

PETER BLAKE: AN ALPHABET

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Peter Blake's 'An Alphabet' is both a tour de force of printmaking and a summation of so many of his artistic concerns. Thematically, the alphabet allows Blake to indulge in his passion for collecting letters and imagery, and yet the finite limits set by an A to Z are quite rigorous and restraining. There is a limitation to working with the alphabet that is not present when working on a canvas where the possibilities are endless; with the alphabet words, objects, and pictures have their place and it becomes a happy antidote to painting. As Blake says "I suppose I love lists. I love songs with lists, like 'These Foolish Things', which has a whole series of lists. And I love things that have a beginning and a very specific ending." Blake's fascination with and stimulation by letters, font and typography was already established by the time he had completed a year of a National Diploma in Graphic Design, just prior to going to the Royal College in 1953.

There is also a beautiful childlike quality to 'An Alphabet' that has its roots in Peter's childhood, which was disrupted by the Second World War when he was evacuated two times, for the first time on the day after war broke out, with the result that "that key age of childhood from seven to fourteen was disrupted". This is not to say the work is childlike but about childhood, or as Mel Gooding writes that has a "knowing innocence" and is "an evocation of a paradise lost".