Slide 1.

Today I’am going to talk about William Blake: his life, peculiar views and how he expressed them by art.

William Blake is an english painter and printmaker, he also dealt with poetry and is included in “*poète maudit*”, which means in french “accursed poet”. This was a group of controversial artists, rejected in their times and appreciated only after death.

Blake was born in middle class family. Since an early age, he showed

a drawing talent. Soon he wanted to become an engraver. However this decision was risky to his artistic career, because engraving in that times was considered as a lowly technique. People, who dealt with this profession might had difficulty to join “The Royal Academy of Arts”.

Blake, since childhood, till his last days was closely interested in spiritual, mystical world. There are theories, about the cause for this fascination. For example, according to one it was because he was growing up in a home, which was placed above an old cemetery. During his life the artist claimed, that he sees ghost and angels, which gave him pseudonym “Mad Blake”

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Here I prepared important words from art field, which help to better understand my presentation.

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Lots of Blake’s works are illustrations of his alleged revelations. As we can see, here a picture of flea’s ghost. This painting is a miniature and was made by tempera technique mixed with gold on mahogany. The story behind “Ghost of Flea” is an example of Blake’s visionary behaviour.

John Varley was an young artist, who was also strongly interested in mysticism. He dreamed for a spiritual experience, however despite his tries, Varley couldn’t achieve this. This brought him to William Blake, who was already known from his alleged unique skills. Varley invited him to his own house and they started to summon spirits. According to them they were successful. Blake claimed that he saw a spiritual apparition of a Flea and he sketched it. As Varley described the situation: “I felt convinced by his mode of proceeding, that he had a real image before him, for he left off, and began on another part of the paper, to make a separate drawing of the mouth of the Flea, which the spirit having opened, he was prevented from proceeding with the first sketch, till he had closed it.” This drawing was the base for the painting you see here.

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As I said, Blake was very interested in mysticism. He even created own unique and complicated lore, which have origins in Bible, history, greek mythology and even more.

According to it, the essence of a human being consists of four “Zoas”: Urizen (which represents wisdom, rationality and law), Luvah (love, passion, rebelion), Tharmas (body and senses) and Urthon (inspiration, creativity). What’s more, those elements had their female counterparts - Emanations. All of Zoas were living in the first human, however they had been separated from their female analoges and this brought ruin to this first human. Zoas started to fight for domination and this caused chaos and destruction. What is interesting, Blake’s mythology was free from common ideas of good and evil. For example, in his beliefs, hell wasn’t a place of eternal torment, but source of unstoppable energy. Heaven, on the other hand, was a state of passivity subordinated to intellect.

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Here we can see The one of Zoas - Urizen, demon of wisdom. This work was made by etching technique and painted with watercolours. It is a front page of one of his prophetic books. Urizen is showed as a old naked man with waved hair holding calipers. The light is a symbol of intellect.

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This picture presents fallen form of Urthon, demon of creativity - Los. It is also example of a new technique, which Blake invented relief etching. He thought, that this would bring revolution into printmaking world, but it didn’t happen. However it allowed him to make illuminated poems, where words and picture are complementing and merging with his painting, printing and poetic skills.

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Here we can see Los’s emanation - Enitharmon. She was representing female domination and sexual oppression, which are creating boundaries for artist’s imagination.

This is a watercolour painting mixed with ink. Enitharmon had androgenic features, it was accentuated by a boy and a girl kneeling behind her. She is placed in fantastic dark scenery with a company of strange animals: donkey eating thistle, large bat above her head. Painting has a wide range of symbols, among other things, we can see a mourning owl (false wisdom), crocodile’s head (bloodthirsty hypocrisy).

In his book, Blake describes The Night of Enitharmon’s Joy as a released female will, which is above christian patriarchy.

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Despite his involvement in own mythology, Blake was interested in christianity, yet he reinterpreted some parts of this religion.

Here we can see one of the apocalyptic scenes from the “Book of Revelation”. Blake created more than hundred watercolours paintings about on this subject, which is called “Blake’s Biblie”. For him, revelation was the most important mystical experience. He claimed, that imagination/vision is God’s element and every human has it.

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This is another example of Bible’s illustration. It’s from one of Blake’s most popular series about “The Great Red Dragon”, which is also visualisation verses of “Book of Revelation”. It says about powerful dragon, who is going to eat a woman’s son, as she will give birth to him. Picture of Red Dragon was used in novel and movie adaptation about Hannibal Lecter.

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Here is another version, with the same title. He changed the poses of characters. However, it retains the characteristic contrast between dark, ominous dragon and a brightening woman.

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Another variation of “The Great Red Dragon”, with added six heads, and the company of the “Beast from the Sea”

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In his oldest years, Blake created illustrations for “The Book of Job”. Maybe he found solace in this allegory. Blake to the end of his life was poor. Strange beliefs and even furious character, made people treat him as insane craftsman.

His art wasn’t appreciated in that times, however, nowadays Blake’s creativeness is still found fascinating by many.