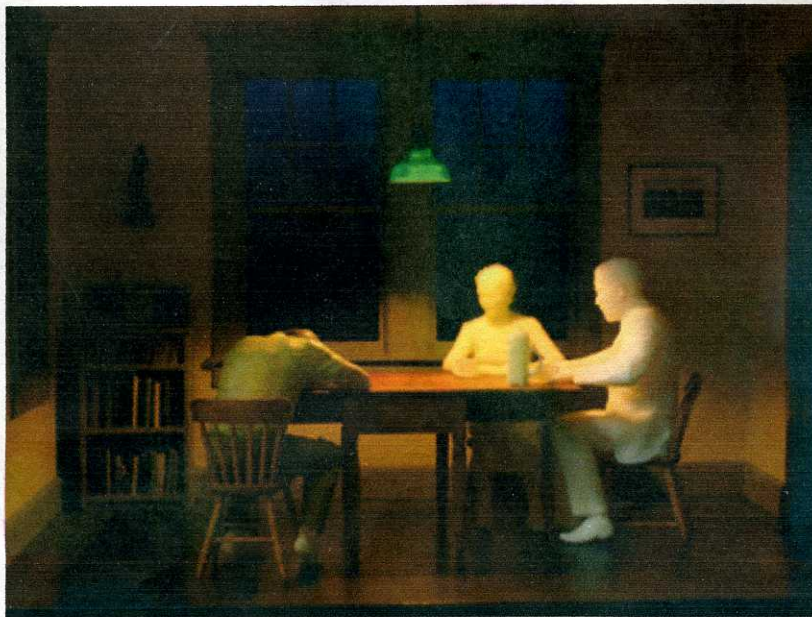


## **Robert Taplin (<http://www.nccsc.net/2009/6/1/robert-taplin>)**

In his recent exhibition, "Everything Imagined Is Real," at Winston Wachter Fine Art in New York City, Robert Taplin presented a series of nine sculpted contemporary scenes (all 2008) based on Dante's *Inferno*. In the first, *I. Thus My Soul Which Was Still in Flight (The Dark Wood)*, a groggy, naked man climbs out of a bed in which a woman is still asleep. The bed—a large doll's size—stands on a small sisal rug, set on a Pottery Barn diagonal to its massive pedestal, as if on a rotating stage. The man's thick-necked, middle-aged body, the woman and the bedclothes are all cast in resin and sketchily painted. The polychrome on the man's torso and limbs is in harmony with the rendering of his form, but on his face it's more detailed, emphasizing his indeterminate expression, with half-open mouth and one eye more bruised and wearier than the other. This tableau is taken from Dante's first canto, "as he, who with laboring breath has escaped from the deep to the shore, turns to gaze at the churning waters, thus my soul, which was still in flight, turned back to look again at the pass which had never yet let any go alive." Taplin, who studied medieval literature and theater design and learned Italian so that he could read Dante in the original, has posted his direct prose translations of fragments of the *Inferno* next to his sculptures, so we can see that he has sculpturally translated and adapted rather than illustrated them. By setting Dante's encounters with unrepentant sinners in our ordinary present, among common American architecture and furnishings and sometimes bathed in the blue glow of television screens, among the hellish circumstances we watch as news, he has created vivid narrative sculptures that twist and teach our perceptions.



Robert Taplin, II. *She Turned Away (Beatrice Sends Virgil to Dante)*, 2008  
Courtesy Winston Wächter Fine Art, New York City

This first one is, bluntly, a painted sculpture and not a miniature special-effects model. There's wit in the color choices: the forest green blanket that still covers the woman is crumpled and peaked, like a textbook illustration of a mountain pass, and the wrinkled blue sheets suggest Dante's churning waters. Taplin has clearly studied the painted sculptures of Raymond Mason,

