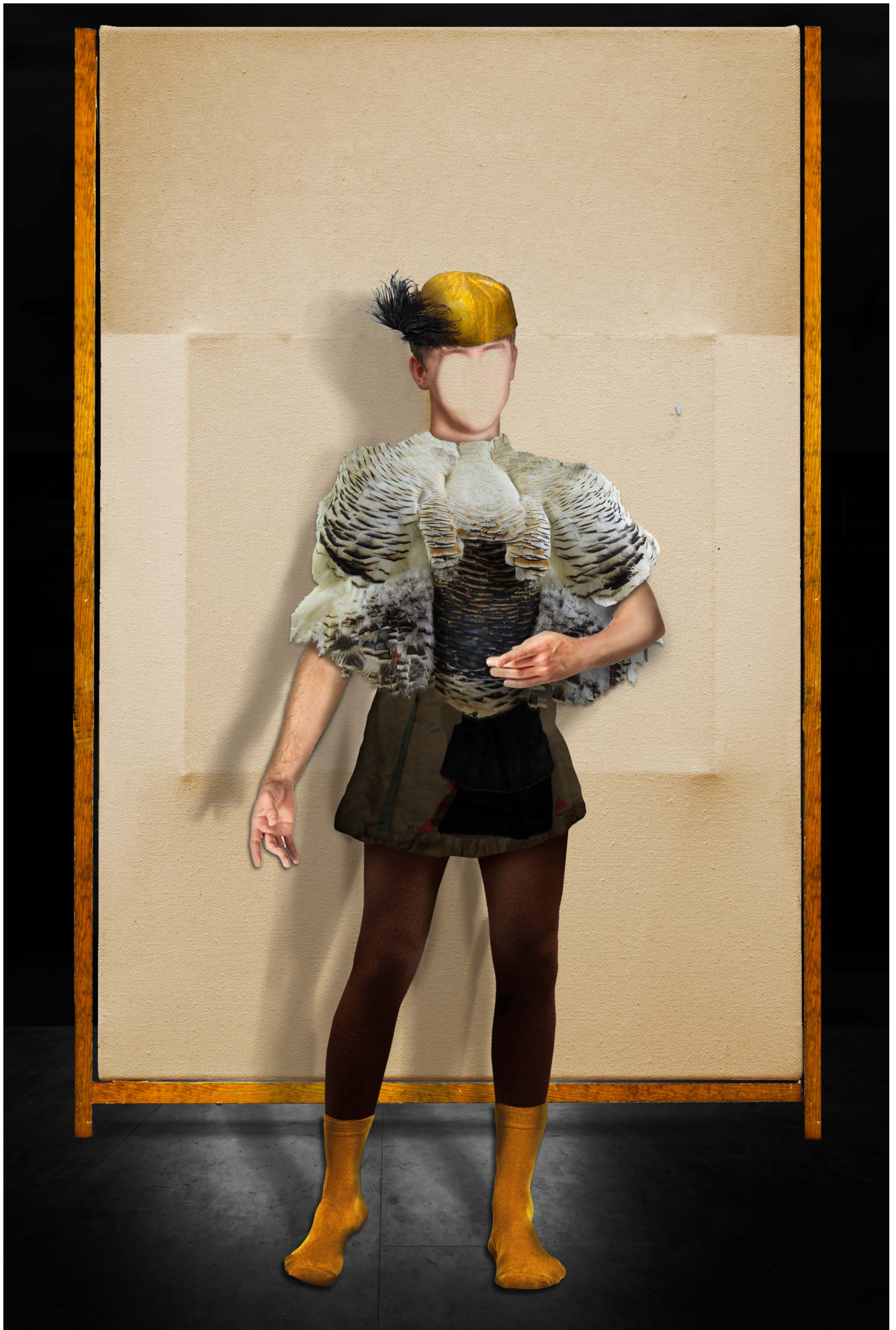
‘Screen Canterbury’ is a Christchurch based funding body that has been allocated a substantial pool of money to use over a three year period to bring productions to the Canterbury region. The ‘Operetta’ production team is already in conversations with Screen Canterbury to assess how much monetary support can be accessed for the film, and in July, an official grant application will be submitted as part of their 2023 funding round.

As a Berlin based artist, Oscar Enberg is already working in collaboration with German production house to complete post-production in Berlin in 2024. This production support will take care of all video and audio editing, as well as final colour grading and picture locking etc.

‘Operetta’ is looking to enter into financial partnerships with any individuals or businesses for whom the idea of supporting an ambitious creative endeavour that aims to return on its investments and, provide a large group of teenagers the unique opportunity to contribute to, and author, a feature film. Donorship and financial investment will be organised in accordance with NZ law and practicing commercial film standards so that all parties are best served, whether it be a purely philanthropic engagement, or a combination of altruism and genuine interest in helping to produce challenging and important New Zealand Cinema.

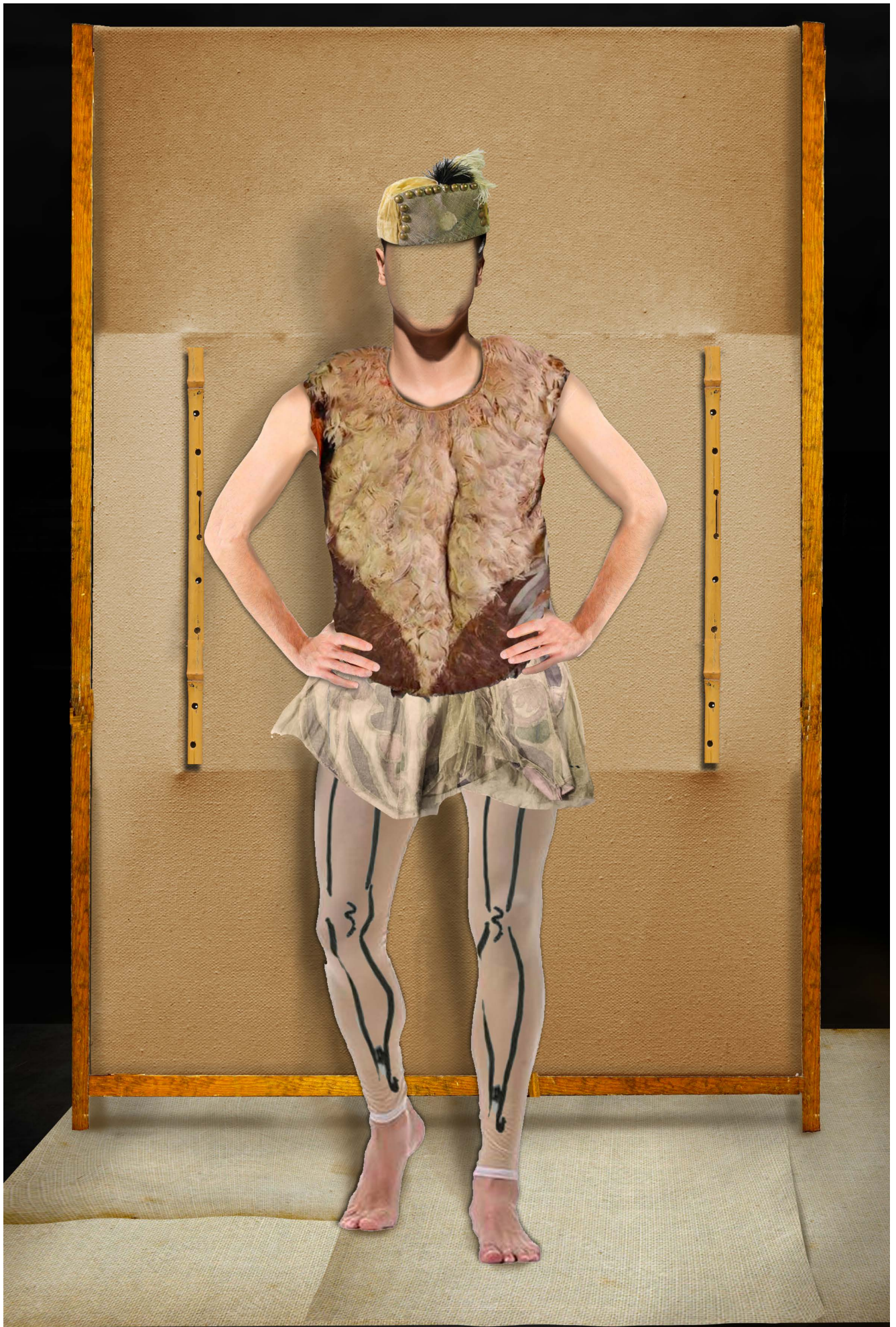
Crucially, this is a project that seeks to celebrate the wealth of artistic tradition that has been at the core of Christ College’s long and rich history. Through the generosity of the school and the talent of current and past students and supporters, we believe ‘Operetta’ will be a film that will resonate with audiences both at home and abroad, and will be a singular addition to the cannon of New Zealand Cinema.

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'OPERETTA' PRODUCTION COSTUME SKETCH
CHORUS MEMBER

OPERETTA



'OPERETTA' PRODUCTION COSTUME SKETCH
CHORUS MEMBER

OPERETTA



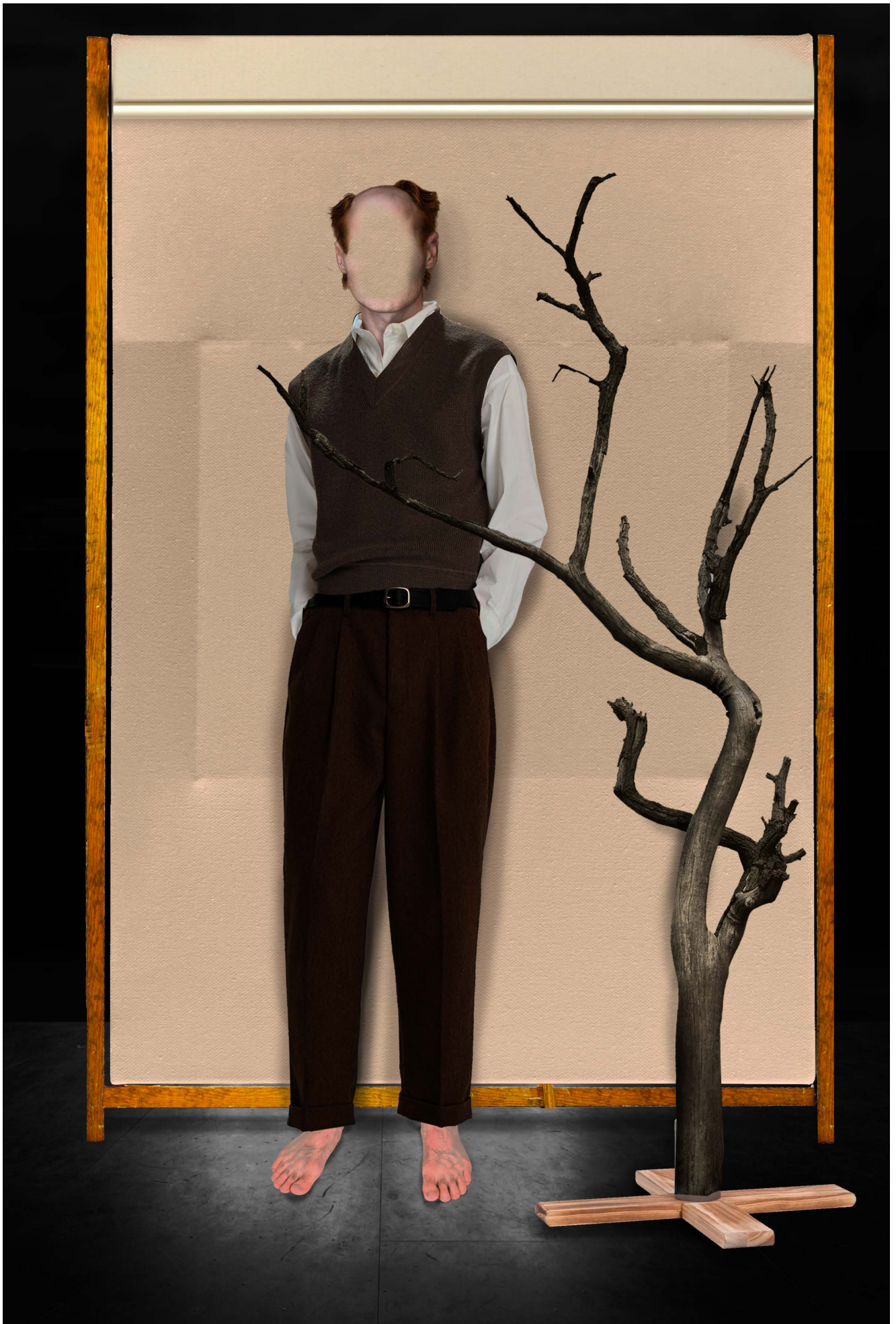
'OPERETTA' PRODUCTION COSTUME SKETCH
SCHOOL UNIFORM

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'OPERETTA' PRODUCTION COSTUME SKETCH
