

Renaissance Prints: engravings and woodcuts

Structuring Principles

Discuss origin of each technology

Discuss Renaissance (late, early modern?) image makers both as medieval craftsmen and simultaneously early Modern Artists

Discuss the relationship of Durer's artistic work and religious convictions in the context of the Reformation

Historical works as Visual Research for printmaking assignments and independent work

Show students engravings and woodcuts as visual sources informing studio work (and studio work will inform your understanding of artistic works)

Demonstrate, discuss the uses of historical visual research in their independent work

Origins of Printmaking in Europe

illuminated manuscript

print

we've discussed the advantages of producing several copies of printed images over the earlier book-based technology of illuminated manuscripts:

- printed texts and images are more affordable to produce and acquire
- more widely disseminated
- were used as souvenirs from pilgrimage sites

The earliest forms of prints were woodcuts and copper engravings

Woodcuts derived from textile printing
and.....

Engraved helmet, 16th c, Italy

Engraved sword, 17th c, England

Silver and gold chalices

....Armorsmiths and goldsmiths (engraving) who had used engraving techniques on fine metal work.

While early print technologies existed, printing as we know it today required the inexpensive availability of paper.

Paper-making as we know it today developed as early as the 1st ce, moved to the Middle East with paper-makers captured by Muslims, and moved to western Europe in the 12th century, with returning Crusaders.

Master ES

The first known printmaker to sign his work with a monogram.

- Goldsmith working in the Rhineland
- Made works appealing to a middle class audience – both religious and secular imagery
- Developed cross-hatching techniques and other methods of mark-making with a burin
- Stippling, flicking, short or long hyphen-styled groupings of mark-making to model forms and develop tonality. These developments likely owe to his training as a painter and his interest in translating some of the illusion of dimension that is possible in painting to printmaking.

Virgin and Child in Garden with Saints, 1461, plate size 8 ½ x 6 ½ inches

The garden alludes to Mary's Virginity (the enclosed garden, referenced by Hamburger). The concept of enclosure (virginity) is further emphasized by the position of the angels outside the garden.

The rear wall features Romanesque windows, suggesting a church or chapel or cloister, giving this garden/wall a liturgical sensibility.

The figures sit in a mead; Mary sits upon a grassy bench – planted with various mead plants. The plants are distinguished and identifiable: plantain, ranunculus, violets, etc.

The perspective is intuitive, rather than systematic.

Mary enthroned in an iconic composition – the style of centrally placed, frontal facing figures derives from Byzantine and later icons.

Mary is reading, perhaps a book of hours, she is crowned Queen of Heaven (the image is ahistorical)

The child Jesus plays with a lamb.... A symbol of his role as sacrificial lamb?

Barbara is on the left with her leashed dragon. She is a Virgin martyr, thus her inclusion with Mary and Catherine (all virgins)

Barbara, like Catherine wears the 'crown of martyrdom'

Catherine on the right with her wheel and the sword that ended her life.

Near Catherine is a book – she is considered a patroness of philosophers and students.

Selected letters from Master ES's Fantastic Alphabet, 1466- 1467, engraving

An example of secular work. The 'Q' is about 4 inches high.

Sketchbook page, alphabet Giovannino de Grassi, late 14th c, illumination

These may be modeled on an earlier hand-illuminated predecessor.

So here is an example of an artist working with existing imagery and forms – a medieval sensibility.

ES' alphabet shows a clear link to existing illumination and marginal decoration, though it's not clear how his alphabet may have functioned or in what context it may have been printed.

Amorous Couple on Grassy Bench, engraving, approx. 5 ½ x 7 inches, 1450

Printmaking as a medium was much less dependent on religious commissions than painting, so secular and popular images appeared earlier in print than in painting.

Satire, folly, criticism, propaganda were all expressions and subjects employing print media, because printed works could be printed in multiples (the idea of the edition is distinct from multiples).

Painting was generally reserved for lofty, serious ideas addressing tradition, legacy, spirituality, cultural values.

The woman responds to the man's approach with mock surprise as she appears to fend him off

The youth is portrayed as a young man of some status (he is a falconer, with glove)

A series of such images brought out the sexual component to courtly or chivalric love with some candor.

Summary of ES' work

ES developed several mark-making strategies for engraving

His works may appear a bit cartoonish to us – whimsical or sweet

He didn't develop a strong range of values in his work, relying primarily on contour lines.

Martin Schongauer

- Trained as a goldsmith and an important engraver; also learned painting techniques.
- Strongly influenced Durer who journeyed to meet him (he had already died)
- 116 prints still exist, though few paintings remain
- His work is exclusively religious, in contrast to the Master ES who was drawn to both religious and secular, popular imagery

St. Veronica, engraving, last half of 15th, c 2 ½ x 3 ¾ inches

St. Veronica is really an easel for the display of the Holy Face.

The engravings of St. Veronica with the sudarium by Master ES is the probable inspiration for this print.

The subject was a popular one in the late Middle Ages in painting as well as in the graphic arts due to its connection with the cult of the Holy Face.

It was popularly believed that the viewer would be protected from a violent death on the day in which he or she contemplated the image of Christ's face.

In this work, we already see more values developed than in the work of Master ES

Schongauer's monogram appears in the plate – not on the printing paper.

The Temptation of St. Anthony, engraving, 12 x 8 inches, last half of 15th c

Better titled the “tribulations” of St. Anthony.

- Anthony was a 3rd c hermit in the Egyptian desert.
- He suffered torments and erotic temptations by demons
- One episode of his abuse, Anthony described himself being lifted ‘out of himself’ as the abuses took place in the sky.
- Epitomized Christian patience with suffering
- A patron saint of diseases: plague and St. Anthony’s fire (ergotism)
- The print may have had a prophylactic function against illness.

The power of this image appears in the contrast between the efforts of the demons to abuse Anthony and the glassy, indifference – patience – of the saint.

Note the simple ‘dash’ marks in the back ground that provide a sense of gradation from middle gray to light / top to bottom of the plate.

Madonna and Child in Courtyard, approx 6 ½ inches x 4 ¾ inches, engraving, last half of 15th c

Mary could be any woman sitting with her infant.

The idea of virginity as enclosed garden remains evident here.

A clarified, clean composition – almost Italianate – only the essential elements are included.

Notice how Schongauer achieves a sense of ‘atmospheric perspective’ -- Mary’s garment includes a range of grays and white – high contrast; the tower in the rear is treated with a close range of middle grays (low contrast).

***Madonna and Child in Courtyard, approx 6 ½ inches x 4 ¾ inches, engraving, last half of 15th c*
*Virgin and Child in Garden with Saints, 1461, plate size 8 ½ x 6 ½ inches***

More convincing perspective than the previous Virgin in Garden by Master ES

Composition is less iconic, more naturalistic than Master ES’

The Death of the Virgin, engraving, 10 x 6 1/2 inches, last half of 15th c

This print brings up some doctrinal questions about Mary’s eventual passing from this world:

- 4th century Epiphanius of Salamis indicated no one knew of her fate
- 5th century accounts that she had been assumed into heaven
- 6th c a text appeared suggesting that the apostles were transported by white clouds to the deathbed of Mary, each from the town he was preaching in at that hour

- 7th century account indicates that Thomas was not among those transported to Mary's death bed and arriving late (a parallel to Christ's appearance in the upper room when Thomas was not present, and thus doubted the apostles account), has the apostles bringing Thomas to Mary's tomb, opening it only to find the grave empty – her body was assumed.
- 7th c The assumption became established teaching primarily in the eastern regions of Christendom
- 7-20th c, debate about the dormition/death/assumption of Mary continued – especially during the Reformation.
- 1950 Pope Pius XII stated with papal infallibility that “having completed her earthly life, [Mary] was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.” Avoiding the question of her death or dormition.
- Protestants countered the Catholic account of Mary's assumption by stating that these accounts were based on apocryphal (documents outside of orthodox sources) texts.

Schongauer's image was created prior to the Reformation. Though it may draw on the account of the miraculous gathering of the apostles and may also be in keeping with beliefs more aligned with a later Protestant sensibility – that Mary died.

Note the complexity of this image containing many figures, in various postures and gestures of prayer, mourning, reverence.

Mary is portrayed with serenity – modeling a good Christian death.

Again note the range of rich values developed by Schongauer, in comparison to the earlier work of Master ES. This is one characteristic that would be influential to Durer.

Schongauer's *Death of Virgin* Durer's *Death of Virgin*

Indeed, Schongauer's engravings had, generally, a strong influence on Albrecht Durer's engraved work – including this piece which Durer borrowed from for his own depiction of Mary's death.

Similar bed canopy – complete with one knotted sheet

Mary surrounded by apostles,

View from the foot of the bed – perhaps the best place for the viewer who is not part of this elite Christian group (a vantage point suggesting the viewer's humility)

John and Mary both hold a taper

Another apostle holds the cross before Mary's eyes.

Albrecht Durer

Durer was trained by his father in goldsmithing – a family craft for generations.

He was trained in painting by Michael Wolgemut (painter and printer)

His drawing abilities were prodigious. He was a master at the tender age of 17.

The Fall of Man, 1504, Durer, engraving, 10 x 7 ½ inches

One of Durer's master works.

Technically

Demonstrates more ways of developing tones and contours than Schongauer's methods (contour lines that suggest volumes are mixed with cross-hatching techniques).

Proof of The Fall of Man, 1504, Durer, engraving, 10 x 7 ½ inches

Suggests a variety of textures – peeling bark, scaly serpent skin, fur, flesh, etc.

Durer employed mathematical proportions in the figures to suggest their idealized or perfected humanity about to be besmirched by their disobedience.

Iconography

The Fall of Man, 1504, Durer, engraving, 10 x 7 ½ inches

Complex erudite iconography representing both (1) Durer's knowledge about Christian doctrine (2) as well as his artistic skills

Adam and Eve have been identified with classical Greek sculptural forms – The Apollo Belvedere and Venus

Scripturally, the image deviates from its source a bit: the Tree of Knowledge is described as being in the 'tree in the middle of the garden', yet Durer depicts the forbidden fruit tree in a wooded area.

The Tree of Knowledge is portrayed as a hybrid – fig leaves and yielding an apple.

This image deviates also from the tradition of images of The Fall which up to this point have generally depicted a garden, not a northern, medieval forest as in the Durer, and the forbidden tree clearly singled out.

Their humanity is about to sink to the level of conflicting humors/planetary influences – represented by the animals:

Elk = melancholic = black bile = Saturn (artist's were associated with melancholy)

Ox = phlegmatic = phlegm

Cat = choleric = yellow bile

Rabbit = sanguine = blood

To suggest imminent expulsion of Adam and Eve into a harsh world, Durer employed the predatory cat opposed to the mouse to allude to the cold indifference of nature.

Detail of Parrot and signature

The wise, benevolent parrot appears in an ash tree signifying the Tree of Life, to which Adam clings.

The Parrot is contrasted by the sinister serpent in the Tree of Knowledge with which Eve is associated.

In the background, a goat (symbol of unbelief) teeters on a precipice, about to fall.

Two of Three Master Prints -- Varieties of virtue: Theological, and Intellectual

St. Jerome in His Study, Durer, 1514, engraving, 9 ½ x 7 ½ inches

Describes the life of the mind – the constructive, effective use of the mind; Jerome's application of the mind in service to God....*vita contemplative* – the contemplative life.

Jerome deeply engaged in scholarly work, cozy room

Translating the bible from the Greek and Hebrew texts into Latin – The Vulgate

The hat in the background indicates his status as a cardinal

The lion refers to the legend of Jerome the desert hermit who befriended a lion when he removed a thorn from the cat's paw.

The dog symbolizes *fidelis* – fidelity and faithfulness.

Memento mori – references to the transience of life include the skull and hour glass.

Gourd = points to an esoteric translation problem in which the word *kikayon* from Jonah 4:6 meant 'gourd'. The biblical context was a sprig that God caused to grow up around Jonah to shelter him from the sun.

Jerome translated it as "ivy". Thus the gourd in this image is not only a symbol of Jerome's scholarship, but also of the divine favor under which he worked.

Melancholia, Durer, 1514, engraving, 9 ½ x 7 ½ inches

Describes the life of the mind – the obstructed, distracted mind

Viewed as Durer's most personal and complex work. The literature on this work's complex symbolism is voluminous

Derives from mystical doctrines of alchemy, Durer's despair at his mother's death, creative frustration, humoral theory, medical/astrological treatises, geometry, and neoplatonic philosophy.

Self Portrait, oil on panel, 1500, 28 x 15 inches

Durer had strong feelings about the links between artistic genius and divinity – he felt that creativity was a way of honoring God and creation was an act akin to God. This notion is substantiated by a self-portrait in which he portrays himself in a gesture that is Christ-like

This image strongly depicts the early modern artist's self-awareness and adaptation of the role of image-maker from mere craftsman to divinely inspired Artist.

Melancholia was a malady associated with the humor, black bile, and the planet Saturn. In the middle ages, it was a debilitating, feared condition caused by too much black bile secreted by the liver, making the person greedy black of spirit and solitary.

By the early Modern era, Marsilio Ficino, an Italian alchemist/scientist/philosopher revised the character of Melancholia to a condition impacting primarily artists, philosophers and poets – erudite thinkers; geniuses who were sometimes stymied in their production by their ambitious ideas. A writer's block or a loss of inspiration was attributed to melancholia.

Agrippa of Nettesheim further identified a few categories of melancholia. Melancholia I, according to Agrippa was the variety afflicting artists as Ficino had described. Hence the title of the piece.

Iconography

The female figure -- represents the artist in the form of a muse -- sits among scattered tools of her trade, symbols of her profession.

A bat, the beast identified with melancholia flies in the sky.

Tools of the stone cutter: tongs, plane, molding curve, hammer, ladder, crucible, ruler, nails

Sphere and polyhedron – sophisticated forms requiring geometry and precise measure of a compass

Measurement and abstraction appear = hourglass, bell (an early time-keeping instrument), scale, magic square (all the rows of numbers add up to 34)

The putto and Melancholia herself both suggest two types of creative practice:

Detail of putto on millstone

(1) Putto- the contented, but uninspired work of the artisan or craftsman

Melancholia (full view)

(2) Melancholia – the cursed/blessed ‘genius’ of both erudite knowledge and sublime inspiration, who suffers at this moment for lack of inspiration.

The pairing of these two figures suggests the strong distinctions Durer makes between artisans/craftsmen and Artists.

This piece, like his self-portrait, indicates a sophisticated self-awareness and identify of the artist. Not merely a maker of images, the early modern artist is a complex, knowledgeable professional, inspired and possessing a kind of divinely ordained skill and sensibility.

Durer and the Reformation

Let us turn our attention to the impact of Luther and the Reformation on Durer and his work.

We have discussed artists whose production was influenced by the Reformation:

Holbein, whose religious commissions in iconoclastic Basle, moved to the England to be a portrait painter in the court of Henry VIII, never made another religious work.

In contrast, Lucas Cranach, was a fervent believer in Luther’s theology, becoming his printer and painting numerous portraits and images employing both Luther’s image and his characterization of Christian faith.

Durer’s relationship to the Reformation was more complicated.....

Ecce Homo, woodcut, 1521

Raised within the one church, Catholicism, Durer was a fervent Christian.

This image is an example of the catholicity of his work –

The ecce homo, as a direct, iconic, reminder of the pain and suffering of Christ's crucifixion – the physical aspects of Christ's torture are clearly depicted, signifying the sacrifice of the crucifixion.

Christ is central, flanked by his torturers who frame him – offering him for our viewing. The compositional strategy places Christ unavoidably in our gaze, he meets our gaze and we are reminded of our sins for which he undergoes these tortures and humiliations.

During the early 1520s, a consuming religious crisis prompted by Luthers' new theology, paralyzed much of the artist's creativity energy.

Durer fully converted to the Reformers' thinking.

Four Holy Men, 1526, oil on panels

"Gave powerful expression to his Lutheran convictions in his painting *Four Holy Men*."

This image was given to the Nuremberg city fathers by Durer to warn them against false (papist) prophets and urging them to support Luther's teachings.

We can classify this image as a 'Lutheran' image by Durer.

According to Craig Harbison, Durer was a devoted Christian trying to make sense of his own religious convictions in the context of the Reformation, as well as attempting to reconcile his livelihood to the Protestant philosophies about the "use and abuse of religious art". (Harbison).

Images of 1523: Last supper and St. Philip

In the last five years of Durer's life, he produced only one religious woodcut, no engravings, no drawings and no completed paintings. This, Harbison argues, suggests that Protestant views on religious images, and the iconoclasms, had a deep impact on his production.

Schone Maria, Albrecht Altdorfer, chiaroscuro woodcut, 1519

Further, Durer owned an impression of the Schone Maria print from the pilgrimage site at Regensburg. He wrote an epithet against idolatry:

"This specter that has risen against Holy Scripture in Regensburg; it has been allowed by the bishop and, because of temporal advantage, has not been stopped. God help us not to do such dishonor to his worthy Mother, but to honor her in Jesus Christ. Amen. AD." (1523)

Last Supper, Durer, woodcut, 1523

First protestant communion was celebrated by Andreas Bodenstein Carlstadt in 1521

Protestants, including Luther, debated the use of both Eucharistic media or one (Carlstadt represented the more radical view – both media; Luther vacillated more)

Durer understood the doctrinal significance of the debate over Eucharistic media in the emerging protestant Reformation. (Harbison)

His 1523 *Last Supper* represents a protestant understanding of the last supper. Presenting the meal, not as an allusion to Christ's role as sacrificial lamb, but to the supper as a communal commemoration.

To this end, he removes Judas (which suggests betrayal and sacrifice)

Adds the sacramental cup in addition to bread

Clarifies the composition, representing only that which is necessary – devoid of dramatic elements or trappings.

St. Philip, engraving, 1523

In the same year, Durer cut the plate for *St Philip*.

The plate was created in 1523, and the date later corrected to 1526 when it was published 3 years later.

Harbison argues that because the *St. Philip* had strong catholic sensibilities, that Durer was reticent to release it after it was created.

On the contrary, *The Last Supper* which was created the same year as the *St. Philip* plate was rushed to press.

Durer's response to Protestant views of religious art, slowed his production significantly. Harbison attributes this to Durer's complex weighing of his relationship to both his religious convictions and artistic convictions. Prior to the Reformation, these had naturally been in sync. Following the Reformation, Durer was forced to make thoughtful, often difficult choices.

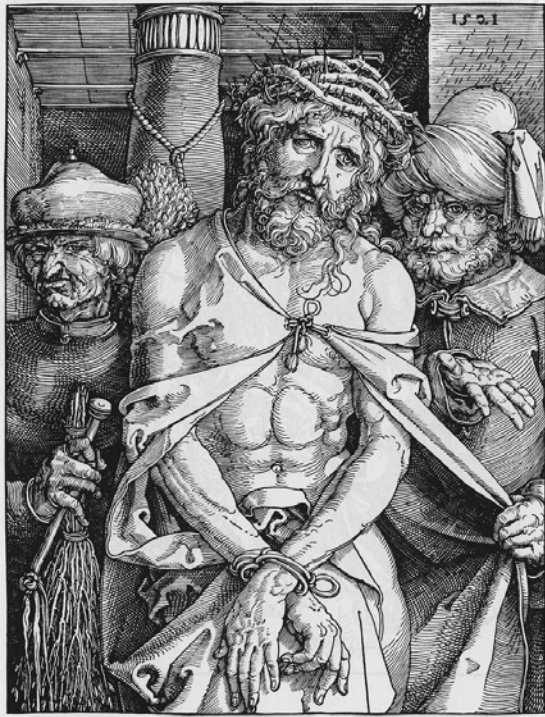
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Sketchbook page, alphabet Giovannino de Grassi, late 14th c, illumination

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Albrecht Durer

Durer's Death of Virgin

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