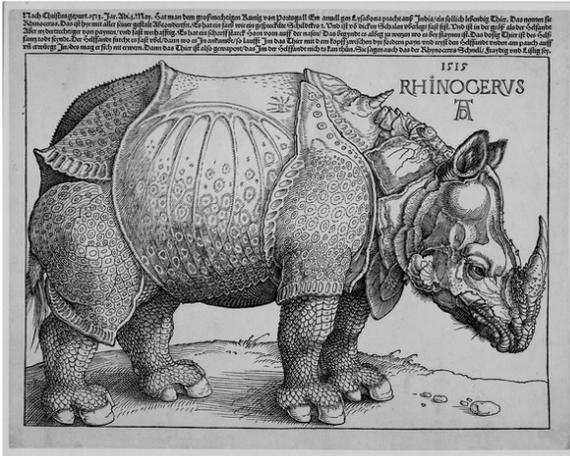


## Albrecht Dürer



Rhinoceros, 1515  
Woodcutting  
The British Museum



Rhinoceros, 1515  
Drawing  
The British Museum

## The Artist

### Albrecht Dürer

Born Nürnberg, Germany 1471, died Nürnberg 1528

Of all the artists active in the Northern Renaissance, Dürer is probably the greatest and most well-known. He is perhaps best known for his woodcarvings and self-portraits, but was an accomplished artist in many fields. Born in Nürnberg in 1471, Dürer apprenticed with his goldsmith father who had emigrated to Germany in 1455. By the time he was a young man, however, Dürer had become fascinated with painting and was apprentice to painter and printmaker Michael Wolgumut with whom he learned how to woodcut and do copper engravings. Throughout his career, Dürer took several trips to further his study, including trips to Italy in 1494 and 1505-07 and Antwerp and the Low Countries in 1520-21. During his travels, he was greatly influenced by Italian artist Giovanni Bellini and Andre Mantegna.

These trips fostered much artistic growth, as he was able to fuse the classical style of the Italian Renaissance with his own unique German style. Between his Italian trips, Dürer published a portfolio of woodcuts entitled *The Apocalypse of St. John*, one of his most celebrated series of woodcuts. By about 1512, Dürer was also working as a portrait artist for several monarchs and various clergy, merchants, and government officials. His self-portraits and numerous wood-carving, including *Rhinoceros*, would become his most famous works although he also produced several written works on geometry, perspective, and proportional painting. He died in 1528, at the age of 56.



Self-Portrait at 28, 1500  
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

## Art Movement

### Northern Renaissance

The extension of the Italian Renaissance in northern Europe after 1500. Although late Gothic influences were visible until the Baroque period, Renaissance art, music, literature, and science soon came to dominate the region. Largely a result of the invention of the printing press, Renaissance ideas spread to the low countries, Scandinavia and Bavaria with an amazing swiftness. The accessibility of printed materials and the relative ineptitude of the Catholic Church after the Western Schism and the Black Plague led to an explosion of both secular and religious publications. While similar to the Italian Renaissance in most respects, Northern authors wrote in the vernacular rather

then Greek or Latin and northern art dealt more with Christianity as a result of the Protestant Reformation.

## The Artwork

### *Rhinoceros*

*Rhinoceros* is one of Dürer's best woodcuts. Never having seen a rhinoceros, the artist drew it from another person's description of one. To make this print, Dürer drew his design of a rhinoceros on a flat block of wood. Using sharp tools, he cut the wood away on both sides of the drawn lines so that they were left in relief. Dürer rolled printing ink on the raised lines and pressed the block onto a piece of paper. This process could be repeated many times to make a number of prints to sell or give away. Dürer's print was in such demand that it was printed in eight editions. Dürer's woodcut of a rhinoceros was made almost 500 years ago and is still very popular today.

## Discussion Suggestions

**Talk about how Dürer's rhinoceros looks (use the picture of a real rhinoceros for this discussion):**

- *Is it realistic?*
- *How detailed is it?*
- *Would the rhinoceros look more real if Dürer had seen a real rhinoceros before he carved it?*

**Talk about texture:**

- *How many different textures do you see on the rhinoceros?*
- *How can you make textures?*
- *Does the texture of the rhinoceros look smooth or rough?*
- *Does it look like the rhinoceros has skin, scales, or plates?*

## Activity Idea

### Create Your Own Animal from a Description

Pre-Activity (Things to consider before drawing your animal):

- Did Dürer use color when he created his rhinoceros? (No---he paid careful attention to details that pertained to the shape and texture of the animal.)
- Notice that the Rhinoceros is made up of simple lines. Instruct students to use pencil to create their animal. They can use colors after they have drawn their animal.

**Activity:**

- Pass out plain white paper to each student and ask them to use pencil.
- Give each student a copy of a description of an animal. (For younger students with lower reading levels, read the description to them.)
- Instruct the students to draw the mystery animal based on the description you have given them, paying attention to details such as texture.

**Materials Needed:**

- White Paper
- Pencils