

## DURER ENGRAVER - PAINTER

by George Constantourakis

Albrecht Durer (1471 - 1528) was without doubt the greatest artist of the Northern Renaissance. Dürer left his native city Nuremberg three times in his life. He traveled through Germany; in 1505-07 he spent some time in Venice; in 1520-21 he went to the Netherlands. He found inspiration in the work of painters of both these two major European artistic centres. But rather than simply imitating what others were doing, Durer 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 Durer'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, Durer 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. Durer was to have a major influence on the development of European art.

Although Durer lived five centuries ago, we are fortunate that so much of his work survives. Durer published over 350 Woodcuts and Engravings which appeared with his famous AD monogram. At least 60 of his Oil Paintings have survived. It is impossible to know how many oil paintings have been lost, but these 60 may well represent most of his major works. Durer 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. Durer 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 Durer's interests and techniques.

More of Durer's writings survive than those of any other early Northern artist. In the diary he kept of his 1520-1 visit to the Netherlands, he records seeing the works of the early Flemish painters, meeting the leading artists of his day, sketching the philosopher Erasmus, worrying about Luther's fate, and attending the coronation of the Holy Roman Emperor.

The Self-Portraits of Durer give us the greatest insight into his character and beliefs. The first, drawn when he was just 13, depicts the soft features of a young boy, sketched with great confidence and skill. Durer was proud of his achievement and years later he added the inscription: *'This I drew, using a mirror; it is my own likeness, in the year 1484, when I was still a child.'* Durer's first painted Self-Portrait dates from 1493, when he was 22 (see Figure on page 5, bottom Left). In this work he appears bashful. *'Things with me fare as ordained from above'*, the artist inscribed at the top of the picture. This work is now kept at the Musée du Louvre in Paris.

## DURER ENGRAVER - PAINTER (continued)

Durer's Self-Portrait of 1498, when he was 26 (see Figure bottom Right), reveals a transformation. Dressed in elegant clothes, he stands up much straighter and is a highly confident young man. Beside him is a window, overlooking a distant Alpine landscape. The view is a pointed reminder that the well-travelled Durer had recently returned from Venice - one of the leading centres of the Renaissance. His face is painted with great realism - evidence of his skill. This work is now kept at the Prado Museum in Madrid.

The final painted Self-Portrait, dated 1500, is inscribed: '*Thus I, Albrecht Durer from Nuremburg, painted myself with indelible colours at the age of 28 years.*' Although the artist has depicted himself in a Christ-like pose, this was no gesture of blasphemy. It was an acknowledgement that God had made Christ and Man in his own image. Artistic talent therefore ultimately derives from God. This work is now kept at the 'Alte Pinakothek' in Munich. (see Figure on Cover Page. This is the earliest known 100% concordant Maximum Card of 1928, from the collection of your Editor).

After this work, no other painted self-portraits survive. Durer drew several Self-Portraits. These include an unusually frank one of him in the nude. A few years later he made a small sketch of his body with his hand touching a spot near his spleen. In what may have been a note to a doctor, or perhaps a comment on his melancholic state, he added the inscription: 'I am pointing to it with my finger: that is where it hurts.' In 1522, towards the end of his life, he did an anguished drawing of Christ as the Man of Sorrows, giving Jesus his own facial features and depicting his own worn body. Sometimes Durer depicted himself in a painted altarpiece. On occasions he appears in his role as artist, proudly holding a board with his name and a few details about the work. At other times he gives a figure in an altarpiece his own features, such as the drummer who is mocking the afflicted Job or King Melchior in a Nativity scene. But despite this abundance of different Self-Portraits, the three painted Self-Portraits which Durer did when he was in his twenties most affect the way we view the artist. To us he seems eternally youthful.





## DURER'S CHRISTMAS ENGRAVINGS

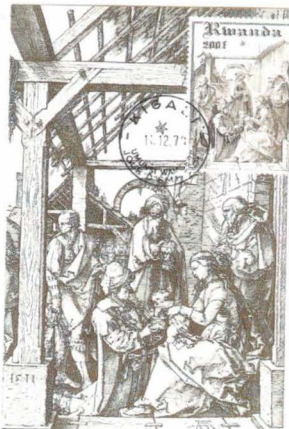
### Clockwise from Left:

(Figure 1) MADONNA WITH THE MONKEY, c. 1498, *Engraving*, Statliche Museen, Berlin. Issue: 15. XII. 1981. For: Christmas 1981. Cancel: 3. VI. 1982, Penrhyn, Northern Cook Islands, regular.

(Figure 2) MADONNA WITH THE MONKEY, c. 1498, *Engraving*, Statliche Museen, Berlin. Issue: 7. III. 1978. For: Durer's Engravings. Cancel: 12. V. 1981, Valetta, Malta, regular.

(Figure 3) MADONNA ON A GRASSY BENCH, 1503, *Engraving*, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge. Issue: 15. XII. 1981. For: Christmas 1981. Cancel: 3. VI. 1982, Penrhyn, Northern Cook Islands, regular.

(Figure 4) ADORATION OF THE MAGI, 1511, *Engraving*, Nuremberg Museum. Issue: 11. XII. 1978. For: Christmas 1978. Cancel: First Day, Kigali, Rwanda, regular.



## DURER'S CHRISTMAS WOODCUTS

### Clockwise from Left:

(Figure 5) THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI (From the: LIFE OF THE VIRGIN Nr. 12), 1501 - 02, *Woodcut*, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna. Issue: 20. X. 1976. For: Woodcuts by Durer. Cancel: 8. II. 1977, Penrhyn, Cook Islands, regular.

(Figure 6) THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT (From the: LIFE OF THE VIRGIN Nr. 13), 1503, *Woodcut*, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna. Issue: 20. X. 1976. For: Woodcuts by Durer. Cancel: 8. II. 1977, Penrhyn, Cook Islands, regular.

(Figure 7) THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS (From the: LIFE OF THE VIRGIN Nr. 9), 1504 - 05, *Woodcut*, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich. Issue: 20. X. 1976. For: Woodcuts by Durer. Cancel: 8. II. 1977, Penrhyn, Cook Islands, regular.

(Figure 8) THE VIRGIN AMONG A MULTITUDE OF ANIMALS, 1503, *Drawing*, Pen and ink and watercolor on paper, 321 x 243mm, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna. Issue: 1. XI. 1978. For: Christmas 1978. Cancel: 17. VIII. 1979, Gibraltar, regular.





## DURER'S CHRISTMAS PAINTINGS

### Clockwise from Left:

(Figure 9) NATIVITY, THE PAUMGARTNER ALTARPIECE, c. 1498 - 1504, *Oil on Panel*, Central Panel 155 x 126cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Issue: 1. XI. 1978. For: Christmas 1978. Cancel: 9. I. 1979, Penrhyn, Gibraltar, regular.

(Figure 10) NATIVITY, THE PAUMGARTNER ALTARPIECE, c. 1498 - 1504, *Oil on Panel*, Central Panel 155 x 126cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Issue: 17. XI. 1975. For: Christmas 1975. Cancel: 30. VII. 1976, St. John's, Antigua, regular.

(Figure 11) NATIVITY, THE PAUMGARTNER ALTARPIECE, c. 1498 - 1504, *Oil on Panel*, Central Panel 155 x 126cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Issue: 29. IX. 1971. For: Durer's Paintings. Cancel: First Day, Burundi, special.

(Figure 12) NATIVITY, THE PAUMGARTNER ALTARPIECE, c. 1498 - 1504, *Oil on Panel*, Central Panel 155 x 126cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Issue: 8. I. 1979. For: Durer's Paintings. Cancel: First Day, Budapest, special illustration of a Portrait of Young Man by Durer.



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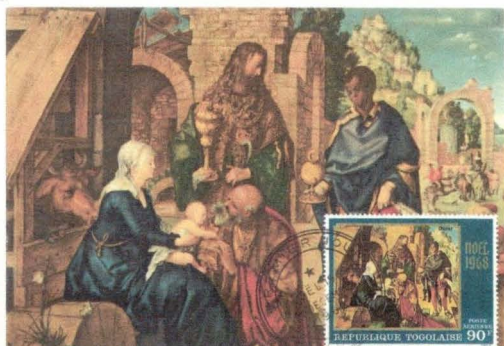
### Clockwise from Left:

(Figure 13) THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI, 1504, *Oil on Wood*, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Issue: 16. X. 1961. For: Christmas 1961. Cancel: 14. II. 1962, Wellington, New Zealand, regular.

(Figure 14) THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI, 1504, *Oil on Wood*, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Issue: 8. I. 1979. For: Durer's Paintings. Cancel: First Day, Budapest, special illustration of a Portrait of Young Man by Durer.

(Figure 15) THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI, 1504, *Oil on Wood*, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Issue: 28. XII. 1968. For: Christmas 1968. Cancel: First Day, Lome, Togo, special mention: "NOEL 1968".

(Figure 16) THE FEAST OF THE GARLANDS, 1506, *Oil on Panel*, Narodni Galerie, Prague. Issue: 6. VII. 1968. For: F.I.P. Day, PRAGA '68. Cancel: First Day, Prague, special mention: "JOURNEE DE LA FIP", plus Durer's AD monogram.





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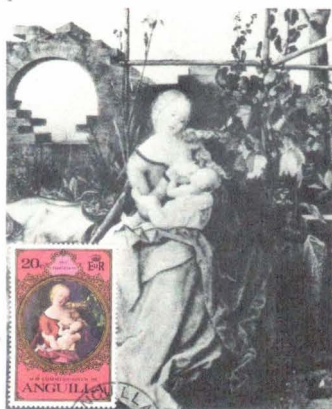
### Clockwise from Left:

(Figure 17) MADONNA WITH THE IRIS, 1500 - 1510, *Oil on Lime*, National Gallery, London. Issue: 8. XII. 1975. For: Christmas 1975. Cancel: 3. V. 1976, Anguilla Valley, regular.

(Figure 18) MADONNA WITH THE IRIS, 1500 - 1510, *Oil on Lime*, National Gallery, London. Issue: 4. XII. 1978. For: Christmas 1978. Cancel: 19. III. 1979, Aitutaki, Cook Islands, regular.

(Figure 19) MADONNA AND CHILD, 1505, *Oil on Panel*, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Issue: 29. IX. 1971. For: Durer's Paintings. Cancel: First Day, Burundi, special.

(Figure 20) MADONNA WITH A SISKIN, 1506, *Oil on Panel*, Staatliche Museen Gemaldegalerie, Berlin. Issue: 1. XII. 1978. For: Christmas 1978. Cancel: 15. XI. 1982, Port Villa, New Hebrides.



## DURER'S CHRISTMAS PAINTINGS

### Clockwise from Left:

(Figure 21) MADONNA OF THE PEAR, 1512, *Oil on Panel*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Issue: 14. VIII. 1954. For: Catholic Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Cancel: First Day, St. Ingbert, Saar.

(Figure 22) MADONNA OF THE PEAR, 1512, *Oil on Panel*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Issue: 14. VIII. 1954. For: Catholic Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Cancel: 5. IX. 1954, Saarbrücken

(Figure 23) MADONNA OF THE PEAR, 1512, *Oil on Panel*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Issue: 31. XII. 1971. For: Durer's Paintings. Cancel: 23. III. 1972, Burundi, regular.

(Figure 24) MADONNA OF THE PEAR, 1512, *Oil on Panel*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Issue: 1. XII. 1978. For: Christmas 1978. Cancel: 15. XI. 1982, Port Villa, New Hebrides, regular.

