CONDITIONS OF USE FOR THIS PDF

The images contained within this PDF may be used for private study, scholarship, and research only. They may not be published in print, posted on the internet, or exhibited. They may not be donated, sold, or otherwise transferred to another individual or repository without the written permission of The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

When publication is intended, publication-quality images must be obtained from SCALA Group, the Museum's agent for licensing and distribution of images to outside publishers and researchers.

If you wish to quote any of this material in a publication, an application for permission to publish must be submitted to the MoMA Archives. This stipulation also applies to dissertations and theses. All references to materials should cite the archival collection and folder, and acknowledge "The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York."

Whether publishing an image or quoting text, you are responsible for obtaining any consents or permissions which may be necessary in connection with any use of the archival materials, including, without limitation, any necessary authorizations from the copyright holder thereof or from any individual depicted therein.

In requesting and accepting this reproduction, you are agreeing to indemnify and hold harmless The Museum of Modern Art, its agents and employees against all claims, demands, costs and expenses incurred by copyright infringement or any other legal or regulatory cause of action arising from the use of this material.

NOTICE: WARNING CONCERNING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

FOR STUDY PURPOSES ONLY. NOT FOR REPRODUCTION.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Tomkins	IV.C.19

Dante Drawings

Dante Drawings
see Bernice Rose's
MoMA catalog,
ca 1984.

eard about the Inferno but I'd never read it.
ress my perception to someting specific,
I walked into the john to take a shit, and
just happened like that, from one minute to
at the time I had six cantos finished --
for a Guggenheim but he didn't know why);
erno as all dark. I asked if he'd ever tried

t, literary rather than visual and
translated into symbols, which is something
g. I still think my favorite illustrations
treated it like a combination road map and
ght illustration was one of the most unexplored

easuring. If the most important image on
I would make it a proportionate size. The
his or her favorite event can pull a
r distortion.

do the rest of it. Even though Bob Whitman

fer technique right away. I already had that.
Black Mountain. We stayed in a cheap hotel
ys liked to draw, I liked the intimacy of
quality of my painting. But I felt I had
in drawing, to incorporate my own way of
e. I said I wouldn't come back from Cuba
until I'd found it, and luckily I did. I still have several drawings from
that trip. There was a hurricane, which I greatly enjoyed. There were
also several fights a day in the hall of the hotel, and at least one
murder -- we left after two people got shot.

The man in the towel was "the most neutral popular image I could find in that scale." It was an ad for some golf club, he recalls, and appeared in every issue of Sports Illustrated. Stevenson was "the positive image of a politician." Nixon was the evil politician. (Bob's original plan was to include the handwritten text of the poem in Dante's own writing, printed

in reverse; he'd found it in a 15-pound volume. But he decided Dante was too visual for that. He also discovered in his research that Michelangelo had also illustrated the poem, but his drawings were lost at sea).

"Once I started in on Dante, I found the natural interruptions of living in New York, plus my impatience with the morality in Dante, which I didn't agree with, forced me into isolation. His morality I had to treat objectively -- the self-righteousness, the self-appointed conscience imposing guilt on old friends. He was the author, the hero, and the man who made the world he described. He ran into his teacher, and couldn't imagine what he was doing in hell! It might not have bothered Dante, but it bothered me.

"Anyway, I had to get out of New York. I was looking for an old fisherman's shack in the wilderness -- something that of course doesn't exist in this country any more. I found a storage room built out on the end of a wharf, which belonged to a motel in a dilapidated part of Treasure Island. The day I moved in, the woman who owned the motel had to shut down because her sister had fallen ill up north. I persuaded her that she would be very lucky to have me look after the place. So actually it turned out to be the closest thing to what I was looking for. Both Jasper and Ileana came down to visit me, and both left after two days. They found it sordid. But it was exactly what I needed. I stayed there six months, and I never knew anyone. I did the last half of it there. The Inferno builds up in intensity, and I really needed

FOR STUDY PURPOSES ONLY. NOT FOR REPRODUCTION.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Tomkins	IV.C.19

Dante Drawings

Took about 2½ years. "I had heard about the Inferno but I'd never read it. I was wondering if I could address my perception to something specific, as opposed to an abstraction. I walked into the john to take a shit, and walked out with the idea. It just happened like that, from one minute to the next. I talked to Ciardi at the time I had six cantos finished -- he said he would recommend me for a Guggenheim but he didn't know why; he'd always thought of the Inferno as all dark. I asked if he'd ever tried to draw with the lights out.

"Some cantos are very different, literary rather than visual and physical. All that had to be translated into symbols, which is something I was never interested in doing. I still think my favorite illustrations of it are the Botticellis - he treated it like a combination road map and cartoon. Also I'd always thought illustration was one of the most unexplored ideas in art.

"It was done practically by measuring. If the most important image on a page took only three words, I would make it a proportionate size. The concept of an artist isolating his or her favorite event can pull a particular passage into popular distortion.

"I think someday I'm going to do the rest of it. Even though Bob Whitman is working on the Paradiso.

"I got to the transfer technique right away. I already had that. I went to Cuba with Cy, from Black Mountain. We stayed in a cheap hotel right on the beach. I'd always liked to draw, I liked the intimacy of drawing as against the object quality of my painting. But I felt I had to find a way to use collage in drawing, to incorporate my own way of working on that intimate scale. I said I wouldn't come back from Cuba until I'd found it, and luckily I did. I still have several drawings from that trip. There was a hurricane, which I greatly enjoyed. There were also several fights a day in the hall of the hotel, and at least one murder -- we left after two people got shot.

The man in the towel was "the most neutral popular image I could find in that scale." It was an ad for some golf club, he recalls, and appeared in every issue of Sports Illustrated. Stevenson was "the positive image of a politician." Nixon was the evil politician. (Bob's original plan was to include the handwritten text of the poem in Dante's own writing, printed in reverse; he'd found it in a 15-pound volume. But he decided Dante was too visual for that. He also discovered in his research that Michelangelo had also illustrated the poem, but his drawings were lost at sea).

"Once I started in on Dante, I found the natural interruptions of living in New York, plus my impatience with the morality in Dante, which I didn't agree with, forced me into isolation. His morality I had to treat objectively -- the self-righteousness, the self-appointed conscience imposing guilt on old friends. He was the author, the hero, and the man who made the world he described. He ran into his teacher, and couldn't imagine what he was doing in hell! It might not have bothered Dante, but it bothered me.

"Anyway, I had to get out of New York. I was looking for an old fisherman's shack in the wilderness -- something that of course doesn't exist in this country any more. I found a storage room built out on the end of a wharf, which belonged to a motel in a dilapidated part of Treasure Island. The day I moved in, the woman who owned the motel had to shut down because her sister had fallen ill up north. I persuaded her that she would be very lucky to have me look after the place. So actually it turned out to be the closest thing to what I was looking for. Both Jasper and Ileana came down to visit me, and both left after two days. They found it sordid. But it was exactly what I needed. I stayed there six months, and I never knew anyone. I did the last half of it there. The Inferno builds up in intensity, and I really needed the isolation.

"About three-quarters of the way through I ran out of imgges. The ad for he golf club had stopped running. But I was able to get back issues from a jobber in New Jersey."

FOR STUDY PURPOSES ONLY. NOT FOR REPRODUCTION.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Tomkins	IV.C.19

LATE 1950s

Rauschenberg -- Dante Illustrations (1959-60)

R. had heard about Dante but never read the poem. From what he'd heard, he thought it might be useful as a vehicle for drawings, which he was ~~xxxxx~~ interested in ~~xxx~~ then. The trouble with drawing was that, unlike painting where one picture suggested another, each drawing tended to end in itself. R. needed a vehicle to keep him going. "I wanted to make more drawings."

He worked on the Dante series for two years, but never read more than two cantos ahead of the one he was illustrating. Read no commentaries on the poem. Used John Ciardi's translation mostly. Had two others, Longfellow's and , which he checked occasionally when he was unsure of an image. "But I seemed to be able to move with Ciardi, and usually it was Ciardi's image that seemed right to me." He had seen one or two of the Botticelli illustrations and those by Dore, but not the Grosz. He liked the Botticelli, which had the intimate quality that makes a drawing (he feels). His decision was to illustrate every canto, not just try to select high spots (his usual refusal to make this sort of choice).

[R. had discovered the transfer technique in a hotel room in Cuba, where he had gone in 1958? ~~or 59~~ from Key West, finding the air fare was only fourteen dollars. (He had gone south because he needed warmth and sunshine). He wanted to do drawings, needed a means of getting content into them -- he could reproduce things all right, but couldn't get anything into them beyond reproduction as with paintings. In Cuba, he hit on the rubbing technique, doing it first dry, using comic strips from newspapers and magazines. Later he found it was easier to wet the paper first with turpentine. Recently he has refined the process even further, using lighter fluid and an empty ballpoint pen. The first drawing now hangs on his wall in studio -- has a little collage in it.]

"I think art is more like the real world when it's made out if it," says R. Images taken from magazines etc have an effect of immediacy, the sense of another life that he likes. But he ~~xxxxx~~ sees them as material to be used, images to be collaborated with, not controlled. R. never quite knows, when he uses them, how they will look, how the inks will come up, etc. Thus they avoid the fixed concept. "The other way to make a painting is to have a conception and then execute it. That doesn't interest me at all." R. wants to collaborate with his materials, let the picture grow out of their interaction with each other and with him, as another element. He admits that a point is reached, finally, when a picture is fixed, finished; but during the process any thing can literally happen, and whatever happens affects everything else. By thus having sufficient respect for the materials he uses, R. hopes to achieve effects that are more interesting than the straight one-to-one relationship of conception:execution.

"I paint in order to learn something new about painting." Finds this way of working much more exciting; painting becomes an adventure. "It really is more interesting to have to go out and find materials, have encounters, get new sensations, go all over the place, as opposed to sitting in the studio all day long."

Guggenheim Failure

When R. had done six of the Dante drawings, he decided he wanted money

FOR STUDY PURPOSES ONLY. NOT FOR REPRODUCTION.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Tomkins	IV.C.19

Other personalities: Kennedy represents transitional figure at the head of things. Stevenson is Virgil, the "eternal figure." Nixon is the political opposition, who appears to be standing in Dante's river of blood.

More on Dante

Worked on them for two years continuously, doing a large painting now and then just because it was so nearly painful to work in the small scale of the drawings. After he had done six he applied for the Guggenheim, didn't get it, then had a hard time getting back into the illustrations because by then it had started to seem like a "project," and the spirit of the first six was hard to recapture.

Fortunately his work started to sell about this time, and there was enough money coming in to keep going.

"Everybody else had illustrated Dante the writer," says R., "but I wanted to show Dante the character in the story. There's a confusion there, and it existed in Dante's mind too, because sometimes he's one and sometimes he's the other -- he actually talks about genius at one point, and says how he knows all about it."

The little man with the towel around him is an ad for golf clubs taken from Sports Illustrated. The ad ran for several weeks, and showed golf clubs the whole family could use, with father, mother, and two children pictured on graph paper. R, used father mainly, but was delighted to have opportunity to use the child in the canto where Virgil carried Dante across a river, picking him up so easily that he might have been a child...

Towards the end, R. had to get away. "It was a particularly bad time for personal reasons. It seemed like everybody I knew was splitting up and getting divorced, so that when the phone rang it was usually about, 'Bob, I jjust had to talk to someone...' The telephone became a disastrous interruption, because it was so hard to get back into the drawings afterward. So R. packed up and went down to Florida. He found a shabby tourist cabin in Treasure Island, out over the water and in a sort of semi-commercial neighborhood, so there wasn't even the distraction of picturesque surroundings, and finished the series here in three months of hard work. At one point he was hung up because he needed more copies of the man in the golf ad, was negotiating with a back date magazine man in NJ looking for issues with the ad in it, but he finally got the copies he needed.

How MMA Got the Dante Drawings

One day last spring (1963), an oriental gentleman came into Castellis and told Ivan Karp (Castelli being out) that he was interested in buying the Dante drawings for the Modern Museum. Karp was very sceptical. He returned later and repeated this information to Castelli, who asked him if he knew how much they cost. He said yes, $30,000 -- but perhaps he could have them for $25,000. No, said Leo. Without further question, the man agreed. He said he was going away to Africa but would return April 24 and complete the arrangements. Castelli, still sceptical himself, made inquiries and found that the new customer, whom he had never seen, was a Chinese architect, who had a rich wife and an interest in jazz (as part owner of the Five Spot). He had dined previously with Barr, and asked him if he would like the drawings (which Barr liked) as a gift, explaining that it was income tax time and he would rather give something to the museum than to the govt (Barr had mentioned the R. drawings in conversation). Upshot was that the Chinese came back from Africa, bought the drawings, gave them to museum. Castelli met him a few days later and asked why. "I like to surprise people," he said.

FOR STUDY PURPOSES ONLY. NOT FOR REPRODUCTION.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Tomkins	IV.C.19

to spend a year on the rest. Went about it very systematically, chose sponsors with great care (Dorothy Miller, George Wittenborn, etc), using very few other artists. "Guggenheims go to printmakers, not to artists who are breaking new ground." He submitted his project, which seemed pretty respectable (Dante), and also one large drawing and one painting, ~~xxxxxx~~ The painting was one he had done to go in an expensive gold leaf frame that had been made originally for Red and proved to be too small. The painting itself was "embarrassingly lyrical," with bright colors, not much foreign material, definitely not "rough." Instead of other paintings, he ~~xxxx~~ submitted photographs, which he learned made his work look more acceptable, for some reason -- without the physical presence of objects in originals, somewhat easier to take. The day after the official judging, the secretary of the G committee called to say he was "very lucky," but that they just wanted to see a little more of his work. R's heart sank. "I knew I was cooked. It was just like I was being asked to do myself in," And not only for the next year, but for the next three or four, because Guggenheims are notoriously easy to renew. What could he send that wouldn't upset them? He finally sent in two more paintings, and the next day his applicated was turned down.

helmets + gas masks for demon squads; handless clocks for eternity; X for double-cross; blue arrow = desire for salvation (arrow also used for transitions, etc); Olympic games winners for giants;

R said he found it difficult to deal with the "beast" image "because our contact with animals is now of little mystery or terror."

Virgil sometimes wears divers wetsuit or astronaut garb.

R. sometimes completely abstract

From John Ciardi's translation.

FOR STUDY PURPOSES ONLY. NOT FOR REPRODUCTION.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Tomkins	IV.C.19

~~1950s~~

After the Embassy performance, R. helped Jean and Niki one day when they were being filmed by German TV (picture shoot). Afterwards, the three of them decided to make something. Jean had given Bob a big door frame he'd found. Bob took a sheet hanging out to dry in the Impasse, and knotted it into the frame, together with some other oddments -- springs, pieces of machinery, and painted it white. They later ~~xxxxx~~ sent this to the "Anti-Proces" show in Milan, where it was held up in customs until opening night, finally arrived by truck about midnight and was unloaded, to loud cheers -- this added to R's European reputation as a hero. (see below)

R's show at Daniel Cordier was immensely influential in Paris. The French artists are not really chauvinistic, and they accepted him at once. "He took them out of painting," says Ileana, "and this made him a hero." Pierre Restany, who is chauvinistic and who had been very much opposed to R. previously, came around somewhat after all his European artists showed their enthusiasm. Says Ileana: "The French get an idea, and then they do something. Restany had the idea, and he felt Rauschenberg

helmets + gas masks for demon squads; handless clocks for eternity; X for double-cross; blue arrow = desire for salvation (arrow also used for transitions, etc); Olympic games winners for giants;

R said he found it difficult to deal with the "beast" image "because our contact with animals is now of little mystery or terror."

Virgil sometimes wears diver's wetsuit or astronaut garb.

R. sometimes completely abstract

from John Ciardi's translation.

FOR STUDY PURPOSES ONLY. NOT FOR REPRODUCTION.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection: Tomkins	Series.Folder: IV.C.19

Canto XII Virgil becomes Adlai Stevenson, the man of intellect; Dante is Kennedy; Nixon boils in a river of blood with the Violent Against Their Neighbors.

R's images: stabbing lines suggest stinging wasps; a dead fish to suggest putrid mire; racing cars for the roar + violence of Hell; riot police with helmets + gas masks for demon squads; hardless clocks for eternity; X for double-cross; blue arrow = desire for salvation (arrow also used for transitions, etc); Olympic games winners for giants;

R said he found it difficult to deal with the "beast" image "because our contact with animals is now of little mystery or terror."

Virgil sometimes wears diver's wetsuit or astronaut garb.

R. sometimes completely abstract

From John Ciardi's translation.

