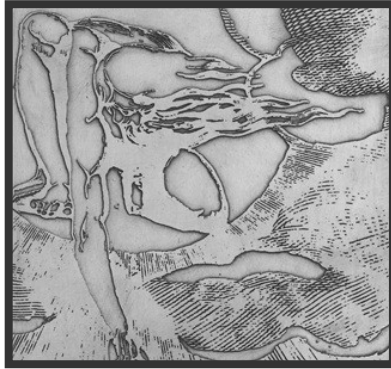


PRESENTATION



The poet, painter, printmaker, and publisher, William Blake (1757-1827) left a body of work that requires particular attention to its physical nature. Because Blake produced his illuminated books composed of word and image by hand, no two copies are the same. As we come to understand the method and materials that Blake used to produce his works, and where possible to study each copy to see how it was made, so we gain a greater understanding of his *oeuvre*.

Few scholars have undertaken this task as seriously as Michael Phillips. University teacher, writer and critic, Phillips has devoted more than two decades of his life to the arduous task of recreating in the printmaking studio the method that Blake invented and developed to produce his extraordinary books. Phillips is, in the words of Mei-Ying Sung, one of the authors who most exemplify the “reconstructive archeology of Blake's printing methods” (2009, p. 3).

In this regard, Michael Phillips' work specifically aims to reconstruct every stage of Blake's bookmaking art, a task which involves recreating the artist's relief-etched copper plates, etching them with acids, preparing inks and papers, applying the ink to the plates and printing. One result of this research is the many demonstrations of how Blake printed his illuminated books that Phillips has given to college and university students in Britain, France, Canada and the United States. Another is that examples of Blake's illuminated books that Michael has re-created are now in some of the great Blake collections in Britain and America, including the British Library and the Lessing J. Rosenwald Blake Collection in the Library of Congress.

As a university teacher, Michael has taught at Oxford, University College London and Edinburgh University before joining the interdisciplinary Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies at the University of York, where he offered a post-graduate MA in English and History of Art entitled ‘William Blake and the Age of Revolution’, and where he is now an Emeritus Fellow.

His publications on Blake include *Interpreting Blake* (1978), *William Blake, An Island in the Moon, A Facsimile of the Manuscript*, (1987), *William Blake, Recherches pour une Biographie* (1995), *William Blake: The Creation of the Songs from Manuscript to Illuminated Printing* (2000) and most recently he has published a new edition of Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (2011).

As guest curator he has produced major exhibitions of Blake, in London at Tate Britain in 2000, in New York at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2001, and in Paris at the Petit Palais in 2009. He is currently preparing a new exhibition – ‘William Blake, Apprentice & Master’ – that will open in 2014 at the Ashmolean Museum of the University of Oxford.

In 2011, I was given the opportunity to study Blake for my PhD Dissertation in Edinburgh and London under Michael Phillips’s direction, including working with him in the professional printmaking studio of the Edinburgh Printmakers Workshop printing relief-etched copper plates of Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* that he has re-created. The following interview reflects some of the many topics and aspects of Blake’s work that we discussed together.

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