

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. October 25, 1964. John Walker, Director of the National Gallery of Art, announced that an exhibition, WILLIAM BLAKE: POET, PRINTER, PROPHEET, arranged by the Blake Trust, will have its American premiere here today. It will run through November 22.

The exhibition contains unique and rare illuminated books and manuscripts from the collections of Mr. Paul Mellon and Mr. Lessing J. Rosenwald in the United States, and of Sir Geoffrey Keynes and Mr. Kerrison Preston in Great Britain. It enjoyed a successful showing last summer at the Tate Gallery in London.

The exhibition also includes facsimile copies of Blake's books made for the Blake Trust by the Trianon Press, Paris. The successive steps in the unusual and intricate printing and color reproduction processes are illustrated. Copies of the final proofs are displayed with the originals.

Mr. Arnold Fawcus, who has produced the facsimiles and has organized the exhibition for the Blake Trust, has described the purpose of the show in these words:

"Blake's poetry and painting are both well known. But what is not generally known is that Blake wrote and then illustrated...his poetry and general works by hand in the medieval manner.

"The purpose of the exhibition is to bring together those aspects of Blake's work that are virtually unknown and are in fact his most original contribution: Blake the poet and illustrator of some of the greatest poems in the English language; Blake the craftsman and printer who engraved his books and colored them by hand as and when he had a purchaser; Blake the mystic and prophetic visionary; Blake the precursor of both symbolism and surrealism; in fact, Blake the poet, printer and prophet."

A substantial part of the Blake exhibition will be circulated by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. An itinerary is attached.

More

The inclusion in the exhibition of the cosmic drama Jerusalem, from the collection of Mr. Paul Mellon, affords a rare opportunity for the public to see the only copy, of the five copies known to be in existence, that was hand-colored by Blake himself. Sir Geoffrey Keynes has said of Jerusalem that it "is generally regarded as Blake's greatest achievement in blank verse and sometimes as the greatest poem in English since Milton's Paradise Lost." It will be on view only at the National Gallery of Art and will not be included in the traveling exhibition.

The exhibition has, from the Rosenwald collection, the only example of Blake's special relief-etched copper plates to survive, although Blake is known to have made several hundred. There is a complete set of the original pages of America, a Prophecy, 1793, and a demonstration of the development of plate 7 of the facsimile from its two-color collotype base through twenty-one separate applications of water color. Original pages from other Blake books, together with sketches, proofs and corrected plates are shown.

The William Blake Trust, endowed from the estate of the late Graham Robertson, was founded in England in 1949 to make available to students of Blake and safeguard for posterity the unique colored copy of Jerusalem. This was done by making a facsimile copy of the original and the success of this project led to the reproduction of further books by Blake. To the present time seven books have been completed, comprising Jerusalem, Songs of Innocence, Songs of Innocence and Experience, The Book of Urizen, Visions of the Daughters of Albion, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, and America, a Prophecy.

William Blake (1757-1827) was interested in the wedding of poetry and visual art into a single artistic expression. His approach, while greatly influenced by medieval manuscripts, differed from them in that the text, engraving, and illumination were entirely the work of one man and were completely integrated. As Lessing J. Rosenwald has said in his foreword to the handbook on Blake that accompanies the exhibition, his process "represents the way in which he really intended his poetry to be read and understood, visualized with the eye of his imagination."

The imaginative genius of William Blake was little understood or appreciated by his contemporaries. The modern world has become increasingly aware of the relevance of his art. Blake combines great literary and artistic ability in a completely unconventional approach. At the same time he was a master craftsman, having served an apprenticeship of seven years to a master-engraver, followed by work at the Royal Academy. He did not choose, however, to portray the visible world but preferred the esoteric, spiritual realms of the imagination.

A commemorative handbook comprising a selection of colored plates from Blake's illuminated books, a study of Blake by Sir Geoffrey Keynes, and a foreword by Mr. Lessing J. Rosenwald, is available from the National Gallery of Art, \$3.00 postpaid.

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WILLIAM BLAKE: POET, PRINTER, PROPHET

ITINERARY

Philadelphia, Pa.	University of Pennsylvania December 5, 1964 - January 3, 1965
Ann Arbor, Mich.	University of Michigan January 16 - February 14, 1965
Ithaca, New York	Cornell University February 27 - March 28, 1965
Providence, R.I.	Brown University April 10 - May 9, 1965
Allentown, Pa.	Allentown Art Museum July 3 - August 1, 1965
Winnipeg, Canada	Winnipeg Art Gallery September 25 - October 24, 1965
Omaha, Neb.	Joslyn Art Museum December 18, 1965 - January 1, 1966
Richmond, Va.	Museum of Fine Arts November 19 - December 18, 1966