

Scholars have long regarded Dürer's nature studies and landscapes as symptomatic of profound changes in the relationship between human beings, nature and art. These non-commissioned works, testimonies to artistic freedom and a subjective perception of the world, seem to predict a new understanding of what it meant to be an artist.¹ Dürer was pronounced the first German landscape artist, credited with elevating everyday roadside views to the subject matter of art and with creating the earliest autonomous landscapes in the German-speaking region.² Unlike any other group of his artworks, the nature and landscape depictions established the topos of Dürer as a pioneer and major innovator in the field of fine art. The recent, increasing objections to this view—that the artworks are not concerned with realistically reproducing reality as they were simply compilations and artistic arrangements, and particularly the animal studies, for example, were merely workshop patterns—have done nothing to change it.³

That Dürer had not forged an entirely new path in his nature studies became clear no later than 1928, in the year of the 400th anniversary of Dürer's death, when the groundbreaking role of his precursors in Franconian painting began to receive attention.⁴ Still to this day, however, scholarship has primarily viewed Dürer's nature and landscape works in the context of his biography, and instrumentalized them as crowning achievements in an artistic success story without equal. Thus, taking into consideration the context and the interests of the time around 1500, an investigation

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Nature as Art's Supreme Guide: Dürer's Nature and Landscape Studies

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Fig. 1
Martin Schongauer (*Circle*):
*Study of a peony, drawing, wash
and body color, c. 1472/1473.*
Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty
Museum, no. 92 GC 80

- 1 See, for example, Piel 1983, p. 17.—Koreny 1994, p. 88.
- 2 See, for example, Thausing 1884, vol. 1, p. 129.—Killermann 1910.—Piel 1983.—Mende: Albrecht Dürer the Younger 2001, p. 296.—Herrmann Fiore 2003, pp. 28–29.
- 3 On the new interpretation of the landscape and animal studies, see Herrmann Fiore 1973.—Leber 1988.—Trux 1993.—Herrmann Fiore 2003, pp. 37–38.—Trux 2003, pp. 47–55.—Exh. cat. Basel 2003, pp. 44–52.
- 4 See Höhn 1928, and later Schindler 1973.



Fig. 2
Hans Pleydenwurff: *Sts. Dominic and Thomas Aquinas (detail with iris)*, painting, c. 1460, cf. cat. 84

both of the associations among the artworks' functions and of their circumstances of production promises to yield new insights and evaluations. In this vein, for example, a significant link has been overlooked until now: the connection between the landscape studies by Dürer and the contemporary interest among Nuremberg humanists in revising descriptions of the heavens and earth.⁵

PAINTED NATURE: FLOWERS, ANIMALS AND INSECTS

For many years, scholars considered Dürer to be the Christopher Columbus of nature studies north of the Alps, but in 1991 this role fell to Martin Schongauer as the leading artistic personality of the preceding generation. The decisive event was Fritz Koreny's sensational find of a colored study of a peony (fig. 1), which he assumed to be a sketch for Schongauer's monumental painting of 1473, the "Madonna of the Rose Garden."⁶ Subsequently, this drawing has been regarded as *the* milestone in the development of the early modern nature study and as marking the beginning, in Germany, of the botanically correct depiction of plants.⁷ Thus, the true-to-life study of nature was no longer Dürer's achievement: his animal and plant depictions had turned out to be documents from the third rather than the first generation of nature studies.⁸

In his book on art from around 1400, Cennino Cennini wrote that artists should consider nature to be art's perfect guide and should dedicate themselves to her study.⁹ Yet this idea did not first appear in the late Middle Ages as a phenomenon of the 15th century, but is manifest in sculpture and painting throughout the medieval period. Presumably, correspondingly meticulous drawings and sketches preceded these precise depictions of plants and other natural objects. But such drawings actually drawn from nature in the region north of the Alps have not survived from the time before Dürer. Upon critical observation, this applies to the peony study as well, which based upon its watermark was dated before Schongauer's famous 1473 painting of the "Madonna of the Rose Garden," and so was thought to be a sketch or study after nature.¹⁰ Considering the amazing agreement between the painting and the drawing—down to the smallest details like the arrangement of the stamens—and given the isolation of the individual blossoms and leaves just as in a typical pattern book, everything indicates that the drawing was not done after nature in preparation for the "Madonna of the Rose Garden," but rather was produced after the painting's completion. The recent reinvestigation of the watermark provides further evidence of this. It cannot be narrowed down as far as previously postulated; based on similar marks the paper must date from sometime between 1465 to 1501.¹¹ Thus, the peony drawing fits into the tradition of the sample sheets of the fifteenth century, which as a rule were produced not as preliminary drawings but as copies made after exemplary artworks.¹²

Even if no drawings from north of the Alps stemming directly from the observation of nature have survived from the time before Dürer, artists must have produced such pieces as far back as the flourishing of Netherlandish painting in the early 15th century. Up to now, scholars have credited Schongauer with the transmission of the groundbreaking new achievements of early Netherlandish painting, but in recent years ideas on this have been changing. Scholarship has repeatedly, and convincingly, clarified the situation: it was rather the Franconian painter Hans Pleydenwurff, in the years 1460/1465, who strongly influenced the Upper Rhine artist. Not only Pleydenwurff's paintings, but also some of his drawings—newly evaluated in terms of dating and their relationship to Frankish art and Martin Schongauer—substantiate this.¹³ Thus, it is not Schongauer, but rather Hans Pleydenwurff who held the key role in the dissemination of the accomplishments of Netherlandish art. These were not limited to the realistic depiction of nature, but above all consisted of a

5 Cf. Krüger 1997, p. 14.

6 Koreny: Pflingstrosen 1991, pp. 108–112.—Koreny 1991.—Koreny 1994.—Schmitt 2004, p. 31.

7 Exh. cat. Basel 2003, p. 7.—Kemperdick 2004, p. 170.

8 Koreny 1994, p. 88.

9 Cennino Cennini: *Libro dell'Arte*, chapter 28 (cited from Cennini/Ilg 1440/1871, p. 18).

10 Koreny: Pflingstrosen 1991, p. 110.—Koreny 1994, p. 85.—Kemperdick 2004, p. 170.

11 A critical investigation of the watermark using data banks like Piccard online [<http://www.piccard-online.de>] did not result in any identical signs, but did testify to the existence of similar watermarks in the time from 1465 to 1501; many thanks to Georg Dietz, Dresden, for his research.

12 See cats. 98, 85 and 86.

13 Kemperdick 2004, pp. 227–234.—Suckale 2009, vol. 1, pp. 215–232.—Among the drawings, see especially the Erlangen "Crucifixion" by the Master of the Stötteritz Altarpiece, around 1465/1470; Buck/Messling 2009, no. 44.

14 Buck/Messling 2009, no. 38.—On early Italian nature studies, see Exh. cat. Vienna 1985, nos. 1–2 (Fritz Koreny).

new dramatic activity on the part of individual figures in large and ambitious paintings. In their figurative conception and their concentration of dramatic events in the action of just a few figures, pictures like the Wrocław “Deposition” (cat. 25) are based on the paintings of the Brussels painter Rogier van der Weyden; however, they are never slavish copies. Thus, in many respects they established new landmarks in German painting.

Naturalistically painted plants and flowers play special roles as foreground motifs in Pleydenwurff’s paintings, for example in the altarpiece side panels showing Sts. Dominic and Thomas Aquinas (fig. 2, cat. 84). The subtle tones of the blue-black iris against the backdrop of the monk’s grey cowl is a virtuosic mastery of color, in which one is inclined to see the hand of Pleydenwurff himself. The exacting detail of the depiction, which is true-to-nature in scale as well, must have required a preliminary drawing. This applies also to the lilies with opening buds in the “Altarpiece of the Three Kings” (cat. 105) and to the birds and insects that occur repeatedly in Pleydenwurff’s paintings and in those of his workshop and successors (cf. cat. 87). No preliminary drawings exist for any of these naturalistic masterpieces. However, similar motifs enjoyed a wide-ranging popularity: as interlacing foliage on the illustrated borders of books, in playing cards, and in engravings of intertwined branches. Therefore it is perhaps not by accident that Pleydenwurff’s drawing of fighting bird pairs is somewhat in the style of playing cards; based on its stylization, it was likely conceived as an imaginative model for border illustrations or goldsmith work.¹⁴

Paintings produced in the Nuremberg of Dürer’s youth also prominently feature plants, animals and insects. Although naturalistically painted flowers and birds are numerous in the works of Dürer’s teacher Michael Wolgemut, few preliminary drawings can be found for these details. What holds true for Schongauer’s peony can also be applied to a still little-known study of an iris, in Stuttgart (cat. 85). Its model can be found in the Annunciation scene in Wolgemut’s 1479 “Zwickau Altarpiece,” though the plant in the drawing is divided into two, in the manner of sample books, in order to fit it on the page. Among Dürer’s predecessors, the painter of the “Augustinian Altar” of 1487 was especially ambitious, in that he dared to paint St. Christopher wading out of the water onto the shore, the saint’s feet disappearing deep into the water (cat. 26). In the depiction of cattails, flowers, a newt, shells and snails, the artist also portrayed natural subject matter that must have been the subject of preliminary drawings.

It is clear, then, that Dürer was not the first artist north of the Alps to produce studies from nature. However, based on the current state of knowledge, he was the very first whose studies have survived, thanks in large part to his concerted efforts in the cultivation

Fig. 3
Albrecht Dürer: *Young Hare*,
wash and body color, 1502.
Vienna, Albertina, no. 3073



of *Memoria*.¹⁵ According to Fritz Koreny's critical assessment, of the many plant studies associated with Dürer, only the iris in Bremen is his own work; the issue of the "The Great Piece of Turf" will be addressed below.¹⁶ In the case of the animal studies, with the famous "Young Hare" in Vienna at their forefront, the situation is a bit better (fig. 3). The assured brush strokes and the varied characterization of the fluffy, white fur on the hare's belly, the short fur on his head and ears, and the long outer coat, display a precisely naturalistic depiction, as does the gauzy white highlights on the wiry fur of the paws. In this work, the highest degree of technical perfection is paired with a surprising economy and amazing simplicity of means.¹⁷ This guarantees Dürer's works the extremely lifelike quality that is missing in many later copies, so precise that they eliminate any incorporation of chance. Among Dürer's other animal depictions, the deer head in Bayonne (W. 365) and the ox muzzles (cats. 188-189) are also worthy of special note. These document the same virtuosity as the "Young Hare" and push the possibilities of representational techniques for the artistic mimicry of nature to their very limits; the double views even adopt characteristics of scientific documentation. All these drawings from around 1502/1505 show Dürer striving towards a consummate imitation of nature. As with the "Young Hare," the deer head also astounds the viewer through its convincing depiction of the fur's color and texture, and through the combination of painstaking work and economy of means. The ox muzzles show the same drive towards perfection and illusionistic lifelikeness which, in the contrast between their clammy, wet snouts and fluffy, soft fur, offered a particular challenge. In the multiple views, these two drawings come close to the helmet studies (cat. 185), in which Dürer likewise developed the graphic and painterly repertoire necessary to achieve the desired effects; he then utilized this expertise in his activities in printmaking (cats. 32, 43, 187) and painting (cat. 106).

PAINTED NATURE: FRANCONIAN LANDSCAPES AND CITYSCAPES

The motif "The Dispersal of the Apostles" seems tailor-made for the chance to unfold a landscape panorama, in all its breadth and depth, in front of the eyes of the viewer (cat. 87). No topic could be better for the almost physical, reproducible valorization of nature and landscape than this biblical scene: the departure of the apostles as they set out to fulfill their mission after the ascension of Christ. Though scholarship has traced the existence of numerous apostle altarpieces in Bamberg, this alone does not explain the great popularity in painting of the topic of the disciples' departure; there are no verifiable cultic reasons for this phenomenon.¹⁸ It is noteworthy that in these early landscape depictions, other "experiences of nature," such as the miraculous draught of fish on the Sea of Galilee (John 21, 1-8), are illustrated as well. In this story, Peter throws himself into the lake in order to swim over to Christ on the shore; the scene appears in "The Dispersal of the Apostles" as well as in the "Miraculous Draught of Fishes" in the "Geneva Altarpiece." The Geneva panel, signed and dated 1444 by Konrad Witz, is the earliest landscape north of the Alps and a monumental portrayal of nature that fills the whole picture space.¹⁹ A loose quotation of this landscape appearing in the Bamberg "The Dispersal of the Apostles" (cat. 89) makes clear the development of landscape as a pictorial subject. In the Bamberg work, the traveler, disappearing between the mountainous bluffs with his tied bundle, is only vaguely reminiscent of the motif's model and of the original scene's overall cohesion. What Dürer would come to make of this in yet a further step, will be discussed below.

¹⁵ See Thomas Eser's essay in this volume.

¹⁶ Exh. cat. Vienna 1985, no. 66 (Fritz Koreny), on further plant studies, see nos. 67-81.

¹⁷ Exh. cat. Vienna 1985, no. 43 (Fritz Koreny).

¹⁸ See Mayer 1951.—Suckale 2009, vol. 1, pp. 174-176, vol. 2, pp. 84-86.—Further prominent examples are to be found in the altarpiece of the chapel-of-ease of St. Blaise in Kaufbeuren, in the work of Marx Reichlich (?) from around 1490 (Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum), and also in Regensburg book illustrations by Berthold Furtmeyr (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 15710, fol. 14v).

¹⁹ See, most recently, Exh. cat. Basel 2011, nos. 17-20, especially pp. 137-139, 145 (Bodo Brinkmann).

²⁰ For further information, see Buck/Messling 2009, no. 39.

²¹ Most recently Suckale 2009, vol. 1, pp. 187-198, fig. 616. On city vedute in the 15th century, see cats. 93-104 in this volume.

²² On this altarpiece, now in Straubing, see Schmitt 2000, p. 733.—Oellermann/Oellermann 2005/2006, pp. 194-195. See further more p. 14, fig. 3 in this volume.



In the second half of the 15th century, landscape portrayals became established elements in Franconian painting, independent of particular pictorial motifs. Many of these landscapes are indebted to an idealized type, as seen in probably the oldest surviving Franconian landscape before Dürer, from 1460/1462 (fig. 4), and appearing once again in various versions in many of Hans Pleydenwurff's works (cf. cat. 105).²⁰ The pattern sheet shows neither an exact topography nor "observed" nature. The *veduta* is far more an attractive model for the gradations of depth and the spatial dramatization of a landscape background. In contrast to such fictionalized motifs, in his "Deposition" (cat. 25) Pleydenwurff included watermills and bluffs, two quintessential elements found specifically in the landscape of Franconia; he based these on observations from nature and repeated them in new variations from then on. No less important was the direct observation of nature shown in works like the collection of six drawings with views of Bamberg from around 1470 (cat. 95), done by a follower of Pleydenwurff, or the authentic view of the city of Vienna in the Schotten Retable of 1469, whose master Pleydenwurff also supposedly trained.²¹

Many of the panels created from around 1470 onwards in Bamberg and Nuremberg include *vedute* of various cities (cat. 96), reminding the viewers of familiar scenes or of views they had seen in their surrounding areas. For example, a wing of Wolgemut's "St. Mary's Altarpiece," completed for the Nuremberg church of St. Dominic in 1489, displays a view—certainly not by chance—of the upper Burgstraße, exactly that part of the street into which the visitor stepped upon leaving the church.²² Many paintings of the 15th century illustrate a comparable interplay between reality and representation, whereby a dense concentration of characteristics furthered the recognition of the locations depicted. It is thus clear that the topographically exact record of a place was not of primary importance. This is in spite of current controversies, such as debates concerning the correct identification of these towns and landscapes (which in any case have undergone major changes in the course of time),

Fig. 4
Hans Pleydenwurff (Workshop):
View of a fortified town,
colored drawing, c. 1460/1462.
Erlangen, Universitätsbibliothek,
Graphische Sammlung, no. B. 139

Fig. 5
Michael Wolgemut: The Presentation
of Christ in the Temple,
wing of an Altar from the former
Nuremberg Dominican Church,
painting, 1489. Straubing,
St. Jakob



discussions about the geographic or historic exactitude of the depictions, and the often fruitless searches for the exact location where the artist executed the drawing.²³ Representation, not authenticity, was the primary intention of the artist.

Furthermore, in the time before Dürer, the model for most of the surviving drawings with landscape depictions or city views was not nature itself, but rather the painted picture. This was true even for the Pisanello workshop's "travel sample book," done between 1431 and 1438: the 51 drawings of the "Taccuino di viaggio," a complex of drawings inimitable in its stylistic coherence, are essentially copies of mostly identifiable works.²⁴ This applies to the realm north of the Alps as well, even to the groundbreaking landscape views of Erhard Reuwich (cat. 94). Noteworthy among the Franconian examples are the "The Dispersal of the Apostles" and the drawing based upon this work, (cat. 88) as well as the "Stibar Crucifixion" (cat. 99) and its related landscape drawing (cat. 98). The drawings must be evaluated as classic examples of sample sketches, executed within the context of producing a collection of workshop models. Such drawings were an essential part of the foundation of working materials for an artist studio.²⁵ This function also applies to pieces such as the much-admired river landscape in Erlangen (cat. 86), which has motifs similar to those found in the "Augustinian Altarpiece" of 1487 (cat. 26) and in other Nuremberg paintings. Even though individual elements in such depictions presuppose the direct study of nature, not a single drawing or study has survived from north of the Alps from the time before Dürer for which it can be proven that it was carried out *in* nature. This situation, based purely on the works that have been handed down to us over time, has been a determining factor in the glorification of Dürer as the "first *plein air* painter" north of the Alps.

DÜRER'S LANDSCAPES AND VEDUTE: DOCUMENTATION—COMPILATION—FICTION?

