

Albrecht Durer

B. 21 May 1471 Nuremberg, Germany

D. 6 April 1528, Nuremberg, Germany

Durer was the third child (second son) of his parents. Records differ, but he eventually had between thirteen to seventeen siblings !

Albrecht's parents were Hungarian immigrants who settled in Nuremberg. The family's original last name was "Turer", but the reason he's known as "Durer" was because the accent of Germany meant the German's pronounced the name with a D, and not a T—and eventually, spelling followed the accent of the family's new homeland. "Turer", in Hungarian, meant "doormaker", and when

Albrecht Durer chose to invent his own coat-of-arms in 1525, he chose the image of an open door as a deliberate play on his family's name.

His father was a goldsmith, and many of the Durer boys initially trained as goldsmiths. Woodcarving uses many similar techniques as metal engraving, so this training eventually helped him create his works!

In addition to the woodcuts for which he is famous, Durer also worked in oil paints, watercolors, and even wrote a book on how to use mathematics to draw a proportional human.

Durer was so skilled a draftsman, he was famous and a self-supporting professional by his early 20s.

His home still stands in Nuremberg, and scholars still have access letters Durer wrote during his lifetime. We know he corresponded with artist Raphael, Giovanni Bellini, and scientist-artist DaVinci (through a secondary person).

Because each woodcut plate could be made until dozens of images, Durer's woodcuts could quickly be traded and travel throughout Europe, helping spread his reputation and spark the "Northern Renaissance" in art.



One of Durer's many self-portraits. He is 26, and dressed himself as a fashionable young aristocrat.



The Adoration of the Magi (1501 – 1502) (Plate #11 in the “Life of the Virgin” cycle)

Albrecht Durer (1471 – 1528)

Woodcut on Paper

Look at Durer’s compositions of the Wise men and see how it compares to the way Giotto, Ghiberti, and Fra Angelico created their works of the wise men.



The Adoration of the Magi (1504)

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)

Oil on Panel

38.9" x 44.6" (99 cm x 113.5 cm)

Uffizi Gallery, Florence

This painting was commissioned by Frederick III the Wise, Elector of Saxony (1463 -1525). Frederick the Wise is most commonly known in history as the protector of a stubborn German ex-monk named Martin Luther. This piece was designed for the altar at All Saint's Church in Wittenberg and was likely hanging over the high altar on October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther pinned his 95 Thesis to the Community bulletin board (aka, the All Saint's Church Door). In 1605, when the painting was 100 years old, it was gifted the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, who admired Dürer and collected his work. Later, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence swapped one of their paintings for this one. It hangs in Florence to this day.

Fun Fact: The wise man in green is a self-portrait Albrecht Dürer!



The Resurrection of Christ (small) 1511

Albrecht Dürer(1471 – 1528)

Woodcut Print

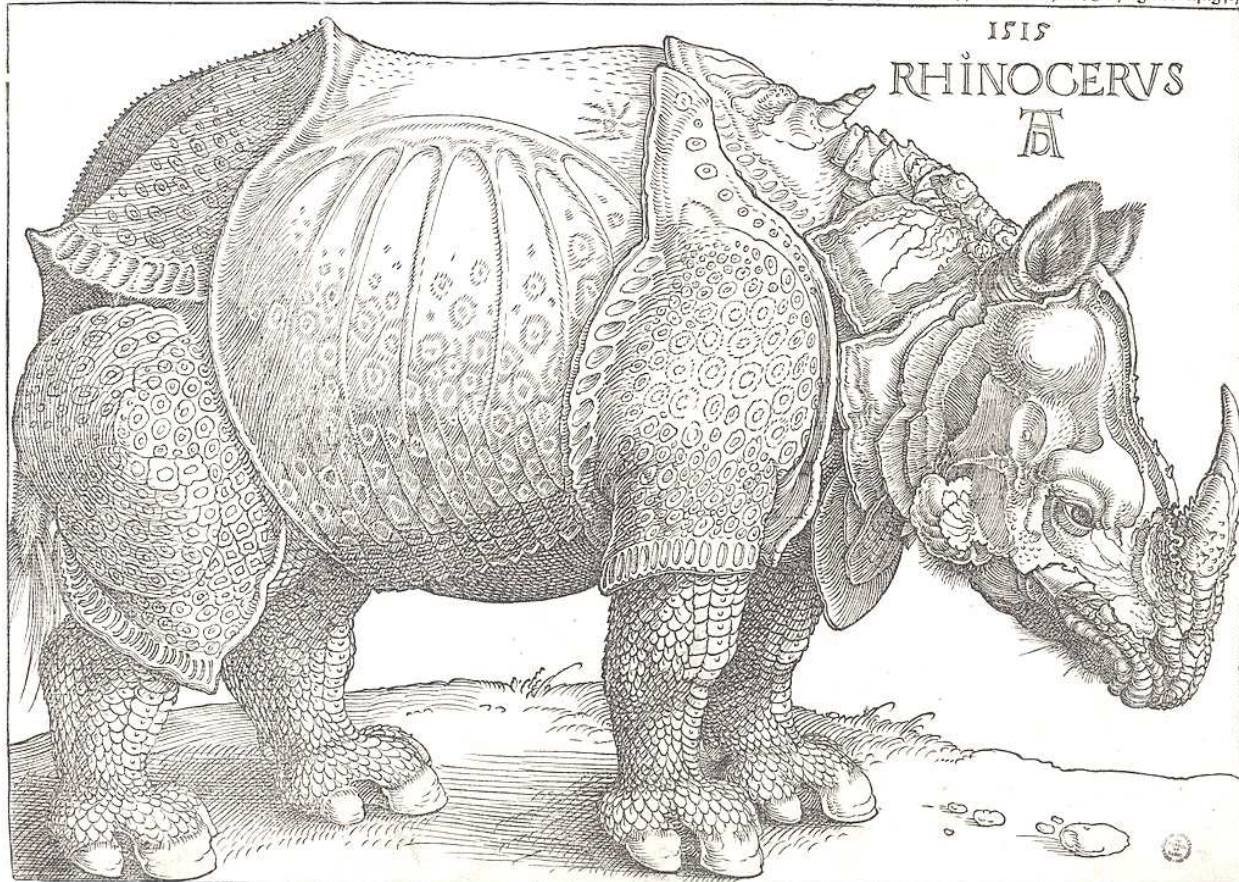
British Museum, London, England



“Melancholia I”

This is one of the most famous woodcuts in history. Named “Melancholia”, no one is sure what Durer was trying to convey, and he left no clues. Some think the angel is a depiction of depression, which Durer may have suffered from. Others believe the angel represents the creative muse, waiting for inspiration. Some tools surrounding the angel, like the nails, the straight edge, the wood plane, seem to reference the craftsmen arts like carpentry. Other tools like the “magic number” square (early type of math game, similar to sudoku) geometrical forms (sphere, rhomboidal shape) reference math. Various symbols, tools, and items surround the angel and may (or may not) lead to clues about what Durer was thinking when he composed this. Ultimately, art scholars and historians have enjoyed debating the various meanings behind this image.

Nach Christus gepurt. 1513. Jar. Abt. 1. May. Hat man den grosmechtigen Künig von Portugall Emanuel gen Kysabona vracht auß India ein sollich lebendig Thier. Das nennen sie Rhinocerus. Das ist hyr mit aller sener geist als Absonderter. Es hat ein farb wie ein gesprenckter Schildkrot. Vnd ist vß dicken Schalen vberlegt fast fest. Vnd ist in der größ als der Sclfand. Aber nyderrechter von paynen vnd fast wechafftig. Es hat ein schauff stark. So in vorn auff der nase. Das begynde es also zu wegen wo es bey staynen ist. Das dösfig Thier ist des Sclfs fang rotte fernde. Der Sclfsfand fürcht es fast vbel/dann wo es in ankumbe/so laufft in das Thier mit den kopff zwischen dye foderen payn vnd reyst den Sclfsfand vnden am pauch auff vñ erwürgt in/des mag er sich nit erwehren. Dann das Thier ist also gewapent/das in der Sclfsfand nichts kan thun. Sie sagen auch das der Rhinocerus Schnell/straydig vnd Listig sey.



Rhinoceros (1515)

Print (above) and Preparatory sketch (right)

One of Durer's most recognizable works has a strange story behind it. Durer never saw a rhinoceros in person. But he certainly heard about it from someone who did. This was the first rhinoceros in Europe since Roman Emperor Philip the Arab (204-249) brought one to Rome in AD 248. This image became THE image of a rhino for nearly 200 years.



FUN FACT: Durer included a “hornlet” on the shoulders of the rhino for some reason—this marks Durer's rhino from the other print made at this time of this animal. The animal was gifted to Pope Leo X (the pope who excommunicated Martin Luther) but died en route to him.

VOCAB:

Printmaking:

In art, printmaking is the process of creating multiple original works of art through the creation of a print plate and the resulting prints. While each print is one of a series, each individual print is considered a work of art in its own right. Printing using a mass-produced system like computer printers is not considered to be “printmaking” in the artist’s sense.

Print Plate:

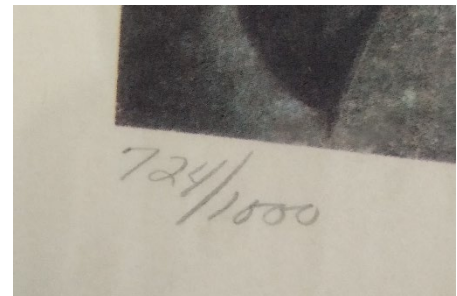
The original plate which is carved, engraved, etched, or coated to hold ink in a particular image. Each proof is then printed off of this plate, and the pattern on the plate defines what the print will look like. Print plates can be made of wood, (like Durer’s works) metal, stone, or even silk (silk-screening). The print plate is often, but not always, mirror image of the final print, so writing will appear “backwards” on the plate.



This print would be printed first, in color, secondly, in black and white. Finished print from these plates on the right. Own collection.

Print:

An image which was created by transferring ink from a print plate to the final surface. In the art world, prints are often identified by a fraction found on the print. The denominator is the total number of prints in the “run” from the same plate, and the numerator shows which number this individual print is in the run. For example on the right, this print bears the fraction 724/1000, the 1000 means there were 1,000 prints made from this particular plate, and this specific print, was the 724th print created out of the 1,000. The lower the number (for both numerator and denominator) the higher the value of the print.



[Artist’s] Proof:

A print that is run just once by the artist to check the progress of the plate’s creation. Often labeled “AP” for “Artist’s Proof”, these are particularly valuable for collectors, since they can show the progression of a piece.