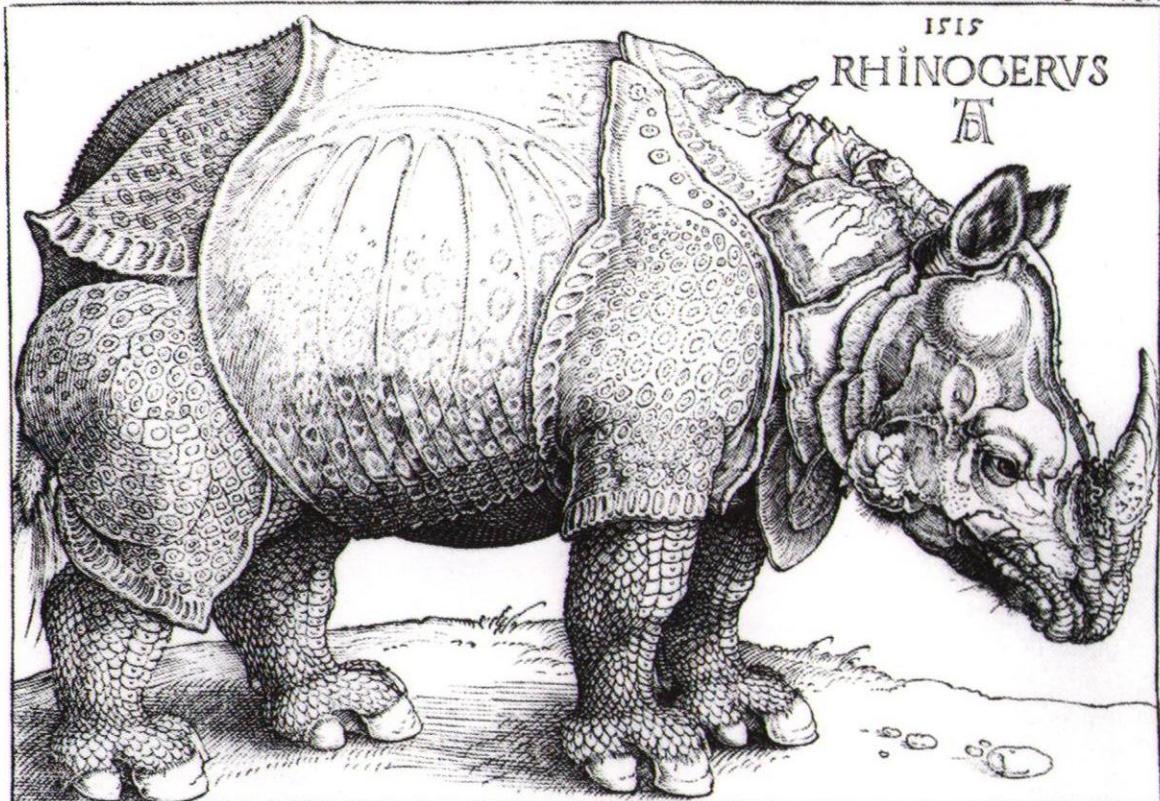


Albrecht Dürer's Rhinoceros

by Kees Rookmaaker

Nach Christus geprägt. 1515. Jar. Adi. 3. May. Hat man in dem großmächtigen Rumig von Portugal Em andil gen Lysabona pracht auf India ein sollich lebendig Thier. Das nennen sie Rhinoceros. Das ist heimat aller ferner gestalt Alcondor. Lebarten sind wie ein gespielder Schlehetrot. Und ist so dicker Schalen überlege fast fest. Und ist in der groß als der Helfende Alber maderndiger von paymen und fast weh auffig. Es hat ein scharff staceit Horn vom auf der nase. Das segyndes aldeg zu wagen wo es bey stauen ist. Das doßig Thier ist des Schläfing todt sondt. Der Helfende furcht es fast viel. dann wo es in anumde so laufft Jim das Thier mit dem Kopff zwischen die so dem paym und roßt den Helfende enden am pauch aufz erzeugt Jim des mag er sich mit erseen. Dann das Thier ist also gewapont das Jim der Helfende nichts kan thun. Sie sagen auch das der Rhinoceros Schnell/ staudig und Lüstig sey.

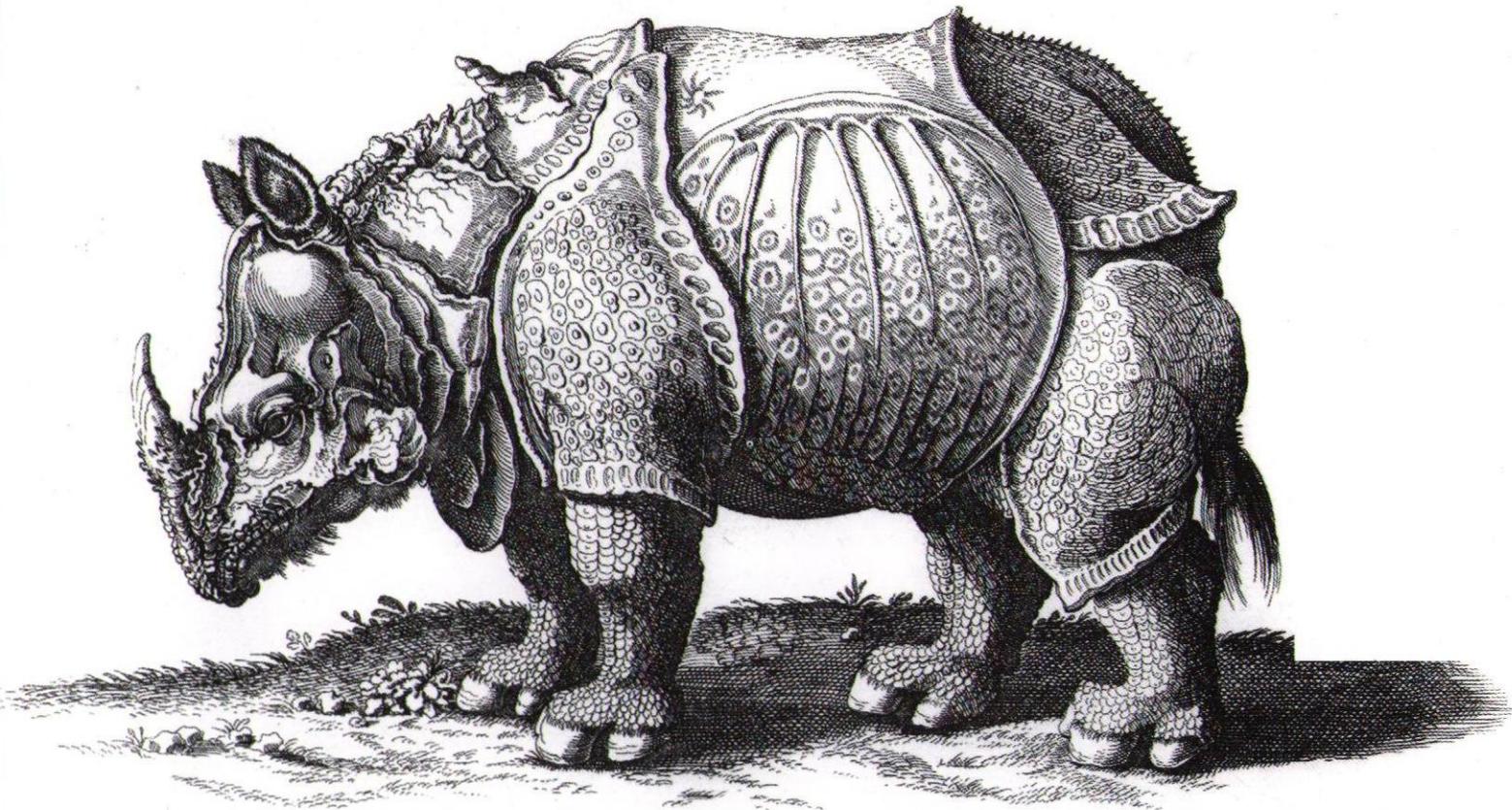


Albrecht Dürer's woodcut of 1515

On the 20th of May in the year 1515, a ship arrived in the harbour of Lisbon, Portugal carrying a ganda donated by a ruler in the East Indian state of Gujarat to the Portuguese King, Emanuel I. This was the first rhinoceros to arrive in Europe since Roman days. The King's advisors delved in their classics to know more about this armour-plated monster. They easily found a passage in the Natural History by Pliny which states that the rhinoceros prepares himself for his fight with the elephant by filing its horn on rocks, and during the encounter tries to hit the elephant's belly because it is softer. As Emanuel had a stable full of elephants, he could not help but be tempted to try to see how his rhinoceros would stand up against an elephant. The duel was arranged on the third of June, 1515. The rhinoceros, kept on a chain

by an Indian keeper, was hidden behind a carpet. A young elephant was introduced into the arena by his mahout. When the carpet was removed, the elephant panicked, forced his way through a window and ran back to his stable. The crowd must have been disappointed by this rather too sudden climax.

The arrival of this new kind of animal quickly spread through Europe. On 13 July 1515, Giovanni Penni published a pamphlet in Rome about the rhinoceros, including a rather rough illustration of the animal. Around the same time, a German trader who was in Lisbon at the time, Valentin Ferdinand of Moravia, wrote about the rhinoceros in a letter back home. It is believed that he included a sketch of the creature with his letter, although this sketch has not been found. However, two German artists depicted the rhinoceros in their work, and these are the most famous illustrations of the animal.

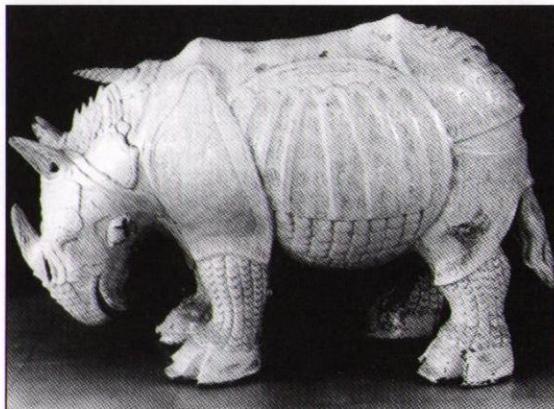


Dürer's rhinoceros copied in J. Johnston,
Historiae Naturalis, 1653

noceros in the year 1515, Hans Burgkmair and Albrecht Dürer. The original drawing by Dürer is known (in the British Museum in London), as well as a very similar woodcut. The rhinoceros shown in this woodcut by Dürer is grotesquely removed from the real thing, with its exaggerated scales and ribcage, and the unexpected horn on the shoulders. It is not impossible that the animal actually had such a growth on its shoulders, as the same occurred in several specimens which have been kept in zoological gardens in this century, but whether it was twisted as Dürer imagined, is a mute point.

Dürer's rendering of the rhinoceros ever since permeated the zoological literature. At least until the end of the eighteenth century it proved always the most popular choice when any text about the rhinoceros had to be illustrated. A few other drawings and engravings were made during those three hundred years, but all faded away quickly, while Dürer's rhinoceros remained. The animal was seen in books, on tapestries, in ceramics, on tiles, actually in about every form of art imaginable.

The rhinoceros itself did not remain long in Lisbon. King Emanuel decided that it would make a marvellous present to the Pope in Rome,



Rhinoceros in Meissen porcelain, ca 1731-1734

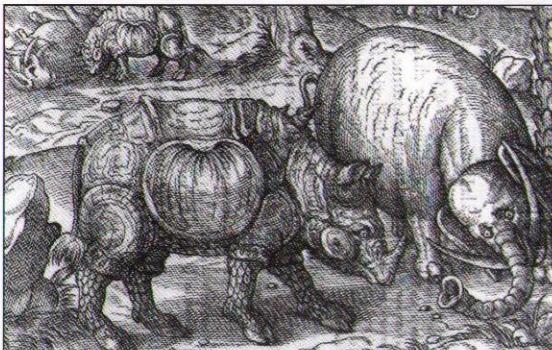


Sinceny faience table top, ca 1750

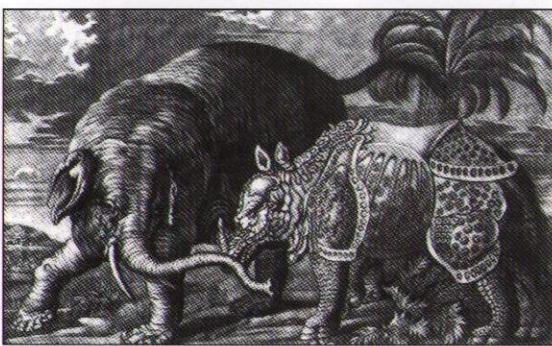
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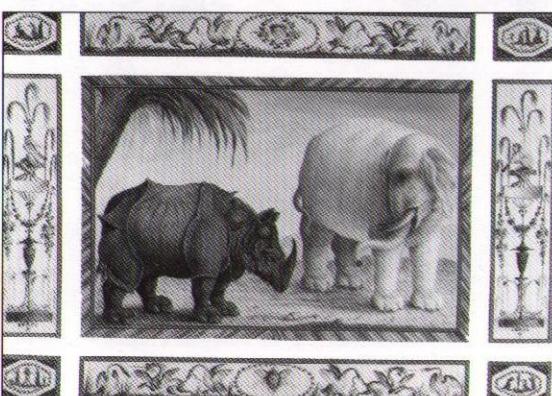
Detail drawing of a Venetian green lacquer bureau-cabinet



Ambroise Paré, from Discourse de la Mumie, 1582



Mezzotint by P. van den Berge



Dürer's rhinoceros in furniture

Continued from page 9

as this gift of an elephant the previous year, had caused an uproar of gratitude in the Italian capital. The rhinoceros, dressed up and laden with other precious gifts, left Portugal on a ship by the end of December 1515, and was seen the next month by the French monarch and his wife in the city of Marseilles. Continuing its journey, it was caught in a heavy storm off the North Italian coast. The ship sank with all its treasures, but it is rumoured that the rhinoceros, though chained, either swam ashore, or it drowned and washed ashore. Rumours have it that its skin was recovered, preserved and sent to Rome stuffed with hay. We might never know if this latter part of the story was based on reality. The corridors of the Vatican have been searched, without success, but then again, the specimen might have rotted away or was perhaps stored in a totally inaccessible place. Or Pope Leo X might have given it to another friend. The disappearance of this rhinoceros from Lisbon is a pity, because we may never know if the hornlet on the shoulders was real, and also because the animal later became the type of the Great Indian rhinoceros, *Rhinoceros unicornis* Linnaeus, 1758.

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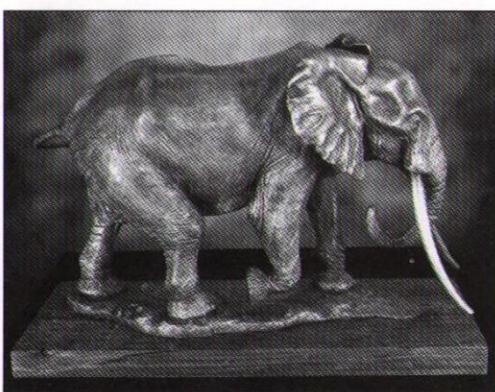
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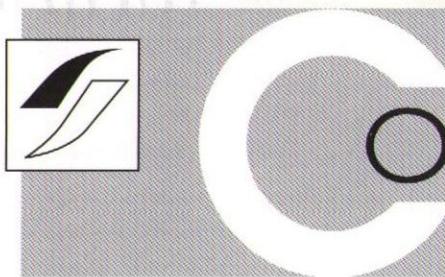
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Cover Story: "Mafunyane"

Alan Ainslie, South African wildlife painter and sculptor, was born in Port Elizabeth and grew up on a farm near Graaff-Reinet in the Eastern Cape. His works rank amongst the finest in the world and today, his sculptures, paintings and drawings grace the homes of art collectors worldwide. Committed to the conservation of wildlife in South Africa and elsewhere in the world, Ainslie has donated part of the proceeds from his work to numerous wildlife organisations, including REF.

Details on the raffle of this magnificent bronze of Mafunyane can be obtained through www.ref.org.za or tel: 453-9829



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