Regardless of whether or not one this constitutes a foundational experience for Dürer during his painting apprenticeship (1486-1489), in 1488/1489 the Wolgemut workshop produced the above-mentioned "St. Mary's altarpiece" with the view of the Burgstraße (fig. 5). Just a few years later, Anton Koberger printed the "Nuremberg Chronicle," with its many authentic as well as imagined cityscapes (cat. 97). Dürer's landscapes and city views thus continued an established tradition. They functioned as exemplary collections of motifs and sample drawings, as can be observed in Dürer's subsequent use of the landscape studies in his prints. For example, the cliff formations and the bushes in the engraving "Knight, Death and the Devil" harken back to the Berlin cliff study (W. 111), and in the engraving "Virgin and Child with the Monkey," Dürer has taken the house on the island from his watercolor now in London (W. 115).²⁶

Dürer usually used individual motifs from the landscape studies loosely and associatively, as the case of the unusual house with the crow-stepped gable from the Innsbruck watercolor (fig. 6, cat. 101) makes clear. It appears repeatedly: as a picturesque architectural motif in the drawing "Pupila Augusta" (cat. 151), the 1519 copper engraving with St. Anthony, the "Feast of the Rose Garlands" (A. 93) and the trefoil window with Sixtus Tucher (cat. 160). Dürer's topographic drawings supplied him with a repertory of motifs, rich with creative possibilities for depicting landscapes in his paintings and prints. In works like "St. Eustace" (cat. 183), "The Sea Monster" (cat. 150), "Nemesis" (cat. 153), "The Holy Family with Three Hares" (cat. 142), as well as "The Life of the Virgin" (cats. 138-141) and "The Apocalypse" (cats. 121-137), the motifs contribute to the inimitable character of Dürer's signature style of dramatization.²⁷ In these images it was unimportant

²³ See, for example, Koschatzky 1971 with the respective research history of the individual pieces, as well as Leber 1988, pp. 8-10, *passim*.

²⁴ See Degenhart/Schmitt 2004.

²⁵ See, for example, Exh. cat. Ulm 1995.

²⁶ Exh. cat. Vienna 2003, nos. 30 (Matthias Mende), 31 (Anna Scherbaum), 43 (Matthias Mende), 139 (Matthias Mende).—Most recently Andersson/Silver 2010, pp. 17-18.

²⁷ See, furthermore, Herrmann Fiore 1997, pp. 28-35.



Fig. 6
Albrecht Dürer: Innsbruck seen
from the North, wash and body
color, c. 1495/1500, cf. cat. 101

that the location shown could not be named or identified. Indeed, in the engraving “Nemesis” (cat. 153), the viewer is supplied with no information as to the identity of the settlement in the valley, despite the fact that Dürer had in fact depicted a rather exact topographical reproduction of the small town of Klausen in Eisacktal, though the view is reversed and simultaneously from two standpoints.²⁸ Dürer was obviously not intending for the viewer to recognize the location over which fickle Nemesis floats. But this orientation towards reality, having taken something directly from nature, guaranteed a high measure of authenticity and credibility in presenting the world as vividly and true-to-life as possible.

The function of Dürer’s landscapes and *vedute* was not limited to the presentation of especially picturesque and exotic motifs. Like the intentionally recognizable cityscapes of the Wolgemut era, Dürer’s works served communicative purposes as well. Thus, the “Wire-Drawing Mill” (cat. 100) is, on the one hand, an example of how a type of landscape motif, one that had previously only served an accessory function in Franconian pictorial tradition, advanced to become an autonomous subject through being isolated and perfected in an artwork. On the other hand, the picture shows a special place: the wire-drawing mill lay in the Hallerwiese, a meadow just outside of the city walls. In this field, “in springtime and summertime, as if on an public stage, the younger generation and people of all ages” assembled for holiday diversions, sports and games, as Konrad Celtis expressed it in his “Norimberga,” printed in 1502 (cat. 20).²⁹ Probably because the countryside held this particular association, Dürer did not portray the riverfront and water wheels, choosing instead to show the mill yard directly bordering the Hallerwiese. This is in stark contrast to the Franconian painters of the previous generation (cat. 95). Furthermore, the urban watermills on the Pegnitz River were not only topographical but also rhetorical places: in 1447, in his Nuremberg laudation, Hans Rosenplüt mentioned among the seven jewels of the city the no less than 67 mills on the Pegnitz, a number which increased to 77 in the new edition of 1490.³⁰

²⁸ Herbert and Hannelore Liedel, Nuremberg, were able to identify these locations recently with photographs; many thanks to the two photographers for this information.

²⁹ See Celtis 1502 (<http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/camena/celtis1/jpg/s175.html>), see also Celtis/Fink 1502/2000, p. 35.

³⁰ Rosenplüt/Lochner 1445/1854, p. 5, line 156.—Rosenplüt 1490/1979, fol. 4r. Many thanks to Thomas Eser for the reference.

Innsbruck, too, had recently gained a high status in the web of political communication. The city, shaped by trade and commerce, gained further importance when the Habsburg court was moved there from Merano in 1420.³¹ In 1490, King Maximilian moved into the rather modest Innsbruck Castle, the courtyard of which Dürer recorded in two drawings. Within just a few years of Maximilian's arrival, the city advanced to a seat of power recognized across Europe. Around 1500, Innsbruck was growing fast and flourishing, and it had the reputation of being the safest, if not the most attractive, location in the empire. Considering Innsbruck's new political and social importance, an interpretation of Dürer's illustration (fig. 6, cat. 101) as mere documentation of an artist's journey does not do the work justice. Like many city views in Nuremberg painting of the preceding generation, this rendition is also not an exact topography taken from one standpoint, but rather a representational image of the city. Furthermore, it was produced in three work phases.³² Dürer combined various characteristic elements of the city architecture; by compacting and exaggerating these, he created an idealized view of the king's residential city on the Inn. The decisive factor, again, was not strict authenticity, but recognizability.

Fig. 7
Albrecht Dürer: *View of Arco*,
wash and body color, c. 1495/
1500. Paris, Musée du Louvre,
no. 18579



In considering the Bamberg cityscapes (cat. 95), revolutionary for the time around 1470, the question arises concerning the position of the Innsbruck drawing in the artistic context of the last third of the 15th century, when the tradition of *vedute* underwent fundamental changes.³³ The Franconian painting of the Pleydenwurff circle played just as important a role as the many city views in the “Nuremberg Chronicle” (cat. 97), which were mostly based on older models. In these, too, the distinctive buildings are the identifying factors in the depiction of each respective city, unless these depictions—irrespective of the state of historical or topographic knowledge of the time—were generalized types or visualized through the re-use of woodcuts of other towns.³⁴ Dürer's work thus on the one hand follows established convention, while on the other hand it documents just how far he expanded the possibilities for a perspectively and atmospherically convincing reproduction of a city view. This is also made clear in the “View of Arco” (fig. 7), which has been composed as an ideal view, taken from different standpoints

and combined with characteristic individual features. Here, the precise determination of Dürer's standpoint turns into an athletic activity; today, a search for this specific location will lead to a wild goose chase around the whole Arco Mountain.³⁵ This is because, once again, Dürer consolidates and exaggerates the things he has observed and the individual motifs, recorded on location in quick sketches, into an artwork that is more than just a faithful mapping of nature. Dürer uses a similar principle in the construction of the view of Trent: here, a purposeful selection of characteristic architecture is coupled with a progression in the heights of buildings and hill ranges. He even incorporates effects such as the characterization of standing or flowing water, with their corresponding mirrored reflections (cat. 104). Trent thus takes shape not only geographically and topographically, but atmospherically as well.

