

Flaming Pages

The Illuminated Books
of William Blake

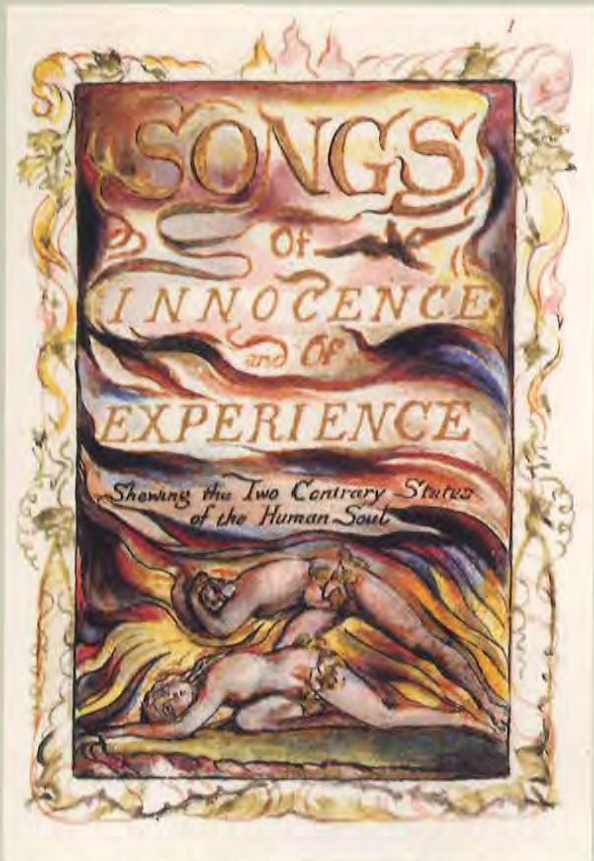
Thus wept the Angel voice & as he wept the earth deep.
Of trumpets, blew a loud alarm across the sea,
No trumpets answer; no reply of clarions or of fife,
Silent the Colonies remain and refuse the loud alarm.

On those vast shady hills between America & Albion's shore;
Now barr'd out by the Atlantic sea; call'd Atlantean hills;
Because from their bright summits you may pass to the Golden world
An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Empires,
Rears its immortal pinnacles, built in the forest of God
By Ariston the king of beauty for his stolen bride.

Here on their magic seats the thirteen Angels sat perturbed
For clouds from the Atlantic hover over the solemn rock.



William Blake—*“My fingers emit sparks of fire...”* (1757-1827) was a poet, a painter, and a print maker.



Title page of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*
1794, c1825

of androgyny, the spiritual ideal of male-female balance, as in the traditions of Alchemy, Kabbalah, and Hinduism all of which he seems to have known. Exactly how he printed his words and images is still being debated. How he was able to fuse words and images into such profoundly moving combinations, page after page, in waves of glowing color, is an even greater mystery.

His epic paragraphs are filled with mythic symbols which require serious study to comprehend. With each successive level of understanding, appreciation for the layered modes of expression grows. Each line of free verse, written in his own hand, is an undulating series of subtle visual pulsations. In the process, he carved the structure of each verbal phrase into units of measure that evoke in almost musical rhythms the inner meaning of the words, and simultaneously reverberate with the images. His figurative lines can be as fluid as water over flower petals or as intense as screams. Very often his pages are flaming visions with the temperature of the flame reflecting the emotional condition of the subject. Taking little credit for his luminous productions, he was a mystic who understood self-transcendence and attributed authorship to Higher Powers.

His best known art is book art in which he invented remarkable ways to weave words and images into dynamic harmonies. Nothing like these visual-verbal compositions had been seen since the hand painted “illuminated manuscripts” of the Middle Ages, and nothing like his printed “Illuminated Books” (as Blake called them) would ever be seen again.

He lived modestly in London for most of his life with his beloved wife and partner, Catherine Boucher, who bound his books and colored some of the plates. After a seven-year apprenticeship under James Basire, ending in 1779, he earned a meager living as a commercial engraver. But his heart was in the books he wrote, printed, and published himself. Although little appreciated during his lifetime, he is now regarded as one of the most creative artists of the Romantic era.

Some of his books are simple enough for children. Others are as dense as Dante or Milton. All along, he thundered against the excesses of mechanical reasoning and materialism and argued passionately for the balance of heart and mind, of reason and imagination. He cried out for liberty, justice, and joy. He called on every nation to see their shortcomings and move beyond them. He believed in Christ, the Prophets, and Angels, but he felt the Christian Church had moved too far from the true spirit of Divine Love. He dreamed of a purified world which he thought of as a new Jerusalem.

His figures developed from the musculature of Michelangelo and Raimondi, and the expressive elongations of medieval sculpture. In Durer's prints, Blake loved the bursts of Divine Light. Sometimes Blake stressed corporeality. Sometimes flesh dematerializes into a spiritualized physicality. Many figures look quite androgynous. In words and images Blake celebrated the mythic image



“The Blossom” in Songs of Innocence
1789, 1794, c1825

On the cover: *“Orc answering Urizen” in America a Prophecy* 1793

His dynamic linearity and explosively spontaneous words have inspired many artists and poets over the last 200 years from Rossetti, Yeats, and the Art Nouveau masters of the late 19th century, to Allen Ginsberg and the Beat Poets, and multimedia artists of our own time. The depth of Blake's humanity and spirituality continues to inspire millions. Some of his most moving words, set to music as a hymn, are still sung in many churches.

This exhibition developed from a wish to present a comprehensive selection of Blake's primary books as the 4th exhibition in our continuing series on The Art of the Book. With loans of the famous Blake Trust editions by Trianon Press from the Special Collections of the CSUEB Library, that dream has come true. Every one of Blake's Illuminated Books (the ones he wrote and printed himself) is represented in this historical survey of how facsimile editions have made Blake's extremely rare original editions available to a wider audience. Until recent developments in the art of printing, Blake's Illuminated Books could only be seen separately in many different locations. Few if any facsimiles have been crafted more carefully than these modern Blake editions. They do lack the richly engraved texture of the original editions, of course, and the mysterious luminosity that seems to radiate up from underneath each page. However, they have played a major role in making known that Blake, the artist, is as important as Blake, the poet.

It is a special privilege to be able to present in one gallery, for the first time, the full development of Blake's Illuminated Books. Special thanks to Martin Butlin for encouraging this project many years ago when he came to see San Francisco's latest Blake acquisition, Morton Paley for kindly reading the manuscript for this brochure and the wall labels, the Institute for Aesthetic Development for donating Blake books to the Special Collections of the CSUEB Library, Myoung-ja Lee Kwon and Richard Apple of the CSUEB Library for loaning their rare volumes, John Windle for loans of 19th century Blake facsimiles, my colleague James Petrillo for curating the multimedia portion of this exhibition, including a performance piece, and the dedicated Gallery staff: Ryan Onstine, Jill Therrien, and Philip Ringler.



**"The Ancient of Days" frontispiece in
Europe a Prophecy 1794**

Lanier Graham, Director
University Art Gallery, CSUEB



"Los howl" in *The First Book of Urizen* 1794



Title page of *Jerusalem* c1804-20



"Adam & Eve" in *Jerusalem* c1804-20

UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY
California State University, East Bay

Opening Reception:

February 1—5 p.m. to 8 p.m.
with a multimedia performance of
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from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Gallery Hours:

Monday — Wednesday: 12:30 to 3:30 p.m.
February 2 through April 19, 2006
Closed Spring Break March 20 — 26

Admission is Free

For Directions:

<http://www.csueastbay.edu/artgallery>

*The University gallery is located on the
first floor of the Art and Education building.*



For Information: 510-885-3299
<http://www.csueastbay.edu/artgallery>

Art Direction and Graphic Design: Daniel James, Valley Graphic Design



"Glad Day"
(aka 'Albion rose' or 'Dance of Albion') c1804



"Whirlwind of Lovers" for Dante's *Divine Comedy* c1826-27

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