

Isolation Chamber Design and Performance

Zac Hays, VCU Fine Art

V2d – 5.2017

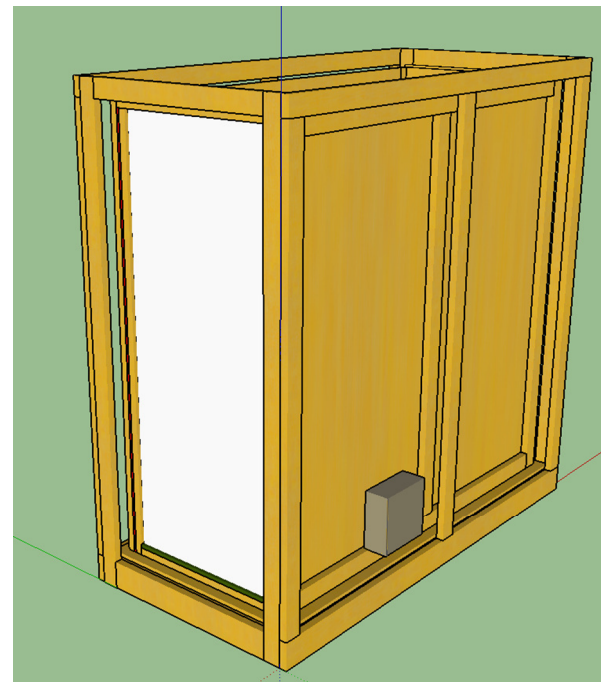
Summary: This isolation chamber was designed to remove as much evidence of the external world as possible, including sound, images, warmth and cold, variations in color and light – leaving the person inside isolated. The space is also designed to block the ability to lie down, sleep or sit comfortably. This deprivation of sensory input plus discomfort changes perception. This was part of my exploration of ‘evidence’ – challenging what it means when the external world is erased.

I built the isolation chamber then spent 10 hours inside, recording my observations. Video with audio was streamed over the internet as a performance. Although there was no publicity for the event, it was viewed over 1,800 times. The effect was apparently as interesting for others as it was for me. A video clip is available: www.zachays.com/after-update-1-16-preview

The design: To create a real sense of isolation, I built one box inside another – floating on pads of Sorbothane, which sharply reduces vibration and sound transmission. Double doors with weather strips sealed out sound and light.

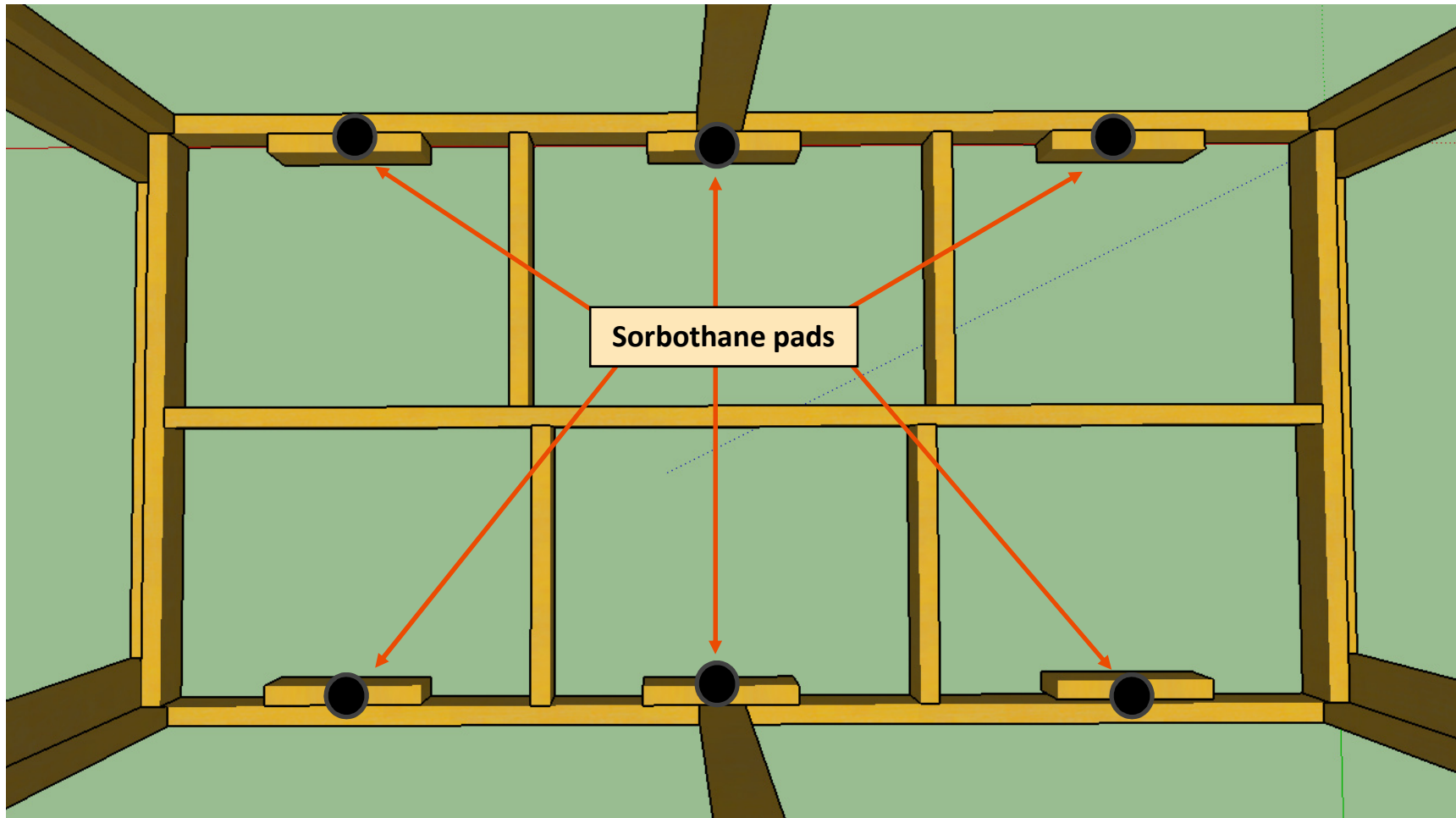
The space between the boxes was filled with Safe ‘n’ Sound rock wool, which reduced sound and insulated the inner box from temperature changes. The outer box rested on rubber wheels to reduce vibration / sound transmission.

The inner box was painted completely white with a light, fan and air supply that created ‘white noise’. A webcam with USB power was mounted at the bottom of the door.

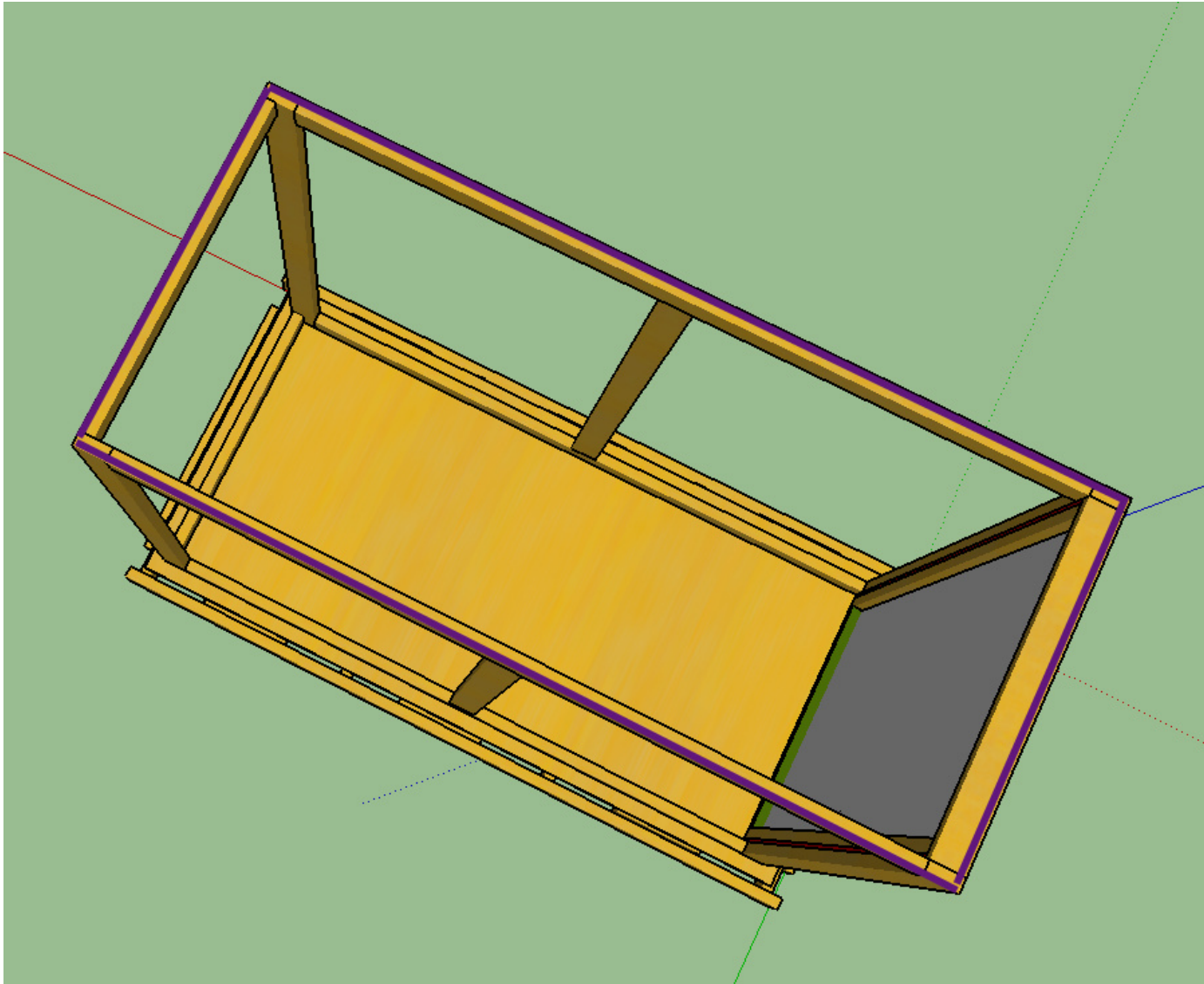


Inner box with outer box frame and fan

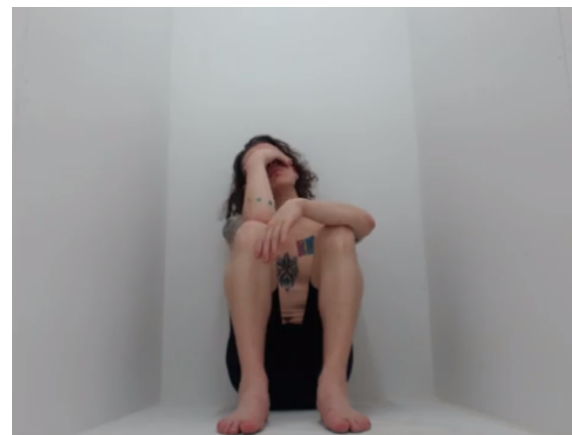
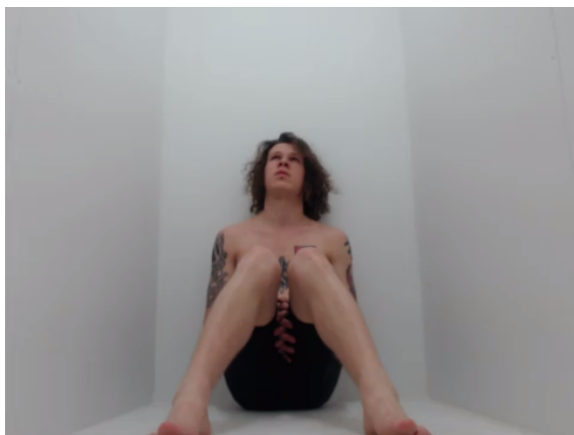
The base of the outer box: Six Sorbothane pads were mounted around the perimeter to allow the inner box to 'float' with no solid connections. Both boxes were covered with plywood, with sound deadening rock wool filling the space between:



The inner box: Basically a duplicate of the outer box; a frame covered with plywood and its own door. The isolation chamber was designed with SketchUp, a 3D program. These images were screen-capped from SketchUp:



Performance: I entered the isolation chamber and closed the doors on May 10th, 2017. Four students volunteered to serve shifts as the ‘safety crew’ in case anything went wrong – inside or outside of the box. A web cam streamed everything to the internet:



The experience exceeded my expectations. ‘Trapped’ in the isolation chamber and deprived of contact with the outside world and any evidence of sound and vision, I was left to internal reflection. This led to a break, a sense that I was not part of my body. Although I did not publicize the event there were > 1,800 views on the internet, which was surprising. The isolation chamber must have been significant even to people who were not inside it.

The isolation chamber experience was important to my art in general, emphasizing in a concrete way the importance of real, substantial evidence that I participate in to create a work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Zac Hays'.