

SANTO LOQUASTO

Santo Loquasto is a designer in the tradition of Ming Cho Lee and Boris Aronson, and he has earned the respect appropriate to that company. His settings tend to have a distinct style and make strong artistic statements through a careful and deliberate manipulation of space, line and color. While he is generally associated with semi-abstract, sculptural and conceptual designs, he has done an equal number of realistically based interiors, especially at the Hartford Stage Company. Loquasto is also one of the major designers for modern dance and ballet, having designed for choreographers Mikhail Baryshnikov, Glen Tetley, Jerome Robbins and Twyla Tharp, although his work for dance is primarily as a costume designer. Robbins was not even aware that Loquasto designed sets when he first hired him. His costume design has also taken him into film, most frequently with Woody Allen, and his costumes for *Zelig* (1983) earned him an Academy Award nomination.

Loquasto has achieved recognition without ever having had a true hit play. Admiring reviews do not translate into money. "I'm sick of being respected," he jokes. This situation has frequently resulted in his taking on many projects simultaneously, creating a hectic schedule on which he seems to thrive. He claims that he does not like the long hours, the occasional all-nighters, and "the entrance to my apartment looking as if I were about to load out three shows," but the animation with which he discusses this lifestyle belies the statements. His excitement mounts as he describes his burgeoning film career: the pressure, he notes, is exhausting,

and the pace hectic, but the overall process, he concludes, "is quite marvelous."

Loquasto does not approach set design from any theoretical basis. While he talks quite articulately about space and places himself in the "sculptural tradition" of theatre design, he is unable, or unwilling, to discuss stylistic elements. He claims not to be a colorist despite his skillful manipulation of mood through color, especially in such productions as Nikolai Erdman's *The Suicide* (Broadway, 1980). And he seems almost surprised to discover a consistent use of line, angularity and verticality in his sets. "There are certain things I like," he admits, "so I know they are probably there in the designs. And there are probably ways I go about things which are predictably the same." But when pressed, the only example he can offer of such a stylistic element is his method of finishing the fascia of a staircase.

Loquasto discusses his work distantly, almost as if he were talking about the work of a stranger. Describing his stylistic approach to space he commented: "In [Woody Allen's] *Floating Lightbulb* [Vivian Beaumont Theatre, 1981] and [Martin Sherman's] *Bent* [Broadway, 1979], I saw a similar kind of break-up of wall space and how it allowed for the abstraction of rooms without ceilings." Regarding style, he concludes that, "Designers who have particularly vivid styles are either those who come out of a painterly tradition, or those who do the same kind of show over and over again, and are asked to do, and choose to do the same thing over and over again." Neither of these descriptions applies to Loquasto.

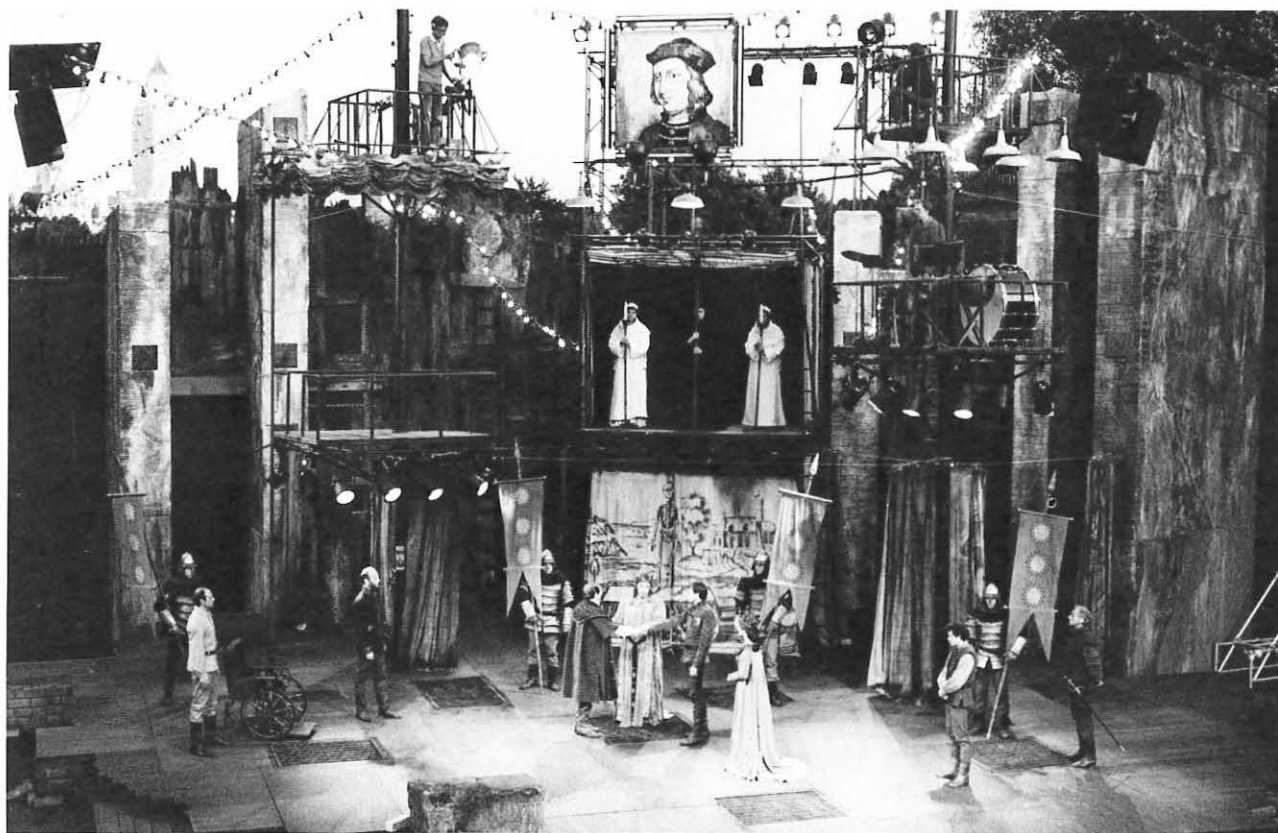
Facing page, Act II of Martin Sherman's Bent. The scene was a Nazi concentration camp. Loquasto used a white surround of textured walls as a constant through both acts. The barbed wire grid created not only a sense of place and mood, but also an abstract element to focus the spectators on the performers. It also provided a sense of confinement in an otherwise open space.

One of the distinguishing elements of his work is the apparent combination of the contemporary and the traditional. At first glance, his early sets reveal the typical stylistic elements of the 1960s and 1970s—textured surfaces, materials such as erosion cloth and rough wood, and Constructivist elements such as pipe scaffolding. He is quick to point out that the presence of these elements is not the result of intentional copying, but an inevitable similarity that develops among designers in a given period. Any use of pipe, for instance, is immediately compared with Ming Cho Lee. Loquasto recalls that Lee once assured him that their use of pipe was different.

It is Loquasto's use of line that is distinctive. While the standard practice is to set walls on a di-

agonal line and to break up long expanses with jogs or extrusions of one sort or another, Loquasto tends to set flat walls at right angles to each other and to create a sense of great height through his use of vertical line. Many of his designs, then, are not so much box sets as they are immense cubes. There is something almost classical about his angularity.

A look at the groundplans alone might suggest a certain starkness in such sets, but relief is provided by rich texture, such as the rough-hewn wood of *King Lear* (New York Shakespeare Festival, 1973). In *Bent*, he notes, the back wall "was broken up, not in any representational way, but simply as texture." Sometimes he thwarts this symmetrical-angular approach for specific effect. *Richard III* (New York Shakespeare Festival, 1983), for example, was de-



Richard III at the New York Shakespeare Festival's Delacorte Theater, (1983). Although his designs are frequently linear and angular, for this production Loquasto created a "skewed space" for a sense of "improvised theatricality." This design also demonstrates his use of great height at the Delacorte, in which his sets often soar upwards of 40 feet.

signed with a "skewed space—just enough off that it was kind of an irritation. It had an improvised theatricality about it."

Loquasto balks at any categorization like "classical" unless there is a specific intentional reference within the design, but he acknowledges that there might be some classical approaches in his style. He admits a liking for certain Postmodern architects like Aldo Rossi who have strong classical references in their own work.

The key to Loquasto's style is rooted in sculptural design which he defines not only spatially, but in terms of the interaction between the space and the performer. "If you think of stage design at its most formal level," he explains, "it is really a frame and a backdrop, as in fundamental design for dance which one thinks of as legs, borders and a backdrop. Whereas sculptural design, I think, cuts through the space. It's an invasion, or it intercepts in some way. It demands that the performers deal with the scenery. It's not simply that it's textured; it's that it really moves into the space. It can be a Noguchi-like suspension overhead, but nonetheless it is there to be dealt with. It demands interaction. Design should ask for an exchange between the performer and his or her environment, just as acting does."

As Loquasto describes a set, his hands and arms move expressively, slicing the air with definite vertical and horizontal strokes as if sculpting a set in the air. These same horizontals and verticals appear in many of his pencil sketches such as those for David Halliwell's *Hail, Scrawdyke!* done at Yale in the late 1960s, and David Mamet's *American Buffalo* (Broadway, 1977) which hang side-by-side on the wall of his cramped studio—a room in his Riverside Drive apartment. Both designs are relatively square and linear. He jokingly suggests that these two sketches demonstrate his true stylistic trademark—the cluttered set. The two rooms are similar but *Scrawdyke*, he points out, is fairly spare, while *Buffalo* is very cluttered. "I keep them up as a sad reminder," he says a bit facetiously. "There is a 10-year separation between them during which time

that room [*Scrawdyke*] just filled up with junk and became that room [*Buffalo*]."

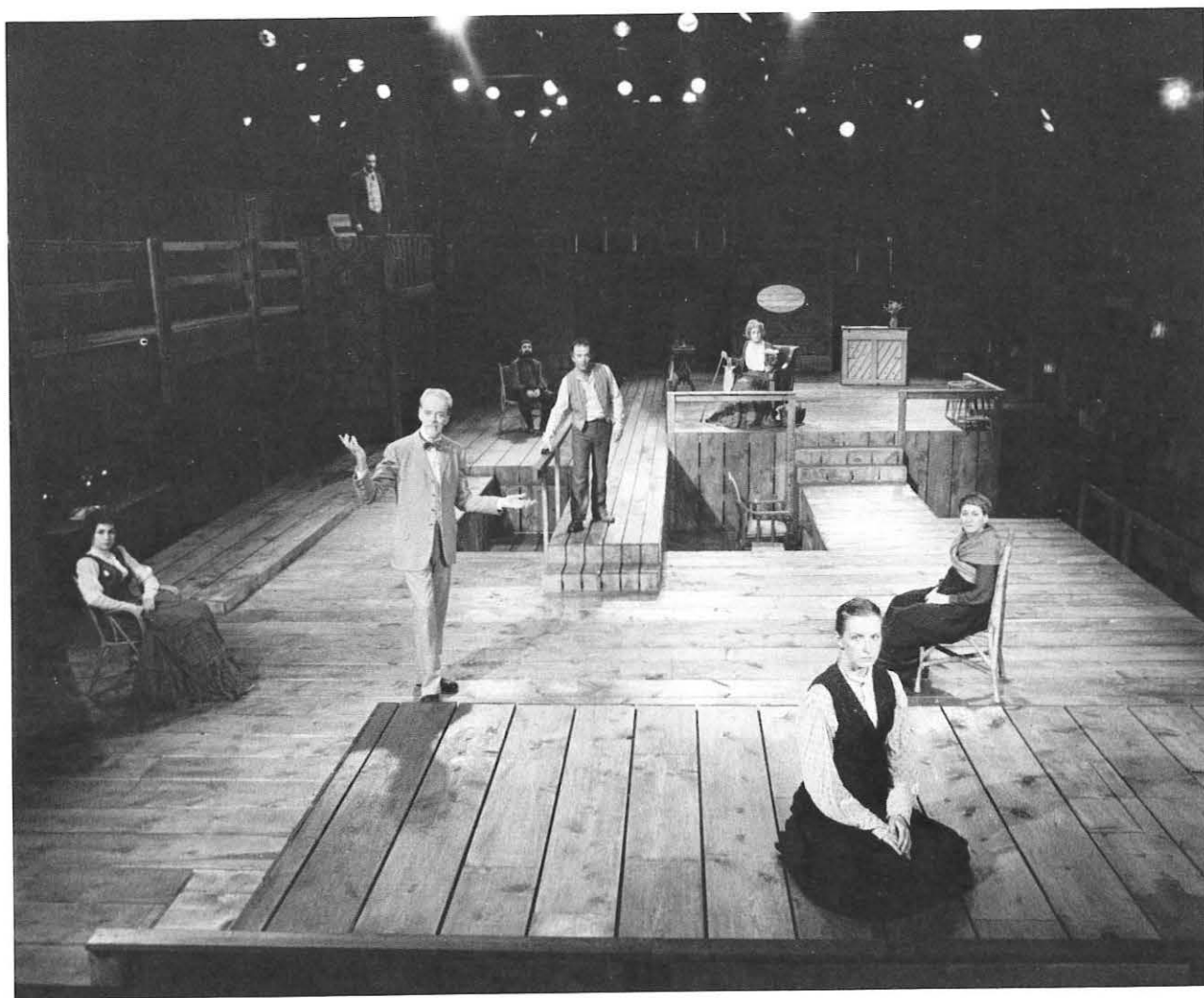
You Can't Take It with You (Hartford Stage Company, 1973) also dealt with clutter and "the relationship of the object to the person." In an article in *ARTnews* (February 1981) Loquasto noted, "It's very American, I think, this fascination for saving, accumulating, turning spaces into shrines to acquisition. [In *You Can't Take It with You*] I was interested in the unfinished quality, the do-it-yourself project that never gets completed, the rough edges in people's lives."

