

## **William Blake**

The National Gallery of Victoria's collection of watercolours, books and prints by William Blake is one of the institution's greatest treasures. Especially rich in its representation of the artist's late years, the collection features thirty-six of the 102 watercolours illustrating *The Divine Comedy* by Dante. These watercolours were part of a group of works acquired through the Felton Bequest in 1918–20 from the Linnell sale in London. Since 1988 the collection has been augmented by important early works – both original inventions by Blake and his engravings after other artists.

The exhibition begins with some of Blake's early reproductive engravings and continues with examples of his hand-printed books of poetry. These publications were among his most original works which, in their unique combination of image and text, redefined the nature of the book. Many other works in the exhibition owe their existence to the painter John Linnell, Blake's friend and last great patron. Linnell secured commissions for Blake and provided him with a series of creative projects that occupied his final years. These included the illustrations to Thornton's *Virgil*, the *Book of Job* engravings and the watercolours to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, all of which are included here.

Luigi SCHIAVONETTI etcher

Italian 1765–1810, worked in England 1790–1810

Thomas PHILLIPS (after)

## **William Blake**

frontispiece from *The Grave, A Poem by Robert Blair*,  
published by Rudolph Ackermann, London, 1813 (second  
edition)

c.1807–8

etching and engraving

Gift of Judith and Graham Ryles OAM in memory of Dr  
Ursula Hoff AO OBE through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2010 2010.248

This portrait of Blake was engraved by Schiavonetti after  
a painting by Thomas Phillips (1770–1845) that was  
exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1807. It has been  
suggested that the painting was initiated by the publisher  
Robert Cromek who included the engraved version in the  
book illustrated by Blake, *The Grave* by Robert Blair, that  
Cromek published in 1808. The portrait was acclaimed by  
Blake's contemporaries as a faithful likeness of the artist.

William BLAKE engraver

English 1757–1827

George CUMBERLAND draughtsman

English 1754–1848

### **Venus counsels Cupid**

plate 14 in *Thoughts on Outline, Sculpture, and the System that Guides the Ancient Artists in Composing their Figures and Groupes* by George Cumberland, self-published, London, 1796

1794

engraving and etching

Unaccessioned item

George Cumberland had studied with Blake at the Royal Academy schools in the late 1770s. He later spent five years in Italy studying classical sculpture and collecting Italian Old Master prints. In 1796 he published his book *Thoughts on Outline* which praised the strong, pure outlines of classical art forms including vase painting, sculpture and antique gems. The book was illustrated with engravings made after Cumberland's designs, eight of which Blake executed. Blake was also an advocate of clear outlines, later stating 'the more distinct, sharp and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art'.

William BLAKE engraver

English 1757–1827

Philip Gidley KING (attributed to) draughtsman

English 1758–1808, worked in Australia 1788–1807

## **A Family of New South Wales**

plate from *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island* by John Hunter, published by John Stockdale, London, 1793

1792

etching and engraving

Purchased, 1984

P8-1984

John Hunter was captain of the *Sirius* on its voyages to NSW., 1787–92, and his journal is one of the most important documents of early British settlement and exploration of Australia. Philip Gidley King was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Norfolk Island in 1790. His drawing of this subject is now in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. Blake was commissioned to execute the engraving and has idealised the features of the figures, giving them a dignity absent from King's plain sketch.

William BLAKE engraver

English 1757–1827

John Gabriel STEDMAN draughtsman

Dutch/Scottish 1744–97, worked in Surinam 1772–77,  
England 1780s–1797

## **A Negro hung alive by the Ribs to a Gallows**

plate 11 from Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam by John Gabriel Stedman, first published by Joseph Johnson and J. Edwards, London, 1796

1792

etching and engraving

Purchased from Admission Funds, 1990P137-1990

Blake's most regular employer by 1790 was the liberal publisher Joseph Johnson, at whose establishment he met a radical circle of dissenting intellectuals. Here he met Captain Stedman, who had served in Surinam in South America to put down a revolt by Negro slaves against the plantation owners. Johnson commissioned sixteen engravings after Stedman's designs from Blake, including this image of a man hung on a gallows for three days until his death. Stedman's publication, with its gruesome images and graphic account of the brutalities of the slave trade, appeared at the height of the Abolitionists' campaign to end slavery.

William BLAKE engraver

English 1757–1827

John Gabriel STEDMAN draughtsman

Dutch/Scottish 1744–97, worked in Surinam 1772–77,  
England 1780s–1797

### **The skinning of the Aboma Snake shot by Cap. Stedman**

plate 19 from Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam by John Gabriel Stedman, first published by Joseph Johnson and J. Edwards, London, 1796

1793

etching and engraving

Purchased from Admission Funds, 1990P138-1990

It has been argued that Blake's friendship with Stedman and work on this publication contributed to his own strong anti-slavery attitudes. This scene shows one of the slaves – 'the negro David' – climbing up the boa constrictor (said to have been 22 feet long) in order to begin skinning the snake. The figure in the lower left is probably Stedman.

## **Songs of Innocence**

The Songs of Innocence cycle of poems is the most famous early example of Blake's poetry printed in relief from etched copper plates and coloured by hand. The poems were first published in 1789 and by 1794 Blake had begun binding them with the Songs of Experience in order to show 'the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul'. Our copy of the Songs of Innocence, with its fourteen plates, is one of the smallest collations of these poems; it is also one of only ten known copies printed before the addition of Songs of Experience.

