

William Blake's old neighbourhood in Lambeth, south London, is still scarred by the poverty he decried. The prosperity of areas near the river Thames contrast sharply with wards to the south and west, home to a large influx of refugees and a high proportion of the socially excluded. Lambeth remains one of the most disadvantaged boroughs in London and the UK.

Some of Blake's most haunting poetry was created there on Hercules Road where he drew, painted, engraved and wrote in the last decade of the 18th century, evoking images of children exploited as chimney sweeps and prostitutes, the latter suffering from the widespread gonorrhoea that blinded their newborn. He remains London's prophet of regeneration, envisioning not only its 'dark Satanic mills' but also the redemption of its most undervalued residents. This vision still needs to be fulfilled.

More than 200 years after he wrote his *Songs of Experience*, more than half of London's inner city youth are estimated to be living below the poverty level. They remain under-served and under-challenged.

If William Blake were a child today, he would undoubtedly be labelled as having 'attention deficit disorder' and excluded from school. But his parents never sent him to school. Headstrong and restless, he spent his childhood roaming the neighbourhoods and outlying villages of London, constantly sketching.

Young William was the typical Myers-Briggs ISTP 'artisan' type. 'Possessed of artisan intelligence, ISTP is not in the least interested in the clerical, interpretive and "science" curricula,' clinical psychologist and author David Keirse writes. 'No amount of cajoling, bribery, rewarding, punishing, or threat will get them to do their school work... [But] give them a tool-centred curriculum and watch their speed.'

London's poorest wards today are filled with such young people, restless and impulsive, for whom action is an end in itself. They thrive on excitement and physical challenge, complain of boredom yet become uncannily focused when they are absorbed in a challenge. These young people could be tomorrow's artisans or sculptors or even surgeons — or gang members wielding MAC-10 sub-machine guns and knives.

Blake was apprenticed at 14 to the engraver James Basire who understood the boy's temperament and recognised his talents. That apprenticeship gave him both his career as an artisan and the avenue to

Formal education doesn't capture the talents of all young people and sometimes goes against their very natures. **Jay Harris** believes BlakeSpace may have the answer

The innocence of experience



Colour plate from William Blake's *The Story of Joth* (1795). The poem it illustrates provides a bitter criticism of economic exploitation and political hypocrisy

nurture his own creativity. Blake later invented a new technology, creating 'illuminated books' as composites of visual images and poetry.

London's excluded today need an economic sector with flexible, low-capital prospects for success. They also need an alternative avenue to access skills and enterprise opportunities. Creative industries is that sector; BlakeSpace is the avenue.

London's creative industries sector is growing faster than any major industry except financial and business services, contributing more than £21bn to London's GDP and accounting for between a fifth and a quarter of job growth. But to successfully enter that sector, disadvantaged young people need supportive mentoring that understands their temperaments and recognises their talents.

BlakeSpace is a full-time programme that will provide experience based learning opportunities in high growth sectors of the creative industries to young people and adults who have been excluded from formal academic programmes. Its mission is to create prosperous, intelligent, creative citizens with the capacity to thrive in a constantly evolving economy.

Action-centred and experiential, it will develop students' skills in visual-narrative literacy and craft mastery, as well as analytical skills in communication, problem solving and decision making.

Students will be mentored by arts graduates seeking experience to help them enter into the creative industries sector. Mentors will help students deliver real-world commissions.

BlakeSpace needs visionary lead partners to deliver its mission. Visionary governmental and charity investment. Visionary businesses who will commission students to do work, providing experience and feedback in the process, or recruit talented students for internships, apprenticeships or employment.

Lady Margaret Hall Settlement, the pioneering Oxford charity that has fought poverty in south central London since 1897, is working to help create the first BlakeSpace: the William Blake Artisans School, near the 'Lambeth Vale' where Blake burned into copper plates his acid-etched vision of a London waiting to be redeemed. Other potential partnerships are being discussed for the Thames Gateway, Haringey in north London and for Ghana.

William Blake was the embodiment of the creative artisan. Self-sufficient and fiercely independent, he could keep his dignity because he had the capacity to sustain himself while developing his individuality and fulfilling his creative vision. The next generation deserves nothing less than the opportunity to develop and fulfil its creative, enterprising potential. The next generation deserves its BlakeSpace.

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