Stage managers say that they can spot his sets instantly. "I don't know whether that means that the designs are similar," he responds, "or simply that they are all similarly littered with piles of garbage." More seriously, he notes that the "clutter" helps to soften the angularity of a set. *American Buffalo*, he explains, "worked off grids of debris and I broke down the sharpness of the space with the junk."

Loquasto talks fluently about the subtleties of space. He believes that his feel for space developed in response to his frequent work on arena and thrust stages such as those of Hartford, Arena Stage and the Beaumont. "It demands that you be involved in pushing action forward," he explains. Most of the plays he has done at the Beaumont, a space with very specific design problems, have been intimate shows for which he feels the theatre is totally unsuited. The actors, he explains, are forced to deal with the sweep of the house and the vast overhead space. "I was always trying to bring the focus down to a human proportion, but the pitch of the house is so great that you always feel that you're looking down on this little playing area." This is further complicated by sightlines that do not allow the performers to use the whole space, and a stage height that blocks the first few rows of the audience.

These problems seemed acute in designing *Floating Lightbulb*. "It was a play that needed to be looked at in a small space," states Loquasto. "But at the Beaumont you always felt the space *around* the acting area." To create greater intimacy he thrust





the stage forward slightly more, taking out almost two rows of seats; reduced the playing area to a "comfortable, almost realistic proportion" of a bedroom, living room and kitchen; and created a surround (a background that envelops the set) of brick apartment buildings with windows and fire escapes. His intention was to create an atmosphere and fill the space without detracting from the visual focus.

"It was middle-class Canarsie in 1940s Brooklyn, but unfortunately it looked a bit like a tenement," he admits.

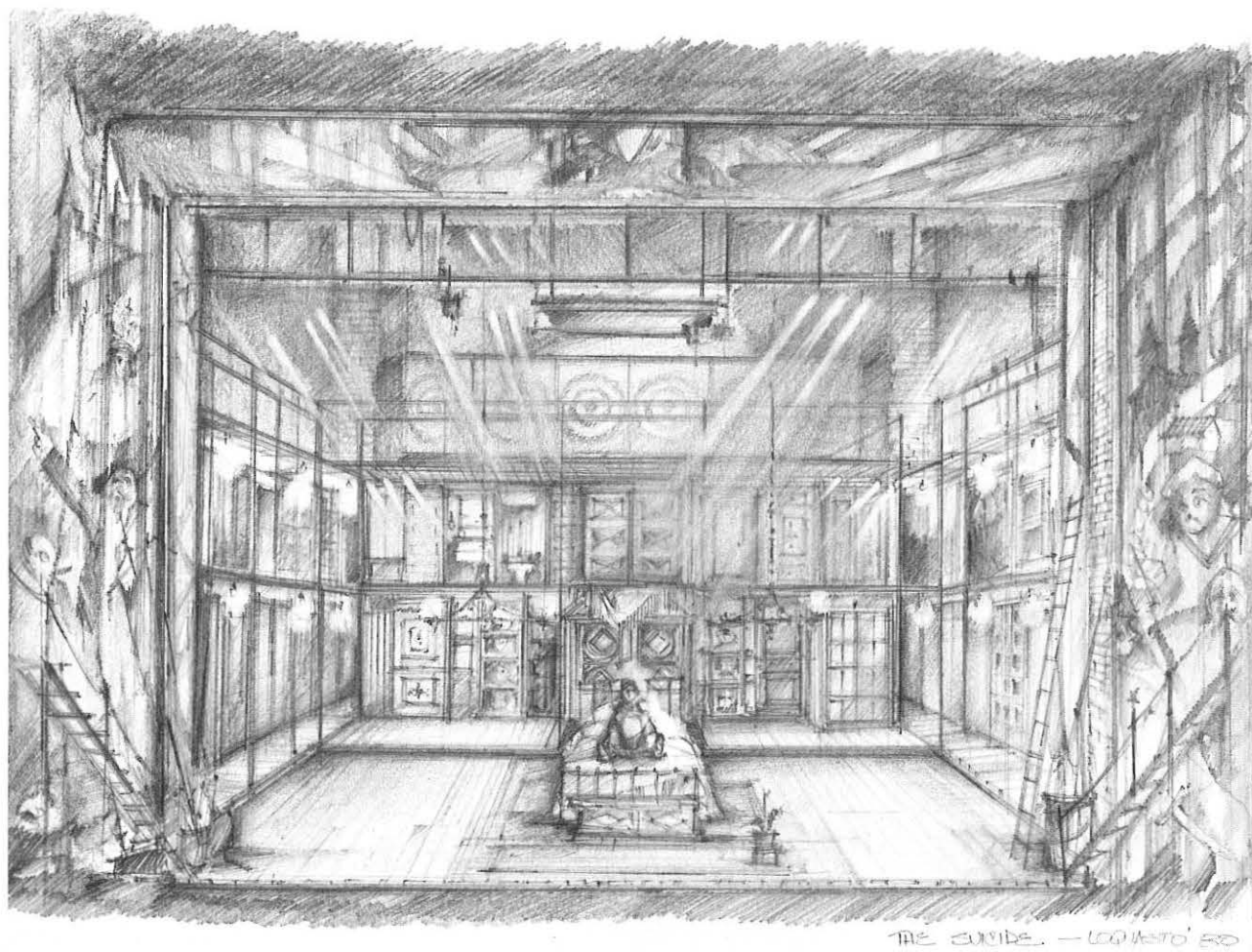
Because so many plays present similar challenges, designers are always seeking better solutions to recurring problems. Loquasto feels that he finally achieved an effective method of dealing with the *Floating Lightbulb* problem—"focusing on an

