

For Immediate Release
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THE PRINT LEGACY OF ALBRECHT DÜRER, A RENAISSANCE MAN

The Genius of the German Renaissance: Prints by Albrecht Dürer
Christie's London
Tuesday, 4 December 2007 at 2pm



London – Print sales in 2007 will culminate with a flourish at Christie's in December with *The Genius of the German Renaissance: Prints by Albrecht Dürer* (1471-1528) on Tuesday, 4 December 2007. This auction provides an extraordinary insight into Dürer's powerful graphic oeuvre, with 130 lots spanning allegorical scenes, mythological and biblical stories. Highlights from the sale include Dürer's key works led by *Death, Knight and the Devil*, 1513 (estimate: £200,000-300,000) *illustrated left* and his four main series *The Apocalypse*, 1496-1511 (estimate: £80,000-120,000), *The Large Passion*, circa 1496-1511 (estimate: £80,000-120,000), *The Life of the Virgin*, circa 1502-1510 (estimate: £80,000-120,000) and *The Small woodcut Passion*, circa 1508-1510 (estimate: £30,000-40,000). With estimates ranging from £2,000 to £300,000, the sale is expected to realise in excess of £2 million.

Albrecht Dürer carried the medium of prints to revolutionary new heights artistically, technically and as a means of self publicity. Hailed by the British museum as the 'first truly international artist,' his work is so highly revered that Germans refer to the turn of the 16th century as 'the age of Dürer'.

Having learnt the importance of precision, exemplified in *A Coat of Arms with a Skull*, 1503 *illustrated right* (estimate: £50,000-70,000), whilst a young apprentice at his father's Goldsmiths, Dürer went on to learn printmaking from the leading Nuremberg artist Michael Wolgemut. These skills provided Dürer with the important fundamentals for executing and embracing the renaissance ideal of 'artes liberal', whereby art was created upon scientific and theoretical foundations. Dürer's skill, like that of Leonardo da Vinci, was to implement these ideas without it being at the cost of imagination and atmospheric renderings. This is demonstrated by the allegorical highlight of the sale by Dürer, *Death, Knight and the Devil* 1513 (estimate: £200,000-300,000) *illustrated top left* and mythical works such as *Nemesis (The Great Fortune)*, circa 1501 (estimate: £30,000-50,000) and *Sea Monster*, circa 1498 (estimate: £25,000-35,000).



The turn of the 1500s was punctuated with surging fears of floods, earthquakes and the antichrist. Dürer's *Apocalypse* series anticipates and explores this apocalyptic angst with scenes from the Revelation of St John. This sale offers the *Apocalypse* in its entirety of 16 plates complete with text, 1496-1511 (estimate: £80,000-120,000) and also exceptionally dynamic individual works from the series such as *The Four Horsemen*, circa 1497-98 illustrated right (estimate: £50,000-70,000), an impression of which is held in the Uffizi in Florence. Demonstrating a dramatic power previously unparalleled in graphic art, the *Apocalypse* is one of Dürer's most important works which brought him international fame. This reflects Dürer's unusual international awareness, as the 1500s represented a golden age for his own hometown Nuremberg which was epitomised by humanist knight and poet Ulrich von Hutton's (1488-1523) statement 'it is a pleasure to be alive.'



Christie's are pleased to offer excellent impressions of Dürer's three most substantial woodcut cycles: *The Large Passion*, 1496-1511 (estimate: £80,000-120,000), which originally cost 12 pfennings and one heller/half a days wages of a Nuremberg stonemason, for one sheet e.g. illustrated left; *The Life of the Virgin*, circa 1502-1510 (estimate: £80,000-120,000) and the *Small Passion*, circa 1508-1510 (estimate: £30,000-40,000). Initially printed as individual images and later as sets, these works were triumphs of the reproducible image and reflected the extent of the artist's imagination. Dürer's woodcuts were larger, more complex and well balanced than those achieved previously by other artists.

