The landmark exhibition of 2023 was William Blake: Visionary at the Getty, originally scheduled for summer 2020 as the American counterpart of the Tate Britain retrospective of 2019–20, but postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, in spring 2023 Blake returned to the main gallery at Tate as part of the rehang of the collections, which involved him in the dialogue between historic and contemporary art and politics through interventions within the chronological survey.

Themed exhibitions continued to be a significant feature of Blake on view, with Earth, the final installment of a cycle about elements at the Royal West of England Academy, Bristol; Light, a traveling exhibition in New Zealand and Japan; and Innocence and Experience, a selection from the permanent collections at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Poetry & Magic at the Italian Cultural Institute of London celebrated the transnational work of Italian anthropologist Anita Seppilli by bringing together an international selection of artworks, including Blake, within a psychogeographic and surrealist poetics of the city.
Blake's place in survey exhibitions focused on technique put the spotlight on his temperas in Method and Material: Tempera Painting in Focus at the Huntington. A Job engraving was included in a survey of printmaking from the Ackland Art Museum at the University of North Carolina.

Interventions on Blake's reception rearticulated his influence on the Pre-Raphaelites in The Rossetti's Radical Romantics at Tate Britain. It featured the Notebook, formerly known as the Rossetti Manuscript, which Dante Gabriel Rossetti bought when he was a student at the Royal Academy. The second edition of Alexander Gilchrist's Life of William Blake documented Blake's influence on protest song and street scenes in the mid-1800s through a reproduction of "London," as well as his impact on arts-and-crafts bindings, evidenced by the cover art by Frederic Shields, which reworked the composition of Oberon and Titania on a lily, a subject identified by William Michael Rossetti in the same book. Blake's watercolor of this subject appeared in Wild Things Are Happening: The Art of Maurice Sendak at the Columbus Museum of Art.

2023 was a strong year for the large color prints, with more than half of the designs on display at home and around the world: Newton and Pity at Tate in the Blake room; the Tate's Nebuchadnezzar and Night of Enitharmon's Joy with the Getty's Satan Exulting over Eve in William Blake: Visionary; the Tate's Good and Evil Angels and God Judging Adam in the traveling exhibition Light; and the Met's own pulls of God Judging Adam and Pity on display as part of the museum's selection of prints and drawings around the Blakean theme of innocence and experience.

Earth: Digging Deep in British Art, 1781–2022
Curated by Emma Stibon, Christiana Payne, and Nathalie Levi
Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
9 July–11 September 2022


This was the final exhibition in a cycle dedicated to the elements at the Royal West of England Academy in Bristol, starting with The Power of the Sea: Making Waves in British Art, 1790–2014 (2014); Air: Visualising the Invisible in British Art, 1768–2017 (2017); and Fire: Flashes to Ashes in British Art, 1692–2019 (2019). Earth contrasted sublime and productive landscapes, from the experience or threat of natural disaster featured by Gainsborough and De Loutherbourg to nature as a site of good husbandry, situating Blake's more intimate small-scale wood-engraved illusinations to Thornton's Pastoral of Virgil in dialogue with Calvert and Palmer. The exhibition also considered nineteenth- and twentieth-century depictions of rock formations and mining subjects.

Wood engravings for Robert John Thornton, The Pastorals of Virgil, 1821:
"Thenot Remonstrates with Colinet"
"Thenot under a Fruit Tree"
"Thenot Remonstrates with Colinet, Lightfoot in the Distance"
"Colinet Departs in Sorrow, a Thunder-Scarred Tree on the Right"
"Blasted Tree and Blighted Crops"
"The Good Shepherd Chases Away the Wolf"
"Sabrina's Silvery Flood"
"Colinet's Fond Desire Strange Lands to Know"
"A Rolling Stone Is Ever Bare of Moss"
"Colinet Resting at Cambridge by Night"
"Colinet Mocked by Two Boys"
"Menalcas's Yearly Wake"
"Thenot and Colinet Folding Their Flocks Together at Sunset"
"Thenot and Colinet Sup Together"
"With Songs the Jovial Hinds Return from Plow"
"Unyoked Heifers Loitering Homeward, Low"

Wild Things Are Happening: The Art of Maurice Sendak
Curated by Jonathan Weinberg
Columbus Museum of Art
21 October 2022–19 March 2023


This retrospective of Sendak's artworks displayed Blake among influences ranging from George Stubbs, Philipp Otto Runge, and Beatrix Potter to Walt Disney and Winsor McCay. A wall hang dedicated to Enlightenment scenes and Sendak's re-creations included Oberon and Titania on a Lily (c. 1790–93), a watercolor that William Michael Rossetti identified as a subject inspired by Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream. Blake also printed the composition as a full-plate design for The Song of Los.

The first item in the wall hang, the Shakespearean illustration “The Death of Cleopatra” (1804) engraved by Robert Hartley Cromek after Fuseli, set the violent tone of moods and animated gestures that characterized the sequence of exhibits. It was followed by a set of four Sendak illustrations to Joel Agee’s translation of Heinrich von Kleist’s Penthesilea: A Tragic Drama (1998); an engraving of Fuseli’s The Nightmare; Sendak’s version of the same composition with an added owl; and plate 75 from Goya’s Caprichos, in which an owl lands on the head of a desperate bound woman, captioned “Will no one untie us?” Coming last in this sequence, Oberon and Titania on a Lily felt haunted by the nightmarish disquiet of the aggressive scenes preceding it. Above them, Sendak’s hot-air balloon design for The Magic Flute (1979–80) took flight from the Penthesilea illustrations. The Blake influences in Sendak’s designs for The
Magic Flute were documented with a different set of works in Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak’s Designs for Opera and Ballet, curated by Rachel Federman for the Morgan Library and Museum, which featured Milton’s Mysterious Dream and Behemoth and Leviathan as evidence of ideas for monster and cave elements. In Columbus, the arrangement invited us to see Blake’s delicate sleeping fairies immersed in a nocturnal Enlightenment world of dreams and nightmares.

Oberon and Titania on a Lily, c. 1790–93 (Butlin #245)
Sendak Foundation

MLK: Equity, Justice, Peace, and Protest
Study Room, Yale Center for British Art
18 January 2023

In honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Yale Center for British Art produced a one-day display that included Blake’s Jerusalem alongside Francis Danby’s Study for “The Golden Age” (1827) and anti-Vietnam War rally photographs by Lewis Morley (1925–2013).

Jerusalem copy E, composed 1804–c. 1820, printed c. 1821, plate 97
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1992.8.1(97)

Innocence and Experience: Selections from the Department of Drawings and Prints
Metropolitan Museum, New York
9 February–16 May 2023

Innocence and Experience was a focused display of 100 works depicting motherhood and portraiture from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries from the permanent collections, built around a lavish late copy of Blake’s Songs of Innocence and of Experience acquired by Edward Calvert in 1825 and eventually by the Metropolitan Museum in 1917, “soon after the Print Department was established.” The impressions from Songs were supplemented by biblical watercolors and large color prints.

Songs of Innocence and of Experience copy Y, composed 1789, 1794, printed 1825:
Combined title page
Frontispiece, Innocence
Title page, Innocence
“Introduction,” Innocence

In spring 2023 the Morgan Library and Museum selected to “illustrate colonialism” a Blake plate in which the conventional use of female allegories to represent the continents becomes a political statement: in presenting “Europe . . . being upheld by Africa and America,” Blake captures “how the wealth of European nations has been propped up by the global exploitation of colonized peoples.”

“Europe Supported by Africa and America,” published in John Gabriel Stedman, Narrative, 1806
Morgan Library and Museum, PML 151931

Method and Material: Tempera Painting in Focus
Huntington Art Gallery, San Marino, CA
26 February–13 March 2023

Taking portraits by the fifteenth-century Italian master Domenico Ghirlandaio as a point of departure, this exhibition explored the legacy of tempera in Britain and America. Ghirlandaio’s works were followed by Blake’s Lot and His Daughters, painted before the Italian method was disseminated in English thanks to the translation of Cennino Cennini’s Il Libro dell’arte in 1844. The gallery label described Blake’s experimental “fresco” technique.

Lot and His Daughters, c. 1799–1800 (Butlin #381)
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 000.55

Light from Tate: 1700s to Now
Auckland Art Gallery
1 March–25 June 2023

Light: Works from the Tate Collection
Nakanoshima Museum of Art, Osaka
26 October 2023–14 January 2024

This is a traveling exhibition, with 2022–22 locations reviewed in the 2022 checklist. It is a survey of 200 years of artistic experimentation with light in drawing, printing, painting, photography, sculpture, the moving image, and contemporary immersive environments through more than seventy works, including Turner, Constable, Monet, Pissarro, Sisley, Kandinsky, Albers, Eliasson, Kusama, Dean, and Lijn.

The Good and Evil Angels, printed 1795 (Butlin #323)
Tate, N05057

God Judging Adam, printed 1795 (Butlin #294)
Tate, N05063

The Rossettis: Radical Romantics
Curated by Carol Jacobi and James Finch
Tate Britain, London, 6 April–24 September 2023
Delaware Art Museum, 21 October 2023–28 January 2024


In The Rossettis: Radical Romantics, Blake participated in an “anti-establishment” radical poetics, offering a model for artistic experiments and “anti-establishment personalities.” Dante Gabriel Rossetti bought Blake’s Notebook in 1847, when he was enrolled at the Royal Academy and, like Blake, reacted against academic protocols. A year later, he left the academy. The Notebook was displayed in room 2, which was entitled Modern Raphael and devoted to Dante Gabriel’s formative influences as a painter: Blake, Delacroix, and “the satirical commentator of French modern life, Paul Gavarni.” Blake was also mentioned elsewhere in connection with caricatural portraits of William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais to flesh out Pre-Raphaelites’ criticism of academic rules and the academy’s founder, whom they called Sir “Sloshua” Reynolds.

Although the commentary did not mention Dante Gabriel’s transcription of some of the prose and poetry from the Notebook, dated around 1850, nor the edition of The Poetical Works of William Blake (1874) by his brother, William Michael, which demonstrate the depth of Blake’s presence in the Rossetti family, the display itself invited a series of associations between texts and images. The Notebook was the central object in the vitrine. It was open to p. 82, featuring a drawing in the center, surrounded by apocalyptic writing announcing the “fiery Gulph” opening between Adam and Eve, four angels descending “headlong with four trumpets to awake the dead,” and below the image “The Great Red Dragon with Seven heads and ten Horns . . . .” To the exhibition goer who stopped to read this text scribbled around the drawing, such manifestations gave end-of-times urgency to the social critique articulated in the images around it. To the Notebook’s right were two volumes of Alexander Gilchrist’s Life of William Blake, first published posthumously in 1863 thanks to the collaboration between his widow, Anne Gilchrist, and William and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and represented by the second edition (1880), one volume closed to show the spectacular Blake-inspired binding design by Frederic Shields. The other was open to a reproduction of “London” from Songs of Innocence and of Experience. Blake’s London chimed with the theme

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of the dispossessed captured in one of Gavarni’s compositions of “rough sleepers” in Paris featured to the left of the Notebook—“a woman folded against a wall.” The commentary mentioned Gavarni’s “modern-life prints for popular journals such as Journal des gens du monde and Le Charivari,” and invited associations with Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s painting Found.

Blake's Notebook
British Library, Add MS 49460


Tate Britain, Blake Room
Tate Britain, London
17 April 2023–2 June 2024

Tate Britain displayed Blake in dialogue with Turner Prize winner Chris Ofili, who was invited to “select a number of his own watercolours and sketches that resonate with the works of William Blake.” This pairing was part of the politics of dialogue between historic collections and contemporary commissions that shaped the rehang of the gallery in spring 2023. Blake has had his dedicated gallery space at Tate since 1920, but his place has moved over the years: from 2013 until recently it was a dimly lit space at the top of a staircase in the Clore Wing; in April 2023 he was brought back into the main gallery area, at the beginning of the permanent collections from the Manton entrance.

At the time of my visit, the Blake-Ofili pairing serendipitously followed from the Ofili mural Requiem, a site-specific commission for the north staircase leading from the Manton entrance to the permanent collections, which was inaugurated in September 2023 to commemorate those who died in the fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017. After the brightly lit, vibrant contrasts of yellow and red dominating the dramatic firescape painted around the staircase, turning to the Blake room and tuning the eye to its dark-blue interior, from the large-scale mural to the smaller scale of prints and watercolors, felt like entering a very different, contemplative experience. However, the mural’s informing presence was felt through two works on display in the Ofili-Blake room: K.S. (Study) (2022), a portrait of the artist Khadija Saye, whose death at Grenfell Tower is Ofili’s focus in the mural; and Poolside Magic (2017), where the bent pose of the central figure is echoed in the prophet figure bearing witness to the tower in flames in the mural. The red-yellow-blue palette of Afternoon with La Soufrière (2021), an unrelated disaster produced by a volcanic eruption on the Caribbean island of St. Vincent, shared the theme of death by fire.

The powerful pairings suggested by the labels were embodied in the display on the wall to the right upon coming into the room from the staircase, which continued across the partition separating the Ofili and Blake sections: the two artists’ works were arranged in the form of a chiasmus from the corners to the center, starting with Ofili’s Poolside Magic, which was oddly associated with Blake’s Simoniac Pape from Dante’s Inferno, placed at the opposite end of the room. Ofili’s Questlove (2000), a portrait of Ahmir Thompson outlined in “afro heads” dots, was put into dialogue with the visionary head The Man Who Built the Pyramids, attributed to John Linnell after Blake. This series of pairings culminated with the two works hanging next to each other on either side of the partition wall between the Ofili and Blake areas, where Ofili’s Harvester (2021), featuring a dark figure floating above flowers, acquired demonic associations by its proximity to Blake’s spectacular Satan Smiting Job with Sore Boils (c. 1826).

To compare the other Ofilis with their Blake counterparts required going back and forth between the two sections separated by the partition wall. We were invited to see “three figures whose bodies stretch across the length of the scene” in Ofili’s charcoal Untitled (2020) “echoing” the floating figure in Blake’s The Soul Hovering over the Body Reluctantly Parting with Life. Curatorial commentary noted “similar imagery” in Ofili’s intaglio outline of The Agony in the Garden (2007) and Blake’s very dark tempera of the same subject, which share the iconography of the embrace. In Afternoon with La Soufrière, “a figure can be viewed in profile within the volcano, much like in Blake’s The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth.” The label for Backpack (Study for Diana and Actaeon) (2012) included Ofili’s statement about Blake’s influence: “My interpretation of the entire story is told in the backdrop … the figures, the landscape and the symbolism all metamorphose fluidly into each other—like they do in William Blake’s imagery, which I love.” The human forms morphing into waves could certainly be connected with human bodies metamorphosing into tree branches in the margins of Blake’s illuminated prophecies, for instance in Milton, but the pairing proposed by the gallery label was less convincing: “We can see parallels between this sketch and Blake’s painting, The Good Farmer.” Blake’s much more static scene is very different from the animation of dynamic lines in Ofili’s charcoal and pastel composition. Frogs in the Shade (Paragon) (2014) is also an unlikely pairing with Blake’s Age Teaching Youth.

At the time of the rehang of Tate Britain, the director, Alex Farquharson, argued that “art is not made in a vacuum. Each room is curated as an example of storytelling. But we also wanted to provide different sides to a given era through the art created at the time.” There is a second entrance that leads to the room from the Blake side of the Blake-Ofili pairing. From the Millbank entrance the room sequence is organized as a chronological survey, placing Blake after rooms 1, “Exiles and Dynasties, 1545–1640,” to 6, “Revolution and Reform, 1776–1833.” Room 6 is devoted to “tumultuous times,” when “wars and revolutions, technology and trade transform[ed] lives across the globe,” from the American Declaration of Independence to the Slavery Abolition Act. The first paragraph of the information panel in the Blake room situated him in “a time of significant societal upheaval and global unrest,” and acknowledged that he “was politically radical, writing poetry that criticised empire, slavery and social inequality,” but then focused on his artistic commissions, working patterns, visions, personal mythologies, and techniques, acknowledging the contribution to coloring made by Catherine, his wife. Put together at a time when many Blakes were on loan or resting after exhibitions, the display offered a representative sample of works in different media from the early to the late period, with the exception of the composite image-text art of the illuminated prophecies, a notable gap in the collection, which is sometimes documented through posthumously reprinted single leaves, sometimes through the separate plates from the so-called Small Book of Designs acquired in 2009, unavailable at the time since they were on loan to the Getty.

5. Tom Seymour and Gareth Harris, “All Change at Tate Britain after First Rehang in a Decade,” Art Newspaper (23 May 2023).

Viewers coming in from the Millbank route first saw two of the twelve large color prints that Blake produced using “an experimental hybrid of printing, drawing, and painting”: Newton and Pity. His more overtly political interventions were documented only through The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth. Its placement at the center of the right-hand wall in that direction of travel, next to The Agony in the Garden, invited a formalist engagement with his work in tempera. To their right was The Soul Hovering over the Body Reluctantly Parting with Life, associated with the commission to illustrate Robert Blair’s The Grave, and to their left two works from the 1780s: The Good Farmer and Age Teaching Youth. The selection was dominated by the late Blake, with five Dante watercolors occupying two sides of the room, ending with Satan Smiting Job with Sore Boils on the way out to the Ofili section.

None of the Blake labels suggested the Ofili comparisons, but as a visitor walked from that end of the room to the Ofili area, the label for Reclining Nude (Satyr 3) (2021) invited a comparison with Newton, which hung in the exact same position on the other side of the partition wall, as if the scene inspired by sugar-cane fields in Barbados acted as the reverse of Blake’s composition: “The magical world shown here echoes the underwater setting of Blake’s Newton in the next room.” Similarly, Pity had a counterpart hanging as its reverse image on the other side of the partition: The Sorceress’s Mirror (2017), “inspired by the shoreline and rock formations of Paria Bay in Trinidad as a basis for the cave.” A review in the Financial Times commented: “A superb room of William Blake’s and Chris Ofili’s iridescent, mysterious watercolours absorbingly converges formal and intellectual concerns—blending figure and background, popular culture segueing into classical and African-Caribbean myth—shared across different epochs?” “Convergence” makes sense for the chiastic design of the wall hang that culminated in the juxtaposition of Harvester and Satan Smiting Job with Sore Boils. However, a different pattern of attention was produced by the constant “back and forth” movement across the partition required to “check … out” comparisons suggested in the other Ofili labels, as Erle noted. From a formalist standpoint Ofili’s work fulfills Tate Britain’s mission insofar as it demonstrates the gallery’s role in inspiring contemporary artists. Yet the back and forth can be considered within a decolonizing practice that resituates the collection through acts of revisioning and recentering the visual canon: what ways of seeing Newton and Pity are being opened up in dialogue with Reclining Nude (Satyr 3) and The Sorceress’s Mirror? The politics of seeing Ofili’s sugar-cane plantation scene as the other side of the underwater imaginary of Blake’s Newton is left implicit. However, as Blake argues, “The wisest of the Ancients considery what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouses the faculties to act” (E 702).

The multidirectional position of the Blake-Ofili room recentered contemporary critique, whether one started or ended with the crescendo and conflagration of the Grenfell Tower mural in the Manton staircase. Jonathan Jones dismissed the Tate rehang, arguing that “this is now the museum where art goes to sleep.” Blake readers and viewers know that sleep is an apocalyptic state of “Rest before Labour” (E 300).

Newton, printed c. 1805 (Butlin #306)
Tate, N05058

Attributed to John Linnell after Blake, The Man Who Built the Pyramids, c. 1825 (Butlin #752)
Tate, N05185

Preliminary Sketch for “Christ Girding Himself with Strength,” c. 1805 (Butlin #465)
Tate, A00043

The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth, c. 1805
(Butlin #651)
Tate, N01110

The Soul Hovering over the Body Reluctantly Parting with Life, c. 1805 (Butlin #625)
Tate, N05300

Age Teaching Youth, c. 1785–90 (Butlin #91)
Tate, N05183

The Good Farmer, c. 1780–85 (Butlin #123)
Tate, N05198

Satan Smiting Job with Sore Boils, c. 1826 (Butlin #807)
Tate, N03340

Dante and Virgil Penetrating the Forest, 1824–27 (Butlin #812.2)
Tate, N03351

Homer and the Ancient Poets, 1824–27 (Butlin #812.8)
Tate, N03353

8. Erle 124.

William Blake: Visionary
Curated by Edina Adam and Julian Brooks
Getty Center, Los Angeles
17 October 2023–14 January 2024


William Blake: Visionary was originally planned in collaboration with Tate Britain as an American retrospective following the Tate retrospective in 2019–20, with the addition of loans from American collections including the Yale Center for British Art, the Huntington Library, and Robert N. Essick. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic the exhibition had to be postponed, the loans renegotiated, and the design revised in light of the introduction of bilingual labeling at the Getty.

The exhibition was divided into sections that documented Blake's trajectory: “Professional Printmaker,” “Independent Artist,” “Inventor,” “Visionary,” and another dedicated to “The British Art World” that set programmatic works—“Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion” (1773, c. 1820–25), Laocoön (c. 1815, c. 1826–27), and the illuminated manuscript of Genesis (c. 1826–27)—in relation to Flaxman, Barry, Fuseli, Romney, West, and Gillray's spectacular visual satires “Presages of the Millennium” and “The Death of the Great Wolf.” While the first room of the Tate exhibition introduced Blake with the imperative “Blake: Be an Artist!,” situating his work firmly within the culture of the Royal Academy and then proceeding to printmaking as a professional outlet, the Getty rooted his work within the productions of the printmaker, ranging from the early period, represented by “The Temple of Mirth,” to the late Job engravings. Also included were the engraved title page of “Night the Third: Narcissa” (1797), two versions of “Death's Door” in white and black etching from the Essick collection, and—oddly—some Dante watercolors.

Against Tate’s sections on “Patronage and Independence” and “Independence and Despair,” the Getty opted for “Independent Artist,” focusing the curatorial narrative on technique and style and featuring works in different media, including biblical subjects in tempera on wood and canvas, biblical watercolors, and three of the twelve large color prints. “Inventor” introduced Blake’s illuminated printing, sampling unbound and disbound pages from illuminated books from the Huntington, the Yale Center for British Art, and the Essick collection. This approach privileged the

Dürer to Picasso: 400 Years of European Prints from the Ackland Art Museum
Curated by Dana Cowen
Fayetteville State University, NC, 25 August–15 October 2023
Elizabeth City State University, NC, 20 October–10 December 2023

This exhibition displayed a plate from Blake’s Illustrations of the Book of Job within a survey of printmaking from the Ackland Art Museum, a selection of thirty-six prints capturing historical movements from the late fifteenth to the early twentieth century and including works by Rembrandt van Rijn, Francisco de Goya, Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, Käthe Kollwitz, and Vincent van Gogh.

“In Satan Going Forth from the Presence of the Lord,” Illustrations of the Book of Job, printed 1826
Ackland Art Museum, 58.1.1067.1

William Blake: Prophet against Empire
Curated by Adhithi Ravikumar
Albert Sloman Library, University of Essex, Colchester 11 October–17 November 2023

This exhibition of facsimiles from the Blake Trust in the Sloman Library took its inspiration from David Erdman’s title to document Blake’s critique of the Enlightenment, science, and capitalism.

10. Cat. pp. 7, 9; the catalogue is reviewed in Blake 55.1 (summer 2021).
artist against the bookmaker, whereas the Tate's more inclusive selection documented bound copies along with a disbound copy of *Songs of Innocence* in its entirety. On the other hand, the Getty's focus on the single sheet as independent artwork led to a better engagement with plates from the so-called Small Book of Designs, in this case appropriately entered under the new captions that Blake penned under each design around 1818, thus repurposing as individual emblems designs that had originally been produced for the illuminated books. This choice marks a significant step forward compared to the objects' classification under the original illuminated books, as adopted by the Tate.

In “Visionary,” the section that gave its title to the exhibition, the Getty introduced Blake's characters through floor-to-ceiling reproductions of plates from *Jerusalem* and *America* that singled out the character as superhero against an orange background: “Albion / The giant Albion represents England and its inhabitants. He is also the symbol of all humankind.” A full disbound copy of *America*, borrowed from the Yale Center for British Art, had pride of place on a curved wall built at the center of the room. This section also displayed the title page, the “Jerusalem” lyric, and two full-plate designs from *Milton*; ten plates from *Jerusalem*; the visionary watercolor *Landscape near Felpham* to document the site of creation; the frontispieces of *The Song of Los* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*; the visionary head of Merlin; and the ghost of a flea drawing and tempera. While the Tate exhibition concluded with the last copy of “The Ancient of Days,” completed in watercolor by Blake “a few days before he died” in 1827, the Getty ended with another impression of the same plate, bound in a volume on loan from the Yale Center for British Art.

Professional Printmaker

“Job and His Family,” *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, printed 1826
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 72.62.53.1

“Satan Smiling Job with Boils,” Illustrations of the Book of Job, printed 1826
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 72.62.53.6

“Job’s Despair,” Illustrations of the Book of Job, printed 1826
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 72.62.53.8

“Job Reburmed by His Friends,” Illustrations of the Book of Job, printed 1826
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 72.62.53.10

“The Lord Answering Job out of the Whirlwind,” Illustrations of the Book of Job, printed 1826
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 72.62.53.13

“When the Morning Stars Sang Together,” Illustrations of the Book of Job, printed 1826
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 72.62.53.14

“Behemoth and Leviathan,” Illustrations of the Book of Job, printed 1826
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 72.62.53.15

“The Fall of Satan,” Illustrations of the Book of Job, printed 1826
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 72.62.53.16

Plutus, 1824–27 (Butlin #812.14)
Tate, N03355

Cerberus, 1824–27 (Butlin #812.12)
Tate, N03354

The Punishment of the Thieves, 1824–27 (Butlin #812.102)
Tate, N03364

The Serpent Attacking Buoso Donati, 1824–27 (Butlin #812.53)
Tate, N03361

The Wood of the Self-Murderers: The Harpies and the Suicides, 1824–27 (Butlin #812.24)
Tate, N03356

The Pit of Disease: The Falsifiers, 1824–27 (Butlin #812.58)
Tate, N03362

“The Pit of Disease: The Falsifiers,” 1826–27, printed c. 1892
Collection of Robert N. Essick

The Primaeval Giants Sunk in the Soil, 1824–27 (Butlin #812.60)
Tate, N03363

Dante and Virgil Approaching the Angel Who Guards the Entrance of Purgatory, 1824–27 (Butlin #812.78)
Tate, N03367

The Ascent of the Mountain of Purgatory, 1824–27 (Butlin #812.74)
Tate, N03366

Beatrice Addressing Dante from the Car, 1824–27 (Butlin #812.88)
Tate, N03369

“Deaths Door,” white-line etching, 1805
Collection of Robert N. Essick

Collection of Robert N. Essick

Blake after Thomas Stothard, “The Temple of Mirth,” published in the Wit’s Magazine, 1784
Tate, T07048

Blake after William Hogarth, “Beggar’s Opera, Act III,” probably third published state, c. 1795
Tate, T06462

Portait of William Blake, c. 1802
Collection of Robert N. Essick

Henry Fuseli, Portrait Sketch of Michelangelo for Fuseli’s “Lectures on Painting,” c. 1788
Collection of Robert N. Essick

Blake after Henry Fuseli, “M: Angelo Bonarroti,” published in Fuseli, Lectures on Painting, 1801
Collection of Robert N. Essick

“Night the Third: Narcissa,” published in Edward Young, Night Thoughts, 1797
Collection of Robert N. Essick
Independent Artist

The Body of Abel Found by Adam and Eve, c. 1826 (Butlin #806)
Tate, N05888

The Body of Christ Borne to the Tomb, c. 1799–1800 (Butlin #426)
Tate, N01164

Oberon, Titania, and Puck with Fairies Dancing, c. 1786
(Butlin #161)
Tate, N02686

Christ Blessing the Little Children, 1799 (Butlin #419)
Tate, N05893

Winter, c. 1820–25 (Butlin #808)
Tate, T02387

The Blasphemer, c. 1800 (Butlin #446)
Tate, N05195

Judas Betrays Him, c. 1803–05 (Butlin #491)
Tate, T06606

The Crucifixion: “Behold Thy Mother,” c. 1805 (Butlin #497)
Tate, N05895

The Entombment, c. 1805 (Butlin #498)
Tate, N05896

The Death of the Virgin, 1803 (Butlin #512)
Tate, N05899

The Bard, from Gray, 1809? (Butlin #655)
Tate, N03551

The Night of Enitharmon’s Joy, formerly Hecate, printed c. 1795–96 (Butlin #316)
Tate, N05056

Nebuchadnezzar, printed c. 1805 (Butlin #301)
Tate, N05059

Satan Exulting over Eve, printed 1795 (Butlin #292)
J. Paul Getty Museum, 84.GC.49

Christ Appearing to the Apostles after the Resurrection, c. 1795 (Butlin #327)
Tate, N05875

Epitome of James Hervey’s “Meditations among the Tombs,”
c. 1820–25 (Butlin #770)
Tate, N02231

Inventor

Songs of Innocence copy Y, “The Shepherd,” composed 1789, printed and colored c. 1802
Collection of Robert N. Essick

Songs of Innocence and of Experience copy E, composed 1789, 1794, 1794, 1795, c. 1832, title page
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, DRN 3515

Songs of Innocence and of Experience copy E, “Laughing Song”
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, DRN 3516

Songs of Innocence and of Experience copy E, “The Tyger”
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1978.43.1573

Songs of Innocence and of Experience copy E, “The Sick Rose”
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, DRN 3521

Songs of Innocence and of Experience copy E, “The Fly”
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, DRN 3522

“I sought Pleasure & found Pain / ‘Unutterable’,” printed 1796, inscribed c. 1818
Tate, T13002

“The floods overwhelmed me,” printed 1796, inscribed c. 1818
Tate, T13004

“‘Every thing is an attempt’ / ‘To be Human’,” printed 1796, inscribed c. 1818
Tate, T13003

“Who shall set’ / ‘The Prisoners free’,” printed 1796, inscribed c. 1818
Tate, T13001

“Vegetating in fibres of Blood,” printed 1796, inscribed c. 1818
Tate, T12997
“Fearless tho in pain’ / ’I travel on’,” printed 1796, inscribed c. 1818
Tate, T129999

Catherine Blake, c. 1805 (Butlin #683)
Tate, N05188

The British Art World

John Flaxman, *Alcestis and Admetus*, 1789
Tate, T08234

George Romney, *The Tempest, Act 1*, c. 1787
Collection of Robert N. Essick

Henry Fuseli, *An Old Man Murdered by Three Younger Men*, early 1770s
J. Paul Getty Museum, 84.GG.711

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Genesis manuscript, c. 1826–27 (Butlin #828.6)
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 000.37

The Creation of Adam, Genesis manuscript (Butlin #828.5)
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 000.36

Second Title Page, Genesis manuscript (Butlin #828.2)
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 000.33

First Title Page, Genesis manuscript (Butlin #828.1)
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, 000.32

“Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims,” second state, partly hand colored, 1810
Collection of Robert N. Essick
Laocoön, c. 1815, c. 1826–27
Collection of Robert N. Essick

“Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion,” 1773, c. 1820–25
Collection of Robert N. Essick

James Gillray, “Presages of the Millennium,” 1795
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.916

James Gillray, “The Death of the Great Wolf,” 1795
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1981.25.906

Henry Fuseli, Siegfried About to Deny on Oath That Brunhild Had Been His Paramour, 1805
Tate, T08133

James Barry, Study for “Philoctetes on the Island of Lemnos,” 1770
Tate, T08127

Benjamin West, The Fright of Astyanax (Hector Bidding Farewell to Andromache), 1797
J. Paul Getty Museum, 84.GG.722

Visionary

Jerusalem copy E, composed 1804–11, printed c. 1811, “William,” plate 29 (Bentley; Erdman not numbered)
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, DRN 3510

Jerusalem copy B, composed c. 1804–11, printed c. 1811, “William,” plate 29 (Bentley; Erdman number)
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, DRN 3510

Milton copy B, title page
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, DRN 3507

Jerusalem copy E, composed 1804–c. 1820, printed c. 1821, frontispiece
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1992.8.1(1)

Jerusalem copy E, title page
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1992.8.1(2)

Jerusalem copy E, plate 25
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1992.8.1(25)

Jerusalem copy E, plate 26
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1992.8.1(26)

Jerusalem copy E, plate 41
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1992.8.1(41)

Jerusalem copy E, plate 78
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1992.8.1(78)

Jerusalem copy E, plate 81
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1992.8.1(81)

Jerusalem copy E, plate 84
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1992.8.1(84)

Jerusalem copy E, plate 97
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1992.8.1(97)

Jerusalem copy E, plate 100
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1992.8.1(100)

Milton copy B, composed c. 1804–11, printed c. 1811, “William,” plate 29 (Bentley; Erdman number)
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, DRN 3510

Milton copy B, plate 15 (Bentley; Erdman plate 16 [18])
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, DRN 3509

Milton copy B, “Preface”
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, DRN 3507

Milton copy B, title page
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, DRN 3507

Landscape near Felpham, c. 1800 (Butlin #368)
Tate, A00041

The Head of the Ghost of a Flea, c. 1819 (Butlin #692.98)
Tate, N05184

The Ghost of a Flea, c. 1819–20 (Butlin #750)
Tate, N05889

Merlin, c. 1819–20 (Butlin #757)
Collection of Robert N. Essick

The Song of Los copy E, composed and printed 1795, frontispiece
Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, DRN 3506

Visions of the Daughters of Albion, composed 1793, printed 1796, frontispiece (Butlin #264)
Tate, N03373
This exhibition placed Blake among contemporary artworks selected to illustrate the Italian cultural anthropologist Anita Seppilli's *Poesia e magia*, transforming the rooms of the Italian Cultural Institute in London into a series of stages within an experience of initiation:

Responding to Seppilli's recurring interest in initiation rites in *Poesia e magia*, the design of the "scenical" exhibition Poetry & Magic approximated a mystery: the visitor encounters the hierophantic figure of Anita Seppilli in the hall of 39 Belgrave Square, begins their journey in the reality of the city's streets with the photography of *The Sacrilege of Bridges* in the lecture room, passes the monster Caliban at the bottom of the stairs, is directed upwards and onwards by the inspired Blake communing with the Archangel Gabriel at the top of the grand staircase, and emerges into the symbolic realm of the Ball Room—a space of light, crystal chandeliers, antique mirrors and foliage glimpsed through large windows—with the prints and paintings of Marcelle Hanselaar, Stephen Chambers and Ana...
Maria Pacheco. Looking into the mirror the visitor reads the label: Poeta.¹²

Blake's inclusion emerged from an experiment with Seppilli's concept of the "super-real" as a starting point for Ben Thomas and the photographer Theresa Mikuriya, who revived surrealist experiments with chance in their drifting through the city, transposing to London the Parisian walk in André Breton's surrealist novel Nadja (1928). Their path through lost steps and lost souls started with Chaucer's pilgrims at Talbot Yard, Southwark, but instead of following them on the way to Canterbury, it took a different route back through the city, which included Hercules Buildings in Lambeth, where Blake lived and printed many of his illuminated prophetic works, and ended in Fountain Court in the Strand, where he died: "This is how Blake entered into the exhibition concept—by objective chance—and he became the presiding spirit of the art work consisting of texts and photographs called The Sacrilege of Bridges that Theresa and I made."¹³

Blake's position at the top of the staircase marked his function as a "presiding spirit" inviting the visitor to the next stage of initiation. Thomas Phillips's portrait captures the poet's "rapt poetic expression" looking upward while recollecting an imaginary conversation with the archangel Gabriel.¹⁴ Blake's own engagement with rituals of initiation through the Platonic and Pythagorean teachings of Thomas Taylor about Bacchic and Eleusinian Mysteries drove the selection of prints from Songs of Innocence and of Experience, from "The Shepherd" to "Ah! Sun-Flower," associated with the cosmic function of the heliotrope in Kathleen Raine's esoteric iconography.¹⁵

Upstairs, Blake-inspired works by Stephen Chambers painted in oil on panels from a discarded wardrobe included Two Black Angels, which reinvents the children from the frontispieces of Songs of Innocence and of Experience, and compositions inspired by emblems from The Gates of Paradise: Harvest, from "I found him beneath a Tree"; Scissors, and the motif of clipping wings, from "Aged Ignorance / Perceptive Organs closed their Objects close"; and Sword, from "My Son! my Son!"¹⁶

Impressions printed from replica relief-etched copperplates by Michael Phillips

Songs of Innocence and of Experience:
"The Shepherd"
"My Pretty Rose Tree"/"Ah! Sun-Flower"/"The Lilly"
"London"
"A Poison Tree"

America a Prophecy:
Plate 9 (Bentley; Erdman plate 7), "In thunders ends the voice"

Ben Thomas

Ben Thomas

Exchanges

The Whitworth, University of Manchester
21 November 2023–24 November 2024

Exchanges features a selection from the Whitworth's art and textile collection, 1490–2021. Blake's The Shrine of Apollo is exhibited as a reference to the Apollo Belvedere sculpture within a display of classical constructions of male beauty sourced from mostly early acquisitions "connected through their use of gesture, movement and self-expression" to Simeon Barclay's neon diptych As a Precursor to Folly.

The Shrine of Apollo, illustration to Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," 1809 (Butlin #538.4)
The Whitworth, D.29.1892

13. I am grateful to Ben Thomas for sharing the genesis of the Blake connection in e-mail conversation, 30 April 2024. The Sacrilege of Bridges takes its title from another work by Seppilli.
14. For the anecdote, see Allan Cunningham, The Cabinet Gallery of Pictures, Selected from the Splendid Collections of Art, Public and Private, Which Adorn Great Britain; with Biographical and Critical Descriptions by Allan Cunningham (London: John Major and George and William Nicol, 1833) 1: 11-13.
Exchanges at the Whitworth, University of Manchester.
Photo: Michael Pollard; © The Whitworth, University of Manchester. Steele-Perkins work: © Chris Steele-Perkins.