In all respects, then, these pictures are products of the studio. Their function as traditionally postulated, i.e. as personal documentations of Dürer's trip³⁶ that were produced on location, conjures up aesthetic categories which came into being not until much later, in the course of the 18th century. Thus, while Dürer's landscapes and city views can be characterized as having been inspired by nature and as realistic portrayals of individual elements, in their totality they are highly

³¹ Summary in Braunfels 1983, pp. 370–373.

³² See also cats. 93–104 in this volume.

³³ On the development of the city veduta, see also cats. 93–104 in this volume.

³⁴ Rücker 1973, pp. 72–127.—The focus of the selection is on biblical locations, bishops' seats, trade centers and university cities. Irritatingly, many cities with which Koberger cultivated the closest relations are illustrated by imaginary views.

³⁵ See Leber 1988, pp. 216–228.

³⁶ See for example Herrmann Fiore 2003, p. 27.—Wood 2005, pp. 59–62.—Exh. cat. Münster 2008, pp. 69–76 (Petra Marx).

composed, idealized and representational images. This is also true of Leonardo's controversial 1473 "Arno Valley Landscape," presumably the first autonomous landscape inscribed with a date in the history of art.³⁷ Shifting the perspective, from purely art historical observation and the concept of autonomy to the cultural-historical context and the microcosm of Nuremberg's Burgstraße in the 1490s, causes Dürer's landscapes to yield new insights. Alongside the publication of the "Nuremberg Chronicle" in 1493, the extensive "Germania illustrata" project of the humanist Konrad Celtis, crowned poet laureate in 1487, increased the general interest in *vedute* and landscape scenes. This project was not supposed to be limited to the compilation of written testimonies, as had been common up to that time. Rather, it was to focus on Celtis's own personal explorations of the territory, especially the outer borders of "Germania."³⁸ Nuremberg offered the best conditions for such ambitions: Schedel's library contained the main geographical works available in that time, and was host to the geographer Hieronymus Müntzer and the cartographers Martin Behaim and Erhard Etzlaub.³⁹ Only a few months after the appearance of the Latin edition of the "Nuremberg Chronicle," Sebald Schreyer, who had commissioned the chronicle, contracted Celtis to do a new, revised version, particularly of the geographic sections of the work, for the sum of 216 guilders.⁴⁰ But this plan was never completed, since the relationship between Celtis and Nuremberg cooled down considerably from 1496 onwards. However, the topographic exploration of Germany begun by Hartmann Schedel and the graphic depiction of geography and topography remained constant themes in Nuremberg. Ten years before the publication of the first geography textbook, the "Amores" by Conrad Celtis were published in 1502. Four woodcuts therein depicted—in accordance with these special interests of the humanists—the borders of "Germania." The images marked the southern territorial and linguistic boundary through a rugged Alpine landscape and the sketchy cityscapes of Trent and "Iuliacum" (Villach; p. 75, fig. 7).⁴¹

Against the background of such intense contemporary interest in geography in Nuremberg and given the continuing difficulty of acquiring accurate cityscapes,⁴² even after the publication of the "Nuremberg Chronicle," we should reconsider Dürer's depictions of Tyrol. Innsbruck and Trent were at that time well-known seats of political power, and for this reason Dürer labeled them by name. The fact that both cities are missing from the "Nuremberg Chronicle" suggests that Dürer may have been collecting material for the planned new edition.⁴³ The other Tyrolian pictures, in contrast, only have vague inscriptions: "Italian castle" (cat. 102), "Italian mountain" (p. 27, fig. 3) and "Venetian outpost" (fig. 7). The terms used point to the Italian language border, and the locations depicted—the Dosso di Trento and the Arco Mountain—are visualizations of this transitional area between the German and *Welsch* (Italian) languages.⁴⁴ While the four border regions of Germania are depicted quite abstractly in the summary illustrations of the "Amores," Dürer made the German-Italian linguistic frontier into a topographic and atmospheric place, thus bringing the border region to life.

DÜRER AND CLIFFS: FROM NATURE TO ART

The rehabilitation of Germany as a nation whose cultural achievements were on a par with those of antiquity or the Italian Renaissance was one of the mainsprings of humanistic geography. The main protagonists of this pursuit in the 1490s were to be found in the circle surrounding Celtis in Nuremberg.⁴⁵ As their publications substantiate, they intended to show that in the carefully ordered and cultivated cultural region of Germania, only small remnants of untamed nature still existed. The cityscapes, as visible signs of urban culture and the achievements of civilization, were meant

37 Exh. cat. London 2010, no. 49.—Rosenberg 2009, pp. 21-22.—Schulze Altcapenberg 2006, pp. 34-36.

38 See Müller 2001.—Müller 2002, pp. 137-149.—Fuchs 2004, pp. 140-181. On Dürer and Celtis see also the essay by Jörg Robert in this volume.

