

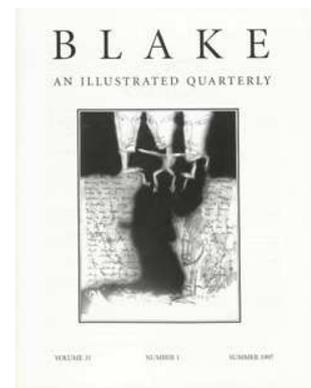
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BLAKE

A R T I C L E

Lorenz Becher: An Artist in Berne, Switzerland

Lorenz Becher

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The Chimney Sweeper

Lorenz Becher: An Artist in Berne, Switzerland

BY LORENZ BECHER

I was born in 1961 in Berne and I work in a studio in the center of Berne. The address is Kornhausplatz 14, 3014 Bern, Switzerland.

Since 1990 I have mainly worked on projects rather than individual paintings. The first one was called *Faces*, the second one, in 1991, *Faces II*. In 1992 I did the *Faces on Board Project* and in 1993, the *Blake Project* happened.

About 200 years after William Blake's writing, illustrating and printing of his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* I copied the songs on pieces of cardboard (averaging 100 cm. by 70 cm.) with black, water-resistant felt pens. The pattern thus constituted by Blake's words in my handwriting became the basis of my visual reaction first drawn into and onto all the texts in black and white and then painted, sprayed, printed, masked on and steel woolled off the *Experience* texts with gouache, acrylics and synthetic resin. Hand-framed black and white in the case of the *Innocence* poems and framed in various colors in the case of the *Ex-*

perience poems, the entire project was first shown in the rooms of the Swiss Telecom International building in Worblaufen, Berne in spring 1996. Among my conscious concerns in the making of the project were the amazing topicality of the texts, not so much on the level of their language, but on the levels of psychological, cultural and historical questions of all sorts. In addition I was greatly inspired and fascinated by Blake's handling of the theme of confinement and emancipation as well as his very modern and complex perception of the notions of system and chaos. My visual work is a reaction to Blake's poetry, not to his own illustrations, and I was also influenced, no doubt, by Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, and The Doors, who were all, in turn, greatly influenced by Blake themselves. It is a great wish of mine to see my Blake paintings published in a book, side by side with Blake's own illustrations and his texts some day. Should this publication get somebody outside Switzerland interested in exhibiting or printing my work, I will be able to get financial support from a Swiss foundation.

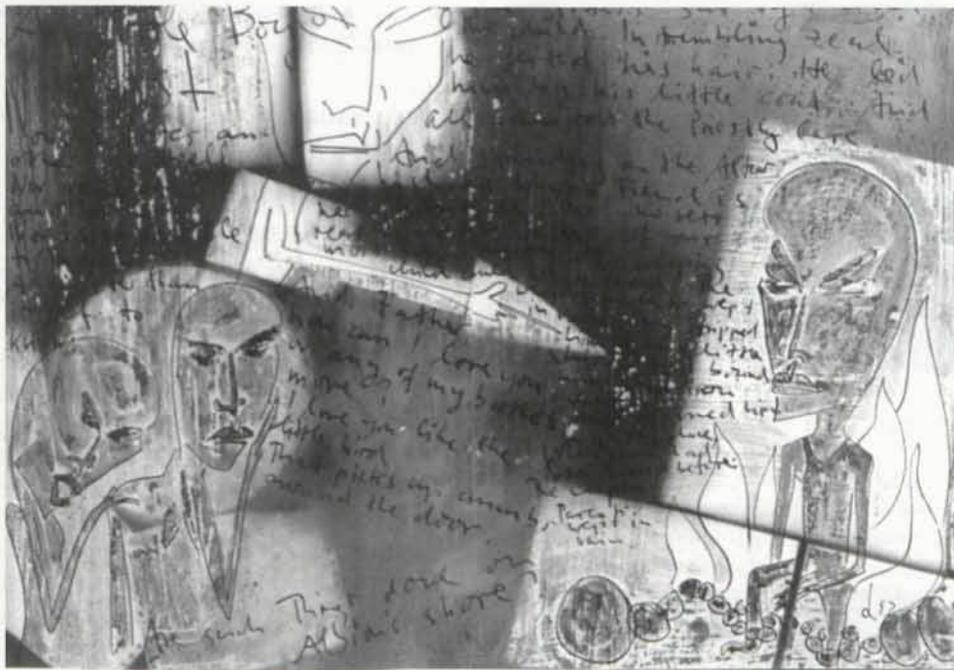
In 1994 I did the *Double Bind Project*, in 1995 the *Magic Carpet Ride Project* and the *Phases of the Moon Project*. In 1996 I painted the *Schattenraumprojekt (Rooms in the House of Shade Project)* in collaboration with Regula Radwila, a Swiss writer. I also completed my *Milespiration Project*, which is the music of Miles Davis transformed into my painting.

This spring I saw Jim Jarmusch's movie *Dead Man* and was fascinated by the fact that almost synchronically he and I, two artists working with pictures in completely different ways one ocean apart, were inspired by one and the same poet. Blake is magic and so are words and pictures!

(For more information call Lorenz Becher [931 03 00]. Studio address is Kornhausplatz 14 in Berne.)



Holy Thursday



The Little Boy Lost



The School Boy

Frank Vaughan, *Again to the Life of Eternity: William Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Thomas Gray.* Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1995. 139 pp. \$65.

Reviewed by CHRISTOPHER HEPPNER

First the book itself. It is large and handsome, and one opens it with a pleasure that does not quite survive unmodified through the process of reading. Susquehanna University Press should find and use both a good designer and a good copy-editor. The text is laid out in single wide and long column format on a large page, with rather small print; it is not a comfortable page to read. In addition, it looks as if the text was simply run through a spell checker. Errors are of the kind that notoriously escapes such programs—Lawrence Stone, for instance, is cited as having written of the “apparent rise in the amount of martial unhappiness, leading to adultery and martial breakdown” (111); I live in hope, but fear that is not what Stone wrote. A good copy editor could have taught Vaughan the difference between “as” and “like,” that “Similar to the speaker, Blake also . . .” (100) will not do, and that “at” cannot consort with both verbs in “the opening lines at which she both stares and personifies” (68). Such an editor would also have caught sentences like the following: “Thus, against this social background, Blake’s handmaid concept is a belief in the ‘gentle subservience ministering to harmony’ . . . which [while?] the apparent feminine detachment expresses to some degree the period’s gender disharmony” (111). A university press should be able to do better than this for the reader.

The viewer is better served; all 116 of the Gray illustrations are reproduced in high resolution glossy black and white, though the plates are low in contrast, so that the white background to the texts of the poems appears as a middle grey against which the texts scarcely stand out, though they remain clearly legible. The text makes many references to earlier illustrations by Bentley and others, but none is reproduced.

Vaughan has both a great deal of information, and a program to advance, which is laid out in the Introduction. This embraces a historical and political contextualization, which concludes:

The Gray designs, if they are to be viewed as an intelligible whole and not as an elaborate but discontinuous series of responses, need to be viewed as Blake’s composite works are now viewed. As [sic] the composite works, the Gray designs represent either the events and ideas of the period, or represent the essen-



The Poison Tree



London



Tirzah