JOCELYN RHODES

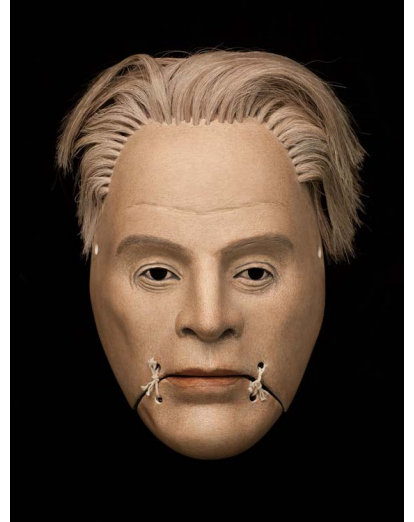
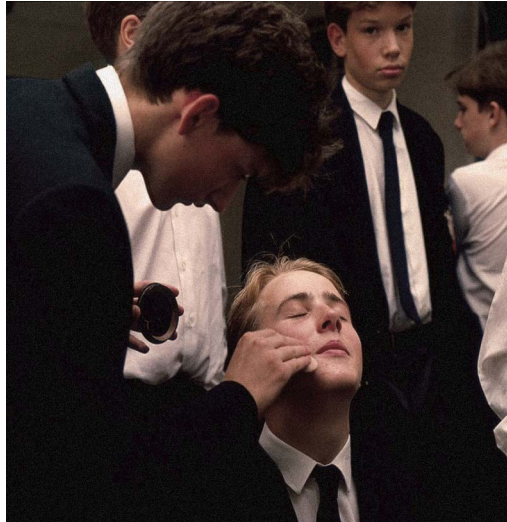
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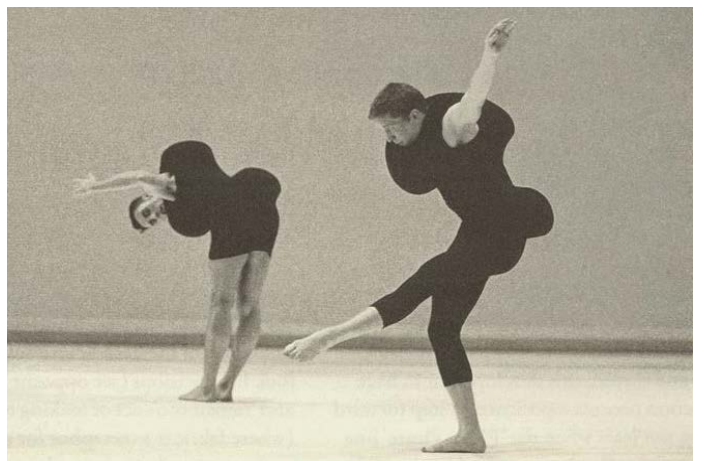
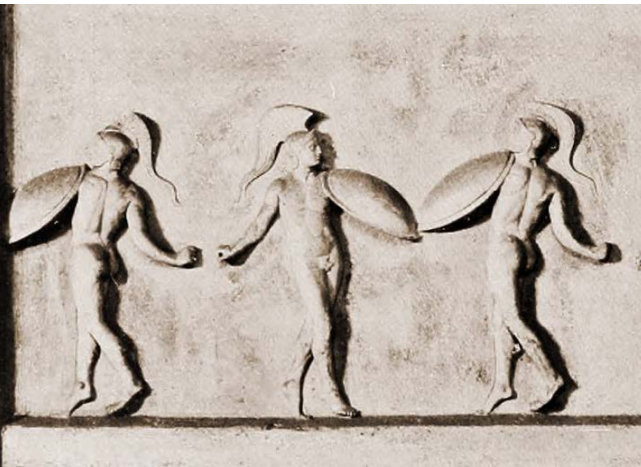
'OPERETTA' PRODUCTION COSTUME SKETCH
KILIK EGGE

