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*Albrecht*  
DÜRER

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in Prague and coming from the Imperial Court Library in Vienna finally entered the Albertina in 1796, thanks to an initiative of its founder, Duke Albert of Saxe-Teschen.

This Dürer exhibition is the second during my term as director. When I asked the Chief Curator of our Graphic Art Collection—Christof Metzger is perhaps the most highly recognized authority on sixteenth-century German art on the international scene—whether he thought it possible to stage another large-scale exhibition on Dürer at the Albertina without the new one turning into a mere reprise, he spontaneously replied: “Not only is it possible, it absolutely must be done!” In recent years, worldwide research projects, in the majority of which the Albertina was involved, have resulted in a new way of looking at Dürer that distances itself from a purely biographical approach and also explores the circumstances and motivations of his art production. Christof Metzger was of the opinion that our own holdings, comprising the most comprehensive and most valuable group of Dürer’s drawings and watercolors in the world, were in need of a thorough revision and, in essential parts, reassessment.

Today we can highlight two aspects: After decades of their depreciation Christof Metzger has managed to reintegrate into Dürer’s oeuvre a set of plant studies painted on parchment that has been associated with the once-famous *Violets*, identifying them as a group of works dating from the mid-1490s. Only by establishing a new and earlier date that deviates from later inscriptions was it possible to reassign to this formerly highly popular group of works its due position in Dürer’s oeuvre. Most remarkable, however, are Christof Metzger’s thoughts about Dürer’s large-size studies of the natural world made during the first years of the new century—such as the *Young Hare* or *The Great Piece of Turf*—and the artist’s studies in chiaroscuro on colored or dyed paper. All of these works push the limits of what was feasible with pen and brush, which already left Dürer’s contemporaries, including Giovanni Bellini, flabbergasted. Christof Metzger sees these works first and foremost as objects that served to demonstrate to visitors of Dürer’s studio the master’s accomplishment as a draftsman and painter and to prove that perfect and final artistic form could be found through the study of nature. These works should not be considered preliminary studies but autonomous pictures, objects produced by a virtuoso attesting to the master’s stupendous ability and the intellectual depth of his approach to nature. This also explains the compositional equilibration of the works produced in the context of the *Heller Altarpiece*—a feature that would actually be superfluous in a preliminary drawing; the same holds true for the harmonious reunion of motifs that can be encountered in different paintings. I am extraordinarily grateful to Christof Metzger for offering entirely new insight into Dürer’s work.

This exhibition is the result of broad international cooperation and the readiness of many colleagues to support this huge Dürer project. Lenders from around the globe have entrusted most precious works to us for the duration of this show—

works offering a comprehensive picture of Dürer as master not only of pencil and pen but also of the brush. I cannot thank them enough for their generosity and confidence. Great things have also been achieved here at the Albertina in our Exhibition Management, Conservation Department, and Period Framing Department. I am extremely grateful to Department Heads Barbara Buchbauer, Kristina Liedtke, and Carmen Lenoir, as well as their teams. That such a thoroughly accomplished exhibition catalogue has grown from thoughts and words is to be credited to the time-tested expertise of Sandra Maria Rust, graphic designer Klaus E. Göltz, and the Prestel publishing house. Andrew John Martin (Munich) and Erwin Pokorny (Vienna) have contributed shorter, albeit highly relevant catalogue entries. Christof Metzger has received invaluable support from Julia Zaunbauer as his assistant curator and coauthor, for which I also thank her most warmly on his behalf.

Each comprehensive Dürer exhibition is an extraordinary and rare event in the museum world. To have witnessed at the Albertina the realization of the two largest exhibitions devoted to Albrecht Dürer in more than fifty years is probably the greatest privilege I could have had at this wonderful museum.

