


MASTERPIECE
MINUTE



Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute with Doc Brown on Virtual SDMA. I'm your host, Michael Brown, Curator of European Art at the San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in every other Friday at 10am to pick up a new mini talk led by SDMA curators and special guests spotlighting works of art from the Museum's collection.


Today's masterpiece is another exquisite example from the Museum's collection of works on paper. It is Albrecht Dürer's engraving of Saint Anthony Reading.

Sitting before a wondrous, imaginary cityscape, the hermit saint pores intently over a prayer-book (called a book of hours). One of the earliest Christians to adopt a hermetic lifestyle, Anthony lived in fourth-century Egypt.



Albrecht Dürer, a giant figure in the history of Western art, enjoyed widespread fame by 1519, when this engraving was made. He was born 550 years ago, on May 21, 1471.

He left his native Nuremberg in present-day Germany in 1494 for Venice, Italy as a fully trained artist. The trip initially was prompted by a resurgence of the plague in his home town, but the visit proved foundational for the young painter's artistic development, as he was able to study works by Bellini and Mantegna and access the latest Venetian techniques and materials. Later the following year, he returned to Nuremberg to set up his own workshop and soon emerged as a leading portraitist and printmaker.



Dürer again sought refuge in Venice during a second epidemic in 1505, spending enough time there to travel to Florence and Rome, where he studied works by Leonardo and Raphael. In 1506, he was in Bologna, site of one of Europe's greatest universities, where he seems to have studied linear perspective with renowned mathematician Luca Pacioli. The experience would later spur Dürer to become Northern Europe's first major art theorist.

Dürer also became an early and outspoken advocate for intellectual property rights. In the sixteenth century, copying others' work was very common, especially for training purposes. Dürer himself copied the intricate fairy-tale townscape that frames Saint Anthony

from a drawing he had made twenty years earlier, now in the Royal Collection Trust. In Rome, printmaker Marcantonio Raimondi had a lucrative business copying the engravings that had made Dürer famous, even using the German artist's familiar AD monogram. This was a step too far for Dürer, and having discovered what Raimondi was doing upon his return to Italy, Dürer took the matter to court. Scholars have called the lawsuit the "first-known case of art-specific intellectual property law brought to trial."

In something of a split decision, Venetian magistrates barred Raimondi from using the famous AD signature, but allowed him to keep cribbing the rest of the compositions, telling Dürer he ought to be flattered.

Determined to have the last word, Dürer wrote in his 1511 illustrated Life of the Virgin series *“Hold! You crafty ones, you strangers to work, and pilferers of other’s brains...”* warning his readers that selling imitations of his engravings would result not only in confiscation but also bodily harm.

This has been Doc Brown with Masterpiece Minute, thanks for listening here on Virtual SDMA!