

WILLIAM BLAKE AND HIS CIRCLE



1 MAY - 26 JUNE 1993
HUNTERIAN ART GALLERY : UNIVERSITY of GLASGOW

Front Cover: No.2

Frontispiece: Detail of no. 29, Blake's engraving after his own "tempera painting" *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, now at Pollock House. In this scene the party are leaving the Gothic gateway of the Tabard Inn at the start of their pilgrimage. The characters are, from left to right, Chaucer, the Clerk of Oxenford, the Cook, the Miller, the Wife of Bath, the Merchant and the Parson.

Glasgow University has an important collection of material related to William Blake, but it is little known outside a small group of specialists. One reason for this is that Blake's work defies simple categorisation and, as a result, is dispersed throughout several departments. The present exhibition, therefore, provides an opportunity to bring many of these works together and to display a number of items in Glasgow for the first time.

This is the sixth in a series of exhibitions in which students in the History of Art Department have been able to participate in the process of research and selection.

The students who contributed to this project were Karen Brown, Elissa Chase, Anneli Downing, Jeffrey Dunn, Karen Iwanowitsch, Rosemary McAuley, Toby Norris, Michael Paine, Emma Pollard, Sophie Pragnell, Julia Salmond and Diane Scott.

We have been greatly assisted by Tim Hobbs and David Weston of the Department of Special Collections, Glasgow University Library, Christopher Allan, Martin Hopkinson and Stephen Perry of the Hunterian Art Gallery, and Jolyon Hudson.

PAUL STIRTON
History of Art Department



*"What is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery,
but the hard and wirey line of rectitude and certainty in the actions and intentions?
Leave out this line, and you leave out life itself."*

William Blake, 1809

Like William Hogarth in a previous generation, Blake's peculiar position in British art owes much to the fact that he was trained as a reproductive engraver. A mechanical skill, much undervalued by the critics and connoisseurs of the period, it nevertheless provided both artists with the ability to pioneer new ways of working and novel means of realising or promoting their ideas. For Hogarth this meant the development of a new type of narrative art which he called *Modern Moral Cycles* and which were distributed to a large public through the sale of the artist's own engravings. For Blake, the most obvious manifestation of his trade was the remarkable series of hand-printed and coloured books such as *Europe* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. It is difficult to imagine a conventionally trained painter turning to this sort of work and even less likely that an academic artist would have possessed the skill or confidence to attempt such a range of original printing techniques as Blake developed for these works. To this day the complexity of his methods remains to be fully explained.

But in Blake's case printmaking stood for more than simply the medium or process.

His training as an engraver had a profound effect on the very nature of his art, defining his aesthetic and giving his work a distinctive appearance that marked him out from his contemporaries.

In 1772 at the age of fourteen Blake was apprenticed to James Basire to learn the skilled trade of reproductive engraving. This was an age of great technical innovation in the print industry which had seen the introduction of stipple engraving and crayon manner, to say nothing of aquatint and soft ground etching. Basire, however, continued to train his pupils in the traditional method of line engraving. This defined the visual imagination of his young apprentice and for the rest of his career Blake relied on the unyielding system of crisp linear description that had been drummed into him in Basire's studio. Time and again in Blake's writings we come across scathing comments about the corrupting influences of tone and colour in art and the corresponding superiority of line which preserved the 'true manner' of Michelangelo, Raphael and Dürer. "The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art; and the less keen and sharp,

the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism and bungling." Right up to the end of his life Blake adhered to these principles, employing pure line engraving for his illustrations to *The Book of Job*, regarded by many as his greatest achievement.

This preoccupation with the quality of line was hardly restricted to printmakers. Indeed, it corresponded to some of the most elevated theories of the emerging school of history painters. James Barry, Henry Fuseli, George Romney and the sculptor John Flaxman all placed a high premium on the use of simple outline and looked to the vase paintings of ancient Greece for

validation of this austere means of description. Blake knew all of these artists from his days as a student in the Royal Academy, and he shared many of their ambitions as well as their commitment to an art based on high ideals and moral principles.

The overriding concern of this group was to establish a native school of art and, following Hogarth's lead, they looked to the achievements of English literature. Shakespeare and Milton became the principal quarry for history painters, but it was not long before scenes from Ossian, Dante and, finally, Chaucer appeared in exhibitions. Despite the popular interest and occasional excitement which such paintings generated, there was still very little support for history painting on the part of collectors. Fuseli, lamenting this state of affairs, wrote "There is little hope of the Poetical painting finding encouragement in England. The people are not prepared for it. Portrait with them is everything." In fact, the situation was not as bad as he would suggest and a solution would emerge from the print trade itself.

