Dürer, Albrecht Encyclopedia Article

Dürer, Albrecht

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Dürer, Albrecht

German Painter, Printmaker, and Engraver 1471–1528

Albrecht Dürer's engraving "Proportion of Man" is both a mathematical and artistic representation of the human body.

Albrecht Dürer was born in 1471 in Nuremberg, Germany, and died there in 1528. He is regarded as one of the leading artists of the Renaissance. His use of mathematical methods in artistic composition influenced subsequent development of art.

Dürer first worked with his father, who was an accomplished goldsmith, then broadened his artistic training by assisting artist Michel Wohlgemuth. Developing his expertise quickly, Dürer was soon able to go out on his own as a painter and printmaker. He became widely known, traveling throughout Europe while studying and producing works of art, and was a particular favorite of Emperor Maximilian I.

Dürer attempted to portray nature realistically in his works, paying close attention to the appearance of animals, plants, and the human body and trying to reproduce them accurately. He was even known to have dissected **cadavers** to better understand the human body. Dürer's realistic paintings of plants influenced botanists to use drawings that more closely resembled the plants portrayed.

To improve his paintings and etchings, Dürer sought a mathematical formulation for the ideal human body and for beauty in general. He studied the problems of space, **perspective**, and **proportion** and constructed his forms on the canvas, using arithmetic and geometric techniques. The results of his studies were published posthumously in 1528 as *The Four Books on Human Proportions,* a work that has had a significant effect on succeeding generations of artists.

See Also

Human Body.

Bibliography

Dürer, Albrecht. *The Complete Engravings, Etchings and Drypoints of Albrecht Dürer.* Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1972.