



DÜRER'S INDEXICAL FANTASY: THE RHINOCEROS AND PRINTMAKING

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The story of Albrecht Dürer's portrayal of the rhinoceros is a well-worn tale.¹ Sultan Muzaffar II, ruler of Cambay (now Gujarat), presented an Indian rhinoceros as a diplomatic gift to Alfonso d'Albuquerque, governor of Portuguese India. The governor forwarded it to King Manuel I of Portugal, who maintained a menagerie at the Ribeira Palace in Lisbon, where the animal arrived on 20 May, 1515.² As the first rhinoceros to reach Europe since ancient times, the extraordinary beast was sent to Pope Leo X in the hopes of securing in return exclusive privileges for the Portuguese empire in India. Departing Lisbon in December, the ship carrying the rhinoceros stopped at an island near Marseille, where the king of France saw the animal. The gift-laden vessel never reached Rome, however. It sank in a storm off the coast of Italy. It was said that the rhinoceros's carcass was retrieved and stuffed and continued its journey to the Vatican, but records of its arrival and subsequent existence there are inconclusive.

As the rhinoceros was regifted across continents, accounts of its appearance travelled between European cities as well. Following a sketch and description of the animal sent to Nuremberg, Dürer produced a drawing (fig. 1.) and woodcut of the rhinoceros (fig. 2.).³ The artist's printed depiction was, for many centuries, a model of the animal's appearance; for instance, it was appropriated by the cosmographer Sebastian Münster for his 1544 volume on the description of the world, *Cosmographia*, and by the natural historian Conrad Gessner for the entry on the rhinoceros in his 1551 zoological encyclopedia, *Historiae animalium*.⁴ Nonetheless, it has also been criticised for its lack of verisimilitude, with commentators adamantly disparaging the animal's rigid and overly ornamented hide, as

well as the inclusion of a dorsal horn protruding from between the beast's shoulders.⁵ Erwin Panofsky's description of the rhinoceros clinches its characterisation in modern scholarship: "Dürer stylised the creature, bizarre in itself, into a combination of scales, laminae and shells, suggesting a fantastically shaped and patterned suit of armour."⁶

I propose instead that the depiction of these "unnatural" features was not a mistranslation of the original drawing, as has been claimed, but a deliberate exaggeration of characteristics intended to draw attention to, and thematise, the artist's printmaking practice. The embellishments signify the material nature of print production—blocks, plates, incising tools and paper—thereby demonstrating Dürer's complex engagement with the medium as an efficacious means of representing subjects from nature, as well as displaying his own considerable mastery of it. Structured by the contradiction between its iconic status and its lack of verisimilitude, the image embodies and enacts the pervasive tension between nascent developments in empirical investigation of subjects from nature and the emergence of artistic practices that articulate the nature of representation itself. Dürer's woodcut rhinoceros is caught between the impulse toward the faithful depiction of nature and the drive to invent artistic forms that rival it.

The number of editions and copies made of Dürer's woodcut rhinoceros attest to its representational authority. However, an enhanced impression of a 1560 copy by the Antwerp print publisher Hans Liefvrick the elder helps us infer some of Dürer's potential ambitions for his depiction of the animal (fig. 3.). Imprinted on the expanded margins of Liefvrick's copy are inked botanical specimens, all common

European plant varieties from the fern, conifer, aster and rose genera.⁷ Stems and veins were inked in black, much as the key block would have been in a multi-coloured woodblock print, while the blooms were inked in red. A yellow-green wash was applied by hand to the leaves. The similarity of the colours to those used to highlight the rhinoceros suggests that the colouring of the beast and printing of the flora occurred at the same time, most likely in the sixteenth century, when the sheet was incorporated into an album of natural history subjects and architectural prints.⁸

The practice of impressing specimens was an important development in early botanical studies, as naturalists established procedures to record the results of their empirical investigations.⁹ Perhaps the most renowned nature print, as the form is called, is the depiction of a sage leaf found in Leonardo da Vinci's *Codex Atlanticus*, produced sometime after 1507 (fig. 4.).¹⁰ Inscriptions surrounding the leaf detail the plant's medicinal properties. Although Leonardo did not imprint the leaf himself (it was done by the artist Francesco Melzi), he did note alongside the image the most successful method for producing nature prints: "The paper should be painted over with candle soot tempered with thin glue, then smear the leaf thinly with white lead, in oil, as is done to the letters in printing, and then print in the ordinary way. Thus the leaf will appear shaded in the hollows and lighted on the parts in relief."¹¹

This technique of inking and imprinting botanical samples was a dependable means of reproducing the plants' features, from vein structure in the leaves to the pattern of petals. The technique not only provided an incontrovertible reproduction of the specimen's appearance, it also evidenced the maker's direct engagement with nature, affirming the veracity of his representations. As the burgeoning field of

natural history prized knowledge of flora and fauna garnered through observation and experience over that transmitted through canonical text, the most valued illustrations of nature also emerged from those practices. Within this newly established framework, the directness of imprinting flora onto the page was highly regarded as a means of producing, in modern parlance, an indexical image – one that has a physical relationship to the object it represents.¹²

The nature prints on the sheet with Dürer's rhinoceros speak to the early modern investment in accurate portrayals of nature arrived at through hands-on investigation.¹³ But why are common European botanical specimens impressed alongside Dürer's depiction of such an exotic animal? Does the combined presentation of nature prints and woodcut rhinoceros – the flora and fauna, common and exotic, allied



Figure 1. Albrecht Dürer. Rhinoceros, 1515. Pen and brown ink.
The British Museum

through shared vivifying colours – suggest a parallel gesture? Is there an implication that the woodcut of the rhinoceros is similar to the direct impression of nature taken from the plants, with both depictions the result of observation and experience? Or was their juxtaposition symbolic, meant to convey for the early modern viewer a relationship between natural history and the usefulness of printmaking for its study and representation?

Even if Dürer could have managed the unthinkable act of inking and imprinting an animal as large and ornery as a rhinoceros, the fact remains that he never saw the creature that was brought to Europe in 1515. Nonetheless, the artist presented his woodcut as a reliable representation of nature, exploiting the characteristics of the medium to make that claim. Like many woodcuts of the period depicting dubious subjects, the inscription affirms the trustworthiness of the representation through the use of the word “abconderfet”, a German variation on the Latin “*imago contrafacta*” – a faithful copy of an absent original, often another image, and in this case the drawing upon which the woodcut was based.¹⁴ This term is also used on Dürer’s drawing of the rhinoceros, assumed to be the more faithful copy of the original sketch, carrying an inscription seemingly transcribed verbatim from a description sent from Lisbon. It reads:

In the year 15[1]3 on 1 May was brought to our King of Portugal to Lisbon such a living animal from India called a rhinoceros. Because it is such a marvel, I had to send it to you in this representation made after it. It has the colour of a toad and is covered and well protected with thick scales, and in size it is as large as an elephant, but lower, and is the deadly enemy of the elephant. It has on the front the nose a strong sharp horn: and when this animal comes near the elephant to fight, it always first whets its horn on the stones and runs at the elephant pushing its head between his forelegs. Then it rips the elephant open where the shin is thinnest and then gores him. Therefore, the elephant fears the rhinoceros; for he always gores him whenever he meets an elephant. For he is well armed, very lively and alert. The animal is called *rhinoceros* in Greek and Latin but in India, *gomda*.¹⁵

Despite his claims of faithfulness to the original, in translating the drawing to the medium of woodcut Dürer made modifications to the inscription, the rhinoceros’s appearance and the composition that indicate his investment in the printmaking technique, both as a means to represent nature and in his own practice as an artist. A comparison of the inscriptions on the drawing and woodcut is instructive. The amended woodcut inscription reads:

On 1 May 1513 was brought from India to the great and powerful king Emanuel of Portugal to Lisbon such a live animal called a rhinoceros. It is represented here in its complete form. It has the colour of a specked tortoise and it is covered and well covered with thick plates. It is like an elephant in size, but lower on its legs and invulnerable. It has a sharp horn on the end of its nose which it always begins sharpening when it is near rocks. The obstinate animal is the elephant’s deadly enemy. The elephant is very frightened of it as, when it encounters it, it runs with its legs down between its front legs, and gores the stomach of the elephant and throttles it, and the elephant cannot fend it off. Because the animal is so well armed, there is nothing that the elephant can do to it. It is also said that the rhinoceros is fast, lively and cunning.¹⁶

Several seemingly minor semantic alterations significantly shift the implications of the inscription toward a focus on Dürer’s printmaking practice. A revealing adjustment is the way the animal’s colour is described. The drawing’s inscription claims that the rhinoceros has the “colour of a toad” (*farb wy ein krot*), whereas the woodcut’s inscription describes the colouring as that of a “speckled tortoise” (*farb wie ein gespreckelte Schildtkrot*). The change in animal described to define colour is indicative of a consequential transformation in the conception of the rhinoceros’s outer covering. Toads’ bodies are covered with soft skin, while speckled tortoises are housed in hard, textured shells. The following line of the woodcut inscription describes the rhinoceros as “covered with thick plates” (*von dicken Schalen uberlegt*), an exterior clearly more akin to that of a tortoise than a toad. The textured hardness resonates with the materials of

Nach Christus gepart. 1513. Jar. Abi. j. May. Hat man dem großmichtigen Künig von Portugal Emanuel gen Lysabona pracht auß India ein sollich lebendig Thier. Das nennen sie Rhinoceros. Das ist hie mit aller seiner gestalt Abgedruckt. Es hat ein farb wie ein gepuckelte Schildkröte. Vnd ist vñ dicken Schalen vberlegt fast fest. Vnd ist in der groß als der Haisfand. Aber nydertrücker von paynen/ vnd fast wechaffig. Es hat ein scharff starck Horn vorn auff der nase. Das begynde es albeg zu weizen wo es bey staynen ist. Das dösige Thier ist des Haisfand todt feynde. Der Haisfand fürcht es fast vñel/ dann wo es In ankunfft/ so laufft Im das Thier mit dem kopff zwischen drey fordern payn/ vnd reyst den Haisfand vñden am pauch auff vñ erwürgt In/ des mag er sich nit erwehen. Dann das Thier ist also gewapent/ das Im der Haisfand nichts kan thun. Sie sagen auch das der Rhinoceros Schnell/ Freybig vnd Listig sey.

