



# THE INFERNO

## MAPPING THE INFERNO

“The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space.”

- Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

## MAPPING THE INFERNO

JOSEPH MASOTTA





Springtime

# THE INFERNO

Between these covers unfolds a visual poem that illustrates perspectives from my home in the City of Angels. I began this journey in order to record invisible fragments of the city using watercolor and compass. Slowly, I compiled photos, charts and maps that define the measure of our metropolis. My initial goal was to illustrate the precincts noted by Italo Calvino in his small book, *Invisible Cities*. In that mission I failed, for images do no justice to Calvino's words.

This publication arrives in a world now marked by a plague that has swallowed the globe. With *Mapping the Inferno*, I have assembled encaustic paintings, watercolors, photographs and sketches that bear witness to the tension between personal animus and collective action being expressed throughout the land. As I prepared these verses, I resumed the mandate of the cartographer—recording a measure of the city where I live. The beauty of this mission lies in the cartographers' paradox; the features a mapmaker chooses to render defines the territory measured.

The vision conveyed herein serves as my marker within this infernal wilderness. The point of the exercise remains my desire to chart a path through this world—but, I find the closer I look the more confounding the details become.

Joseph Masotta  
Los Angeles, 2020



To continue, let us not solve  
that long before we reached the summit  
our eyes held a faint light

by two flames. They, from another light  
another light in your pack - so  
could only signify a faint light

and said: 'What does it mean? The other one,  
who does it signify? Who are they that they  
are there?'

As they turned the water and the mire,  
I answered him: 'I will soon be seen  
through the visibility is low'

But never made an arrow's speed,  
so slowly from the dark  
as did the little ship of the plover

skin favours us, it is a  
across the water, it is a  
O feline soul, it is a

Ah, Phlegos, the goat in vain,  
replied they said: 'We'll be in your boat  
no longer than a breath of air'

But the little barque  
hid my face, it hid  
until it took my weight, it hid

Soon as we were in the narrow boat,  
it glided off, with deeper water  
than behind it had been the end of it.

And so we took a channel through the mire  
one full of mud arose before me,  
'Who are you, come here before'

And I to him: 'I come, but do not  
but who are you, who have you here?'

As I spoke, I saw a man who weeps, he said,  
'For you, you glow, but may you sorrowful  
remain. I answered him, 'I know you now,  
for all that your appearance is so foul.'

He looked at both hands and made grab the part  
at which my guide's recollection with a smile  
seeing of the light - the other days he said

and then he put his arms around my neck,  
and pressed my face, and said: 'Indisputable  
blessed is the man that sees thee, he is

on earth, this character was, it is  
what had a name; his memory, it is  
so hard, he grows my power and limit

Two men there, who think themselves  
great things, it shall - shall - like you in me,  
then I say a name that all men know

And I replied: 'I had a great desire  
to see this ancient boat of mine in my life  
before we leave behind the lake of ice'

And he: 'Before we reach the shore, you will  
be able to see for a moment what  
that is a world of yours shows me full of light'

And shortly after, only within my sight,  
the other man, he had appeared here, he  
still thank God for it, recalling my doubt

'Get Phlegos, he said, 'Come on, have a go,  
they are dead, and the world is  
two of them, it is a world of yours'

Here, he said, 'I have a great desire  
to see this ancient boat of mine in my life  
before we leave behind the lake of ice'

My master said: 'My son, now nears  
by heaven as Deo, with all its kin,  
in a world of citizens and cavaliers'

And I to him: 'Already there, within  
the valley, I can see its mosque, sermillion red  
as if just taken from a kiln.'

'An eternal interior fire,' he said,  
'gives them the heat glow that is the light  
of this infernal city of the dead'

Now we came into the deep dark  
which I remember that in the night, the  
walls were made of something and like

Along way round had we navigated  
before air and light, and finally cried:  
'All downhill! This stops, the water's gate.'

