

R O B E R T

T A P L I N

ROBERT TAPLIN / SCULPTURE

October 14 - November 15, 1997

Opening Reception Friday, October 17, 6-9 pm

Gallery Hours Tuesday-Saturday 12-6 pm

Wednesday til 8 pm

TRANS HUDSON GALLERY

416 West 13 Street

New York, NY 10014

Joseph Szoecs, Director

Tel 212/242-3232



*"...I do not think that anyone can understand another human being by his own actions
and passions, as a brute beast can. Nor can it happen by a reflection of the spirit
that he can penetrate another's being, as angels can, because the human spirit
is cloaked in the grossness and darkness of its mortal body."*

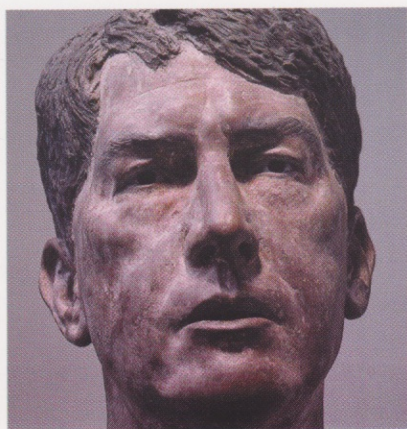
DANTE ALIGHIERI, DE VULGARI ELOQUENTIA [ON THE ELOQUENCE OF THE VERNACULAR]

Dante's question—how anyone can understand another human being—is at the core of these recent figurative sculptures by Robert Taplin. Look, for example, at the head from “All The Nails Pointed In (Bob).” Judging by the imperial hook of the nose, this could be a successful son of the ruling class. Except that something misshapes it from the inside out. That something has puffed the sinus beyond the cheek bone, pulled the chin back, sagged the flesh below the ears. And the eyes: one tries to focus on you but can't, the other wanders to the horizon and beyond. Taplin manages to reveal a troubled human spirit, even though we can't read exactly what's wrong through the “grossness and darkness” of the mortal body.



Or, go to the smaller figure in “Learn As Leaves Must Learn To Fall (Susan)” and stay a little. The more you look, the more dangerous and ancient it seems, until it's easier to turn away than try to get to the bottom of whatever sorrow has caused her to stand this way—the weight resigned to the hips, the arms and legs twisted in such a complicated arrangement it's as if standing was survival, balance resistance. Turn to the large head and see that resistance echoed and enlarged. Even though we know this was molded out of clay, the head seems to have been shaped by blows and is, just imperceptibly, still ringing.

Taplin's use of juxtaposition pushes us to ask how we understand any of this—how we read the human figure. A glance at the large head from “Don't Look Away (Alex)”



reveals an androgynous, public portrait. At the same time, the small full-length figure shows us a woman caught in a private moment of...is that embarrassment or ecstasy? In a similar way, “The Body Is A Frail Leaf, The Mind Is A Fortress” tells its story of relationship through relationship. The male seems curiously removed, passive, except that the tensed, out-turned feet and the one hand marking time make us wonder what he's denying. (The mind is a fortress, perhaps, but under siege.) Meanwhile, the composition of the blindfolded woman's body—the legs veed, the inverted triangle of the breast and ribs, the head and shoulders slumped—all direct us to the unprotected pubis: more sacrificial than

sexual, as if it was being offered up. The juxtaposition of the two bodies is what sparks the narrative.

Robert Taplin's outwardly modest sculpture tells complex stories in the simplest possible language. It is, in short, vernacular and challenges us to do what Dante claims only angels can: “to penetrate another's being.”

DANIEL JESSE WOLFF

Daniel Jesse Wolff writes frequently on popular culture, photography, and literature.

1. "DON'T LOOK AWAY (ALEX)" 1997
CONCRETE, STEEL 65" X 40" X 24"
2. "THE BODY IS A FRAIL LEAF, THE MIND IS A FORTRESS" 1994
CONCRETE, BRASS, WOOD, FIGURES 22" H, 25" H
3. "LEARN AS LEAVES MUST LEARN TO FALL (SUSAN)" 1995
CONCRETE ON WOOD BASES, FIGURE 33" H, HEAD 35" H
4. "ALL THE NAILS POINTED IN (BOB)" 1997
CONCRETE, STEEL, HEAD 27" H
5. "INTERNAL EXILE (EMILY)" 1995
CONCRETE ON WOOD BASE, FIGURE 32" H