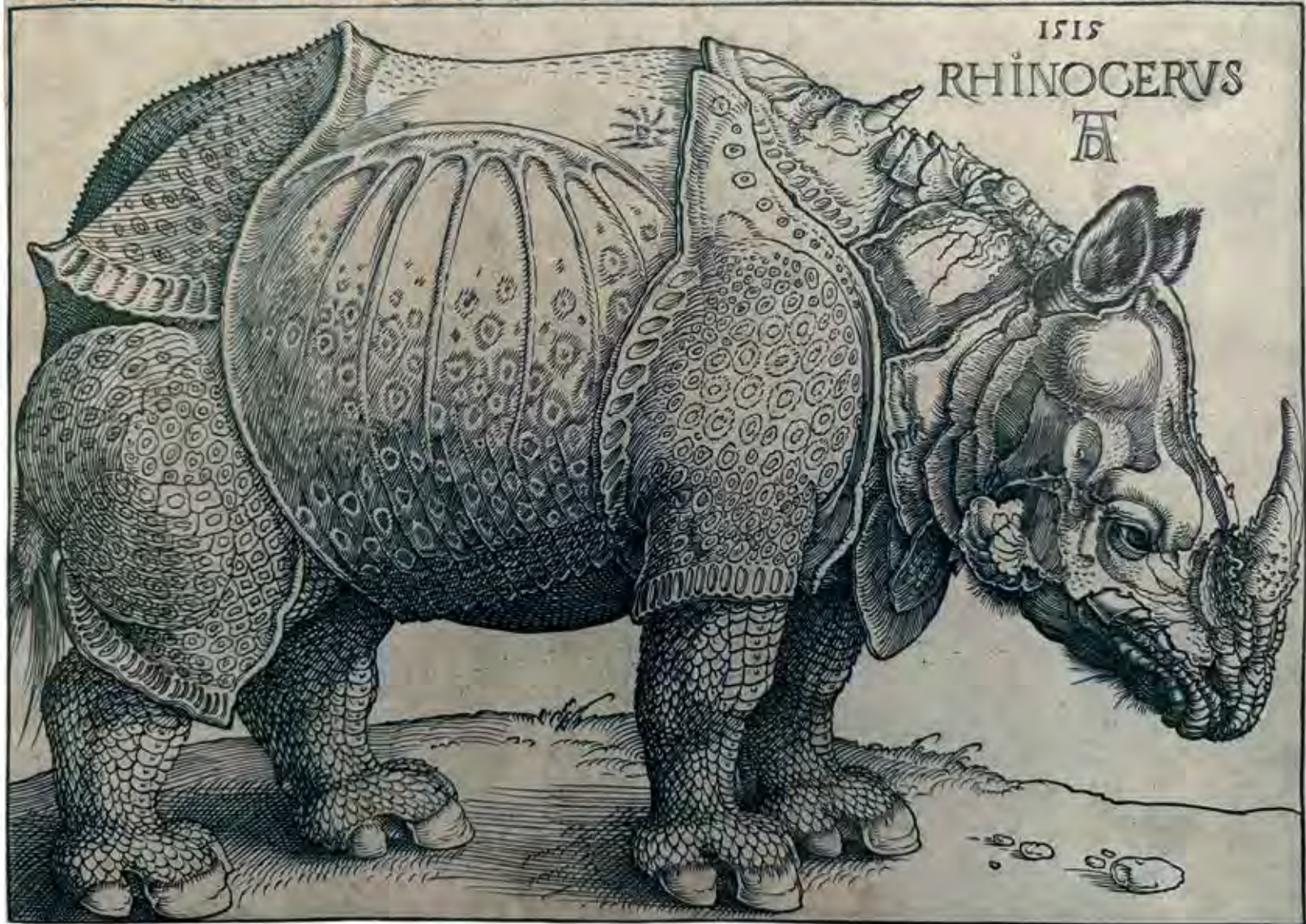


Figure 2. Albrecht Dürer. *Rhinoceros*, 1515. Woodcut and letterpress.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Dürer's craft-printing plates and woodblocks. The inscription uses the German word *Schalen*, which can be translated as shells, scales or plates, which Dürer perhaps likened to the materials from which printed images emerge.¹⁷ His added flourishes to the beast's hide – the exaggerated armour-like panels with prominent ribs, decorative scalloped edges and raised nubs, whose volume is especially visible at its rump – emphasise the hard, ornamented quality of its outer covering. These features are much more pronounced in the woodcut than in his drawing. They are also more noticeable on Dürer's woodcut than on that of his compatriot Hans Burgkmair the elder, who also depicted a rhinoceros in 1515. The posture and physical features of the animal make it likely that Burgkmair worked from a similar, if not the same, sketch and description as Dürer. Yet his depiction of the animal is remarkably different. Downplaying the rigidity of the skin and scales, Burgkmair portrays the rhinoceros with a softer, more pliable surface. His front legs shackled, Burgkmair's rhinoceros seems less majestic and more lifelike than Dürer's, which has led to claims that his portrayal is more naturalistic.¹⁸ But rather than seeing Dürer's rhinoceros simply as a less faithful representation of nature, I think it can be understood as a meditation on printed modes of representation and the claims they make.

