

REFORMATIONS

DÜRER & the New Age of Print

Exhibition Highlights

Reformations: Dürer & The New Age of Print explores how master German artist Albrecht Dürer (Nuremberg, 1472-1528) and his contemporaries harnessed the interest and potential of Johannes Gutenberg's new moveable type press in early printed images, books, and incunabula (works printed prior to 1505.) These works from the early moments of printmaking in Europe remind viewers of the ways in which creative uses of new technology can contribute to artist and social change.

The Dürer Prints

Albrecht Dürer

***Life of the Virgin* series (20 prints)**

c. 1500-1510

Woodcut

From 1501 to 1511, Albrecht Dürer designed 20 large-scale woodcuts depicting key episodes in Mary's life, covering the Annunciation, Christ's birth and childhood, and her assumption into heaven, body and soul. In 1511, Dürer printed his designs for his *Life of the Virgin* series and published them alongside text in a book of poetry written by a humanist, Benedictine monk with whom he worked, Benedictus Chelidoniumus (d. 1521).

Albrecht Dürer

***Small Woodcut Passion* series (36 prints, plus title page)**

c. 1509-1511

Woodcut

Consisting of 36 woodcuts (plus the title page), the *Small Woodcut Passion* is Albrecht Dürer's most extensive and best-known series of Passion prints. In scenes ranging from *The Fall of Man* to *The Last Judgment*, Dürer added significantly to the 14 episodes that typically comprise the Passion cycle depicting Christ's last days on earth, his crucifixion, and resurrection. Presented as the new Adam and Eve, Jesus and his mother Mary are shown as participating in the salvation of humankind. With its emphasis on human sin and redemption, and Jesus's exemplary nature, the *Small Woodcut Passion* is rich with human drama.

Albrecht Dürer
Engraved Passion series (16 prints)
c. 1508–1513
Engraving

Composed from 1507 to 1512, the *Engraved Passion* is the only print series depicting Christ's final days on earth that Albrecht Dürer executed in copperplate engravings. This series represents one of his greatest attempts to raise printmaking to the level of a fine, intellectual art. As the narrative of events culminating in Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, which Christians believe restored eternal life to humankind, the Passion of Christ was central not only to the Catholic faith, but also to reform-minded northerners who wished to meditate on Christ's pain and sacrifice. Like today's Stations of the Cross, its events were depicted in the Renaissance in a series of narrative scenes, often in painting or low-relief sculpture. Dürer began no fewer than six Passion projects over his lifetime, choosing the humble printmaking mediums of woodcut and engraving to reinterpret the familiar story for a broader audience.

Albrecht Dürer
Sudarium of St. Veronica
Engraving, 1513

On Christ's way to the cross, he stopped and a woman named Veronica offered him a cloth to wipe his bloodied face. The cloth with Christ's image, the so-called *Sudarium*, speaks of St. Veronica's charity, and constitutes the first, printed likeness of Christ. This virtuoso engraving shows Dürer's interest in Christ's Passion and in translating the traditional art of painting icons (likenesses of holy figures) to the new printed medium.

Books

Johann Gutenberg
A Noble Fragment: Being a Leaf of the Gutenberg Bible . . . (Mainz, 1450–55)
New York: A. Norton & Gabriel Wells, 1921
Latin

The Gutenberg Bible was the first book printed in the West using moveable type. Before, books were made by hand (manuscripts) or printed from engraved wooden blocks. This new technology, seen here in one leaf of the Gutenberg Bible, allowed for the rapid reproduction and dissemination of printed texts, thereby opening an essential, early gate to the modern information age.

Hartmann Schedel

***Liber Chronicarum* (“Nuremberg Chronicle”)**

With woodcuts by Wilhelm Pleydenwurff and Michael Wolgemut

Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, 1493

Latin

The so-called *Nuremberg Chronicle* is the most important illustrated history of the world printed in the period. It spans from the creation of the world to 1493, with a final section on the end of days and Last Judgment. This costly production represents an ambitious collaboration of author, Hartmann Schedel, illustrators, Wilhelm Pleydenwurff and Michael Wolgemut, and the Nuremberg printer, Anton Koberger. A one-time apprentice of Wolgemut, Albrecht Dürer likely contributed to both the designs and carving of some of the woodcuts.

This volume includes an astounding 1,809 illustrations using 645 original woodcuts (with many repeated designs), including some of the first printed townscapes. The monumental, double-page woodcut on display shows a portrait of Dürer’s hometown, Nuremberg. The monochrome *Liber Chronicarum* was first printed in Latin and soon after in a less-expensive form in the German vernacular. Many copies were later hand-colored, reflecting a continued taste for the colorful ornamentation often associated with luxurious manuscripts.

Saint Jerome

Correspondence

With woodcut by Albrecht Dürer

Basel: Nicolas Kessler, 1497

Latin

Introducing this early printed compilation of 120 letters written by St. Jerome (4th century), the frontispiece woodcut of *St. Jerome and the Lion* is one of Dürer’s earliest known prints. The woodcut depicts Jerome tending to a wounded lion, extracting a thorn from its paw. Dürer returned to this subject in a far more refined, 1514 engraving emphasizing St. Jerome’s absorption in translating the (Vulgate) Bible into Latin.

Hore intemerate Virgi incipiunt feliciter

Paris: Philippe Pigouchet & Simon Vostre, 1497

Metalcut

Latin

In the late 15th century, many printed books—like this highly decorated, engraved book of hours—were designed to look like illuminated manuscripts. Early printers reproduced devotional texts that scribes had once labored to copy. Many of the new, printed volumes appeared in more compact formats for private use. Decorated with small narrative images in the margins, this exquisite volume represents one of hundreds produced by Parisian engraver/printer Philippe Pigouchet and printer Simon Vostre in the late 15th century.

Ulrich Pinder

Speculum Passionis Domini Nosti Lesu Christi

With woodcuts by Hans Schaeufelein and Hans Baldung Grien

Nuremberg: Friedrich Peypus, 1507

Latin

Executed by two of Albrecht Dürer's best students, the 39 full-page woodcut prints in this book reflect Dürer's own style and graphic sensibility, and demonstrate the importance of mixing text and image in the new age of print. Ulrich Pinder, a physician in Nuremberg, published many tracts on medicine and health, as well as this text emphasizing reflection on Christ's Passion: also a preoccupation of Albrecht Dürer and other Reformation-era artists.

Simon Fish

Supplicacyon for the beggars

Nuremberg: Friedrich Peypus, 1529

Printed Pamphlet

English

The highly polemical *Supplicacyon for the beggars* raised harsh accusations against the Catholic Church, and was likely distributed swiftly. The pamphlet form demonstrates the desire by increasingly radical reformists for cheaper printing and more rapid production and popular dissemination. The handwriting shown here, sometimes cut off mid-word, seems to indicate a cover made from scrap paper found lying about the print shop.

Vitruvius

De architectura

With woodcuts by Fra Giovanni Giocondo

Venice: Ioannis de Tridino alias Tacuino, 1511

Latin

Vitruvius (Roman, 1st century BCE) was one of the most important architects from antiquity. His treatise of ten books on ideal, classical architecture is still the only complete, surviving work on architecture from antiquity. The Italian printmaker, Fra Giovanni Giocondo, wanted to render the Vitruvian text readable and usable for scholars. He added 136 woodcuts, since the original illustrations were lost. The revival of this treatise, and Giocondo's helpful illustrations, contributed enormously to the classical architectural revival in the Renaissance.

Luca Pacioli

Summa de arithmetica, geometria, proportioni et proportionalita

Toscalano: Paganino Paganini, 1523

Latin

Authored by the so-called “father of accounting,” Fra Luca Pacioli’s *Summa de arithmetica* includes a 27-page treatise on bookkeeping and was the first such Renaissance text to be written in the Italian vernacular. At the time, Venice was at the pinnacle of European trade, and Pacioli’s manual proved an essential reference for commerce. It was written primarily for merchants. The text has also been credited with advancing Renaissance mathematics, as well as laying the groundwork for Pascal’s theory of probability. An Italian Franciscan friar and mathematician, Pacioli is known for collaborating closely with Leonardo da Vinci.

Albrecht Dürer

Institutionum Geometricarum Libri Quatuor

With woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer

Paris: Apud Christianum Wechelum, 1532

Latin

This treatise represents Dürer’s attempt to educate artists on geometry and how to represent three-dimensional forms on a two-dimensional surface. Although the mechanical method shown here proved impractical for common use, Dürer showed artists how to achieve a credible illusion of depth using a “window” device instead of mathematical equations. This illustration shows a foreshortened lute, as seen and drafted by the artist using this Italian Renaissance optical device.