The subdued, pastel hand-colouring (by Blake or his wife Catherine) is characteristic of the monochromatic palette employed by Blake in the late 1780s and early 1790s. It serves to create a sober mood that parallels the radical simplicity of the poems and draws out their serious aspect. Later printings became increasingly strong and bright in colour, creating an effect similar to a medieval illuminated manuscript (such as the plate from Jerusalem on display). From 1796 Blake printed the poems on one side of the sheet only, emphasising the point that the poems were to be understood as pictures as well as texts.

**The Little Girl Lost (second plate) and The Little Girl Found (first plate)**

leaf 1 recto from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.1-1988



## **The Divine Image**

leaf 2 recto from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with  
watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.3-1988

## **A Cradle Song (first plate)**

leaf 3 recto from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with blue wash and watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.5-1988

## **The Little Boy Lost**

leaf 4 recto from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with  
watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.7-1988

## **Nurse's Song**

leaf 5 recto from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with blue wash and watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.9-1988

## **Holy Thursday**

leaf 6 recto from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with blue wash and watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.11-1988

## **Spring (second plate)**

leaf 7 recto from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with  
watercolour

Felton Bequest 1988

P122.13-1988

## **The School-Boy**

leaf 7 verso from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with  
watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.14-1988

## **The Voice of the Ancient Bard**

leaf 6 verso from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with blue wash and watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.12-1988



## **On Another's Sorrow**

leaf 5 verso from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with blue wash and watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.10-1988

## **The Little Boy Found**

leaf 4 verso from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with  
watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.8-1988

## **A Cradle Song (second plate)**

leaf 3 verso from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with  
watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.6-1988

## **Infant Joy**

leaf 2 verso from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with  
watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.4-1988

## **The Little Girl Found (second plate)**

leaf 1 verso from Songs of Innocence

1789, hand-coloured before 1794 (copy X)

relief etching printed in green ink and finished with blue wash and watercolour

Felton Bequest, 1988

P122.2-1988

## **Blake's illuminated printing**

In the late 1780s Blake began designing hand-printed books that brought together the twin aspects of his genius – his poetry and his art. Wanting to work independently of the commercial publishing world, Blake invented the technique of relief etching, which he termed 'illuminated printing'. His objective was to combine on the one plate the elements of text and imagery, which were usually printed separately using different processes.

First, Blake drew the images and wrote the text by hand (in reverse) on the plate with an acid-resistant liquid. The plate was then placed in nitric acid to etch away the exposed parts, leaving the entire composite design standing in relief and able to be printed in one step. Blake printed the plates in coloured inks which he and his wife Catherine then hand-coloured with watercolour. Early books (see *Songs of Innocence*) were characterised by cool colours and pastel tones, while later books (see *Jerusalem*) were usually printed in warm tones and richly hand-coloured. Describing it as 'a method of Printing which combines the Painter and the Poet', Blake's illuminated printing enabled the artist to achieve a unity of text and illustration in his publications that was unprecedented in the history of the book.

## **Arise, O Rintrah!**

plate 8 from *Europe: A Prophecy* 1794

c. 1794–95

relief etching and white-line etching printed in blue ink, with colour printing in opaque pigments, and finished with watercolour and pen and ink

Felton Bequest, 1920

1028-3

*Europe: A Prophecy*, the second of Blake's Prophetic Books, was written during the years of the French Revolution and soon after Britain had declared war on France. Blake, a fierce republican, opposed the invasion. Although peopled by characters from Blake's personal mythology, *Europe* was clearly written in response to these political events. The old man in this design gestures as if to ward off some threat, presumably war and its attendant catastrophies.

## **Los, Enitharmon and Orc**

plate 21 from *The First Book of Urizen*, 1794, re-issued as part of *The Large Book of Designs*, copy B

c. 1795

colour relief etching printed in opaque pigments, and finished with watercolour and pen and ink

Felton Bequest, 1920

1027-3

The *First Book of Urizen* shares with Blake's other *Prophetic Books* his central belief that humanity's fallen state was brought about by the domination of reason over the poetic imagination. Urizen [reason] is the law giver who weaves the 'Net of Religion'. His counterpart is Los, who stands for the imagination. Enitharmon is the female emanation of Los, and the child of their union is Orc, who embodies energy and the spirit of rebellion. In this illustration Los is depicted looking jealously at Orc – bound by the chain of his passions – while Orc looks up lovingly at his mother, Enitharmon.



## **Vala, Hyle and Skofeld**

plate 51 from Jerusalem c. 1804 – c. 1820

c. 1820

relief etching and white-line etching printed in orange ink, and finished with watercolour, pen and ink and gold paint

Felton Bequest, 1920

1026-3

Jerusalem was the last and the longest of Blake's Prophetic Books. It tells of the struggles of Albion (representing mankind and also a personification of England) and his female counterpart Jerusalem, their fall and final redemption through Christ. Here, Vala, shown crowned, represents the fallen Jerusalem overcome and incarcerated in the fiery depths of absolute despair. Her companions are Hyle (who stands for Blake's overbearing patron William Haley) and Skofeld (representing the soldier John Scofield, who had charged Blake with sedition in 1803). This impression is a separate sheet that has been highly worked with watercolour and painted gold highlights.

Luigi SCHIAVONETTI etcher

Italian 1765–1810, worked in England 1790–1810

William BLAKE draughtsman

English 1757–1827

### **Death's Door**

facing page 12 in *The Grave, A Poem* by Robert Blair,  
published by Robert Cromek, London, 1808 (quarto issue)

c. 1805–08

etching and engraving

Purchased, 1954

3153-4

Robert Blair's poem belonged to the school of graveyard poetry in which the theme of death was used as a motif for moral instruction. Blake was commissioned by Robert Cromek to design and engrave the illustrations, but the task of engraving was transferred to Louis Schiavonetti, a popular professional engraver. Blake was furious, and dubbed his replacement 'Assassinetti' and called Cromek 'A petty, Sneaking Knave' who 'loves the Art but 'tis the Art to Cheat'. Cromek paid Blake 20 guineas for the twelve designs while Schiavonetti could command a fee of up to 60 guineas for engraving a single plate.

**(Time advancing and Time passing by)**

pages 24-25 in *The Complaint, and the Consolation: or, Night Thoughts* by Edward Young, published by Richard Edwards, London, 1797

1797

hand-coloured etching and engraving and letterpress

Felton Bequest, 1989 P183-1989

In 1795 Blake was commissioned to illustrate a deluxe four-volume edition of Edward Young's popular meditative poem *Night Thoughts*. Blake finished more than 500 watercolours for the project, of which he engraved forty-three to illustrate the four 'Nights' which comprise the first volume, before plans to publish the further volumes were abandoned. This is one of twenty-seven known copies with contemporary hand-colouring probably based on a model by Blake. This volume once belonged to William à Beckett (1806–69), first Chief Justice of Victoria, and later to Alfred Felton (1831–1904), this Gallery's greatest benefactor.

## **Illustrations of the Book of Job**

In 1823 John Linnell commissioned from Blake a series of twenty-two engravings illustrating the Book of Job. The compositions of the plates were based on a set of watercolours Blake had made in c.1805–06, of which he had made a second version for Linnell in 1821.

Blake's series is a complex, personal interpretation of the Book of Job that has parallels with his own mythology. Blake presents Job as a fallen man cut off from the true spiritual dimension of existence who must endure suffering before achieving redemption. Blake's belief in the centrality of the poetic vision, or inspiration, is reflected in his narrative by Job's spiritual awakening. Job's mistaken focus on the material world and the outward observance of religion is referred to in the first plate, in the family's conventional, pious poses and the musical instruments (symbols of inspiration) hanging unused on the tree. It is only after suffering torments that Job realises the false nature of his faith and is finally restored to prosperity and a new existence, as seen in the final plate, where he and his family are depicted in joyful activity, singing and making music.

**Title page**

from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.1-3

## **Job and his Family**

plate 1 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.2-3



## **Satan before the Throne of God**

plate 2 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.3-3

## **The Destruction of Job's Sons**

plate 3 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.4-3

**The Messengers tell Job of his Misfortunes**

plate 4 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.5-3

**Satan going forth from the Presence of the Lord**

plate 5 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.6-3

## **Satan smiting Job with Boils**

plate 6 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.7-3

## **Job's Comforters**

plate 7 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.8-3

## **Job's Despair**

plate 8 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.9-3

## **The Vision of Eliphaz**

plate 9 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.10-3



## **Job rebuked by his Friends**

plate 10 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.11-3

## **Job's evil Dreams**

plate 11 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.12-3

## **The Wrath of Elihu**

plate 12 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.13-3

**The Lord answering Job out of the Whirlwind**

plate 13 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.14-3

## **The Creation**

plate 14 from *Illustrations of The Book of Job*

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.15-3

## **Behemoth and Leviathan**

plate 15 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.16-3

## **The Fall of Satan**

plate 16 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.17-3

## **The Vision of God**

plate 17 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.18-3



## **Job's Sacrifice**

plate 18 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.19-3

## **Job accepting Charity**

plate 19 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.20-3

## **Job and his Daughters**

plate 20 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.21-3

**Job and his Wife restored to Prosperity**

plate 21 from Illustrations of The Book of Job

1823–26, published 1826

engraving on chine collé

Felton Bequest, 1920

1058.22-3

## **Illustrations for Thornton's Virgil**

In 1819 John Linnell recommended Blake to Dr Robert John Thornton (the Linnell family's physician), who was about to publish a third edition, newly illustrated, of his school text *The Pastorals of Virgil*. The second and third editions included Virgil's Latin verses together with 'imitations' of the poetry by various English authors. Blake was commissioned to illustrate the imitation of *Eclogue I* by Ambrose Philips, for which he executed seventeen wood-engravings. Fourteen of these are in the NGV's collection.

Blake had not previously used the wood-engraving medium and his tiny works show a rugged handling and expressive freedom that is markedly different to the meticulous carving of conventional wood-engravings. Blake used the white-line technique, in which the design is carried by the white lines cut away to contrast with the printed black ground. The expressive qualities of these white lines directly convey the energy of the artist's hand and contribute to the highly atmospheric nature of the works. Although Blake's wood-engravings perfectly capture the poetry's mood of rustic simplicity, with its melancholy overtones, they seem to have startled Dr Thornton, who was only dissuaded from rejecting the blocks by the intervention of a group of eminent artists.

## **Thenot and Colinet sup together**

Colinet: New milk and clouted cream, mild cheese  
and curd,  
With some remaining fruit of last year's hoard,  
Shall be our evening fare.

## **With songs the jovial hinds return from plow**

Colinet: With songs the jovial hinds return from plow.

## **Unyoked heifers loitering homeward, low**

Colinet: And unyok'd heifers, loitering homeward, low.

Illustrations to The Pastorals of Virgil

by Robert John Thornton, 3rd edition, London, 1821

1820–21

wood-engravings

Purchased, 1960

1884-5 – 1886-5

## **Colinet resting at Cambridge by night**

Colinet: The damp, cold greensward for my nightly bed,  
And some slant willow's trunk to rest my head.

## **Colinet mocked by two boys**

Colinet: Untoward lads, the wanton imps of spite,  
Make mock of all the ditties I indite.

## **Menalcas' yearly wake**

Colinet: For him our yearly wakes and feasts we hold.  
Three girls dancing on a lawn; parents in armchairs  
looking on.

Illustrations to The Pastorals of Virgil

by Robert John Thornton, 3rd edition, London, 1821

1820–21

wood-engravings

Purchased, 1960

1881-5 – 1883-5

### **Blasted tree and blighted crops**

Colinet: Sure thou in hapless hour of time wast born,  
When blightning mildews spoil the rising corn,  
Or when the moon, by wizard charm'd, foreshows,  
Blood-stain'd in foul eclipse, impending woes.

### **The good shepherd chases away the wolf**

Colinet: Nor fox, nor wolf, nor rot among our sheep:  
From these good shepherd's care his flock  
may keep.

### **Sabrina's silvery flood**

Colinet: Unhappy hour! when fresh in youthful bud  
I left, Sabrina fair, thy silvery flood.

### **Colinet's fond desire strange lands to know**

Colinet: A fond desire strange lands and swains to know.

Illustrations to The Pastorals of Virgil

by Robert John Thornton, 3rd edition, London, 1821

1820–21

wood-engravings

Purchased, 1960

1877-5 – 1880-5



### **Thenot remonstrates with Colinet**

Colinet: Nor lark would sing, nor linnet, in my state.  
Each creature, Thenot, to his task is born;  
As they to mirth and music, I to mourn.

### **Thenot under a fruit tree**

Colinet: Yet though with years my body downward tend  
As trees beneath their fruit in autumn bend,  
Spite of my snowy head and icy veins,  
My mind a cheerful temper still retains.

### **Thenot remonstrates with Colinet, Lightfoot in the distance**

Colinet: Thine ewes will wander; and the heedless lambs,  
In loud complaints require their absent dams.  
Thenot: See Lightfoot; he shall tend them close; and I  
'Tween whiles across the plain will glance mine eye.

### **Colinet departs in sorrow, a thunder-scarred tree on the right**

Colinet: The riven trunk feels not the approach of spring;  
Nor birds among the leafless branches sing.  
Ill-fated tree! and more ill-fated I!

Illustrations to The Pastorals of Virgil

by Robert John Thornton, 3rd edition, London, 1821  
1820–21

wood-engravings

Purchased, 1960

1873-5 – 1876-5

## **The Creation of Eve**

illustration for Paradise Lost by John Milton (VIII, 452-77)

1822

pen and brown and black ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk, with stippling and sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

1024-3

Milton's writings were an important source of subject matter for Blake's art. His first illustrations to Paradise Lost date from 1807 and a second set of twelve watercolours was made in 1808 for his patron, Thomas Butts. In 1820 John Linnell commissioned new versions of the Butts set and two of these are now in the Gallery's collection. They are close copies of the Butts water-colours, but executed with a miniaturist touch instead of the broader wash style of the earlier works. Here, Adam and Eve sit on a 'soft downy bank damasked with flow'rs' watched over enviously by Satan.

## **Satan watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve**

illustration for Paradise Lost by John Milton (IV, 325-535)

1822

pen and ink and watercolour over traces of black chalk, with gum and stippling and sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

1025-3

Adam recalls the creation of Eve out of his side: 'Mine eyes he closed, but open left the cell / Of fancy, my internal sight'. Taking his cue from the fact that the scene is described by Adam from memory, Blake introduces an ethereal quality to it through luminous handling of the watercolour and minimisation of detail.

## **Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims**

1810

etching and engraving, 3rd of 5 states

Unaccessioned item

Blake executed this large engraving after his painting of the same subject in the hope of publicising his work and generating income. The engraving is strongly linear and in a deliberately archaising style which Blake allied with the 'correct and finished Line manner of Engraving' used by early masters such as Albrecht Dürer, Lucas van Leyden and others. The work failed to sell and was the subject of an acrimonious dispute with the publisher Robert Cromek and the artist Thomas Stothard. Stothard had painted the same subject and was accused by Blake of artistic theft.

## **The Circle of the Lustful: Paolo and Francesca**

1826–27

engraving, posthumous impression

Gift of Lessing J. Rosenwald, 1968

1835-5

Blake's series of watercolours illustrating the Divine Comedy was to have been published as engravings but Blake had only started on seven plates by the time of his death in 1827. This image is one of the most original of Blake's designs for the entire Divine Comedy series and it is not surprising that he chose it as one of his first engravings. It is a dramatic visualisation of the punishment of the Carnal Sinners in the second circle of Hell who are forever forced to be tossed by dark and stormy winds.

