

REFLECTIONS UPON HAVING ILLUSTRATED
THE DIVINE COMEDY OF DANTE ALIGHIERI

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IN THE EARLY 1970'S MY PAINTINGS WERE CRITICIZED AS BEING UNCONSCIOUSLY "TOO ILLUSTRATIVE". IN ORDER TO COUNTER WHAT I CONSIDERED A CLICHE' OF CRITICISM BY ARTIST-FRIENDS AND CRITICS ALIKE, I ADOPTED A PERSONAL AGENDA OF CONSCIOUS ILLUSTRATION.

I SOUGHT SUBJECT MATTER THAT HAS TRADITIONALLY MERGED THE BOUNDARIES OF ART AND ILLUSTRATION. I MADE ARCHITECTURAL MODELS OF ATLANTIS FROM PLATO'S CRITIAS; AND THE NEW JERUSALEM FROM THE BIBLE. WORKING WITH EARLY MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHY FROM THE BOOK OF KELLS AND THE BOOK OF DURROW, I ATTEMPTED SOME TEXT ILLUMINATION. FROM THERE I MOVED TO ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR AND LONGEST TRADITIONS OF ART-ILLUSTRATION, THAT OF THE ILLUSTRATION OF THE DIVINE COMEDY OF DANTE ALIGHIERI. BEGUN BY DANTE'S FRIEND GIOTTO, OVER 30 ARTISTS UP TO THE PRESENT HAVE ATTEMPTED TO ILLUSTRATE THE DIVINE COMEDY. AS FAR AS I KNOW I AM THE ONLY ARTIST WHO HAS FINISHED THE ILLUSTRATION OF ALL 100 CANTOS OF THE POEM.

TO BEGIN WITH I SET MYSELF THE TASK OF FINDING A VISUAL FORMAT THAT WOULD AT LEAST HINT AT THE COMPLEXITY AND COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE POEM ITSELF. DURING THIS CONCEPTUAL STAGE I READ THE POEM 15 TIMES IN TRANSLATION AND 3 TIMES IN THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN. FROM THIS RESEARCH I DECIDED UPON A TRIPTYCH FORMAT CONSISTING OF 3, 6 FOOT SQUARE PANELS DEVELOPED AS A TRI-MANDALIC STRUCTURE. IN THE ILLUSTRATION I SHOW A CROSS-SECTION OF THE CONICAL PIT OF L'INFERNO [HELL], AN ELEVATION OF IL PURGATORIO [THE MOUNTAIN OF PURGATORY], AND A CROSS-SECTION THROUGH THE ENTIRE MEDIEVAL COSMOS OF IL PARADISO [PARADISE]. SURROUNDING EACH MAJOR IMAGE, IN A CIRCULAR SERIES OF PANELS LIKE A FILM-STRIP, I TRIED BY MEANS OF WORDS, DIAGRAMS AND ANECDOTAL PICTURES TO ILLUSTRATE THE ENTIRE CONTENTS OF EACH ONE OF THE 100 CANTOS OF THE POEM. I BEGAN THE ILLUSTRATION IN 1972 AND FINISHED IN 1975.

FOR ILLUSTRATION TO BECOME ART, I BELIEVE, THE ARTIST