

Exhibitions

The importance of printmaking in the work of Albrecht Dürer is highlighted in two contrasting exhibitions held in Chantilly and Birmingham

Albrecht Dürer: Print and Renaissance

Musée Condé, Chantilly
4th June–2nd October

by ARMIN KUNZ

An enlarged map of Europe showing the places that Albrecht Dürer visited as well as those associated with artists whose work either inspired the German master or was influenced by him greets the visitors to this exhibition. Dürer's trip of 1494–95 is described here as a 'journey to Tyrol' instead of the more commonly used 'first trip to Italy'. In a conversation with the present reviewer, Mathieu Deldicque, the Director of the Musée Condé, explained that the show is 'about the travel of prints, not the travel of artists'. He clearly intends to avoid taking sides in a fringe debate among a small but determined group of scholars who question the traditional view that Dürer went to Venice for the first time as part of the 1494–95 trip; that he stayed in Venice in 1505–07 is

well documented and undisputed. Yet the remark also perfectly encapsulates the exhibition's concept. Co-curated by Deldicque and Caroline Vrand, the curator in charge of early prints at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, the show explores the vital role played by the new medium of print in establishing connections between artists in the early modern period.

Dürer was among the first artists to choose printmaking as his main artistic medium (and also as his main source of income). In this, his model was undoubtedly the painter and engraver Martin Schongauer from Colmar. Schongauer's engravings were the first to be printed in large numbers and thus widely disseminated. The exhibition's opening gallery illustrates this convincingly by displaying Schongauer's engraving *Torment of St Anthony* (c.1470–73; Bibliothèque nationale; cat. no.1.b) and two early copies of it, one by Master FVB (c.1475–1500; Bibliothèque nationale; no.1.c) and another by Master

1. Installation view of *Albrecht Dürer: Print and Renaissance* at Musée Condé, Chantilly, 2022. (Photograph Armin Kunz).

FVB and Israhel van Meckenem (c.1475–1500; Bibliothèque nationale; no.1.c), alongside Dürer's *Head of a bearded old man* (no.1.a; Figs.1 and 2), a dynamic pen-and-ink drawing that is obviously indebted to the saint's head in Schongauer's print. The dates suggested for the drawing range from 1492 to 1520; the catalogue entry follows the most recent scholarship by putting it around 1505, therefore indicating that it was perhaps less a direct response to Schongauer's Anthony than, as Vrand puts it, a distant 'reminiscence' of it (p.46).

The exhibition is presented in the eighteenth-century Jeu de Paume building in the grounds of the château de Chantilly. Its simple, rectangular interior is elegantly partitioned to guide the visitor through the five main sections with smaller subdivisions, corresponding to the chapters in the accompanying catalogue.¹ These alternate between essays by Deldicque and Vrand, with additional articles and entries on groups of works by such specialists as Laura Andolfini on Dürer and Leonardo and Alice Klein on Hans Wechtlin. The show is part of a series of collaborations undertaken in recent years by the Bibliothèque nationale's Département des estampes et de la photographie to organise exhibitions that, for whatever reason, cannot be presented in its own august quarters in Paris. In this instance, the strategy had the seductive bonus of



showing the Musée Condé's holdings of Dürer drawings, which, according to the museum's statutes, cannot be lent. Of those, the design drawing (1508; no.52) for the so-called Landauer altarpiece alone would justify the trip to Chantilly. The three sheets with silverpoint drawings from the sketchbook Dürer kept during his journey to the Netherlands in 1520–21 (nos.89 a–c) complement the picture for anyone who saw the recent shows in Aachen and London commemorating the quinqucentenary of this trip.² In addition to works from the collections of the Musée Condé, the Bibliothèque nationale and the École des Beaux-arts, Paris, there are also many rarely exhibited surprises, among them a pair of pen-and-ink drawings of female heads from the Musée Antoine-Vivenel, Compiègne (nos.38a–b), and a pen-and-ink drawing that is best characterised as a 'portrait' of a stork (Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels; no.72).

Another discovery, even for connoisseurs, are the Dürer prints from the Musée Condé's collection, for which Nicole Garnier-Pelle's essay on the provenance provides welcome background information. Exiled to London after the revolution of 1848, Henri d'Orléans, duc d'Aumale, quickly became a client of Dominic Colnaghi. Given the duke's bookish and bibliophile predilections, he began his print collecting by acquiring the twenty-one volumes of Adam von Bartsch's *Le Peintre-Graveur* (1803–21) in April 1855, before making his first purchases of Dürer prints with *Nemesis* (c.1501–02; no.26) in June 1858 and *St Eustace* (c.1501; no.76) in April 1860. The duke continued to collect prints by Dürer, aiming not for a complete collection but for a selection of the master's most important works. Their quality is usually high, although they betray the preference of collectors of this period for richly inked, dark impressions. Only later would scholarship establish that these are often not necessarily the earliest ones pulled from the plate. Most other works in the exhibition – among them many of Dürer's innovative and highly influential woodcuts – come from the Bibliothèque nationale's holdings, without which the exhibition could

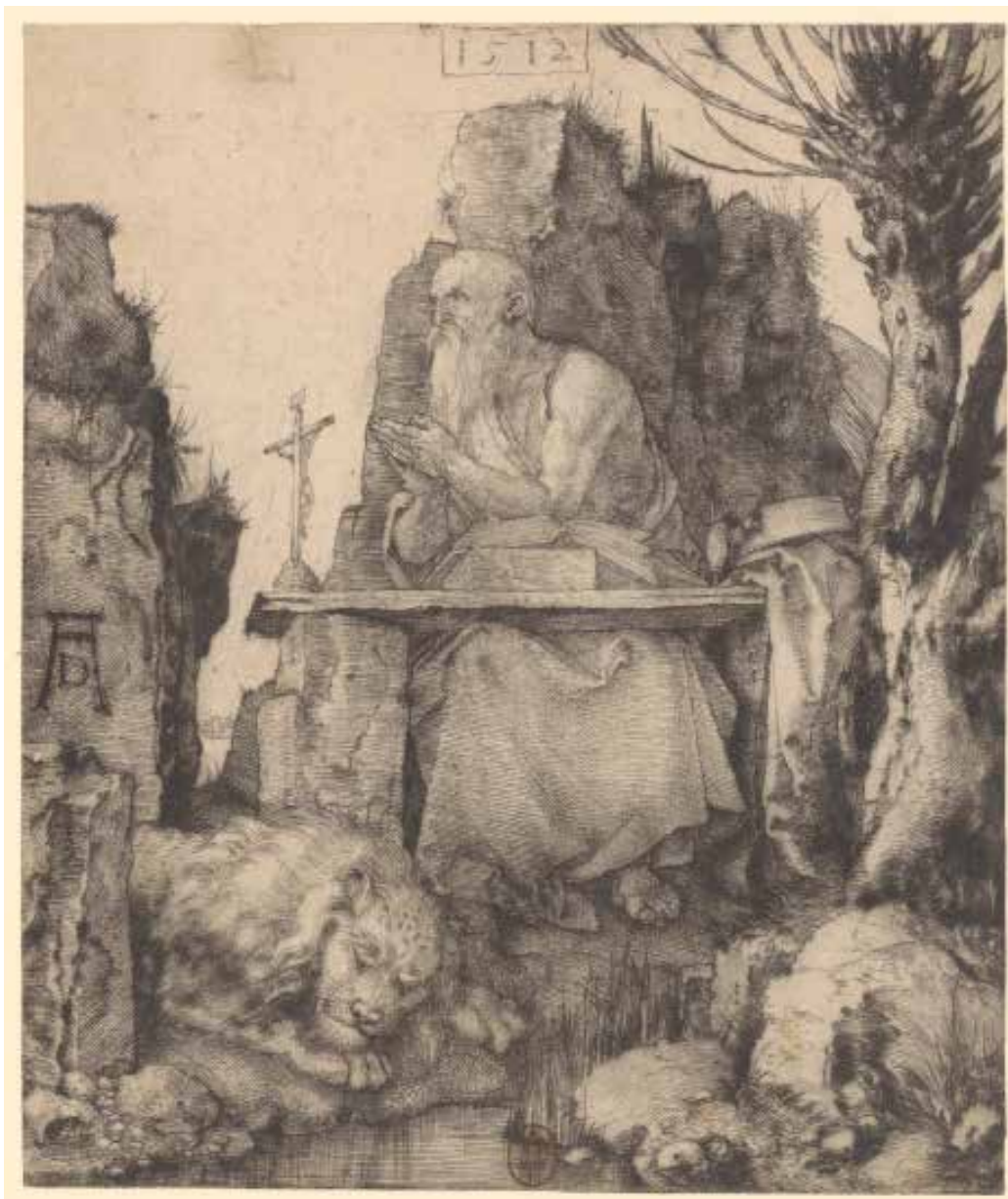


hardly present such an exceptional depth and breadth of Renaissance printmaking. They include prints by Pollaiuolo, Mantegna, Marcantonio Raimondi, Hans Baldung Grien, Hans Burgkmair the Elder, Lucas Cranach and Lucas van Leyden, as well as a superb impression of Dürer's extremely rare drypoint *St Jerome by the pollard willow* (no.80; Fig.3), which comes from

2. Head of a bearded old man, by Albrecht Dürer. c.1505(?). Pen and brown ink, 18.7 by 13.1 cm. (Fondation Custodia, Paris; exh. Musée Condé, Chantilly).

the Bibliothèque's founding collection, assembled by Michel de Marolles in the seventeenth century.

In December 1860, the duke scored a coup by securing the drawing collection of Frédéric Reiset, a wealthy collector and connoisseur, who was made curator of prints and drawings at the Louvre in 1850. In 1879 Reiset would also sell forty important



paintings to the duke, which can now be found among many other treasures adorning the galleries of the château, across the lawn from the Jeu de Paume. Reiset's collection included eight works thought to be by Dürer, and the attribution of no fewer than six of them have stood the test of time. Apart from the drawing for the Landauer altarpiece and the three drawings from the journey to the Netherlands, mentioned above, there is a highly finished *Annunciation* (1526; no.83) and an Italianate *Holy Family surrounded by saints and angels* (1521; no.90). The latter is unusual for the many *pentimenti* that enable the viewer to observe Dürer's efforts to determine the gestures of

3. *St. Jerome by the pollard willow*, by Albrecht Dürer. 1512. Drypoint, 20.9 by 17.6 cm. (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris; exh. Musée Condé, Chantilly).

Opposite
4. *Pupila Augusta*, by Albrecht Dürer. c.1498. Pen and ink on paper, 25.4 by 19.4 cm. (Royal Collection Trust © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2022; exh. Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham).

the figures, especially evident in the tender interplay between the Virgin and the Christ Child; the drawing shows signs of a probing hesitancy far removed from the effortless fluidity that characterises so many of his later drawings.

Given the recent revival of interest in connoisseurship prompted by the discovery of an early pen-and-ink drawing, *Virgin and Child with a flower on a grassy bench*, attributed to Dürer, which is currently on the London art market, one slightly regrets that the two other drawings from Reiset's Dürer group are not shown in the exhibition. One, a *Virgin and Child*, is at least illustrated in the catalogue,

with a tentative attribution to Hans Süss von Kulmbach (p.21; inv.DE 890); the other (inv.DE 894), now given to Ludwig Krug, is merely referenced in a footnote. Sheets such as these, situated along the fringes of an artist's established oeuvre, are often the most helpful for dividing the master's hand from that of a pupil or copyist.

But this is a minor quibble. Overall, the exhibition is well considered and reflects much important recent scholarship. The focus on Dürer provides the perfect basis for examining – as its subtitle suggests – the role of printmaking in the seminal years around 1500. None of his predecessors (and perhaps only very few of his successors) made prints such a central concern of their artistic praxis as the master from Nuremberg.

¹ *Albrecht Dürer: Gravure et Renaissance*. Edited by Mathieu Deldicque and Caroline Vrand. 288 pp. incl. 271 col. ills. (In Fine éditions d'art, Paris, 2022), €35. ISBN 978-2-38203-025-7.

² Reviewed by Mark Evans in this Magazine, 163 (2021), pp.1180–84.

Dürer: The Making of a Renaissance Master

Barber Institute of Fine Arts,
Birmingham
17th June–25th September

by LEA VIEHWEGER

In German-speaking countries, exhibitions on Albrecht Dürer are a frequent occurrence, recent examples being those in Vienna in 2019 and Aachen in 2021.¹ In the United Kingdom, however, the artist has been the subject of renewed focus only recently. In 2017 Jeffrey Ashcroft published a comprehensive translation of Dürer's writings into English and in 2021–22 a version of the Aachen exhibition travelled to the National Gallery, London.² Both made the artist newly accessible to an English-speaking public and introduced a generation of art history students to the voice of the northern European artist and entrepreneur, especially through the Netherlandish travel journal (which occasionally sounds more like an accountant's than an artist's voice).³