FOR STUDY PURPOSES ONLY. NOT FOR REPRODUCTION.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Tomkins	IV.C.19

Dante Drawings

"Rauschenberg's achievement in these visually beautiful and poetically eloquent drawings is that he rises above the level of a tour de force to parallel in terms of avant-garde art the literary achievement of James Joyce in his comparable transformation of Homer's hero and his wanderings in 'Ulysses.'" - John Canaday, NYT, 12/19/64

rt Rauschenberg

rty-four "Combine
naming which is
i photographic

the poem and
irit, moods
depict any

into that of
erhaps, with
and includes
rn dress, etc.
g freedoms of
ed simultan-
nd complex
ctivity and
urative, from

eted during
the project
o my financial
tion to the
our illustra-

ed for financial
orking on this
ure, it has
become impossible for me to continue the project and, at the same time, to work at other aspects of my profession which might be remunerative. A Fellowship would be a valuable solution to this problem, allowing me fully to dedicate myself to the project for the necessary time and to work at it and treat it as one large work, without the interruptions which necessitate frequent retrogressions and new beginnings.

The Leo Castelli Gallery intends to exhibit the entire set of illustrations when they are completed. And if no art publisher is interested in using them at that time, Mr. Castelli expects to publish them privately.

I shall be living in New York City and, while referring to several translations of the "Inferno", will work, primarily, from John Ciardi's translation.

FOR STUDY PURPOSES ONLY. NOT FOR REPRODUCTION.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Tomkins	IV.C.19

Dante Drawings (started late 1958 or early 1959)

Even Emile Genauer, in Trib of 12/21/65, found these "have a grandeur of theme common to the old masters... They remain soft-spoken, subtle, unbelievably effective projections of Dante's own bitter revelations."

Life devoted six pages to Them (Dec. 17, 1965) (or rather, to a single painting-panorama commissioned by the editors of Life and called "A Modern Inferno.")

Series was shown at MOMA from Dec. 21 '65 thru March 6, '66; then circulated abroad under Internatl. Council

Robert Rauschenberg

thirty-four "Combine
and naming which is
, and photographic

of the poem and
e spirit, moods
n to depict any
m.

sely into that of
g, perhaps, with
nce; and includes
modern dress, etc.
oying freedoms of
sented simultan-
ge and complex
of activity and
figurative, from

ompleted during
put the project
nd to my financial
ttention to the
ty-four illustra-

e used for financial
le working on this
nature, it has
oject and, at the
same time, to work at other aspects of my profession which might be remunerative. A Fellowship would be a valuable solution to this problem, allowing me fully to dedicate myself to the project for the necessary time and to work at it and treat it as one large work, without the interruptions which necessitate frequent retrogressions and new beginnings.

The Leo Castelli Gallery intends to exhibit the entire set of illustrations when they are completed. And if no art publisher is interested in using them at that time, Mr. Castelli expects to publish them privately.

I shall be living in New York City and, while referring to several translations of the "Inferno", will work, primarily, from John Ciardi's translation.

FOR STUDY PURPOSES ONLY. NOT FOR REPRODUCTION.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	Tomkins	IV.C.19

Robert Rauschenberg

PLANS

I plan to illustrate Dante's "Inferno" with thirty-four "Combine Drawings", a technique of my own invention and naming which is involved with the use of watercolor, pencil, and photographic transfers.

I am making one illustration for each canto of the poem and each illustration is an attempt to evoke the spirit, moods and actions of the entire canto, rather than to depict any particular incident which occurs in the poem.

The "look" of these illustrations falls loosely into that of contemporary United States abstract painting, perhaps, with a certain forward use of materials in evidence; and includes photographic aspects of contemporary life, modern dress, etc. The visual focus tends to be multiple, employing freedoms of scale and distances: near and far being presented simultaneously. The result seems to indicate a large and complex "view" or "scene", containing implications of activity and changes of movement from the literal to the figurative, from the general to the specific.

The first six of these illustrations were completed during five months of this year, but I have had to put the project aside, for the time being, in order to attend to my financial needs. I believe that if I can give full attention to the "Inferno" I will be able to finish the thirty-four illustrations within one year.

If a Fellowship be awarded to me, it will be used for financial support for myself and materials needed while working on this proposed project. Because of its extended nature, it has become impossible for me to continue the project and, at the same time, to work at other aspects of my profession which might be remunerative. A Fellowship would be a valuable solution to this problem, allowing me fully to dedicate myself to the project for the necessary time and to work at it and treat it as one large work, without the interruptions which necessitate frequent retrogressions and new beginnings.

The Leo Castelli Gallery intends to exhibit the entire set of illustrations when they are completed. And if no art publisher is interested in using them at that time, Mr. Castelli expects to publish them privately.

I shall be living in New York City and, while referring to several translations of the "Inferno", will work, primarily, from John Ciardi's translation.