39 Müller 2001, pp. 283-285, as well as Iwanczak 2009.

40 Müller 2001, pp. 286-294.—Fuchs 2004, pp. 103-104 (Klaus Arnold).

41 Wiener: *Germaniae* 2002, pp. 97-99.

42 See Rücker 1973, pp. 73-77.

43 See also Jörg Robert's essay in this volume.

44 Cf. the essay by Thomas Eser in this volume.

45 See also pp. 65-77.

to attest to this.⁴⁶ Culture and nature, as two contrasting poles, had been popular subjects in art since the 14th century.⁴⁷ Dürer explored both categories in his drawings and landscape pictures and investigated their respective characteristics and possibilities for their portrayal. His goal was not the establishment of the landscape as an autonomous picture genre, but rather the understanding of nature and the discovery of the appropriate means for its depiction; these same concerns return later in his investigation of human proportions. Along with recording a particular place, the landscape studies functioned as a process for finding the artistic means necessary to convey spatial depth and atmosphere, color tuning and surface structures. Of the pen and ink drawings, the Berlin

Fig. 8
Albrecht Dürer: *Spring in the Woods with the Hermit Saints Anthony and Paul*, drawing, 1504, cf. cat. 181



drawing of the forest pond stands out in particular. The work not only offers insight into the creative process, but also documents Dürer's changing artistic intentions over the course of its creation (fig. 8, cat. 181). He must have started the drawing primarily as a sketch for the woodcuts of the Hermit Saints Anthony and Paul in the "Schlechte Holzwerk" (Poor Woodwork; see cat. 179). With the theme of the first hermits, Dürer was providing the art market with reasonably-priced devotional pictures. These would have appealed to the tastes of a wide variety of print purchaser, not just his Nuremberg monastic humanist clientele centered around Jakob Locher, Stephan Fridolin, Benedikt Chelidonius or Caritas Pirckheimer. For this elite circle of clients, Dürer designed the picture cycle "The Legend of St. Benedict"⁴⁸ and the woodcuts of the "Poor Woodwork" with its examples of hermitages set in the isolation of the forest, a pristine world far from civilization.⁴⁹

While the Berlin sheet may have begun as a study for the design for these woodcuts, in the course of drawing the focus obviously shifted from the motif of the hermit to the artistic question of how the trees and forest could be convincingly represented in relation to spatial depth, light and shadow, without losing sight of the forest for the trees, so to speak. In a way unlike any other of his landscape drawings, this work clearly shows Dürer's approach to drawing as a process. Worthy of note is how he approaches the problem of depicting the dark background: in contrast to the sketchy drawing of the trees in the fore- and middle ground, this part is worked through with care and renders the trees increasingly schematic as they disappear into the darkness of the forest. In spite of the uneven quality of the picture and the sketchy unfinished state of many sections, the drawing is not purely a study; with its drawn frame it demands the status of a completed picture.

In the "Cliff Landscape with Wanderer" (cat. 89), Dürer was also interested in the appropriate artistic depiction of natural elements. A comparison of this pen and ink drawing with the landscape by Hans Traut or his workshop (mentioned above) is instructive. Though Dürer certainly carries on local traditions, he far surpasses his predecessor in the exactitude of his observation, in particular in the depiction of the structure and surface of the cliffs and the transition from rock to turf. In Traut's work, the trees sprout from the ground like mushrooms, the grass meets up with rock in a schematic fashion, and the same type of hatching is used regardless of what is being depicted, whether it is the water's surface or the hills, the foreground or background. In contrast, Dürer puts effort into using graphic means that are attuned to the structures, the transitions and the effects of depth. Surely he started the drawing as a study and with the intent of perfecting his depiction of

elements of nature. However, by the end he had lent the drawing an impression of a completed composition through the addition of the traveler motif and the cursorily sketched middle- and background. This sheet, too, documents how Dürer would take a drawing conceived as a study and elevate it beyond a mere fragment, thereby striving for perfection, for a completed picture of a quality worthy of collection. The drawing did not serve the purpose of representing a real landscape, but rather was the initial grappling with the motifs of cliffs and stone quarries as elements of untamed nature.

Since the 1460s, cliff sceneries held a prominent role in Franconian painting. They offered an ideal backdrop not only for the entrance and exit of figures, but also for the formation of three-dimensional, ancillary scenes. Even in the topographic views of the “Seventh Age of the World” in the “Nuremberg Chronicle,” cliff scenes occur as repeatedly used stereotypes for the illustration of such varying landscapes as Macedonia, Wallachia, Saxony or Italy. In contrast to the depiction of plants and animals, though, cliff sceneries in Franconian painting remained strangely stylized and considering their schematic character do not seem to be based on nature studies. Dürer’s ambitions were broader and included, along with flora and fauna, the depiction of other elements of nature. With the motif of cliffs or stone quarries—Dürer labeled three of the total of six cliff drawings “steinpruch” (quarry)⁵⁰—he was turning his attention to a further jewel of his hometown. Hans Rosenplüt, in his poem in praise of Nuremberg from 1447 and 1490, describes the city wall and the forest, and afterwards goes on to applaud the quarry, the source of the stone for the tall city buildings of Nuremberg.⁵¹

In paintings before Dürer, cliffs occur above all in the depiction of hermit saints and recluses in the wilderness, a theme which had become very popular in the course of the 15th century. Since Giotto, Italian painting had been rich in cliff scenery for the illustration of lonely, inhospitable places; until the 15th century, however, the configuration of the motifs remained for the most part bound to the Byzantine heritage. Jacopo Bellini and Andrea Mantegna developed a completely new approach in their works, in which cliff scenery advanced to the position of a motif that dominated the picture and thereby displayed an impressive range of different geological formations. The cliffs served as backdrops and took on bizarre shapes and characteristics, leaving their natural models far behind and transferring the action to breathtaking locations. Dürer’s cliff studies had other intentions. Alongside the study of nature and surfaces, Dürer’s interest focused on the transitions between stone and organic growth, and on the roots draping over or down the sides of the cliffs. Through experimentation, Dürer sought a convincing vocabulary that would approach the natural forms as closely as possible. In contrast to the sketch-like, spontaneous and unfinished drawings in Berlin, Bremen and Milan, the drawing in London (fig. 9, cat. 90) demonstrates an unusually high degree of perfection. With the exactitude of a scientific draftsman, Dürer records the specifically local red sandstone (*Burgsandstein*) layered with blue-green clay, paying special attention to the characteristic structure of the rock and tinting its reddish tone slightly with violet.⁵² Particularly noteworthy is the area of the rockslide and the vegetation to the right of the picture’s center; here, Dürer portrays blades of grass, exposed roots, and the branches of bushes and trees using a hair-thin brush. This drawing, with its meticulous

Fig. 9
Albrecht Dürer: *Quarry*,
drawing, wash and body color,
c. 1495/1500, cf. cat. 90



46 Müller 2001, pp. 403-438.

47 A short overview is given, for example, in Büttner 2006, pp. 37-87.

48 See also cats. 164-168 in the present volume.

49 Cf. see cats. 179-182 in this catalogue.

50 See Koschatzky 1971, nos. 19-23 as well as the pen and ink drawing in Bayonne (W. 106; Strauss 1495/53).

51 Rosenplüt/Lochner 1445/1854, p. 4, lines 109-113.—Rosenplüt 1490/1979, fol. 3v.

52 For the geological identification, I would like to thank Thomas Pürner of the Bayerisches Landesamt für Umwelt, Geology Department.



