

Albrecht Dürer

(1471-1528)



- St. Michael's fight against the dragon, 1498

"Albrecht Dürer was without doubt the greatest artist of the Northern Renaissance. Living in Nuremberg, half-way between the Netherlands and Italy, he found inspiration in the work of painters of both the major European artistic centres of his time. But rather than simply imitating what others were doing, Dürer was very much an innovator. He is, for example, the first artist who is known to have painted a self-portrait and to have done a landscape painting of a specific scene.

"The range and versatility of Dürer's work is astonishing. His woodcuts and engravings made him famous across Europe and he is still considered to be the greatest printmaker of all time. As an oil painter, Dürer was equally successful at religious and secular subjects, producing magnificent altarpieces and powerful portraits. His drawings and watercolours are impressive for their diversity of subject-matter and the varied media in which they were produced. Dürer was to have a major influence on the development of European art.

"Although Dürer lived five centuries ago, we are fortunate that so much of his work survives. Dürer published over 350 woodcuts and engravings which appeared with his famous AD monogram. At least 60 of his oil paintings have survived, an approximate number since in a few cases art historians are divided over the attribution of a work. It is impossible to know how many oil paintings have been lost, but these 60 may well represent most of his major works. Dürer after all, spent much of his time as a printmaker and often complained that working in oils was time-consuming and badly paid. Finally, there are a thousand of his drawings and watercolours. Dürer seems to have realized that future generations would be interested in what he had produced. He carefully saved these works on paper, sometimes inscribing them with his monogram, the year and even a few words of explanation about the subject-matter. These informal drawings, produced as studies for prints and paintings or else simply for personal pleasure, are highly revealing about Dürer's interests and techniques.