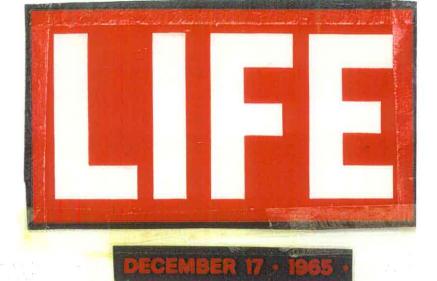
n the following six pages is a modern interpretation of the Inferno by one of America's most celebrated and provocative artists, Robert Rauschenberg. Commissioned by LIFE, the work is a single continuous panorama which is here reproduced in two fold-out sections. Like so many of his contemporaries, Rauschenberg views Hell not as a place devised for man in the afterlife, but as a condition created by man here and now. To convey the multiplicity of contemporary evils, he composed a kaleidoscope of newsphotos and clippings whose images he transferred to his picture by silk-screen printing. The journey into this Inferno gets under way with a careening motorcyclist whose cerie color indicates that this is no ordinary trip. The panorama which spreads out before him has the jarring familiarity of a tabloid. Here individuals are much in evidence: the doers of evil (Eichmann, the Klan), the spokesmen of evil (Minute Men, McCarthy), and the victims of evil (Kennedy). Here also are elements that create a climate of violence: extremists who obliterate reason, signs that inflame, formal exercises that celebrate war. As the panorama unfolds individuals yield to masses: an atomic cloud, a group burial of South African Negroes, voracious shoppers, victims of war. There is the presence of unpredictable power: unyielding nationalism, an unmanned control board. Throughout the panorama, unrelated images set up visual and emotional vibrations: a howling baby, a bloody drop of paint, a giant athlete, a shrieking bird. On the other side of the foldout the breakdown of individualism intensifies. Antiracial marches take on the automaton character of military drills. Soldiers dissolve into heaps of gassed bodies. All about is a wasteland of bombblasted cities, auto wreckage. And in its midst appear two astronauts. Like Dante and Virgil they are voyagers into unearthly realms. One is visible and physical. The other is a shade, metaphysical; like Virgil, he is the guide whose comprehensive knowledge is symbolized by the spectrum. These travelers stand apart from the earth like detached witnesses, observing the accelerating force of dehumanizing machines and the bestiality that threatens to destroy man.



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