Chekhov's Uncle Vanya at the La Mama Annex (1983). Loquasto and director Andrei Serban wanted to create a set that caused "unnatural spatial relationships among people." Space was articulated through levels rather than walls, but the set had familiar Chekhovian textures—wood, candles, wicker.

interior room while allowing a surround to come to life”—in a 1983 production of *The Glass Menagerie* at Hartford Stage. The surround was created of light boxes suggesting windows and fire escapes. In front of that was a scrim painted to suggest a brick wall. There were several layers of scrims creating an “atmospheric and lush” image. A large fire escape cut across the top of the space which forced the lights to be hung unusually close to the actors. Thus, instead of long shafts of light illuminating the actors as is usually the case, the performers were

more isolated—“It was rather like a television studio,” explains Loquasto. The arrangement allowed for both a large and an intimate playing space.

On the whole, Loquasto probably designs taller sets than any other working designer, which may be partly due to working at the outdoor Delacorte Theater in Central Park in the mid-1970s. In order to achieve any sort of focus in that space, the back wall of the set must block out the natural background of the lake. Standard flats in proscenium theatres tend to be 12 to 14 feet tall. When Ming Cho Lee was



Pencil sketch for Nikolai Erdman's The Suicide (ANTA Theater, 1980). Made largely of doors, the set was almost a paradigm of Loquasto's frontal, angular style. It was a cube, although the "fourth wall" was shattered by catwalks that extended into the auditorium, and tattered banners hanging over the audience. Along the upper back wall was a "shooting gallery" of political and literary figures that periodically lit up.

resident designer for the Shakespeare Festival in the 1960s he regularly used 18- to 24-foot units at the Delacorte. Loquasto's sets became 30 feet and more. "I certainly was comfortable working out there under the sky," he laughs. "I think it comes from working with Michael Annals on *Prometheus Bound* (Yale Drama School, 1967). We went right up to the grid. I've always liked high trims—Gordon Craig and all that."

Much of Loquasto's work consists of single or unit settings, but since *Bent*, he has experimented more with the manipulation of space through the use of moving scenic elements. The rear wall in *The Suicide*, for instance, moved up and down stage, the play beginning with a shallow space which deepened throughout the production. He employed moving scenic pieces in *Bent* to provide a unifying element to the episodic script—its two acts seemed like separate plays. "The problem was to provide the piece with a visual continuity," explained Loquasto. "You should feel as though you have traveled through the first act and come to this unfortunate resting point in the second. That was the crux of the design." As Loquasto describes the set, some sense of his approach to design, color, line and texture becomes apparent, as well as the rationale of the transforming sets.

There was a white surround of textured walls which remained constant through both acts. It was clearly an abstraction—it was not specific but rather it was sympathetic to the various locations required: a city park, backstage at a cabaret or the unrelenting confinement of a concentration camp. It was also segmented in a way that not only allowed it to pass through the doors of the theatre, but to be clarified in its abstraction. In the second act, barbed wire crossed against the surround, forcing us to view these men against a grid. You really felt a scrutiny of the human condition. This effect was achieved, I hope, rather subliminally. The production was postponed, and during that time I

continued to think about the play and to change things—sort of cut things down to basic elements. The set was quite stark but maintained a rather Broadway-Brechtian format with exposed lights and all. Ultimately, I worked with small, tight elements defining each scene, the space being fully revealed in the second act with only the barbed wire in the back. It was at once its most open and yet its most confined.

Loquasto's use of color is distinctive, although he protests that it is "all rather low key." During the design process he works almost exclusively in black and white; he does little if any color rendering and works largely with white models. But his use of color is frequently singled out by the critics. The set for *Sarava* (Broadway, 1978) "hauls us instantly into a suspension of disbelief; and the hazy turquoise backdrop of the scrim locates this suspension precisely in a decaying tropical city," noted *New York Times* critic Walter Kerr. Kerr also remarked of *Bent*: "The blazing reds and yellows with which designer Santo Loquasto has made a hothouse of the passage are directly followed by the cool grays and muted blues of a vast public park equipped with a lone bench." Loquasto admits that *The Suicide* was very colorful and that its mood was manipulated through a subtle use of reds. The design for that play is almost a paradigm of Loquasto's techniques.

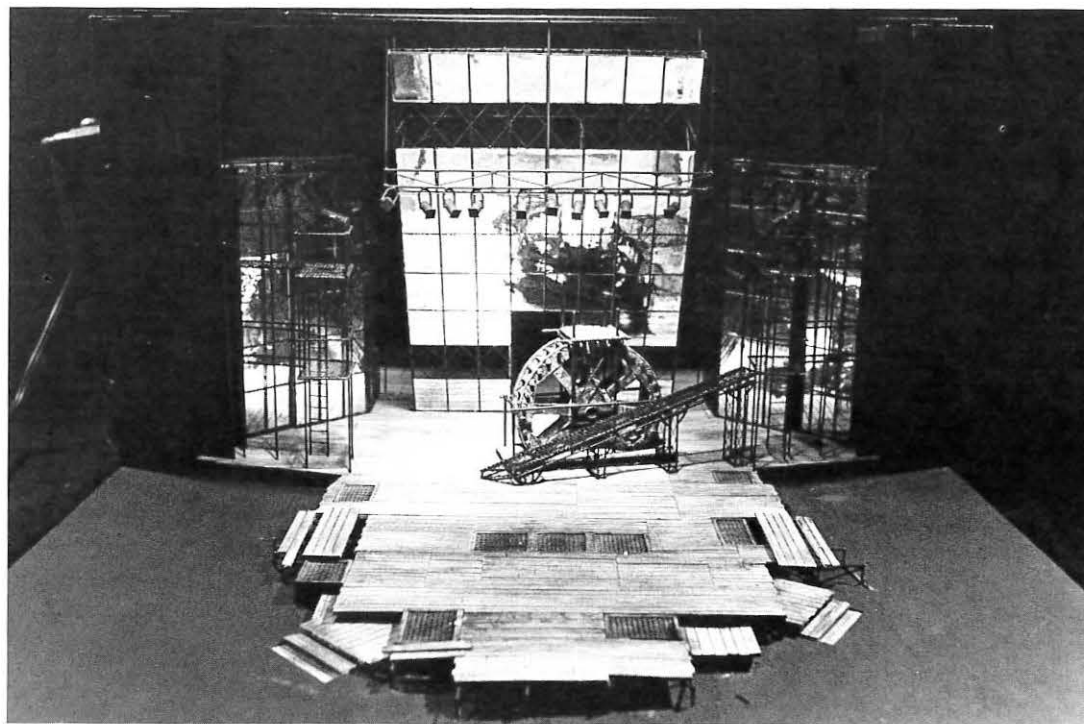
The Soviet play by Nikolai Erdman takes place in a nightmare world representing the Communist dream gone awry. It is ostensibly set in the bedroom of a house taken over by the state. The set was an open cube, the high back and side walls set at right angles to each other, and it was made of doors. "It was like a tenement," explains Loquasto, "only the doors were like Russian icons and antiques." The moving back wall was a shooting gallery lined with faces of writers and other historic figures which periodically lit up. Across the top of the back wall and along the sides were catwalks that extended into the auditorium as far as the balcony. Scenes occurred

Facing page top, model for Ibsen's Peer Gynt (Guthrie Theater, 1983). Loquasto combined modern images such as mylar mirrors with 19th-century theatricality to convey the complex themes of the play while preserving its spectacular production values. Facing page bottom, Gorky's The Lower Depths at Arena Stage (1977). Although stylistically similar to the later Uncle Vanya, it was conceived in a different way.

over the audience on these catwalks. There were tattered political banners on dropcloth-like material hanging from the auditorium walls, and rusty pipes and old rags visible throughout the set. He worked with "dark icon colors" to achieve an old, but rich-textured feeling. All the doors were painted red beneath their surface colors and the surface paint was allowed to dry and crack so that the red showed through. "You felt that this rich age had been splattered by a sort of decadent contemporary world," explains Loquasto.

More than most of his contemporaries, Loquasto is a conceptual designer, seeking strong visual and spatial metaphors for the themes and ideas in the plays. He refers to design as a process of translation—from idea to design, and from design to finished product. Significantly, he seems more familiar than his colleagues with the work of Europeans like Patrice Chereau, Peter Stein and Giorgio Strehler—people who combine the roles of director and designer in highly visual, conceptual productions. "Strehler's production of *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in Milan, for example, was probably the most extraordinary thing I've seen in the theatre—as moving as Peter Brook's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," comments Loquasto. His affinity for conceptual staging has led to collaborations with such Eastern European directors such as Andrei Serban, Liviu Ciulei and Jonas Jurasas, the director of *The Suicide*. "I've always loved the larger-than-life quality of the Eastern European—the passionate commitment that battling with repression can give rise to," he states in the *ARTnews* article, and notes laughingly that, "Someone once called me 'the dissident's designer.'"

His interest and admiration for the theatricalist approach is undoubtedly related to his desire for control and precision in his designs. He loves the collaborative process and has a good working relationship with several directors, as well as with lighting designer Jennifer Tipton. Yet occasionally and indirectly, he expresses a desire for an experience in which there would be no compromises, in which he





could create something truly his own. He says that he has never been interested in directing because it "seemed a vast undertaking . . . I often thought there was actually less control in directing than in designing, which made directing less interesting and less attractive, although far more vital." Given this outlook, it is not surprising that Loquasto is an avid patron of avant-garde theatre and tries always to see the work of Richard Foreman, who generally writes, directs and designs his own productions.

It is in part the desire for greater control, as well as his interest in the European theatricalist approach, that led him to do more and more costume design in conjunction with set design. "When you're doing something like Shakespeare," he notes, "or working with a kind of open expanse of

space, the way in which it is articulated with people becomes very important to you and you can orchestrate visually more effectively when you do both." An added benefit of costume design is the contact with the performers, although he admits there are occasional problems of temperament to deal with that do not exist with scenic design.

Much of his conceptual approach to design came together in two 1983 productions directed by Rumanians. One was Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* directed by Liviu Ciulei at the Guthrie Theater, and the other was Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* directed by Andrei Serban at La Mama E.T.C. in New York.

Ciulei's conception of *Peer Gynt* was quite specific and, in a sense, limited Loquasto's possibilities. Ciulei became fascinated with the idea of using

Act I of Harold Pinter's Old Times (Mark Taper Forum, 1972)—an unusually spare interior for Loquasto. For Act II, the bookcase unit was replaced with lowered closet doors, and the chairs were replaced with two very geometric beds.

mirrors, partly as a result of seeing Serban's mirrored production of *The Marriage of Figaro* earlier that season. Loquasto eventually designed a unit set with a mirrored surround. Sections of the left and right mirrored walls could slide in order to allow props to be brought onto the stage. The rear mirror, made of stretched vinyl (popularly known in theatre as the *Chorus Line* mirror), was hinged and could tilt up. (The side mirrors were plexiglass and tended to create distorted, funhouse images which did not please Loquasto.)

Mirrors become an immediate scenic metaphor. Therefore, we created this space that was surrounded by moving mirrors allowing the space to yawn at the audience at times and become a great mysterious void. It both confined the space and at the same time created a distorted reflection of the space. It also took the action and made it far more exciting because you could see the actors tipped up at a 90-degree angle. It was all housed in a steel 19th-century type structure. I was not so much concerned with a sense of Crystal Palace architecture as with keeping the reference to the 19th-century mind and 19th-century fantasy of the play. I presented the necessary scenic elements just as elements, all housed on scaffolding structures which allowed them to seem almost like shards in a museum pinned together with steel bolts. Anitra's tent was a 19th-century Romantic vision of the East complete with tassels, but not at all like a side show—it was all rather colorless, like cool sand. The horse in the desert was a beautiful silky horse, but on a platform of steel and simple planks.