And the gate a thousand spirits of evil -  
angels thrown from Paradise, who have  
who does go there, who has not died

got walk the kingdom of the dead? My poor  
master, wish as ever, made a sign  
that he and they might wish to speak in peace

Then, their great displeasure more to see  
they said: 'Come on alone; let that one  
who reckons, has crossed this kingdom here'

let him refuse his foolish path below;  
let him try, for ever, and all the time  
the evil each of them, this world of evil

Dear Reader, ask yourself, as for their  
discouraged to the end of the world,  
if it were not, it back to earth again

from four and five, one five with  
at me, at me, at me

do not abandon me as a deserter;  
and if they interdict our outward sail,  
then let's return together, rapidly.'

with that, my counsel, resolute  
as always, said: 'Fear not, a Higher Will  
has authorized our passage, which they can't refuse'

But you wait here; restore your wearied spirit  
with good hope; and don't worry while I'm gone -  
I won't forsake you in the underworld.'

Then my leader left me quite alone,  
to undergo an agony of doubt,  
as it's wonderful in my mind with NO





High Noon



to see them go to would his eyes  
 so picture just how huge must be whole  
 to come part to parts of just such size.

If he was fair as most he had a new  
 and dazed out face his Mark you can see  
 how he may be the source of my use.

And oh, how weird and wonderful to me,  
 to see his triple face; Vermilion red  
 as fire and fore most, middle of his  
 and from the middle of each side  
 two others sprout ed. All joined to each  
 and fused as one to make a single head.

The right one had a tuft of yellow hair;  
 the left was colored like the one who dwells  
 beside the Nile, in hope that woolly hair.

From under each two monster pinions swelled  
 of size befitting such an ardent freak;  
 and I saw craft with such a spread of  
 No planes had they, but like a bat's they creaked,  
 and these wings emanated from him as  
 he flapped them with unflappable technique.

To fear Cassius to a solid mass.  
 I'll give eyes a rest, and down each chin  
 drooled down.

He worked his three mouths like a fox machine  
 and in each set of teeth he scouted a wratch  
 with noise like butchers cracking a bit of chine.

When in front, being bitten was no match  
 for being ripped; repeatedly, his back  
 was shinned to leave a pair of not a patch.

'That sinner there, who is most sorely racked,  
 my master said, is Judas, who's biting ground  
 head first; just watch those wriggling legs rear!

And of the other two whose heads hang down,  
 the one who dangles from the black-fleshed jaws  
 is Brutus: see, he squirms without a sound.

well-built one a Cassius, or was,  
 night is rising, putting day to rout;  
 I have seen it all, so let's not pause.'

As I dashed, I put my arms about  
 his neck; and, choosing well his time and place,  
 when the wings were opened out,  
 he held on the shaggy case face;  
 then I was in a tuff to that he climbed, between  
 the monster and frozen interface.

When we reached the lower mezzanine  
 of where the wings meet the upper thigh, my guide,  
 I performed a most difficult climb,  
 had over his shoulder, they occupied  
 himself in some way to ascend the hair,  
 toll-Bart, he said to me, on going 'I double  
 once again, 'the winding stair,  
 partial, the guide's nearly spent,  
 I had no further of the pain.'

What that he be a rocky rent,  
 I must mean on the wall  
 proceeded to the next.

Why you eyes, I  
 to see but had  
 to see but had

As his body is deep, one has  
 a cave not seen by sight but by the sound  
 a little stream makes as it sinks and sighs,  
 ending by decisions involuntarily  
 the hollows of the rock it explores.

My guide and I began that hidden route  
 to journey back into the world of light,  
 and caring not for rest; but resolute,  
 we climbed and climbed until we caught a sight,  
 beyond a rounded opening, of stone  
 one store of things of it's earthly delight;  
 and we emerged to see the stars once more.

