

# William Blake:

## An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

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### Descriptive Summary

<b>Creator:</b>	Blake, William, 1757-1827
<b>Title:</b>	William Blake Art Collection
<b>Dates:</b>	circa 1780-1827, undated
<b>Quantity:</b>	3 boxes, 1 oversize folder (35 items)
<b>Abstract:</b>	The collection is comprised of six drawings and fifteen prints by Blake, a poet, engraver, and painter. The drawings include designs for the <i>Book of Los</i> and John Milton's <i>Paradise Lost</i> as well as proofs of eleven of the plates for <i>Illustrations of the Book of Job</i> . There is also a portrait drawing of Blake by Frederick Tatham.
<b>Call Number:</b>	Art Collection AR-00024
<b>Language:</b>	No linguistic material present
<b>Access:</b>	Open for research. A minimum of twenty-four hours is required to pull art materials to the Reading Room.

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### Administrative Information

<b>Acquisition:</b>	Purchase (1964) and gift (T. E. Hanley)
<b>Processed by:</b>	Alice Egan, 1997, and Helen Young, 2001
<b>Repository:</b>	<a href="#">Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin</a>

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## Biographical Sketch

William Blake, born November 28, 1757, in London, was a poet, engraver, and painter. He was first educated at home, and in 1767 was sent to Henry Pars' drawing school in London, where for four years he drew copies of plaster casts of ancient sculptures. This was followed by an apprenticeship as an engraver with James Basire, an engraver to the London Society of Antiquaries. During his apprenticeship, Blake was sent to make drawings of monuments and tombs in Westminster, where he acquired a taste for Gothic art. In 1779, Blake began studies as an engraving student at the Royal Academy, where he associated with the sculptor John Flaxman and the painters Thomas Stothard and Henri Fuseli. Blake painted from his imagination, which was stimulated from an early age by visions of angels, monks, and various historical figures.

In 1782, Blake married Catherine Boucher. He taught her to draw and paint and she became his assistant. With his wife and younger brother Robert, Blake opened a print shop in 1784. In 1787 Robert Blake died, and afterwards William Blake had a vision in which his brother revealed to him a new technique of relief etching by which text and illustration could be printed from one plate. The following year Blake used his new technique as he began work on *The Songs of Innocence*, which he completed and hand-produced with his wife in 1789. Most of Blake's works after this time were printed with this method and were issued in small editions.

In 1791, Blake moved to Lambeth where he started work on the "prophetic books," which dealt with the soul's struggle between the freedom of its natural energies on one hand and reason and organized religion on the other. In October 1793 Blake published a prospectus, *To the Public*, which advertised his recent illuminated books: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, and *America, A Prophecy*. These were soon followed by *The Book of Urizen* (1794), *The Songs of Experience* (1794), *Europe, a Prophecy* (1794), and *The Song of Los* (1795). His illustrations started to become larger, and more color was being used. Blake began creating paintings, and in 1795 he produced a series of twelve large watercolor prints.

Blake started receiving some commissions during this time: from Richard Edwards in 1796 to illustrate Edward Young's *The Complaint and the Consolation, or Night Thoughts* (1797); from his friend John Flaxman, in about 1801, to produce a set of watercolor designs to be bound with Flaxman's copy of Thomas Gray's *Poems* (1790); and from Thomas Butts to create a series of paintings on biblical themes (1799-1805). Then in 1800 he was invited by the poet William Hayley to live at Hayley's estate at Felpham in Sussex, where Blake stayed for three years. Hayley commissioned a number of works from Blake, including the illustrations for Hayley's *Little Tom the Sailor* (1800), and the engravings for his *Life and Posthumous Writings of William Cowper* (1803), and his *Ballads on Anecdotes Relating to Animals* (1805). By 1802 Blake had become weary of the obligations related to his residency at Hayley's estate, and in 1803 he returned to London. Here he continued work begun at Felpham on *Milton: a Poem in 2 Books* (1804-1808) and started work on his last illuminated book, *Jerusalem* (1804-1818).

In May 1809, Blake held a one-man exhibition in his brother James' hosiery shop, but the exhibit attracted little attention. In the following years Blake became relatively obscure, and received just enough engraving work to barely support himself and his wife, but he did continue with his own work.

Blake began to develop a following in the 1820s after obtaining the support of the painter John Linnell. Linnell commissioned a series of watercolor designs to be published as engravings from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (of which only seven were engraved at the time of Blake's death) and a set of watercolors and engravings, *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1826), which were based on watercolors that Blake created earlier for Thomas Butts. Linnell also found other commissions for Blake, and introduced the artist to a circle that included Samuel Palmer, Edward Calvert, George Richmond, Frederick Tatham, and others who would later call themselves the Ancients, and for whom Blake was a hero and great influence. Blake died August 12, 1827, in London.

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## Sources:

Gilchrist, A. "William Blake." In L. Stephen & S. Lee (eds.), *The Dictionary of National Biography* (v.2, pp. 642-646). London: Oxford University Press, 1938.

Keynes, G. *A Bibliography of William Blake*. New York: Grolier Club, 1921.

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## Scope and Contents

The collection chiefly comprises works by William Blake; there is also one portrait of Blake. The collection is organized into three Series: I. Original Works by William Blake, II. Reproductive Prints, and III. Portrait by Frederick Tatham.

Blake's original works consist of six drawings and fifteen prints. The drawings include a design for the frontispiece to the *Book of Los*, a design for John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and a design possibly for a Bible illustration. Among the original prints is a group of proofs of eleven of the plates for *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1825); these are accompanied by a letterpress proof of the 1825 cover label. The portrait drawing of Blake by Frederick Tatham (1805-1878) is very similar to Tatham's Blake portrait used as the frontispiece in *The Works of William Blake*, edited by Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats (London, 1893).

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## Related Material

The Ransom Center holds additional Blake materials in its Library, including a volume of *Poetical Sketches* (1783), three copies of *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1825), and a volume of *Songs of Innocence* (1789), one of eleven copies hand-colored by Blake.



**Series I. Original Works by William Blake, circa 1780-1827**

- Accession Number: 65.312** Book of Los. Circa 1795. 1 sketch: pencil, b&w, 23.1 x 17.8 cm. **Box** 2.1
- Accession Number: 65.154** Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims. 1810. 1 print: etching, b&w, 51.5 x 110.4 cm. **Location** Flat file
- Accession Number: 2002.6.1-12** [Illustrations of the Book of Job: proofs and cover label]. 1825. 11 prints: etching, b&w, sheet 21.8 x 16.3 cm. and smaller. **Box** 1.2-12
- Accession Number: 73.92** The Man Sweeping out the Interpreter's Parlour. Circa 1822. 1 print: etching, b&w, 34 x 24.3 cm. **Box** 2.2
- Accession Number: 80.71** [Mr. Cumberland's card]. 1827. 1 print: engraving, b&w, 3.3 x 8.2 cm. **Box** 2.3
- Accession Number: 65.239** Parable of the Sower. Undated. 1 drawing: ink wash, b&w, 23.6 x 39.3 cm. **Box** 2.4
- Accession Number: 66.65** Satan Calling up His Legions. Undated. 1 drawing: pencil, b&w, 14.5 x 11.7 cm. **Box** 2.5
- Accession Number: 70.8** Satan, Sin & Death. Circa 1780. 1 drawing: ink, pencil, wash on paper, b&w, 25.4 x 29.3 cm. **Box** 2.6
- Accession Number: 66.41** Urizen. 1794? 1 print: etching with watercolor, gouache, pencil, col., 8.1 x 11.3 cm. **Box** 2.7
- Accession Number: 67.19** A Vision of the Last Judgment. Circa 1813. 1 drawing: pencil, pen and ink, b&w, 46.3 x 34.9 cm. **Box** 2.8
- Accession Number: 70.7** A Woodland Encounter. Circa 1785. 1 drawing: pen and ink wash on paper, b&w, 28.2 x 24.7 cm. **Box** 2.9

**Series II. Reproductive Prints, undated**

- Accession Number: 76.19.1** The Archangel Michael foretells the Crucifixion. Undated. 1 print: reproductive, b&w, image 17.7 x 13.4 cm. **Box** 3.1
- Accession Number: 65.516.1-6** [Divine Comedy]. Undated. 6 prints: reproductive, col., 29.1 x 20.5 cm. or smaller. **Box** 3.2-7
- Accession Number: 66.38** Little Tom the Sailor. Undated. 1 print: reproductive, b&w, 50.7 x 22.2 cm. **Box** 3.8
- Accession Number: 76.19.2** The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. Undated. 1 print: reproductive, b&w, image 15.9 x 13.3 cm. **Box** 3.9
- Accession Number: 85.97** Pity Like a Naked Babe. Undated. 1 print: reproductive, col., 14.4 x 18.2 cm. **Box** 3.10
- Accession Number: 76.19.3** "Proverbs of Hell" [leaf of engraved text]. Undated. 1 print: reproductive, col., image 16.5 x 11.7 cm. **Box** 3.11

**Series III. Portrait by Frederick Tatham, 1820s**

**Accession Number: 2002.5** [William Blake: head portrait]. 1820s. 1 drawing: pencil & ink, 11.2 x 10.1 cm.

**Box**  
1.1