Consider, for instance, a recent interpretation of the rhinoceros's outer covering as a visual artifact of Dürer's father's work as a goldsmith and his own juvenile work designing armour.¹⁹ Encased like a warrior in overlapping plates resembling crafted and embossed metal, the animal affirms the inscription's statement that it is "well armed". Thus, the rhinoceros's exaggerated exterior could imply that Dürer used his printed depiction of the animal to refer to his familial knowledge of metalwork. Similarly, the rhinoceros's outer covering can also be interpreted as an allusion to his prolific and virtuosic printmaking practice. Just as the hide is redolent of metalwork, the exaggeratedly textured surface of the animal's exterior also evokes the highly textured surface of printing plates and woodblocks, with their deeply carved incisions and sculptural raised lines. Early impressions of the woodcut, whose embossing from the block is sharply pronounced, might even suggest – however fantastically – that the print was created by rolling ink over the rhinoceros's plates and imprinting them on

a sheet of paper.

Given Dürer's exceptional skills in a variety of media, his choice of woodcut technique for representing the unseen rhinoceros is telling. The artist produced from direct observation numerous ink-and-wash drawings of animal subjects, as well as two engraved portraits of horses, which are admired for their verisimilitude.²⁰ The rhinoceros, however, is his only depiction of a single animal in relief. Because his woodcuts are printed from the surface of woodblocks, the medium evidences the nature of the animal's skin by the embossment made in the paper when the image was printed. In early impressions, each of the rounded protuberances depicted by Dürer on the animal's exterior would have been raised from the paper's surface, producing a bumpy texture not unlike the imagined *feel* of the hide of the animal. The materiality of printmaking thus suggests a tangible, physical experience of the natural world. The immediacy of the encounter with the rhinoceros through the woodcut is akin to the immediacy of the experience of the sage leaf in the nature print from Leonardo's codex, suggesting a similar physical relationship to the represented object. Indeed, the Liefrinck copy with the impressed leaves is possible evidence of such a contemporaneous reading.

In this regard, the excessive ornamentation of the beast's skin takes on a new valence. For if its exaggeration was critical to engendering an experiential representation of nature, one seemingly based on engagement with the animal, then the embellishments to the rhinoceros's hide also point to the work of printmaking as a means to faithfully depict nature, even if deploying creative measures was necessary to produce the appearance of that "faithfulness". Leonardo also recommends artistic intervention in the production of the nature print of the sage leaf. He advises preparing the paper with candle soot and inking the leaf with white lead, essentially printing light on dark, to achieve the illusion of the three-dimensional form of the leaf through shading. Even the technique of nature printing, the most direct impression of nature, was enhanced by the artist's manipulation of the representation. Because Dürer could not directly engage with the rhinoceros, his intervention was more radical, requiring outright invention to create the illusion of firsthand knowledge of the animal.

Another oft-criticised feature of Dürer's Indian rhinoceros

is the dorsal horn. Indian rhinoceroses have a single nasal horn, as conveyed in the inscription. (Critics have speculated that Dürer may have been aware of a description of African rhinoceroses, which do have two horns, although both are on the animal's snout). Burgkmair, who copied a similar original drawing, did not include a horn on the animal's withers, which suggests that Dürer's addition of a dorsal horn was not a mistake of transcription but rather another calculated gesture.²¹ The position, shape, and compositional prominence of the ancillary horn announce that the woodcut is an emblem of the artist's printmaking practice. Again, the artist has made significant alterations from his drawing to his woodcut of the rhinoceros. The title and date, centred above the animal in the earlier depiction, are positioned more provocatively in the printed depiction. The spiralled second horn is larger in the woodcut and points directly to the name of the animal and title of the work: "RHINOCEROS" printed in capital letters. Above the title is the date the woodcut was made and below it is the artist's unmistakable and authoritative monogram. The horn points to the name of the wondrous subject that Dürer fashioned in 1515, providing the viewer with a complete account of its making. Its position establishes a connection between the label "rhinoceros" and its referent, as well as between the woodcut image and its maker.²² Dürer was the first artist to put his monogram on woodcuts; by 1515, it would have been eminently recognisable. Joseph Koerner writes that "it is useful to think of Dürer's monograms as attempts by this artist to tether his visual utterances to their origin."²³ His placement of the monogram within the constellation of the rhinoceros's horn, identifying label and the date of the woodcut's making seems to do just that – irrevocably bind the artist not only to the woodcut image but to its very process of making and, further, to align that virtuosic process of making with the sense of wonder evoked by the rhinoceros itself.