Prof. Dr. Klaus Albrecht Schröder  
Director General  
The Albertina Museum

that his father suffered from “all manner of distress, disparagement and enmity,”<sup>20</sup> Albrecht the Elder seems to have led a happy and professionally successful life. In 1467, after becoming a citizen of Nuremberg, he married his employer’s daughter, the then fifteen-year-old Barbara Holper (1452–1514). She bore eighteen children within twenty-four years, most of whom died at an early age. At the time the Family Chronicle was compiled in 1524, only Albrecht the Younger and two other siblings were still alive.<sup>21</sup> Endres (1484–1555) survived both his brothers and continued the family tradition as a goldsmith. Hans (1490–1534), the family’s problem child who is on record as having taken part in knife fight,<sup>22</sup> learned the profession of painter from his elder brother and in 1527 was appointed to the doubtlessly desirable position of court painter to the Polish king, Sigismund I the Old, in Kraków.

Albrecht Dürer the Elder became a master craftsman in 1468 and opened his own shop in Nuremberg’s principal market. Business was evidently very good because he was able to purchase the house “Unter den Vesten” in the present-day Burgstrasse in 1475, a wealthy and influential neighborhood to which he and his wife had familial, professional, and personal ties.<sup>23</sup> Their neighbors included the famous physician and humanist Hartmann Schedel, Nuremberg’s leading painter Michael Wolgemut, and the eminent publisher Anton Koberger. In 1480 Albert opened a shop immediately adjacent to Nuremberg’s city hall; his customers included Emperor Frederick III and Uriel Górká, the bishop of Poznań, and he himself held some public offices. As the city’s silver and gold tester, he was responsible for determining the fineness of precious metals.<sup>24</sup> Several goldsmiths’ works have been attributed to Albrecht Dürer the Elder, albeit none of them with certainty.<sup>25</sup>

### III “My father had a special liking for me”: Childhood and Adolescence

Albrecht’s namesake, Albrecht Dürer the Younger, grew up under favorable conditions; he attended school for several years and learned arithmetic, reading, and writing. He was probably also able to learn the fundamentals of Latin.<sup>26</sup> He later noted that knowledge of Latin as well as the ability to read and write were basic prerequisites for the training of any artist,<sup>27</sup> although he consulted German translations of Latin texts whenever possible. He entered his father’s goldsmith workshop as an apprentice sometime between the ages of ten and twelve. The youth’s extraordinary drawing abilities soon made themselves noticeable. His earliest known work, the silverpoint drawing *Self-Portrait at the Age of Thirteen*, was made with amazing authority in a technique that demands the highest degree of precision and largely rules out the possibility of making corrections (cat. 2).

Dürer seems to have been fully aware of his own talent and entreated his father to allow him to continue his training in the workshop of a painter. While such a re-orientation was not entirely unknown at that time, it did delay the start of his professional career.<sup>28</sup> According to the Family Chronicle, Dürer’s father regretted that his

we know only that he wandered “hither and thither” across Germany.<sup>33</sup> The most attractive destinations for a young artist at that time were above all the Netherlands, the Rhine-Main area, and the Lake Constance region.<sup>34</sup>

There is much to suggest that Dürer spent the time from 1492 to 1494 in the Upper Rhenish region. The humanist Christoph Scheurl noted in his July 1515 obituary of their mutual friend Antonius Kreß that Dürer traveled to the Alsatian town of Colmar in the hope of meeting the famed Martin Schongauer there. Dürer himself informed the author that he arrived in Colmar in 1492, too late to encounter *Hübsch Martin* (pretty Martin), who had already died on February 2, 1491.<sup>35</sup> According to accounts, the artist’s brothers, the goldsmith Caspar and the painter Ludwig, were hospitable to the young traveler and allowed him to study and copy Schongauer’s works. This is not proven, as the young Dürer could have equally come under influence of Upper Rhenish artists such as Schongauer, the Master of the Housebook, and Master E.S. through the study of their widely disseminated engravings (fig. 7).<sup>36</sup> Even the three Schongauer drawings that were later in his possession and that he identified with inscriptions in his own hand as works by the Colmar master were not necessarily acquired during his *Wanderjahre*; he could just as well have purchased them at a later date, or they could have been given to him as presents.<sup>37</sup>

Christoph Scheurl also notes that Dürer traveled from Colmar to Basel, where he visited the fifth of the artist brothers, the goldsmith Georg Schongauer. For Dürer, who became familiar with woodcuts in the Wolgemut workshop, the Upper Rhenish center of early book production would indeed have been a worthwhile destination.<sup>38</sup> It is possible that the network of his godfather, Anton Koberger, proved helpful here as he was a renowned publisher with branches across Europe and contacts to publishers and printers in the Upper Rhenish region.<sup>39</sup> A number of woodcut illustrations from books printed at Basel around that time have consequently been attributed to Dürer (cat. 9–13). Based on the 1573 inventory of Willibald Imhoff’s art collection, a concluding stay at Strasbourg is considered possible<sup>40</sup> because it catalogues two now lost portraits from 1494: those of Dürer’s supposed Strasbourg teacher and his wife.<sup>41</sup>

When Dürer’s father summoned him back to Nuremberg after an absence of four years, he returned with the ability to depict space, bodies, material, and indeed atmosphere that was foreign to the Wolgemut workshop. The journey to these centers of printing was evidently worthwhile, for Dürer was now a virtuoso master of the copperplate engraving technique that had previously hardly been practiced in Nuremberg (cat. 23).

#### **V “The maiden called Agnes”: Marriage and the First Journey to Italy**

Now twenty-three years old, Dürer arrived back in Nuremberg around Whitsun 1494. Only a few weeks later, on July 7, he married the nineteen-year-old Agnes Frey (1475–1539).<sup>42</sup> Agnes, who possibly grew up in the same neighborhood, was by all



Shortly after marrying, the young artist set off on his travels again. This time he headed for Italy. Almost nothing is known about this trip, which still represents one of the most controversial periods in Dürer's biography. The only clues about his destination within his artistic oeuvre are a number of watercolors (cat. 36, 39, 40) featuring landscapes on the road to Italy as well as some individual costume and figural studies (cat. 65, 66) that suggest a stay in Venice. A vague indication in support of the trip is to be found in a written remark made many years later when Dürer wrote to Willibald Pirckheimer from Venice on February 7, 1506, that the "stuff that pleased me so well eleven years ago doesn't please me at all now" (cat. 103).<sup>46</sup> Christoph Scheurl moreover notes in his *Libellus de laudibus Germaniae et ducum Saxoniae* from 1508 that Dürer recently "went back to Italy."<sup>47</sup>

Arguments speaking *against* a first trip to Italy include the lack of any clear-cut stylistic influence of Italian art on Dürer's early works, which only would become evident in the very final years of the fifteenth century. The Italian motifs he adapted could just as likely have been taken from the widely disseminated Italian prints that he could easily have become acquainted with in Nuremberg or during his journeyman years (cat. 74–77).<sup>48</sup>

While traveling to Venice at that time might appear unusual for a painter, it was by no means an uncommon destination for the merchants, pilgrims, envoys, or scholars, for example, also residing in Dürer's neighborhood. The trip could be accomplished in just under two weeks by accompanying any one of the trade convoys that regularly traveled the route between Nuremberg and Venice.<sup>49</sup> Agnes's dowry would ensure the financing of the trip, and members of her family living in Innsbruck could have been helpful to Albrecht along the way.<sup>50</sup> Much speculation surrounds the reasons for Dürer's journey across the Alps, but the plague that broke out in Nuremberg in September 1494 was hardly one of them.<sup>51</sup> For Dürer, who was about to set up a workshop specializing in printmaking, Venice was an attractive destination over and above its position as a center of early book printing. He was evidently interested in making contacts, networking with the Italian market, and very possibly in meeting Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), who marketed his works throughout Europe via a well-organized distribution network.<sup>52</sup>

Even the exact time of the journey has been a matter of controversial discussion. Traditionally, scholarship assumes that he was absent from Nuremberg between late summer 1494 and early summer 1495.<sup>53</sup> The reasons given for this time frame are related to the weather, road conditions, and even the colors of the foliage in the landscape watercolors.<sup>54</sup>

## VI "Who in his engravings uses the monogram": Establishing a Trademark

Dürer probably began with the measures involved in setting up his own workshop in 1494; as a married man, he was permitted to do so, and his wife's dowry

use of the AD monogram, guaranteeing authorship, origins, and quality. After some initial experiments, Dürer finally selected the soon iconic AD ligature as his monogram, using it for the first time around 1495—still with the lower case “d” at that time—on the engraving of *The Holy Family with the Dragonfly* (cat. 23). The Dürer monogram had the role of protective trademark, becoming necessary because his prints were being early copied in both northern and southern Europe almost as soon as Dürer had produced them.<sup>60</sup> Probably at Dürer’s instigation, Nuremberg’s City Council resolved on January 3, 1512, that the “stranger who is selling prints below the City Hall, and among them a number that bear Albrecht Dürer’s monogram, which has been fraudulently copied, shall be obliged to remove the same sign from all of them and to cease selling them here.”<sup>61</sup>

The few paintings made by Dürer during the early years of his career include smaller devotional images such as *Saint Jerome Penitent* (cat. 19), but above all portraits, the commissions for which were procured for him by his parent’s relatives and acquaintances as well as his own circle of friends.<sup>62</sup> Frederick III, elector of Saxony, was already one of his customers in 1496.<sup>63</sup>

Dürer’s flourishing business permitted him to take on employees.<sup>64</sup> It is uncertain how many assistants and apprentices were working in his workshop. We know, for example, about an apprentice that Frederick III sent from Wittenberg to Nuremberg who worked for Dürer in 1502.<sup>65</sup> Dürer’s younger brother, Hans, was also bound in apprenticeship to him and is documented in the workshop until 1509 at least, when he received a gratuity for his participation in the production of the *Heller Altarpiece*.<sup>66</sup> The sources also name Hans Springinkle, who worked with Dürer on *The Triumphal Arch of Emperor Maximilian I* (cat. 176)<sup>67</sup> We ultimately owe the admittedly undocumented information about the *three Hanses* in Dürer’s workshop—Hans Schäufelin and Hans Baldung Grien from 1503 to 1507 as well as Hans Süß von Kulmbach from 1507—to Joachim von Sandrart, the author of the *Teutsche Academie*.<sup>68</sup> The works by all three of these artists clearly show Dürer’s stylistic influence,<sup>69</sup> while it is believed that Schäufelin and Baldung “must have had direct access to the reference materials and models in Dürer’s workshop.”<sup>70</sup> The three Hanses had surely already completed their training by the time they entered Dürer’s workshop as assistants, as they worked fairly independently; at any rate it was Schäufelin and Baldung who kept the workshop running, probably under the supervision of the artist’s wife and mother, while the master was away visiting Venice for the second time between 1505 and 1507.

The enlargement of his operations and the possibilities it offered him to delegate work to others made it possible for Dürer to devote himself more intently to theoretical matters. Inspired by his growing interest in realistic space and figurativeness, fascinated by the art of Mantegna and Pollaiuolo, but above all motivated by his circle of humanist friends that encouraged him to take a more theoretical approach, Dürer began to occupy himself more and more with the measurable in art and nature.<sup>71</sup>

After about 1500, Dürer devoted himself to the study of human proportions and sought general principles for the depiction of the ideal body. These theoretical considerations found visual manifestation in the 1504 engraving *Adam and Eve* (cat. 93).

Central figures involved in Dürer's intellectual approach to this subject matter were Willibald Pirckheimer (1470–1530) and Konrad Celtis (1459–1508). Pirckheimer, the scion of a patrician Nuremberg family and one of the most influential humanists of his time, studied in Padua and Pavia, was a member of Nuremberg's city council for many years, translated Latin and Greek texts, and was an advisor to Emperor Maximilian I. And despite the social differences between them, he was a close friend of Dürer's since 1500 at the latest. It was Pirckheimer who familiarized Dürer with Latin, Greek, and Italian texts, introduced him to the world of the educated middle class, commissioned Dürer to illustrate several books in his library (cat. 78), and lent him the money to undertake his second trip to Venice. The scholar Konrad Celtis, who in turn is known as the German "archhumanist," founded several humanist sodalities, or academic societies, and was named the first German poet laureate by Emperor Frederick III in 1487.<sup>72</sup> Dürer was possibly acquainted with him since the mid-1490s, and Celtis probably not only procured commissions from the Saxon Elector Frederick III for the artist but also introduced him into the circle of Nuremberg's humanists. Dürer could not only rely on these friends for assistance when it came to dealing with illustrations from classical mythology, understanding Latin texts, and the intellectualization of pictorial contents, but he could also pictorialize their humanist concepts.

