One must be serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life.

— Oscar Wilde—

“Édition originale” of Blaise Pascal’s posthumously collected writings on religion. Pascal established his brilliance early, inventing the mechanical calculator, developing the field of probability theory with Fermat, and breaking new ground in projective geometry, hydrodynamics, and hydrostatics. One night in 1654, Pascal experienced a mystical vision that inspired him to renounce his scientific career; after his death, a scrap of paper was found sewn into the lining of his coat recalling that night: “Joie, joie, joie, pleurs de joie.” Pascal joined the Jansenists, a sect of radical Augustinian Catholics, and embarked on a defense of his faith, placing probability theory in service to theology in his provocative wager on the existence of God. He engaged directly with the philosophical debates of the day, notably those raised by Descartes and Montaigne, and proved magnetic even to those who disagreed with him: Voltaire described Pascal as a giant he wanted to battle. Text in French. This 1670 issue was preceded by an issue of about thirty copies, labeled the “préoriginale” by bibliographer Le Guern, printed for submission to the censors: only two copies of the 1669 issue are known to survive.


First color reproductions of William Blake’s illuminated Songs of Innocence (1789) and Songs of Experience (1794), preceded only by the hand-colored copies printed by Blake himself. Startlingly vivid and direct, these short visionary lyrics include “The Lamb,” “The Chimney Sweeper,” “Ah! Sunflower,” “London,” and “The Tyger”: “When the stars threw down their spears, / And watered heaven with their tears, / Did He smile his work to see? / Did He, Who made the lamb, make thee?” Few nineteenth-century readers had any sense of how Blake’s poems were originally presented, each text etched within a vividly hand-colored image in the technique Blake called “illuminated printing.” In 1884, William Muir set out to produce a series of historically accurate color reproductions of Blake’s illuminated works, beginning with Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience. Working in lithography, Muir printed fifty copies of each volume, each meticulously colored by hand in imitation of Blake’s originals. A milestone in English publishing.

One of the earliest drawing manuals published in Italy. Opening with images of the human eye, the manual examines the anatomy of other isolated features, then turns to character studies of various ages and types in action. The copper engravings reproduce designs by the young Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri), the Italian Baroque painter known for his fluid, naturalistic early style.

Joshua Reynolds; [John Singer Sargent]. The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds. London: Bell and Daldy, 1872-1873. Two octavo volumes, original green cloth. Bookplate of John Singer Sargent to both pastedowns, Sargent’s signature and “Christmas 1874” inscribed in both volumes. $1200.

Victorian set of the writings of eighteenth-century English painter Joshua Reynolds, the first president of London’s Royal Academy of Arts, and the leading society portraitist of his era. From the library of the great nineteenth-century American portraitist, John Singer Sargent, who like Reynolds immortalized the leading figures of his day in the grand manner.


First edition of Maurice Denis’s iconic modernist coloring book. A founding member of the group of French painters known as Les Nabis, Denis was invited by editor Henri Laurens to contribute to his series of art books for children. In response, Denis produced this series of dreamlike French landscapes: vibrant scenes of villages and mountains, countryside and seashore, with captions by Denis that provide a running commentary on his creative process. In 1912, the bibliophilic society “Les XX” commissioned a deluxe edition of twenty signed copies, featuring an extra plate and multiple impressions of each image. This inexpensive trade edition, while less lavishly produced, reflects the book’s original identity as a cheerful, ephemeral activity book.

[Oscar Wilde]. The Importance of Being Earnest. A Trivial Comedy for Serious People by the Author of Lady Windermere’s Fan. London: Leonard Smithers, 1899. Small quarto, original mauve cloth gilt, housed in a custom box. $4500.

First trade edition of Oscar Wilde’s virtuosic comedy of mistaken identity, his last and best play, one of 1000 copies. The farcical plot is secondary to Wilde’s brilliant dialogue, which flirts with absurdity but never wholly commits: “Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone.” The Importance of Being Earnest was an immediate popular and critical success, but Wilde’s 1895 conviction for “gross indecency” put an end to the play’s run. His name appears nowhere in the published edition.


First edition of Oscar Wilde’s first book of poems, one of 250 copies. By his mid-twenties, Wilde had enjoyed considerable success as a poet, and published this handsomely printed collection at his own expense. Disappointed by the book’s sales, Wilde turned from poetry to the more profitable genres of fiction and drama, but always considered himself a poet before all, declaring that he would be remembered as “the infamous St Oscar of Oxford, Poet and Martyr.” A fine copy of a major literary debut, splendidly bound by Root & Son.

First edition of Hughes’s poems about the midcentury migration of African-Americans to the cities of the north: “I do not need my freedom when I’m dead. / I cannot live on tomorrow’s bread. / Freedom / Is a strong seed / Planted / In a great need.” Jacob Lawrence’s stark black-and-white illustrations extend the themes of his 1941 series *The Migration of the Negro*, the first paintings by a black artist to be acquired by the Museum of Modern Art. Hughes has warmly inscribed this copy to Moses Asch, founder of Folkways, the first major independent label dedicated to the preservation of American folk music and traditions. The book is accompanied by an early reissue of *The Glory of Negro History*, written and narrated by Hughes and recorded by Asch in 1955: Hughes traces African-American history from the forgotten black explorers of the New World, through the slave trade and emancipation, culminating in the rise of the Civil Rights movement. A remarkable presentation copy, testifying to the friendship between two American pioneers.


First edition, second issue, of Gaultier’s celebrated series depicting the legend of Cupid and Psyche. The narrative is drawn from the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, better known as *The Golden Ass*. That second-century Latin novel was revived in the fourteenth century, and popularized by way of Boccaccio and countless others: the forbidden love between Cupid and Psyche, god and mortal, body and soul, captivated the Renaissance imagination. Léonard Gaultier was the official engraver to the French court from 1594 to 1617. His delicate, sometimes whimsical engravings are the culmination of a long pictorial tradition: scenes of note include Psyche illuminating the sleeping Cupid by lamplight, Venus crossing the ocean astride a fantastic dolphin, and Psyche feeding the three-headed dog Cerberus. This copy is second issue, circa 1590, without Gaultier’s name and the date 1586 in the final plate: both issues are very scarce, and this copy appears to be the largest on record. Text in French. A beautiful copy of a beautiful book, in an unusual and ornate armorial binding by Edinburgh binder Orrock & Son.
Illustrated English edition of Erasmus’s *The Praise of Folly*, a high spot of Renaissance humanism, first published as *Moriae Encomium* in 1511. Erasmus wrote the essay during a visit to his friend Thomas More in England: the punning title suggests praise for More as well as Folly. This parody of a classical *encomium*, in which the goddess Folly makes the case for herself as mankind’s great benefactor, remains Erasmus’s most influential work: in his opening letter, he writes, “I am apt to believe I have praised Folly in such a Manner as not to have deserved the Name of a Fool for my Pains.” Erasmus’s long view of human nature, opposed to the extremes of both the Catholic Church and Martin Luther’s Reformation, made his name a byword for intellectual freedom. Painter Hans Holbein, who would produce the defining portrait of Erasmus as Renaissance man, decorated the margins of Erasmus’s own copy of *The Praise of Folly* with a series of grotesque pen and ink sketches. Those original drawings were reproduced as engravings, serving as illustrations in dozens of future editions, including this one, the first English edition to feature them.

First edition, one of 150 numbered copies, with fourteen Art Deco fashion plates inspired by the Greek myths and hand-colored in pochoir. Thomas Lowinsky’s surreal illustrations include “Circe and Cocktails Prepared for the Fleet,” “Danae Waiting for the Weather Report on the Wireless,” “Helen Turns Modiste to Retrieve Her Fallen Fortunes,” and “Clyte Abandons the Old Sun for the New” (an early depiction of indoor tanning). With an introductory essay on modern clothes by art critic Raymond Mortimer, member of the Bloomsbury group: “our feeling for the stream-line seems an indestructible part of the civilisation in which we live. We insist on it in motor-cars, we are beginning to prefer it in architecture and we are unlikely to lose our taste for it in women.”


Broadside of twenty-four vividly hand-colored cards, each depicting a costumed ethnic character and a riddle, with answers provided at the base of the sheet. At Twelfth Night celebrations marking the close of the Christmas season, each party guest would draw a card, and impersonate that character for the evening: King of Peace, Queen of Mirth, Ismail Pacha, The English Rose, Cossack of the Don, How-Ching, Paddy O’Toole, The Yankee Girl, and so on. The riddles favor bad puns: “Why is a disagreeable woman like a male pig? Because she’s a Bore.” “Why is London Bridge like the House of Lords? Because it is supported by Piers.” Publisher Park issued a series of Twelfth Night character cards with different themes: this set depicts national caricatures from Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the United States. A near-fine survival.

Signed first edition of these poems chronicling the rise of Billie Holiday’s career. Borrowing their titles from her songs, Weatherford’s poems explore Lady Day’s rough childhood in Baltimore, her early gigs in Harlem, and her defining performance of “Strange Fruit” at the age of 25.


Inscribed first edition of two-time Caldecott medalist Raschka’s visual tribute to Thelonious Monk. Raschka matches the musical notes of the chromatic scale to the values of the color wheel, transposing the sounds of Monk’s “Misterioso” into paint.


Signed first edition of Raschka’s celebration of John Coltrane, in which the musical elements of Coltrane’s “Giant Steps” are performed by a box, a snowflake, some raindrops, and a kitten.


Signed first edition of Golio’s panoramic tribute to Charlie “Bird” Parker and John “Dizzy” Gillespie, a running commentary on their 1945 bebop collaboration “Salt Peanuts,” extending to a length of almost ten feet.

[Anne Margaret Polhill]. *Parisian Sketchbook*. Several places, mostly Paris: (1828-1830). Quarto sketchbook, contemporary red paper-covered boards. 45 pages of drawings, most in ink over pencil, with eight in ink wash and two in watercolor. Three additional sketches laid in. $4500.

Comic sketchbook of an Englishwoman abroad, most drawings dated between 1828 and 1830. Married in 1823, Brighton residents Anne and Edward Polhill had three children in quick succession, and relocated to Paris to live more economically. Anne’s lively drawings reflect the experience of a young family in transition: scenes of apartment hunting, strolls in the park, children at school, and balls in the evening. Parisian landmarks, including the Tuileries and the Place du Carrousel, provide the backdrop for wry sketches of prevailing manners and modes. A man on the street is captivated by a young lady’s “boa constrictor,” a sharp contrast emerges between good and bad chaperones at a ball, the jilted Prince Royal dances with a “jolie parfumeuse.” Polhill also records the July Revolution of 1830, depicting shocked Englishwomen spying on soldiers in the Place Vendôme: “Madame, they are shooting the King’s head off. True it is a bronze head, but that is equally frightful.” A delightful artifact.

Nineteenth-century stained glass window depicting the English epic poet John Milton. The central portrait includes the usual Miltonic signifiers: the three-quarter view, direct gaze, flowing locks, austere black robe, and white collar. This is Milton as a young man, with no sign of his impending blindness. Of particular interest are the four grisaille images that border the portrait, featuring characters from Paradise Lost. At bottom left is Satan, cast out of heaven, with a leering serpent coiled around his body, as William Blake memorably depicts him in his illustrations for the poem. Moving clockwise, the viewer encounters the archangel Raphael, who counsels Adam and Eve in Eden, and the archangel Michael, who leads them out after the Fall. At lower right are Adam and Eve, downcast, in their improvised “vain covering” of fig leaves: “O how unlike / To that first naked Glory.” An unusual and striking portrait of one of the greatest English poets.


Stunning fine press edition of John Milton’s 1644 essay on the freedom of the press, a forceful protest against Parliament’s re-establishment of censorship during the English Civil War. Milton’s most celebrated line is chiseled over the entrance of the New York Public Library’s Main Reading Room: “a good Booke is the pretious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalm’d & treasur’d up on purpose to a life beyond life.” Founded by Lucien and Esther Pissarro in 1894, the Eragny Press was distinguished by a distinctive mix of French Impressionist and English Arts and Crafts styles. Their Areopagitica was first printed in October 1903, but a fire at the bindery destroyed most of the run. This second issue, printed in March 1904, consisted of 160 copies. A beautifully printed and bound example of Milton’s classic defense of free speech.


James Boswell (editor). The Table Talk of Dr. Johnson: Comprising Opinions and Anecdotes of Life and Literature, Men, Manners, and Morals. London, 1825. Copper-engraved frontispiece. $300.


Jacques de Grasset de Saint-Sauveur. Encyclopédie des voyages, Contenant l’abrégé historique des moeurs, usages, habitudes domestiques, religions, fêtes, supplices, funérailles, sciences, arts, et commerce de tous les peuples. Europe (I-II), Asie (III), Afrique (IV), Amérique (V). (Paris): chez l’Auteur; chez Deroy, Libraire; chez les principaux Libraires de la République, 1796. 72 parts divided into five quarto volumes, bound in four, early nineteenth-century full vellum with central arabesques tooled in blind. Four engraved frontispieces and 434 engraved plates depicting the peoples of the world, hand-colored and heightened in gold. $24,000.

Complete first edition of this hand-colored encyclopedia of the peoples of five continents, an ambitious Enlightenment-era survey of the known world. French diplomat Jacques Grasset recorded the customs and costumes of each local population, from the provinces of France through increasingly remote civilizations, concluding with the latest discoveries in the New World. The lasting appeal of the work lies in the hundreds of vividly hand-colored plates, framed as glimpses into everyday life: a turbaned Moor with his camel, Bohemian peasants toasting in a tavern, a Senegalese warrior carrying both spear and gun, an Indian nabab with parasol and hookah, a Caribbean drummer and dancers, a French housewife surrounded by her pets, a Chinese Buddhist monk, an Indonesian astride an elephant, Turkish women enjoying the baths, a group of young Russians sledding. Text in French. A spectacular extra-illustrated set, in a handsome early binding.


First and only edition of French illustrator George Barbier’s masterpiece, Falbalas & Fanfreluches, one of 600 copies, complete with sixty vibrant pochoir plates. Barbier’s brilliant eye for color, lively historical imagination, and expertly controlled line made him one of the most sought-after artists of his day: he designed costumes for the Folies Bergère and the Ballets Russes, covered the latest styles for Journal des Dames et des Modes and Gazette du Bon Ton, and produced advertising for Renault and Cartier. In this series of five almanacs, issued from 1922 to 1926, Barbier finally enjoyed complete artistic control. Light literary content is provided by a series of stylish Parisiennes, including novelist Colette and actress Cécile Sorel, but the primary appeal of the work lies in Barbier’s iconic pochoir plates, each requiring up to thirty stencils to achieve his characteristically rich colors. His theme is romance, past and present: from secret liaisons in distant lands to the open flirtations of the Jazz Age, all presented with a sympathetic wink. Some of the most famous plates include his interpretations of the Seven Deadly Sins, featuring Proust-reading opium smokers in “La Paresse” and champagne-toasting restaurant diners in “La Gourmandise.” Text in French. A landmark of Art Deco illustration.

Complete set of Anglo-Irish educator and novelist Maria Edgeworth’s Tales of Fashionable Life: the second edition of Volumes I-III, and the first edition of Volumes IV-VI. Known as “the Great Maria,” Edgeworth was widely acclaimed in her day: her emphasis on practical, hands-on education for children was influential on both sides of the Atlantic, and bestsellers like Castle Rackrent and Belinda inspired a generation of English novelists. Tales of Fashionable Life includes a series of short works, most notably the short novel The Absentee, which impressed writers as diverse as Walter Scott, Ivan Turgenev, and John Ruskin. This set was part of the library at Ashley Combe in Somerset, built in 1799 and improved in 1835 for the benefit of Ada Byron, daughter of poet Lord Byron and young bride of William King, later the First Earl of Lovelace. A gifted polymath, Ada Lovelace would work with mathematician Charles Babbage on his Difference Engine and Analytical Engine, and her notes on the latter, which contain an algorithm for generating Bernoulli numbers, are often cited as the first computer program. In 1886, the Earl purchased the Ben Damph Forest in Scotland, and built Ben Damph House, where these books eventually settled. An attractive set, offering a connection to two pioneering nineteenth-century Englishwomen.

First edition, second issue, of this collection of games and puzzles, arts and crafts, magic tricks and secret codes, and scientific experiments inspired by the likes of Boyle. Some have clear practical application (how to make wax candles), others less so (how to inflict shocks with a homemade battery).


First edition of this brilliantly hand-colored introduction to world geography for French children. Among the many cities pictured are Amsterdam, Moscow, Krakow, Berlin, Venice, Madrid, Constantinople, Peking, Mecca, Cairo, New Orleans, Washington (looking entirely rustic), and Buenos Aires.


First American edition of this influential science primer, first published in Dutch between 1777 and 1779. Beginning with “the innumerable heavenly lights,” the work turns to topics in chemistry, geology, zoology, and botany, illuminating the wonders of the natural world. Very scarce.


Early American edition of this abridged collection of pragmatic advice to his son: “The general rule is to have a real reserve with almost every one, and a seeming reserve with almost no one.”


Early edition of this popular American anthology, first published in 1800. Highlights include anecdotes of Confucius and Demosthenes, Hotspur’s soliloquy, and Henry Lee’s funeral oration for George Washington: “to be truly great, you must be truly good.”

Complete set of these striking writing patterns, first published in 1935. A pioneer in English arts education, Richardson taught handwriting by encouraging children to draw. Her method introduces increasingly complex patterns constructed out of basic handwriting strokes, paired with examples of literary texts to be copied, from nursery rhymes in Book I to passages from Shakespeare and Hardy in Book V.


First edition of this survey of four centuries of calligraphy, a presentation copy inscribed by editor Jan Tschichold, one of the most influential typographers of the twentieth century. Tschichold compiled the *Schatzkammer* as a source book shortly before he moved to England, where he pioneered Penguin's iconic postwar paperback design. Text in German. Featured calligraphers include Palatino in sixteenth-century Rome, van den Velde in seventeenth-century Rotterdam, Bickham in eighteenth-century London, and Stirling in nineteenth-century Barcelona.

First octavo edition of this Enlightenment-era emblem book, first published as a folio in 1759 in Parma, where sculptor Jean-Baptiste Boudard worked at the peak of his career. Boudard’s Iconologie features one symbolic engraving per page, alphabetically arranged from Abondance to Zèle, each accompanied by an explanatory caption. The range, detail, and animation of Boudard’s engravings are remarkable. He depicts ideas and emotions, monsters and muses, concepts of time and qualities of character, with a marked emphasis on the arts and sciences: Imprimerie is a woman setting SEMPER UBIQUE in type, while Thetis wears her great open compass like a halo. Domination, head wreathed by a serpent with a lion at his feet, faces Douceur, who cradles a lamb and a dove in the shadow of a watchful elephant. Taken together, the emblems are greater than the sum of their carefully explicated parts, proceeding with a dream logic of their own. Text in French. A near-fine copy of a striking allegorical encyclopedia.


First edition in English of Plato’s Republic, translated by Scottish classicist Henry Spens “to stir up the youth to the study of the Ancients,” and published by the Foulis brothers at the University of Glasgow. In the most influential of Plato’s dialogues, Socrates leads a debate on the character of the just city and the just man. The allegory of the cave in Book VII, which dramatizes the possibilities and limits of enlightenment, remains a touchstone for educators: “when at any time he sees one in confusion, and unable to perceive any thing, he will not laugh in an unreasonable manner, but will consider, whether the soul, coming from a more enlightened life, be darkened by ignorance, or going from prevailing ignorance, to a life more enlightened, be filled with the dazzling splendor, and so will congratulate the one on its fate and life, and compassionate the life and fate of the other.” Spens’s translation, once eclipsed by Thomas Taylor’s collected edition of 1804, was revived in the twentieth century in the Everyman’s Library series of pocket classics. The recipient of this copy, George Dempster of Dunnichen, was a member of Parliament who moved in the same Scottish Enlightenment circles as David Hume, Adam Ferguson, William Robertson, and James Boswell. A handsome presentation copy of a landmark in Western philosophy.

First edition of New York street photographer Bill Cunningham’s only book, a collaboration with artist Editta Sherman, the “Duchess of Carnegie Hall.” Between 1968 and 1976, Cunningham took thousands of photographs of Sherman in vintage clothing, featuring Manhattan architecture of each period as her backdrop: an Empire-waisted muslin gown paired with City Hall (1802-1811), a Victorian hoop skirt with Cooper Union (1859), a pleated Fortuny gown with the Stock Exchange (1903), a modernistic domed hat with the Guggenheim Museum (1959). Cunningham scouted locations by bicycle, and Sherman arrived by bus or subway, so as not to wrinkle the clothes. Playful as the photographs are, Cunningham’s keen attention to detail gives the collection real historical value; *Façades* dates from the same era as the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, created in response to the casual destruction of Penn Station. First exhibited in 1977 at the Fashion Institute of Technology, Cunningham’s photographs are now part of the permanent collection at the New-York Historical Society.

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