Although the production utilized 20th-century technology and materials, such as air casters to move platforms, and the stretched-vinyl mirror, it was filled with images that referred to or "quoted" the 19th century. Loquasto researched the period using, among other things, photos of period construction sites. This formed the basis of the grills on

the stage floor which functioned as traps for actor entrances and exits, as well as a source of smoke and light.

The production also embodied another Loquasto trademark: an almost Brechtian exposure of the mechanics of the stage by which, he explains, he is acknowledging the limitations of the stage. "It's not illusionistic, it's not about fooling the eye," he declares. But Loquasto is also fascinated with 19th-century gimmickry which is intended to be *completely* illusionistic. So he equivocates: "The purpose of the designer is to either deceive or clarify."

For all its conceptual imagery, *Peer Gynt*, especially the second part (the production was divided into two separate evenings), was filled with devices lifted right out of 19th-century stage craft, including a shipwreck at sea. The lights came up on a 12-foot boat "floating" in a sea suggested by parachute silk covering the entire stage. Stage hands under and around the silk, together with fans, and aided by Jennifer Tipton's dappled, "mysterious" lighting, created the illusion of a stormy sea. The parachute silk rose up to cover the boat which protruded through a slit thus completing the illusion of the sea swallowing up the victims of the storm. Other effects in the production included an explosion and flames. Loquasto feels that using these "old-fashioned devices" in a self-conscious way eliminates any need to "apologize."

Uncle Vanya provides an insight into the process of design under non-commercial circumstances. In a September 1983 *New York Times* article, director Andrei Serban discussed his approach: "There's a line in the play about the big empty house being 'like a maze.' All the productions of 'Vanya' that I've seen have been small. This one has the reality of film. The [La Mama] Annex has become like a wasteland barn." Loquasto and Serban talked every day for a week about the production, considering the "familiar list of Chekhov metaphors" Loquasto explains. The basic space they decided on was to be "seemingly simple but long, creating an unnatural spatial relationship among people. The characters



talk to each other in a normal way, but they may be 30 feet apart." Rooms and spatial divisions were defined by differing stage levels rather than walls. There was very little furniture. "It was very Ronconi," laughs Loquasto, referring to Italian director Luca Ronconi. But we needed recesses here to break up the space—for psychological shelter. It was Andrei's notion to really go down into the floor and make Vanya's study into a kind of hollow. He wanted the sweep of a Beckett landscape, but one where you also had warm wood and familiar Chekhov textures of candles and wicker. But by stretching the space, it took on the ascetic serenity of an Oriental walkway as well."

The set was built and altered during the rehearsal

period. "It was really like building a full-scale model," explains Loquasto. "We could see what worked in the space and what didn't." Few production situations, of course, allow for that kind of flexibility.

Most of Loquasto's design for dance has been costumes, although for story ballets such as Baryshnikov's staging of *Cinderella* for American Ballet Theatre (1983), and such contemporary works as Twyla Tharp's *The Catherine Wheel* (1981) he has also created some elaborate settings. His most successful ongoing collaboration in dance has been with Tharp, with whom he first worked on *Sue's Leg* in 1975. Mary Clarke and Clement Crisp in their book *Design for Ballet* credit Loquasto with virtually

Two dance designs for Twyla Tharp. Left, Sue's Leg (1975). Loquasto's costume design for this dance altered dance costuming and even affected fashion by glamorizing standard rehearsal clothes, creating unisex outfits of satin and crepe de chine. Right, The Catherine Wheel (1981), for which Loquasto created a mechanized abstraction of a torture device that moved about the performers and cast shadows on the silk backdrop.

creating a new form of costuming for dance—"elegant and wildly relaxed . . . essentially of their time and very chic."

"Ballet dancers all wear rehearsal garbage," notes Loquasto, and Tharp was not interested in "unitards or the modern dance look which, regardless of what it costs, looks bedraggled." Loquasto had previously done little design for dance and simply took rehearsal clothes—legwarmers and loose-fitting clothing—and glamorized them, creating monochrome, unisex outfits of satin and crepe de chine. In the process, he inadvertantly created a new clothing fashion that went beyond the stage world (something that he nearly did again with the jeans he designed for the film *So Fine* [1981] with see-through panels on the buttocks).

Tharp claims that every time she discusses a new

design with Loquasto she shows him the same picture from a book of paintings by Munkasi and says, "Just do something like this. Each time, of course, he comes up with something original, but it has that sensibility." Interestingly, many of Loquasto's designs for Tharp start out much more elaborately than the final product indicates. *Fait Accompli* (1983) had very elaborate costumes in its Texas premiere but was eventually greatly simplified. "The costumes, which we all loved, probably wouldn't have contributed very much in what we wound up doing which was extremely simple," relates Loquasto. In the final version "you just see the movement of these superb dancers. We finally hit upon the simplest kind of costume that suits her company. It's neither a unitard nor a leotard."

The Catherine Wheel, with music by David Byrne,



is one of Loquasto's favorite settings for dance, but even that was eventually cut back by Tharp. The dance tells a story about the disintegration of a family, but there are parallel references to mythology and St. Catherine. There were large silk drops to allow for the play of shadows and "a nasty environment of steel and rather crude or menacingly formed devices which all had a sense of torture about them. They were made of mechanized wheels, and suggested claws and instruments of torture which came in and clanged about the dancers during certain portions of the piece," as Loquasto describes it. "Along with its brilliant score," he continues, "the piece had such authority in how it was presented that it completely overwhelmed the audience. I have never, in a dance performance, except *Fait Accompli*, seen or felt an audience gripped in such silence."

When asked what it is she likes about Loquasto, Tharp simply replies, "He's such a perfectionist." But, Loquasto believes that Tharp was ultimately dissatisfied with the design for *The Catherine Wheel*, and the performance has subsequently been presented only in excerpt form against drops.

