

The German Renaissance

Parallel to and influenced by the blossoming of ideas in Italy during the 13th to 16th centuries, developments in political and religious thinking, technical advances in printing, the humanities: art and architecture, north of the Alps led to what is now regarded as an equally important Northern Renaissance. As a consequence significant changes occurred in France, England, the Low Countries, Poland and Germany.

The Renaissance was largely driven by the renewed interest in classical learning, and was also the result of rapid economic development. At the beginning of the 16th century, Germany (referring to the lands contained within the Holy Roman Empire) was one of the most prosperous areas in Europe despite a relatively low level of urbanization compared to Italy or the Netherlands. It benefited from the wealth of certain sectors such as metallurgy, mining, banking and textiles. More importantly, book-printing developed in Germany, and German printers dominated the new book-trade in most other countries until well into the 16th century.

In what is known as the **German Renaissance** many areas of the arts and sciences were influenced, notably by the spread of Renaissance humanism to the various German states and principalities, many advances being made in the fields of architecture, the arts, and the sciences. Germany produced two developments that were to dominate the 16th century all over Europe: printing and the Protestant Reformation. Most notable among the artists were the contemporaries **Matthias Grünewald**, (c. 1470 – 1528) **Albrecht Dürer** (1471 – 1528) and **Lucas Cranach the Elder** (c. 1472 – 1553).

Matthias Grünewald (c. 1470 – 1528) left very few works, only ten paintings—several consisting of many panels—and thirty-five drawings survive, all religious, although many others were lost at sea in the Baltic on their way to Sweden as war booty. His reputation was obscured until the late nineteenth century, and many of his paintings were attributed to Albrecht Dürer, who is now seen as his stylistic antithesis. This drawing of **Saint John the Evangelist** (between 1512 and 1514) was thought to be a self portrait, but is now disputed.



The details of his life are unusually unclear for a painter of his significance at this date, despite the fact that his commissions show that he had reasonable recognition in his own lifetime. The first source for his biography describes him around 1505 in Frankfurt working on the exterior decoration of an altarpiece by Dürer. This is the sort of work typically performed by apprentices and therefore, by this reckoning, an estimate of his date of birth would be c. 1475. He has been described as leading a withdrawn and melancholy life, and marrying unhappily.

In 1511 he became court artist to the Archbishops of Mainz, Uriel von Gemmingen and Albert of Brandenburg. In 1512 he settled in nearby Frankfurt where records indicate he bought a house and married Anna, a converted Jew, then probably aged 18. The marriage was not happy and in 1523 she was institutionalised with what is variously described as mental illness and demonic possession.



From 1512 to 1514 or 1515 he worked on the Isenheim altarpiece, apparently in partnership with another Mathis, variously surnamed Nithart, Neithart, von Würzburg (after his place of birth), or Gothardt. Grünewald seems to have left Isenheim in a hurry, returning to Frankfurt, and his subsequent poverty suggests he was not fully paid for the altarpiece. In 1527 he entered the services of the wealthy and noble von Erbach family, apparently with a child (whether his own or adopted, is unclear). He most probably died in 1532, although sources vary.

The Mocking of Christ (1503–1505) is an early oil on wood painting

Christ sits blindfolded on a low stone wall. His hands and arms are bound with a rope. A torturer who pulls on the rope stands before him, with his back turned to the viewer. Another stands behind Christ and tugs on his hair and has raised his fist to strike him. On the right is a man with a staff in his left hand, while with his other he holds back the second torturer, who appears not to notice him.

An older man faces the man with the staff, and lays his hands upon

the latter's shoulders, and appears to be conversing with him. In the background are three further men: on the left a musician who plays a flute with one hand while beating a small drum with the other, a youth near the centre of the image, and an older man on the right.

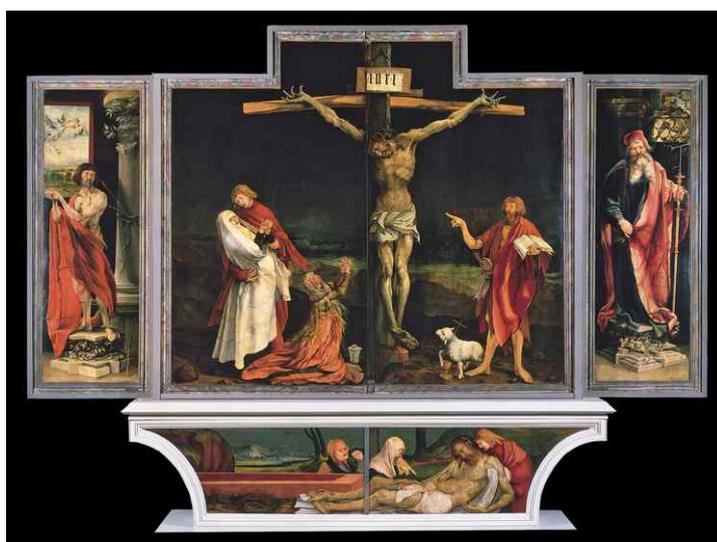


Grünewald's largest and most famous work, the *Isenheim Altarpiece* created c 1512 to 1516, has been widely regarded as the greatest German Renaissance painting since it was restored to critical attention in the 19th century. It is an intensely emotional work that continues the German Gothic tradition of unrestrained gesture and expression, using Renaissance compositional principles, but all in that most Gothic of forms, the multi-winged triptych.

It was painted for the Monastery of Saint Anthony in Isenheim near Colmar, which specialized in hospital work, and is now on display at the Unterlinden Museum at Colmar, Alsace, in France. The Antonine monks of the monastery were noted for their care of plague sufferers as well as their treatment of skin diseases, such as ergotism. The image of the crucified Christ is pitted with plague-type sores, showing patients that Jesus understood and shared their afflictions. The veracity of the work's depictions of medical conditions was unusual in the history of European art. The sculpted surround of the altarpiece, is attributed to **Nikolaus of Hagenauer** (c. 1445/1460 — before 1538).

Its nine images on twelve panels are arranged on double wings to present three views according to the season or occasion. As well as being by far his greatest surviving work, the altarpiece contains most of his surviving painting by surface area, being 2.65 metres high and over 5 metres wide at its fullest extent.

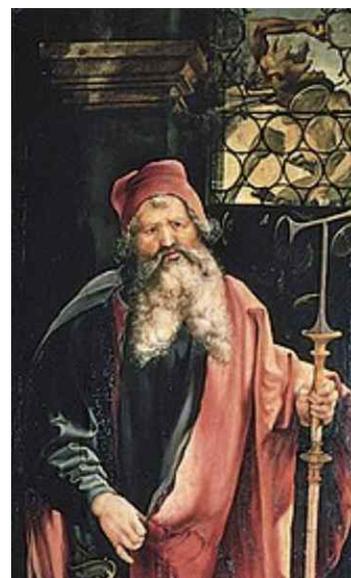
The healing function of the hospital appears to have been crucial in the commissioning of the altarpiece and also appears to have had a major effect on its contents. Patients at the hospital would presumably be afflicted with both agonising pain and mortal fear. They may also have had deep feelings of guilt arising from the



belief that Satan had caused their disease as a result of their sins. Those who had access to the chapel, even if only infrequently, could therefore easily identify with the torments suffered by both Christ and St Anthony.