## VII "Here I'm a gentleman": The Second Journey to Italy

In the summer of 1505, Dürer set off for what was probably his second journey to Venice. His wife and his mother, who had been living with him since Albrecht the Elder died of dysentery in 1502,<sup>73</sup> remained behind. During the artist's absence, one of the women must have supervised the marketing and distribution of the workshop's print operations.<sup>74</sup> Although he never cited a concrete reason for his trip, Dürer supplied us with a wealth of information about his stay in Venice in a group of ten letters he wrote from there to his friend Willibald Pirckheimer.<sup>75</sup> While the letters almost convey the impression that the artist was undertaking a cultural holiday tour in the present-day sense or a kind of sabbatical, it was surely business interests that occasioned him to cross the Alps yet again. Dürer was now a well-known and successful artist who was celebrated and admired far beyond Nuremberg's city walls. His prints were even bestsellers on the Italian market, influencing printmakers there with the painterly and tonal qualities of his engravings in addition to offering a treasure store of motifs that were used by Italian painters, sculptors, printmakers, and decorative artists (figs. 8–10).<sup>76</sup>

Dürer's most important and consequential commission in Venice was the one for the *Tewczsche Thafell* (the *Deutsche* or German panel),<sup>77</sup> the so-called *Feast of the*

While in the Netherlands, Luther received the bogus news of the staged kidnapping and feared murder of Martin Luther, who was ostracized as a heretic at the Diet of Worms in May 1521. Dürer's so-called Lament for Martin Luther, written in his account of his travels, reveals the extent of Dürer's admiration for Luther and the hope he had placed in the reformer.<sup>93</sup> While his earlier plan to make a record of Luther's countenance in an engraving was surely motivated by financial considerations—Luther was one of the most famous men of the era and his portrait promised to be a bestselling item<sup>94</sup>—Dürer evidently did sympathize with the reformatory idea of the renewal of faith and the church. He possessed many of Luther's writings and also purchased a number of the reformer's tracts while in the Netherlands.<sup>95</sup>

#### X **"The true foundation of all painting": The Late Years of Creativity**

Dürer returned to Nuremberg in the summer of 1521 and immediately began working on arranging for the payment of his outstanding pension. Now fifty years old, Dürer headed the execution of the wall paintings he designed to Pirckheimer's iconographic program for the façades and great hall of Nuremberg's city hall.<sup>96</sup> The façades depicted saints, examples of virtues and Biblical scenes embedded in illusionistic architectural painting. Often repainted and then completely destroyed in the air raids over Nuremberg during World War II, they are known solely through later drawings made of them (fig. 15).<sup>97</sup> A design drawing by Dürer himself (cat. 197) is the only thing that exists today of the completely burnt paintings on the north wall of the great hall that once showed *The Calumny of Apelles*, the *Minstrels' Gallery*, and *The Triumphal Chariot of Maximilian I* (fig. 16).

Dürer devoted the following years until his death to the publication of his theoretical writings, thus continuing with the tradition of classical scientific treatises on proportions, mathematics, and architecture with which he had occupied himself over the past quarter of a century.<sup>98</sup> *Vnderweysung der messung mit dem zirckel vnd richtscheyt in Linien ebenen vnnd gantzen corporen* (Instruction in Measurement with the Compass and Straight-edge of Lines, Planes, and Solid Bodies), an applied geometry manual for artists and craftsmen, was published in 1525. While Dürer regarded such knowledge as fundamental, the publication missed its target because of its complexity (cat. 198). This was followed in 1527 by *Etliche vnderricht zu befestigung der Stett Schloß vnd flecken* (Some Instructions on the Fortification of Cities, Castles, and Towns) with monumental, financially ultimately impractical models for defensive structures. His magnum opus, the *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion* (Four Books on Human Proportion), brings together principles regarding the mathematical calculation of ideal bodies for the purpose of making them teachable and learnable. Dürer had occupied himself with this demanding thematic since around 1500, but he would not live to witness the publication of his tract.<sup>99</sup> It was his widow, Agnes, who endeavored to publish the *Treatise on Proportions*.

