

**HAA Graphic Cabinet presents**  
**William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job***

Active in London as Europe was being rocked by a succession of revolutions, William Blake (1757–1827) was a visionary painter, poet, and printmaker whose work subtly critiques the social upheaval that he both witnessed and experienced throughout his long and prolific career. Indeed, Blake was a fanatical individualist and a resolute adversary of oppressive authority, and in an array of paintings and lavishly illustrated books he reinterpreted biblical themes and received mythologies in an intellectual mutiny against political standards and organized religions.

Blake was trained at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, but he began his career as an apprentice to the engraver James Basire. Under Basire's tutelage he mastered copper engraving, a craft he advanced by combining text and image in a fantastic cosmology that both inverted and subverted conventions and laws.

Late in life, Blake created twenty-one illustrations to the Old Testament Book of Job as a commission for a patron, John Linnell, who wished to have a set made after seeing Blake's watercolors of the same theme. Each illustration chronicles an episode in Job's suffering, enlightenment, and ultimate redemption: from the cataclysmic loss of his children and dramatic encounter with boils, to the emergence of his true faith and the restoration of his health, wealth, and family. Departing from traditional readings of Job's story as an allegory of the correlation between human misery and the will of God, Blake interprets Job's tribulations as punishment for his guilt-driven and therefore false piety, and his emancipation from evil as the discovery of genuine spirituality. In doing so, Blake denounces the rigid structure of Christian theology to locate God not in biblical discourse, but in the goodness inherent in each individual.