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## **THE SEALED BOOK: VISIONARY HEADS**

### Mark Shields

24 February – 11 March 2022

Grosvenor Gallery  
35 Bury Street  
London, SW1Y 6AU

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#### **PRESS RELEASE**

Grosvenor Gallery is delighted to announce its upcoming exhibition, **'The Sealed Book: Visionary Heads'**, a collection of **twenty two charcoal works on paper by Mark Shields**. The exhibition will open at the gallery with a private view on **Wednesday, 23 February 2022 from 6-8 pm** and will be on display till **11 March 2022**.

Shortlisted for the 2021 Trinity Buoy wharf drawing prize with his drawings 'Seer' and 'Sybil', the current body of works represent the complete series made directly after. Suggestive of the rich depth of mezzotints, these new works on paper were created after a series of small but turbulent non-representational watercolour and gouache works made at the beginning of 2021, in response to the tangible threats of climate change, pandemic and global unease.

Two hundred years ago, William Blake was at work on a series of drawings which were to become known as 'Visionary Heads'. Blake made these portraits of biblical, historic, and imaginary figures during evenings spent with the watercolourist John Varley, who would later use them as illustrations in his "Treatise on Zodiacal Physiognomy".

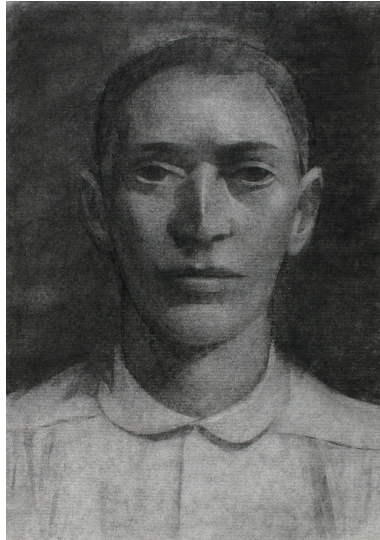
Physiognomy, or the deduction of character from the empirical observations of physical features, has its origins in antiquity but became popular again in the 1600's through alchemical experiments which sought to distil the human essence. In the eighteenth century, J.C. Lavater explored connections between physiognomy and aesthetics and was also to commission Blake as illustrator. Victorian scholars continued to study the 'science of faces', developing theories of ideal geometric proportions, and investigating how different traits, features and expressions affect us.

Sociologist and anthropologist Casare Lombroso (1835-1909) catalogued vast numbers of photographs documenting physical and moral weaknesses; psychiatric patients, criminals, brigands, political agitators, racial types, sexual deviants, etc., in order to establish physical differences which separated such types from 'normal' human behaviours.

The figures of 'The Sealed Book', are neither Blake's spirit visitants nor the attempted categorisations of Lavater and Lombroso, but they bear echoes of both. They seem to look into us, and through us, with an unsettling, sad and perhaps accusing gaze. Neither angels nor criminals, these are faces of those who are themselves given to visions, who seem touched and burdened by a deeper wisdom. All clothed in the same timeless garment, reminiscent of institution or religious order, they form an ascetic community inclined to intuition, inspiration, and imagination. These faces of the sealed book challenge our fears and suspicions and invite us to open their Book of Vision, the apocalyptic book.



1.



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3.

1. *Sealed Book IX*, 2021, Charcoal on paper
2. *Sealed Book XVI*, 2021, Charcoal on paper
3. *Sealed Book XXI*, 2021, Charcoal on paper

**FOR A FULL BIOGRAPHY OF THE ARTIST PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE  
TO ACCESS HIGH RES IMAGES OF THE WORKS PLEASE CLICK [HERE](#)**

**FOR ALL PRESS INQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:**

art@grosvenorgallery.com

+44 (0)20 7484 7979

Instagram: @grosvenorgallery

Twitter: @grosvenorart

Facebook: @grosvenorgallery

Opening Hours:

Weekdays: 10am – 5pm

Saturday: By appointment Only (12 – 4pm)

**Directors** Conor M Macklin, Charles Moore

**Associate Director** Kajoll Khanna

**Registered in England No.** 2914566

**VAT registration No.** 645 2528 36

**Registered Office** Kingfisher House

No. 11 Hoffmanns Way Chelmsford Essex CM1 1GU

**Grosvenor Gallery  
(Fine Arts) Ltd**  
35 Bury Street  
London  
SW1Y 6AY

T +44 (0)20 7484 7979

E art@grosvenorgallery.com  
www.grosvenorgallery.com