# **The Circle of the Thieves: Agnello Brunelleschi attacked by a Six-Footed Serpent**

1826–27

engraving, posthumous impression

Gift of Lessing J. Rosenwald, 1968 1838-5

Some progress proofs were taken by Blake as he was working on his engravings, but on his death the seven plates passed into the possession of John Linnell. Linnell printed sets for sale in 1838, and a further edition was printed in 1892. The impressions exhibited here are from an edition of 25 printed in America in 1968. The copper plates are now in the Library of Congress, in the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection.

## **Blake's illustrations for Dante's Divine Comedy**

At his death in 1827, Blake left 102 watercolours illustrating Dante's Divine Comedy in varying stages of completion. The works had been commissioned by John Linnell in 1824 and remained in his family until they were sold at auction in 1918. The NGV acquired thirty-six of the watercolours, the largest single group from the series, and the remaining works entered the collections of the Fogg Museum at Harvard University in America and five British institutions: the Tate; the British Museum; Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery; the Ashmolean Museum and the Royal Institution of Cornwall.

Written in the early fourteenth century, the Divine Comedy is an epic poem that narrates the story of Dante's pilgrimage, guided by the Roman poet Virgil, through Hell and Purgatory to Paradise. Dante's Hell is a pit with nine successive circles, each reserved for specific categories of sinners. Purgatory is a mountain on top of which is the Earthly Paradise (Garden of Eden) where Dante meets his idealised love, Beatrice, who finally guides him to Paradise. Blake dedicated seventy-two of his images to the depiction of Hell, twenty to Purgatory and ten to Paradise. The complete series has never been exhibited together. These touchscreens have been designed to provide exhibition visitors with the opportunity of viewing Blake's last great series of works in its entirety – all 102 works illustrating the Divine Comedy are presented here in narrative sequence with brief descriptive texts.

We are grateful to our fellow institutions, as listed above, for their generous support of this project.

## **Illustrations for Dante's Divine Comedy**

In 1824 John Linnell commissioned Blake to illustrate Dante's Divine Comedy. Blake worked on the project for three years, leaving 102 watercolours in varying stages of completion and seven unfinished engravings at his death in August 1827. The series is one of Blake's crowning achievements, acclaimed for its imaginative power, rich technique and complex interpretation of Dante's text.

The Divine Comedy recounts Dante's imaginary pilgrimage, guided by the Roman poet Virgil, through Hell (Inferno) and Purgatory to Paradise. The Inferno is described as a conical structure with successive circles, each reserved for particular categories of sinners. Purgatory is a mountain, on top of which is the Earthly Paradise where Dante finally meets his beloved Beatrice. Dante is shown throughout the series dressed in red (denoting experience) and Virgil in blue (denoting the spirit).

Blake admired Dante's epic poem, especially his imaginative descriptions of Hell, to which he devoted seventy-two images. However, he disapproved of aspects of Dante's theology, in particular the retribution and punishment inherent in his conception of Inferno. Blake's scribbled notes on some watercolours voice his opposition to Dante's beliefs. As Blake told a friend in 1825, 'Dante saw devils where I see none – I see only good'.



## **Dante running from the Three Beasts**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Inferno* I, 1-90)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk

Felton Bequest, 1920

988-3

Dante, in the middle of his journey through life, comes to a dark wood and loses his way. After a night full of fear he sets out again at dawn but is distracted from his way by a leopard (representing for Dante worldly pleasure, or Florence), a lion (pride, or the Royal House of France) and a wolf (avarice, or the Papal See). Fleeing from these, he encounters Virgil. This is the opening image in the series, and one of the few watercolours to be completely finished.

## **The Vestibule of Hell and the Souls mustering to cross the Acheron**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Inferno III, 22-83)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk,  
with sponging and traces of gum or glair

Felton Bequest, 1920

989-3

Dante, led by Virgil, has entered the Vestibule of Hell and reached the shores of the river Acheron where the souls of those who lived without blame and without praise wait to be ferried across. Above them mourn the choir of angels who neither rebelled nor were faithful to God, and who were chased from Heaven but refused by Hell. Dante describes the ensign with a banner leading the souls, and the hornets and wasps that attack them. Dante described the figures as naked, but Blake has clothed them in rich garments to suggest worldly rank and power.

ABOVE

**Minos**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Inferno* V, 1-24)

1824–27

pen and black and red/brown ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk, with sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

990-3

Dante and Virgil have descended from the first circle of Hell down into the second, that of the Carnal Sinners. Minos charges the souls as they appear according to how they clasp each other, sending them to a suitable punishment. He warns Dante to beware of where he is entering and also of those whom he trusts; Virgil tells Minos not to impede their progress.

BELOW

**Cerberus (second version)**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Inferno* VI, 13-33)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and traces of pencil

Felton Bequest, 1920

991-3

The monster Cerberus presides over the third circle of Hell, that of the Epicures and Gluttons. He is prevented from devouring Virgil and Dante by Virgil who distracts the beast by feeding him handfuls of earth. This is one of two watercolours depicting Cerberus, the other being in the Tate Gallery, London.

## **The Goddess of Fortune**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Inferno VII, 25-96)

1824–27

pencil, black chalk, watercolour and ink

Felton Bequest, 1920

993-3

Dante questions Virgil about the role of Fortune in human history. Blake's own reflections on this are inscribed on this drawing: 'The hole of a Shithouse / The Goddess Fortune is the devils Servant ready to Kiss any ones Arse'. Above Fortune, Blake depicts the two opposing circles of the Avaricious and the Prodigal, who roll enormous weights against each other. The group of the Avaricious on the left are priests, popes and cardinals, and Blake marks the weight with which they fight 'Celestial Globe'; the other group fight with a weight inscribed 'Terrestrial Globe'.

## **The Stygian Lake, with the Ireful Sinners fighting**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

Inferno VII, 106-26

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and traces of black chalk with sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

992-3

Dante and Virgil enter the fifth circle of Hell and come to the Stygian marsh or Styx, in which they see the Wrathful and the Sullen smiting each other not only with their hands but also with their heads, bodies and feet; the sobs of those below the water make its surface bubble.

ABOVE

**The Angel crossing the Styx**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Inferno VIII, 67-75 and IX, 64-84)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and traces of pencil

Felton Bequest, 1920

994-3

Dante and Virgil approach the City of Dis, its mosques glowing red in the eternal fire of Hell. Dante describes the sound of the approach of the Heavenly Messenger as of a wind; Blake illustrates this literally as a whirlwind which snatches up the figures of the damned. In the background can be seen two of the great rock bridges that connect the various circles of Hell.

BELOW

**The Angel at the Gate of Dis**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Inferno IX, 36-60 and 88-90)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk,  
with sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

995-3

The Heavenly Messenger or Angel arrives at the Gate of Dis which is guarded by three hellish Furies; they call upon the Gorgon Medusa to come and turn the Angel into stone. Virgil covers Dante's eyes so that he shall not share the same fate. The furies are unable to prevent the Angel opening the door to allow Dante and Virgil to enter, for their mission is divinely sanctioned.



ABOVE

**The Hell-Hounds hunting the Destroyers of their own Goods**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Inferno XIII, 109-129)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and pencil

Felton Bequest, 1920

996-3

The poets are now in the second ring of the seventh circle, the Wood of the Self-Murderers. Dante and Virgil are listening to the story of one suicide when they are interrupted by sounds as of a boar hunt; two notorious spendthrifts, Giacomo da Sant' Andrea and Lano da Sienna, dash into view, pursued by Hell-Hounds. Two Harpies look down from the trees.

BELOW

## **Capaneus the Blasphemer**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Inferno XIV*, 46-72)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk,  
with sponging and scratching out

Felton Bequest, 1920

997-3

Dante and Virgil are now in the third ring of the seventh circle, where those who have done violence against God, nature or art are punished. Capaneus, who had committed violence against God, was one of the seven kings who besieged Thebes. He defied Jupiter and was killed by a thunderbolt. Dante describes him as lying, proud and disdainful, apparently unaffected by the flames. This is one of the most highly finished watercolours in the series, in which Blake has used sponging and scratching-out to create highlights in the bolts of lightning.

## **The Symbolic Figure of the Course of Human History described by Virgil**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Inferno XIV, 94-119)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil, with sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

998-3

Dante and Virgil, in the third ring of the seventh circle, come across a blood-red stream. Dante explains that the rivers of Hell are formed by tears falling from the giant old man encased in the mountain of Ida on the island of Crete, the centre of the known world. For Dante, this figure embodied the course of human history. Blake endows the figure with a crown, an orb and a sceptre to show that in his view the decay of the world was the result of political oppression – kingship and tyranny.

## **Geryon conveying Dante and Virgil down towards Malebolge**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Inferno* XVII, 1-27 and 79-123)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk,  
with sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

999-3

Virgil and Dante are carried on the back of the monster Geryon from the third ring of the seventh circle down to Malebolge in the eighth circle. In antiquity Geryon was a monster with three heads, six arms and three bodies joined together at the waist, and he was slain by Hercules. In the Middle Ages, however, Geryon was equated with fraud, with the face of a just man but the body of a reptile.

## **The Necromancers and Augurs**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Inferno* XX, 1-56)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and traces of pencil

Felton Bequest, 1920

1001-3

This is an incident in the fourth chasm of the eighth circle, where the Sorcerers and Fortune-tellers receive their punishment, which consists of having their heads twisted backwards. Dante names seven figures in all, one of them a woman, Manto, after whom Virgil's birthplace, Mantua was named, is probably her father Tiresias. Virgil and Dante look down from the rock bridge above.

## **The Devil carrying the Lucchese Magistrate to the Boiling-Pitch Pool of Corrupt Officials**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Inferno XXI, 29-42)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and pencil

Felton Bequest, 1920

1002-3

This scene is set in the fifth chasm of the eighth circle. Bonturo Dati's fellow magistrate is being carried by a demon and is about to be thrown into the boiling pitch before being attacked with hooks, as in the next scene.

ABOVE

## **The Devils under the Bridge**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Inferno XXI, 46-57)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and pencil

Felton Bequest, 1920

1000-3

This shows the scene in the fifth chasm of the eighth circle, with the devils jabbing at the Lucchese Magistrate Bonturo Dati, head of the popular party at the time and the worst of all his fellows at fraud. In the distance the Seducers pursued by demons can still be seen. Dante described great rock bridges as characteristic of Malebolge, but Blake remarkably depicts them as being made from petrified, giant pieces of human anatomy.

BELOW

**The Devils setting out with Dante and Virgil**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Inferno XXI, 97-139)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and traces of black chalk

Felton Bequest, 1920

1003-3

The devils who have been harassing the Lucchese Magistrate and other fraudulent men turn towards Dante and threaten him. However, one of their number, Malacoda, stops them and instructs them to escort Dante and Virgil as they continue on their way through the eighth circle. The devil leading them is Barbariccia and the fanged devil is Ciriatto.



## **The Thieves and the Serpents**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Inferno* XXIV, 82-96)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk,  
with sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

1004-3

The two poets have crossed over the cliff into the seventh chasm of the eighth circle, where the Thieves are punished by serpents. This part of Dante's narrative was the subject of no fewer than nine of Blake's watercolours and two of the related engravings.

## **Vanni Fucci 'making Figs' against God**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Inferno* XXV, 1-15)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and traces of black chalk, with sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

1005-3

Vanni Fucci had been bitten by a serpent, instantly transformed into ashes and then, like the phoenix, reconstituted into his former shape. This was his punishment for robbing the treasury of San Jacopo in the Church of San Zeno, Pistoia, in 1293. Here Vanni Fucci blasphemes against God with an obscene gesture. The flames rain down on him from the dark cloud above, and serpents renew their attacks on him.

## **The Six-Footed Serpent attacking Agnello Brunelleschi**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri  
(*Inferno* XXV, 49-78)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk,  
with sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

1006-3

The infamous Florentine thief Cianfa de' Donati, at this moment transformed into a six-footed serpent, attacks Agnello Brunelleschi and their bodies begin to fuse. Their fellow Florentine thieves Puccio Sciancato and Buoso stand on the right looking on in horror, while Dante and Virgil stand on the left.

## **Ulysses and Diomed swathed in the same Flame**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Inferno* XXVI, 25-63)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and traces of black chalk

Felton Bequest, 1920

1007-3

Virgil and Dante are now in the eighth chasm of the eighth circle, where the punishment of Evil Counsellors occurs. The figures are swathed in individual flames, likened by Dante to fireflies. Ulysses and Diomed are punished for deceiving the Trojans with the Wooden Horse.

ABOVE

**The Schismatics and Sowers of Discord: Mohammed**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Inferno XXVIII, 19-42)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and traces of black chalk

Felton Bequest, 1920

1008-3

The poets are in the ninth chasm of the eighth circle, that of the Sowers of Discord, whose punishment is to be mutilated. Mohammed shows his entrails to Dante and Virgil while on the left stands his son Ali, his head cleft from chin to forelock. A winged devil with a sword stands on the right – he perpetually splits the sinners open again when they heal. In the distance, behind Mohammed, can be seen Bertrand de Born carrying his head in his hand.

BELOW

**The Schismatics and Sowers of Discord: Mosca de' Lamberti and Bertrand de Born**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Inferno XXVIII, 103-142)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil, with sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

1009-3

Still in the ninth chasm of the eighth circle, Dante and Virgil are shown with Bertrand de Born on the left, now holding out his head like a lantern, and Mosca de' Lamberti, raising the stumps of his handless arms. Bertrand de Born had set Henry II of England against his son, while Mosca de' Lamberti's murder of Buondelmonte had begun the conflict between the Guelph and Ghibelline factions in Florence. The devil that appears in the previous design is shown from behind in the background.

## **The Pit of Disease: Gianni Schicchi and Myrrha**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Inferno XXX, 22-45)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and traces of black chalk, with sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

1010-3

This is a scene set in the tenth chasm, of the Falsifiers, in the eighth circle. Dante sees two pale and naked shadows rushing out, biting like hungry swine. One, Gianni Schicchi, grabs Capocchio by the neck with his fangs. Capocchio is probably the Florentine alchemist who was burned alive in Sienna in 1281. The other animal-headed figure on the left is Myrrha, daughter of King Cinyras of Cyprus with whom she had an incestuous relationship.

## **Ephialtes and two other Titans**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Inferno* XXXI, 84-111)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and pencil

Felton Bequest, 1920

1011-3

The poets are now crossing the bank that separates the eighth circle, or Malebolge, from the ninth circle or central pit. This is guarded by Giants, standing waist deep in a ditch. They come across Ephialtes, the son of Neptune, who is chained and unable to move his arms, as described in Dante's text. However, Blake has added two other giants. The passage illustrated is one in which Dante describes Ephialtes shaking himself, like an earthquake with falling stones.



## **Antaeus setting down Dante and Virgil in the Last Circle of Hell**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Inferno* XXXI, 112-143)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk,  
with sponging and scratching out

Felton Bequest, 1920

1012-3

After their encounter with Ephialtes, the poets go further on and come upon Antaeus who was invincible as long as he remained in contact with the earth, but who was finally conquered by Hercules. Virgil asks Antaeus to set the poets down in the last circle. Here Blake parallels Dante's imagery of the Carisenda, one of the leaning towers in Bologna, as seen when a cloud is going over it, and also the imagery of a ship's mast in his rigid right arm.

## **Lucifer**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Inferno* XXXIV, 10-81)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk

Felton Bequest, 1920

1013-3

Dante and Virgil are now in the ninth and last circle, that of the Traitors, and have reached the inner of four concentric rings where traitors are frozen in a kind of building, shining like straw in glass. At the centre stands Lucifer, frozen from the waist down, with three heads and bat-like wings, the flapping of which freezes the heart of Hell. In each mouth he chews on a sinner: Judas Iscariot, Brutus and Cassius. Virgil leads Dante around Lucifer's back and out of the last circle of Hell, finally leaving the 'infernal regions'.

## **The Rest on the Mountain leading to Purgatory**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Purgatorio VI, 46-57)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and pencil

Felton Bequest, 1920

1014-3

The poets are climbing the steep path that encircles the mountain leading to Purgatory. Now they sit down to rest on a terrace, looking down over the sea. In the text Dante wonders at the direction of the sun, but Blake shows it obscured by mist or clouds. The colouring of this design is cooler than in the illustrations to the Inferno, being dominated by pinks and greens.

ABOVE

**The Souls of Those who only repented at the Point of Death**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri  
(Purgatorio V, 37-57 and VI, 28-48)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk

Felton Bequest, 1920

1015-3

Although Dante describes the souls of those who only repented at the point of death as 'running', Blake illustrates Dante's simile of flaming vapours and shows the souls as airborne, turning in a great circle. He also seems to show them in pairs, male and female.

BELOW

## **The Lawn with the Kings and Angels**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri  
(Purgatorio VII, 64-90 and VIII, 22-48 and 94-108)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and traces of pencil

Felton Bequest, 1920

1016-3

The poets are now accompanied by Virgil's fellow Mantuan, the poet Sordello, and have come to a lawn scooped out from the mountainside. Here they see a group of Negligent Rulers singing sacred songs. Two angels appear with blunted, flaming swords to guard the kings from a serpent, likened to that which tempted Eve. Dante describes the richly coloured grass and flowers, but Blake shows the kings in a grove of trees, the symbol of error.

## **The Angel inviting Dante to enter the Fire**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri  
(*Purgatorio* XXVII, 5-36)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and traces of pencil, with sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

1017-3

Virgil and Dante are now accompanied by the Roman poet Statius. They are near the summit of the mountain of Purgatory mounting a path the inner side of which is filled with flames. They are confronted by an angel who tells them that the only way forward is by passing through fire. Dante is terrified but Virgil reassures him that, even though he will feel pain, he cannot be destroyed; moreover, beyond the flames he will find Beatrice.

## **Dante at the Moment of entering the Fire**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri

(Purgatorio XXVII, 46-48)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and pencil,  
with sponging and touches of gum

Felton Bequest, 1920

1018-3

Virgil has just entered the flames and has asked Statius to follow Dante in third place, rather than coming second. The angel hovers above. As in the previous design, the colours are now richer than in the earlier depictions of Purgatorio.

## **The Harlot and the Giant**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri

(*Purgatorio* XXXII, 85-87 and 142-53)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk,  
with sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

1019-3

Dante has entered the Terrestrial Paradise, or Garden of Eden, and Beatrice has replaced Virgil as his guide. They reach the mystic tree of the knowledge of good and evil, where Dante falls asleep. When he awakes he finds Beatrice seated at the foot of a tree. The chariot on which Beatrice appeared to him has been transformed into a seven-headed beast, probably denoting the seven capital sins. It is surmounted by the Harlot characterising the papacy during the 'Babylonian Captivity' at Avignon; the giant represents Phillip the Fair of France, under whose power the papacy had fallen.



## **Dante adoring Christ**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri  
(*Purgatorio* XIV, 97-111)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk, with touches of gum

Felton Bequest, 1920

1020-3

This is the first of Blake's illustrations to *Paradiso*. Dante is shown before the vision of Christ. In the text the vision starts as one of the Cross itself, from which Christ glows out, but Blake omits the Cross, merely showing Christ in the position of the Crucified. Blake also omits the figure of Beatrice, possibly to show Dante worshipping Christ without the intervention of the church.

ABOVE

**St Peter appears to Beatrice and Dante**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri  
(*Paradiso XXIV*, 19-33)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and pencil

Felton Bequest, 1920

1021-3

Dante and Beatrice have risen up through the various spheres of Heaven to the eighth sphere, that of Stellar Heaven in the constellation of Gemini, Dante's natal sign. This is the sphere of the redeemed souls, which appear as flames. St Peter, so blissful a flame that it eclipses all the others, appears and wheels around Beatrice, addressing her in divine song.

BELOW

**St Peter and St James with Dante and Beatrice**

illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri  
(*Paradiso XXV*, 13-24)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk, with  
sponging

Felton Bequest, 1920

1022-3

St James appears from out of the sphere containing Christ's first vicars, and joins Peter. He questions Dante on Hope, just as Peter had questioned him on Faith.

## **The Queen of Heaven in Glory**

illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri  
(Paradiso XXX, 97-126, XXXI, 1-21, 55-73 and 112-142,  
and XXXII, 1-9)

1824–27

pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk

Felton Bequest, 1920

1023-3

This is the last of Blake's illustrations to Dante's Divine Comedy and it was left unfinished. The Redeemed are depicted as a great rose, with Beatrice seated in the centre below the Virgin Mary. All commentators are agreed in seeing in this design some condemnation by Blake of Dante's ideas on salvation.