

Large print captions

Out of the Woods BLACKWELL HALL, Weston Library Opens 5 October

This display of wood engravings and woodcuts from Durer to the present addresses the dynamic relationship between the printed page and the materials used in its production. In particular, it considers the implications of the woodblock itself but also touches on other qualities of the book as object, including paper and bindings.

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INTRODUCTION

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The display considers the use and representation of the natural world, issues of survival and extinction and the persuasive and subversive power of image and text. Central to the display is Gaylord Schanilec's *Sylvae*, a book which celebrates the idea of wood through its very embodiment: its binding is made from trees from his land and its pages bear their direct imprint.

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1 – 2. The Passion

Durer's cycle of illustrations for *The Life of the Virgin*, *The Large Passion*, and *The Apocalypse* remain some of the most beautiful woodcuts ever produced, demonstrating an unprecedented level of technical virtuosity, while bringing naturalism and humanity to the subject. *The Large Passion* is accompanied with a poem by the theologian, Benedictus Chelidoniumus. The book is open at the Last Supper while above it hangs the Crucifixion.

Albrecht Durer, *Passio domini nostri Jesu* (Nuremberg, 1511)

Douce D subt. 41 and JJ Durer folder

3. A sea fight between Admiral Blake and the Dutch

The enduring nature of woodblocks, often produced at some expense, ensured they remained in use long after the original purpose for their creation had passed. This large naval scene depicting the Battle of Dungeness in 1652 was probably made soon after the battle, but was still in use 90 years later. It was used to illustrate a personalized souvenir printed on the ice at the frost fayre held when the Thames froze during the winter of 1740. This one was printed for Miss Frances Jackson.

A sea fight between Admiral Blake and the Dutch (London, 1740)

John Johnson Printed on the Ice 1 (20)

4. *The Canterbury Tales*

Eric Gill's wood-engravings of leafy borders are populated with people, animals and mythological creatures who peer out from the trees, stems, branches and flowers decorating every page. All the elements of this book – illustration, typography, paper, binding and ink – come together harmoniously to produce a masterpiece of 20th century book design.

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (Golden Cockerell Press, 1931)

Arch. C c.6 (volume 4)

5. *The pastorals of Virgil*

William Blake was asked to prepare 17 wood-engravings for this edition of Virgil's *Pastorals*, a technique he had not previously used. The resulting images were highly unconventional, promoting the editor Robert Thornton, to comment "they display less of art than genius'.

Despite their reception in some quarters Blake's wood-engravings were enormously influential with a group of young artists known as the Ancients, which included Samuel Palmer and Edward Calvert.

R. J. Thornton. *The pastorals of Virgil* (London, 1821)

8° Y 203 Art.BS.

6. A woodcut soldier

Woodblocks are usually about an inch thick and made from dense, fine grained woods such as box, cherry, beech, maple, lime, lemon and apple, into which the woodcutter gouges out the design. Ink is applied to the remaining raised area using a dabber and the image can be transferred onto paper in various different ways including by hand stamping or by running the block through a printing press.

Seventeenth century wood-engraved block of a soldier
Bibliography Room woodblocks

7. A seasoned boxwood log (*Buxus Sempervirens*), blocks and tools

Chris Daunt calls English box 'the king of woods'. It is slow growing, dense, and even, making boxwood blocks resilient enough to create thousands of impressions. Once properly seasoned the boxwood log can be cut to size, polished and sealed for engraving.

Wood-engravers prefer blocks cut from the endgrain as this minimizes the appearance of the natural grain in the polished surface which can interfere with the lines of the image. The blocks are stored upright, much like books on a shelf, and kept at an even temperature and humidity to prevent the joints from opening and cracking.

The engraving tools or 'burins' are designed to fit in the engraver's palm, and are made of a metal shank mounted on a wooden handle shaped like a mushroom. The most common tools are different shaped gravers, spitstickers, scorpers and tint tools.

Private loans

8. *Sylvae*

Woodland surrounds Gaylord Schanilec's press in Wisconsin. *Sylvae* records his journey into the woods with Ben Verhoeven to document twenty four species of trees. Textual descriptions are accompanied by fifty three images using, in almost all cases, the wood from the trees themselves printed directly onto paper. Varying degrees of intervention achieve texture, colour and detail. The book is bound in wood – another use of trees, whose 'nectar, sap, and fruit provide us with the sweeter things in life.'

Gaylord Schanilec, *Sylvae* (Midnight Paper Sales, 2008)

Rec. c.175

9. A marquetry binding

Books have always been bound within wooden boards but few match Alan Taral's remarkable pear-wood binding decorated with 'fusion' marquetry made of many different precious wood veneers including palm tree, yew, bubinga, lati, planetree, amboina, elm burrs, thuya and faiera.

Clare Curtis, *A selection of poems on the theme of water* (Oldham, 2008)

Broxb. adds. d.2

10. *Capriccio poems*

Just fifty copies were produced of '*Capricchio*', a collaboration between the American artist Leonard Baskin and his friend, the British poet Ted Hughes. It was issued by Baskin's Gehenna Press in 'the unsettled spring' of 1990. The power of the poems, which draw upon Hughes' relationship with Assia Wevill, is matched by graphic intensity of Baskin's woodcuts. Five separate blocks, now part of the Bodleian's Gehenna Press Archive, were used to create this image.

Ted Hughes, *Capriccio poems* (Gehenna Press, 1990)

Arch. C a.5 and MS. Gehenna Press e.3

11. *Running Rings*

The tree studies in *Running Rings* were inspired by the parkland at Studley Royal, near Ripon. The hand-printed poems are by Phil Madden while the overall design and wood block prints are the work of Paul Kershaw. Issued in an edition of 70 by the Grapho Press in 2018, the book combines the schematic abstractions of metal type with the organic depictions of wood – achieved through wood.

Phil Madden and Paul Kershaw. *Running rings* (Grapho Editions, 2018)

Rec. c.173

12. *The Farmer's Year*

Leighton's vision is of a rural England where agriculture and the people who work the land are depicted on a heroic scale. Her farmers stride across the dramatic landscape and labourers toil purposefully with their hands at a time when the Great Depression and mechanization were changing the countryside forever. Her small woodblocks for the initial letters have survived and a few are on display with the book.

Claire Leighton, *The Farmer's Year* (London, 1933)

Rec. b.4

13. Stone and Wood

'I was hugely influenced by Henry Moore's sculptures – the massive, semi-abstract, primeval figures are the absolute embodiment of rock compared to marble Classical figures where the stone was almost incidental to the subject. That early experience of carving stone strongly influenced the way that I engrave. I start with a rudimentary drawing on the block but a fairly clear idea in my head of what I am aiming for. The first marks can seem quite brutal but the image gradually emerges and the design develops on the block. I'm always confident that the image will emerge from the wood.'

Hilary Paynter

2020 *Vision* (Nomad Press, 2020)

Private loan

14. *Threshing*

Threshing is one of a group of six engravings engraved by John Nash for exhibition in 1922. In this image Nash (1893 – 1977), a founder member of the Society of Wood-Engravers, depicts a steam threshing machine spewing smoke out across a farmyard. The scene is impressionistic and bold, with thick black lines, looming trees and men working with their heads down under a sky threatening rain.

The block has started to split and a clear line can now be seen on the plate where the wood has moved apart.

2020 *Vision* (Nomad Press, 2020)

Private Loan