

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART TO EXHIBIT
THE ART OF WILLIAM BLAKE
October 19 - December 1

Commemorating the 200th Anniversary
of the birth of William Blake
(1757-1827)

John Walker, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announces the opening to the public on October 19 of an important exhibition of the art of William Blake. The exhibition commemorates the 200th anniversary of the birth of Blake and has been arranged in honor of the visit to Washington of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The Queen has consented to visit the Exhibition the morning of October 18. It will be open by invitation at 3 p.m. on October 18 and will be open to the public on October 19. The exhibition will include 160 tempera paintings, water colors, drawings, prints, and illustrated books by the great English artist and poet.

Twenty-three collectors and institutions in the United States and England are lending their treasures to the exhibition. Heading the list of lenders is Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II who has graciously lent four water colors from Windsor Castle. Also from England come one painting and one water color lent by The National Trust, London. Among museums in this country lending to the exhibition are: The Art Institute of Chicago; the Cleveland Museum of Art; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University; The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Libraries lending are: the Library of Congress and the Pierpont Morgan Library. In addition, 25 works in the National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection, are included in the exhibition.

William Blake was born in London November 28, 1757, the son of a hosier. At the age of ten he was sent to a drawing school where he copied from plaster casts. Supplied with money from his father, Blake began to haunt print shops and auctions, buying prints by the old masters. A London auctioneer called him his "little connoisseur." At fourteen Blake was apprenticed to the well-known engraver, James Basire. After two years he was sent out by his master to make drawings of what were, then, neglected works of art, called "Gothic monuments." He copied the monuments of the Kings and Queens in Westminster Abbey and also spent long hours in the British Museum pouring over early illuminated manuscripts.

From his study of illustrated medieval manuscripts he learned much that was in accord with his own creative bent: two-dimensional composition, drawn with intensity and illuminated with wonderful colors to illustrate that a faith can result in a very high form of art. Line, vision, color were sufficient. Essentially Blake was an illustrator, though an exceptional and often baffling one to be sure. The extraordinary number of recent books on the interpretation of his designs demonstrate, aside from the fact that the artist has a strong appeal for the contemporary mind, that he was primarily a visionary story teller. Each picture has a meaning. The pen, the brush, the graver were always subservient to the mind and the imagination. His is a literary art. The Bible, Spenser, Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare, Homer, Virgil and Dante were the sources of his inspiration. Evidently Blake meant it when he said he was "drunk with intellectual vision." He seized upon the most abstract or intangible literary images and, with a daring unknown in English art, translated the verbal concepts into visual form.

If the great poets were ever at hand for Blake as sources of inspiration, so also his own lyrical genius poured forth a torrent of ideas that cried out for illumination. The unique quality of Blake's art lies in the fact that he was able to interpret with fire the inventions of his own imagination.

In his foreword to the illustrated catalogue Mr. Walker traces the growth of American interest in Blake's work over the past seventy-five years. The first Blake exhibition was held at the Boston Museum in 1880. Subsequently two important exhibitions were held at the Grolier Club in New York, in 1905 and in 1917. In 1939 the Philadelphia Museum of Art held the largest exhibition of Blake's work yet assembled, all items being lent from American collections. By that time the copper plates for the illustrations for Dante, most of the famous Linnell Collection of trial proofs for the Book of Job, and many other rare prints had passed into the hands of Lessing J. Rosenwald. Now, after almost a century of the collecting of Blake in this country, the National Gallery of Art commemorates the bicentennial of his birth with the present exhibition.

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LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION
of
THE ART OF WILLIAM BLAKE

National Gallery of Art
October 19 - December 1

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

The Art Institute of Chicago

The Brooklyn Museum

The Cleveland Museum of Art

The Evergreen House Foundation

The Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University

Mrs. Robert W. Goelet

Mr. T. Edward Hanley

Mr. Philip Hofer

Library of Congress

Mr. Paul Mellon

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The National Trust, London

The Philadelphia Museum of Art

The Pierpont Morgan Library

The Rhode Island School of Design

The Philip H. and A. S. W. Rosenbach Foundation

Mr. and Mrs. Charles J. Rosenbloom

Mrs. Landon K. Thorne

Mrs. William T. Tonner

University of Kansas Museum of Art

Mr. Edwin Wolf II