

Presentation launch campaign

3. William Blake's World Stature

All around the world William Blake, who died nearly 200 years ago, is known among an ever growing number of people as England's most relevant artist to the world today. He's the artist, poet and visionary emblematic of this country's long-standing tradition of dissent that keeps on telling us why inspired art is important, why creative freedom is important, and why the arts are essential to human society. In his prophetic poem *Jerusalem* Blake wrote

"Poetry Fetter'd, Fetters the Human Race! Nations are Destroy'd, or Flourish, in proportion as Their Poetry Painting and Music, are Destroy'd or Flourish! The Primeval State of Man, was Wisdom, Art, and Science".

It is to a great extent thanks to William Blake and other akin spirits that people all over the world look at the artistic creation of Great Britain with reverence and respect. Every single day somewhere in the world someone is studying Blake, writing about him, being inspired by his poetry and art to create their own art in all possible media and platforms. He's studied in universities, conferences are organized around him, books and articles about him are published all the time and, most importantly, new generations of artist and thinkers walk guided by his inspiration and example looking for the emancipation of the spirit and for a genuine way to create art, freed from the constraints –harsh or subtle– imposed upon them by society.

Only in the Blake Society we have members from fifteen countries and five continents,¹ and every single day people from across the globe sign up to our electronic newsletter –we have around 800 subscribers at the moment.

Blake keeps on being translated into other languages, and only this year the Spanish publishing house Atalanta, directed by Jacobo Siruela, one of the editors who has done most to make the work of great literature and thought from other traditions known in the Spanish-speaking world has published two beautiful volumes with Blake's complete illustrated Prophetic Books.

When all these people who love and admire Blake come to England, they are eager to see the places where he worked and created. Then they realize that from the 9 houses in which he lived during his life-time, only two are standing: the Cottage in Felpham, and the one in London in 17 South Molton Street, most of which is used for commercial purposes and has on the ground floor a Brazilian Waxing shop.

They can't understand it. Why this most emblematic of English artists, who has given so much to the world, doesn't have –apart from the museums and galleries that have his work in their collections– a single place where his work can be honoured?

¹ Britain, USA, Australia, France, Canada, South Africa, Greece, France, Norway, Japan, Israel, Russia, Austria, Italy, Ireland.

5. A vision of the Cottage as creativity – a place that gives out rather than draws in.

There are virtually no extant personal objects that belonged to William Blake. This offers an interesting symbol for reflection about the way he built his life, created his work and the destiny he fulfilled. That in spite of his significance in British and the world's culture there is no object of his to display in a museum may suggest that the energy that drove his art and life burnt through creation and constant transformation, and was not of the kind to be tamed in the form of a museum.

We find that much more interesting, so what the Cottage won't be, is a museum. We don't want people to simply come in, look around then leave, but rather for it to be a place where people think, project and create. It would have an open door, but the emphasis would shift from a door open to draw in, to one open to give out.

Open one or two days a week for day visitors, the rest of the week its rooms will be at the disposal of individuals and groups (i.e. artists, authors, thinkers, philosophers and scientists) invited to work on creative projects. One possible use of part of the building would be a house of refuge for persecuted writers. Each month the Cottage would host a public event: for instance, a conversation of Blakean interest with an artist or scholar, an exhibition, a talk or book launch, or an intimate concert. Ideally these events would be hosted by those who are currently working in the Cottage, and would be a chance to display the fruits of their work.

So the Cottage would be a place for conception and creation, whose core values are imagination and dissent. It would also provide a flexible collaborative space for artists and minds where they could produce work that reaches local galleries, universities and other institutions. We want to create a space where people can take their projects off the ground, and therefore a space of renewal, including renewal of the world outside, even if in a humble measure.

As we said in the flier you received as an invitation for this event, "the Cottage is to be an exemplar of a way to live a life through courage and creativity. We are inviting support from everyone who is strengthened by the knowledge that somewhere in the world such a place exists; a home for the dissenting imagination."

What it means, a dissenting imagination, is a difficult question. Blake did not address it to the air – he addressed it to his time and his world, and so must we address it to ours.

In this confusing world of ours, all forms of dissent seem to be reabsorbed by an omnivorous culture of surplus as soon as they see the light. So perhaps dissent now means, among other things, not conforming to that prodigal culture, to resist its pervading compulsions, to defend – as artists, as thinkers – our right to respite, to a space of quiet where a vision of Man as inherently blessed, and *blessing* of the world around him through the way he looks at that world, and acts upon it, can be found again.

I guess what we want is to create a place out of whose door the man in Blake's Glad Day can step again and again.