

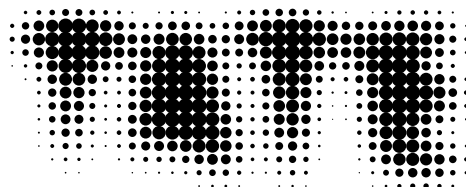
# WILLIAM BLAKE

11 September 2019 – 2 February 2020

## LARGE PRINT GUIDE



Please return to the holder



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ROOM 1

BLAKE BE AN ARTIST

## Entering the room, clockwise

### Quote on the wall

The grand style of Art restored; in FRESCO, or Water-colour Painting, and England protected from the too just imputation of being the Seat and Protectress of bad (that is blotting and blurring) Art. In this Exhibition will be seen real Art, as it was left us by Raphael and Albert Durer, Michael Angelo, and Julio Romano; stripped from the Ignorances of Rubens and Rembrandt, Titian and Correggio.

William Blake, 'Advertisement' for his one-man exhibition, 1809

## WILLIAM BLAKE

The art and poetry of William Blake have influenced generations. He has inspired many creative people, political radicals and independent minds. His images and words are admired around the world for their originality and spirituality.

Blake lived at a time of radical thought, war and global unrest. The British Empire was expanding. New ideas about social justice developed alongside rapid industrialisation. Blake created imaginative images and texts that resonated with this changing world. They drew on his deeply felt religious beliefs and personal struggles.

The exhibition is organised chronologically. It takes us through the ups and downs of Blake's creative and professional life. The full range of Blake's work is on display here. His commercial engravings, original prints, his unique 'illuminated books' and paintings are all included. These have been drawn from public and private collections from around the world. To preserve these rarely seen objects, the light levels across the exhibition are deliberately low.

Blake's art and poetry have appealed to many kinds of people, for different reasons. His work has provoked diverse interpretations. This exhibition does not try to explain Blake's imagery and symbolism in a definitive way.

Instead it considers the reception of his art and how it was experienced by his contemporaries. It sets out the personal and social conditions in which it was made. In doing so we hope to reveal the circumstances that gave Blake the freedom to create such innovative works.

## **Portrait of William Blake**

c.1802

Graphite with black, white and grey washes on paper

This is probably a self-portrait drawn by Blake when he was in his 40s. It does not present him in the act of writing or drawing. Instead, the image invites us to see his intense gaze as a sign of his creative force. This perhaps reflects his claim that he saw visions. Blake's art and personal behavior divided contemporary opinion. A few friends and supporters accepted him as a genius. Many others considered him eccentric or questioned his mental health.

Collection of Robert N. Essick

X77014

## Catherine Blake

c.1805

Graphite on paper

This intimate and apparently casually-drawn portrait shows Catherine Blake (née Boucher, 1762–1831). William and Catherine were married from 1782 until Blake's death in 1827. Catherine played a huge part in Blake's creative and commercial work. She helped him with printing and colouring his works, even finishing some of his drawings. Blake's extraordinary vision depended on his partnership with Catherine.

Tate. Bequeathed by Miss Alice G.E. Carthew 1940

N05188



## **ROOM 1**

### **'BLAKE BE AN ARTIST!'**

Blake was born in London in 1757, the son of a fairly successful shopkeeper in Broad Street, Soho. Blake wanted to be an artist from an early age. His family indulged his passion. They bought prints and plaster casts for him to copy, paid for drawing lessons and funded his training as an apprentice engraver. In 1779 he enrolled as a student at the Royal Academy of Arts. This gallery explores the art he created in the years that followed. It was during this time that he developed his ambitions as an original artist and poet.

The Royal Academy encouraged its students to imitate the great art of the past. They were expected to copy antique sculptures and look to Renaissance artists like Michelangelo and Raphael for inspiration.

Blake later rejected the more rigid ideas associated with Academic teaching. He sought to create a more personal vision and began to identify with the 'Gothic' artists of the medieval past. He felt the Academy was being taken over by portrait painters motivated by self-interest. But he did admire some ambitious and individualistic figures there. These included James Barry and Henry Fuseli. Blake took seriously their ideas about painting great public works full of



moral purpose and drama. The conflict between such aims and the realities of a cynical and market-driven art world would be a shaping force in Blake's creative life.



## **Academy Study**

c.1779–80

Graphite on paper

Lent by the British Museum, London

X73454

## **Study for 'Glad Day', 'Albion Rose' or 'The Dance'**

c.1780

Graphite on paper

This pencil study relates to the print of Albion Rose also on show at the entrance to this room. The drawing seems poised between academic life study and an imaginative representation of an ideal.

Lent by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

X71197

Thomas Stothard 1755–1834

**Reclining female nude viewed from the back**

c.1800

Pencil and wash on wove paper

Lent by the Royal Academy of Arts, London

X70789

## THE ROYAL ACADEMY

Blake registered as a student at the drawing schools of the Royal Academy of Arts in London in October 1779. He was 21 years old and had already taken private drawing lessons and spent seven years as an apprentice to the engraver James Basire.

Blake later rejected the formal teaching and ideals of the Academy. However, there are surviving drawings which suggest he followed the Academic route of drawing carefully from classical sculptures, prints and life models. Importantly, the Royal Academy created a new sense of ambition for artists of Blake's generation. It encouraged them to rival the greatest artists of the past, using idealised figures in images dealing with grand ideas.

Thomas Stothard 1755–1834

**A Scene on the Medway**

c.1780–1

Etching on paper

In late 1780 Blake took a sketching trip to the River Medway, south east of London. He went with fellow Academy student Thomas Stothard and another friend. There were major military facilities nearby. With Britain at war with America and France, the students were suspected of being spies and briefly arrested. They got off when they made it clear they were art students. Stothard produced this print commemorating the event.

Tate. Purchased 1996

T07042

## **Vitrine**

attributed to Edward Francis Burney 1760–1848

### **Sketchbook**

c.1779–80

Ink and wash over graphite on paper This sketchbook is filled with studies of Blake's contemporaries at the Royal Academy schools lounging, posing and socialising. The Academy provided very limited practical training. It was however important in offering young artists the opportunity to socialise and share ideas – much like a modern art school.

Lent by the Royal Academy of Arts, London

X70784

attributed to Robert Blake 1762–1787

## **Sketchbook**

1777

Graphite, chalk, ink and watercolour on paper

This sketchbook has been associated with Robert Blake, the artist's much-loved younger brother who also aspired to be an artist. He may have attended the Academy schools alongside William.

The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and  
Botanical Gardens

X73662

## **Quote above**

Here [at the Royal Academy] he drew with great care, perhaps all, or certainly nearly all the noble antique figures in various views. But now his peculiar notions began to intercept him in his career. He professes drawing from life always to have been hateful to him; and speaks of it looking more like death, or smelling of mortality. Yet still he drew a good deal from life, both at the academy and at home.

From Benjamin Heath Malkin's biography of William Blake, 1806

William Blake after Michelangelo 1475–1564

**Abias**

c.1785

Ink and watercolour on paper

Lent by the British Museum, London

X73455



**Part of a Face: Copy from a Plaster Cast:  
a Daughter of Niobe?**

c.1779–80

Graphite on paper

Tate. Presented by Mrs John Richmond 1922

A00045

**Drawing of legs of Cincinnatus**

c.1779–80

Ink and wash over graphite on paper

Bolton Museum & Archive

X70745

Drawing was fundamental for Blake. The back page of your leaflet is offered as your own sketchbook for this exhibition. Help yourself to a pencil.

Share your drawings

#williamblakeinspired @Tate

Anonymous  
**Cincinnatus**  
1700s

Plaster cast

Students of the Royal Academy were encouraged to draw from the collection of plaster casts of ancient Roman and Greek sculptures. This cast is probably the actual figure that Blake drew from. His drawing is displayed nearby.

Royal Academy of Arts, London  
X70754



## **Joseph's Brethren Bowing down before him**

1784–5

India ink and watercolour over graphite on paper

The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum,  
University of Cambridge

X34499

## **Joseph Ordering Simeon to be Bound**

1784–5

India ink and watercolour over graphite on paper The  
Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge  
X34500

### **Quote above**

Painting is Drawing on Canvas & Engraving is Drawing on  
Copper & nothing Else Drawing is Execution & nothing Else  
& he who Draws best must be the best Artist

William Blake, 'Public Address', c.1809–10

## **Joseph Making himself Known to his Brethren**

1784–5

India ink and watercolour over graphite on paper The  
Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge  
X34503

## THE STORY OF JOSEPH

Blake's bitter view of the contemporary art world has its origins in the disappointments and frustrations he experienced early in his career.

In 1785 Blake exhibited these three watercolour designs showing the biblical story of Joseph. Blake showed them at the annual exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, the main showcase for contemporary art.

Students at the Academy were encouraged to depict serious, dramatic subject matter in a classical style. But these exhibitions were filled with more commercial artworks. The exhibition catalogue, also on display here, shows the dominance of portraits, landscapes and light-hearted 'fancy' subjects. Being watercolours, Blake's designs were shown in a separate space where they got less public attention than the oil paintings in the main gallery.

## **Vitrine**

**The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, M.DCC.LXXXV.**

**The Seventeenth**

**1785**

Book

Blake exhibited several times at the Academy between 1780 and 1808. The works included in these exhibitions, held at Somerset House on the Strand, were listed in printed catalogues. These catalogues show how the exhibits were grouped in each show.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74301

## Wall facing the entrance of the room

**Albion Rose**

c.1793

Colour engraving and etching on paper with hand-colouring on paper

This image exemplifies how any single work by Blake might have multiple meanings. It can be related to several different strands within Blake's poetry and thought. The figure has been reinterpreted many times, as a symbol of youthful rebellion, spiritual freedom and of creativity.

The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and  
Botanical Gardens  
X70738



## Other side of the wall

### BROAD STREET

This photograph shows Blake's family home, on the corner of Broad Street, Soho, shortly before it was demolished in 1963. The Blake family ran their hosiery and haberdashery business here from around 1752 to 1812. Blake lived here as a boy, would have visited frequently during his apprenticeship and moved back in 1779 while studying at the Royal Academy. In 1784–5 he tried to establish a print publishing business next door at no. 27. When the Blake family arrived, the street was full of doctors, clergymen, wealthy widows and fashionable tradespeople such as pianomakers. But Broad Street started to change over these years. There were the first signs of the industrialisation and poverty that prevailed in the area in the mid-19th century. Such later developments influenced how people have thought about Blake's family background.

62–74 Broadwick Street, Westminster, 1962

London Metropolitan Archives, LCC Photograph Library

This map from Blake's time shows Broad Street and the family home at no. 28. All Blake's London homes, apart from Hercules Buildings in Lambeth where he lived in the 1790s, were within a few minutes' walk. He trained as an engraver on Great Queen Street, less than 20 minutes' walk to the east. He lived on Poland Street in 1785–91, and South Molton Street to the north-west in 1801–21. Blake's long-term patron Thomas Butts lived on Great Marlborough Street, one block north of Broad Street. Blake's first drawing school, run by Henry Pars, the Royal Academy where he studied and his final home in Fountain Court were all about twenty minutes' walk away to the south-east, on the Strand.

**Richard Horwood, Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster the Borough of Southwark, and parts adjoining Shewing every house 1792–9 (detail)**

British Library, London, UK / © British Library Board

## Entering next room

### Vitrine

John Boydell 1720–1804

and Josiah Boydell 1752–1817

**A Collection of Prints, from Pictures Painted for the  
Purpose of Illustrating the Dramatic Works of Shakspeare,  
by the Artists of Great Britain**

1802–3

### Book

Open to Richard Earlom after Henry Fuseli, King Lear: Act 1,  
Scene 1 (King Lear Casting Out his Daughter Cordelia) 1792

Line engraving

Lord Egremont

X77271

This monumental volume represents the high-point of ambitious art publishing in Blake's time. It was issued by John Boydell. In the late 1780s he commissioned a series of paintings by leading artists to form a 'Shakespeare Gallery'. These were then reproduced as engravings. This image of a dramatic painting by Fuseli shows King Lear cursing his daughter. It has been compared to Blake's **Tiriel** series, on display here. Blake was disappointed not to get any work on this well-funded project.

## Entering the room, clockwise

### EARLY DRAWINGS AND WATERCOLOURS

Blake's earliest drawings typically used sweeping lines and areas of grey washed ink or watercolour. His figures make grand gestures in bare, even abstract, settings.

His style was based on the innovative art of the 1760s and 1770s, especially the drawings of James Barry, Henry Fuseli, and John Flaxman. They became well known for creating works with strong visual and emotional impact and communicating ideas in a bold way.

Blake's subjects were often drawn from history, literature and the Bible. This was in keeping with the teaching of the Royal Academy and traditional ideas about 'high art'. However, Blake's subject matter from these early years is sometimes unclear. Spiritual forms, ghosts and visions start to appear. This means that the story and meaning of his individual works can be difficult to decipher.

## **Age Teaching Youth**

c.1785–90

Ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Bequeathed by Miss Alice G.E. Carthew 1940

N05183

## **An Allegory of the Bible**

c.1780–5

Graphite, ink and watercolour on paper

Blake started using more colours in the mid-1780s. The mysterious subject matter of this design is new as well. The title is not the artist's own. It was added by later commentators, as is often the case with Blake's symbolic designs.

Tate. Bequeathed by Miss Rachel M. Dyer 1969

T01128

## **Moses Receiving the Law**

c.1780

Ink, grey and black washes and graphite on paper

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

X71201

Robert Blake 1762–1787

## **The Preaching of Warning**

c.1785

Graphite on paper

Blake's younger brother Robert also aspired to be an artist, and probably attended the Royal Academy schools as well. Very few of his drawings are known. However, this design suggests a similar interest in big gestures and simplified compositions.

Tate. Presented by Mrs John Richmond 1922

A00003

**The Good Farmer, Probably the Parable of the Wheat  
and the Tares**

c.1780–5

Ink and watercolour on paper

This is an illustration of one of Christ's parables, which appears in several biblical sources.

Tate. Bequeathed by Miss Alice G.E. Carthew 1940

N05198

**The Spirit of a Just Man newly Departed Appearing to  
his Mourning Family**

c.1780–5

Pen and watercolour on paper

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

X73716



**Job, his Wife and his Friends: The Complaint of Job**  
c.1785

Ink and watercolour on paper

Blake returned to the subject of the long-suffering Job from the Bible many times over his lifetime.

Bequeathed by Miss Alice G.E. Carthew 1940  
N05200

## **The Death of the Wife of the Biblical Prophet Ezekiel**

c.1785

Ink and wash over graphite on paper

This illustrates a story from the biblical Book of Ezekiel. Like Blake's drawings of the Book of Job, also shown here, it provides a lesson about spiritual fortitude in the face of loss. 'Also the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, behold, I take away from you the desire of your eyes with one stroke" (Ezekiel 24. 15–18).

This relatively finished drawing was used as the basis of a line engraving Blake issued in 1794.

Philadelphia Museum of Art:

Gift of Mrs. William Thomas Tonner, 1964

X70786

## TIRIEL

In the late 1780s Blake had established a reputation as a designer and poet among a small circle of friends. He began writing an epic poem, which he also intended to illustrate. It is not clear how Blake would have funded the production of an illustrated edition and it was not published.

Blake's manuscript and many of the surviving drawings are displayed here. The story combined elements of Greek tragedy and Shakespeare. It also drew on supposedly ancient Gaelic stories (actually composed by the Scottish writer James Macpherson in the 1760s). The narrative concerns a king, now blind, his arguments with his sons and daughters, and his encounter with his elderly parents, Har and Heva. The language is dramatic, with exaggerated imagery suggesting surging emotions, 'Thunder & fire & pestilence'.

The project represents the culmination of Blake's early efforts as a painter and poet. It also exposes how his ambitions to combine epic images and texts were frustrated by conventional publishing techniques.



**Tiriel Supporting the Dying Myrantana and Cursing his Sons**  
c.1789

Ink, wash and watercolour on paper

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection  
X73723

**Har and Heva Asleep with Mnetha Guarding them**  
c.1789

Ink, watercolour and chalk on paper

The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum,  
University of Cambridge  
X73531

## **Har and Heva Bathing, Mnetha Looking On**

c.1789

Pen and wash on paper

This drawing doesn't explicitly illustrate any lines in Blake's poem 'Tiriell'. It is clearly indebted to the example of James Barry's images of Jupiter and Juno (also displayed here).

The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum,  
University of Cambridge  
X73096

James Barry 1741–1806

**Jupiter and Juno on Mount Ida**

c.1804–5

Etching, line engraving and mezzotint on paper Blake admired and imitated the outspoken artist James Barry. This print relates to a design that Barry had exhibited in 1776 and published in a different format in 1777. As well as creating striking images in a powerfully personal style, Barry produced his own prints, using experimental techniques. His works provided models for Blake as he developed his own style.

Tate. Purchased 1992

T06584

**Tiriell and his Children**

c.1785–90

Watercolour, ink and graphite on paper

Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Alpheus Hyatt  
Purchasing Fund

X73537

**Har blessing Tiriël while Mnetha Comforts Heva**

c.1789

Ink on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London

X73456

**The Blind Tiriël Departing from Har and Heva**

c.1789

Ink and grey wash on paper

Collection of Robert N. Essick

X73714

## Oberon, Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing

c.1786

Watercolour and graphite on paper

The subject is from Shakespeare's **A Midsummer Night's Dream**: 'Hand in hand, with fairy grace, / Will we sing, and bless this place'. Supernatural and fantastical subject matter like this enjoyed great popularity in Blake's time.

Tate. Presented by Alfred A. de Pass in memory of his wife Ethel 1910

N02686





## **Enoch Walked with God**

c.1780–5

Ink, watercolour and graphite on paper

This is a biblical illustration, although its precise subject matter is somewhat unclear: 'And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters... And Methuselah lived an hundred eighty and seven years, and begat Lamech' (Genesis 5: 22–5).

Cincinnati Art Museum. Gift of Mr and Mrs. John W.

Warrington, 1977.214

X77270

## **Vitrine**

### **Tiriël**

Manuscript. Opening at page 10, which is numbered '5', 'And aged Tiriël stood & said where does the thunder sleep...'

c.1789

Ink on paper

British Library

X71202

## **Tiriél Cursing his Sons and Daughters**

c.1789

Ink and wash on paper

This design illustrates the page of the manuscript opened here, numbered section '5'. It is unclear how Blake might have integrated the text, on an upright format, with plates reproducing these designs. Would they have been printed sideways, or have appeared as separate sheets? Normal printing techniques would have made it difficult and expensive to integrate images and text.

The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum,  
University of Cambridge  
X73536

ROOM 2

MAKING PRINTS,  
MAKING A LIVING

## **MAKING PRINTS, MAKING A LIVING**

Blake was trained as a reproductive engraver. This exacting craft involved copying an image by cutting fine lines onto a metal plate so that it could be printed and reproduced many times. Blake enjoyed the precision of this work. He gained a good reputation and engraving provided him with an income throughout his life. He was sometimes employed to design as well as engrave illustrations, and for a short period from 1784 ran his own print publishing business with his friend and fellow engraver James Parker.

While Blake admired the uncompromising qualities of older prints, the market favoured more obviously decorative techniques. Blake could adapt his style, but he found the limitations of commercial work frustrating.

Around 1788 Blake invented a new form of printmaking, 'relief etching'. He described the technique in poetic rather than practical terms so his exact methods remain mysterious. The process allowed Blake to print in colour and combine texts and images. Blake used the technique to create a succession of visionary books. These engaged with the most pressing moral and political questions of the day, including revolution, sexual freedom and the slave trade.

Blake's illuminated books combined poetry and images

in experimental ways. His images rarely illustrate the text directly. He also printed some of the images separately without words. Later in life Blake continued to print copies for fellow artists and rare book collectors, adding richer colours and gold to make them more visually enticing.



## **Clockwise from the wall text**

### **Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion**

c.1810

Engraving using carbon ink on paper

This started as a student exercise, as Blake's inscription indicates. He copied a figure by Michelangelo while he was an apprentice to the engraver James Basire in 1773. He reworked it around 1810, in the rigorous style of 16th- and 17th-century German and Netherlandish art. Michelangelo's figure becomes Joseph of Arimathea, said to have brought Christianity to the British Isles. Blake presents him as a 'Gothic artist', building cathedrals in the 'Dark Ages'.

The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum,  
University of Cambridge  
X71203

## MONEY

We know quite a lot about what Blake was paid for his work as an engraver and for his sales of prints and paintings. In Blake's time British money was made up of pounds, shillings (20 to a pound) and pence (12 to a shilling). £1 in Blake's time might be worth £100 today but there is no easy way of matching prices to present-day equivalents. Entrance to most art exhibitions cost one shilling. A good supper cost about the same. The most basic art supplies could cost £10–15 a year.

A tradesperson or shopkeeper might have an income of £80–150 a year. But living costs meant that such people had little opportunity to save, especially as prices rose after the 1790s. Middle-class professionals might earn £200–500 a year or more. The wealthy had incomes of many thousands of pounds.



## **On the wall**

James Basire 1730–1802 after Benjamin West 1738–1820

### **Pylades and Orestes**

1771

Engraving on paper

This engraving by James Basire was published just before Blake was apprenticed to him, at the age of 14 in the summer of 1772. The rigorous engraving style, based on precise, hard lines, proved to influential on Blake.

Tate. Purchased 2019

X73762

## **Edward and Eleanor**

c.1780–93

Engraving and etching on paper

The style of this image relates back to the historical paintings of the 1760s, like Benjamin West's *Pylades and Orestes* (an engraving of which by Basire is on display here). The print was included in Blake's 'Prospectus' advertising his works in 1793. At that date he was planning an engraved 'History of England'.

Lent by The British Museum, London

X73457

## Vitrine

Joseph Ritson 1752–1803

**A select collection of English songs.**

**In three Volumes [vol.1]**

1783

Book

This was published by Joseph Johnson. Blake probably got nearly £100 for the three plates he engraved for it.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74309

**The Wit's Magazine; or, Library of Momus, Being a  
Compleat Repository of Mirth, Humour, and Entertainment  
[vol.1]  
1784**

Book

This comic print represents May Day festivities. Humorous subjects are unusual for Blake. Much of his engraved work accompanied serious poetry and prose. But as a working engraver he had to turn his hand to a variety of subject matter and styles.

Blake probably earned over £100 for the plates for this magazine.

Tate Library and Archive  
Z74294

William Enfield 1741–1797

**The Speaker: or, Miscellaneous pieces, Selected from the Best English Writers, and Disposed under Proper Heads, with a View to Facilitate the Improvement of Youth in Reading and Speaking. A New Edition**

1797

Book

This was probably Blake's first engraving for the publisher Joseph Johnson, originally done in 1780. He would have been paid about £21 for engraving the original design which had been done by his friend from the Royal Academy, Thomas Stothard.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74304

C.G. Salzmann 1744–1811

translated by Mary Wollstonecraft 1757–1797

**Elements of morality, for the Use of Children, with an  
Introductory address to parents.**

1792

Book

Blake made 32 illustrations for this German educational text. The engravings were produced at an especially busy time for him so it's possible that the engraving work was done by Thomas Owen, his only known apprentice. The text was translated by feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft and published by Joseph Johnson. Blake probably earned over £330 for this work.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74307

## ENGRAVING AND ILLUSTRATION

Blake's skills as a reproductive engraver were well-known in his lifetime. He worked for a range of London publishers but was most often employed by the politically radical publisher Joseph Johnson.

Engraving was time-consuming and highly skilled work. The trade flourished as the middle-class market for art expanded. But engravers were vulnerable to being exploited by publishers. Sometimes their work was not properly credited, or another engraver would put his name on their plates. It is impossible to know quite how many engravings Blake did for publishers during his lifetime.

In the decade after 1782, when Blake first started making a living as an engraver, he earned a modest but steady income, equivalent to a shopkeeper or small trader. Blake also earned money from selling his own art and teaching, maintaining a 'portfolio career' involving multiple activities.

**CONTENT WARNING: a work in this showcase depicts the brutal treatment of an enslaved person.**

## **On the wall**

William Blake after William Hogarth 1697–1764

**Beggar's Opera, Act III**

1790

Engraving on paper

This print was commissioned by the leading publisher John Boydell, around 1788. Blake was probably paid about £53 for this work.

Tate. Transferred from the reference collection 1991

T06462

## **Quote above**

I curse & bless Engraving alternately because it takes so much time & is so untractable. tho capable of such beauty & perfection

William Blake, letter to William Hayley, March 1804



**CONTENT WARNING: a work in this showcase depicts the brutal treatment of an enslaved person**

## Vitrine

Mary Wollstonecraft 1797–1851

**Original stories from Real Life; with Conversations,  
Calculated to regulate the Affections, and Form the  
Mind to Truth and Goodness**

1796

Book, open to frontispiece

Blake designed and engraved the illustrations for this educational text by the radical feminist Wollstonecraft. They were commissioned by the publisher Joseph Johnson. The frontispiece features Mrs Mason. This character's moral lessons for two poorly-brought-up girls make up the text. It is unclear how sympathetic Blake was to such moralising content. He earned over £10 for the 10 drawings and over £120 for the engravings.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74305

John Gabriel Stedman 1744–1797

**Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, in Guiana,... South America, from the year 1772 to 1777**

1796

Book, 2 volumes

City of Westminster Archives

X75326

## **Volume 1, open to 'Negro hung by the ribs'**

This controversial image provides an important test case for how we think about Blake's politics.

Blake expressed his opposition to slavery in all forms and is often taken as a courageous opponent of empire and colonialism. However, his work has been interpreted in different ways. Some people see this print as a sympathetic image of an enslaved man. For others it is a sensationalist representation of slavery that objectifies the Black body.

The image was published as part of an account of life in the Dutch colony of Surinam in South America. The text was written by a British mercenary, John Gabriel Stedman. Blake based his engravings on Stedman's drawings.

## **Volume 2, open to 'A Surinam Planter in his Morning Dress'**

Stedman's book includes romanticised accounts of sexual exploitation. He includes details of his relationship with an enslaved woman of colour, Joanna.

Following Stedman's text and drawings, Blake's illustrations feature several images of partially-clothed women of colour. We could interpret these images as objectifying. The plantation owner in this print is powerful-looking and dominates the composition. But he is also depicted as arrogant and cruel. Are such images critical of colonial exploitation, or do they participate in it?

## **On the wall**

### **Pestilence**

c.1795–1800

Ink and watercolour on paper

Bristol Culture: Bristol Museums & Art Gallery

X73449

### **The House of Death**

c.1790

Graphite, ink and watercolour on paper

Blake produced a number of designs relating to plague, war, fire and disaster which he probably planned to engrave. This design has been linked to the poet John Milton's vision of a 'Lazar House' – a hospital for infectious diseases – from **Paradise Lost** (1664). It was reworked as a 'Large Colour Print' (on display in Room 3).

Tate. Bequeathed by Miss Alice G.E. Carthew 1940

N05192

## Vitrine

Erasmus Darwin 1731–1802

### **The Botanic Garden: a Poem, in Two Parts**

1795

#### Book

The publisher Joseph Johnson was Blake's most reliable employer in the late 1780s and 1790s. He allowed Blake to interpret quite freely. Johnson was a political radical. Social gatherings above his bookseller's shop were a hotbed of new ideas about society, politics and sexuality. It is unclear to what degree Blake shared the liberal ideas that circulated in Johnson's more conventionally-educated and comfortably middle-class circle. Blake probably earned about £25 for this plate.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74306

William Shakespeare 1564–1616

**The plays of William Shakspeare, accurately printed from the text of the corrected copy left by the late George Steevens, Esq. With a series of engravings, from original designs of Henry Fuseli, Esq. R.A. Professor of Painting**  
[volume 6]

1805

Book

Blake wrote to William Hayley in 1803: 'I have got to work after Fuseli for a little Shakespeare. Mr. Johnson the bookseller tells me that there is no want of work'. Blake probably earned about £50 for the small plates he did for this edition.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74303

George Cumberland 1754–1849

**Thoughts on Outline, Sculpture, and the System that  
Guided the Ancient Artists in Composing their Figures  
and Groups**

1796

Book

Cumberland and Blake met as students at the Royal Academy. Cumberland was then working in an insurance office. In 1784 he inherited money and was able to retire and pursue his various scholarly and artistic interests. Blake and Cumberland shared artistic interests, particularly in creating a pure, linear style of design based on ancient art.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74308



## **On the wall**

### **Los and Orc**

c.1792–3

Ink and watercolour on paper

This watercolour represents a turning-point in Blake's art because it depicts a subject taken from his invented mythology which he used across the illuminated books. The figures appear to be the characters Los, representing imagination, and the chained Orc, the spirit of rebellion.

Tate. Presented by Mrs Jane Samuel in memory of her husband 1962

T00547

### **'Hell beneath is Moved for thee, to Meet thee at thy Coming' Isaiah, xiv, 9**

c.1780–5

Ink and grey wash on toned paper

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

X70785

## **Lucifer and the Pope in Hell**

c.1794–6

Etching or engraving printed in colour with gum or glue-based pigments and hand-finished with watercolours and ink on paper

This image was produced using Blake's relief etching method, printed in colour with additional pen and ink and watercolour, to create a dense, painterly effect. It is based on the earlier drawing, also on show here.

The Huntington Library, Art Collections,  
and Botanical Gardens  
X73663

## THE BOOKS OF DESIGNS

Blake announced that the invention of relief etching allowed him to combine text and image, 'both Letter-press and Engraving in a style more ornamental, uniform, and grand, than any before discovered'. He boasted that it was a cheap and efficient method, that put him ahead of the greatest of writers: even 'Milton and Shakespeare could not publish their own works'. But he sold few of his illuminated books. Even his most enthusiastic supporters were generally baffled by the strange imagery and complex mythology of his epic poems.

He had more success selling his watercolours and individual prints. He produced several groups of prints taken from the illuminated books, with the texts masked out. Many were gathered into entirely pictorial 'Large' and 'Small' books of designs. These re-imagined the plates as independent works of art. Blake sometimes provided suggestive new titles or texts to accompany them.

**Frontispiece to 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion'**

c.1795

Relief etching, ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the National Gallery and donations from the Art Fund, Lord Duveen and others, and presented through the the Art Fund 1919

N03373

**Plate 4 of 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion'**

c.1795

Relief etching, ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the National Gallery and donations from the Art Fund, Lord Duveen and others, and presented through the the Art Fund 1919

N03374

**Urizen, Plate 3**

1794

Colour relief etching predominantly in pink, black, green and blue, with hand-colouring, on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London

X73460

**Small Book of Designs: Plate 7,**

'Of life on his forsaken mountains'

1794

Colour-printed relief etching with hand-colouring, on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London

X73613

**Small Book of Designs: Plate 8,  
dark seascape with figure in water**  
1794

Colour-printed relief etching with hand-colouring, on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London  
X73614

**The Temptation and Fall of Eve**

X73674

**Small Book of Designs: Plate 11,  
Gowned Male Seen from behind**  
1794

Colour-printed relief etching with hand-colouring, on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London  
X73604

## **From Small Book of Designs**

**Copy A, plate 1, Design excerpted from the Title-page to 'The First Book of Urizen'; a Bearded Gowned Male (probably Urizen) Sitting Examining a Book**

**Copy A, plate 12, Design from 'Preludium' in 'The First Book of Urizen'**  
1794

Colour-printed relief etchings with hand-colouring, on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London  
X73515 and X73612

**Urizen, Plate 7**  
1794

Colour relief etching predominantly in black, grey and pink, with hand-colouring, on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London  
X73458

**From Small Book of Designs**

**Clockwise, from top left:**

**Plate 2, 'The Ancient Poets Animated all Sensible Objects'**

**Plate 5, 'The Ancient Tradition that the World...'**

**Plate 6, 'number of monkeys, baboons, & all of that species'**

**Plate 4, 'The Giants who Formed this World'**

1790

Colour printed relief etchings with hand-colouring on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London

X73607-10



**Small Book of Designs: Plate 9, 'Lo, a shadow of horror'**  
1794

Colour-printed relief etching with hand-colouring, on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London  
X73615

**Small Book of Designs: Plate 21, 'In living creation appear'd'**  
1794

Colour-printed relief etching with hand-colouring, on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London  
X73616

## **The Book of Thel, Plate 6**

1796, c.1818

Etching with paint, watercolour and ink on paper

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Art Fund, Tate Members, Tate Patrons, Tate Fund and individual donors 2009

T13000

## **The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Plate 16**

1796, c.1818

Etching with paint, watercolour and ink on paper

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Art Fund, Tate Members, Tate Patrons, Tate Fund and individual donors 2009

T13001

**First Book of Urizen, Plate 17**

1796, c.1818

Etching with paint, watercolour and ink on paper

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Art Fund, Tate Members, Tate Patrons, Tate Fund and individual donors 2009

T12998

**First Book of Urizen, Plate 21**

1796, c.1818

Etching with paint, watercolour and ink on paper

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Art Fund, Tate Members, Tate Patrons, Tate Fund and individual donors 2009

T12999

## **Quote above**

I was in a Printing house in Hell, & saw the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation.

**William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell c.1790**

## **First Book of Urizen, Plate 15**

1796, c.1818

Etching with paint, watercolour and ink on paper

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Art Fund, Tate Members, Tate Patrons, Tate Fund and individual donors 2009

T12997

**First Book of Urizen, Plate 11**

1796, c.1818

Etching with paint, watercolour and ink on paper

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Art Fund, Tate Members, Tate Patrons, Tate Fund and individual donors 2009

T13004

**First Book of Urizen, Plate 10**

1796, c.1818

Etching with paint, watercolour and ink on paper

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Art Fund, Tate Members, Tate Patrons, Tate Fund and individual donors 2009

T13003

**First Book of Urizen, Plate 6**

1796, c.1818

Etching with paint, watercolour and ink on paper

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Art Fund, Tate Members, Tate Patrons, Tate Fund and individual donors 2009

T13002

## Vitrine

### Songs of Innocence and of Experience (Copy S)

1789–94

Book, 54 relief etched plates on 54 leaves Open at 'The Tyger'  
Relief etching with watercolour, with some gold

This became Blake's best-known short poem, even within his lifetime. The contrast between the intimidating 'tyger' evoked by the text and the rather cuddly big cat drawn by Blake has drawn a lot of interest and commentary. Blake's illustrations often contrast with or complicate the written words. This copy was probably put together after 1808. It may be the copy purchased before 1816 by the collector and bibliographer Thomas Frognall Dibdin (1776–1847).

Cincinnati Art Museum,

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John J. Emery, 1969.509:1-54

X73508



William Blake after Thomas Stothard 1755–1834

## **Fall of Rosamund**

1785

Etching, engraving and watercolour on paper

This is the kind of print which was commercially popular in Blake's time. It was based on a design by Blake's friend from the Royal Academy, Thomas Stothard. Blake was paid the significant sum of £80 for engraving it. He has used a stipple technique, involving little dots rather than the definite, hard strokes of line engraving. It is printed in three colours to enhance its decorative effect.

Tate. Purchased 1992

T06671



## **Vitrine in the centre of the room**

### **RELIEF ETCHING**

Blake conceived his technique of relief etching in around 1788. He claimed this was under the inspiration of his brother Robert, who had died in 1787. The technical details of his method have long fascinated and frustrated scholars and collectors and remain debated.

Engraving and etching involve making lines in a copper plate which are filled with ink to create the printed image. Relief etching, on the other hand, involves using acid to eat away areas of the plate that you want to leave unprinted. The remaining surfaces are inked and printed. Relief etching allowed Blake to combine hand-written texts and images on a single plate. These were normally entirely separate processes. Blake also experimented in printing with colours, and added pen and ink, watercolour and later on gold to create more dense, painterly images.

## THE ILLUMINATED BOOKS

Blake used relief etching to create a succession of lyrical and visionary books. He called these 'illuminated books' which suggests a comparison with medieval manuscript illustration, or 'illumination'. Most were composed and first printed while Blake was living in Lambeth (1790–1800).

The illuminated books reflect Blake's experience of a turbulent time. Britain was at war with revolutionary France. His books set out radical ideas about personal freedom, sexual liberty, and his opposition to empire, tyranny and slavery. These themes were under discussion in the middleclass radical political circles associated with his publisher Joseph Johnson. But Blake's approach to these subjects was both more cryptic and more confrontational.

If the books had been more widely distributed Blake might have been arrested because of their radical sentiments. But very few people saw Blake's books and his symbolism was too obscure to attract notice from the authorities. In time they became collectors' items. Blake printed new versions with richer colouring aimed at rare book collectors. The different copies of the illuminated books can be quite different in their organisation and appearance. Each unique copy is now identified by a letter of the alphabet ('copy A', 'copy B' and so on).

## Anticlockwise from the text

### **The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (copy B)**

c.1790

Book, 27 plates on 15 leaves

Open to 'A Memorable Fancy'

Relief etched plates in coloured inks with gluebased pigments and hand-colouring on paper

Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, accession number

Arch. G. d.53

X73563



'A Memorable Fancy' describes Blake's invention of relief etching in symbolic terms. His text does little to explain his process practically. Blake's commitment to individualism and rebellious nature are present in this description of art-making as an experimental and inspired process. This copy belonged to the scholar and collector Francis Douce (1757–1834) and may be in his original binding.

## **The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (Copy H)**

c.1790

Book, 27 plates on 15 leaves

Open to plates 14, 'The ancient tradition...' and 15, 'A Memorable Fancy'

Relief etching with hand-colouring

The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum,  
University of Cambridge.

X73532

This book sets out Blake's commitment to the spirit of rebellion. It expresses his opposition to order, restraint and reason in a mix of poetry and prose, songs and pithy declarations. It has proved hugely quotable. The imagery of flame and cloud, and of figures flying and embracing on the title page conveys the general sentiments. This copy was bought by the younger artist John Linnell (1792–1882) in 1821, for £2 2s. The binding is Linnell's and dates to around 1824.

## **The First Book of Urizen (Copy G)**

1794, printed c.1818

27 leaves, open to plate number 14

Relief etching printed in yellow brown with watercolour and gold

During his lifetime, Blake's books were appreciated by collectors for their visual qualities far more than for their political and literary content. **The First Book of Urizen** was first printed in 1794. It was already strongly visual. In this new copy, printed in around 1818, Blake has enhanced this full-page image with intense colouring and gold.

Library of Congress. Lessing J. Rosenwald collection, 1807 (Rosenwald 1807).

X77352

## **Europe, a Prophecy (Copy A)**

1794

Book, 17 plates on 17 leaves

Open to Plate 2, title page

Colour-printed relief etching in dark brown with pen and black ink, oil and watercolour on paper

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

X73728

**Europe, a Prophecy** relates contemporary historical events – specifically the French Revolution – in an epic, symbolic form. As Blake’s biographer Alexander Gilchrist (1828–1861) observed of this book: ‘It is hard to describe poems wherein the **dramatis personae** are giant shadows, gloomy phantoms; the scene, the realms of space; the **time**, of such corresponding vastness, that eighteen hundred years pass as a dream’. Catherine Blake is likely to have coloured many of the plates in this copy, including the title page. This copy may be that bought from Blake by the painter George Romney (1734–1802).

**Europe, a Prophecy (Copy E)**

1794

Book, 17 plates on 10 leaves

Open to plates 17: 'Ethinius queen of waters...'

and 18 'Shot from the heights of Enitharmon'

Relief and white-line etching with colour printing  
and hand colouring

Library of Congress. Lessing J. Rosenwald collection, 1806

X77354

## **Book of Thel (Copy I)**

c.1789

Book, 8 plates on 8 leaves

Open to the title page

Relief etching printed in green ink with hand-colouring

Thel is a shepherdess who seeks spiritual illumination through conversation with a series of entities: a lily, a cloud, a worm and a clod of clay. This copy belonged to the scholar and collector Francis Douce (1757–1834) and may be in his original binding.

Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, accession number

Arch. A. d.22

X73562



## **For Children (Copy E)**

1793

Book, 18 plates on 18 leaves

Open to Plate 1, Frontispiece, 'What is Man!'

Etching and line engraving on paper

Blake used conventional engraving techniques for this little book of emblems, composed and printed in 1793. It was available to buy at Blake's house in Lambeth and at Joseph Johnson's shop in St. Paul's Church Yard. This copy belonged to the artist Henry Fuseli, who passed it to the daughter of one of his patrons in 1806.

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

X73727

## **There is no Natural Religion (Copy B)**

c.1788 (composition date)

c.1794 (print date)

Book, 11 plates on 11 leaves. Open to Plate 10,

'1 Mans Perceptions are not Bounded...'

Colour-printed relief etching on paper

This collection of short philosophical statements was one of Blake's first experiments in relief etching. It was first printed in around 1788. This copy, printed in coloured inks, was produced around 1794.

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

X73726

**Entering next room, on the right**

## **SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND OF EXPERIENCE**

**Songs of Innocence** (1789), **Songs of Experience** (1793) and the combined **Songs of Innocence and of Experience** (1794) are the bestknown of Blake's illuminated books. He sold more copies of these books than any other (although he probably printed no more than 30 in his lifetime). The poems deal with themes of childhood and morality, and include striking observations about suffering and social injustice. The visual style is highly decorative. The dense crowding of texts and borders is suggestive of illustrations to children's books or even embroidered samplers.

**Songs of Innocence, plate 22:**

**'Spring'**

c.1795

Colour-printed relief etching with pen and black ink and watercolour

**Songs of Innocence, plate 5:**

**'The Shepherd'**

c.1795

Colour-printed relief etching with pen and black ink and watercolour

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund

X73725, X73724

## First plinth, clockwise from Leaf 1

### **Songs of Innocence (Copy X)**

1789, hand-coloured before 1794

Disbound book, 14 plates on 7 leaves

Relief etching printed in green ink, text strengthened with blue wash, and finished with watercolour on paper

The seven sheets shown here were originally part of a complete copy of **Songs of Innocence**. They were later separated. They show how Blake printed **Songs of Innocence** on both sides of the page, with poems often running over from one page to the next.

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,

Felton Bequest, 1988

X73688, X75317–22

**Leaf 1, front: The Little Girl Lost (second plate),  
The Little Girl Found (first plate)  
Leaf 1, back: The Little Girl Found (continued)**

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest, 1988  
X73688

**Leaf 2, front: The Divine Image  
Leaf 2, back: Infant Joy**

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest, 1988  
X75317

**Leaf 3, front: A Cradle Song (first plate)  
Leaf 3, back: A Cradle Song (second plate)**

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest, 1988  
X75318

**Leaf 4, front: The Little Boy Lost**  
**Leaf 4, back: The Little Boy Found**

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest, 1988  
X75319

**Second plinth, clockwise from Leaf 5**

**Leaf 5, front: Nurse's Song**  
**Leaf 5, back: On Another's Sorrow**

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest, 1988  
X75320

**Leaf 6, front: Holy Thursday**  
**Leaf 6, back: The Voice of the Ancient Bard**

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest, 1988  
X75321

**Leaf 7, front: Spring (continued)**

**Leaf 7, back: The School-Boy**

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,

Felton Bequest, 1988

X75322



## Entering the room, clockwise

### Vitrine

#### Three cancelled plates from 'America, a prophecy'

1793

9 plates on 6 leaves

Open to cancelled plate 'c', not used in the book:

'The Albions Angel rose...'

Relief etching printed in brown, with graphite annotations

Blake produced three additional plates for **America, a Prophecy** weren't included in the final book. This whole page of poetry and marginal designs was probably meant to go between plates 10 and 11 (also on display here). We can see Blake's own pencil annotations with revisions to the text.

Library of Congress. Lessing J. Rosenwald collection, 1805  
(Rosenwald 1805)

X77356

## AMERICA, A PROPHECY

Many of Blake's illuminated books have been disbound, so that the individual plates can be displayed, as here. This transforms the way we experience them. Instead of turning pages, we look from one sheet to another as if they were individual, distinct pictures.

Blake's 18-page book **America, a Prophecy** is displayed here as 18 separate sheets. We can see that like conventionally printed books, he included a pictorial 'Frontispiece' and a 'Title page' setting out the details of the author and date of publication. There was an introduction ('Preludium'), before his epic, visionary poem unfolds over a series of plates. The images and text remain open to interpretation.



## Frontispiece for 'America a Prophecy'

1793

Colour relief etching on paper

Each printing of Blake's illuminated books could result in pages of quite different visual character. Blake used different coloured inks and would add pen and ink and watercolour to change his designs. This version of the frontispiece is different in character to the coloured version shown to the right.

Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gray Collection of Engravings Fund

X73538

## **America, A Prophecy (Copy M)**

1793

18 plates on 18 leaves, disbound

Colour-printed relief etching in brown with ink and watercolour on paper

The American War of Independence (1775–83) was the key historical event of Blake's youth. It shattered the British elite's assumptions that they could rule over a global, English-speaking empire. For many others, including Blake, it was a heroic overturning of the oppressive old order. Blake's poem deals with historical events in mythical terms. The central character is Orc, the spirit of revolution, who pursues the 'shadowy daughter of Urthona'. It was produced at a time when the French Revolution inspired both hope and fear that revolution would spread across Europe.

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

X73741–X73758

**Plate 1, Frontispiece**

X73742

**Plate 2, Title Page**

X73743

**Plate 3, 'Preludium | The Shadowy Daughter...'**

X73744

**Plate 4, 'Silent as Despairing Love...'**

X73745

**Plate 5, 'A Prophecy | The Guardian Prince of Albion...'**

X73746

**Plate 7, 'Albions Angel stood...'**

X73748

**Plate 8, 'The Morning Comes...'**

X73749

**Plate 9, 'In Thunders Ends the Voice...'**

X73750

**Plate 10, 'The Terror Answered...'**

X73751

**Plate 11, 'Sound! Sound! My Loud War Trumpets...'**

X73752

**Plate 12, 'Thus Wept the Angel Voice...'**

X73753

**Plate 13, 'Fiery the Angels Rose...'**

X73754

**Plate 14, 'So Cried He...'**

X73755

**Plate 15, 'What Time the Thirteen Governors...'**

X73741

**Plate 16, 'In the Flames Stood...'**

X73756

**Plate 17, 'On Albions Angels...'**

X73757

**Plate 18, 'Over the Hills...'**

X73758



ROOM 3

PATRONAGE AND

INDEPENDENCE

## PATRONAGE AND INDEPENDENCE

Throughout his life Blake depended upon the support of family and friends. These included several fellow-artists and amateurs, including John and Ann Flaxman, Thomas Stothard and George Cumberland. In the 1790s Blake started selling works to Thomas Butts, a senior civil servant. Butts became his most important patron, eventually owning up to 200 works by the artist. The Rev. Joseph Thomas also commissioned series of watercolours illustrating Milton and Shakespeare.

The wealthy poet William Hayley was another important supporter. In 1800–3 Blake went to work for Hayley, moving with Catherine to Sussex. The move opened up new connections, with the Rev. John Johnson and Elizabeth Ilive, Countess of Egremont.

The support of Flaxman, Butts, Hayley and their friends gave Blake a degree of financial stability. Blake's patrons were well-off and socially established, much more so than the artist. They admired the artist's unconventional character and independent spirit. But Blake resented being their employee and the advice they sometimes offered. As a result these relationships often became strained.



## **Clockwise from the wall text**

John Flaxman 1755–1826

### **Studies after William Blake**

June 1792

Ink on paper

These are sketches of Blake's work drawn from memory. Flaxman drew them while in Rome, where he achieved great success as a sculptor.

London, private collection

X71156

John Flaxman 1755–1826

### **Portrait of William Blake**

c.1804

Graphite on paper

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

X75316

## JOHN FLAXMAN AND GEORGE CUMBERLAND

Blake met Flaxman and Cumberland while at the Royal Academy. Flaxman was already getting established as a sculptor and designer. Cumberland worked in an insurance office, but was also an amateur artist. He inherited money in 1784 and was able to quit his day job. He became a lifelong supporter of Blake.

Both gave Blake work over a number of years and collected his illuminated books. Flaxman supported Blake's first publication, **Poetical Sketches** (1783), and with his wife Ann commissioned a long series of illustrations to the poems of Thomas Gray

### Quote above

A little Flower grew in a lonely Vale  
Its form was lovely but its colours pale  
One standing in the Porches of the Sun  
When his Meridian Glories were begun  
Leapd from the steps of fire & on the grass  
Alighted where this little flower was  
With hands divine he movd the gentle Sod  
And took the Flower up in its native Clod  
Then planting it upon a Mountains brow  
'Tis your own fault if you dont flourish now

William Blake, 'To Mrs Ann Flaxman', c.1797

## Vitrine

Edward Young 1683–1765

### **Night Thoughts**

1797

Book, 43 plates on 43 leaves

Engravings with hand-colouring

Blake produced over 530 watercolours for Edward Young's long poem on 'life, death and immortality'. He created bold designs in large margins around each sheet of the printed text. These often give literal form to ideas in the text. Publisher Richard Edwards commissioned Blake, but later abandoned the project and closed down his business. Blake had asked for over £100 for the designs but was paid only £21. He despaired, writing in 1799: 'I am laid by in a corner as if I did not Exist'. This copy was hand-coloured by Blake or by Catherine Blake.

By courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum,  
London.

X73718

## **The Conversion of Saul**

c.1800

Ink and watercolour on paper

The Huntington Library, Art Collections,  
and Botanical Gardens

X73665

## **Moses Striking the Rock**

1805

Watercolour over graphite on paper

This was delivered to Butts in May 1805, paid for in March 1806. The price, as usual, was one guinea.

Philadelphia Museum of Art: On loan from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the gift of Florence Foerderer Tonner in memory of her dear parents, Robert H. Foerderer and Caroline Fischer Foerderer

X73709

## **Samson Subdued**

c.1800

Ink and watercolour over graphite on paper

This appeared among 12 drawings in Blake's accounts with Butts in January 1805, the group priced at £12 12s.

Philadelphia Museum of Art:

Gift of Mrs. William Thomas Tonner, 1964

X73708

## **The Christ Child Asleep on the Cross**

1799–1800

Tempera on canvas

Lent by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

X73722

## **Christ Blessing the Little Children**

1799

Tempera on canvas

Tate. Presented by the executors of W. Graham Robertson  
through the Art Fund 1949

N05893

## **The Body of Christ Borne to the Tomb**

c.1799–1800

Tempera on canvas mounted onto cardboard

The frame is original and may even have been chosen  
by Blake.

Tate. Presented by Francis T. Palgrave 1884

N01164



**Text above**

## **THOMAS BUTTS**

Butts commissioned or purchased as many as 200 works from Blake, including a long series of paintings and watercolours on biblical themes. These provided a steady income at a time when Blake's engraving work started to dry up.

Many of the Bible watercolours present prophecies from Revelations or Ezekiel. Butts's interest in these wildly imaginative works might seem at odds with his highly respectable social position. He was a well paid civil servant, with a side-line as a coal merchant, and also ran a girls' school.

## Vitrine

### Elizabeth Butts

1809

Bodycolour on ivory, framed in the lower half of an oval red leather case

Elizabeth Butts ran a girls' school from the house she occupied with her husband Thomas Butts in Great Marlborough Street. Miniature portraits were a reliable source of income for artists, but Blake is known to have done only nine, between 1801 and 1809. Miniatures were cherished objects, shared between loved ones. But Blake disparaged such descriptive work: 'Portrait Painting is the direct contrary to Designing & Historical Painting in every respect'.

Lent by The British Museum, London

X71206

## Thomas Butts

c.1809

Bodycolour on ivory, set in a gilt oval frame, the glazed back set with locks of hair on a woven hair ground

This may be the miniature that Blake sent to London from Sussex in 1801. He wrote to Butts: 'by my Sisters hands I transmit to Mrs Butts an attempt at your likeness which I hope She who is the best judge will think like'.

Butts was not in the army, so the costume must refer to Butts' job in the civil service organising equipment and supplies for the military.

Lent by The British Museum, London

X71204

## **Thomas Butts II**

c.1809

Bodycolour on ivory, in a wooden frame with gilt-brass mounts

Thomas Butts junior (1788–1862) took art lessons from Blake from around 1806. He produced his own prints somewhat in the style of Blake. He inherited his parents' collection of works by the artist. Much was sold in the 1850s. Other works passed to his own children.

Lent by The British Museum, London

X73461

## **The Great Red Dragon and the Beast from the Sea**

c.1805

Ink with watercolour over graphite on paper

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Rosenwald Collection,  
1943

X73685

## **The Number of the Beast is 666**

c.1805

Ink and watercolour on paper

The Rosenbach, Philadelphia

X73715



## **Satan in his Original Glory:**

**'Thou wast Perfect till Iniquity was Found in Thee'**

c.1805

Ink and watercolour on paper

This watercolour shows how such works have changed over time. There is a strip of much stronger blue colour at the bottom right edge, in an area which had been masked from the light in the past.

Tate. Presented by the executors of W. Graham Robertson through the Art Fund 1949

N05892

## **Christ Girding Himself with Strength**

c.1805

Chalk and watercolour over pencil on paper

Bristol Culture: Bristol Museums & Art Gallery

X73453

## **The Assumption**

1806

Graphite, watercolour and ink on paper

This shows Mary, mother of Christ, ascending to heaven. There is no direct reference to this in the Bible, but there were many artistic precedents for this image.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

X73717

**David Delivered out of Many Waters**

c.1805

Ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Presented by George Thomas Saul 1878

N02230

**The Crucifixion: 'Behold Thy Mother'**

c.1805

Ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Presented by the executors of W. Graham Robertson through the Art Fund 1949

N05895

**The Magdalene at the Sepulchre**

c.1805

Pen, ink and watercolour on paper

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection. X73730

## **The Angel Rolling away the Stone**

c.1805

Watercolour on paper

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Morse gift  
X34493

## **Illustrations to Milton's 'Paradise Lost'**

1807

12 designs on 12 sheets

Ink and watercolour on paper

John Milton's epic poem describes Adam and Eve's banishment from the Garden of Eden. Satan, the rebellious fallen angel, is a major character. Blake made these illustrations for the Rev. Joseph Thomas, following an introduction from Flaxman.

The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical  
Gardens

X73666–X73677



## **Satan Calling Up His Legions**

X73666

## **Satan, Sin, and Death: Satan Comes to the Gates of Hell**

X73667

## **Christ Offers to Redeem Man**

X73668

## **Satan Spying on Adam and Eve and Raphael's Descent into Paradise**

X73669

## **Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve**

X73670

## **Raphael Warns Adam and Eve**

X73671

## **The Rout of the Rebel Angels**

X73672

## **The Creation of Eve**

X73673

## **The Temptation and Fall of Eve**

X73674

## **The Judgment of Adam and Eve: 'So Judged He Man'**

X73675

## **Michael Foretells the Crucifixion**

X73676

## **The Expulsion**

X73677

## **REVEREND JOSEPH THOMAS**

The Rev. Joseph Thomas of Epsom, Surrey, was a clergyman and friend of Flaxman. Flaxman put him and Blake in touch, leading to a series of commissions. Thomas had married an heiress, Millicent Pankhurst. He held no church appointment and was free to pursue his artistic and scholarly interests.

Blake produced several series of watercolours for Thomas illustrating the poetry of the 17th-century writer John Milton, and Shakespeare's plays. Thomas also purchased a few published works by Blake.

**Illustrations to Milton's Hymn  
'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity'  
1809**

6 designs on 6 sheets  
Graphite, ink and watercolour on paper

Blake was paid two pounds for each of these six designs by Thomas, twice what he was paid by Butts for the individual Bible watercolours. He made another set of these illustrations for Thomas Butts. Milton's poem celebrates the birth of Christ, and the retreat of pagan and evil forces.

The Whitworth, The University of Manchester  
X34509–12, X71162–3

**The Descent of Peace**

X71162

**The Angels appearing to the Shepherds**

X34512

## **The Descent of Typhon and the Gods into Hell**

X34510

## **The Shrine of Apollo**

X34511

## **Sullen Moloch**

X71163

## **The Night of Peace**

X34509

**First plinth entering the room, clockwise**

**From The Poems of Thomas Gray**

1797–8

Watercolour with ink and graphite on paper

12 designs on 6 sheets

Designs 1–2 and 105–116

Ann and John Flaxman commissioned these illustrations of Gray's poems to support Blake when he was struggling to find work. Blake uses the same format as he used for his engraved illustrations to Edward Young, also on display here.

Gray's poem 'Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard' is a melancholy reflection on death, but Blake's illustrations emphasise the eternal nature of spiritual life. The final page features Blake's own poem 'To Mrs Ann Flaxman'.

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

X75317, X73733–8

**Second plinth, clockwise**

**Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard, Designs 105–6**

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection  
X73733

**Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard, Designs 107–8**

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection  
X73734

**Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard, Designs 109–10**

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection  
X73735



**Third plinth, clockwise**

**Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard, Designs 113–14**

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection  
X73737

**Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard, Designs 115–16**

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection  
X73738

## Entering the next room, clockwise

### TWELVE LARGE COLOUR PRINTS

Blake made these prints using a form of experimental monotype. This involved painting tacky ink onto a board and transferring it through pressure onto paper. He enhanced the basic printed image with ink and watercolour. The end result is very painterly, but with textures impossible to achieve by hand. Blake referred to these works as 'frescos'. This reflects his wish to imitate the grand wall paintings of the ancient world and medieval times.

Thomas Butts purchased eight of these prints from Blake in 1805, and probably owned a full set. The subject matter comes from the Bible, Shakespeare and Milton, as well as Blake's imagination. There is no definitive sequence. Scholars have connected the prints in many different, inventive ways.

## **The Good and Evil Angels**

1795–c.1805

Colour print, ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Presented by W. Graham Robertson 1939

N05057

## **God Judging Adam**

1795

Relief etching, ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Presented by W. Graham Robertson 1939

N05063

## **Christ Appearing to the Apostles after the Resurrection**

c.1795

Print, ink, watercolour and varnish on paper

Tate. Bequeathed by W. Graham Robertson 1948

N05875

## **Nebuchadnezzar**

1795–c.1805

Colour print, ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Presented by W. Graham Robertson 1939

N05059

## **Newton**

1795–c.1805

Colour print, ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Presented by W. Graham Robertson 1939

N05058



## Quote above

The Enquiry in England is not whether a Man has Talents. & Genius - But whether he is Passive & Polite & a Virtuous Ass

William Blake, annotations to **The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds**, c.1808–9

## Pity

c.1795

Colour print, ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Presented by W. Graham Robertson 1939  
N05062

**The Night of Enitharmon's Joy (formerly called 'Hecate')**  
c.1795

Colour print, ink, tempera and watercolour on paper

Tate. Presented by W. Graham Robertson 1939  
N05056



**Elohim Creating Adam**  
1795–c.1805

Colour print, ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Presented by W. Graham Robertson 1939  
N05055

## **The House of Death**

1795–c.1805

Colour print, ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Presented by W. Graham Robertson 1939

N05060

## **Satan Exulting over Eve**

c.1795

Colour print, ink and watercolour on paper mounted  
on canvas

Tate. Purchased with assistance from the National Heritage  
Memorial Fund, the Friends of the Tate Gallery, the Essick  
Foundation, Edwin C. Cohen and other benefactors

honouring Martin Butlin, Keeper of the British Collection

1967–1989, 1996

T07213

## **Lamech and his Two Wives**

1795

Colour print, ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Presented by W. Graham Robertson 1939

N05061

## **Naomi Entreating Ruth and Orpah to Return to the Land of Moab**

c.1795

Colour print finished in pen and ink, shell gold and Chinese white on paper

Victoria and Albert Museum, London,  
given by J. E. Taylor, Esq.

X01509



## Entering the next room, clockwise

### **ELIZABETH ILIVE, COUNTESS OF EGREMONT**

Elizabeth Ilive, Countess of Egremont, was a scientist and supporter of modern art. She had an unconventional relationship with the Earl of Egremont. They eventually married in 1801. Their country house at Petworth in Sussex was an important centre of modern British art, attracting a succession of painters. It is not certain whether Blake visited the house.

As well as the two paintings on display here, Ilive bought copies of Blake's late engravings of the Book of Job, and paid Catherine Blake £84 for a painting of his in 1829. These are on display in the final room of the exhibition.

## **Satan calling up his Legions**

1800–1805

Tempera and gold leaf on canvas

National Trust Collections, Petworth House, (The Egremont Collection (acquired in lieu of tax by H.M.Treasury in 1956 and subsequently transferred to The National Trust))

X73707

## **Dante Alighieri**

1800–3

Ink and tempera on canvas

Manchester Art Gallery

X73521

## **A Vision of the Last Judgement**

c.1808

Watercolour, pen and ink and pencil on paper

National Trust Collections, Petworth House, (The Egremont Collection (acquired in lieu of tax by H.M.Treasury in 1956 and subsequently transferred to The National Trust))

X34505

## **Brutus and Caesar's Ghost**

1806

Ink and watercolour on paper

This and the three other watercolours shown here are from a group commissioned by the Rev. Joseph Thomas. He added them as illustrations into a copy of Shakespeare's plays. Thomas also bought works by other artists to include in the book.

Lent by The British Museum, London

X73464

**William Shakespeare**

1800–3

Ink and tempera on canvas

Manchester Art Gallery

X73522



**Richard III and the Ghosts**

c.1806

Pen and black ink, and grey wash, with watercolour on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London

X13425

**Queen Katherine's Dream**

1809

Ink and watercolour on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London

X73463

**Jacques and the Wounded Stag**

1806

Ink and watercolour over graphite on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London

X73462

**William Cowper**

1800–3

Ink and tempera on canvas

Manchester Art Gallery

X73514

## **Evening**

c.1805

Watercolour and chalk on wood

This and the accompanying panel showing 'Winter', also on display here, were part of a fireplace decoration which Blake painted for the Rev. John Johnson. As well as 'Evening' and 'Winter', Blake created a long landscape scene running over the top of the fireplace which is not known to have survived.

National Gallery of Art, Washington,  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Hanes, in Honor of the 50th  
Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1990.22.1  
X73686

## **A Woody Landscape**

c.1801

Watercolour and graphite on paper

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection  
X73760

**Landscape with Spire**

c.1801

Graphite on paper

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

X73759

**John Milton**

1800–3

Ink and tempera on canvas

Manchester Art Gallery

X73512

## Landscape near Felpham

c.1800

Graphite and watercolour on paper

Blake produced several landscape watercolours showing the scenery near his home in Sussex. This was the only time he made observational landscape drawings, though imaginative landscapes play a large part in his literary and visionary designs. These watercolours may reflect the new opportunities of living in a natural environment, or a kind of release from the burden of work he did for Hayley.

Tate. Presented by Mrs John Richmond 1922

A00041





**The Entrance Front of Hayley's House at Eartham**  
1801

Ink with watercolour and graphite on paper

This was the house that Hayley lived in until 1798, when he moved to The Turret at Felpham. Blake and Hayley visited it together in September 1801.

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection  
X73761

**Edmund Spenser**  
1800–3

Ink and tempera on canvas

Manchester Art Gallery  
X73517

**Winter**

c.1805

Tempera on pine

Tate. Purchased 1979

T02387

## **THE HEADS OF THE POETS**

The five long canvases shown above other works in this room were commissioned by William Hayley to decorate his new library in The Turret, his house at Felpham. They represent famous poets, with a portrait of Hayley's late son as a centrepiece. Blake based the likenesses on existing engravings but took the opportunity to introduce more imaginative scenes within the decoration.

The canvases are hung high to show how they would have been displayed originally.



## **WILLIAM HAYLEY AND SUSSEX**

Blake and Catherine were invited to Sussex by the wealthy poet William Hayley. They stayed there between 1800 and 1803, the only time they lived outside of London. The cottage they stayed in at Felpham still stands.

The move offered a healthier environment, as well as opportunities for work. Hayley expected Blake to do miniature portraits, reproductive engravings and decorative paintings for his library. There were rare chances for more inventive work, but Blake became frustrated with his situation.

In 1803 Blake was wrongfully arrested following an argument with a soldier. Hayley supported his legal defence but the friendship between them ended. Blake returned to London from Sussex, facing an uncertain future.

## **The Horse**

c.1805

Tempera and ink on copper engraving plate

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

X73731

### **Quote above**

For when Los joind with me he took me in his firy whirlwind  
My Vegetated portion was hurried from Lambeths shades  
He set me down in Felphams Vale & prepar'd a beautiful  
Cottage for me that in three years I might write all these  
Visions To display Natures cruel holiness: the deceits of  
Natural Religion Walking in my Cottage Garden, sudden  
I beheld The Virgin Ololon & address'd her as a Daughter  
of Beulah

William Blake, from 'Milton a Poem', c.1804–11

## Vitrine

William Cowper 1731–1800

**The life, and posthumous writings, of William Cowper, Esqr.,  
with an introductory letter to the Right Honourable  
Earl Cowper**

[volumes 1 and 2]

1803

Book, 2 volumes

Blake engraved the plates for this book, which he described sarcastically as 'a most valuable acquisition to Literature'. He had expected more exciting work from Hayley.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74311

William Hayley 1745–1820

**The triumphs of temper: a poem in six cantos. The  
thirteenth edition, corrected, with new original designs,  
by Maria Flaxman**

1807

Book

Blake engraved the plates for this book from drawings by Maria Flaxman, the sister of his supporter John Flaxman.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74310

attributed to William Blake

**Thomas Alphonso Hayley**

c.1800

Graphite and gouache on paper

This is William Hayley's son, Tom, who died at the age of 19 in May 1800. He had been studying sculpture with John Flaxman.

Yale Center for British Art, Yale Art Gallery Collection,

Gift of Charles Rosenbloom

X73732

## Vitrine

William Blake after George Romney 1734–1802

**William Cowper**

1801

Watercolour on card

Hayley instructed Blake to paint this miniature of the poet William Cowper, based on an original portrait by George Romney. Blake later complained about Hayley to Thomas Butts: 'As a Poet he is frightend at me & as a Painter his views & mine are opposite he thinks to turn me into a Portrait Painter as he did Poor Romney'.

The Cowper and Newton Museum, Olney, Buckinghamshire  
X77079



**The Rev. John Johnson**

1802

Watercolour on card

Johnson was rector of Yaxham with Welborne, Norfolk, and a cousin of William Cowper. Blake went on to provide a set of fireplace surrounds for Johnson, which are also on display here.

The Cowper and Newton Museum, Olney, Buckinghamshire  
X70733

## **First vitrine entering the room**

**Milton, a poem in 12 [i.e. 2] books (Copy D)**

1804–18

Book, 50 plates on 50 leaves

Open to Plate 40 ('When on his highest life ...')

Relief etching printed in orange and hand-coloured

Blake began this prophetic book while in Sussex. It charts a journey of spiritual self-discovery through the figure of the 17th-century poet John Milton who returns from heaven. The symbolism and sources are wide-ranging and incorporate elements of Blake's own life. This plate shows the cottage where he and Catherine lived while in Sussex. It still stands today. Blake loved it, writing, 'if I should ever build a Palace it would be only My Cottage Enlarged'.

Library of Congress. Lessing J. Rosenwald collection, 1810  
(Rosenwald 1810)

X77355

## Second vitrine

### Sketch for the frontispiece to 'The Lion'

1802

Ink over graphite on paper

Hayley reported Blake's progress engraving this design for his Ballads in a letter to the Rev. Johnson in August 1802: 'our good Blake is actually in Labour with a young lion – a new born Cub will probably kiss your hand in a week or two'.

Lent by the Royal Academy of Arts, London

X71158

William Hayley 1745–1820

**Ballads ... founded on anecdotes relating to animals,  
with prints, designed and engraved by William Blake**

1805

Book

These are among the more playful and inventive of the works commissioned by Hayley. Blake expected them to be a popular success. He wrote to his brother in 1803: 'These Ballads are likely to be Profitable for we have Sold all that we have had time to print'. The series was discontinued, to Blake's frustration.

West Sussex Record Office, Crookshank 327

X77229

ROOM 4  
INDEPENDENCE  
AND DESPAIR

## INDEPENDENCE AND DESPAIR

This gallery traces a particularly tumultuous period in Blake's life, from 1805 to 1812. In 1805 he secured work illustrating Robert Blair's poem **The Grave**. Published in 1808, his designs were a critical success, praised by many leading artists and patrons. But Blake was disappointed that he did not get the work of engraving the illustrations as well as designing them. He also suspected the publisher, Robert Cromek, of stealing his idea to do an engraving of the pilgrims from Chaucer's **Canterbury Tales**.

In 1809 Blake organised a retrospective exhibition of his work. This was held in Broad Street, Soho, in the family home where his brother was now running the hosiery business. The exhibition catalogue set out his highly personal ideas about art and his ambitions as a painter of large-scale frescos. This room includes a recreation of the 1809 exhibition where you can experience Blake's work as it would have been seen in Broad Street. There is also a projection showing his paintings at the gigantic scale he hoped to realise them.

The exhibition of 1809 was, however a critical and commercial disaster. Blake was bitterly disappointed and felt betrayed by his friends in the art world. Having made big claims about restoring 'the grand style of Art', he

exhibited for the last time in 1812. He then withdrew from the public gaze for several years.



## **Clockwise from the wall text**

### **Vitrine**

Benjamin Malkin 1769–1842

**A Father's Memoirs of his Child**

1806

### **Book**

This book includes the first printed biography of Blake. It also included several of Blake's shorter poems, including 'The Tyger'. Its publication in 1806 contributed to Blake's growing reputation at this date.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74302



José Joaquín de Mora 1783–1864

**Meditaciones poeticas**

1826

Book

During his own lifetime Blake's illustrations for **The Grave** reached as far as South America. This Spanish-language book features poems inspired by Blake's designs.

By courtesy of The University of Liverpool Library

X73623

## CANTERBURY PILGRIMS

In around 1806 both Blake and his old friend Thomas Stothard started planning pictures representing characters from **The Canterbury Tales** by medieval writer Geoffrey Chaucer. Stothard's painting was commissioned by publisher Robert Cromek and they planned to issue a print of it. Blake felt betrayed by both his friends and claimed that Stothard had stolen the idea of a friezelike composition from him. Blake completed his own painting in 1808 and published his print in 1810, but worried they would be overshadowed by the more commercial work of his rival.

The incident prompted a series of bitter and frustrated commentaries by Blake. It also motivated his one-man exhibition of 1809. He felt his artistic vision was more authentic than Stothard's, and that his friends were more interested in making money than in making great art.



## Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims

1810

Engraving on paper

Blake wrote that his version of the **Canterbury Pilgrims** matched the universal vision of Chaucer, whose characters include representatives of 'all ages and nations'. His engraving technique evokes the direct, firm style of 16th-century German and Netherlandish prints.

Lord Egremont

X73622

## Vitrine

William Carey 1759–1839

**Critical Description of the Procession of Chaucer's Pilgrims  
to Canterbury Painted by Thomas Stothard, esq., R.A**

1808

Book

Tate Library and Archive

Z74313

Louis Schiavonetti 1765–1810 and James Heath 1757–1834  
after Thomas Stothard 1755–1834

## **The Pilgrimage to Canterbury**

1809–17

Etching and engraving on paper

Blake called Stothard's treatment of the Canterbury Pilgrims 'misconceived'. He described his rival's figures as 'a burlesque set of scare-crows, not worth any man's respect or care'. The engraving was made by another rival, Luigi Schiavonetti.

Tate. Purchased 1994

T06857

### **Quote above**

My title as Genius thus is provd  
Not Praisd by Hayley nor by Flaxman lov'd

William Blake, epigram c.1810

## **Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims**

1810, reprinted before 1881

Engraving on paper

Blake's design was reprinted several times through the 19th century and became one of his best-known compositions. This copy was owned by John Giles, a stockbroker. Giles was a member of the youthful group of Blake's followers known as 'The Ancients'.

Tate. Presented by the Giles family 2016

P14339

**Please continue clockwise in this section,  
to the wall on the right**

Thomas Phillips 1770–1845

**William Blake**

1807

Oil paint on canvas This is Blake at the age of 50, enjoying a brief period of relative celebrity. Phillips said he captured Blake's 'rapt poetic expression' as he recalled one of his visions, a visit to his studio from the Archangel Gabriel.

The portrait was seen by thousands of visitors to the Royal Academy exhibition in 1807. Many more would have seen it in engraved form as the frontispiece to **The Grave**.

National Portrait Gallery

X34496



Anthony Cardon 1772–1813 after Henry Edridge 1768–1821

**Luigi Schiavonetti**

1811

Stipple engraving on paper

The most successful engravers in Blake's time, including Schiavonetti, specialised in mixing different techniques to create soft tonal effects. These contrast with the more rugged and emphatic techniques that Blake preferred.

National Portrait Gallery

X71117



## Vitrine

John Flaxman 1755–1826

### **Portrait of Robert Hartley Cromek**

c.1804

Black chalk on paper

Cromek was originally an engraver. The Grave was his first venture as a publisher. Blake put his faith in Cromek because they had several mutual friends. These included Benjamin Heath Malkin, who wrote the first biography of Blake, and Flaxman, who made this portrait.

The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum,

University of Cambridge

X73534

## THE GRAVE

The materials gathered here relate to Blake's work for an edition of Robert Blair's poem, **The Grave**, published in 1808. Blake scholars have not given these images as much attention as illustrations of his original writings. But he took this project seriously, and it secured him a degree of acclaim at a difficult time in his career.

The illustrations were commissioned by Robert Cromek in 1805. This was the first publishing venture of Cromek, an engraver. Blake quickly produced the 20 drawings. He may have been invigorated by the themes of Blair's poem, a reflection on death and the afterlife.

Cromek promoted **The Grave** tirelessly, taking Blake's work to new places and new publics. As well as displaying them at his London house, Cromek toured Blake's designs to Birmingham and Manchester. The illustrations were generally well received, but Blake came to feel betrayed by Cromek, who employed the fashionable engraver Luigi Schiavonetti to produce the prints.

## **A Title Page for 'The Grave'**

1806

Ink and blue watercolour on paper

The Huntington Library, Art Collections,  
and Botanical Gardens

X73678

## **Death's Door**

1805

Whiteline etching with handtinting in black and grey washes  
on paper

This is the only surviving print for **The Grave** that Blake produced himself. The publisher Cromek was worried that the ruggedness of Blake's unusual technique would put off customers. He therefore engaged the much more conventional printmaker Luigi Schiavonetti to engrave Blake's designs.

Collection of Robert N. Essick

X77009

## **Christ Descending into the Grave**

c.1805–7

Ink and watercolour over traces of graphite on paper

Private collection

X02943

## **Death of the Strong Wicked Man**

1805

Ink, watercolour and graphite on paper

Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département of Arts graphiques

X02946

## **The Death of the Good Old Man**

1805

Pen and ink and watercolour over traces of graphite on paper

Collection of Robert N. Essick

X02951

**The Counseller, King, Warrior, Mother and Child,  
in the Tomb**

1805

Ink and brown wash over graphite on paper

Collection of Robert N. Essick

X02945

**Friendship**

c.1805–7

Ink and watercolour over graphite on paper

Private collection

X02954

**'Heaven's Portals wide expand to let Him in'**

1805

Black and grey inks and watercolour over graphite on paper

Collection of Robert N. Essick

X02958

**First vitrine entering the room, left to right**

Robert Blair 1699–1746

**The Grave 2nd edition**

1813

Book

High sales of *The Grave* prompted the publication of this second edition in 1813.

City of Westminster Archives

X75324

Robert Blair 1699–1746

**The Grave**

1808

Book

Tate Library and Archive

Z08934

**Second vitrine, left to right**

Robert Blair 1699–1746

**The Grave** (subscriber's copy)

1808

Book

This copy belonged to the prominent architect,  
Sir John Soane RA.

By courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's  
Museum, London

X73719

Robert Blair 1699–1746

**The Grave** (subscriber's copy)

1808

Book

This copy belonged to Blake's patrons, the Earl and Countess of Egremont.

Lord Egremont

X77272



## **Entering the next section, wall on the left**

The largest of the paintings in Blake's exhibition is long lost. The line of wooden beading here indicates its approximate size. Blake said it showed 'Three Ancient Britons overthrowing the Army of armed Romans; the Figures full as large as Life'. It is not clear how it would have fitted into the small rooms at 28 Broad Street.

## THE 1809 EXHIBITION

The space opposite evokes the upstairs rooms at 28 Broad Street, Soho, where Blake held his one-man exhibition in 1809. This was an ordinary London town-house, built in the 1730s. The Blake family had lived there since the 1750s. We know the proportions of the front room on the first floor from archival records and images.

Visitors probably gained access to the exhibition through the hosiery shop downstairs. In 1809 this was being run by Blake's brother, James. This was a strange setting for an art exhibition. It was even stranger given the visionary character of Blake's works and the gigantic ambitions he expressed in the accompanying **Descriptive Catalogue**. There were only a handful of visitors, and a single published review which dismissed Blake as 'an unfortunate lunatic'.

Every 20 minutes two works in this recreated exhibition will be virtually 'restored'. They will be illuminated so you can see how they would have looked in 1809. You will also hear Blake's words about these pictures, expressing his ambition to be a painter of large-scale wall paintings. Blake's words are spoken by the actor Kevin Eldon.



## 28 BROAD STREET

Blake's exhibition was held in the first-floor rooms of 28 Broad Street, shown here in a later print. The plasterwork and window surrounds were later 19th-century additions. In 1809 Blake's sister, brother and his wife lived at this address and ran the hosiery and haberdashery shop on the ground floor.

Frederick Adcock, **William Blake's house, Soho, London 1912**  
The Print Collector / Alamy Stock Photo

## Quote above

The execution of my Designs, being all in Water-colours, (that is in Fresco) are regularly refused to be exhibited by the Royal Academy, and the British Institution has, this year, followed its example, and has effectually excluded me by this Resolution ... it is therefore become necessary that I should exhibit to the Public, in an Exhibition of my own, my Designs, Painted in Watercolours. If Italy is enriched and made great by RAPHAEL, if MICHAEL ANGELO is its supreme glory, if Art is the glory of a Nation, if Genius and Inspiration are the great Origin and Bond of Society, the distinction my Works have obtained from those who best understand such things, calls for my Exhibition as the greatest of Duties to my Country.

William Blake, from '[Advertisement of] Exhibition of Paintings in Fresco, Poetical and Historical Inventions', 1809

## Vitrine

**The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, M.DCCCVIII.**

**The Fortieth**

1808

Book

Blake exhibited with the Royal Academy for the last time in 1808. He showed his watercolours of 'Jacob's Dream' and 'Christ in the Sepulchre'. They were not displayed in the main gallery of oil paintings. Instead they were hung among many hundreds of works, crowded between scenes of ordinary life and landscape views. Blake was annoyed by the way his paintings were shown in public exhibitions. He hoped that presenting them in a one-man show would get them more attention.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74315

## Catalogue of the Fifth Annual Exhibition by the Associated Painters in Water Colours

1812

Book

Many watercolour painters became frustrated by the way their works were treated at the Royal Academy exhibitions. From 1805 they held their own exhibitions. In 1812 Blake showed several paintings and 'detached specimens' of his new prophetic book, **Jerusalem**, with the Associated Painters in Water Colours. A critic in the fashionable **Lady's Monthly Magazine** declared, 'we dare say they may be fine; but they are also too sublime for our comprehension'. This was the last time that Blake attempted to engage public attention by exhibiting his works.

Tate Library and Archive

Z74316

## **In the recreated exhibition**

### **Wall on the left**

#### **From left to right:**

#### **Satan Calling up his Legions**

1795–1800

Tempera on canvas

#### **The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan**

c.1805–9

Tempera on canvas

#### **The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth**

?1805

Tempera and gold on canvas

## **The Bard, from Gray**

?1809

Tempera and gold on canvas

Lent by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. X27118

Tate. Purchased 1914. N03006; Tate. Purchased 1882. N01110

Tate. Purchased 1920. N03551

Blake provided a long commentary on his 'spiritual forms' of Pitt and Nelson. The recently deceased Prime Minister William Pitt and naval hero Admiral Nelson had both led Britain in the war against France. Blake shows these national figures guiding biblical monsters bringing chaos and destruction to the world. The symbolism is complex. In the picture of Nelson 'The Nations of the Earth' are shown as contorted figures enveloped by the serpent. A figure of colour in chains lies collapsed at the bottom. He appears to be freed of the serpent's coils, perhaps suggesting that such destruction could also lead to new freedoms and spiritual rebirth.



## **Wall on the right**

**From right to left:**

### **The Penance of Jane Shore in St Paul's Church**

c.1793

Ink, watercolour and bodycolour on paper

### **Christ in the Sepulchre, Guarded by Angels**

c.1805

Ink and watercolour on paper

### **The Soldiers Casting Lots for Christ's Garments**

1800

Indian ink, grey wash and watercolour on paper  
Ruth the Dutiful Daughter in Law

1803

Wash, graphite, and coloured chalk on paper

Tate. Presented by the executors of W. Graham Robertson through the Art Fund 1949. N05898

Lent by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. X34490  
The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of  
Cambridge. X27112  
Southampton City Art Gallery. X27117

Blake's one-man exhibition was organised during a period of war and social upheaval. His imagery is spiritual and allegorical. It may appear disconnected from contemporary politics. But Blake imagined a public role for art. In connection with his watercolour of angels hovering over the body of Christ, on display here, he wrote: 'The times require that every one should speak out boldly; England expects that every man should do his duty, in Arts, as well as in Arms, or in the Senate'.

## **Transcript of the audio installation**

**The spiritual form of Nelson guiding Leviathan, in whose wreathings are infolded the Nations of the Earth.**

**The spiritual form of Pitt, guiding Behemoth; he is that Angel who, pleased to perform the Almighty's orders, rides on the whirlwind, directing the storms of war: He is ordering the Reaper to reap the Vine of the Earth, and the Plowman to plow up the Cities and Towers.**

The two Pictures of Nelson and Pitt are compositions of a mythological cast, similar to those Apotheoses of Persian, Hindoo, and Egyptian Antiquity, which are still preserved on rude monuments, being copies from some stupendous originals now lost or perhaps buried till some happier age. The Artist having been taken in vision into the ancient republics, monarchies, and patriarchates of Asia, has seen those wonderful originals called in the Sacred Scriptures the Cherubim, which were sculptured and painted on walls of Temples, Towers, Cities, Palaces, and erected in the highly cultivated states of Egypt, Moab, Edom, Aram, among the Rivers of Paradise, being originals from which the Greeks and Hetrurians copied Hercules, Farnese, Venus of Medicis, Apollo Belvidere, and all the grand works of ancient art.

They were executed in a very superior style to those

justly admired copies, being with their accompaniments terrific and grand in the highest degree. The Artist has endeavoured to emulate the grandeur of those seen in his vision, and to apply it to modern Heroes, on a smaller scale.

The Artist wishes it was now the fashion to make such monuments, and then he should not doubt of having a national commission to execute these two Pictures on a scale that is suitable to the grandeur of the nation, who is the parent of his heroes, in high finished fresco, where the colours would be as pure and as permanent as precious stones though the figures were one hundred feet in height.

## Entering the next section

### **The Virgin and Child in Egypt**

1810

Tempera on canvas

This painting demonstrates Blake's enduring ambition to work on a larger scale. He adopted the 'Tüchlein' technique of 16th-century Netherlandish painting, using tempera (glue-based paint) on linen. Blake had seen such paintings on the London art market. It is one of four life-size figure paintings done for Thomas Butts in 1810.

Lent by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

X33250

Was I angry with Hayley who usd me so ill  
Or can I be angry with Felphams old Mill  
Or angry with Flaxman or Cromek or Stothard  
Or poor Schiavonetti whom they to death botherd  
Or angry with Macklin or Boydel or Bowyer  
Because they did not say O what a Beau ye ar  
At a Friends Errors Anger shew  
Mirth at the Errors of a Foe

William Blake, satirical verse c.1810

## **An Allegory of the Spiritual Condition of Man**

?1811

Ink and tempera on canvas

This is the largest surviving painting by Blake. The title is not Blake's, and the subject matter remains open to interpretation. The symmetrical composition evokes large-scale European church paintings of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum,  
University of Cambridge  
X01746

# PROJECTION ROOM

The two Pictures of Nelson and Pitt are compositions of a mythological cast, similar to those Apotheoses of Persian, Hindoo, and Egyptian Antiquity, which are still preserved on rude monuments, being copies from some stupendous originals now lost or perhaps buried till some happier age ... The Artist wishes it was now the fashion to make such monuments, and then he should not doubt of having a national commission to execute these two Pictures on a scale that is suitable to the grandeur of the nation, who is the parent of his heroes, in high finished fresco, where the colours would be as pure and as permanent as precious stones though the figures were one hundred feet in height.

William Blake, **Descriptive Catalogue** 1809



The projection shows details from two of Blake's paintings at the scale Blake hoped his work might one day be seen. They depict the 'spiritual forms' of the Prime Minister, William Pitt, and the naval hero, Admiral Nelson. In the catalogue of his 1809 exhibition, Blake wrote of his ambition to execute these and other paintings 30 metres high or more, for display in public buildings.

Many artists in Blake's time aspired to such ambitious paintings, inspired by the high-minded rhetoric of the Royal Academy. But Blake himself observed: 'The Painters of England are unemployed in Public Works'. There was no state support for artists, and little patronage from the monarchy or Church of England. Artists were instead freelancers, dependent on the market.

Despite his aspirations, Blake must have known that his dreams would never be fulfilled. After the failure of his one-man show in 1809 he became increasingly withdrawn and bitter.

## Image on the right

Blake hoped to see his paintings executed 'in Fresco, on an enlarged scale to ornament the altars of churches'. This image shows the interior of St James Piccadilly, the Blake family's parish church, with his painting of The Crucifixion inserted as if it was an altarpiece.

ROOM 5

A NEW KIND OF MAN

## 'A NEW KIND OF MAN'

After years of obscurity, Blake enjoyed a burst of creativity in the last ten years of his life. In 1818 he met a younger, more business-savvy artist, John Linnell. Together with fellow artists Samuel Palmer and John Varley, Linnell provided Blake with employment, friendship and a new sense of recognition.

Buoyed by their material and moral support, Blake produced some of his most extraordinary works. He completed his last and most ambitious illuminated book, **Jerusalem**, in 1820. He also found new purchasers for his older books and relief-etchings. He created a series of 'visionary heads' to indulge Varley's spiritualist interests. For Linnell he made a long series of large and vivid watercolours illustrating Dante's **Divine Comedy** and engravings for the biblical Book of Job, undertaken in the antiquated style he had always admired.

Blake spent his last years living with Catherine in modest accommodation in Fountain Court off the Strand, with a view onto the Thames. For the younger, more materially successful artists who gathered around him, he represented an ideal of creative integrity and spiritual authenticity. Their memories of him have been crucial in shaping modern perceptions of the artist. An influential

1863 biography drew on Blake's followers' recollections of him as 'a **new kind of man**, wholly original'.



## Quote above

The Corner of Broad Street weeps; Poland Street languishes  
To Great Queen Street & Lincolns Inn, all is distress & woe

William Blake, **Jerusalem** 1804–c.1820

## Entering the room, vitrine on the left

### The Book of Job

In 1823 Linnell commissioned Blake to make a series of engravings. They illustrate the Old Testament Book of Job, about a man whose faith is tested by God. Blake made the 22 resulting plates over three years, through bouts of ill health. They are considered his masterpieces of engraving, praised for their crisp lines, variation of tone and dramatic atmospheric effects.

Blake based the designs on his earlier watercolours on the same theme. Catherine helped to print the proofs as the designs progressed. But in a new departure, Blake engaged professional fine art printers to print the finished plates. Linnell hoped the project would make enough profit for Blake to live on. But it did not sell well at the time and was even said to be 'repulsive to print-collectors'.

## **Illustrations of the Book of Job**

1823–5, published 1826

22 line engravings on paper, in original binding

This copy is one of two bought by the third Earl of Egremont in 1831. It remains in its original state of presentation, in the cheap paper-covered cardboard binding that Blake and Catherine would have applied to all Blake's books. This was standard practice in the book trade, the idea being that buyers would have the cardboard cover removed and a leather binding applied in the colour and style of their choice.

Lord Egremont

X77351



## **Illustrations of the Book of Job**

1823–5, published 1826

22 line engravings on paper, in modern binding

### **Open at plate 6: Satan Going Forth from the Presence of the Lord and Job's Charity**

Blake was observed working on his Job engravings by visitors to his rooms at Fountain Court. The artist George Richmond noted how Blake worked facing the light, sitting at his 'long engraver's table' by the window.

Linnell claimed the distinctive borders around Blake's illustrations came about in a spontaneous flourish. These were apparently 'an afterthought, and designed as well as engraved upon the copper without a previous drawing'.

Lord Egremont

X73621

## **Illustrations of the Book of Job**

1823–5, published 1826

22 line engravings on paper, in original binding

Open at plate 16: **Behemoth and Leviathan**

Westminster City Archives

X78242

## **Illustrations of the Book of Job**

1823–5, published 1826

22 line engravings on paper, in original binding

Open at plate 15: **When the Morning Stars Sang Together**

The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Bequeathed by Francis Falconer Madan, 1962

X71196

## Clockwise from the entrance of the room

John Linnell 1792–1882

**William Blake wearing a hat**

c.1825

Graphite on paper

Linnell made this seemingly spontaneous portrait of Blake during one of their regular walks on Hampstead Heath, to the north of London. Linnell, who lived by the Heath, was Blake's most important friend during his final years. Their families became close and through Linnell Blake's social circle expanded. He met landscape artist John Constable at Linnell's house. Looking at Constable's drawing of trees on Hampstead Heath, Blake exclaimed that it was 'not drawing, but **inspiration!**'

The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum,

University of Cambridge

X73535

## THE 'VISIONARY HEADS'

In October 1819 Blake began a series of extraordinary sketches of spirits. He claimed to have seen and even spoken with the spirits in 'visions'. John Varley encouraged him. He provided Blake with drawing materials to make these so-called 'Visionary Heads'. He also attended the séance-like sessions when the spirits appeared to Blake. Varley described sitting with Blake 'from ten at night till three in the morning sometimes slumbering and sometimes waking, but Blake never slept'. According to Linnell, Varley believed in Blake's visions 'more than even Blake himself'.

Over a period of about six years Blake made over 100 'Visionary Heads'. They depict real historical figures such as medieval kings, as well as legendary characters like Merlin and a range of imagined beasts. Blake's contemporaries debated whether his nocturnal visions were a sign of mental ill health or a charming quirk.

## **Old Parr When Young**

1820

Graphite on laid paper

Blake made only a few full-length sketches of the spirits he saw in his visions. This one depicts a real-life figure, Thomas Parr, who, upon his death in 1635 was supposed to be 152 years old. He was buried in Westminster Abbey. Blake would have known his gravestone from his days there sketching monuments as an engraver's apprentice.

The Huntington Library, Art Collections,  
and Botanical Gardens

X73679

## Vitrine

William Blake and John Varley 1778–1842

### **The Blake / Varley Sketchbook**

1819

Book

Varley gave Blake sketchbooks to record his nocturnal visions. This page shows Rowena, a Saxon queen renowned for her beauty.

Private collection

X73560

## The Ghost of a Flea

c.1819–20

Tempera and gold on mahogany

The Ghost of a Flea is one of Blake's most bizarre and famous characters. As the vision appeared to Blake he is said to have cried out: 'There he comes! his eager tongue whisking out of his mouth, a cup in his hand to hold blood, and covered with a scaly skin of gold and green.'

John Varley watched Blake make the original sketch of this character. He also owned this painting showing the creature on a stage, flanked by curtains with a shooting star behind. Varley was a keen astrologer. He paid Linnell to engrave Blake's drawings, including the Flea, to illustrate his **Treatise on Zodiacal Physiognomy** (1828).

Tate. Bequeathed by W. Graham Robertson 1949

N05889

## **The Ghost of a Flea**

c.1819

Graphite on paper

Private collection

X71089

## **The Death Chamber, possible sketch for 'Jerusalem'**

c.1800–7

Red chalk on paper

This sketch was owned by artist Samuel Palmer. He wrote of his fondness for drawings by Blake in which 'the first thought is just breathed upon the paper'. The male figure at the centre recalls that in the last plate of **Jerusalem**. Behind him are two robed females with arms outstretched. To the right are two more figures, one bent double and another reclining against the altar table. The drawing's medium, red chalk, had associations with the Renaissance Old Masters – Blake may have used it to align himself with this tradition.

Harvard Art Museum/Fogg Museum,  
Gift of Meta and Paul J. Sachs. X73539



Robert John Thornton 1768–1837

**Pastorals of Virgil, with a course of English reading adapted for schools**

c.1821, printed 1830

Wood engravings on paper

This set of wood engravings was included in Thornton's Latin textbook. They illustrate a poem about two shepherds, one young, one old. These illustrations were hugely admired by 'the Ancients'. This was a group of young artists that clustered around Blake in his final years, idolising him and collecting his work. One of the group, Samuel Palmer, said these engravings possessed 'a mystic and dreamy glimmer as penetrates and kindles the inmost soul... unlike the gaudy daylight of this world'.

Tate. Presented by Herbert Linnell 1924

A00111–A00127

## The Creation of Eve

1822

Brown and black ink and watercolour over graphite and black chalk, with stippling and sponging

As well as commissioning new work from Blake, Linnell also employed him to revisit past compositions. This watercolour is a more richly coloured reworking of an illustration made for Thomas Butts in 1807. It was originally part of a series illustrating John Milton's **Paradise Lost** (shown in room 3). Linnell may have wanted a full set of such reworkings but Blake only made three.

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest,

1920

X73690

## **Satan Smiting Job with Sore Boils**

c.1826

Ink and tempera on mahogany

The first owner of this tempera was George Richmond, a member of the 'Ancients'. This was a circle of young artists who gathered around Blake in the 1820s.

In the biblical text this work refers to, Satan is given permission by God to torture Job in order to test the limits of his faith. This, **The Body of Abel Found by Adam and Eve** and the set of engravings to the Old Testament Book of Job (displayed nearby) reprise work that Blake had made for Thomas Butts 20 years earlier.

Tate. Presented by Miss Mary H. Dodge through the Art Fund  
1918  
N03340

## **The Body of Abel Found by Adam and Eve**

c.1826

Ink, tempera and gold on mahogany

In the 1820s Blake's work took on a richer appearance. He began to use more vibrant colour and to apply gold leaf more frequently. Another new practice was his use of a mahogany support. These innovations were perhaps inspired by Northern European art of the late 15th century, which adapted ideas of the Italian Renaissance. Blake and Linnell often visited such works in private and public collections across London. Blake's use of gold may have been facilitated by the fact that one of his Fountain Court neighbours was a gilder.

Tate. Bequeathed by W. Graham Robertson 1949

N05888

## THE DIVINE COMEDY

The last three years of Blake's life were dominated by a major commission from Linnell. This was to illustrate **The Divine Comedy** by medieval Italian poet Dante Alighieri. This epic poem describes a journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise.

Blake threw himself into the task and apparently learned Italian especially. The young artist Samuel Palmer observed him at work on the watercolours, 'hard working on a bed covered with books... like one of the Antique patriarchs, or a dying Michael Angelo.'

In his designs Blake uses colour to convey the transition from dark, menacing Hell to luminous Paradise. No other British artist since Flaxman had attempted to illustrate the poem in its entirety. Sadly the project, totalling 102 watercolours and seven engravings, remained unfinished at Blake's death. Even in its unfinished state, this series demonstrates the power of Blake's imagination, his unceasing creative energy and technical skill.



## The Inscription over the Gate

1824–7

Graphite, ink and watercolour on paper

Here Dante and his guide, the Roman poet Virgil, stand before the gates of Hell. The sublime landscape is populated by souls trapped in alternating circles of fire and ice.

Three quarters of Blake's **Divine Comedy** illustrations depict Hell. Displayed nearby are Blake's interpretations of its resident beasts and the various painful fates suffered by sinners. A corrupt Pope is plunged into a fiery pit, and a thief, Agnello Brunelleschi, undergoes a grotesque mutation, becoming half-man, half-serpent.

Tate. Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the National Gallery and donations from the Art Fund, Lord Duveen and others, and presented through the

Art Fund 1919

N03352

## **Plutus**

1824–7

Graphite, ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the National Gallery and donations from the Art Fund, Lord Duveen and others, and presented through the the Art Fund 1919

N03355

## **The Symbolic Figure of the Course of Human History described by Virgil**

1824–7

Ink and watercolour over graphite, with sponging on paper

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest, 1920

X73695

## **The Simoniac Pope**

1824–7

Ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the National Gallery and donations from the Art Fund, Lord Duveen and others, and presented through the the Art Fund 1919

N03357

## **Cerberus**

1824–7

Graphite, ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the National Gallery and donations from the Art Fund, Lord Duveen and others, and presented through the the Art Fund 1919

N03354



**Vanni Fucci 'making Figs' against God**

1824–7

Ink and watercolour over graphite and traces of black chalk,  
with sponging on paper

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,

Felton Bequest, 1920

X73699

**Capaneus the Blasphemer**

1824–7

Ink and watercolour over graphite and black chalk,  
with sponging and scratching out on paper

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,

Felton Bequest, 1920

X73694

## **The Devils setting out with Dante and Virgil**

1824–7

Ink and watercolour over graphite and traces of black chalk  
on paper

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest, 1920

X73697

## **The Thieves and the Serpents**

1824–7

Ink and watercolour over graphite and black chalk, with  
sponging on paper

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest, 1920

X73698

## **The Serpent Attacking Buoso Donati**

1824–7

Ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the National Gallery and donations from the Art Fund, Lord Duveen and others, and presented through the the Art Fund 1919

N03361

## **The Six-Footed Serpent attacking Agnello Brunelleschi**

1824–7

Ink and watercolour over graphite and black chalk, with sponging on paper

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest, 1920

X73700

## **Ephialtes and two other Titans**

1824–7

Ink and watercolour over black chalk

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest, 1920

X73702

## **Dante and Virgil Approaching the Angel Who Guards the Entrance of Purgatory**

1824–7

Graphite, ink and watercolour on paper

The next phase of Dante's journey takes place on Mount Purgatory, where souls labour to atone for their sins in order to move up the mountain towards Paradise. In contrast to the claustrophobic, subterranean landscape of Hell and its painful punishments, Purgatory is brighter and regularly shown surrounded by water. Blake varies the mood of each scene through changes of weather or the time of day.

Tate. Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the National Gallery and donations from the Art Fund, Lord Duveen and others, and presented through the Art Fund 1919  
N03367

**Dante and Statius sleeping, Virgil watching (illustration to the 'Divine Comedy', Purgatorio XXVII)**

1824–7

Watercolour with some ink over indications in graphite on paper

The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Presented by the Art Fund, 1918.

X71194

**The Lawn with the Kings and Angels**

1824–7

Ink and watercolour over black chalk and traces of graphite, with sponging on paper

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,

Felton Bequest, 1920

X73704

**Matilda and Dante on the Banks of the Lethe with Beatrice  
on the Triumphal Chariot**

1824–1827

Graphite, ink and watercolour on paper

Lent by The British Museum, London

X73466

**Beatrice Addressing Dante from the Car**

1824–7

Ink and watercolour on paper

Tate. Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the National Gallery and donations from the Art Fund, Lord Duveen and others, and presented through the the Art Fund 1919

N03369

**Beatrice and Dante in Gemini, amid the Spheres of Flame  
(illustration to the 'Divine Comedy', Paradiso XXIV)**

1824–7

Watercolour and ink over graphite and chalk on paper

The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Presented by the Art Fund, 1918

X71195



## **Saint Peter, Saint James and Saint John with Dante and Beatrice**

1824–7

Graphite, ink and watercolour on paper

Blake devoted only ten watercolours to Paradise, a celestial sphere populated by saints and angels. Beatrice, a pure soul, becomes his guide here. Saints Peter, James and John question Dante on faith, hope and love, the necessary elements for salvation.

Dante described Paradise in florid language. For many artists attempting to illustrate his poem this was the most intimidating realm. But Blake confidently portrays it as an ethereal, gravity-less and light-filled space.

Lent by The British Museum, London

X73467

## **Vitrine in the centre of the room**

Robert John Thornton 1768–1837

### **Pastorals of Virgil, with a course of English reading adapted for schools**

1821, 3rd edition

Book, 2 volumes

Linnell introduced Blake to his doctor, Robert John Thornton. He was the author of a popular Latin textbook, to which Blake contributed illustrations. Six were engravings of portrait busts like this one of Homer. Blake also contributed a set of wood engravings that were almost excluded from the publication. As before, Blake's 'daring' style alarmed his patron. But this time fellow artists rallied round and persuaded Thornton to keep his illustrations in the book.

City of Westminster Archives

X75325

## Blake's illustrations of Dante

c.1827

7 line engravings on paper, bound

Open at: **The Circle of the Lustful: Francesca da Rimini**  
(**'The Whirlwind of Lovers'**)

In this image adulterous lovers are drawn together in an eternal whirlwind. A separate vortex contains the figures of Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta. The couple had fallen in love while reading the love story of Lancelot and Guinevere. They were discovered in an embrace by Francesca's husband, Paolo's brother. Blake shows this moment as a sketchy reminiscence in the sun. This is one of only seven unfinished engravings Blake made of his 102 illustrations to Dante's **Divine Comedy**. All were taken from the 'Hell' section of the poem.

City of Westminster Archive

X75327

## **Plinth**

**Verso: Jerusalem, plate 35, proof impression**

**Recto: Jerusalem, plate 28, proof impression**

c.1820

Relief etching with ink and watercolour on paper

Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

X73740

**Please continue to the end of the corridor, on the right**

**Illustrations to *Pilgrim's Progress***

**John Bunyan Dreams a Dream**

1824–7

Watercolour and ink over graphite and chalk on paper

The upper band of this work contains a sequence of sketched scenes that preview the events that unfold in the images that follow.

Private collection

X73442, X71166–8, X71170–93

## PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

John Bunyan's **The Pilgrim's Progress from This World, to That Which Is to Come** (1678) was a popular religious text in Blake's day. It is not known why Blake embarked on this series of illustrations. They were left unfinished at his death.

**Pilgrim's Progress** tells the story of a challenging journey. Taking place in the realm of a dream, it follows the character Christian as he travels from the City of Destruction (earth) to the Celestial City (heaven) in the hope of unburdening himself of his sins.

Although it contains some of Blake's most imaginative and original imagery, **Pilgrim's Progress** has not received the same level of attention as his other late projects. One reason for this may be that Catherine, Blake's wife, is thought to have been involved in colouring the illustrations. For nearly all their married life Catherine helped Blake to print and hand-colour his works. Her creative and practical influence is only beginning to be fully appreciated.



**Christian Reading in his Book**

X71166

**Christian Meets Evangelist**

X71167

**Christian Pursued by Obstinate and Pliable**

X71168

**Christian in the Slough of Despond**

X71170

**Christian Drawn out of the Slough by Help**

X71171

**Christian Directed by Mr Worldy-Wiseman**

X71172

**Christian Fears the Fire from the Mountain**

X71173

**Christian Falls at the Feet of the Evangelist**

X71174

**Christian Knocks at the Wicket-Gate**

X71175

**The Gate is Opened by Goodwill**

X71176



## **The Man in the Iron Cage**

X71177

## **The Man who Dreamed of the Day of Judgement**

X71178

## **Christian before the Cross**

X71179

## **Christian Met by the Three Shining Ones**

X71180

## **Christian Passes the Lions**

X71183

## **Christian Climbs the Hill Difficultly**

X71181

## **Christian in the Arbour**

X71182

## **Christian Goes Forth Armed**

X71184

## **Christian Beaten down by Apollyon**

X71185

## **Faithful's Narrative**

X71186

**Vanity Fair**

X71187

**Faithful's Martyrdom**

X71188

**Christian and Hopeful in Doubting Castle**

X71189

**Christian and Hopeful Escape from Doubting Castle**

X71190

**The Pilgrims Meet the Shepherds of  
the Delectable Mountains**

X71191

**Christian and Hopeful in the River**

X71192

**Christian and Hopeful at the Gates of Heaven**

X71193

## Entering the last section

### Vitrine in the centre of the room

#### **Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion (Copy H)**

1804–c.1820, printed c.1832

Book, 100 plates on 100 leaves

Relief etching printed in reddish-brown on paper

Blake produced only a small number of copies of his last and greatest illuminated book **Jerusalem** in his lifetime. This complete copy was printed in around 1832, five years after Blake's death, by his friend the sculptor Frederick Tatham. He sold it to Samuel Boddington, a merchant who had inherited massive wealth and slave plantations from his father.

The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum,

University of Cambridge

X73095

## Clockwise

### **Epitome of James Hervey's 'Meditations among the Tombs'** c.1820–5

Ink, watercolour and gold paint on paper

This painting was inspired by a text on death and the afterlife. It focused on grief and the hope of reunion in heaven. The text's author, James Hervey, is seen here with his back to the viewer at the bottom of a staircase that leads heavenwards. Unusually, Blake inscribed the work with a key to its narrative. Jesus floats above the altar, and the staircase features Noah and his Ark, and Adam, Eve and the serpent. This painting was owned by Thomas Butts. He bought it 30 years after he first commissioned work from Blake.

Tate. Presented by George Thomas Saul 1878  
N02231

## Characters from Spenser's Faerie Queen

1821

Ink, watercolour and bodycolour on gesso ground on paper

When Blake died in 1827 Catherine was left with all his unsold works but very little money. Lord Egremont, a patron since the Blakes' time in Sussex, continued to show his support. His purchase of this painting in 1829 for the very generous sum of £84 provided Catherine with much-needed funds. Spenser's **Faerie Queen**, published in the 1590s, followed six main characters representing different virtues, such as holiness and chastity. They are seen here in procession on horseback.

National Trust Collections, Petworth House, (The Egremont Collection (acquired in lieu of tax by H.M.Treasury in 1956 and subsequently transferred to The National Trust))

X34504

## **The Sea of Time and Space**

1821

Ink, watercolour and bodycolour on gesso ground on paper

The subject of this detailed and richly coloured painting is a mystery. It appears to relate to the theme of choice.

The kneeling figure has been identified as divine inspiration and imagination. Its title comes from Blake's poem **Vala, or the Four Zoas** and was only applied in 1949.

It is shown in its original frame, which was made by John Linnell's father, the framer James Linnell. It is thought that Colonel John Palmer Chichester, of Arlington Court, may have purchased it directly from Blake.

National Trust Collections, Arlington Court  
(The Chichester Collection)

X73706



## **'Europe' Plate i: Frontispiece, 'The Ancient of Days'**

1827

Relief etching with ink and watercolour on paper

In his final days Blake is said to have coloured an impression of this work. He is reported to have claimed it 'the best I have ever finished'. Though small in size it has become one of Blake's best-known images. Its central figure is Urizen. He represents the scientific quest for answers. Urizen measures the world below with his golden compass. This act symbolises a threat to freedom of thought, imagination and creativity. For Blake, these were the cornerstones of human happiness.

The Whitworth, The University of Manchester

X71164



## JERUSALEM

### The Emanation of The Giant Albion

After my three years slumber on the banks of the Ocean, I again display my Giant forms to the Public: My former Giants & Fairies having recieved the highest reward possible: the love and friendship of those with whom to be connected, is to be blessed: I cannot doubt that this more consolidated & extended Work, will be as kindly recieved

Reader! lover of books! lover of heaven,  
And of that God from whom all books are given,  
Who in mysterious Sinais awful cave  
To Man the wond'rous art of writing gave,  
Again he speaks in thunder and in fire!  
Thunder of Thought, & flames of fierce desire:  
Even from the depths of Hell his voice I hear,  
Within the unfathomd caverns of my Ear.  
Therefore I print; nor vain my types shall be:  
Heaven, Earth & Hell, henceforth shall live in harmony  
I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans  
  
I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create

Southey has been with Blake & admired both his designs & his poetic talents; At the same time that he held him for a decided madman. Blake... showed S. a perfectly mad poem called Jerusalem – Oxford Street is in Jerusalem

Henry Crabb Robinson, diary, July 1811

... we dare say they may be fine; but they are also too sublime for our comprehension

**Lady's Monthly Magazine**, reviewing the 1812 exhibition featuring 'Detached Specimens' of Jerusalem

... an ancient, newly discovered, illuminated manuscript...  
it contained a good deal anent one 'Los' who it appears is  
now, and hath been from the creation, the sole and fourfold  
dominator of the celebrated city of Golgonooza

TG Wainewright announcing the publication of  
Jerusalem, 1820

Some of the 'giant-forms' as he calls them, are mighty and  
grand, and if I were to compare them to the style of any  
preceding artist, Michel Angelo, Sir Joshua's favourite,  
would be the one

JT Smith, biography of Blake, 1828

No one... was found ready to lay out twentyfive guineas on a work which no one could have any hope of comprehending, and this disappointment sank the old man's heart ...

A production so exclusively wild was not allowed to make its appearance in an ordinary way... Of these designs there are no less than a hundred; what their meaning is the artist has left unexplained. It seems of a religious, political, and spiritual kind, and wanders from hell to heaven, and from heaven to earth; now glancing into the distractions of our own days, and then making a transition to the antediluvians'

Allan Cunningham, biography of Blake, 1830

Vitrine

## **Jerusalem (Copy B)**

1804–c.1820, printed c.1820

25 plates on 25 leaves, disbound

Relief etching and white-line etching on paper,  
with hand-colouring

Blake started his final illuminated book, **Jerusalem**, in around 1804. He completed it in 1820. Blake's admirer, the journalist and artist Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, announced its publication as 'a tremendous piece of ordnance ... an ancient, newly discovered, illuminated manuscript'.

This is one of only two copies of **Jerusalem** that Blake fully coloured himself. It comprises the first section, of 25 plates. It was originally bound with copies of **America** and **Europe**.

Private collection

X73681, X77019–X77042



## **Frontispiece**

X73681

## **Plate 2 [title page]**

X77019

## **Plate 3: 'To the Public'**

X77020

## **'Jerusalem. Chap. I. Of the Sleep of Ulro!'**

X77021

## **Plate 5: 'The Banks of the Thames are clouded!'**

X77022



**Plate 6: 'His spectre driv'n by the Starry Wheels  
of Albions sons'**

X77023

**Plate 7: 'Was living: painting like a frightened wolf'**

X77024

**Plate 8: 'Rose up against me thundering from the Brook of  
Albions River'**

X77025

**Plate 9: 'Condens'd his Emanations into hard  
opake substances'**

X77026

**Plate 10: 'Into the Furnaces & into the valleys of the Anvils of Death'**

X77027

**Plate 11: 'To labours mighty, with vast strength, with his mighty chains'**

X77028

**Plate 12: 'Why wilt thou give to her a Body whose life is but a Shade?'**

X77029

**Plate 13: 'And that toward Eden, four, form'd of gold, silver, brass, & iron'**

X77030

**Plate 14: 'One hair nor particle of dust, not one can pass away'**

X77031

**Plate 15: 'And Hand & Hyle rooted into Jerusalem by a fibre'**

X77032

**Plate 16: 'Hampstead Highgate Finchley Hendon Muswell hill: rage loud'**

X77033

**Plate 17: 'His Spectre divides & Los in fury compells it to divide'**

X77034

**Plate 18: 'From everyone of the Four Regions of  
Human Majesty'**

X77035

**Plate 19: 'His Children exil'd from his breast pass to and fro  
before him'**

X77036

**Plate 20: 'But when they saw Albion fall'n upon mild  
Lambeths vale'**

X77037

**Plate 21: 'O Vala! O Jerusalem! do you delight in my groans'**

X77038

**Plate 22: 'Albion thy fear has made me tremble; thy terrors have surrounded me'**

X77039

**Plate 23: 'Jerusalem! Jerusalem! deluding shadow of Albion!'**

X77040

**Plate 24: 'What have I said? What have I done? O all-powerful Human Words!'**

X77041

**Plate 25: 'And there was heard a great lamenting in Beulah: all the Regions'**

X77042

# CREDITS

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

11 September 2019 – 2 February 2020

Curated by Martin Myrone, Senior Curator,  
British Art to 1800, and Amy Concannon, Curator,  
British Art, 1790–1850

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£20/£14 concessions for performance only

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