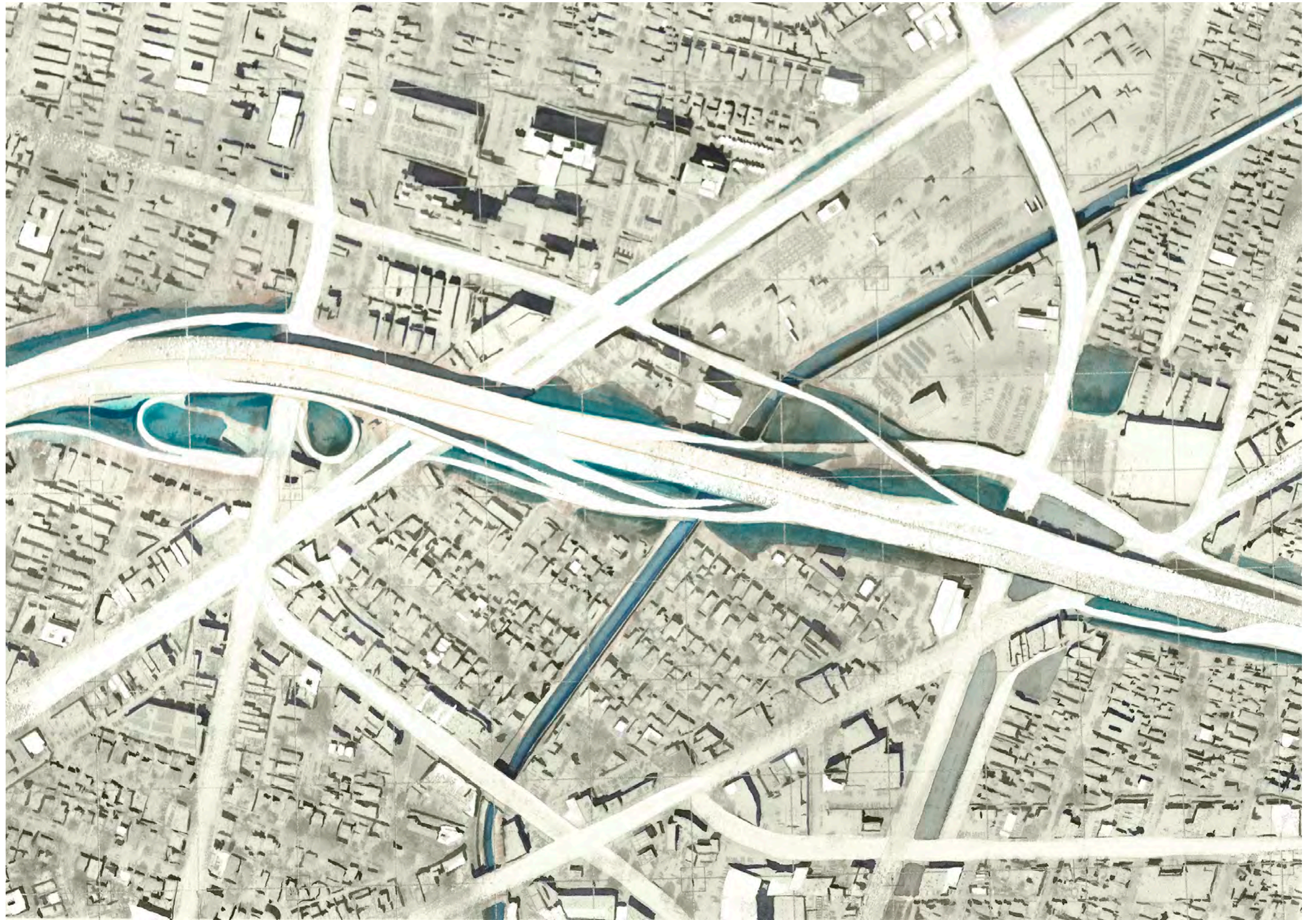
Berenice





Blue Tribe





Cecilia





Olivia









Dawn







Dusk







Eclipse





## A Season in Hell

A. Rimbaud

At last, O happiness, O reason, I removed from the sky the azure, which is a blackness, and I lived, a spark of gold of the natural lights.

Out of joy, I took on the most clownish and exaggerated mode of expression possible:

It has been found again!  
What? eternity.  
It is the sea mingled  
With the sun.

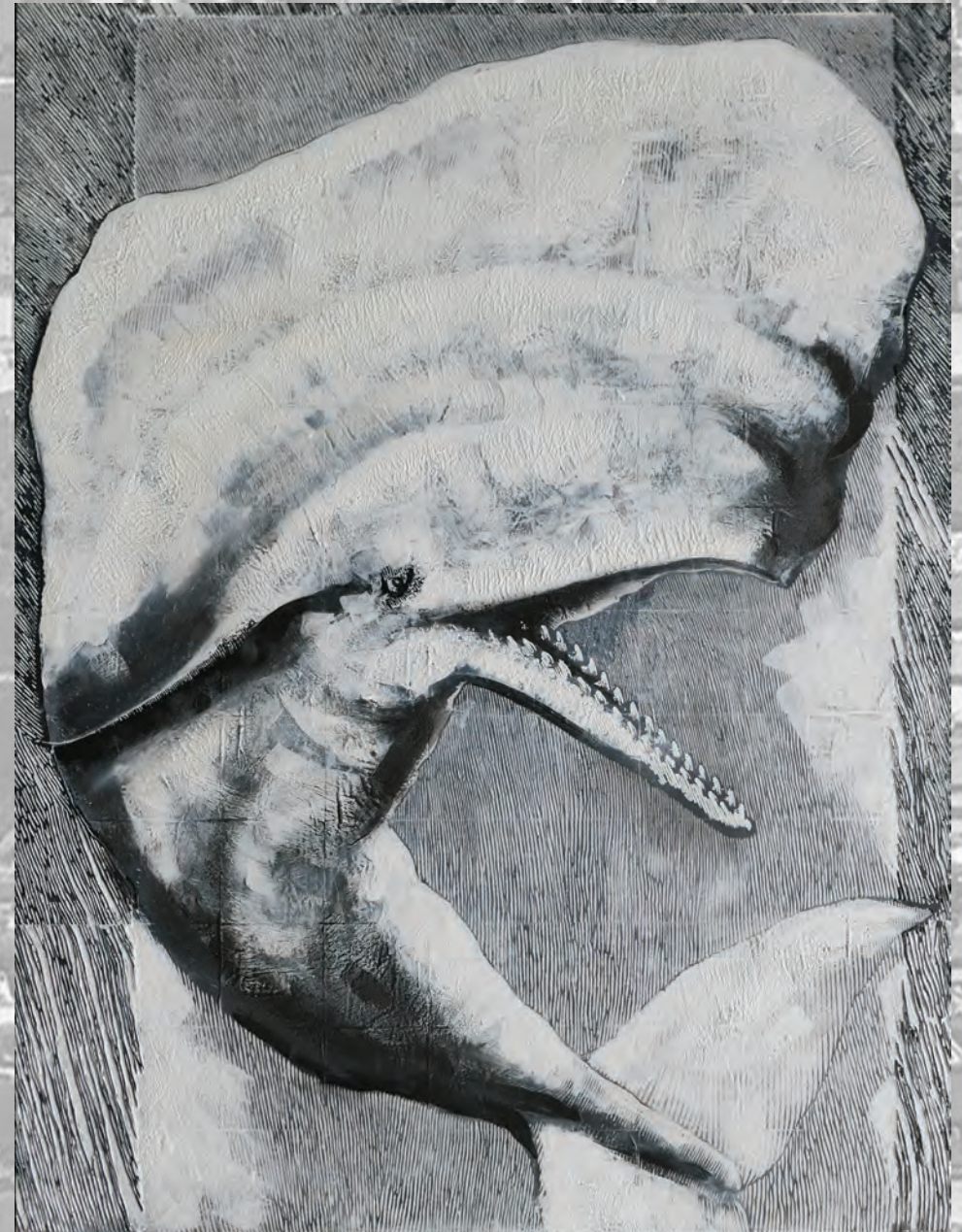
My immortal soul.  
Keep your vow  
Despite the lonely night  
And the day on fire.

Thus you detach yourself  
From human approval,  
From common imposes!  
You fly off as you may...

No hope, never;  
And no orietur.  
Knowledge and fortitude,  
Torture is certain.

No more tomorrow,  
Satin embers,  
Your own heat  
Is the only duty.

It has been found again!  
What? Eternity.  
It is the sea mingled  
with the sun.