Dürer makes another telling modification to the inscription from drawing to print, eliminating

the primary text's designation of the rhinoceros as an object of wonder that demands illustration. The drawing's inscription, following the original Lisbon letter, asserts "Because it is such a marvel [*Wunder*] I had to send it to you in this representation," whereas the woodcut states, "It is represented here in its complete form."²⁴ Why would the artist omit language that touts the spectacle of the rhinoceros? Through this seemingly trivial change, Dürer's revised statement slyly shifts attention to his own work, redirecting consideration from the marvel of the animal itself to the marvel of its represented form. This elision suggests that the woodcut as well as the animal is an object of wonder. Late in his life, Dürer described the gift of artistic skill as wondrous (*wunderlich*) in his *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion*:

One man may sketch something with his pen on half a sheet of paper in one day, or may cut it into a tiny piece of wood with his little iron, and it turns out to be better and more artistic than another's big



Figure 4. Unknown artist. Rhinoceros, c 1550. Woodcut with hand-colouring, letterpress and impressed plants.

Published by Hans Liefvink, Antwerp. The British Museum, 1928, 0310.98

work at which its author labours with the utmost diligence for a whole year. And this gift is wondrous. For God often gives the ability to learn and the insight to make something good to one man the like of whom nobody is found in his own days, and nobody has lived before him for a long time, and nobody comes after him very soon.²⁵

The artist no doubt had in mind his own work, including the wondrous rhinoceros, as he penned these words.

Koerner has said that Dürer's prints are "an icon and index of himself. And this agrees with how his images came to be received, as spectacles of their maker's talent more than as depictions of the subjects they show."²⁶ In making the woodcut rhinoceros, Dürer deploys his skills to compensate for not having seen the animal. He does so by aligning the texture of the animal's hide with the texture he creates on the printed page, substituting the processes of invention and representation for those of observation and transcription. The rhinoceros print thus is a complicated demonstration of the tension between the growing importance of empirical investigation and Dürer's display of his own virtuosic techniques of representation, in which his skills of making are rendered equal to or better than the results of direct observation. The outcome is an iconic image that masquerades as an indexical one, an image that volleys back and forth between the marvellous and the literal, creating the oxymoronic category of the fantastical index.



Figure 3. Francesco Melzi and Leonardo da Vinci. Sage leaf printed on manuscript page of the Codex Atlanticus (after 1507).

197v. Biblioteca Ambrosia, Milan. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

¹ See Bartrum 2002: 283–292; ‘The ill-fated rhinoceros’ in Bedini 1997: 111–136; and Clarke 1986.

² On menageries, see Pérez de Tudela and Gschwend 2007: 419–447, esp. 421–432.

³ Dürer most likely saw a description and drawing of the animal sent from Lisbon. One such report was forwarded by Valentin Ferdinand, a Moravian printer, to his humanist acquaintances in Nuremberg. An Italian copy of this description survives in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence (Cod. Stroziano 20, CI-XIII 80); see Bedini 1997: 119–121. More recently, Jim Monson has proposed that Dürer may have based his drawing on an anonymous drawing now at the Vatican Library; see ‘The source for the *rhinoceros*’.

⁴ Ernst Gombrich discusses the representational authority of Dürer’s rhinoceros in *Art and illusion*, 81–82.

⁵ The criticism goes back at least as far as 1586, when Philip Galle made an engraving of another rhinoceros brought to Lisbon, the first since the Indian rhinoceros of 1515. Galle’s inscription reads, “this beast is rarely seen in our region and has never been, as far as I know, correctly depicted by anyone, either in drawing or in print.” (Translation by Dániel Margócsy)

⁶ Panofsky 1955: 192

⁷ Judy Warnement, director of the Harvard Botany Libraries, and Kanchi Gandhi, bibliographer and nomenclature specialist at the Harvard University Herbaria, identified the printed specimens as Podocarpus, Sanicula, Fern, Asteraceae and Rosaceae. I am grateful for their efforts.

⁸ See Bartrum 2002: 287. The album, bequeathed to the British Museum by Sir Hans Sloane in 1753, also included a broadsheet by Jan Molljns I, depicting an elephant exhibited in Antwerp in 1563, that has similar nature prints on its verso.

⁹ Geus 2000

¹⁰ See Karen M. Reeds on the origins of nature prints in ‘Leonardo da Vinci and botanical illustration: nature prints, drawings, and woodcuts ca. 1500,’ in Givens et al. 2008: 205–238. Leonardo’s *Codex Atlanticus* is in the collection of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan.

¹¹ Ibid.: 210

¹² Rosalind E. Krauss (1985: 198) states, “As distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referent. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify.” On the relationship between icon and index, see Doane 2007.

¹³ Pamela H. Smith argues that in the sixteenth century the pursuit of knowledge became active – one had to observe, record and engage bodily with nature; see Smith 2004: 18. Around the same time that Hans Lieftrink’s woodcut was issued, a detailed recipe for nature printing was described in Alessio Piemontese’s book of secrets, first published as *Secreti del Reverendo Alessio Piemontese* (Venice, 1555) and subsequently distributed widely in Italian, French and English. Reeds “Leonardo da Vinci and botanical illustration”: 218.

¹⁴ Derived from the old German *abconterfeien*, meaning to represent or make a likeness. For more on how language derived from Imago Contrafacta came to be understood in the sixteenth century see Parshall 1993: 554–579; for the German derivations, 560–561 and n15.

¹⁵ “*Ite[m] in 153 jor adi i maj, hat man unserm künig van portigall gen lisabona procht ein sold lebedig tir aus India das nent man Rhynocerate das hab ich dir von Wunders wegen müssen abkunterfet schicken hat ein farb wj ein/ krot (toad) vnd van dicken schaln überleg fast fest vnd ist in d[e]r gros als ein helffant aber nydrer ist des helffantz tott feint es hat for[n] aewff der nasen ein starck scharff hore[n] und so dz tir an helfant kumt mit jm zw fechten so hat es for albeg sein / hore[n] an den steinen scharbff gewestzt vnd lauff*

dem helfant mit dem kopff zwischen dy fordere [n] pein dan reist es den helfant aewff wo er am düsten hawt hat vnd erwirgt jn also der helfant fürcht jn ser übell den Rhynocerate dan er erwirgt jn albeg wo er den helfant aukumt dan er ist woll gewapent vnd ser freidig und behent D[a]z tir würt Rhinocero in greco et latino Indico vero gomda.” Original inscription and translation from the British Museum website (www.britishmuseum.org/research). I would like to thank Susanne Ebbinghaus for her assistance with making this translation more literal. The description of the animal’s attributes and aggressive tendencies toward the elephant is derived from Book 8 of Pliny’s *Natural history*.

¹⁶ “*Nach Christus gepurt. 1513. Jar. Adi. 1. May. Hat man dem groszmechtigen Künig von Portugall Emanuell gen Lysabona pracht ausz India/ ein sollich lebendig Thier. Das nennen sie Rhinocerus. Das ist hye mit aller seiner gestalt Abconterfet. Es hat ein farb wie ein gespreckelte Schildtkrot. