



The Young Durer: Drawing the Figure (The Courtauld Gallery)

Stephanie Buck, Stephanie Porras, David Freedberg, Michael Roth

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Accompanying a landmark exhibition at the Courtauld Gallery, this book examines the remarkable drawings made by Durer as a young man from 1490 to 1495, especially those made during his journeyman years, or Wanderjahre – considered the final part of a craftsman’s training – and a second shorter trip which immediately followed and seems to have brought the artist to Italy. These trips form the framework for the book, which focuses on the young artist’s figure studies and has at its heart the Courtauld Gallery’s double-sided drawing of a Wise Virgin and Two studies of the artist’s left leg. This superbly ambitious work serves as a springboard to explore in depth the role of drawing at this stage of Durer’s career. It allows us to address a series of crucial questions: how Durer formed ‘his hand’, how he responded to artistic challenges presented by contemporary and earlier art (both on a stylistic and an iconographic level), how his pursuit of professional success was linked with the quest for an individual artistic identity, and how the strategy of recording his own creative achievements in drawings dovetails with his claim for a new status for the artist in his city.

The scholarly and beautifully illustrated catalogue is introduced with five essays by distinguished experts. Stephanie Buck examines the documentary evidence and attempts to reconstruct the motivations and activities of Durer’s travels as a young man. David Freedberg discusses Durer’s obsessive observation and recording of himself in portraits and in studies of his limbs. These represent the first critical steps in the artist’s developing understanding of the body, and of the ways in which its movements could not just show emotion, but rouse the equivalent sense of torsion, tension and pathos in the bodies and minds of his viewers. Stephanie Porras looks at Durer’s copies of drawings or prints circulating in Nuremberg workshops or acquired during the Wanderjahre, which were used as a means of seeking inspiration, of challenging himself to draw more sophisticated figures and dynamic compositions. Michael Roth asks the question of how the three strands of the art of the line – drawing, engraving and woodcut – structurally correspond in Durer’s work and, consequently, how drawing merges with certain manual aspects of printing. A final essay presents new technical research on Durer’s early drawings undertaken collaboratively in a number of leading collections of the artist’s work, and aims to enrich our understanding of the young Durer’s approach to the medium of drawing.

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