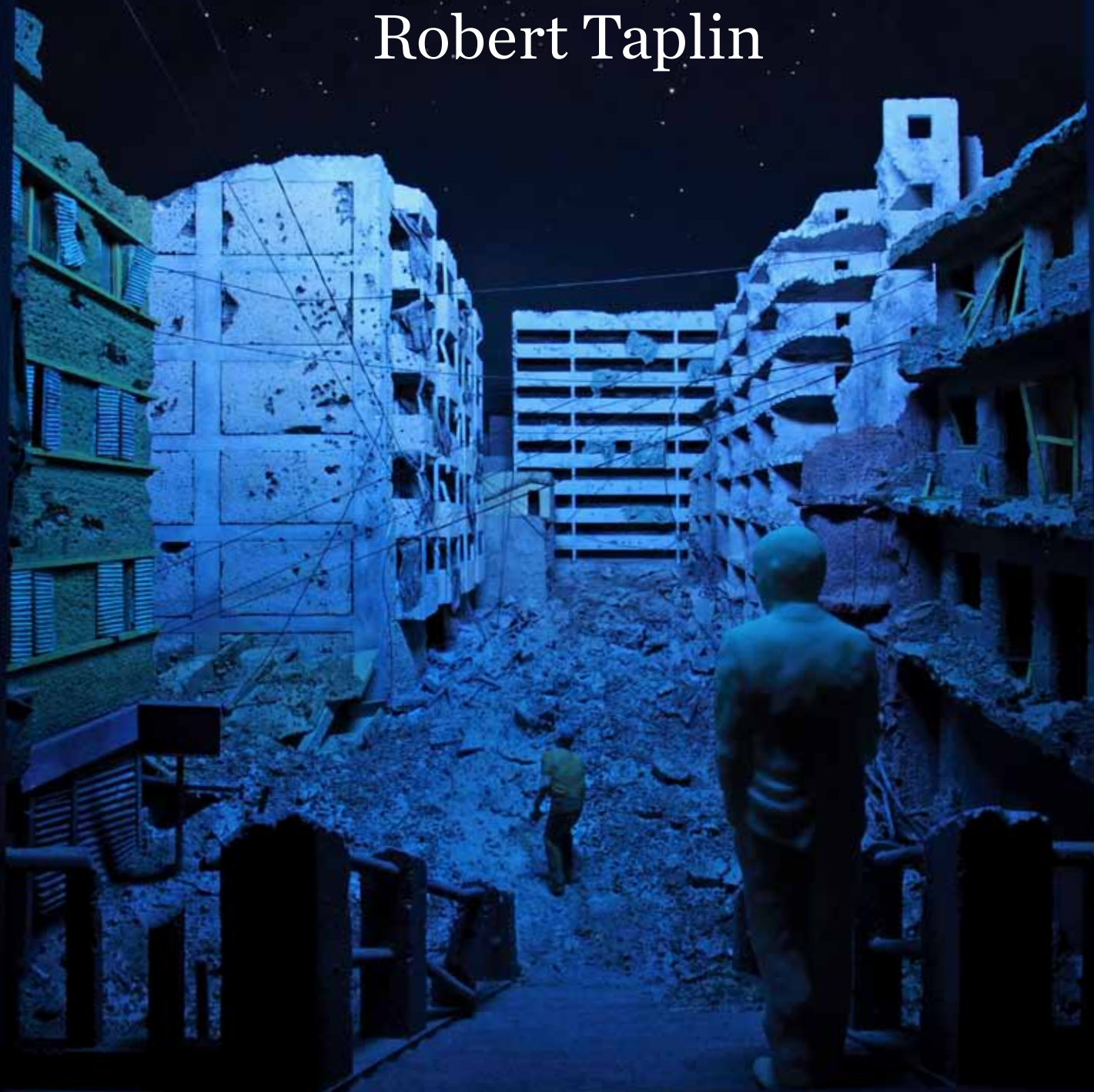


Robert Taplin





DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF RICHARD BARNES:
TEACHER, POET, PLAYWRIGHT, MUSICIAN.
"DANTE SPOKE TO HIM."

Robert Taplin

TWO SCULPTURE SERIES
2006-2016

Everything Imagined is Real (After Dante)
History of Punch



Welcome to New Haven, 1978, steel, lights, found objects, 24' x 12' x 12'
Installation at Union Square, NYC, sponsored by The Public Art Fund

A Reminiscence

BY ROBERT TAPLIN

IN 1970 I TOOK A LEAVE OF ABSENCE from Pomona College, where I was studying medieval literature with the remarkable poet and medievalist Richard Barnes. I had the good fortune to spend six months in Italy, mostly in Florence and Perugia, learning Italian so I could read Dante in the original. As a young American who had never spent any time in Europe, I was struck with tremendous force by the early Italian art I saw in those six months. I had no interest in anything past the early Renaissance. I'd take Ruskin's Mornings in Florence—incredible free lectures from a master—and go do just what he asked. The Giotto's and Massaccio's, Donatello's and Della Robbia's of Florence and Padua; the Duccio Maesta in Siena; the Piero della Francesca's of Arezzo and San Sepulcro—all these made a lasting impression. I also spent a week at Chartres, living in the hostel and going up daily to the Cathedral to draw and listen to a marvelously eccentric ex-pat Englishman who every morning gave fabulous, unofficial lecture-tours on specific aspects of the Cathedral. He was a down-at-the-heels Ruskin-in-exile with an encyclopedic knowledge of Chartres.

Years later, after a decade of struggling to find my way in the vocabulary of late modernism, I read Meyer Shapiro's groundbreaking book on Moissac and Romanesque sculpture. He confirmed my early feeling that the medieval art of France and Italy was both highly demonstrative and formally brilliant. I had already begun to work my way back through early David Smith and Giacometti to the three great European sculptors of the end of the nineteenth century—Rodin, Degas, and Medardo Rosso. In the early '80s, the notion that you could abandon some of the ideals of modernism and return to a narrative, imagistic way of making sculpture seemed highly unlikely. Some of the painters and photographers of my generation were exploring these possibilities, but not the sculptors. The expressionist sculpture of Europeans like Lüpertz and

Baselitz seemed to fall into the old rut of a highly generalized "Images of Man" approach. Gormley's efforts to make a figure that was a place not a protagonist seemed like an extension of Minimalist ideas. Painters like Golub and Fischl interested me much more, as did the Imagists of Chicago and California. But as the '80s wore on a group of mostly female sculptors started to touch on these issues in the context of a renewed interest in the "body." Kiki Smith and Judith Shea led the way. In these early years the emphasis was on absence, not presence; the abject, not the animated. These artists were circumspect about embracing a fully dramatic, narrative approach, and initially I felt as if I had the field to myself. Gradually I became aware that photographers as different as Jeff Wall and Sally Mann were interested in some of the same problems.

In 1977 a poet friend, Daniel Wolff, and I had done a public project, *Nine Views of New Haven*, which consisted of nine "viewers"—hand-cranked peep shows—sited on the streets of New Haven for a month. Then in 1978 the Public Art fund sponsored an exhibition of all nine in a small arcade I built for the south end of Union Square in New York. Taken as a sequence, the set told a story of unrequited love, loosely modeled on Dante's early book of poems *The Vita Nuova* (The New Life), in which the whole affair seems like a crazy fantasy in the mind of a hyper-sensitized dreamer. Nearly thirty years went by before I embarked on the project of making another set of nine sculptures based on the first nine cantos of Dante's *Inferno*. (This series was first exhibited in New York City at Winston Wachter Fine Arts in 2008 and has been shown twice more, at MASS MoCA and Grounds for Sculpture.) I had spent six months rereading the *Inferno*, drawing, taking notes, and thinking I was crazy to be entering territory already so heavily trod. Eventually I chose a set of nine short verses, one from each of the first nine cantos, to serve as a springboard for what became *Everything Imagined Is Real (After Dante)*. The idea was to construct from these verses a story parallel to the one Dante tells, following the emotional and to some extent the narrative progress of the original, but without the theology and metaphysics. In search of contemporary visual correlatives



The Coals, 1985, forged steel, 60" x 72" x 36"

to the circles of Dante's hell, I turned increasingly to photographic images of human suffering, particularly those occasioned by war and its attendant catastrophes.

Susan Sontag and others have wondered if the force with which early photographic depictions of human misery struck their first viewers has worn down with time. As the daily flood of painful imagery has turned into a blur, a constant irritant like traffic or smog, it now also brings with it a double-edged kind of guilt—guilt at our callousness and guilt at the knowledge that our comfort and security are upheld by others' misery. Add to that the often startling beauty of the work of many contemporary photojournalists, and my fascination with images of modern war and displacement began to add up to a psychological net, which felt similar to the cycles of self-recrimination familiar to anyone who has found himself lost in the dark wood in the middle of the path of his life. With Dante I decided to go farther in to find a way out. Working mostly from photojournalistic sources and a few personal memories, I began to see that the only way an individual who has never experienced the modern hell of war and displace-

ment might hope to understand it was by extrapolating from the much less graphic personal misery of an individual life. This is also the method of Dante's *Inferno*. However, much of the moral framework of Dante's work has been upended in my version. Whereas the "souls" Dante encounters are all guilty, in *Everything Imagined* the ghosts we meet are likely innocent. And while Dante's descent into Hell is the prologue to a long ascent to God, the future for the protagonist of *Everything Imagined* is uncertain at best. In the *Inferno* the reader sometimes sees Dante as a character in the drama and sometimes sees the drama through Dante's eyes, but the narrator (and so the reader) always maintains a lofty righteousness as he surveys the damned. There are moments of fear and pity but never the sense that we might or should trade places with the condemned. In *Everything Imagined* we also see the protagonist and what he sees, but by the end of the series both protagonist and viewer have been made complicit with the events depicted.

Dante's *Inferno* fits in the tradition of the medieval dream poem in which the poet falls asleep and has a dream so vivid that the reader begins to mistake it for reality. When we and the poet wake, the world in which we've been immersed vanishes, but the emotions it invoked in us stay lodged fast in our psyche. The chaos and suffering that suffuse the world at large, daily made palpable to us by the media, are like some terrible nightmare that we must put aside just to carry on with our daily lives. And yet all the while that nightmare seems to be drawing closer, whether we're prepared to deal with it or not.

THE SECOND SERIES OF SCULPTURES featured in this book, "History of Punch," was started before the Dante project and continued after it. My interest in puppetry also dates back to my years at Pomona College. I was involved in the theater program there primarily as a stage designer, studying with David Flaten. The director of the theater program was a Brecht specialist, Andrew Doe. The whole Brechtian ethos, particularly its

non-naturalistic way of telling a story, was a formative influence on me. The "alienation effect," which Brecht used purposefully to break up the theatrical illusion and the audience's identification with the characters on stage before setting it all back in motion, seemed to me important then and still does. In 1973 the theater program organized a trip to Los Angeles to see a production of the National Bunraku Theater of Japan. At Pomona we staged several full-scale kabuki shows under the direction of Leonard Pronko, and the bunraku theater, in which two or three black-clad puppeteers operate half-scale puppets directly on stage in imitation of kabuki actors, made a tremendous impression on me. Punch, the deformed little puppet of Punch and Judy fame, found his way into several small sculptures I made in the late '80s and early '90s. Then sometime in the late '90s I saw an exhibition of Tiepolo's *Divertimento per li Regazzi* (Entertainment for the Children) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Derived from the earlier Commedia Dell'Arte tradition on the continent, this set of 100 or so pen-and-wash drawings from the turn of the nineteenth century use a Venetian carnival version of Punchinello in multiple to overrun a mildly surreal, late Baroque, Italian genre world. These drawings are roughly contemporaneous with Goya's "Caprichos," and they seemed to offer a way to dive fully into the world of genre. I adopted Punch and threw him into contemporary society.

In my early years as an aspiring modernist I always assumed that the Rococo was the most despicable and superficial period of European art. At some point, as the modernist period was in its death throes, I started to take a closer look. I remember sometime in the '90s looking at a portrait of a milkmaid by Boucher and being struck by how much more contemporary it seemed in tone and handling than the Bernini maquettes exhibited in the same room. In evidence were all the objectionable aspects of the Ancien Regime: the elite's spurious infatuation with the "people," the obvious undertone of sexual availability, the address to the "male gaze," etc. And yet there was also a frankness to it, an openness that seemed contemporary and attractive. It gradually dawned on me that

the late Baroque was an era of private extravagance and public spectacle, with power concentrated in the hands of tiny elites, playing out against a backdrop of ongoing religious conflict and spectacular achievements in the sciences and arts. The scenes of carefree dalliance, with everyone blissfully oblivious to the coming deluge! Those fabulous drawings by Watteau! It all felt so familiar.



Stiltwalker, 1987, bronze, 10" x 6" x 5"

So Punch is a figure of aggravated ambivalence. His comic vulgarity, lack of inhibitions, and his apparent absolution from the normal requirements of society make him a figure of abuse and fascination. He is both a pariah and a free spirit, an alien among us who demonstrates the power of shame and guilt by ignoring them completely. As I worked on this series, I became aware of how far and deep Punch-like figures go back in European society. The court jester, the fool, the Jack in the Box, and all the witches of European lore have the same stereotypically Semitic features. Deep-seated fear and envy of the Jew are bedrock tropes in European society, comparable in function to the cultural load projected onto African Americans in the contemporary U.S. The majority culture is convinced that these supposed outliers have some secret power or talent unavailable to the mainstream, a creative genius that allows them to dominate certain areas of the cultural sphere, inspiring both fascination and superstitious dread. If, according to this thinking, Jews and blacks are mysteriously generative and resourceful, they are also seen as capable of inexplicable treachery and random acts of violence. All this is likewise true of Punch. Lewis Hyde, in his book *Trickster Makes the World* (1999), extensively investigates the ancient mythos of this phenomenon. Punch's ancestry probably goes all the way back to the comic satyr of classical theater. So Punch is in the tradition of the grotesque—the hunchbacked, over-sexed alien, a conglomeration of things that frighten and appall us. Yet he also clearly wields considerable power, the power of the despised, the unknown, the exotic, the outsider. We would like to ignore him or just get rid of him, but we recognize him. We don't trust him, but, under the right circumstances, we might even follow him. We watch him with a queasy fascination and lingering self-reproach.

In the last piece of the Punch Series, *Punch Pops the Weasel* (2013), Punch rises up heedlessly, ecstatically, in a tutu, bursting out of the box like some floozy from a birthday cake at an over-the-top party. But it's also Punch in ascension, the apotheosis of Punch, Punch in a very short moment of self exposed glory. When he comes down, he's likely to get hurt,

but for the moment he doesn't care. Punch is all in, totally committed in a way most of us can't manage. Good luck to him.

December 19, 2015
New Haven, Connecticut



Sketch of a terracotta "Comic Actor," 5th century BC, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014

Everything Imagined Is Real (After Dante)



And 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.

v. 22-27



Thus My Soul Which Was Still in Flight (The Dark Wood), 2008

When she had told me this, she turned away her shining eyes,
filled with tears, which made me more full of haste to come to
you as she wished.

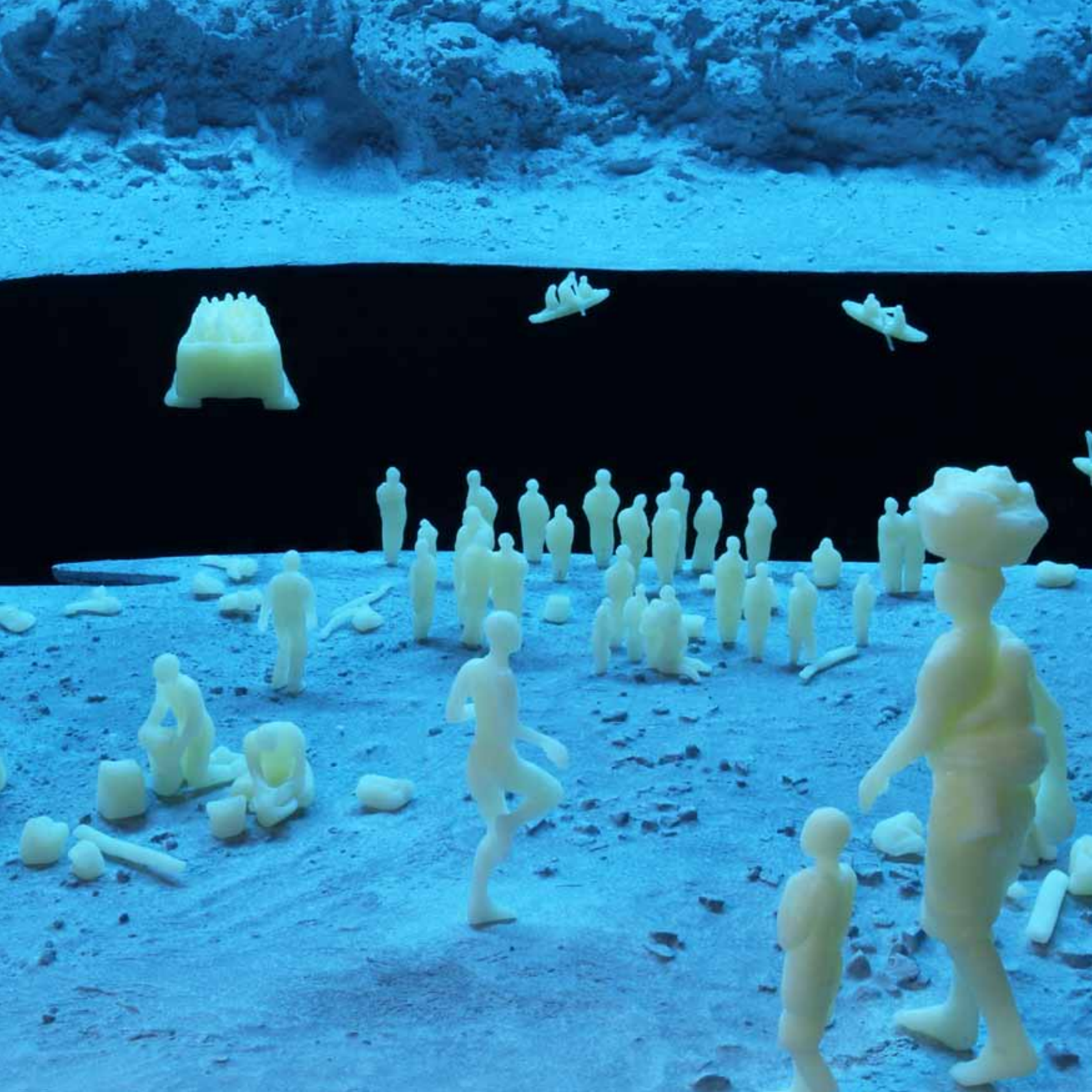
v. 115-118



She Turned Away (Beatrice Sends Virgil to Dante), 2008



Photos: Tim Nightswender



And so they go forth over the dark waters and before
they arrive over there a new crowd gathers over here.

v. 118-120



Across the Dark Waters (The River Acheron), 2007

When I raised my eyes a little higher, I saw the master...

v. 130-131



Photos: Tim Nightswender

I Saw the Master (Limbo), 2008



And as the cranes go, chanting their lays, making of themselves a long line,
so I saw shadows coming, carried on that wind, trailing their drawn out cries.

v. 46 - 49



I Saw Shadows Coming (The Second Circle), 2008

O, you who are led through this hell, recognize me if you can.
You were made before I was unmade.

v. 40-42



Recognize Me If You Can (The Third Circle), 2008

So that one nation rules and another
languishes according to the judgment of
that one who lies hidden like a snake in
the grass.

v. 82-84



One Nation Rules (Fortune), 2008



Then he grabbed
the boat with both
hands, but Virgil
quickly pushed
him off saying,
“Get back with the
other dogs!”

v. 40-4

left: *Get Back! (The River Styx)*, 2008
right: *We Went in Without a Fight
(Through The Gates of Dis)*, 2008

following page: *I Saw Shadows Coming
(The Second Circle)* (detail), 2008



We went in without a fight and I, who was eager to see
what was within such a stronghold, as soon as we were
inside, cast my eyes about and at every hand I saw a great
plain full of torment and pain.

v. 106-111



Photo: Tim Nightswender

Dante and the Echoes of War

BY CHRIS HEDGES

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH ROBERT TAPLIN’S *Everything Imagined is Real (After Dante)* was unsettling. The nine, small sculptured scenes, seven of which are dioramas, portray Dante’s concentric circles of Hell, using imagery much of which is drawn from photo-journalistic accounts of warfare. These sculptures brought back with unexpected fury the conflicts I covered as a war correspondent. The landscape of war, as Taplin understands, is bizarre and hallucinogenic. A city under siege—I was in Sarajevo when it was being pounded with 2,000 shells a day—is a tangled mass of pock-marked concrete, gaping shell holes, twisted iron rods, smashed vehicles, and mangled corpses. At night the skyline is lit up with flame-red explosions. The air is rocked continually with the reverberating noise of concussions and the cries and moans of the victims.

By the time I was done with war, no longer able emotionally and physically to cope, I had collected around me the shades of those who had died, as well as memories I neither could nor wanted to speak about. Taplin brought them back with the roar of a freight train. And, while the memories he triggered in me may not have coincided exactly with the scenes he or Dante had in mind, they speak to Taplin’s remarkable ability to capture the sordid reality of war and violence.

The first sculpture in the series, *Thus My Soul Which Was Still in Flight (The Dark Wood)*, portrays a contemporary Dante rising abruptly from his bed out of a nightmare. I saw in this sculpture, with Dante’s wife still peacefully asleep beside him, my own nighttime revisitations with trauma. It would be wrong to call these nightmares. They are far worse. You wake suddenly. Your heart is racing. You are sweating. You rise impulsively to escape. Sometimes you remember what disrupted your sleep. Sometimes you do not. But insomnia always follows. You lie frustrated, not wanting to look at the clock to see

how long you have been awake, until you watch the first light creep through the windows of the room.

The next sculpture, *She Turned Away (Beatrice Sends Virgil to Dante)* confirmed for me Taplin’s uncanny grasp of what it is like to live among the dead. Virgil and Beatrice, cast in greenish-white resin, devoid of color like the shades I carry within me, are seated at a dining room table. It is nighttime. A single overhead light shines down on the table, while the world outside the windows is black and ominous. Dante, portrayed in naturalistic color, unaware of the ghosts next to him, sits with his head on the table in despair. Virgil and Beatrice watch him placidly. They are the uninvited guests who beckon him into the circles of hell.

When you cover modern war, you can be transported in a matter of hours out of combat zones into the comparative peace of London or Paris. You walk the streets, and the people around you do not appear real. You are barely able to converse. The normal banalities that preoccupy those around you leave you lost, alienated, and confused. You long, in a perverse way, to return to war, return to hell, for there your strange pathology is understood, there you can commune once again with the culture of death, there the dead you carry within you come back to life.

In this small sculpture of Dante in despair at the table I felt the siren call of death, the dark enticement of the underworld, the allure of the shades that only Dante is eventually allowed to see. Here he turns his back on his wife, asleep in bed. He leaves the world of light for the world of darkness.

THERE IS A LINE YOU CROSS, the river of woe, when you enter conflict zones. This line is physical. You feel a change in the air. You see the first signs of the carnage and detritus of war. You hear the distant sounds of battle. They terrify and thrill you. You know that over that river, beyond that road, across that tarmac, down that mountain pass is hell. And you long to go there. In *Across the Dark Water (the River Acheron)*

Taplin conjures a desolate riverbank with dozens of refugees fleeing the contagion of war. Mothers cradle infants. Families carry small bundles of possessions. The exhausted lie on the ground. Here are the refugees fleeing Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, or any war. Here are those willing to risk their lives and the lives of their children in leaky rubber boats or by climbing over mountain passes to escape. War condemns the innocent and the vulnerable. And all who have been to war, all who have come to grips with its reality, hate it most for what it does to the children, who die in droves, their childhoods stolen.

In *I Saw the Master (Limbo)*, Taplin portrays the great sculptor David Smith, cast from white resin like Virgil and Beatrice, stepping through the front door of Dante's house. Again it is night. A red glow of unknown origin blazes from outside the house, illuminating Smith from behind. Dante is seated in a chair reading, looking up startled toward his unearthly visitor. Smith is Taplin's inner witness, his muse, the shade that he carries within him to remind him of what it means to have integrity as an artist. Inner witnesses are those whose spirit lives within us, those whose spirit does not allow us to betray what they embodied.

In *I Saw Shadows Coming (the Second Circle)*, Taplin addresses himself to the erotic force of war. In this piece we become Dante, seeing hell through his eyes. The diorama is entirely encased in a large black cabinet, with a single window to peep through. Visible through the window are nondescript gray houses and fire leaping up on the horizon. Streaks of black clouds swallow the blue sky. A round white patio table is directly below the window with four white chairs, one of which is knocked over. Heavy bombers fly overhead. In Dante's *Inferno* Paolo and Francesca, consumed by lust, have been condemned to this second circle of hell. But in Taplin's hands the lovers are metamorphosed into the flying machines of war. These machines have an undeniable beauty, even eroticism. They wield staggering lethal power and give us license to kill. They allow us to satiate our most amoral impulses. They urge us to destroy, not only things but also other human beings. And this urge, this lust, condemns us as lovers of war and

lovers of death. Few of us, under the right circumstances, are immune.

Recognize Me if You Can (The Third Circle) is another diorama encased in a black cabinet, this time with a jagged viewing hole in the side. You look down, as if through a ceiling, into a dark cave or a hovel. Below you are those trapped in a war zone. They peer anxiously into the street or huddle in fear with a few possessions. In Dante's *Inferno* this is the circle of the gluttonous, but these people are more likely starving.

In *One Nation Rules (Fortune)* the aftermath of an explosion, perhaps a car bomb, and the frantic response of a confused and frightened crowd, dominate a street scene. A corpse lies near the burning vehicle. The crowd does not know what has happened or where to go. In combat there is no recognizable narrative. You do not understand what is happening. You know only the tiny perimeter around you. You frantically try, often without success, to locate the attackers. When the shooting stops, you create a coherent story to make sense of the confusion and chaos, to give it order. All stories of combat, in some sense, are lies. And Taplin captures this confusion and panic.

In *Get Back (The River Styx)* Virgil uses a heavy oar to shove a desperate refugee seeking safety on his boat back into the water. The impulse to survive overwhelms those who are afraid. Once, in Khartoum, during an attempted coup, a close friend and I turned onto a street patrolled by heavily armed members of the presidential guard. We heard the soldiers, unsure of who we were, flick the safeties off their automatic weapons, preparing to fire. I was walking a few paces behind my friend and instinctively stepped behind him so the bullets would go through him first. The impulse to save myself at the expense of a friend mocked the heroic image I once had, before going to war, about myself. Fear makes us desperate, at times despicable. Courage, even when you can exhibit it, is never a constant.

The final diorama, *We Went in without a Fight (Through the Gates of Dis)*, shows the end result of war. It is framed in a black box shaped like a massive gravestone. At the top of a concrete ramp, in the foreground, stands an alabaster Virgil,

his back to us. Beyond him we see what he sees: Dante staggering through an anonymous modern city in ruins. There are no other people. There are no other signs of life. The fronts are sheared off the apartment buildings. The remaining walls are pockmarked with artillery fire. Rubble lies in heaps. Sagging electrical wires crisscross the street. Dante's body is contorted in shock and grief. The scene glows in blue moonlight.

Overhead, above the ruins, a black night sky opens into the universe, dotted with pinpoint stars. Humanity's folly and hubris, this final scene implies, may doom us as a species. But the distant illuminations promise renewal—if not on earth, than in some distant galaxy. The stars hold out hope that there are worlds beyond ours where the allure of violence and death does not prevail.

December 22, 2015
Princeton, New Jersey



Installation view, Grounds for Sculpture, 2012

History’s Ghost

BY NANCY PRINCENTHAL

BRASH, SPLENDID AND A TRIFLE SQUAT, the home that Frank Furness designed in 1876 for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts suggests a richly ornamented temple that has been stepped on, in passing, by a Titan of industry. Inside, ceilings soar, and sink. A grand stairway sweeps aside space where a lobby might be. In these eccentric spaces, a viewer is dazzled and a little disoriented, and on the alert for misfires of the canon—for commanding portraits, historical epics and religious allegories painted by talented upstarts of the European diaspora—that is, by early Americans, busy figuring out who they are. Irremediable gatecrasher that he is, Robert Taplin’s Punch is right at home here. At times obstreperously large, more often unnervingly small, he insinuates himself into company that accepts his presence best by paying him no heed. To the PAFA’s assembly of the self-begotten, he is family.

We first meet Punch as a child on a plinth above the Academy’s front entrance. Balancing on one foot, on a low stool with cabriolet legs, while deftly juggling all manner of things—an elegant pair of gloves, a flask, a fragment of a sculpted figure, a rolling pin—he offers himself as guide (or shill?) for the portmanteau culture the institution represents. Inside, the Punch I next found was rather less confident. *Punch is Homeless* is a battered giant of man. White and glossy as unbaked meringue, he leans heavily against an overburdened shopping cart; containing his life’s possessions, it is both suitcase and shield. As with classic witches, Punch’s features are Semitic—a huge hooked nose curves to meet a hooked chin. To contemporary eyes, his ruffed color and blousy shirt, cinched at the waist, are the costume of a clown; his tall, pointed headgear, derived from the conical hat of the traditional Pulcinella, reminded me of the extraterrestrial Coneheads of vintage *Saturday Night Live* fame. But his demeanor, stolid and distant, commands respect.

A complexly familiar alien, then, struggling to maintain his dignity, Taplin’s Punch wanders without quarter, bearing down hard on the distinction between nobility and an almost comic haplessness. Behind *Punch is Homeless* stretches Benjamin West’s monumental *Christ Rejected* (1814), which presents a humble, barefoot Christ, clad in little more than a white sheet, circled by a lavishly arrayed crowd of clergy and onlookers, Pontius Pilate among them. But the bombast of this painting, by a self-taught artist turned Royal Academician, undercuts its bid for pity. No quick judgments are on offer, either of West’s Christ or of Taplin’s Punch. We viewers are jury, and witness, and accused.

By comparison to the large Punches, his smaller incarnations, made of cast resin, are a slightly nacreous shade of white that looks as if it would glow in the dark. Unearthly in a way that is more frankly disturbing than the bigger figures, they are also often nastier. Little Punch takes a woman from behind, and, more spectacularly, pulls a nuclear explosion out of a top hat; the detonation’s double-tiered cloud suggests a particularly toxic wedding cake. Bad magic is only lurking in the wings when young Punch puts his arms tenderly around a donkey, or sits cross-legged between two peacefully gossiping, knitting women, his hands angrily covering his ears—a volatile demon child, perhaps, but only a little more than most. All kids carry their adulthood coiled inside; putting his on display, Punch renders it obscurely obscene—and more than a little seductive.

This young Punch, part child and part homunculus, is a figure of Taplin’s creation. But even the adult Punch of established tradition is a trove of conflicting impulses. He has always partaken of brute violence, including the thrashings of the hapless Judy, and of tender idylls, as in reveries of sylvan romance drawn by Tiepolo. On balance, though, the adult Punch is less often innocent than appalling. And so we are skeptical of the large *Punch Makes a Public Confession*, the last of Taplin’s sculptures I encountered, and a rousing finale. Head thoughtfully inclined, eyes downcast, hand gesturing delicately to his heart, he stands tall before a podium that sprouts two

big microphones—in short, he makes the preening display of contrition so familiar to American political drama. On the walls around him, shadowed by Punch’s looming presence, are proud portraits of the country’s founding fathers. Colonial America is very close to the surface in Philadelphia, a city that trades heavily on its past, as does PAFA. Infiltrating its galleries, Taplin’s Punch becomes history’s ghost, a prodigal in whose slightly blurred features we recognize the figures who most haunt us—and tantalize us, too.



Punch Makes a Public Confession (2014) installed at PAFA, 2015.

Photo: Peter Mauss / esto



History of Punch



Photos: Peter Mauss / esto

above: *Punch Makes Love to the Duchess* (2005)
 right: *Punch Receives a Prize* (2007), and *Punch is Homeless* (2012),
 installed at PAFA, 2015.





above: *Punch does a Magic Trick*, 2010
 right: *Young Punch Scratches His Burro's Ears*, 2007



Photo: Chris Gardner



above: *Punch Invited to a Stag Party*, 2012
left: *Young Punch Prepares To Execute a Rag Doll*, 2013



above: *Young Punch Watches TV with the Maids*, 2012
 right: *Punch Attends a Premiere*, 2012



Photo: Chris Gardner



Photos: Chris Gardner

above: *Punch Stopped at the Border*, 2005
 right: *Punch Pops the Weasel*, 2013





Young Punch Goes Shopping With His Mother, 2010



Photo: Peter Mauss / esto

Everything Imagined is Real
(After Dante)

I. *Thus My Soul Which Was Still in Flight*
(*The Dark Wood*)
2008, wood, polychromed resin
50" x 48" x 42"

II. *She Turned Away*
(*Beatrice Sends Virgil to Dante*)
2008, wood, polychromed resin, lights
78" x 56" x 47"

III. *Across the Dark Waters*
(*The River Acheron*)
2007, wood, resin, plaster, lights
84" x 94" x 50"

IV. *I Saw the Master (Limbo)*,
2008, wood, resin, lights
78" x 56" x 47"

V. *I Saw Shadows Coming*
(*The Second Circle*)
2008, wood, plexiglas, plaster, resin, lights
92" x 62" x 66"

VI. *Recognize Me if You Can*
(*The Third Circle*)
2008, wood, resin, plaster, lights
80" x 54" x 42"

VII. *One Nation Rules (Fortune)*
2008, wood, resin, plaster, lights
84" x 94" x 52"

VIII. *Get Back! (The River Styx)*
2008, wood, resin, polychromed resin
82" x 64" x 52"

IX. *We Went in Without a Fight*
(*Through the Gates of Dis*)
2008, wood, resin, lights
92" x 62" x 66"

History of Punch

illustrated:

The Young Punch Juggling
2014, fiberglass, steel, aluminum, lights
193" x 86" x 30"

Punch Makes a Public Confession
2014, milled foam, reinforced gypsum,
wood, steel, 106.5" x 64" x 44.5"

Punch Makes Love to the Duchess
2005, cast resin, 8" x 11" x 9"

Punch Receives a Prize
2007, cast resin, 12" x 15" x 12"

Punch does a Magic Trick
2010, cast resin, 10.5" x 12" x 10"

Young Punch Scratches His Burro's Ears
2007, cast resin, 8" x 9" x 6"

Punch Invited to a Stag Party
2012, cast resin, 11" x 12" x 10"

The Young Punch Prepares to Execute a Rag Doll, 2013, cast resin, 8" x 7.5" x 6.5"

Young Punch Watches TV with the Maids
2012, cast resin, 7.5" x 14.5" x 9.5"

Punch Attends a Premiere
2012, cast resin, 11" x 9.5" x 8"

Punch Stopped at the Border
2005, cast resin, 11" x 14" x 12"

Punch Pops the Weasel
2013, cast resin, 14" x 12" x 12"

Young Punch Goes Shopping with his Mother
2010, fiberglass with internal lights
101" x 58" x 42"

Punch Is Homeless
2012, milled foam, reinforced gypsum
98.5" x 93" x 57"

additional works in series:

Punch Relieves Himself in a Vase
2005, cast resin, 11" x 7" x 5"

Punch Goes to a Costume Ball
2005, cast resin, 12" x 8" x 5"

Punch Returns from the Ball in Disarray
2005, cast resin, 11" x 8" x 5"

Young Punch Goes Shopping with his Mother
2005, cast resin, 11" x 6" x 5"

Young Punch Dances with a Brush and Comb
2005, cast resin, 9" x 5" x 4"

Punch Is Homeless
2007, cast resin, 11" x 10" x 11"

Punch Makes a Public Confession
2012, cast resin, 11.5" x 7" x 6"

Young Punch Dances with Pearls and a Mirror
2012, cast resin, 32" x 15" x 15"

Punch Is Homeless, 2012

Exhibitions

Everything Imagined is Real (After Dante)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2009

Everything Imagined is Real (After Dante)
Complete Series
Winston Wachter Fine Arts, New York, NY
- 2012

Heaven, Hell and the History of Punch
Complete Series
Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, NJ

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2007

Connecticut Contemporary,
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT
Ill. Across The Dark Waters (The River Acheron)
- 2008

Inside the Box
Howard Yezerski Gallery, Boston, MA
Ill. Across The Dark Waters (The River Acheron)
- 2009

These Days: Elegies for Modern Times
Complete Series
MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA

History of Punch

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2006

Fact and Fictions
Winston Wachter Fine Arts, New York, NY
- 2010

Selections from the Punch Series, 2005–2010
The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum,
Ridgefield, CT
- 2012

Heaven, Hell and the History of Punch
Grounds For Sculpture, Hamilton, NJ
- 2015

Punch
Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts,
Philadelphia, PA

GROUP EXHIBITION

- 2007

DeCordova Annual
DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA



Robert Taplin is a self-taught artist who lives and works in New Haven, Connecticut. Born in 1950, Taplin earned a B.A. in Medieval Studies from Pomona College in Claremont, California in 1973. He began creating artwork in the mid-1970s and exhibiting soon after. Solo exhibitions of his work have been presented by the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (Philadelphia); Grounds for Sculpture (Hamilton, NJ); the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (Ridgefield, CT); the Ezra and Cecile Zilka Gallery at Wesleyan University (Middletown CT); the Smack Mellon Gallery (Brooklyn, NY); the Salt Lake Art Center (Salt Lake City, UT); Winston Wachter Fine Arts (New York, NY); and the TransHudson Gallery (New York,

NY), among many others. A brief selection of institutions that have shown his work in group exhibitions are MASS MoCA (North Adams, MA); the DeCordova Museum (Lincoln, MA); the Wadsworth Atheneum (Hartford, CT); the Palm Beach Institute for Contemporary Art (Palm Beach, FL); and the Proctor Art Center at Bard College (Annandale, NY). In addition, he has executed Public Commissions for the State of Connecticut and the New York MTA and received grants from the Connecticut Commission on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. His work has been featured in publica-tions such as *ARTnews*, *Art in America*, *Sculpture Magazine*, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. He has also written extensively on sculpture, most prominently for *Art in America*, and published a number of articles and dozens of individual reviews. He has taught at a variety of institutions including, Yale University School of Art and the Rhode Island School of Design. He is represented by Winston Wachter Fine Arts, in New York.

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right: Robert H. Taplin; photo: Nan Norene
cover: *We Went in Without a Fight (Through the Gates of Dis)*, 2008
back cover: *The Young Punch Juggling*, 2014; photo: Peter Mauss / esto