Wings closed:

With the exception of certain holy days, the wings of the altarpiece were kept closed, displaying *The Crucifixion* framed, on the left, by the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian pierced by arrows, and on the right by Saint Anthony the Great, remaining placid although he is being taunted by a frightening monster. The two saints protect and heal the sick, Saint Anthony as the patron saint of the victims of Saint Anthony's fire and Saint Sebastian, whose aid was invoked to ward off the plague.

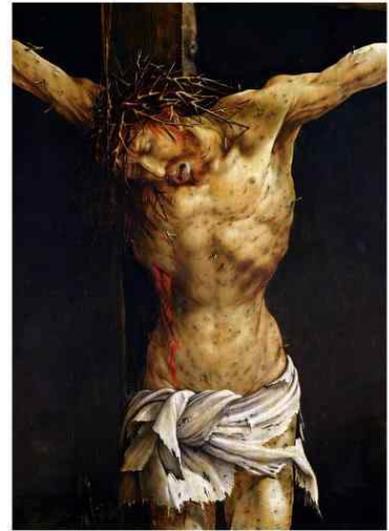




Grünewald's Crucifixion stands as one of the most poignant representations of this scene in Western art due to the artist's masterful depiction of horrific agony, with Christ's emaciated body writhing under the pain of the nails driven through his hands and feet.



In a depiction not common at the time, Christ is portrayed as a writhing, emaciated, contorted, sore-blotched body in terminal agony, complete with dirty toenails, cadaverous greenish skin, dislocated shoulders and hands clawed in pain. The general nightmarishness is accentuated by the dark setting, reflecting the "darkness all over the earth" that the Bible records as occurring at the time Christ commended his spirit to God.



This body covered with sores and riddled with thorns must have terrified the sick, but also left no doubt about Christ's suffering, thus comforting them in their communion with the Saviour, whose pain they shared. "Grünewald depicts Jesus' body ravaged by crucifixion yet evokes pointedly the Christian message of Jesus' suffering; originally intended for a hospital, the altar painting may have been designed to provide comfort and solace to the sick."



Mary, the mother of Jesus, is shown at Christ's right, collapsing in anguish in the arms of John, the beloved disciple of Christ, and shrouded in a large piece of white cloth; while Mary Magdalene, in an allusion to Christ's twisted fingers, wrings her hands in torment.



At Christ's left, John the Baptist, accompanied by a lamb, symbolising the sacrifice of Jesus, announces the New Testament by crying out in Latin *illum oportet crescere me autem minui*, "He must increase, but I must decrease.". The presence of John the Baptist is anachronistic. Beheaded by order of Herod in 29 AD, he could not possibly have witnessed the death of Christ. His inclusion in this scene is symbolic, since he is considered as the last of the prophets to announce the coming of the Messiah.



A predella beneath the central panel depicts the entombment.



Outer wings opened:

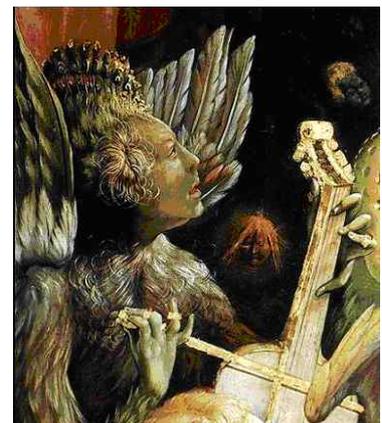
The outer wings of the Isenheim Altarpiece were opened for important festivals of the liturgical year, particularly those in honour of the Virgin Mary. Thus are revealed four scenes: the left wing represents the Annunciation during which the archangel Gabriel comes to announce to Mary that she will give birth to Jesus, the son of God. The Virgin Mary is depicted in a chapel to indicate the sacred character of the event. In the central corpus, the Concert of Angels and the Nativity are not independent scenes but instead fit within a unified concept: the viewer witnesses Christ's coming to earth as a newborn baby, who will be led to combat the forces of evil personified by certain of the angels, disturbing in their physical appearance. A number of symbols provide keys to aid in interpretation: the enclosed garden represents Mary's womb and is a sign of her perpetual virginity, the rose bush without thorns refers to her as free of original sin, the fig tree symbolises mother's milk. The bed, the bucket and the chamber pot underscore the human nature of Christ.



The concert of angels set inside a gilded temple, although seemingly innocent, raises some curious puzzles. Of the angels, only three are actually playing instruments, with the others either singing or in attitudes of reverence. The principal player is the angel in the left foreground, who is playing a *viola da gamba*. At the time, this instrument, related to the cello, had only recently evolved, so this is one of its earliest depictions in art. The odd aspect of this depiction, however, is that the angel appears to be holding the bow *backwards*, a technique that would make playing extraordinarily awkward, if not almost impossible.

A number of explanations have been proposed for this curiosity. The first possibility is, of course, that it is simply a mistake by the artist, due to the relative novelty of the instrument. However, others have argued that the positioning of the angel's hand is quite deliberate and meaningful. For example, one suggestion is that the angels' orchestra is linked to the music of the spheres, and that the pose reflects the belief that angels make music differently to humankind. Alternatively, it has been said that the position of the angel's arm serves the purpose of balancing the composition, presumably by unifying the principal angel with the other angels. More controversially, it has been suggested that the angel represents Venus, the morning star, heralding the dawn of a new day represented by the birth of Christ, and that the function of the bowing technique is to direct the viewer's attention to the point of generation between the angel's legs.

Whichever explanation is favoured, what then do we make of the equally idiosyncratic dagger-like bowing technique of the strange greenish-black feathered creature directly behind the main angel? This creature is markedly different from the rest of the angels. He is entirely feathered, seemingly unclad, with a sickly, gangrenous colouring; with elongated and reptilian fingers, and a strange crest on his head. He is distinctly dark, with



similar colour tones to the-seemingly-disembodied impish heads emerging from the black recesses of the space. His attention is not on the music and, unlike the other angels, his gaze is not directed towards the Virgin and Child. Instead, he is staring fixedly at the ghostly vision of God high in the heavens. His reaction to this sight is difficult to read, but he is clearly not exultant or ecstatic. Rather, he appears to be somewhat baffled, with an air of dawning realisation, trepidation or even dread.



A plausible interpretation of these distinguishing features indicates that this figure is Lucifer who, according to tradition, had been a high-ranking but overly-ambitious angel and was banished from heaven because of his pride. He later became identified with the Devil: visiting illness and suffering upon the people who he tempted into the various types of sinful behaviour to which they were prone. The coming of Christ would therefore have been a double blow for him. Firstly, Christ's birth, death and ultimate resurrection meant that humans who committed to faith in Christ now had an avenue to achieving redemption and everlasting life, no matter what the Devil did. This directly reflected the situation of St Anthony, who was able to use his faith in Christ to withstand and overcome the Devil's torments. Secondly, Christ's direct capacity to heal, or to drive out the demons who caused suffering, meant that the results of the Devil's efforts could potentially be undone. This directly related to the situation of the patients.

