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***DEFINING BEAUTY: ALBRECHT DÜRER AT THE MORGAN TO OPEN
MAY 18***

***SHOW IS THE FIRST IN MORE THAN 20 YEARS TO FEATURE ALL THE
MORGAN'S WORKS BY ONE OF THE WORLD'S ICONIC ARTISTS***

“What beauty is, I know not, though it adheres to many things . . . ”

—Albrecht Dürer

****Press Viewing: Thursday, May 20, 2010, 10 a.m. until noon****

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New York, NY, March 10, 2010—Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), preeminent master of the German Renaissance, transformed drawing in Northern Europe. Using his unrivaled talent as a draftsman and the force of his powerful artistic personality, Dürer tirelessly promoted drawing as a medium, creating works of exceptional beauty and remarkable technical skill.



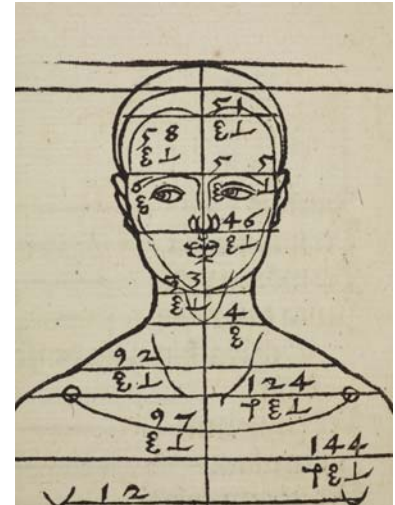
Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, 1504, pen and brown ink, brown wash, corrections in white. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1910. I, 257d.

Now, in an exhibition at The Morgan Library & Museum opening May 18, 2010, eight extraordinary drawings by Dürer demonstrate the variety and dynamism of his draftsmanship. Exhibitions focused on Dürer’s drawings are rare, and this occasion marks the first time in more than twenty years that the Morgan’s outstanding Dürer holdings will be displayed together. Also included are prints and treatises by the artist. The exhibition will run through September 12 in the Clare Eddy Thaw Gallery, allowing visitors a close, personal encounter with the work of this artistic icon.

“Albrecht Dürer was one of the greatest, most inventive artists of all time,” said William M. Griswold, director of The Morgan Library & Museum. “His range and skill in a variety of media are extraordinary, and his pursuit of the idea of beauty singular and obsessive. To experience the Morgan’s spectacular collection of Dürer drawings in the small, almost chapel-like setting of the Thaw Gallery is to come face to face with pure genius.”

Among the many highlights of the exhibition that demonstrate Dürer's preoccupation with beauty are his seminal engraving of 1504, *Adam and Eve*, along with its most important extant related preparatory drawing. To create the work, Dürer joined several sheets of paper, then unified the composition with brown wash to create a perfect balance between the two figures. Dürer's efforts to resolve the composition are evident; both figures hold the apple that led to their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Ever cognizant of his authorship, Dürer added his monogram and the date to the drawing. This iconic image, perhaps more than any other, documents how the artist strove to create both beauty and harmony in his depictions of the human form.

Demonstrating the persistence of Dürer's fascination with perfect proportions is another work from about a decade later, *Head of a Man in Profile*. By overlaying a grid on a man's head delineated in pen and brown and red ink, Dürer used geometry to construct a profile with mathematical precision. Also on view is a 1532–34 edition of his landmark treatise, *Four Studies on Human Proportion*, a book in which he articulated his artistic philosophy and the centrality of proportion in his depictions of the human body.



Albrecht Dürer, Folio from *Four Books on Human Proportion* (detail), Nuremberg: 1532/34. Gift of Mr. John P. Morgan II in memory of Mrs. Junius S. Morgan, 1981; PML 77029.2.

Dürer, however, did not limit himself exclusively to a mathematical ideal. He also turned to the natural world as a source for his art. During Dürer's lifetime, empirical observation became increasingly valued throughout northern Europe, as exemplified by the accurate topographical view of his hometown in the *Nuremberg Chronicle* of 1493. One of the most famous printed books of the fifteenth century, it was published by Dürer's godfather, Anton Koberger. A similar commitment to observation is evident in the rugged features and fuzzy textures of Dürer's unidealized charcoal portrait of his brother Endres. For Dürer, perfection could exist in no single individual; he appreciated humanity's variation and even its flaws.

Dürer saw beauty not only in the world around him but also in the spiritual realm. *Kneeling Donor*, a study for his altarpiece *Feast of the Rose Garlands* for the church of San Bartolomeo in Venice, reveals how deeply he was inspired by religious subjects. He adopted the technique of brush and black ink with gray wash and white heightening on blue paper during his 1505–7 stay in Venice. Also on view is one of his most famous engravings, *Melancholia I*. This enigmatic image of the allegorical figure of Melancholy, her head leaning upon her hand, has been seen alternatively as a statement on artistic creativity and as evidence of Dürer's interest in ancient debates over the definition of beauty.



Albrecht Dürer, *Abduction on Horseback*, 1516, pen and brown ink, with traces of underdrawing in black chalk; inscribed with stylus. Gift of J. P. Morgan, Jr., 1924; I, 257a.

In other instances, Dürer turned to the aesthetic tradition of Germany, Nuremberg in particular, for inspiration. Dominating his drawing *Abduction on Horseback* is a hairy brute resembling the Wild Man, a folk figure with a long tradition in German art. The frenetic pen lines may be explained by the fact that the drawing was made in preparation for one of Dürer's six known etchings—a new technique in northern Europe. He drew from the rich metalwork in Nuremberg as well; both his father and father-in-law were among the legion of renowned gold- and coppersmiths for which the city was famous. Dürer's intricate design in pen and dark brown ink for the pommel plate of a saddle shows the artist's personal commitment to this decorative tradition. Further documenting his inventiveness is the bright, multicolored watercolor for a wall scheme in the Nuremberg town hall, a civic center and source of

local pride whose decoration was extremely important to the city.

In his pursuit of beauty, Dürer devoted careful attention to every aspect of artistic production. On view in the exhibition are a woodcut, its associated woodblock, and a letter to the patron for whom it was made. In the letter Dürer wrote, "Please let it be as it is. No one could improve it because it was done artistically and with care. Those who see it and who understand such matters will tell you so."

ORGANIZATION AND SPONSORSHIP

Defining Beauty: Albrecht Dürer at the Morgan is organized by Elizabeth A. Nogrady, Moore Curatorial Fellow in the Department of Drawings and Prints at The Morgan Library & Museum.

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The Morgan Library & Museum

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, musical venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. More than a century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

General Information

The Morgan Library & Museum

225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405

212.685.0008

www.themorgan.org

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve.

Admission

\$12 for adults; \$8 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children, 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop.