Albrecht Dürer

New Clark exhibition looks at his world and art innovations

By Charles Bennett

WILLIAMSTOWN

The exhibition "Albrecht Dürer: The Strangeness of a World" at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, is a testament to the genius of one of the most influential artists of the Northern Renaissance. Dürer's work, spanning over three decades, offers a unique perspective on the world through his art and writings.

Dürer was an artist with a mission: to make his work famous and himself known. His talent and dedication to his craft were evident in his early works, which included woodcuts and engravings. He was a master of the medium, pushing the boundaries of what was possible in printmaking.

In addition to his artistic talent, Dürer was also a prolific writer. His treatises on art and prints were influential in the development of the Northern Renaissance. His works were widely distributed through prints and books, making him a household name throughout Europe.

Dürer's art was shaped by his religious beliefs and his understanding of the world. His prints often depicted religious themes, such as the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," which was inspired by the Book of Revelation. The exhibition includes a range of Dürer's works, including engravings and woodcuts, that showcase his mastery of the medium and his ability to convey complex ideas through his art.

The Clark Art Institute's exhibition is a comprehensive look at the life and work of Albrecht Dürer. It includes a variety of works from different periods of his career, offering a glimpse into the evolution of his art and his impact on the art world.

The exhibition runs through January 25, 2010. It is a must-see for anyone interested in the history of art and the Northern Renaissance.
Similarities seen in Dürer’s time and ours

DURER from E1

Clarke from the institute’s own collection, it will be on view through March 13.

Clarke, who offered the above insights into Dürer’s character in a preview tour of the exhibition last week, will talk about the artist and the exhibition in a free public lecture today at 3 p.m. in the Clark auditorium.

The show, she explained last week, grew out of her own efforts to familiarize herself with the Clark collection after taking over as Maston Curator of Prints, Drawings and Photographs earlier this year.

Amazing discovery

As she delved into the Dürer holdings, she said she was increasingly astounded at what she saw.

“It was unbelievable,” she said. “There were over 300 works. It is one of the best Dürer collections in the region, if not in North America.”

She saw “a great opportunity to get our amazing Dürers out of the vault.”

A specialist in 19th- and early 20th-century German art, Clarke said she examined Dürer’s work from a “modernist perspective” and began to envision a show that looked at how and why his imagery continued to excite such strong visual pull 500 years later.

His “Four Horses of the Apocalypse,” “Knight, Death and the Devil,” “Adam and Eve” and “Melencolia” are among the most recognized images in Northern European art, not to mention the ubiquitous “Praying Hands” (not in the show) a greeting-card staple.

Son of a goldsmith

Born in Nuremberg, Germany, the son of a goldsmith, the precocious young Dürer was befriended by a rich and learned neighbor, Willibald Pirckheimer, who encouraged him to visit Italy, where he met the painter Giovanni Bellini, teacher of many Renaissance artists, and was exposed to the work of masters like Leonardo da Vinci and Andrea Mantegna.

Some scholars credit Dürer with pioneering the synthesis of Italian classical proportions, linear perspective and naturalism with the German taste for realism and particularity. But Clarke said it would be simplistic to think that Dürer simply absorbed Italian influences on his visits in 1494 and 1495 and brought them back to Germany.

Compare to digital age

She said the advent of the printing press in the mid-1400s made widespread the circulation of new ideas and the reinterpretation of history and religious thinking in Dürer’s time.

The cultural impact of print publishing in that era may have been comparable, she said, to the effects of digital communication on our own.

Beyond those information rev-