



# Drawings of William Blake: 92 Pencil Studies (Dover Fine Art, History of Art)

*William Blake*

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"Let a Man who has made a Drawing go on & on & he will produce a Picture or Painting, but if he chooses to leave it before he has spoil'd it, he will do a Better Thing." Blake prized the "first lines" from his hand for their freshness and their proximity to the source of inspiration. From the relatively few that have survived, Sir Geoffrey Keynes has selected 92 of Blake's finest pencil drawings, composed in the first flush of creativity.

From hasty sketches to remarkably detailed first drafts, these fine reproductions show the full range of Blake's troubled genius. There are many of the first, vigorous and immediate drawings of Blake's illustrations of *The Book of Job*, *The Divine Comedy*, the Miltonic epics, and of Shakespeare's plays. Blake's humor and his gift for portraiture are exemplified in the "Visionary Heads," drawn directly, he asserted, from visions of historical personages who came to sit in his studio (Voltaire, Friar Bacon, Bathsheba, Queen Eleanor, etc.). From the mystic world of his own intricate mythology are figures from *The Four Zoas*, Urizen, Los, the Soul Hovering over the Body, and a wealth of other drawings no less compelling for their complex, sometimes inaccessibly personal symbolism. Although Blake scorned drawing from nature and preferred for models the creatures of his own mind, his studies of nude figures and famous sculpture, as well as a touching portrait of Catherine Blake, his wife, show great aptitude in accurate representation.

Of special interest are the two Laocoön studies: one, a representation of the classical sculpture Blake was commissioned to do for an encyclopedia; the second, a depiction of Urizen and his sons, Satan and Adam, struggling with the serpents of Good and Evil, a subtle transformation of the Greek mythology into Blake's own. Into this extraordinary second study, Blake infused all the intensity and anguish of his own vision of mankind. Rare landscapes, allegorical designs, anatomical studies, and Blake's famous "grotesques" complete this collection of "first lines" from a skilled and inspired hand.

These plates are drawn from Blake's earliest surviving work to his last, and arranged, as nearly as possible, in chronological order. Sire Geoffrey Keynes' introduction is as excellent as his selections of the drawings themselves, lending insight into Blake's life, his temperament, and his development and achievement in the graphic arts. Concise, sensitive commentary accompanies each individual drawing. The drawings have been faithfully reproduced from originals in museums and private collections all over the world; wherever possible, they have been reproduced in their actual size. No art lover or art library should be without this handsome treasury of Blake's immensely original drawings. More than just an art book, it is an adventure in the first fruits of an incredibly prolific, yet elusive imagination.

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