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VISUAL LANGUAGE

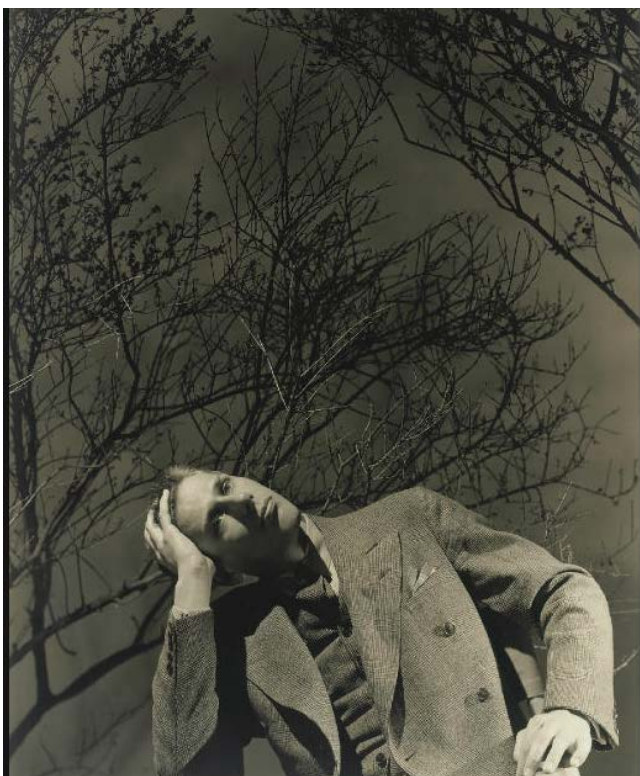
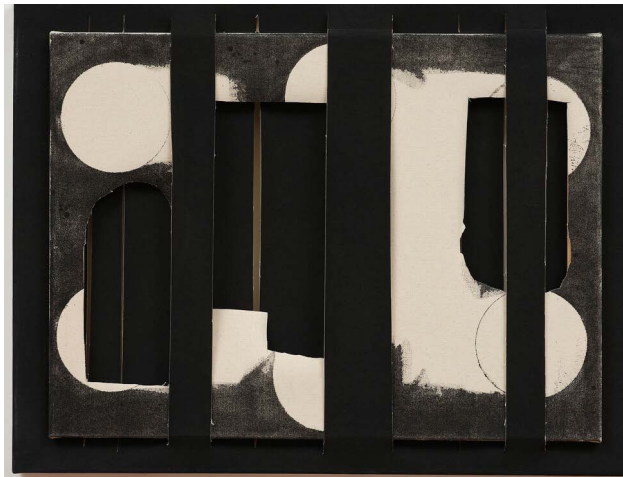
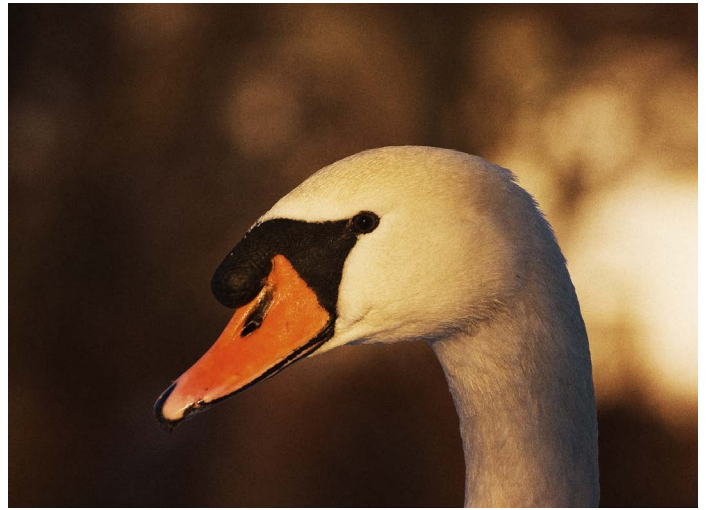


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VISUAL LANGUAGE



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