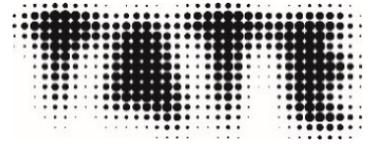


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TATE BRITAIN

WILLIAM BLAKE

11 September 2019 – 2 February 2020

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This autumn, Tate Britain will present the largest survey of work by William Blake (1757-1827) in the UK for a generation. A visionary painter, printmaker and poet, Blake created some of the most iconic images in the history of British art and has remained an inspiration to artists, musicians, writers and performers worldwide for over two centuries. This ambitious exhibition will bring together over 300 remarkable and rarely seen works and rediscover Blake as a visual artist for the 21st century.

Tate Britain will reimagine the artist's work as he intended it to be experienced. Blake's art was a product of his tumultuous times, with revolution, war and progressive politics acting as the crucible of his unique imagination, yet he struggled to be understood and appreciated during his life. Now renowned as a poet, Blake also had grand ambitions as a visual artist and envisioned vast frescos that were never realised. For the first time, *The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan* c.1805-9 and *The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth* c.1805 will be digitally enlarged and projected onto the gallery wall on the huge scale that Blake imagined. The original artworks will be displayed nearby in a restaging of Blake's ill-fated exhibition of 1809, the artist's only significant attempt to create a public reputation for himself as a painter. Tate will recreate the domestic room above his family hosiery shop in which the show was held, allowing visitors to encounter the paintings exactly as people did in 1809.

The exhibition will provide a vivid biographical framework in which to consider Blake's life and work. There will be a focus on London, the city in which he was born and lived for most of his life. The burgeoning metropolis was a constant inspiration for the artist, offering an environment in which harsh realities and pure imagination were woven together. His creative freedom was also dependent on the unwavering support of those closest to him, his friends, family and patrons. Tate will highlight the vital presence of his wife Catherine who offered both practical assistance and became an unacknowledged hand in the production of his engravings and illuminated books. The exhibition will showcase a series of illustrations to *Pilgrim's Progress* 1824-27 and a copy of the book *The complaint, and the consolation Night Thoughts* 1797, now thought to be coloured by Catherine.

Blake was a staunch defender of the fundamental role of art in society and the importance of artistic freedom. Shaped by his personal struggles in a period of political terror and oppression, his technical innovation, and his political commitment, these beliefs have inspired the generations that followed and remain pertinent today. Tate Britain's exhibition will open with *Albion Rose* c.1793, an exuberant visualisation of the mythical founding of Britain, created in contrast to the commercialisation, austerity and crass populism of the times. A section of the exhibition will also be dedicated to his illuminated books such as *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* 1794, his central achievement as a radical poet.

Additional highlights will include a selection of works from the Royal Collection and some of his best-known paintings including *Newton* 1795-c.1805 and *Ghost of a Flea* c.1819-20. This intricate work was inspired by a séance-induced vision and will be shown alongside a rarely seen preliminary sketch. The exhibition will close with *The Ancient of Days* 1827, a frontispiece for an edition of *Europe: A Prophecy*, completed only days before the artist's death.

William Blake will be curated by Martin Myrone, Lead Curator pre-1800 British Art, and Amy Concannon Assistant Curator, British Art 1790-1850. The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue from Tate Publishing and a programme of talks and events in the gallery.

MEDIA RELATIONS:

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