Loquasto has done few story ballets and is still fairly uncomfortable with what he calls "decorative" design. "Because I am not a painterly designer," he explains, "there is a real insecurity that does not allow me to move into that form of design with great ease." He expresses an admiration for easel painters who work for the stage, from Picasso to the "simplicity and authority of David Hockney which takes your breath away." He feels that for painters working in decorative design, there is a directness. "The translation [from design to stage setting] is just an enlargement; it is very much a personal expression." But for someone trained as a stage designer working in that tradition, Loquasto feels, "you are working out of so many references that the work begins to deteriorate. You almost know too much about what it is you are doing! You are denied a simple impulse. You have so much to

draw on—art, architecture, the music, and movement itself that you have lost your spontaneity. It saddens me that I see in Boris Aronson's *Nutcracker* that struggle right to the end of his great career. He wanted very much to be an artist at work in the theatre, not simply a designer. But the parts of that ballet that work best are the parts where he was doing what he did best: wonderful stage magic."

Despite his own reservations, Loquasto received accolades for *Cinderella*. While criticizing the gaudiness of some scenes, Joan Ross Acocella in *Dancemagazine* (March 1984) talked about gowns that were "truly poetic creations—cotton candy spun of amber and verdigris. God knows how he imagines such a thing."

How his imagination works, of course, is something that he himself is hard-pressed to explain. But Loquasto does comment that, "We are inundated with images and we accumulate so much. My mind is a file cabinet of designs." He claims that he cannot walk past a dumpster without glancing inside "just to see if there might be a piece of wood or a chunk of plaster that suggests something to me, and that I can carry away in some sort of triumph." His actual process of creating a design, though, is fairly routine.

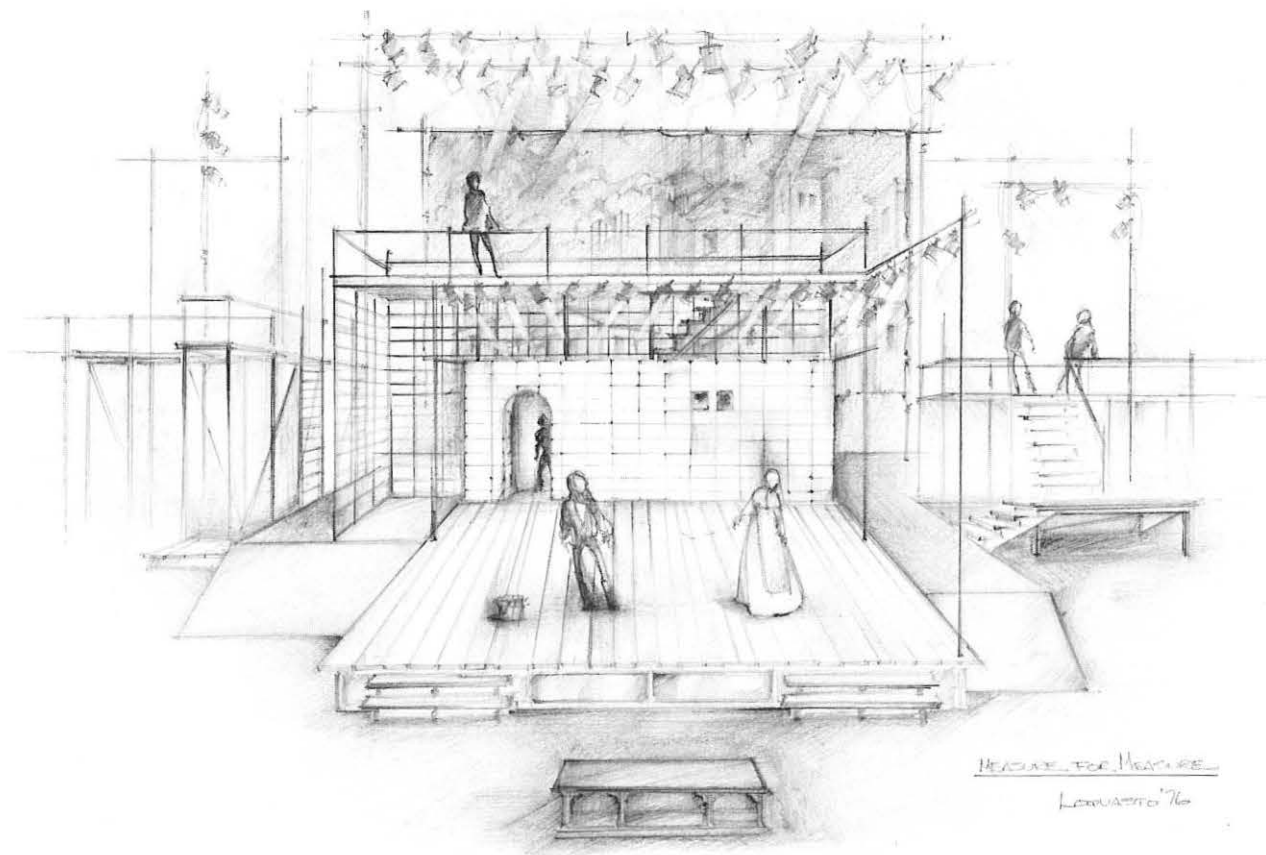
For theatre projects he begins by reading the script, but he does not like to do so until the director has been chosen, since he feels that the basic concepts must come from the director—"it's usually the collaboration with the director that is the fun of the project and that attracts me the most." In general he wants to do plays that provide "an opportunity to do something important—not important in terms of fame or fortune—but important to my development." What Loquasto seems to want most from a director is the creation of a positive working atmosphere that allows ideas to develop, to be tossed around, to "gestate and change." Nikos Psacharopoulos, artistic director of the Williamstown Theatre Festival and a former professor at Yale is, according to Loquasto who designed dozens of pro-

ductions for him through the late 1960s and early 1970s, ideal in this respect. He “allows you to search out production values in a play. He points out ways of exploring a play that give it a kind of physical and visual energy. He sets up an atmosphere in which the designer can pursue an idea.”

This seems to be the key to Loquasto’s method. Rarely does an idea spring full-blown into his head. He likes to pick a director’s brain, mull over ideas, let things evolve and change. Frequently he builds several models, changing elements or whole concepts each time as he did with *Bent*. A ballet he did for Glen Tetley is typical. Several models were constructed, each one a pared down version of the pre-

vious. “He’s choreographing,” Loquasto explains, “and you’ve designed it—but you’re still finessing the design, so you’re all working together. That, of course, is quite exciting.” But dance can frequently be frustrating for someone who thrives on collaboration since the designer is sometimes not brought in until the work is otherwise complete.

Film can present similar problems. “It’s really the director and the cinematographer’s world,” he says. Your job [as production designer] is more of a service. You are there to surround the director with appropriate choices.” His work on the film *Falling in Love* (1984), directed by Ulu Grosbard, however, was much more collaborative. (He had previously



Pencil sketch for Measure for Measure (Delacorte Theater, 1975). Although typically angular and frontal, the set was asymmetrical so as to create a degree of physical and spatial tension.

worked with Grosbard on several stage plays, including *American Buffalo*.)

"Process" is a word that comes up over and over as Loquasto describes his work, and it seems that the process is as exciting and important for him as the finished product. For this reason Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* (New York Shakespeare Festival, 1978) was one of his favorite productions, primarily because of the relationship he established with director Robert Woodruff "who allowed the design to evolve in a totally individual manner." This set was also remarkable for its starkness—an almost bare stage with a refrigerator (which Loquasto referred to as an "icon").

Because of his enthusiasm for collaboration, he truly enjoys working in the resident theatres which provide more opportunity for experimentation and exploration in a relatively unpressured environment than the Broadway theatre. He is also impressed with the wealth of "talented, skilled young technicians and the great spirit with which they work" at these theatres.

The most successful designs seem to happen quickly but "sometimes the process goes on forever and you never feel at rest. Productions that have worked I don't think about, but the ones that have been tortured or twisted are always with me and I'll continually see something and say, 'That's what I should have done!'"

Because Loquasto does both sets and costumes, and because he is often working on several projects simultaneously in various media, he maintains a larger staff than many of his colleagues. His assistants generally consist of a draftsman/technician who also works at the shop, and a production assistant who deals with props, set dressing and the like (although Loquasto usually selects the set dressing himself). Costumes usually entail two more assistants who shop, dye, age costumes, alter and so on. For Woody Allen's *Zelig*, Loquasto had a whole team of assistants searching New York City and environs for appropriate period clothes that would match those in the black-and-white photos

and films incorporated into the movie. "My work habits are expensive," he states. "I am blessed with loyal assistants, many of whom work with me when they can and who will work for less when the job pays less. But they shouldn't have to suffer for my sins."

Like most successful designers, his days are long, generally starting at 8:30 a.m. and going to midnight. When working on a film they are even longer. The filming of *Falling in Love* and the New York premiere of *Cinderella* were happening simultaneously and it was not unusual for Loquasto to be decorating Saks Fifth Avenue for a film scene until 2:00 a.m., and then be in the American Ballet Theatre scene shop at 8 a.m. Such a schedule allows for little personal life. "I'm a pretty boring person," he jokes.

Loquasto was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania in 1944. He became interested in theatre in grade school and by age 15 was an apprentice at the Ross Common Playhouse in Wind Gap. During his second summer there he designed his first shows: *Gigi* and *Picnic*. He subsequently designed for other community theatres and did some acting at nearby Lafayette College in Easton when youngsters were needed. He attended Kings College in Wilkes-Barre where he was an English major. "I really wanted a liberal arts education," he states, "even though it was very apparent to me that I wanted to work in the theatre. I knew that if I didn't force myself to become familiar with other disciplines, I never would."

Loquasto feels that the strongest influence on his career was his work at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in Massachusetts where he worked in various capacities on and off for 11 summers beginning in 1965. It was there that he met Nikos Psacharopoulos who was influential in his attending Yale, and John Conklin, who was the resident designer then, and for whom he expresses the greatest respect and admiration. He envies Conklin's knowledge of art and literature, and his ability to draw upon and incorporate that knowledge into his work.

Loquasto says he patterned his basic approach to design on Conklin's process and learned "more about design from him than anyone."

He speaks with great enthusiasm of Yale and singles out Donald Oenslager and Michael Annals as especially influential. Loquasto attended from 1966 to 1969, the first years of Robert Brustein's reign, and remembers the general excitement created by such artists in residence as Jonathan Miller, Robert Lowell, Irene Worth and Kenneth Haigh, and the stimulus and provocation of the political and social upheaval of the period which engendered a generally creative atmosphere.

While at Yale he began to design for the Hartford Stage Company and the Long Wharf Theatre, and later for the Yale Repertory Theatre. It was through Conklin and such fellow Yale directors as Jeff Bleckner and A.J. Antoon that Loquasto made the move to New York and became associated with the New York Shakespeare Festival. His work in dance and film came about almost accidentally, the result of choreographers or directors seeing his theatre work. Lighting designer Jennifer Tipton recommended him to Twyla Tharp. He never expected to work in these fields and, in fact, remembers as a student thinking about classical ballet costume, "God, who would want to do this?"

He has done few operas and admits to being somewhat intimidated by the tradition. "You don't simply do a *Traviata* or a *Bohème* without knowing those operas inside and out," he says. Opera, he feels, should be left to those who thrive on it. "Dance has replaced what would probably have been my desire to work in opera."

Given his conceptual designs and his affinity for European directors and designers, one might expect Loquasto to long for some sort of European repertory situation and a season of classical European plays. But what he really wants to do is more American classics—not the somber, weighty plays



of O'Neill but something like *Arsenic and Old Lace*. "I want to do that desperately." In 1977, when he was primarily known for his realistic sets like *That Championship Season* and *American Buffalo*, he told a *New York Times* interviewer, "I suppose I've always had a flair for that kind of busy, chochka-filled set." Despite his subsequent work with Serban, Ciulei, and the ballet, he still does. His style may be in the tradition of Ming Cho Lee and Boris Aronson, but his heart is with Raymond Sovey—the designer of the original production of *Arsenic and Old Lace*.

Act II of The Cherry Orchard (Vivian Beaumont Theater, 1977) directed by Andrei Serban. This non-traditional, conceptual production of Chekhov upset many critics. Loquasto's design incorporated the iconography of Chekhov but none of the texture or mood associated with him. The setting seemed surreal: scenic elements stranded in the midst of a vast, white space.