Painters of literary and historical subjects were able to thrive due to the success of two related enterprises: the highly publicised exhibitions based around one author, such as Boydell's *Shakespeare Gallery* of 1789, and, alongside this, the sale of engravings after paintings commissioned by publishers and printsellers. These prints were the medium through which most people saw the work of leading artists and they provided a very good source of income. Blake worked on





both sides of this trade, producing prints after other artists' work as well as the engravings after his own paintings. It was a strange alliance between the most elevated form of art, history painting, and the most inferior, reproductive engraving, but it opened up an immense market for British prints and ensured the success of artists and engravers alike.

If Blake's career has a degree of single-mindedness which links some of his earliest to his very last designs, one group of works strikes an unusual note. These are the illustrations to Virgil's *Eclogues*, which were commissioned to accompany a school text. Not only was this pastoral theme unusual in Blake's output, the medium of wood-engraving was unfamiliar to him. The resulting prints, however, reveal a genuine sympathy for the verse which is enhanced by

the rather coarse execution of the blocks. Rev. Thornton, the editor, was less than pleased with the result and went so far as to place a disclaimer in the text stating that "they display less of art than of genius, and are much admired by some eminent painters." This cool remark should perhaps be contrasted with the comments of Samuel Palmer, who came to regard the illustrations to Virgil as something of a talisman: "there is in all such a mystic and dreamy glimmer as penetrates and kindles the innermost soul, and gives complete and unreserved delight, unlike the gaudy daylight of this world. They are like all that wonderful artist's works the drawing aside of the fleshy curtain...."

Through the work of Palmer, Calvert and the other members of the group known as 'The Ancients', Blake's vision of pastoral

serenity was given new significance for a later generation of English landscape artists.

The Blake Collections in Glasgow

Glasgow has held an important position in Blake studies starting in 1853 when William Stirling (later Sir William Stirling Maxwell) acquired five paintings from the estate of Thomas Butts. The most important of these was *Sir Jeffrey Chaucer and the Nine and Twenty Pilgrims on their journey to Canterbury*, the centrepiece of Blake's solo exhibition in 1809. In all, six paintings by Blake were presented to the city of Glasgow in 1967 as part of the Pollok Gift and are currently displayed at Pollok House and in the new St Mungo's Museum of Religious Art and Life. Considering the overall pattern of Stirling Maxwell's taste as a collector, it seems likely that Blake's work appealed to him because of its affinity with emblems. Stirling Maxwell assembled the largest collection of emblem books in the world (now deposited with Glasgow University Library) including several items of Blake's printed material such as the bound proof copy of *The Book of Job*. In this context it is possible to see Blake's work as part of a long-standing European tradition in which literary and moral themes are explored in the interrelationship of text and image.

Stirling Maxwell was not alone, however, in his interest in Blake. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the Glasgow industrialist and bibliophile Bernard Buchanan MacGeorge assembled a considerable collection of Blake's books and drawings.

When this library was sold in 1924 the catalogue listed some of the finest copies of the 'Prophetic Books', all of which are now scattered. The rare broadsheet ballad *Little Tom the Sailor* was the only item to be acquired for the University. Some consolation for the dispersal of this group may be found in the two works, *Europe* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, which were donated to Glasgow University Library in 1975 and now form the centrepiece of the present exhibition.

As regards Blake's contemporaries, the University has been fortunate in acquiring a number of important prints and drawings, some dating back to the original formation of the collection. William Hunter, the pioneer of obstetrics and principal benefactor of the University's substantial art collection, was the Professor of Anatomy at the Royal Academy. From this position he was able to assemble a large personal collection including a number of prints such as the group of etchings and aquatints by James Barry which were probably acquired directly from the artist himself. Since then the university has benefited from a number of gifts and bequests which have greatly enriched the print collection. One principal benefactor was James McCallum whose collection of over 3,000 prints included such unusual items as *The Witch digging up a Corpse*, a unique impression of a soft-ground etching by Henry Fuseli.

PAUL STIRTON

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The listing is arranged by artist, with short biographical notes preceding each group of entries. All works are drawn from the University's collections, those marked GUL being from the University Library.



WILLIAM BLAKE

1757-1827

Born in London and trained as a reproductive engraver under Basire before attending the R.A. schools. In 1789 he produced The Songs of Innocence, the first of a series of hand-printed and coloured books expressing his visionary view of religion and the condition of mankind. At Lambeth during the 1790s he refined his complex autograph printing techniques and produced a series of large colour prints. After an unhappy period in Felpham c.1800-1803 under the patronage of William Hayley, Blake prepared for a public exhibition of his work which he held in 1809. The failure of this enterprise along with other setbacks appears to have affected the artist deeply, but he continued to work, mostly in watercolour, and to benefit from the support of a few close friends and admirers. His spirits picked up again during the 1820s when several new projects, such as the illustrations to Virgil and to The Book of Job, restored his confidence. Blake had been outside the British art establishment for much of his career, but in the years before his death in 1827 a group of younger artists, known as 'The Ancients', looked to him for inspiration.

1. **Visions of the Daughters of Albion**
1793

Relief etching with watercolour GUL

The Visions of the Daughters of Albion is a book consisting of 11 pages of text

and illustration, each one printed and coloured by Blake and his wife. It relates a tale of sexual repression and alienation in the doomed relationship of three characters. Oothoon, a young liberated woman, is raped by Bromion who resents her sexual independence. Unable to accept her in this 'fallen' state, Oothoon's lover Theotormon rejects her although he is racked by despair and internal conflict.

The book is open at the Title Page with its elaborate copper-plate inscription. Facing this, on the left, is the Frontispiece showing the huddled forms of the three characters; Oothoon and Bromion are manacled to the rocks while Theotormon crouches nearby in despair. This page was often bound at the end of the book to suggest the continuing slavery of the Daughters of Albion.

EUROPE, A PROPHECY 1794

Relief etchings colour printed with added watercolour GUL

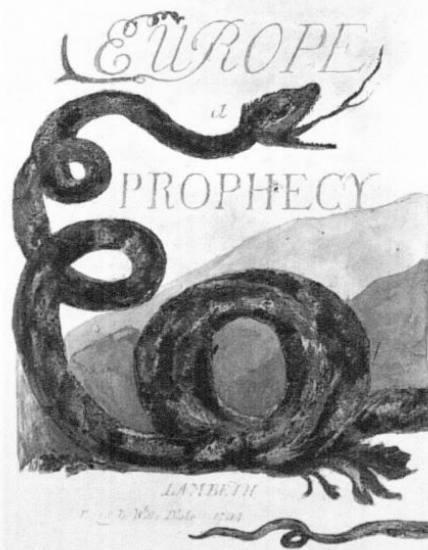
Of the twelve known copies of *Europe* this example was probably printed c.1795 when Blake's interest in colour printing was at its height. The range of textures combined with the sharp line and rich colour reveal the full mastery of Blake's technique and the intensity of his vision.

The seventeen plates recount the mythical history of Europe from the time of Christ to the Revolutions of Blake's own period. In essence, it is an allegory of liberation from tyranny but, given the repressive climate of the 1790s, Blake's message was necessarily veiled.

Orc, the spirit of revolution, is revealed to Earth as Christ. This message, however, is suppressed by Orc's mother, Enitharmon, who restores the twin evils of church and state. After 1,800 years of plague, famine, war and tyranny, Orc awakens to end the old rule and to lead mankind to revolution.

2. Frontispiece

Commonly known as 'The Ancient of Days', it is more accurately God or Urizen creating the Universe. The Creation was, for Blake, an evil act symbolized by the compasses which define the world and limit the imagination with materialism and reason. A passage in the Preludium states "and who shall bind the infinite with an eternal band?"



3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

3. **Titlepage**

The snake, usually associated with materialism, here represents Orc the spirit of revolution.

4. **Preludium**

A spiritual pilgrim makes his way through life while an assassin, symbolising the pitfalls of materialism, lies in wait at the mouth of a cave.

5. **Plate 2**

The "howling terrors" are strangled by a demon while the figure of Despair clasps his head in torment.

6. **Plate 3: A Prophecy**

A winged female figure shakes from her hair "the secret child" Orc whose arrival in Europe is associated with the birth of Christ.

7. **Plate 4**

The naked Enitharmon may be either covering Orc, her son, to impose her deceitful rule or unveiling him unaware of his revolutionary purpose. Her other children can be seen playing in the background.

8. **Plate 5**

Rintrah, Enitharmon's servant, wages war and enslaves the people to his regime. This may be taken to symbolize the tyrannical rule of King or Government.



9. **Plate 6**

Famine: a consequence of Rintrah's war.

10. **Plate 7**

An old man attempts to ward off an oncoming horror, possibly invasion or the threat of revolution to the old order.

11. **Plate 8**

Two beautifully stylized figures blowing spiral trumpets are spreading mildew to blight the corn under Enitharmon's corrupt rule.

12. **Plate 9**

"Thought chang'd the infinite to a serpent." The revolutionary snake of the titlepage has been tamed into a product of materialism.

13. **Plate 10**

Palambron, Enitharmon's servant, is here connected with the Pope and represents the tyrannical rule of the church.

14. **Plate 11**

Plague: a consequence either of Rintrah's war or of the Apocalypse arising from the revolution brought by Orc. Beside an inscription "Lord have mercy on us", a bellman is calling for the dead to be brought out for burial.

15. **Plate 12**

"Enitharmon laugh'd in her sleep to see ... every man bound." Insect life suggests the corruption of the old order. Enitharmon is ignorant of the arrival of the 'flames of Orc' and the revolution they signify.

16. **Plate 13**

The figure locked in chains by the scaly jailor is a recurrent motif in Blake's work illustrating the physical binding of Man to the burden of the material world.

17. **Plate 14**

The deceitful rule of Enitharmon is coming to an end; she realizes the possibility of revolution and calls her snakes and insects to her.

18. **Plate 15**

"And in the vineyards of red France appear'd the light of his fury". The triumph of revolution; a man saves a

woman and child from the flames of Orc's revolution. The remains of a ruined classical temple on the left suggests the destruction of the old order based on reason and materialism.

19. **A Negro hung alive by the Ribs to a Gallows**

Engraving after J.G. Stedman, from J.G. Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, London, 1806 GUL

Stedman's horrific account of punishments inflicted on negro slaves fuelled the parliamentary debate on abolition and shaped Blake's own views on slavery. The engravings in this, the second edition, were coloured by hand in the early 19th century.



20. **Psyche Repents**

Engraving after George Cumberland, from G. Cumberland, *Thoughts on Outline*, London, 1796 GUL

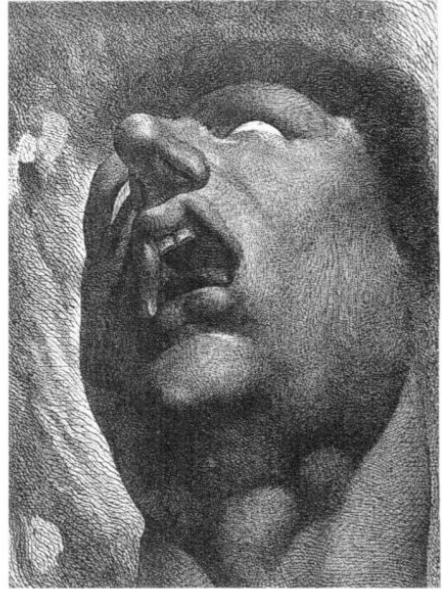
Blake worked with Cumberland on the plates accompanying *Thoughts on Outline*, a treatise on "the inestimable value of chaste outline" as practised

by the ancient Greeks. The oval composition suggests a Greek cameo.

21. Head of a Damned Soul c.1788-90

Etching and engraving
after Henry Fuseli

This impressive print is a good example of the "dot and lozenge" technique of engraving which Blake learned from his master Basire. The design is related to Fuseli's *Four faces from Dante's Inferno* which appeared as illustrations to J.C. Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy* in 1792 (see No. 22). The motif of a dramatically foreshortened head reappears in several works by both Blake and Fuseli.



22. Democritus

Engraving after Rubens, from
J.C. Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*,
Vol 1, London, 1789 GUL

Lavater, a lifelong friend of Fuseli, founded the pseudo-science of Physiognomy which held that head shape is determined by character. The English edition, which appeared in forty-one parts between 1788 and 1789, contained over 500 plates of which four were engraved by Blake. This plate, after a painting by Rubens now in the Prado, shows the Greek philosopher Democritus emphasizing his "sarcastic grin". The book is from the collection of the obstetrician William Hunter.

23. William Cowper 1792

Engraving after George Romney

This plate was used as the frontispiece to William Hayley's *Life of Cowper*, published in 1803. Hayley, a successful poet and author in his own right, is better known as friend of George Romney, John Flaxman and William Cowper; and as an important patron of Blake. Blake worked for him at Felpham from 1800 to 1803, but felt that he was used more as a reproductive engraver than as an original artist during that time. Cowper's cousin, Lady Hesketh, objected to Romney's portrait because she thought it hinted at the poet's madness, but she admired Blake's engraving which she thought "soften'd".

24. Shipwreck c.1793-5

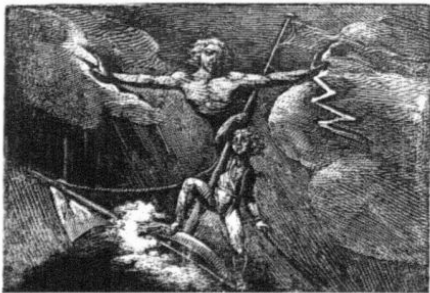
Engraving after George Romney

This plate was originally commissioned as an illustration to William Hayley's *Life of Romney* published in 1809. It depicts an event from 1772 described by the explorer Karl Thunberg in which an old man attempted to rescue the victims of a shipwreck off the Cape of Good Hope. The engraving is after an oil sketch made by Romney in Rome, now lost.

25. Little Tom the Sailor 1800

Metal cut and relief etching

A broadsheet illustrating a ballad written by Blake's patron, the poet William Hayley, to "relieve the necessities of a poor woman". It was printed from four plates; two text plates etched in relief like the illuminated books, and two white-line "wood-cuts on pewter" for the illustrations.



25

26. Theory or The Graphic Muse

Engraving after Sir Joshua Reynolds, from Prince Hoare, *An Inquiry into the Requisite Cultivation and Present State of the Arts of Design in England*, London, 1806. GUL

Blake's hostility to Reynolds' artistic principles is well documented: His friendship with Hoare or financial necessity may have compelled Blake to undertake this commission. The original painting was executed by Reynolds for the ceiling of the Royal Academy.

27. Christ with a bow trampling on Satan c.1806-8

Engraving

This plate was probably engraved by Thomas Butts Jr, son of Blake's chief patron. There is some doubt over the correct title, the bearded figure vanquished by Christ being variously described as Satan or Urizen, the personification of reason and law.

28. A Descriptive Catalogue...

London, 1809

GUL

In 1809 Blake held an exhibition of sixteen of his own works at his brother's house in Golden Square, London. In the *Descriptive Catalogue*, printed to accompany the exhibition, he provided the most comprehensive account of his theories on art. The exhibition itself was very poorly attended, and what response it did arouse was mainly hostile. The reviewer in *The Examiner* described Blake as "an unfortunate

lunatic whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement". This copy of the catalogue was bought at the Butts' sale of 1853 along with *The Canterbury Pilgrims* by Sir William Stirling Maxwell of Pollok. It is open at the fly-leaf where there is a unique printed handbill advertising the exhibition.

29. The Canterbury Pilgrims 1809

Engraving

This print, engraved by Blake himself, is after the 'tempera painting' of *The Canterbury Pilgrims* now at Pollok House in Glasgow. The painting was the centrepiece of Blake's exhibition in 1809. In the *Descriptive Catalogue* (No. 28) he devoted some 36 pages to an analysis of Chaucer's characters which he described as "the physiognomies or lineaments of universal life". In this he found some support; Charles Lamb declared that Blake's description was the finest criticism he had ever read of Chaucer's poem. Blake was very proud of his engraving technique and later wrote "This Print is the Finest that has been done or is likely to be done in England ... I defy any man to cut cleaner strokes than I do." Despite these high expectations, the engraving, like the exhibition, attracted little attention. The composition was possibly inspired by the Parthenon frieze, the highlight of the Elgin Marbles, which was displayed for the first time in London in 1807.



30. Illustrations to Thornton's "Pastorals of Virgil" 1821

Wood engravings

These 17 designs were published in 1821 as part of an illustrated school edition of Virgil's *Eclogues*. They are the only wood-engravings executed by Blake and closely follow the pastoral dialogue of two shepherds, Colin and Thonot. Despite some reservations by the editor, Dr R.J. Thornton, these prints went on to exert a strong influence on 'The Ancients', a group of younger artists who gathered around Blake in the last years of his life. Samuel Palmer described the tiny images as "visions of little dells and nooks and corners of paradise".

ILLUSTRATIONS TO THE BOOK OF JOB 1825

Line engravings

The 21 engraved illustrations to *The Book of Job* were commissioned by Blake's artist friend John Linnell in 1823. The subject, however, had interested Blake for some time before

this and in 1805 he had begun a set of watercolours of Job for Thomas Butts. A second set of watercolours was produced for Linnell in 1821 and it was these which provided the basis for the engravings begun two years later. Despite Blake's antipathy for the Old Testament, Job presented the artist with an opportunity to explore some of his favourite themes: the power of faith; the contrast of youth and age; the vengeful character of the Old Testament God. Blake inscribed a date of 1825 into the plates, but they were not published until the following year.



32. **Job and his Family**
Plate 1

Job and his family sit complacently reciting their prayers while the musical instruments are hung disused in the tree.

32. **The Destruction of Job's Sons**
Plate 3

With God's approval the bat-winged Satan rains down fire and destruction on Job's degenerate sons.

33. **Job Rebuked by his Friends**
Plate 10

Job's pitiless friends point accusing fingers at him while his wife despairs. This is the same subject as Barry's print (No. 40), although Blake's design probably owes more to Fuseli's *Three Witches*.

34. **Job's Evil Dreams**
Plate 11

At the lowest depth of his torment, Job recognises the false reproachful God, revealed by his cloven hoof and the entwining serpent of materialism.

35. **When the Morning Stars Sang Together**
Plate 14

A gentler Christ-like God, linking heaven and earth, reveals the full wonder of the Creation to Job. In the margin are the six acts of the Creation.

36. **Job and his Family Restored to Prosperity**
Plate 21

In contrast to the first plate in the series, Job, his wife and their spiritually resurrected children praise God with the instruments from the Tree of Life and the Song of Moses.

37.

38.

JAMES BARRY
1741-1806

Irish-born history painter who was brought to London in 1764 by the philosopher Edmund Burke. Barry studied in Italy 1766-71 where he met Gavin Hamilton. Between 1777 and 1783 he worked on a large decorative scheme for the Royal Society of Arts on *The Progress of Human Culture*, a project for which he received little or no support. Elected R.A. in 1773 and Professor of Painting in 1782, he was expelled from the organization in 1799 for his bitter attacks on fellow members.

37. The Fall of Satan 1777

Etching and aquatint

Milton's *Paradise Lost* was a popular source for British history painters, combining the moral qualities of a great Christian epic with the added appeal of an English author. Blake wrote a long poem entitled *Milton* and Fuseli virtually bankrupted himself setting up a *Milton Gallery* in 1799. It was Barry, however, who produced the most powerful images from Milton, the dark clouds in this design suggesting the Sublime.

38. Philoctetes 1777

Etching and aquatint

Having been bitten by a snake on the voyage to Troy, the Greek warrior Philoctetes is abandoned by his companions who could no longer bear his cries of pain or the stench from his wound. This print is after Barry's painting *Philoctetes* of 1770.



39. King Lear 1776

Etching and aquatint

This design is based on Barry's earlier painting of *King Lear* exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1774. Bequeathed to the University by the obstetrician and collector William Hunter in 1783, the print was probably bought directly from the artist himself.

40. Job reproved by his Friends 1777

Etching and aquatint

In the depth of his sufferings at the hands of God, Job listens to the reproving counsel of his wife and friends. Barry's print is dedicated to his mentor Edmund Burke, whose *Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* had specified scenes from *The Book of Job* as suitable for depiction by artists.

HENRY FUSELI

1741-1825

Born in Switzerland where he began a literary career as a translator. Under the encouragement of Sir Joshua Reynolds, he took up painting and travelled to Rome in 1770 where he met Gavin Hamilton, Alexander Runciman and George Romney. His work combined classical and mannerist elements to create a very expressive form of history painting, at its best when treating dramatic subjects from English and European literature. He became an R.A. in 1790 and replaced Barry as Professor of Painting in 1799. Despite his notoriously sarcastic wit, Fuseli remained on good terms with Blake throughout their lives. Fuseli once remarked that Blake was "damned good to steal from" and Blake wrote of Fuseli as "the only man that ere I knew, who did not make me almost spew."



42

for either the poisonous mandrake plant or the remains of a corpse to concoct a lethal potion. This is the only known impression of the print.

ALEXANDER RUNCIMAN

1736-85

Trained in Edinburgh in the studio of James Norie, Runciman was commissioned in 1767 to decorate the house of Sir James Clerk at Penicuik. This supported his trip to Italy between 1767 and 1771 where he had considerable success as a landscape and history painter in the circle of Barry and Fuseli. On returning to Scotland Runciman undertook the decoration of Penicuik House based on subjects from *Ossian*.

41. Evening thou bringest all 1802

Lithograph

This is one of the earliest original lithographs produced in Britain. It was published in London by Philipp André in 1803 as part of a set entitled *Specimens of Polyautography*. Other artists involved in the venture included James Barry and Thomas Stothard (No. 58).

42. Witch digging up a Corpse c.1812

Soft-ground etching

The macabre subject is possibly based on the Witch's Song from Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queenes* of 1609. A hooded witch scratches at the ground searching

43. Agrippina Mourning over the Ashes of Germanicus c.1772

Etching

Agrippina, widow of the murdered Germanicus, was a popular subject for artists in the late 18th century on account of her nobility and stoic forbearance. Runciman treated the subject on several occasions.

44. **Cathloda** c.1774

Etching

Taken from James Macpherson's cycle *The Poems of Ossian, Cathloda, Duan I*, this is a smaller version of *The Finding of Corban-Cargla* (No. 46). The hero Fingal has accidentally discovered the cave where King Starvo imprisoned Corban-Cargla.

45. **Cormar attacking the Spirit of the Waters** c.1772

Etching

This episode in the Ossianic cycle is from Calmar's story in which his ancestor Cormar rushes "again among the waves to find the son of the wind". The figure of Cormar is based on the *Borghese Gladiator*, an antique figure frequently treated in drawings by Runciman and Fuseli.

46. **The Finding of Corban-Cargla**
c.1772

Etching

One of three etchings in this exhibition which were derived from Runciman's painted decorations for Ossian's Hall at Penicuik House (see Nos. 44 and 45). Ossian was regarded as a bard-like figure, a Celtic Homer, and Runciman's treatment of these subjects recalls scenes from ancient Greece.

47. **The Arrival of St. Margaret to Scotland** c.1772

Etching

In November 1771 Runciman painted four scenes from the life of St. Margaret

for the staircase at Penicuik House. This vivid design with its swirling, windblown drapery is based on one of those paintings. Penicuik House was much damaged by fire in 1899 with the loss of all the painted decorations.



JOHN RUNCIMAN
1744-68

A gifted and precocious artist, John Runciman accompanied his older brother Alexander to Italy to study the Old Masters. While there he developed a vivid and personal style, but he was prone to attacks of depression and destroyed much of his work before his premature death in Naples.

48. **The Return of the Prodigal Son**
c.1768

Etching

This tightly-worked etching is one of very few works from the final year of the artist's life. Rembrandt was a major

influence as is suggested by the inscription beneath the foot of the central figure.

GEORGE ROMNEY 1734-1802

Turning his back on a successful portrait practice in London, Romney took himself to Rome in 1773 to pursue his ambitions in the field of history painting. While there he met Fuseli and, in that circle, developed a distinctive drawing style using pen and ink wash. He is best known for a series of paintings of Emma, Lady Hamilton.

49. Lady Macbeth sleepwalking c.1788

Pen, sepia and grey wash

Like most British artists with an inclination towards history painting, Romney produced representations of Shakespearean characters. This drawing may be a preparatory sketch for a painting intended for Boydell's *Shakespeare Gallery*, the most important venture to promote a native school of history painting in England.



JOHN FLAXMAN 1755-1826

Sculptor, printmaker and designer who achieved an enormous reputation throughout Europe. Flaxman met Blake at the R.A. schools c.1770. He studied in Italy between 1787 and 1794 where he developed a refined Neoclassical style of sculpture that was in great demand for public monuments. Engravings after his drawings enjoyed similar success amongst artists and were copied by such diverse figures as Ingres, Goya and Friedrich.

50. Otus & Ephialtes Holding Mars Captive

Engraving by Thomas Piroli after Flaxman, from *The Iliad of Homer*, London, 1805

GUL

These austere line illustrations to Homer were the most influential of Flaxman's designs and were widely distributed throughout Europe. His drawing style, inspired by the simple linear manner of Greek vases, reflected a popular belief in the superiority of line over all other modes of description. Blake equated line with truth and despised artists like Rembrandt and Titian whom he referred to as "blotting and blurring demons".

51. The Lake of Pitch

Engraving by Thomas Piroli after Flaxman, from *Compositions from the Divine Poem of Dante Alighieri*, London, 1807

GUL

Flaxman's illustrations to *The Divine Comedy* were commissioned in 1792 by

the Neoclassical designer Thomas Hope, but it was not until 1807 that this folio was issued to the public. Fuseli had already produced a number of imaginative drawings after Dante in the 1770s and Blake was working on a series of watercolours from *The Divine Comedy* which remained incomplete at his death in 1827.

52. Typhaon, Echidna, Geryon

Stipple engraving by William Blake after Flaxman, from *Compositions from the Works and Days and Theogony of Hesiod*, London, 1817

GUL

This image illustrates the new engraving technique created by Blake which utilized both stipple and line to imitate the soft pencil marks of Flaxman's drawings.

**JOHN HAMILTON
MORTIMER
1740-1779**

Trained in the studio of Thomas Hudson, Mortimer abandoned portraiture to take up history painting. During the 1770s his drawings and prints revealed greater freedom and imagination, but he died before his full potential could be realised.

53. Richard II 1775

Etching

The twelve *Characters from Shakespeare* are amongst Mortimer's most original works. The figures are depicted in an oval format, but this hardly restricts Mortimer's forceful rendition of these fictional characters.

54. Poet 1775

Etching

Mortimer's etchings preserved many of the qualities of his original pen and ink drawings. In this print the textured background of broken lines contrasts with the delicate stippling on the face.

55. Caliban 1775

Etching

Caliban, the misshapen monster of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, is an appropriate subject for Mortimer. In his annotations to Reynolds' *Discourses*, Blake praised Mortimer alongside Barry and Fuseli as an example of the imaginative artist.



56. Banditti ≈ Dedication Plate 1778

Etching

The fifteen etchings of *Banditti* were the most famous of Mortimer's works

during his own lifetime. Dedicated to Sir Joshua Reynolds, they were published soon after Mortimer's election as an Associate of the Royal Academy.

57. Banditti taking his post 1778
Etching

The inspiration behind Mortimer's *Banditti* series was the 17th century Italian printmaker Salvator Rosa. Like Rosa, Mortimer was often identified with his subjects, fuelling a popular myth of the artist as a wild and unconventional character.

THOMAS STOTHARD
1755-1834

Stothard was the most prolific and successful book illustrator of the late 18th

century but he maintained a parallel career as a painter of historical and literary subjects. His most famous work was The Pilgrimage to Canterbury.

58. The Lost Apple 1803
Lithograph

Stothard aspired to be a serious history painter, but this essay in the new technique of lithography is closer to the pastoral poetry of Gainsborough's cottage door scenes.

59. The Pilgrimage to Canterbury 1809-17

L. Schiavonetti and J. Heath after Stothard
Etching and engraving

When the publisher Robert Cromek commissioned Stothard to paint *The Pilgrimage to Canterbury*, it seems likely



parallel career
and literary
work was The

ious history
n the new
is closer to
sborough's

fter Stothard

ert Cromek
o paint *The*
seems likely

that he intended to deceive Blake. Cromek already had a contract to publish Blake's engraving of this subject. Stothard, an old friend of Blake, later claimed to have acted in good faith, but this affair did cause a serious rift between the two artists. Both pictures are clearly related but there is little doubt that Blake's work had priority. Indeed, Stothard's painting was probably planned after he had seen a drawing by Blake. His painting appeared before Blake's own and, to Blake's distress, Stothard was given much of the credit for choosing to illustrate Chaucer.

DAVID SCOTT 1806-49

Trained in Edinburgh as a line engraver under his father, Scott was introduced to Blake's work at an early stage. Pursuing an ambition to be a history painter, he visited Italy in 1834 and produced a number of impressive and monumental works.

60. Of Death 1830-31 Etching

One of a set of six engravings published by the firm of Constable under the title *Monograms of Man*. Using text and image, these prints sought to trace the "symbolic life of man and his quest for the unknown". Beneath the design is an inscription from *The Book of Job*.



EDWARD CALVERT
1799-1883

The seminal event in Calvert's early career was his meeting with William Blake in 1826. In the same year he met Samuel Palmer and together they became the core of the group known as 'The Ancients', admirers of Blake who sought to preserve his visionary approach to art. Between 1827 and 1831 he produced a number of lyrical prints, but after this period his work lost much of its intensity.

**61. The Ploughman or Christian
Ploughing the Last Furrow 1827**
Wood engraving

Calvert was greatly inspired by Blake and his work, as can be seen from this design; but it is the visionary mood which reveals Blake's influence. Early impressions of the print bear the inscription: "Seen in the kingdom of heaven by vision through Jesus Christ our Savior".

62. The Cyder Feast 1828
Wood engraving

Calvert was a highly skilled wood-engraver capable of very subtle effects in miniature. This subject, recalling the artist's childhood in the cider country of south-west England, suggests a new pagan quality in his work.

SAMUEL PALMER
1805-81

Palmer was introduced to Blake by John Linnell in 1824, after which he became the central figure in 'The Ancients'. In 1827

he moved to Shoreham in Kent where he produced some of his finest work. Forced to leave his "valley of vision" in 1835, he lost much of his inspiration to a rather dry topographical style. In 1850, however, he regained much of the earlier spirit when he took up etching.

**63. Christmas or Folding the Last Sheep
1850**
Etching (fourth state)

Christmas clearly shows the influence of Blake's Virgil wood-engravings (No. 30). Palmer was particularly drawn to moonlit scenes which allowed him to achieve the "mystic and dreamy glimmer" that he had perceived in Blake's work.

64. The Vine or Plumpy Bacchus 1852
Etching (fourth state)

This poetic evocation of the drinking Song from Act 2 of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is unusual in Palmer's oeuvre. Here the joyous celebration of abundance comes close to the pagan spirit of his friend Calvert's *Cyder Feast* (No. 62).

**65. The Rising Moon or
An English Pastoral 1857**
Etching (sixth state)

This scene of pastoral peace and moonlight recalls the spirit of Palmer's work in Shoreham almost 30 years earlier. The pastoral idyll had been cut short when Palmer finally left the village in 1835, but something of the spirit of those years was recaptured when he took up etching in the 1850s.



64

**66. The Early Ploughman or
The Morning Spread upon the
Mountains c.1860**

Etching (sixth state)

Palmer's painstaking approach to the etching process is here employed to create an evocative, idealized landscape. "It is my misfortune to work slowly, not from any wish to niggle, but because I cannot otherwise get certain shimmerings of light and mysteries of shadow."

67. The Lonely Tower 1879

Etching (sixth state)

Palmer describes the mood of this work as one of "poetic loneliness ... in a secluded spot of a genial, pastoral country." The subject was inspired by lines from Milton's *Il Penseroso*.

**68. Opening the Fold or
Early Morning 1880**

Etching (sixth state)

Inspired by Blake's wood-engravings (No. 30), Palmer produced his own translation of *The Eclogues of Virgil*. At his death in 1881, however, this etching was the only completed illustration of a projected set of ten.

EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

Thursdays from 6 May at 7.30 pm

William Blake: A lecture series by Paul Stirton and J. Drummond Bone, organised by the Department of Adult & Continuing Education. Blake as artist, poet and radical thinker will be examined in five lectures at the Department and a visit to the Blake exhibition.

FEE: £14.00

Further details from D.A.C.E. (Tel 041-330 4394)

FUTURE EXHIBITIONS:

CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH

Master of Design 3 July - 28 August

Drawn entirely from the University's internationally-renowned Mackintosh Collection, some 50 works will illustrate Mackintosh's remarkable versatility as a designer. Designs for clocks, doors, tombstones and textiles will be on show. In addition Mackintosh's better-known designs for furniture, interiors and graphics will be richly represented.

Closed: 16-19 July

LECTURE SERIES

4, 11, 18, 25 August 12.30-1.30 pm

Mackintosh at Midday: An introductory lecture series illustrating the breadth and brilliance of Mackintosh's career as architect, designer and artist.

FEE: £1.50 PER LECTURE

Further details from The Secretary Hunterian Art Gallery (041-330-5431)

Opening Hours: Mon-Sat. 9.30 - 5.00