Fig. 10
 Albrecht Dürer: *The Great Piece of Turf*, wash and body color, 1503. Vienna, Albertina, no. 3075

execution, far surpasses all the other stone quarry drawings,⁵³ which Dürer repeatedly used as models for engravings. It is a prime example of a perfected artistic form achieved through the study of nature.

Like the *vedute*, Dürer's cliff studies also illustrate that he did not limit his art to the greatest possible authenticity in the representation of nature. Far more, the rock formations take on picturesque, sometimes anthropomorphic forms, which lend them both an authentic and a dramatically charged character.⁵⁴ The cliff studies make clear how Dürer isolated and perfected a traditional motif in Franconian art and then utilized it in the staging of his graphic works and paintings.

The watercolors, spontaneous and process-driven experimentations with color, became tests of painterly solutions for aerial perspective, color tuning and pictorial depth of field. Increasingly, Dürer dispensed with the traditional, additive pictorial formulas for the depiction of space, such as the overlapping and staggering of groups of trees, cliffs or ranges of hills, in favor of the creation of atmospheric effects. In "The Willow Mill" (cat. 192), for example, the emphasis is on the mood of the evening sky after a thunderstorm. The slow-flowing water reflects the sky, which acts as an effective backdrop, enabling the dark, clear rooflines of the Kleinweiden Mill stand out.

Together with the "Young Hare" (fig. 3) and the "The Great Piece of Turf" (fig. 10), the landscapes studies are consummate examples of Dürer's staging of nature. For the "The Great Piece of Turf," too, the occasion was not the observation and "loving depiction of teeming life"⁵⁵ on the roadside, but far more the elevation of a subordinate element of 15th century pictorial tradition to the autonomous subject of a picture. Pieces of turf appear in the foreground of many panel paintings of the preceding generation (cats. 25-27), but the grasses and flowers often seem pasted on and follow pictorial rules that are independent of the subject of the painting. In his work, Dürer embraces these elements in that he isolates and perfects them. The study of nature and the arrangement of nature thus seamlessly overlap. In "The Great Piece of Turf," probably modeled after real botanical elements, Dürer composes a characteristic and exemplary study of detailed nature. In his relatively limited palette and reduced, economic means, he greatly surpasses the works of his predecessors in structure, plasticity and spatial arrangement. Since this motif is a frequently-used element in the standard repertoire of a painter of that time, one that Dürer still used quite schematically in his early painting (cats. 66, 107), the drawing might have been intended as presentation piece for an instruction book, to record and pass down the knowledge and skill he had gained (this will be discussed below). The same applies to the "Young Hare," which combines technical perfection with the highest artistic demands for the faithful depiction of nature. Like the London drawing of the stone quarry, "The Great Piece of Turf" and "Young Hare" are exemplary demonstration pieces, illustrating Dürer's perfected artistic abilities.

DÜRER'S NATURE STUDIES AS ARTISTIC EXEMPLA

The few pieces which show a motif from various sides clearly illustrate Dürer's investigative drawing and painting processes. The helmet studies (cat. 185)—used as models for the copper engravings "Coat of Arms with a Lion and a Cock" and "Coat of Arms with a Skull" (cat. 187)⁵⁶—and the ox muzzles (cats. 188-189), clarifies his scientific accuracy in the study of material surface structures. With the helmets, Dürer tried out and developed, step by step, the appropriate artistic techniques for depicting shiny metallic surfaces, the rivets and the leather straps together with corresponding light and shadow effects. Thereby, in each of the three helmet studies, Dürer tries out different materials and colors, as well as different drawing and painting techniques. In the first view, on the upper left, Dürer uses brown ink for a preliminary sketch that is quite different from the final drawing. He depicts the surface through various tones of loose hatching, carried out freely and unsystematically. The second view, on the right, with a blue underdrawing and corrections at the top and bottom, displays systematically-placed parallel- and crosshatching. Finally, the third view, in its particular use of graphic and painterly techniques, seems to be seeking a balance between the two extremes. With great ambition and normative precision, Dürer worked step by step to achieve a convincing depiction of a contemporary helmet. In doing so, he far surpassed the degree of immersive detail that would have been necessary in a model for the two copper engravings. The ox

⁵³ See Schoch/Mende/Scherbaum, nos. 6, 7, 65, 69.

⁵⁴ On this phenomenon, cf. Möseneder 1986.—Leber 1988, pp. 60-77.—Thürlemann 2002/2003.

⁵⁵ Killermann 1910, pp. 27-28.

⁵⁶ Schoch/Mende/Scherbaum, nos. 35, 37.



Fig. 11
Albrecht Dürer: *Pond in the Woods*, wash and body color, 1496, cf. cat. 184

muzzles, too—with the contrast between moist snout and dry fur, warm and cold, shiny and furry, dark and light—placed high demands on the particularly mimetic capabilities of the artist.⁵⁷ In depictions like that of the unfinished crystal ball in the panel painting “*Salvator Mundi*” of 1504/1505 (p. 181, fig. 10a), Dürer plumbs the depths of artistic possibilities. Here, Dürer’s art focuses on the knowledge of the principles that rule natural forms and phenomena, and declares “reason”—beyond mere “practice” in terms of workshop conventions and exercises—to be the foundation of artistic work.⁵⁸ Furthermore, in his “*Aesthetic Excursus*,” Dürer writes that “reason” must develop along with “practice,” so that the hand

is able to execute that for which “reason” is striving.⁵⁹

A comparison with Pisanello’s nature studies, comparable in their subject matter and multiple views, makes clear that most of Dürer’s drawings are not spontaneous sketches, but rather perfected showpieces. Pisanello’s sketches, which came into being in direct confrontation with the subject, but not as autonomous works, have a spontaneous character that reveals a direct experience in nature—a quality missing from Dürer’s drawings.⁶⁰ Pisanello’s works served as preliminary sketches for frescoes, paintings and medallions, as did the 41 sketch-like pen and ink drawings with landscape studies and cliff scenery by Fra Bartolommeo from the years 1495 to 1508, most probably done on location and intended for use in landscape backgrounds.⁶¹ In contrast to these drawings, Dürer’s landscape studies, in their highly detailed handling of the subject and in the fact of their preservation, come much closer to the self-sufficient, pictorially-complete drawing compositions of Jacopo Bellini, the inventor of this type of drawing. Contemporaries valued these works of the Venetian master as being equal to the rest of his oeuvre and consequently saved them.⁶²

Watercolors made Dürer’s direct, spontaneous work and experimentation possible. However, the frequently offered explanation of the medium’s practicality while traveling goes back to the artistic practices of the 18th and 19th centuries and elevates Dürer to the status of a pioneer of watercolor and *plein air* painting.⁶³ Many of Dürer’s landscapes reveal an elaborate, multi-layered painting technique, as for example in the “*Pond in the Woods*” (fig. 11, cat. 184). Dürer concentrates on the most authentic possible depiction of the calm water in the shallows of the pond. He gives just as much consideration to the view of the water’s various depths as he does to the water’s reflection of the bright sky studded with dark clouds. Much in the work remains sketchy, and again Dürer’s eye lingers on the transitional regions; with the greatest precision and the most delicate of highlights, he delineates the border areas such as the shallows of the pond to the reedy, grassy shore, and from the grass to the tree trunks. In respect to the depiction of space and the closeness to nature, the distance from the obviously schematic depiction in the “*Augustinian Altarpiece*” is glaring (cat. 26). In its “incompleteness” and openness, Dürer’s drawing allows a glimpse into the construction of the picture and its colors, as well as into the differentiated use of broad and minutely detailed brushstrokes side by side. Considering Dürer’s directions from 1500 for the construction of a head, with its step-by-step instructions using different colors of ink (cat. 172), it is likely that a didactic function was intended even for unfinished nature studies like the “*Pond in the Woods*” (cat. 184). Better than any description, the London work makes clear the building up of the various sections of the picture in consecutive steps and layers. On the left and in the foreground, the earth is composed first by a layer of watery brown on the unprepared paper and then finished

⁵⁷ In his theoretical writings, Dürer repeatedly used such opposing terms; see Rupprich II, pp. 403–405.

⁵⁸ The terms “*geprawch*” (practice) and “*verstand*” (reason) are used by Dürer in his “*Aesthetic Excursus*,” see Rupprich III, p. 296, paragraph 58.

⁵⁹ Rupprich III, p. 297, paragraph 76.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Exh. cat. London 2001, pp. 146–151, 163–189.—Degenhart/Schmitt 2004, vol. 1, no. 15.

⁶¹ Exh. cat. London 2010, no. 90.

⁶² Degenhart/Schmitt 1984, p. 9.

⁶³ Koschatzky 1971, pp. 11, 15.—Cohn 2002.—On pre-Romantic *plein air* painting in oil, see Conisbee 1979.

by a bit of green and darker brown, while the trees are left in varying degrees of completion and the pond shows brown under painting in the darker area. These clearly illustrate how and in what succession Dürer executed the pictorial elements and effects, worked out down to the very last detail. Such drawings were ideal and didactically perfect visual material for the demonstration both of Dürer's creative process and of his artistic proficiency.

The functions of the nature studies are multi-faceted. They range from studies done for the development of artistic techniques, to the pattern sheet, all the way to quasi-autonomous pieces for the demonstration of virtuosic mimesis. Dürer's nature studies reveal the same urges as the studies of human proportion he began in 1500: a desire to understand the principles of nature, a will to perfection, and the intention to record, textbook-like, a thing once understood. He included these figurative studies in his first instructions on proportion in 1504, and subsequently continued work on the subject at a pace approaching mania.⁶⁴ The conceptual similarity to the human proportion studies, along with correlations in style and painting technique, speak for the completion of most of the nature and landscape studies before the 1505 Venice trip and thus before he first wrote of any plans for a painting instruction book. The consistent superlative quality and the high standard of the drawings, along with the almost complete absence of spontaneous sketches covering the whole range of his motifs, suggests that Dürer ordered and cleaned out his collection of drawings, only keeping exemplary works in order to obfuscate somewhat the frequently arduous creative process and the implicit detours taken on the way to a finished product. While at the beginning of his career, Dürer collected exemplary works by preceding artistic authorities he admired, now with his "autonomous" drawings he created his own models, so that others could view them and so he could convey his skills. The landscape studies did not only serve as ideal viewing and teaching material. Starting in the first decade of the 16th century, an increasing appreciation of works with a sketch-like, spontaneous quality had developed; thus, Dürer's drawings also made exquisite collectors' pieces.⁶⁵

Dürer, in his desire to pass on the knowledge he had gained over long and arduous years of work, must have decided to compile an instruction book while in Italy in 1505/1506.⁶⁶ Only fragments of this book have been preserved—not enough to supply answers to the questions we have raised. However, we might here point out two passages from Dürer's writing in general, in which he not only makes clear that the quality of a painting can be measured by its degree of precision in imitating nature, but in which he even elevates art to a medium through which to acquire knowledge of the world. He wrote, "Through the instruction of paintings, the measurement of earth, water and stars has become understandable, and paintings will further facilitate this understanding for many more people."⁶⁷ In key passages of the "Aesthetic Excursus," begun most probably around 1512/1513 and continued with new approaches and revisions up until it went into print in 1528, Dürer once again formulates his credo of the archetypal quality of nature. Nature, he writes, allows the recognition of the truth in things, and therefore one should study it and live in accordance with it, so as not to be misled. Truly, art is in nature, and he who manages to wrest it from nature has thus attained it. The truer-to-life the work is, the better it is. One should never, he continues, try to do more or attempt to do something better than that which God himself has accomplished in his creation.⁶⁸ In his proportion studies and in his nature studies and landscapes, Dürer's unquenchable thirst for an understanding of nature and its principles and his engagement with artistically suitable realizations, took on visual form.

⁶⁴ Cf. cats. 170–174 in this volume.

⁶⁵ On sketchiness and openness as new aesthetic categories, see Hess/Mack 2012.

⁶⁶ Rupprich II, p. 83.

⁶⁷ Rupprich II, p. 100, as well as p. 133, lines 104–108; see also p. 131, lines 96–99.

⁶⁸ Rupprich III, p. 295, 53–55.