

Dante's Inferno

By Marcus Sanders, Doug Harvey

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A faithful yet totally original contemporary spin on a classic, *Dante's Inferno* as interpreted by acclaimed artist Sandow Birk and writer Marcus Sanders is a journey through a Hell that bears an eerie semblance to our own world. Birk, hailed by the *Los Angeles Times* as one of "realism's edgier, more visionary painters," offers extraordinarily nuanced and vivid illustrations inspired by Gustave Dore's famous engravings. This modern interpretation depicts an infernal landscape infested with mini-malls, fast food restaurants, ATMs, and other urban fixtures, and a text that cleverly incorporates urban slang and references to modern events and people (as Dante did in his own time). Previously published in a deluxe, fine-press edition to wide praise, and accompanied by national exhibitions, this striking paperback edition of *Dante's Inferno* is a genuinely provocative and insightful adaptation for a new generation of readers.

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Dante's Inferno By Marcus Sanders, Doug Harvey Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review
Creative people who don't write sometimes enjoy a honeymoon with the press -- right up until they put pen to paper. It happened with Madonna. She used to give interviews saying what an old-fashioned girl she really was at heart, how all she'd really like to do was find a nice writer and settle down. Consequently, she barely ever saw a bad review -- until she made the mistake of writing her first book. Critics promptly saw they'd been kidding themselves all along, and they turned on her.

So when word got around that the visionary California painter and book artist Sandow Birk was not just illustrating but co-writing a new adaptation of Dante's "Divine Comedy," some of us who cherish his work feared the worst. Sure, he could concoct historical canvases, sketches and propaganda posters about a bloody civil war between San Francisco and Los Angeles, as he did with "In Smog and Thunder: Historical Works From the Great War of the Californias." And OK, he could paint majestic landscapes of each of California's 33 state prisons in the luminist style of Albert Bierstadt and Frederic Remington, as he did with "Incarcerated: Visions of California in the 21st Century." Pastiching great painters was one thing. But Dante? In tackling not just fine but literary art for the first time, was Birk cruising for the same bruising Madonna got?

In a word, no. This version of the "Inferno" is God's face in a Groucho mask, a triumphant cathedral that will bring new readers to Dante, new appreciation for Birk's model here -- the great French illustrator Gustave Dore -- and new converts to the growing church of Sandow Birk.

The cover is so infernally beautiful that folks reading in public would do well to keep a tight grip on it. Imagine a panoramic hellscape in ochers and siennas, all set against a sulfurous sunset sky. On the left, half of the Golden Gate Bridge yearns forlornly, cables dangling from its broken span. To the right rises the ziggurat-crowned thrust of Los Angeles City Hall. Down below, so discreet that I never noticed it even in an art gallery last year, where the canvas measured a good 9 feet across, stands the leafless lattice of the World Trade Center's unmistakable stumps. And in the lower right corner, snaking around skyscrapers, oil refineries, palm trees and crow-clad telephone wires, writhes the telltale red and white tracery of nighttime freeways in gridlock. Behold -- literally -- the commute from hell.

For Birk, as for Dante, hell isn't just some posthumous grade you get on your life. It's a porous netherworld that welcomes slumming tourists like Dante and periodically overflows the infernal regions to contaminate the living world. Just look at Birk's panel for Canto III, the moment when the poet Virgil guides Dante through the gates of hell. Birk's Virgil resembles the caped figure familiar from Dore's edition, but here he's leading Dante past an overturned car into a littered, ominous underground garage. Signs beside them read "Do not back up/Severe tire damage" and "More parking lower level," and visible on the horizon is the Hollywood sign. Either hell is in Los Angeles, or Los Angeles is in hell.

Birk has drawn a full-page lithograph like this, plus a small black-and- white frontispiece, for each of Dante's 34 chapters. With the help of journalist and fellow surfer Marcus Sanders, he's also "adapted" Dante's text. They've avoided the word "translate," and it's not hard to see why. Here's Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's translation of that moment at hell's portal in Canto III:

"All hope abandon, ye who enter in!"

These words in sombre colour I beheld

Written upon the summit of a gate;

Whence I: 'Their sense is, Master, hard to me!' "

OK, now try Birk and Sanders:

"Abandon all hope upon entering here!

When I saw these bleak words etched in the stone above the gate,

I turned to Virgil and said, 'Hang on, I'm not too sure about this.' "

Obviously, Dante purists are going to tak

About the Author
Sandow Birk is a recipient of both Guggenheim and Fulbright fellowships. His work has been exhibited widely and published in several books. He lives in Long Beach, California.

Marcus Sanders is a contributing editor for Surfing and Surfline, and has written for numerous travel and surfing magazines. Born and raised in Canada, he lives in San Francisco.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

George Gomez:

Do you considered one of people who can't read pleasant if the sentence chained within the straightway, hold on guys this aren't like that. This Dante's Inferno book is readable by means of you who hate those perfect word style. You will find the data here are arrange for enjoyable examining experience without leaving even decrease the knowledge that want to give to you. The writer connected with Dante's Inferno content conveys thinking easily to understand by a lot of people. The printed and e-book are not different in the written content but it just different by means of it. So , do you nevertheless thinking Dante's Inferno is not loveable to be your top checklist reading book?

David Smith:

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