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**POET, PAINTER, ENGRAVER, CREATOR OF ILLUMINATED
BOOKS—NEW MORGAN EXHIBITION PRESENTS THE GENIUS OF
WILLIAM BLAKE**

***SHOW INCLUDES THE SELDOM SEEN COMPLETE BOOK OF JOB
WATERCOLOR SERIES—AMONG BLAKE’S GREATEST WORKS***

William Blake’s World: “A New Heaven Is Begun” Opens September 11, 2009

****Press Preview: Thursday, September 10, 2009, 10 a.m. until noon****

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Jeremy Irons Reading Blake Poetry Featured in Exhibition; Legendary Poet-Musician Patti Smith to Present Blake-Inspired Program November 19

New York, NY, September 10, 2009— Visionary and nonconformist William Blake (1757–1827) is a singular figure in the history of Western art and literature: a poet, painter, and printmaker. Ambitiously creative, Blake had an abiding interest in theology and philosophy, which, during the age of revolution, inspired thoroughly original and personal investigations into the state of man and his soul. In his lifetime Blake was best known as an engraver; he was later recognized for his innovations across many other disciplines.



William Blake, "Melancholy," from John Milton's *Il Penseroso*, watercolor, over traces of black chalk. Purchased with the assistance of the Fellows with the special support of Mrs. Landon K. Thorne and Mr. Paul Mellon, 1949. 4.7.

In the Morgan’s first exhibition devoted to Blake in two decades, former director Charles Ryskamp and curators Anna Lou Ashby and Cara Denison have assembled many of Blake’s most spectacular watercolors, prints, and illuminated books of poetry to dramatically underscore his genius and enduring influence. *William Blake’s World: “A New Heaven Is Begun”*—the subtitle a quote from Blake referring to the significance of his date of birth—is on view from September 11, 2009, to January 3, 2010.

The show includes more than 100 works and among the many highlights are two major series of watercolors, rarely displayed in their entirety. The twenty-one watercolors for Blake’s seminal illustrations for the Book of

Job—considered one of his greatest works and revealing his personal engagement with biblical texts—were created about 1805–10. Also on view are twelve drawings illustrating John Milton’s poems *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, executed about 1816–20. Both series were undertaken for Blake’s principal patron, Thomas Butts.

“The name William Blake means different things to different people,” said William M. Griswold, director of the Morgan. “Engraver, painter, poet, visionary—all apply to Blake, and all are accurate. The Morgan is fortunate to have one of the most important collections of Blake material in the world, and this exhibition provides an opportunity to see his extraordinary creativity across many disciplines.”

WILLIAM BLAKE

The son of a London haberdasher and a religious dissenter, Blake studied the Bible privately with his family. He was educated at home and well read as an adult. This intellectual curiosity was coupled with a keen perception of the political and social world, finding expression in his artistic independence as well as the complex mythology he constructed in response to the age of revolution in which he lived. This mythology centered around the figure of “Urizen,” an authoritarian, kinglike figure who represents rulers both sacred and profane, with whom other characters representing independence and artistic creativity must interact.

Blake was trained as an engraver. His skill was often applied to reproducing designs of his fellow students and teachers at the Royal Academy. Blake engraved his own works as well, and painted for Academy shows, wrote poetry, and engraved illustrations for books issued by the radical publisher Joseph Johnson. He was also active within the Soho/Covent Garden artistic community. Although Blake explored many artistic disciplines, he continued to work throughout his life in the medium for which he was trained, engraving.

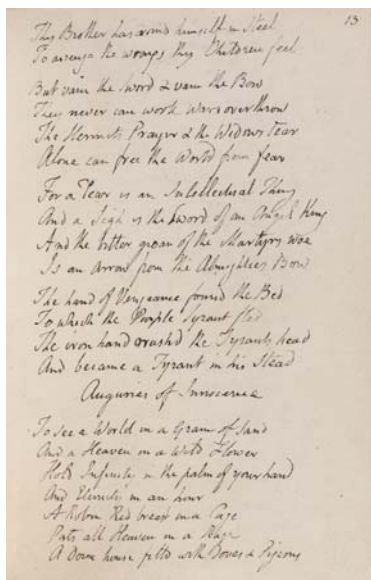
As a result of a dream conversation with his dead brother Robert in 1787, Blake developed a new method of engraving relief plates. By using a special coating for copper plates, he was able to combine reverse script with illustrative details. With this inventive technique, he created *Songs of Innocence* in 1789 and embarked on a major productive period that saw the creation of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), *Visions of the Daughter of Albion* (1793), *Continental Prophecies: America* (1793), *Europe* (1794), and the *Song of Los* (1795). While living in Lambeth in the 1790s—across the river but still within walking distance of the artistic and literary center of London—he created small runs of the illuminated books, which were printed on speculation or for a few patrons.



William Blake, “Behemoth and Leviathan,” from *Illustrations for the Book of Job*, ca. 1805–10, no 15 in the set of 21 illustrations, pen and black ink, gray wash, and watercolor, over traces of graphite. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1903; 2001.77.

EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

In addition to the superlative watercolor series—twenty-one illustrations to the Book of Job and twelve designs illustrating Milton’s *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*—other important drawings are on display, including *Fire* (ca. 1805), which addresses the subject of war. The more fully expressed *Continental Prophecies*, a series of three illuminated books, further showcase Blake’s talents as a visual artist and his passionate interest in politics.



William Blake, *The Pickering Manuscript*, ca. 1802–04, autograph manuscript fair copy of ten poems, page 13. Gift of Mrs. Landon K. Thorne, 1971; MA 2879.

Blake’s fame as a poet is seen in his fair copy of ballads known as *The Pickering Manuscript*, named after its early owner and publisher. Giving voice to Blake’s well-known poem “Auguries of Innocence,” found in the manuscript, is the actor Jeremy Irons, who has also recorded the shorter poem, “Tyger.” These can be heard on a gallery listening station and on the Morgan’s Web site.

Blake supported himself with his engravings, and a selection of his prints—many of which are extremely rare impressions—documents this important aspect of his production. A magnificent example of Blake’s largest print, touched with watercolor by the artist, depicts *Chaucer’s Canterbury Pilgrims*. With this work the artist hoped for commercial success, something he was unable to secure in his lifetime.

Among Blake’s crowning achievements as a visual artist and poet are his illuminated books, such as *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (ca. 1794). These works, which also showcase his exceptional technical skills, reflect medieval manuscript illumination and the interrelationship between word and image. Also on view is the only dated copy of Blake’s dramatic *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

Shedding light on the artistic milieu surrounding Blake are a number of works by friends and contemporaries, including drawings by younger artists such as John Linnell (1792–1882) and members of a group that assembled around Blake and called themselves the Ancients. Also represented are works by painters such as Samuel Palmer (1805–1881) and Henry Fuseli (1741–1825).

COLLECTION HISTORY

The Morgan Library & Museum’s Blake collection—one of this country’s most distinguished—began with purchases as early as 1899 by the institution’s founder, Pierpont Morgan. The exhibition is a tribute to the scholarship and generosity of Charles Ryskamp, director of the Morgan from 1969 to 1986. During his

tenure, major gifts almost doubled the size of the Blake collection; and in recent years his gifts of engravings, letters, and related materials have augmented the holdings as a major source for research.

This exhibition is made possible through the generosity of Fay and Geoffrey Elliott.



This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Concert

Blake in Poetry and Song: An Evening with Patti Smith

Patti Smith, the legendary poet, singer, and musician, appears with her daughter Jesse Smith for a special evening of poetry and music inspired by the works of William Blake.

Thursday, November 19, 7:30 pm

Tickets: \$35 for Non-Members; \$25 for Members

Lecture

Blake's Enlightened Graphics: Illuminated Books and New Technologies

Joseph Viscomi, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

This lecture examines the radical printmaking technique invented by Blake in 1788, the facsimile technologies used to reproduce his illustrated books during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the digital technology used by the William Blake Archive (www.blakearchive.org) today.

Thursday, October 8, 6:30 pm*

Tickets: \$15 for Non-Members; \$10 for Members

*The exhibition will be open at 5:30 PM especially for lecture attendees.

Family Programs

Color in Reverse: Printing Illuminations

Museum educator Lisa Libicki will introduce children to Blake's art of illustration through a brief exhibition-related activity in the gallery. During the workshop that follows, participants will experiment with simple printing techniques, laying out text and image in reverse to create a composition that they will print. Color will be added to complete the richly textured prints. Please bring a favorite poem to include in the art project. All materials are provided. Appropriate for ages 6–12. Advance tickets are recommended as space is limited for this program.

Saturday, October 17, 2–4 pm

Tickets: Adults: \$6 for Non-Members; \$4 for Members; children: \$2

Gallery Talks

William Blake's World: "A New Heaven Is Begun"

Anna Lou Ashby, Andrew W. Mellon Curator, Printed Books, The Morgan Library & Museum

Friday, September 25, 7 PM

Docent Tours

Docent-led guided tours of the exhibition *William Blake's World: "A New Heaven Is Begun"* are offered Tuesdays through Fridays at 2 PM beginning October 9.

All gallery talks and tours are free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations are necessary.

The Morgan Library & Museum

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, musical venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. A century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

General Information

The Morgan Library & Museum

225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405

212.685.0008

www.themorgan.org

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve.

Admission

\$12 for adults; \$8 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children, 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop.