



## Albrecht Dürer

**Designer's full name:** Albrecht Dürer

**Designer's pseudonym/nickname:** None

**Gender:** Male

**Year Born:** 1471

**Country Born:** Germany

**Year Died:** 1528

**Country Died:** Germany

**Religion | Political Alignment:** After meeting Martin Luther in 1518, Dürer became Lutheran. Prior to this, he was Catholic as his work reflected some of that imagery and subject matter.

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**How did any of the above affect either his/her life experience or work because it/they provided a challenge at the time?**

None of the above qualities of the designer provided a challenge for the time.

**Did this designer do notable work in fields other than what would TODAY be considered graphic design?**

Dürer was well known for his paintings (some of them altarpiece paintings) and prints (both woodcut and copperplate); these were mostly influenced by the Italian Renaissance. He established a large array of commissioned and personal paintings with a variety of subjects: cityscapes, nature studies, portraits, the

Madonna and Child, and other Biblical as well as secular imagery. Dürer also produced technical drawings as he practiced his knowledge of human anatomy and proportion.

**For what is this designer most noted in relation to design? EXPLAIN.**

Dürer is studied because of his immensely detailed prints and paintings. With many trips to Italy to study drawing the human form, his etchings became not only significant because of the crowded detail (he melded fierce realism and symbolism together, specifically in *Adam and Eve*), but because of their proportional accuracy. Because of his time spent studying in Italy, as well as under many skilled masters, Dürer also wrote many books about the human body and helped spread those teachings.

**Is there anything controversial about this designer? Explain.**

There is nothing notably controversial about this designer.

**Explain this designer's education/training, including academic, apprenticeships, and /or mentorships.**

As a young child, Dürer went to school where he learned the basics of math, reading, and writing. After only three short years of that, he started working as a goldsmith with his father who had also just brought on another partner in 1484. He studied the principles of design through this apprenticeship, which led to his new job painting for Michael Wolgemat when Dürer was fifteen. His fire for painting stoked, he then sought out Martin Schongauer and put himself within the circle of his—also a painter and goldsmith—brothers. From this, Dürer began his travels and independent work.

**Did this designer promote a specific ideology in his/her work? Explain.**

Dürer portrayed Humanist ideals in his work. Mathematical and technical accuracy was very important to him, and he even did many studies on the human body and motion. His paintings and etchings were therefore very much structured by reason, not emotion or persuasion, like many medieval artists before him.

## **Why is this designer viewed as iconic in the history of graphic design?**

Not only was Dürer a prolific painter and engraver, his advancements in math and geometry were the steppingstones to Germany's advancements and Greco-Roman revivals in typography. He provided immense instruction on how to articulate letters perfectly.

## **Is there any other important information to know about this designer?**

No.

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**Student:** Sara Liepe-Doerfler

## **State and explain the one most important effect that your assigned artist and the quality/importance of his/her work had on the history of graphic design.**

Through extensive study, Albrecht Dürer's advancements in both art and math led to his rise to fame within the art community and the graphic design history canon. Originally trained as a goldsmith, Dürer built upon his drawing skills by taking apprenticeships in painting and traveling to learn about the human form. Springing from these pursuits, Dürer's prints had a massive influence on the history of graphic design because of their technical accuracy and densely packed Catholic and Christian imagery.

Dürer's practice showed Humanist tendencies with mathematical reasoning being a key to the execution of his prints and paintings. Dürer studied the art of antiquity in Italy and was influenced by the Italian Renaissance. He did many sketches on the human body and motion, and these studies were reflected in his sketches. Even though they are not complete works, they are reviewed with the same reverence as his fully completed pieces as they are rendered with equal eloquence. Wanting to share what he had learned in Italy and in his other personal studies, Dürer wrote many books about the human body, geometry, and letterforms. Dürer himself said, "...builders, painters, and others sometimes have to show writing on high walls, and so it is needful for them to know how to form their letters correctly." He was motivated to help other artists and builders. These steppingstones of books and drawings led to advancements and

rediscoveries in typography. He saw a right and a wrong way to craft letters and wanted everyone to do it correctly.

Not only were Dürer's drawings technically splendid, but they were also full of religious figures and themes. His combination of artistic talent and religious association gained him acclaim. In 1512, before he met Martin Luther, he was tasked with illustrating the Holy Roman Emperor's personal prayer book. Catholicism dominated culture and was a major part of society, especially in Italy; assisting in this project was an honor. Even though this was a great gig, the Catholic church was both a sore spot and a glorified staple within the community and this led to how Dürer's work was received. With the Catholic church battling the growing unrest for its practices, Dürer's audience was open and receptive to religious imagery and texts that were accessible at their level. In some ways, Dürer was catering to the questioning minds of Nuremberg and surrounding Germany.

Without both his technical skill and religious association, Dürer might not have been as essential to the canon. Germany's social unrest at the time was influenced by their religious beliefs. They thought that the Apocalypse would come in the year 1500, and the Protestant Reformation was brewing. With the artist's apocalyptic-themed engravings circling about the emotionally charged masses, these were moving pieces to see and fed their desire for religion separate from the Pope. The woodcut printing process helped to easily spread these prints, and his piece, *Apocalypse*, is interpreted to show some criticism of the Catholic church. Some historians claim that depictions in *The Whore of Babylon* show correlations between the elaborately dressed prostitute with the fine, rich clothes of the Pope. During all of the political change of the time, it cannot be ignored that his religious stance was important to the creation and motivation of his work and its impact on history. Whether Dürer held convictions for these etchings or if he was merely profiting off of a churning society, he made art about and in response to the things that were going on around him, and did it beautifully and effectively.

Art reflects life and life influences art. Dürer wanted to share what he had learned from his studies of antiquity with other artists and practiced those skills to create work that held connections to Catholicism and emerging Protestant Christianity. He is studied immensely in the history of art and design for both his knowledge of the human form and geometry and because of the impact that his work had on a rapidly changing society.

## Bibliography

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