Amongst the devotional works within Dürer's oeuvre, which includes *St Eustace*, circa 1501 (estimate: £25,000-35,000) and *St Jerome Penitent*, circa 1496 (estimate: £25,000-35,000), the Madonna was a celebrated subject. The Council of Trent recognised Dürer along with Italian artist Cimabue (circa 1240-1302) for achieving a sacred dignity in their art. This sale offers 16 Madonnas which reflect the artist's ability to capture peaceful harmony and quiet reflection, led by *Madonna with the Monkey*, circa 1498 (estimate: £15,000-20,000), *Virgin and child on grassy bench*, 1503 (£10,000-15,000) and *Glorification of the Virgin*, circa 1502 (estimate: £8,000-12,000). Inspired by the renowned Venetian painter Giovanni Bellini's Madonnas and the sculptural nudes of Andrea Mantegna, Dürer's works united nature and form drawing from the sculptures of antiquity.



The carefully crowded compositional form of *Adam and Eve*, 1504 (estimate: £40,000-60,000) *illustrated right*, further reflects the inspiration of Mantegna and the circle of Bellini, as well as Dürer's study of *The Rules of Vitruvius* (circa 84 -after 27 BC). The only engraving signed with his whole name, Dürer's *Adam and Eve* is the first work by a German artist to realistically capture 'contraposto' twisting human torsos. This is also the first time in the history of the printed image that pale bodies are placed against a dark background, creating the chiaroscuro effect, and also that the atmospheric potential of the pictorial ground in a graphic work is fully explored.



Further notable works to be offered include Dürer's *Jealousy or Hercules at the crossroads*, circa 1498 (estimate: £25,000-35,000), *Holy family with the butterfly*, circa 1494 (estimate: £25,000-35,000), *Melancholia I*, 1514 (estimate: £20,000-30,000), *Saint Jerome in his Study*, 1514 (estimate: £20,000-30,000), *The Desperate Man*, circa 1515 (estimate: £20,000-30,000) and *Ulrich Varnbüler*, 1522 (estimate: £20,000-30,000).

Dürer was an astute business man who recognised the portable medium of prints as an excellent way to spread his reputation across Europe. Taking prints with him on innumerable trips around Europe and showing, selling and giving them as gifts to wealthy merchants, Dürer also sent his wife Agnes Dürer to the Frankfurt fair with prints in 1505, upon the outbreak of plague in Nuremberg. This inspired other artists including Raphaël (1483-1520), Titian (1485-1576) and Parmigianino (1503-1540) who are known to have entered into collaborations with printmakers to distribute their work beyond their local regions.



As part of this self-publicity Dürer used a monogram from 1495, *illustrated left*, making his works instantly recognisable and acting as a trademark and certification of artistic quality. Dürer is known to have considered the medium of painting vs. prints and decided that the money made from paintings in the context of the time taken to execute them did not compare to prints. For this reason, between 1511 and 1514 Dürer concentrated his artistic efforts upon printmaking. Albrecht Dürer died on 6 April 1528 a rich man.

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A selection of images is available on request

Notes to Editors:

Auction: *The Genius of the German Renaissance: Prints by Albrecht Dürer*, Christie's King Street on Wednesday 4 December 2007 at 2pm

Public Viewing: Christie's London, 8 King Street, St James's SW1Y 6QT

- Saturday, 1 December: 12.00pm – 5.00pm
- Sunday, 2 December: 12.00pm – 5.00pm
- Monday, 3 December: 9.00am - 4.30pm
- Tuesday, 4 December: 9.00am – 12.00pm

Christie's holds the world auction record for a Rembrandt print at auction with his drypoint *Christ presented to the People; oblong Plate*, 1655 which realized £528,000/\$935,341 on 10 December 1991. Sales of Prints are held ten times a year, four in New York and six in London. Christie's is proud to have pioneered themed sales and print collections, the success of which is reflected in the superb results for the Albrecht Dürer collection of the late Count Antoine Seilern in 1998, which realised £1,211,613/1,984,622, the Rembrandt collection of Walter J. Johnson in 1997, which realised £1,624,086/ \$2,619,495 and the Rembrandt collection of G.A.H Buisman in 2006, which was 100% sold and realised £854,160/ \$1,488,800/€1,237,677. Sales at Christie's London in 2006 realised in excess of £12 million.

