

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL GALLERY MOUNTS MAJOR EXHIBITION OF DURER GRAPHICS
TO COMMEMORATE IN AMERICA GERMAN MASTER'S 500TH BIRTHDAY

WASHINGTON, D.C. Dürer in America: His Graphic Work, the largest exhibition ever held in the United States of drawings and prints by the major Northern Renaissance artist, Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), opens today, April 25, at the National Gallery of Art.

Organized by the National Gallery to commemorate in America the 500th anniversary of the German master's birth, the exhibition will remain on view through June 6.

After exhibition at the National Gallery, three of the drawings (Young Woman in Netherlandish Dress from the National Gallery's Widener Collection, Adam and Eve from the Pierpont Morgan Library, and Nude Woman with Herald's Wand from the E.B. Crocker Museum in Sacramento, California) will be sent on to Nuremberg, Germany, for that city's major exhibition, part of a year-long salute to its native son.

The National Gallery's exhibition, spanning Dürer's entire career, is designed to show his development as a graphic artist. Brought together for the first time are 36 drawings from public and private American and Canadian collections and a selection of 207 of the finest impressions of prints from 22 public collections in the United States. All but two of the known Dürer drawings in North America are included. The prints were chosen on the basis

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of quality from among tens of thousands of impressions in America. Ten books with woodcut illustrations and six bound volumes of prints are also exhibited. Different book pages will be on exhibition each day.

Over a quarter of the exhibited prints come from the outstanding collection of Lessing J. Rosenwald, a trustee of the National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition was organized by Gaillard F. Ravenel, a curator at the National Gallery, with the collaboration of Dr. Charles Talbot of Yale University, Jay Levenson, a graduate student at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and Dr. Richard S. Field of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Drawings include the Self-Portrait of 1493, one of Dürer's most important early drawings; Adam and Eve, a study for the famous engraving; and Kneeling Donor, a study for the Feast of the Rose Garlands altarpiece, commissioned around 1506 by the German merchants in Venice and now in the National Gallery in Prague.

Among the best known prints are Melencolia I, the subject of which has been called "the spiritual self-portrait" of the artist, The Knight, Death and the Devil, Saint Jerome in His Study. Complete sets of the five important series, The Apocalypse, The Large Passion, The Life of the Virgin, The Small Passion, and The Engraved Passion will be on view.

Also exhibited are several rare objects, including a wood block for the print Madonna and Child with Three Hares, and a volume of The Engraved Passion, bound in Dürer's studio and embossed with the coat of arms of Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, Dürer's lifelong patron and admirer.

Supplementing the graphic works is a gallery of paintings and sculpture by Dürer and some of his German contemporaries. The National Gallery's two Dürer paintings, Madonna and Child (with

Lot and His Daughters on the reverse) and Portrait of a Clergyman, will be featured, as well as paintings by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553), Albrecht Altdorfer (before 1480-1543) and Bernhard Strigel (1460/61-1528), and a wood sculpture by Tilman Riemenschneider (1460-1531), also in the Gallery's collections. Two works by Cranach, Adam and Eve, are on loan from the Norton Simon Collection.

Medals by German artists from the Gallery's Samuel H. Kress Collection include a portrait of Emperor Charles V designed by Dürer and portrait medals of other sixteenth century figures such as Erasmus, Frederick the Wise of Saxony, and Dürer himself.

A special section of the exhibition has been designed to involve viewers actively in problems of connoisseurship, using examples of Dürer's graphics to explain the criteria of quality in Old Master prints. Fifty prints with texts and labels have been chosen to illustrate different print-making techniques and variations in successive impressions. Some examples are mounted over light boxes to illuminate watermarks; others are hinged to the walls in plexiglass mounts to allow visitors to observe aspects of paper restoration.

A facsimile of a working state (the second of five states) of Adam and Eve is also included, as well as unusual impressions (one on satin) and different types of forgeries.

This technical section is a condensed version of an exhibition produced earlier this year for the Philadelphia Museum of Art by Dr. Field.

Concurrent with the exhibition, the Gallery will hold a series of four consecutive Sunday lectures devoted to Dürer, to be given by distinguished scholars, beginning the opening day of the exhibition, April 25. All the lectures will be given at 4:00 p.m. in the Gallery auditorium. Wolfgang Stechow, 1971

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Kress Professor in Residence at the Gallery, will inaugurate the series. Dr. Stechow has also been invited to deliver the opening remarks at the Dürer anniversary exhibition in Nuremberg on May 21, the artist's birthday.

The National Gallery's Department of Education will give daily tours of the exhibition. Details are available at the Information Desks in the Gallery.

A catalog has been published in conjunction with the exhibition and is available at the Gallery.

END

Albrecht Dürer, A Study Exhibition of Print Connoisseurship

This gallery contains a condensed version of an exhibition held earlier this year at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. There, as here, the exhibition was conceived and installed by Dr. Richard S. Field, Assistant Curator of Prints.

The exhibition proposes to explore the concept of quality in Old Master prints through the masterpieces of Albrecht Dürer. It is intended to demonstrate that quality is a function of three basic variables: the condition of the printing surface (plate or block); the care and intent involved in the inking and printing process (and, to some extent, in the selection of the paper); and, lastly, the present condition of a specific impression. All of these factors must be judged simultaneously; they must also be weighed against certain objective criteria in so far as possible, but the viewer is cautioned that in the long-run many judgments are not entirely based on scientific evidence. Experience and hard looking, a good memory and a knowledge of print-making, and considerations of pure taste must be reckoned with.

Neither the observations offered by the labels, nor the judgments implicit in the present selection, are necessarily free from error or dispute. The visitor must feel free to decide the level of his own participation in this kind of didactic exhibition. For the casual observer there are many obvious comparisons; and for the devotee there are innumerable occasions for very minute discriminations. A work of art always stands ready to receive and reward that amount of effort and love the observer wishes to expend.

Engraving

An engraving is printed from a copperplate. The lines which carry the ink are incised into the copper by means of a sharp pointed tool called the burin. Normally these lines are thin, quite regular, tend to be curvilinear, and terminate in pointed ends. To print an engraving the entire plate is covered with ink and the surface is subsequently wiped clean with a cloth and the heel of the hand. A moist piece of paper is laid down on the plate, and the two, surrounded by felt, pass through two rollers which exert considerable pressure. The emerging impression consists of lines which stand in slight relief since the moist paper has extracted most of the ink from the incised lines of the copperplate.

The Woodcut

Unlike the engraving, the woodcut is printed from a raised surface. All the lines of the image have been isolated by cutting away all the wood which was not meant to receive ink. The block was inked with a simple roller, and printed with a wooden spoon or by means of a press similar to that used for early books. The deterioration of the woodblock with age is considerably easier to spot than that of the engraved plate. Normally, the lines would first break down as little checks developed; subsequently larger splits and breaks appeared. At the same time the fine edge would be worn away and often, if care was not taken, the whole image would become heavier and less clear. Occasionally accidental damage would be extensive enough to require the insertion of a small block of wood carrying freshly cut lines.

Etching and Drypoint

These are also ~~intaglio~~ techniques in which the image is printed from incised lines. The etched line results from the action of acid. The copperplate is first coated with an acid-resistant ground. The artist, using a pointed instrument, draws his design through this ground exposing the copper beneath. Then the plate is immersed in an acid bath and the lines are eaten to a controlled depth. The remainder of the ground is removed and the plate is printed in the same fashion as the engraving.

The drypoint is the most direct and spontaneous manner of working a copperplate. A sharp needle is used to furrow out the lines, but, unlike the burin (engraving) there remains a pronounced burr along one or both edges of the line. This may wear rapidly, but when fresh it prints with considerable thickness and tone.

YOUNG WOMAN ATTACKED BY DEATH (THE RAVISHER) c.1495

- f/
- 1A. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection
Meder 76, only state, a/p
Watermark: high crown (fragment), M.20

A rich, gritty impression showing influence of the Housebook Master's drypoints.

- 1B. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Collection
Meder 76, only state, f/f (?)
Watermark: city coat-of-arms, probably M.276

A late impression of c.1570 shows a plate in amazingly printable condition. Under the microscope it becomes apparent, however, that the plate has been carefully reworked with the burin. Note the extensive loss to the upper left of the print.

THE PRODIGAL SON AMID THE SWINE c.1496

- 2A. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Mr. and Mrs. Isaac D. Fletcher Fund, 1919
Meder 28, only state, a/h
watermark: orb with cross (?), M.53

A very early, contrasty impression, somewhat damaged along the left edge. The branches added to the tree, upper center, are conspicuously full of burr, which was normally scraped away before printing. Many vertical scratches are seen in the sky and on the back of the swine to the right; these are in reality very shallow scratches inflicted either by a gritty ink or by a dirty cloth during the process of wiping the plate prior to printing. They disappear with the use of the plate.

- 2B. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Collection
Meder 28, only state, c/h (?)
Watermark: none visible (probably Gothic P paper)

A nice impression but unfortunately a bit lightly inked. What has happened to the lower right corner?

MADONNA WITH THE MONKEY c.1498

- 3A. Baltimore Museum of Art, Gift of Blanche Adler
Meder 30, only state, a/l
Watermark: bull's head, M.62

A beautiful impression of the highest quality, yet seriously marred by the stain across the top of the entire print and by slight trimming all around. The deep black ink, fully worked into the plate, creates a play of tone and texture that is nearly painterly in its richness; Meder referred to this phenomenon as "Überspielung," which indicates qualities that seem to surpass those normally anticipated from engraved lines.

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3B. Philadelphia Museum of Art, W. P. Wilstach Collection

Meder 30, only state, b/1

Watermark: none visible (probably bull's head paper)

How does this example compare to that of the Baltimore Museum of Art? That was a handsome impression, but this might be just as desirable. Although well inked and cleanly printed, this impression shows a loss of tonal subtlety. The fine lines do not hold the ink quite as well. Compare the modeling of the faces or the shading in the sky, for example. Meder notes the appearance of one or two curved scratches in the sky over the little house; here, one is barely discernible. Slight tears have been mended at the bottom and lower left.

3C. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Collection

Meder 30, only state, 1/1

Watermark: row of letters in a band; not in Meder, Briquet or Churchill; probably 17th century

The hole (top center) may indicate that some owner had already thought of retiring the plate from use. This impression is rather good, at least clear and even, and honestly reflects the worn and damaged condition of the copper surface. The paper has been washed and backed with a strong, thin piece of Japanese tissue.

3D. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.

Engraved copy, possibly 19th century; not mentioned by Heller or Bartsch

Watermark: none

FALL OF MAN (ADAM AND EVE)

4A. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Heliogravure facsimile of impression belonging to the British Museum

Meder 1, second state of five

This illustrates Dürer's normal engraving procedure. The main design, following preparatory drawings, was engraved in outline. Then the entire surface was completed, section by section. Proofs were pulled to check the work, but unlike artists of later centuries, no editions were ever contemplated before the work had reached total perfection. Only occasionally were small corrections made, as in this plate and the second state of Melencolia I. A heliogravure is a photomechanical etching which accurately reproduces the raised lines of an engraving or an etching.

- 4B. National Gallery of Art, Gift of R. Horace Gallatin
 Meder 1, fourth state of five, c/c
 Watermark: bull's head, M.62

The completed plate in a superb, clear impression on Dürer's choicest paper. A few scratches have already made their appearance -- those in the air, above the mountain goat, across Eve's right knee and on Adam's upper thigh -- but in no way indicate a loss of quality of plate or impression.

- 4C. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Louis E. Stern Collection
 Meder 1, fifth state of five, a/d (?)
 Watermark: bull's head, M.62

For reasons of his own, Dürer "split" the tree trunk that appears beneath Adam's left arm. A very good impression, but certainly less exciting than the foregoing.

SAINT EUSTACE c.1501

- 5A. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Mr. and Mrs. Isaac D. Fletcher Fund, 1919
 Meder 60, only state, b-d/k
 Watermark: high crown, M.20

A beautiful impression with considerable relief and burr. Nevertheless there are even finer examples of this subject with much painterly tone coaxed from the lines ("Überspielung"). Impressions 5A and B, on the best "high-crown" paper, are difficult to catalogue. Each print already manifests the scratches on the Saint's right arm and shoulder, the horizontals over the far left mountain and on the rear of the horse, as well as the deep gash in the upper right corner. Each print shows the horizontal scratch which extends outward from the left tower, while 5A carries various curved scratches in the air over the castle.

- 5B. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Gift of R. Horace Gallatin
 Meder 60, only state, b-d/k
 Watermark: high crown, M.20

What effect do the wide margins have? Do the differences in ink tone and richness affect the overall quality? Occasional weak spots appear in many impressions: here, one might compare the areas beneath the Saint's feet with the Metropolitan example.

- 5C. Philadelphia Museum of Art, William S. Pilling Collection
 Meder 60, only state, d-f/k
 Watermark: bishop's coat-of-arms, M.39

Printed between 1540 and 1560; the loss of clarity and depth has been somewhat disguised by over-inking. A prominent addition to the repertoire of scratches are the deep parallel diagonals over the standing dog facing right; these remain on the plate into the 17th century as may be seen in

5D. A past owner has sought to improve the present example by having the margins restored and a simulated platemark drawn in. The Museum's restorer has again removed these "false margins" from the upper half of the print and they are exhibited separately. By swinging the plexiglas frame you can clearly observe from the verso what is so deceptive from the front side.

- 5D. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Collection
Meder 60, only state, k/k
Watermark: single-headed eagle, M.224

A very good impression from the worn plate, indicating only that the printer managed to record all that the plate had to offer at the time, c.1585-1600.

- 5E. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,
Meder 60, only state, /k
Printed on satin

It is believed that some of these silk and satin impressions date from the end of the 16th century. They are quite rare but, so far as we are aware, do not echo the practice of the master himself. Nevertheless, the rich and precious surface is not totally foreign to so painterly an engraving as the Saint Eustace.

- 5F. and 5G. Philadelphia Museum of Art

Which of these two impressions would you buy for the Gallery?

Can you remember how they compare with the other impressions of Saint Eustace in this exhibition?

Try to catalogue both by reference to the translation of Meder's description. The work on the right has a watermark close to the large city gate, Meder 263 and Briquet 15945; that on the left has no watermark.

The work on the left is a very fine heliogravure reproduction (the lines stand up as they would in an original). It was printed in the late 1880s by the French publisher Armand-Durand, on simulated vellum. It is disturbingly white and smooth; there is no platemark visible. The even blackness, the white paper, and the fact that measurement proves it to be a slightly reduced version are sufficient indications of its actual nature. Examination under high power is less satisfactory -- so fine is the reproduction! Ironically, it serves here as a good indication of how the very finest, flawless impressions might be remembered.

The impression on the right is a mediocre original. It is difficult to catalogue according to Meder, and seems to have been printed when many of the original scratches had worn away; the diagonal wisp-like scratch over

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the left tower remains unnoticed by Meder. It has suffered considerable damage both in terms of tears and surface wear and is hardly a very valuable work of art. When fresh, it may have been fairly pleasing, though undramatic.

YOUNG COUPLE THREATENED BY DEATH (THE PROMENADE) c.1498

6A. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Mr. and Mrs. Isaac D. Fletcher Fund, 1919
Meder 83, before reworking, a/k
Watermark: bull's head (?), M.62

6B. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection
Meder 83, before reworking, f-g/k (?)
Watermark: crowned city coat-of-arms, M.46-48

A good impression enhanced by skillfully added false margins, it must be dated 1540-50 on the basis of paper and plate condition. There are numerous light scratches -- one in the sky leading to the coif, one or two in the white area of the skirt, and one on the lower leaf in the plant at the left.

6C. Charles J. Rosenbloom, Pittsburgh
Meder 83, before reworking, k/k
Watermark: bishop's coat-of-arms, M.39

The viewer should decide how this rich impression relates to 6A, 6B, and 6D. This provides a most instructive comparative exercise. It also illustrates the need to make comparisons rather than jumping to conclusions based on vague, remembered standards.

6D. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Collection
Meder 83, before reworking, k/k
Watermark: none

We believe that the copperplate was virtually in the same condition as for the foregoing impression! The differences may be ascribed entirely to the techniques of inking and printing. The present example was lightly inked and very clearly wiped; the preceding was well-inked, wiped to allow a thin film of ink tone to remain on the surface of the copper, and printed with considerable pressure.

SAINT JEROME IN PENITENCE c.1497

7A. Philadelphia Museum of Art, William S. Pilling Collection
Meder 57, normal state, b/g
Watermark: Gothic P, M.321

The print connoisseur must possess a memory for quality. How does this impression compare to that hanging in the main gallery? Did you also note that it has been trimmed by about 8mm. at the top, which did not prevent

an uninformed restorer from adding false margins all around? The coolness of this impression is the result of a thin film of ink that was allowed to remain on the plate.

- 7B. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Collection
Meder 57, normal state, c-d/g
Watermark: none

A fair impression showing some plate wear and compensatory over-inking with considerable plate tone (more than 5A). The Museum has attempted to remove a dark-brown wash added to increase the depth of the background rocks.

- 7C. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Charles M. Lea Collection
Meder 57, normal state, f/g
Watermark: bishop's coat-of-arms, M.39

Do you recognize this kind of impression of a Dürer engraving? Was it executed during Dürer's lifetime? If there were no watermark to indicate a printing of 1540-1550, could you arrive at a similar dating without such evidence? Compare the details of this impression with those of 7A and 7B. For a similar treatment of inking see the discussions under 5C and 6C.

NEMESIS (THE LARGE FORTUNE) 1501-2

- 8A. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Mr. and Mrs. Isaac D. Fletcher Fund, 1919
Meder 72, second state of two, a/f
Watermark: high crown, M.20

A few first states exist before the "slipped" or accidental stroke beneath the bridge. The most sought-after examples of Dürer's engravings, are, like this one, rich and dark. Scarcely a moment's observation is necessary before one sees the substantial differences between 8A and 8B.

- 8B. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Collection
Meder 72, second state of two, b/f
Watermark: high crown, M.20 (visible from the recto)

A somewhat later impression, which has been printed a bit unevenly. The surface has been abraded, and at some point it was probably varnished. Later, it was torn vertically over half its length. By swinging the plexi-glas frame you may observe the repairs and the watermark.

KNIGHT, DEATH AND DEVIL (THE CHRISTIAN KNIGHT) 1513

- 9A. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
 Meder 74, only state, a/g
 Watermark: none visible

It is always unfortunate when a fine impression of early date survives in a damaged condition; such is the present case. The heavily repaired print could be more deceptively restored, of course (the horse's hind quarter), but its ultimate value will inevitably remain diminished.

- 9B. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Collection
 Meder 74, only state, g/g
 Watermark: none

By ca. 1580 the copperplate had worn dreadfully; but even enough to allow quite satisfactory if extremely pale impressions, c.1580. By that date, it is safe to speculate, between 1000 and 5000 prints had been pulled of this most popular image.

SAINT JEROME IN HIS STUDY 1514

- 10A. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Purchased: Lisa Norris Elkins Fund
 Meder 59, only state, b/f
 Watermark: small jug (fragment), M.158

A fine, even impression; probably cleaned without entirely removing old washes or stains (ceiling above the Saint, the lion's mane, etc.) Possibly to be dated c.1520.

- 10B. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.
 Engraved copy; Heller 758, B.60B
 Watermark: two C's with double cross and crown, M.292

A copy, probably executed c.1580-1600, it is one of the most deceptive in the entire "Dürer corpus."

COAT OF ARMS OF DEATH 1503

- 11A. Baltimore Museum of Art, Riggs Collection
 Meder 98, before slipped stroke, b/d
 Watermark: bull's head, M.62

An excellent impression on smooth, polished paper with a slight rose-tan tonality. Prints of this quality on such clean, perfectly preserved paper are immediately suspect. In such cases, the presence of the anticipated watermark is some reassurance. A horn of the bull's head watermark is visible in the shield.

11B. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Meder 98, after slipped stroke, d/d
Watermark: large city gate, M.261

An impression of c.1580 that clearly shows a plethora of scratches gathered in the course of time.

11C. Private Collection
Engraved copy by Jérôme Wierix (1553?-1619); Alvin 1191, Heller 1023
Watermark: none

A good copy, certainly used -- if not executed -- to deceive.

11D. Private Collection
Facsimile reproduction (Reichsdruckerei?) by hand-retouched heliogravure
Watermark: none

This is a very deceptive facsimile. Not only has it been cut down to avoid measurement of the platemark, but the laid paper has been "antiqued" to impart the patina of age and even slight damage! Close inspection reveals the following imperfections: first, the paper is not early 16th century; it is too regular and does not correspond to any of the five papers Dürer employed for quality impressions. Second, the hand-retouching of the photomechanically executed plate (an intaglio process) misunderstood the little brooch on the lady's breast, and simplified the decorative work on her bodice into a fish-roe pattern. Last, comparison with an unmanipulated facsimile from the same publisher (11E) shows the presence of identical specks or flaws, which are discernible in the heliogravure but not in the original.

11E. Private Collection
Facsimile reproduction (Reichsdruckerei?) by hand-retouched heliogravure
Watermark: none

HOLY FAMILY WITH THREE HARES c.1497

12A. Philadelphia Museum of Art
Given by Lessing J. Rosenwald to the Print Club Permanent Collection
Meder 212, only state, a/i
Watermark: orb with cross, M.53

An even, early impression that nevertheless lacks brilliance; in excellent condition aside from three old horizontal folds, now flattened.

12B. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Henry Walters, 1917
Meder 212, only state, e/i (?)
Watermark: none visible

Do you prefer this strongly inked impression to the former? In what part of the 16th century would you date it?

12C. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Meder 212, only state, g-h/i

Watermark: cross on three mounts within a cloverleaf in a circle, M.157

The block has a marked split through the plants at the left, and one just beginning through the right angel. This impression of c.1580 was pulled on paper Meder associates with a slightly later moment in the life of the wood-block -- after the appearance of several wormholes not visible in this particular example.

12D. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Collection

Meder 212, only state, i/i

Watermark: none

Showing much of the damage the block was to suffer to the present day, compared with 12E, however, there are enough fine details remaining to preserve the Düreresque qualities (the Virgin's face, for example) that seem to have vanished from the more recent printing.

12E. Philadelphia Museum of Art, William S. Pilling Collection

Meder 212, only state, i/i (or later)

Watermark: none

A clean impression, possibly 18th or 19th century, from a considerably split and wormed block. A number of wormholes and courses have been filled in on the block while others have been disguised with brown ink on the paper. Note how the breaks in the border have also been disguised.

FLIGHT INTO EGYPT c.1504

Fourteenth block of the Life of the Virgin

13A. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Charles M. Lea Collection

Meder 201, only state, before 1511 text edition, b/c

Watermark: bull's head, M.62

A good, but not brilliant, impression printed on good paper but with less *than optimum* care and after a passage of time sufficient for a few small breaks to develop in the bottom borderline. This impression also suffers from considerable imbedded dirt and varnish, several losses (the large stone lower center, the ass's neck) and a few tears (including one more than 90mm. long extended horizontally over Joseph's head). Press button in order to see watermark and repairs.

13B. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Collection

Meder 201, only state, after 1511 text edition, d/f

Watermark: crowned double eagle, M.222

A poor impression of c.1590, probably from the sixth post-1511 edition as listed by Meder.

separate label

The watermark is actually a thinner part of the paper -- thus it is visible when light passes through the sheet. We are not really sure as to the precise function of any watermark, but for the historian it may help in dating a document or work of art; at least it could help in grouping objects. The bull's head watermark at the left appears on many early impressions of Dürer's works; note that the paper is moderately thin, even in thickness, and has a regular pattern of chain and laid lines (caused by the papermaker's mould). The impression on the right shows the Württemberg coat-of-arms as a watermark. Both the quality of the impression and the watermark work together to establish a date of printing late in the 16th century. Note, too, that the paper is thin and uneven; that the lines are more widely spaced; and that the quality of the vat mixture was compromised by all sorts of impurities.

LAMENTATION OF CHRIST 1498-99

Tenth block of the Large Woodcut Passion

- 14A. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection
 Meder 122, before 1511 text edition, a/b
 Watermark: orb with cross, M.53

Before the early split through Christ's feet. This splendid deep impression is one of the "quality" edition Dürer pulled on this fine, strong "Reichsapfel" paper c.1498. The yellowish color of the paper is probably the result of the action of light; it could easily be cleaned.

- 14B. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Charles M. Lea Collection
 Meder 122, after 1511 text edition, a-b/c
 Watermark: none

How has the block been damaged? How has this impression suffered in the act of printing? The block has been very carefully reworked with a knife or very fine graver (burin?), adding white lines along contours to effect a clearer isolation of figures. Most easily detected is that which borders the back of the Virgin's drapery.

- 14C. Baltimore Museum of Art, Garrett Collection
 Meder 122, Ulm edition of 1690, c/c
 Watermark: monogram of Jesus, relates to M.304, 306, 311

Although the date of the paper is uncertain, the uneven printing establishes a fairly late date. Note the ever-widening crack, and the great loss of quality. We now think, as opposed to the Philadelphia catalogue entry, that the watermark is close to Briquet 9837, associated with Flemish papers of 1590-1600.

- 14D. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.
 Reversed, engraved copy, not mentioned by Heller or Bartsch
 Watermark: none

A fine 16th century Italian copy in no sense intended to deceive.

- 14E. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Collection
Etched copy not mentioned by Bartsch, Heller or Meder
Watermark: none

This is one of the series of etched copies of the Apocalypse, the Large Woodcut Passion, and several of Dürer's early single woodcuts. The broad etched line is hardly to be discovered in 16th - or even 17th-century printmaking, indicating the likelihood of an 18th-century date. There are some very fresh impressions of these etched copies on a paper watermarked ARCHETTES (M.289) that Meder associates only with the last impressions taken from the original woodblock after 1700.

HARROWING OF HELL 1510

Eleventh block of the Large Woodcut Passion

- 15A. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection
Meder 121, only state, before 1511 text edition, a/b
Watermark: cross with name Maria, M.316

A deep, brillinat, contrasty early impression. Note repair at the lower right.

- 15B. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection
Meder 121, only state, before 1511 text edition, b/b
Watermark: cross with name Maria, M.316

15A/ X
A light, even, slightly silvery impression on the same paper as 15A. Tempting as it is to assign ~~the first impression~~ to Dürer and this to an unsupervised shopworker, one should hesitate to do so. It is not beyond question that there were genuine taste factors that operated to produce proofs of markedly different effects. Nevertheless, this impression is smudged, over-inked in several areas, and poorly printed at the top right.

- 15C. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Charles M. Lea Collection
Meder 121, only state, possibly from the Ulm edition of 1690
Watermark: monogram of Jesus, relates to M.304, 306, 311 (see 14C)

A fine impression for so late a date. The edges have been over-inked. As in 14C the block has been gone over with a graver or burin and fine white lines appear here and there. Furthermore, the block has been carefully repaired -- the little vertical split rising 95mm. from the lower left corner has been filled in and the damage to the lines of Eve's right thigh has been modified.

THE ANGEL WITH THE KEY TO THE BOTTOMLESS PIT 1496-97

Sixteenth block of the Apocalypse

- 16A. Private Collection, Philadelphia
Meder 178, only state, at the time of, of after, the 1511 edition
Watermark: none

The paper is very similar to that used in the published book editions of 1511. Meder associates the gaps in the mountain contours and the break in the branch above the Angel's outstretched hand with the 1511 edition (no text is ever encountered on the verso of this woodcut). Of considerable interest is the 19th-century repair. Can you define the extent of this repair and sense the subtle differences between the original and drawn lines?

THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN 1515

- 17A. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Given by Bryant W. Langston
Meder 19, before rust spots, b-c/c
Watermark: bishop's coat-of-arms, M.39

Considerably less dramatic than the Meder "a" example in the main gallery, this was printed less forcefully and with less ink from slightly shallower lines; some ink was rather artlessly wiped on the surface of the plate. The circled S on the face of the print is the mark of William Strang, a 19th-century collector who once owned this print.

- 17B. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Collection
Meder 19, after appearance of rust spots, c/c
Watermark: indecipherable, probably not one cited by Meder

A 17th or 18th-century impression from a plate damaged by considerable corrosion. Meder has not considered the possibility that the plate has been reworked.

SAINT JEROME BY THE POLLARD WILLOW 1512

- 18A. Baltimore Museum of Art, Garrett Collection
Meder 58, second state of three, b-c/d
Watermark: none visible

The amount of ink carried by a drypoint line would be small if it were not for the rough burr that is found on one or both sides. This burr not only holds lots on ink but it prints it in a feathered fashion which our eyes "feel" as velvety. Unfortunately the burr is also very fragile and a work executed entirely in drypoint, such as this one, is liable to a quick and certain deterioration. Here virtually all the lines have lost their burr and the print has become flat (compare with the example in the main exhibition). How has the printer compensated for this loss? How much of this print has been restored?

- 18B. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection
Meder 58, second state of three, c/d
Watermark: none visible

A nice impression in good condition but manifesting a greater number of light scratches than 18A, including one across the Saint's chest and on the mound at the lower right.