The right wing shows the Resurrection, in which Christ emerges from the tomb and ascends into Heaven bathed in light transfiguring the countenance of the Crucified into the face of God. The Resurrection and the Ascension are therefore encapsulated in a single image.

The third view discloses the carved and gilded wood altarpiece by Nikolaus Hagenauer.

With its inner wings open, the altarpiece allowed pilgrims and the afflicted to venerate Saint Anthony, occupying the place of honour at the centre of the corpus, as a protector and healer of Saint Anthony's fire. At his left side is a pig, the emblem of the Antonite order. On his left and



right, two bearers of offerings illustrate these contributions in kind, an important source of income for the Antonites. This central section is framed by Saint Augustine, with the donor Guy Guers kneeling at his feet on the left, and Saint Jerome, accompanied by a lion, on the right; two of the four great fathers of the Latin Church. The wings when open show two of Grünewald's paintings illustrating incidents in the life of Saint Anthony. The left wing depicts a visit of Saint Anthony to Saint Paul the Hermit. The two hermits meet in a stunning landscape, intended to represent the Theban Desert. Grünewald created a fantastic universe, surrounding the date palm with a strange mixture of vegetation, in marked contrast with the calmness and tranquillity of the encounter, in which the animals in attendance take part, with the crow bringing two morsels of bread to the two recluses. In this dreamlike scene, medicinal plants, painted in naturalistic fashion, sprout at the feet of the two main figures.

The right-hand panel shows a nightmarish scene of Saint Anthony tormented by Demons: fantastical and monstrous creatures sent by Satan. Trampled to the ground, beaten with sticks, torn by claws and bitten, the Saint appeals to God for help who sends angels to combat these evil demons. In the lower left corner, the being with webbed feet and a distended belly seems to personify the disease caused by ergot poisoning, resulting in swelling and ulcerous growths.



The identification of the patients with the images of suffering in the altarpiece is made even more explicit in the lower left by the ghastly depiction of a floundering, bloated creature with weeping lesions, witnessing the horrifying scene of the tormented saint. The reclining position of this horrifying image repeats that of the afflicted saint.



The *Taubischofsheim Altarpiece* is a late work by Grünewald, probably completed between 1523 and 1525. The panels, which today are displayed separately, were originally painted on either side of a 196 cm by 152 cm wooden panel. Whether the pieces were the central part of a polyptych is uncertain, however. In order to display the work in an art museum, the panel was split in half during its first restoration in 1883.



In the panel of Christ Bearing the Cross Jesus collapses in the street on the way to Calvary under the unbearable weight of a rough-hewn cross. His eyes are turned to heaven but the agonised and harassed expression on his dirt and tear strewn face reflects the pain of his suffering, which is all too human. The forward leaning diagonal of his fallen body is countered by the backward thrust of his head; and is echoed and reinforced by the arm of the cross and the onward movement of his tormentors. One crouching in front seems to block his way, imprisoning him in a tight space where more lashes can be inflicted on him, while another grips his robe to steady him the more to allow the blows to fall on his back. The grotesque expressions of the persecutors show only violent hatred, incapable of empathy and compassion.

In his novel *Là-Bas (The Damned)*, first published in 1891), the French writer Joris-Karl Huysmans delivers an impressive description of Matthias Grünewald's *Tauberbischofsheim altarpiece*:

"...the christ rose before him, formidable on a rude cross of barky wood, the arm an untrimmed branch bending like a bow under the weight of the body.

This branch seemed about to spring back and mercifully hurl afar from our cruel, sinful world the suffering flesh held to earth by the enormous spike piercing the feet. Dislocated, almost ripped out of their sockets, the arms of the Christ seemed trammelled by the knotty cords of the straining muscles. The laboured tendons of the armpits seemed ready to snap. The fingers, wide apart, were contorted in

an arrested gesture in which were supplication and reproach but also benediction. The trembling thighs were greasy with sweat. The ribs were like staves, or like the bars of a cage, the flesh swollen, blue, mottled with flea-bites, specked as with pin-pricks by spines broken off from the rods of the scourging and now festering beneath the skin where they had penetrated."

The Isenheim Christ is possibly the most terrifying image of the Crucifixion in Western art. It has inspired many later artists; most notably Graham Sutherland's 1946 altarpiece for St. Matthew's church, Northampton. Commissioned in the mid-1940's to paint a Crucifixion he had been deeply moved by the photographs of concentration camp victims that had recently been published. These images as well as Matthias Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* became the inspiration for a painting that was critically hailed as defining the human condition in the immediate post-war era.



Likewise, Francis Bacon was influenced by Grünewald's terrifying image when in 1944 he painted the horrifying and nightmarish *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*.

Albrecht Dürer (1471 – 1528), was a German painter, printmaker and theorist of the German Renaissance. Born in Nuremberg, son of a successful goldsmith, Dürer established his reputation and influence across Europe when he was in his twenties due to his high-quality woodcut prints. He was in communication with the major Italian artists of his time, including Raphael, Giovanni Bellini and Leonardo da Vinci, and from 1512 was patronized by Emperor Maximilian I. Dürer is commemorated by both the Lutheran and Episcopal Churches.

Dürer's vast body of work includes engravings, his preferred technique in his later prints, altarpieces, portraits and self-portraits, watercolours and books. The woodcuts series are more Gothic than the rest of his work. His well-known engravings include the three *Meisterstiche* (master prints) *Knight, Death and the Devil* (1513), *Saint Jerome in his Study* (1514) and *Melencolia I* (1514). His water-colours mark him as one of the first European landscape artists, while his woodcuts revolutionized the potential of that medium.

This silverpoint **Self-portrait** drawing of 1485 by the thirteen-year-old Dürer, executed "when I was a child", testifies to his prodigious talent.

Dürer's introduction of classical motifs into Northern art, through his knowledge of Italian artists and German humanists, has secured his reputation as one of the most important figures of the Northern Renaissance; reinforced by his theoretical treatises, which involve principles of mathematics, perspective, and ideal proportions.

As Dürer left autobiographical writings and was widely known by his mid-twenties, his life is well documented in several sources. After a few years of school, he learned the basics of goldsmithing and drawing from his father. Though his father wanted him to continue his training as a goldsmith, he showed such a precocious talent in drawing that in 1486 at the age of fifteen he started as an apprentice to Michael Wolgemut, the leading artist in Nuremberg at the time, with a large workshop producing a variety of works of art, in particular woodcuts for books. Nuremberg



was then an important and prosperous city, a centre for publishing and many luxury trades. It had strong links with Italy, especially Venice, a relatively short distance across the Alps.



Portrait of the Artist Holding a Thistle (1493) is the earliest of Dürer's painted self-portraits and has been identified as one of the first self-portraits painted by a Northern artist.

Dürer looks out at the viewer with a psychologically complex but rather melancholy and reserved, serious minded, facial expression. In 1493 Dürer was 22 years old and working in Strasbourg. He had completed his apprenticeship and his tour as a journeyman, and would marry the following year.

The date and the plant in the artist's hand seem to suggest that this is a betrothal portrait. He has depicted himself in the act of offering a flowering spray resembling a thistle. During the 15th century, thistles were symbols of male conjugal fidelity, from the name in German, "Mannstreue". This umbelliferous (resembling a sunshade) plant is used in medicine, and is regarded as an aphrodisiac. It may also have religious significance; the same plant in outline form is inscribed in the gold ground of Dürer's painting *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* (1493–94).

Dürer was temperamentally inclined to philosophical doubts. He often analysed his own face in drawn or painted effigies – sometimes idealizing it, sometimes not. The lines written beside the date in this painting reveal the philosophical and Christian intention of the work: *"My affairs follow the course allotted to them on high."*

Very soon after his return to Nuremberg, at the age of 23, Dürer was married to Agnes Frey following an arrangement made during his absence. Agnes was the daughter of a prominent brass worker (and amateur harpist) in the city. However, no children resulted from the marriage, and with Albrecht the Dürer name died out. The marriage between Agnes and Albrecht was not a generally happy one, as indicated by his letters in which he quipped in an extremely rough tone about his wife, calling her an "old crow" and other vulgar remarks. His friend, Pirckheimer, also made no secret of his antipathy towards Agnes, describing her as a miserly shrew with a bitter tongue, who helped cause Dürer's death at a young age. One author speculates that Albrecht was bisexual, if not homosexual, due to several of his works containing themes of homosexual desire, as well as the intimate nature of his correspondence with certain very close male friends.

On his return to Nuremberg Dürer opened his own workshop (being married was a requirement for this). Over the next five years, his style increasingly integrated Italian influences into underlying Northern forms. Arguably his best works in the first years of the workshop were his woodcut prints, mostly religious, but including secular scenes such as **The Men's Bath House** (c. 1496). These were larger and more finely cut than the great majority of German woodcuts hitherto, and far more complex and balanced in composition.

It is now thought unlikely that Dürer cut any of the woodblocks himself; this task would have been performed by a specialist craftsman. However, his training in Wolgemut's studio, which made many carved and painted altarpieces and both designed and cut woodblocks for woodcut, evidently gave him great understanding of what the technique could be made to produce, and how to work with block cutters. Dürer either drew his design directly onto the woodblock itself, or glued a paper drawing to the block. Either way, his drawings were destroyed during the cutting of the block.





Frontispiece and *The Wheel of Fortune*, illustrations for the *Ship of Fools*

Sebastian Brant's illustrated satirical book, *Ship of Fools*, is an allegory, originating from Book VI of Plato's *Republic*, about a ship with a dysfunctional crew. The allegory is intended to represent the problems of governance prevailing in a political system not based on expert knowledge, such as democracies. Published in 1494, sixty eight of the woodcuts plus the frontispiece, have been identified as being by Dürer. It has served as the inspiration for novels, songs, films and television programmes and a number of paintings, including Hieronymus Bosch's *Ship of Fools* (c 1490-1500)

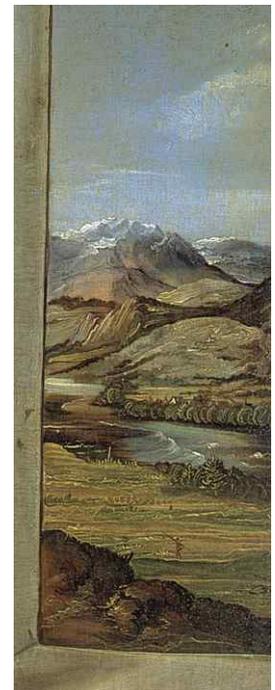


Self-portrait at 26 (1498) is the second of Dürer's three painted self-portraits, executed after his first trip to Italy. In the depiction Dürer elevates himself to the social position he believed suited to an artist of his ability. He presents himself in half length, under an arch, turned towards the viewer. He bears an arrogant expression, betraying the assured self-confidence of a young artist at the height of his ability. His presence dominates the pictorial space, from his hat which almost reaches the top of the canvas to his arm positioned on the lower ledge, where he rests his fingers enclosed in fine rich gloves.

He depicts himself in front of an open window before a flat landscape containing a lake and distant snow-capped mountains. The landscape may represent either the memory of his recent travels abroad or his inner mental state. Light spills from the window, falling along his head to highlight

both his delicate skin tones and long blond hair. Dürer is dressed with effeminate grace in flamboyant, extravagant clothes showing the influence of Italian fashion. His low-necked shirt or chemise is of fine linen, gathered and trimmed with a band of gold braid or embroidery, and worn under an open-fronted doublet and a cloak tied over one shoulder. His white jacket has black lining under a white pleated shirt of which the verticals match the horizontals of his headdress. His fingers are crossed, hidden inside silk gloves, an unusual pose for Dürer's early career; he always paid close attention in detailing the hands of his sitters who are usually showing holding an object; examples include a pillow, rosary, sheet of paper and flower.

Dürer is presented as almost seductive, with a rakish patterned hat placed over long, almost girlishly curled blond locks of hair under a draped pointed hat with a tassel. He looks out at the viewer with a cool ironic stare.



Interpreted as marking a farewell to his irresponsible youth and the acclaim he received during his visit to Italy, he is apprehensive as the 15th century comes to an end and dark clouds hang over the Germanic states. The middle-ground of the pleasing flat plain and lake may represent his travels from 1492 to 1497, yet they are shadowed by steep mountainous glaciers; forebodings of what lie in store.



Self-Portrait at Twenty-Eight) (early in 1500) is the last of his three painted self-portraits, considered by art historians as the most personal, iconic and complex of his self-portraits.

The painting is most remarkable because of its resemblance to many earlier representations of Christ, and the similarities with the conventions of religious painting: its symmetry, dark tones and the manner in which the artist directly confronts the viewer and raises his hands to the middle of his chest as if in the act of blessing. In 1500 a frontal pose was exceptional for a secular portrait, being associated with images from medieval religious art, and above all images of Christ. In Italy the conventional fashion for profile portraits was coming to an end, being replaced with the three-quarters view.

In its directness and apparent confrontation with the viewer, the self-portrait is unlike any that came before. It is half-length, frontal and highly symmetrical; its lack of a conventional background seemingly presents Dürer without regard to time or place. The placement of the inscriptions in the dark fields on either side of Dürer are present-

ed as if floating in space, emphasizing that the portrait has a symbolic meaning. Its sombre mood is achieved through the use of brown tones set against the plain black background. The lightness of touch and tone seen in his earlier two self-portraits has been replaced by a more introverted and complex representation.

Geometric analysis of the composition demonstrates its relatively rigid symmetry, with several highlights aligned very close to a vertical axis down the middle of the painting. However, the work is not completely symmetrical; his head is slightly right of centre, his hair not quite in the middle—the strands of hair fall differently on either side while his eyes look slightly to the left, perhaps demonstrative of an inner turmoil behind the inflexibility and impersonal dignity of the mask-like face.

This is a markedly more mature Dürer than appears in both the 1493 and the 1498 self-portraits, and commemorates a turning point in the artist's life and in the millennium: the year 1500, displayed in the centre of the upper left background field, is here celebrated as epochal. Moreover, the placing of the year 1500 above his signature initials, A.D., gives them an added meaning as an abbreviation of Anno Domini.



The engraving of **Adam and Eve** (1504) (left) depicts them in a scene together, with several symbolical animals around them. According to Erwin Panofsky, a mountain ash behind Adam represents the tree of life; while the parrot on its branch represents wisdom. A fig tree stands in for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Four animals, a cat, elk, rabbit, and ox represent the four humours: cruelty, melancholy, sensuality, and lethargy, respectively. Additionally, the relationship of the mouse and feline at the feet of the figures parallels that of Adam and Eve.

The pair of panels of **Adam and Eve** (1507) offered Dürer the opportunity to depict the ideal human figure. Painted in Nuremberg soon after his return from Venice, the panels were influenced by Italian art. Dürer's observations on his second trip to Italy provided him with new approaches to portraying the human form. Here, he depicts the figures at human scale—the first full-scale nude subjects in German painting.

A series of extant drawings show Dürer's experiments in human proportion, leading to the engraving of Adam and Eve, which shows his subtlety while using the burin in the texturing of flesh surfaces. This is the only existing engraving signed with his full name.

The Venetian artist Jacopo de' Barbari, whom Dürer had met in Venice, visited Nuremberg in 1500, and Dürer said that he learned much about the new developments in perspective, anatomy and proportion from him. De' Barbari was unwilling to explain everything he knew, so Dürer began his own studies, which would become a lifelong preoccupation.

The most successful way to build a reputation in the 15th and 16th centuries was to paint altarpieces. Although not generally well paid Dürer made several, but eventually relied more on printmaking which had a very wide audience and made him very prosperous.

The ***Paumgartner altarpiece*** (c. 1500) is an early triptych by Dürer commissioned by the Paumgartner family of Nuremberg. The central panel depicts a nativity scene, while the wings depict Saint George (left) and Saint Eustace (right). The saint's faces are donor portraits of the brothers Stephan and Lukas Paumgartner, respectively. Other members of the Paumgartner family are depicted as small figures in the centre panel. In 1616 the painting was altered to suit 17th century tastes. This entailed adding helmets, horses, and landscape backgrounds to the portraits of the saints and painting over the small donor figures in the centre panel. These embellishments were removed by restorers in 1903



Lamentation of Christ (c 1500) shows the dead Jesus, held by Joseph of Arimathea and surrounded by the Pious Women, including an aged and distraught Mary. The figures are compacted together into a diamond shape, formed by the diagonal on the right, with three standing figures of Saint John the Evangelist, Mary Magdalene and Nicodemus, the last two holding vases which contained balms used to prepare the corpse for the burial; a line running from a point outside of the picture, down to where the praying figure of the donor's recently deceased wife prays at the feet of Christ; the diagonal on the left running through the edge of the shroud and along the upper leg of Nicodemus; and the upper diagonal along the back of Nicodemus, the clasped hands of Saint John to the head of Mary Magdalene at the apex.

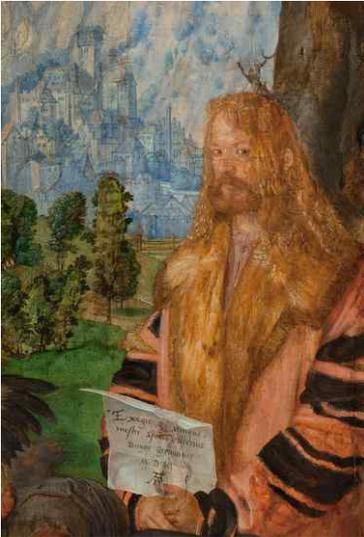
The work was commissioned by goldsmith Jakob Glimm as a memorial of his first wife, Margaret Holzmann, who had died in 1500. The removal of later re-painting in 1924 showed the original figures of the donors (Glimm and his three sons) and of the dead woman, depicted in far smaller proportions than the religious characters.

The ***Feast of the Rosary*** (1506) dates to Dürer's second sojourn in Venice and has been called "probably the most superb painting that a German master has ever created."

The painting shows the Virgin Enthroned holding the Child in the centre, with two flying angels who are holding, above her, an elaborated royal crown made of gold, pearls and gems; a scheme deriving from Flemish art but already widespread in the German area at the time. The throne's backrest is covered with a green drape and by a baldachin held by two flying cherubim. Below is an angel playing a lute, an evident homage to Giovanni Bellini's altarpieces. Mary is depicted in the act of distributing rose garlands to two groups of kneeling worshippers, portrayed on two symmetrical rows at the sides.



The two rows are headed, on the left, by Pope Julius II, crowned by the Child and followed by a procession of religious figures; and, on the right, by the German emperor Frederick III (portrayed with the face of Maximilian I, his son and patron of Dürer), crowned by Mary and followed by a lay procession. The pope and the emperor, considered at the time the supreme authorities of the Catholic world, having previously removed the papal tiara and crown, are now kneeling to receive the Madonna's blessing. Along with other angels St. Dominic of Guzman (protector of the adoration of Mary and of the Rosary), stands at the side of the Virgin distributing crowns of flowers. Near the left edge is the patriarch of Venice, Antonio Soriano, with the hands joined, and, next to him, Burkard von Speyer, then chaplain of the church of San Bartolomeo.



On the right, standing in front of a lush Alpine landscape, is the artist's self-portrait. In his hand is a cartouche bearing his signature, and with a short inscription reporting that five months were needed to complete the work. The characters next to the painter are likely Leonhard Vilt, founder of the Brotherhood of the Rosary in Venice, and (in black) Hieronymus of Augsburg, the architect of the new Fondaco dei Tedeschi. Annexed is the donor's portrait.

The style of the work is reminiscent of some Bellini's works featuring the same quiet monumental appearance, such as the San Giobbe Altarpiece (1487) or the San Zaccaria Altarpiece (1505), especially regarding the guitar playing angel in the centre. The Doge, accompanied by a number of Venetian nobles and artists, possibly including Bellini, visited his studio to view the completed work, and offered him the position of painter to the Republic, which he refused.

About two-thirds of the work was subject to later repainting, including the great part of the heads and some half of the panel.

A **baldachin**, or **baldaquin** is a **canopy of state** typically placed over an altar or throne. It had its beginnings as a cloth canopy, but in other cases it is a sturdy, permanent architectural feature, particularly over high altars in cathedrals, where such a structure is more correctly called a ciborium when it is sufficiently architectural in form. Baldachins are often supported on columns, especially when they are disconnected from an enclosing wall. A **cloth of honour** is a simpler cloth hanging vertically behind the throne, usually continuing to form a canopy. It can also be used for similar canopies in interior design, for example above beds, and for processional canopies used in formal state ceremonies such as coronations, held up by four or more men with poles attached to the corners of the cloth.

"Baldachin" was originally a luxurious type of cloth from Baghdad, from which name the word is derived. Henry III of England is recorded as wearing a robe "de preciosissimo baldekino" at a ceremony at Westminster Abbey in 1247. The word for the cloth became the word for the ceremonial canopies made from the cloth.



Marie Antoinette's bed, which has a baldachin, in the Petit Trianon (Versailles, France)

Christ among the Doctors (1506) dates to Dürer's sojourn in Venice, and was executed hastily while he was working at the *Feast of the Rosary* altarpiece.

