

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D. C.

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EXHIBITION OF PRINTS, WATER COLORS AND BOOKS, BY
WILLIAM BLAKE, FROM THE ROSENWALD COLLECTION

The National Gallery of Art has announced the opening, on Easter Sunday, April 25th, of an exhibition of prints, drawings and books by William Blake.

This is the first public showing in Washington of a part of the famous Collection of Lessing J. Rosenwald which was recently given to the Nation. The gift, which consists of more than 6600 prints and drawings and over 350 illustrated books, was divided between the National Gallery and the Library of Congress. Some of the books given to the Library of Congress are **being** shown with the prints and drawings belonging to the National Gallery.

Blake's work has always been a source of particular interest to Mr. Rosenwald, and the collection now on view is the result of sixteen years of search for items from the hand of the great English artist. A decade ago, it would not have been possible to see, outside of England, a collection of William Blake of comparable wealth and variety. In more recent years, although contemporary enthusiasm for Blake's art has grown enormously, few important works by him have come on the market.

Blake's life was a long struggle against poverty, but he was never without a few friends who were, fortunately, willing to help him, even if only in a limited fashion. William Butts, John Varley, William Hayley, the poet, and John Linnell, the young patron, friend and student of the artist, were over a long period of years his greatest supporters. It was from the collections of these men, and a few other sources, that the present Rosenwald Collection has been formed. The Linnell family at one time possessed perhaps the largest number of items. One section of the estate was sold in London in 1918; but there were also boxes containing many Blake drawings and engravings which were not discovered in time for the first sale. When those boxes were found, they were deposited in the British Museum for safe keeping, where they remained until they were sold to Mr. Rosenwald in 1937.

Outstanding in the material purchased from the Linnell heirs were seven original copper plates for Blake's engravings for the illustrations of Dante, which are now on exhibition at the National Gallery of Art. These copper plates and the copper plates for the Book of Job, now in the British Museum, and a fragment for the book, 'American', now also in the Rosenwald Collection, are all that survive of the metal plates designed and engraved by Blake. In the Linnell Collection were also a long series of proofs

and early proof states for the engravings for the Book of Job, which form an important part of the present exhibition, and offer an extraordinary opportunity for students to study the development of Blake's masterpieces of engraving.

From other sources, Mr. Rosenwald secured the seven magnificent water colors, now placed on exhibition. These are among Blake's most successful artistic productions. Two are especially imaginative, inspired by the Book of Revelation--one the famous Woman Clothed with the Sun, formerly in the A. Edward Newton Collection, and the other, the sombre representation of the Beast of the Apocalypse.

To round out the exhibition, there are two cases of the books which were written, printed and illustrated by Blake, himself.