The Whale



## Hunger

A. Rimbaud

If I have any taste, it is for hardly anything  
But earth and stones.  
I breakfast always on air,  
On rock, on coal, on iron.

Turn, my hungers. Feed, hungers,  
On the meadow of sounds.  
Suck the gaudy poison  
From the convolvuli.

Eat the broken stone;  
The old masonry of churches;  
Boulders from old floods,  
Loaves sown in the grey valleys.

The fox howled under the leaves.  
Spitting out the bright feathers  
Of his feast of fowl:  
Like him, I consume myself.

Salads and fruits  
Are only waiting to be picked;  
But the hedge spider  
Eats nothing but violets.

Let me sleep! let me simmer  
On Solomon's altars.  
The scum runs down over the rust,  
And mingles with Kedron.

Battle Flag





## Song of the Highest Tower

A. Rimbaud

Let it come, let it come,  
The age of our desire.

I have endured so long  
That I have forgotten everything.  
Fear and suffering  
Have flown to the skies.  
And morbid thirst  
Darkens my veins.

Let it come, let it come,  
The age of our desire.

Thus the meadow,  
Given over to oblivion,  
Grown up, and flowering  
With frankincense and tares,  
Amid the wild buzzing  
Of filthy flies.

Let it come, let it come,  
The age of our desire.

Scar Tissue







White Flag

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Allegory	Collage and encaustic on linen with stainless steel	20" x 32"	2018
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Tamara	Watercolor on paper	14" x 20"	2017
High Noon	Encaustic on panel	18" x 24"	2018
Berenice	Gouache on museum board	14" x 20"	2016
Blue Tribe	Encaustic on paper mounted to panel	24" x 36"	2018
Cecilia	Watercolor on paper	14" x 20"	2017
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Zero Hour	Encaustic and gold leaf on paper mounted to panel	24" x 36"	2018
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	<i>A Season in Hell</i>		
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Scar Tissue	Encaustic and collage on cheesecloth over panel	36" x 60"	2020
White Flag	Encaustic and collage on cheesecloth over panel	36" x 40"	2019
White Crowd	Encaustic and collage on panel	18" x 24"	2018





White Crowd (detail)

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Joseph Masotta is a multidisciplinary artist who lives and works in Los Angeles. He attended Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and received a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Boston Architectural College where he was awarded the Henry Adams Scholastic Medal for excellence in architecture.

Masotta has practiced architecture for over 35 years. In 1994 he co-founded Parallax Architects, a firm that specializes in learning environments for K-12 independent schools. His work has been realized on school campuses throughout Los Angeles.

In his art practice, Masotta is currently exploring the nature of assembled congregations through the genre of portraiture, creating highly textured-wax works expressing individual personalities inherent in each collective group.

In 2019, Masotta was an artist-in-residence at Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill in Massachusetts. While in residence, he expanded on his current series, *Sign(s) of the Times*. The encaustic paintings focus on examining mobs, crowds, and tribes as signifiers of the contemporary social milieu.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This vision is dedicated to Patti Smith.  
Her light brightens a large corner of the Inferno.

Without the technical, critical and artistic assistance of my daughter, Mona Lisa, this poem would not exist.

Allegory, White Flag, Blue Tribe, Zero Hour and Battle Flag were previously published in FULL BLEDE. I wish to thank FULL BLEDE's publisher, Sacha Baumann, for her support of my work.

Buried within these pages reside excerpts from  
*A Season in Hell* by Arthur Rimbaud,  
a couple of notes from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*,  
handwritten signs from Dante's *Inferno*,  
and a few lines from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*.

Rimbaud, Arthur, *A Season in Hell*, trans. Oliver Bernard  
United Kingdom, Morel Books, 2009

Melville, Herman, *Moby-Dick* or, *The Whale*, illus Barry Moser  
San Francisco, CA, Arion Press, 1983

Alighieri, Dante, *The Inferno*, trans. Ciaran Carson  
New York, NY, Granta Books, 2002

Calvino, Italo, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver  
New York, NY, Harvest/HBJ Books, 1974

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