The topic is from the Gospel of Luke describing the finding of the child Jesus in the temple. The character at the left of Jesus is a true caricature, perhaps inspired by one of Leonardo da Vinci's drawings seen by Dürer. The man in the lower left corner has a cartouche on his beret, a custom of the Pharisees. A slip of paper inserted in the book held by this temple elder is inscribed with the initials of the artist, the date and an inscription: *Opus Quinque Dierum*, meaning "Made in five days".





The youthful hands of Jesus and the greying hands of the doctor who looks on Him with a leering grimace form a circular dance at the centre of the composition.

According to some sources, the picture could have been given to painter Giovanni Bellini, in whose house it was perhaps seen by Lorenzo Lotto, who used one of the figures in the painting for his *Madonna with Child between Saints Flavian and Onuphrios*. The subject had been already treated by Dürer in a woodcut of the *Life of the Virgin* series and in a panel of the *Seven Sorrows Polyptych*. However, in the Venetian work the German artist adopted a totally new composition, with the characters occupying the whole scene and surrounding the young Jesus, leaving a little room for the black background.

Dürer made many watercolours and drawings during his travels and created large numbers of preparatory drawings from life, especially for his paintings and engravings, and many survive, most famously the **Praying hands** from circa 1508. Previously thought to be a study for an apostle in the Heller altarpiece (destroyed by a fire in 1729) a more plausible theory of the drawing is that, in its elaborate execution on precious blue paper, it is rather a virtuoso record of the hands in the painting, which Dürer could bring back with him from Italy to Nuremberg.



He continued to make images in watercolour and gouache (opaque watercolour), including a number of still-lives of pieces of meadow or animals, including his *Young Hare* and the *Great Piece of Turf*.



Young Hare (1502) is acknowledged as a masterpiece of observational art, presenting technical challenges in rendering the appearance of light with a multi-coloured, multi-textured subject, Dürer not only managed to create a detailed, almost scientific, study of the animal but also infuses the picture with a warm golden light that hits the hare from the left, highlighting the ears and the run of hair along the body, giving a spark of life to the eye, and casting a strange shadow to the right.

Dürer lightly sketched the image and under-painted it with washes of brown watercolour, then built up the texture of the fur with a variety of dark and light brush-strokes in both watercolour and body-colour. The painting was brought to



completion with the addition of a few refined details such as the whiskers and the meticulous reflection of a window in the creature's eye.

There is some debate over how Dürer accurately captured the image of the hare: he may have sketched a hare in the wild and filled in the individual details from a dead animal, or captured one and held it alive in his studio while he worked on the painting. The reflection of the window frame in the hare's eye is often cited as evidence for the theory that Dürer copied the hare from life, but this cross-barred reflection is a technique that Dürer frequently used to add vitality to the eyes of his subjects.

Dürer used his watercolour studies as source material for his prints. In the woodcut, *The Holy Family with Three Hares*, the hares are modestly rendered, and in the only of his other prints to feature a hare, the 1504 copperplate engraving *Adam and Eve*, the hare is turning away, half-hidden behind the legs of Eve. The prominent date and Dürer monogram on the *Young Hare* indicate that Dürer considered it a work in its own right rather than merely a preparatory sketch. The painting engendered numerous copies: at least twelve from contemporaries are known.

Animals feature in many of his prints.





The **Great Piece of Turf** (1503), considered one of the masterpieces of Dürer's realistic nature studies, is a watercolour of a seemingly unordered group of wild plants.

The various plants can be identified as cock's-foot, creeping bent, smooth meadow-grass, daisy, dandelion, germander speedwell, greater plantain, hound's-tongue and yarrow. The composition shows little order and arrangement, the various roots, stems and flowers seem to be in opposition to each other. The apparent chaos, combined with the attentive detail of each individual plant, lends the painting greater realism. Though the composition of vegetation in itself is continuous and seemingly disorganised, the blank background provides a contrast to the chaos, and imposes a sense of order.

Some of the roots have been stripped of earth to be displayed clearly to the spectator. The depiction of roots is something that can also be found in other of Dürer's works, such as *Knight, Death and the Devil* (1513). The vegetation comes to an end on the right side of the panel, while on the left it seems to continue on indefinitely. The background is left blank, and on the right can even be seen a clear line where the vegetation ends.

The humanist scholar Conrad Celtes compared Dürer's work to the literary work of the medieval philosopher and scientist Albert Magus who also based his work on the observation of nature.

After his return to Nuremberg in 1495, from his first trip to Venice, Dürer trained himself in the difficult art of using the burin to make engravings. It is possible he had begun learning this skill during his early training with his father, as it was also an essential skill of the goldsmith. In 1496 he executed the *Prodigal Son*, which the Italian Renaissance art historian Giorgio Vasari singled out for praise some decades later, noting its Germanic quality. He was soon producing some spectacular and original images, notably *Nemesis* (1502), *The Sea Monster* (1498), and **Saint Eustace** (c. 1501), who we see with animals, including his hunting dogs, kneeling before the vision in a highly detailed landscape background.



Saint Eustace was a second century martyr. The legend is that while Placidus, was out hunting he saw a stag which he was about to shoot with a cross between its antlers. He converted to Christianity and changed his name to Eustace .

Prints are highly portable and these works made Dürer famous throughout the main artistic centres of Europe within a very few years.



His highly detailed painting technique is apparent in the **Allegory of Avarice** (1507), which, notwithstanding his two extended sojourns to Venice, has a very Germanic feel to its biting realism. Is this grotesque and toothless, worn out crone demanding payment from a male onlooker for exposing her withered breast?

Intended to represent both avarice and the passing nature of youthful beauty, the woman is shown in half-length, painted in thick impasto. She has long straight blond hair, glazed eyes, a long nose, a pinched jaw and a mouth with only two remaining teeth, which is twisted in a scornful laugh. Her visible right arm is muscular and out of proportion to the rest of her body, while a dark tuft of hair sprouts from her underarm. Only her hair and the regular and almost noble outlines of her face hint at former beauty. The intense focus of the image is achieved by tight cropping and the contrasting of the lush colouring of the woman's gown and hair against a flat black background.

The work has been compared to a painting, *Col tempo* (*With age*) (1500-10) by Giorgione, with which it shares obvious thematic similarities, while Dürer's use of impasto and the rich colouring in the foreground display a debt to the Venetian school. The art historian T. Sturge Moore suggests that Dürer may have wanted to show that he could paint like Giorgione. Others believe that the work is a satire on a sitter who had not paid him as much as he might have wished for an earlier portrait. However, given the artist's financial situation at this time, it seems unlikely that he would have deliberately offended potential patrons or customers. Writer Jessie Allen discounts this theory and believes that the work was likely unable to attract a buyer and so, to save money, Dürer used the other side of the canvas to create a commercially viable image: the *Portrait of a young Man* (1507). The work is often seen as unfinished, and is sometimes referred to as a sketch.

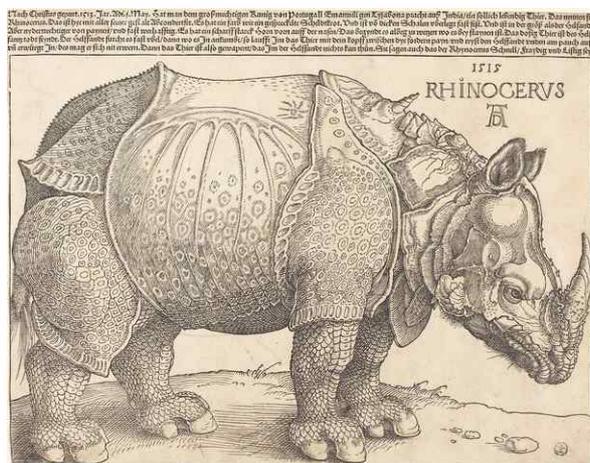


The horrifying subject of *Death and the Lansquenet* (1510) illustrates Dürer's skill and his contribution to the art of the woodcut. The technique of the woodcut involves cutting away the surrounding wood from a design on the surface of the block. It is then inked on the raised surface and printed. Although, in comparison with engravings, (in which the ink is rubbed into the incised line) either on wood (which uses the end-grain) or metal (notably copper) the medium of the woodcut is quite crude and limited in its virtuosity of line. Nevertheless, Dürer is able to convey a sense of sunlight falling on the figures and contrasts of different materials, such as the hardness of bone and the fluffiness of feathers.

The woodcuts depicting the *Fall of Man* and of the *Expulsion From Paradise* (c. 1509-10) exhibit a greater refinement of detail and technique, with fine cross-hatching in some areas.



Dürer represents a number of fearless animals in Paradise. His monogram is clearly depicted on a board in the corner.



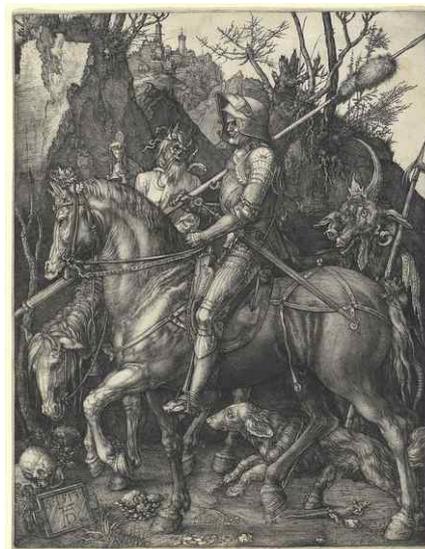
Dürer created his woodcut of a *Rhinoceros* in 1515, without ever seeing the animal himself, from a sketch by another artist and a written description of the Indian rhinoceros, which having arrived in Lisbon, was the first living example seen in Europe since Roman times. The image has such force that it remains one of his best-known images and was still used in some German school science text-books as late as the last century.

Dürer's woodcut is not an entirely accurate representation of a rhinoceros. He depicts an animal with hard plates that cover its body like sheets of armour, with a gorget at the throat, a solid-looking breastplate, and what appear to be rivets along the seams. He places a small twisted horn on its back and gives it scaly legs and saw-like rear quarters. None of these features is present in a real rhinoceros, although the Indian rhinoceros does have deep folds in its skin that can look like armour from a distance. Despite its anatomical inaccuracies, Dürer's woodcut became very popular in Europe

and was copied many times in the following three centuries. It was regarded by Westerners as a true representation of a rhinoceros into the late 18th century. Eventually, it was supplanted by more realistic drawings and paintings, particularly those of Clara the rhinoceros, who toured Europe in the 1740s and 1750s. It has been said of Dürer's woodcut: "probably no animal picture has exerted such a profound influence on the arts".

Knight, Death and the Devil (1513) is a large engraving. The image is infused with complex iconography and symbolism, the precise meaning of which has been argued over for centuries. It is one of three *Meisterstiche* (master prints) completed during a period when he almost ceased to work in paint or woodcuts to focus on engravings.

An armoured knight, accompanied by his dog, rides through a narrow gorge flanked by a goat-headed devil and the figure of death riding a pale horse. Death's rotting corpse holds an hourglass, a reminder of the shortness of life. The rider moves through the scene looking away from the creatures lurking around him, and appears almost contemptuous of the threats, and is thus often seen as symbol of courage; the knight's armour, the horse which towers in size over the beasts, the oak leaves and the fortress on the mountaintop are symbolic of the resilience of faith, while the knight's plight may represent Christians' earthly journey towards the Kingdom of Heaven.



The work was mentioned by Giorgio Vasari as one of "several sheets of such excellence that nothing finer can be achieved". It was widely copied and had a large influence on later German writers. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche referenced the work in his work on dramatic theory *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) to exemplify pessimism, while it was later idealised in the 20th century by the Nazis as representing the racially pure Aryan, and was sometimes used in their propaganda imagery.



As with the two other of his master prints, it contains a dog, skull, and hourglass, symbols of fidelity and the transience of life. The engraving is heavily indebted to the Gothic style. Many of the forms blend into each other. The outline of the horse is built from a series of interlocking curves, while the knight's chin is woven into the line of his helmet. These two central figures are surrounded by a tangled mass of branches, harness and hair, which according to art historian Raymond Stites contrast with the relatively solid figure of the knight and his horse to set them as a "tangible idea in a world of changing forms". The man is shown looking doggedly straight ahead; he does not allow his line of vision be interrupted or distracted by the demons beside him.

According to Elizabeth Lunday the "skeletal figure of death stands ghostly pale against the darkness of a shadowy crag, while the devil, a multi-horned goat-like creature, skulks amongst straggly tree roots."

Death is shown with his horse in the left background and rendered without nose or lips in lighter shades than the other figures. A skull is seen in the lower foreground, directly in the Knight's path, whilst a dog is running between the two horses.



Death, the Devil, and the landscape are all rendered in a bleakly northern manner. The surrounding characters are threatening to the knight, who is seemingly protected by the literal and figurative armour of his faith. It is believed by some art historians to be linked with publications of the Dutch humanist and theologian Erasmus's *Handbook of a Christian soldier*. The engraving draws from Psalm 23: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil".

The work does not contain an overtly political message. Instead it reaches back to a medieval sense of morality, and is replete with Gothic imagery. The knight seems resigned, and his facial features are downcast. His gloomy posture is in contrast to the sturdy look of his horse. While his armour protects



him against the surrounding demons, the skull on a stump is held in front of the horse and the fall of the sand held by death in the face of the knight.

It is generally believed that the portrayal is a literal, though pointed, celebration of the knight's Christian faith, and also of the ideals of humanism. An alternative interpretation was presented in 1970 by writer Sten Karling, and later by Ursula Meyer, who suggested that the work did not seek to glorify the knight, but instead depicts a "robber knight" (*raubritter*). They point to the lack of Christian or religious symbolism in the work and to the fox's tail wrapped on top the knight's lance – in Greek legend the fox's tail was a symbol of greed, cunning and treachery, as well as lust and whoring. However, knights were commonly depicted in contemporary art with a fox tail tied to the tip of their lance. Moreover, the fox tail was a common form of protective amulet. In this interpretation Death and the Devil are merely the knight's companions on his journey, not omens.

The central subject of the engraving *Melencolia I* (1514) is an enigmatic and gloomy winged (female ?) figure thought to be a personification of melancholy. Holding her head in her hand, she stares past the busy scene in front of her. The area is strewn with symbols and tools associated with craft and carpentry, including an hourglass, scales, (symbols of the passage of time and destiny) a hand plane, a claw hammer and a saw. Other objects relate to alchemy, geometry or numerology. Behind the figure is a structure with an embedded magic square, and a ladder leading beyond the frame. The sky contains a rainbow, a comet or planet, and a bat-like creature bearing the text that has become the print's title.



Melencolia I has been the subject of more scholarship than probably any other print, but, despite a vast art-historical literature, it has resisted any definitive interpretation. Dürer may have associated melancholia with creative activity; the woman may be a representation of a Muse, awaiting inspiration but fearful that it will not return. As such, Dürer may have intended the print as a veiled self-portrait. Other art historians see the figure as pondering the nature of beauty or the value of artistic creativity in light of rationalism, or as a purposely obscure work that highlights the limitations of allegorical or symbolic art.

The art historian Erwin Panofsky, whose writing on the print has received the most attention, detailed its possible relation to Renaissance humanists' conception of melancholia. Summarizing its art-historical legacy, he wrote that "the influence of Dürer's *Melencolia I* — the first representation in which the concept of melancholy was transplanted from the plane of scientific and pseudo-scientific folklore to the level of art — extended all over the European continent and lasted for more than three centuries."

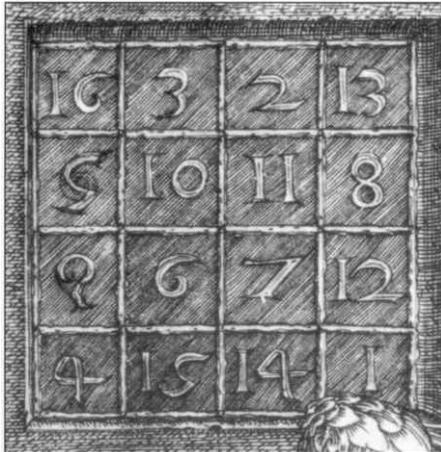


The winged, androgynous central figure is thought to be a personification of melancholia or geometry, resting her head on a closed fist. She sits on a slab with a closed book on her lap, holds a compass loosely, and gazes intensely into the distance. Seemingly immobilized by gloom, she pays no attention to the many objects around her. Her face is relatively dark, indicating the accumulation of black bile, and she wears a wreath of watery plants (water parsley and watercress or lovage). A set of keys and a purse hang from the belt of her long dress. Behind her, a windowless building with no clear architectural function rises beyond the top of the frame. A ladder with seven rungs leans against the structure, but neither its beginning nor end is visible. Amongst the unused tools and mathematical instruments there is the nozzle of a bellows or perhaps an enema syringe (clyster). On the low wall behind the large polyhedron is a brazier with a goldsmith's crucible and a pair of tongs. To the left of the emaciated, sleeping dog is a censer, or an inkwell with a strap connecting a pen holder.

A putto, the only active element of the picture, sits atop a chipped millstone, scribbling on a tablet with a burin. Attached to the structure is a set of scales, a bell and an hourglass surmounted by a sundial.



A bat-like creature spreads its wings across the sky, revealing a banner printed with the words "Melencolia I". Beyond it is a rainbow and an object which is either Saturn or a comet. In the far distance is a landscape with small treed islands, suggesting flooding, and a sea. To the right of the background a large wave crashes over the land. Panofsky suggests that the scene is at night, citing the "cast-shadow" of the hourglass on the building, with the moon lighting the scene and creating a lunar rainbow.

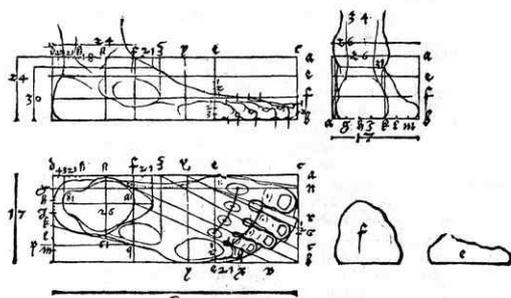
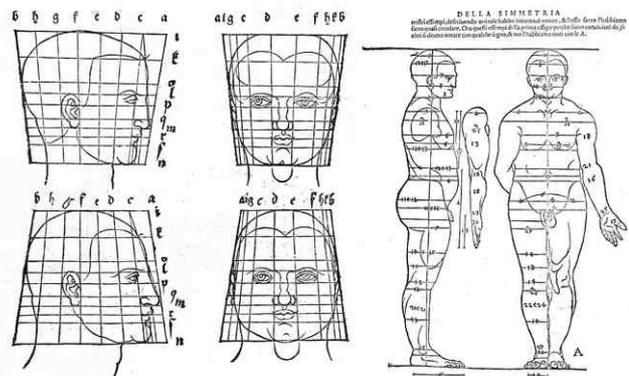


The print contains numerous references to mathematics and geometry. In front of the dog lies a perfect sphere, which has a radius equal to the apparent distance marked by the figure's compass. On the face of the building is a 4x4 magic square with the two middle cells of the bottom row giving the date of the engraving, 1514, which is also seen above Dürer's monogram at bottom right. The square follows the traditional rules of magic squares: each of its rows, columns, and diagonals adds to the same number, 34. It is also associative, meaning that any number added to its symmetric opposite equals 17 (e.g., 15+2, 9+8). Additionally, the corners and each quadrant sum to 34, as do still more combinations. Dürer's mother died on May 17, 1514; some interpreters connect the digits of this date with the sets of two squares that sum to 5 and

17. The unusual solid that dominates the left half of the image is a truncated rhombohedron with what may be a faint skull or face, possibly even of Dürer. This shape is now known as Dürer's solid: over the years, there have been numerous analyses of its mathematical properties.

Dürer wrote a number of theoretical treatises, on the principles of mathematics, perspective, and ideal Proportions. They include four books on measurement (geometry), four on human proportion and a book on fortification.

Appended to the last book on human proportion is a self-contained essay on aesthetics, which Dürer worked on between 1512 and 1528, and it is here that we learn of his theories concerning 'ideal beauty'. Dürer rejected Alberti's concept of an objective beauty, proposing a relativist notion of beauty based on variety. Nonetheless, Dürer still believed that truth was hidden within nature, and that there were rules which ordered beauty, even though he found it difficult to define the criteria for such a code.



However, unlike Alberti and Leonardo, Dürer was most troubled by understanding not just the abstract notions of beauty but also as to how an artist can create beautiful images. Between 1512 and the final draft in 1528, Dürer's belief developed from an understanding of human creativity as spontaneous or inspired to a concept of 'selective inward synthesis'. In other words, that an artist builds on a wealth of visual experiences in order to imagine beautiful things.

Dürer exerted a huge influence on the artists of succeeding generations, especially in printmaking, across Europe through prints was undoubtedly an inspiration for major artists such as Raphael, Titian and Parmigianino, all of whom collaborated with printmakers in order to promote and distribute their work. His intense and self-dramatizing self-portraits have continued to have a strong influence up to the present, especially on painters in the 19th and 20th century who desired a more dramatic portrait style.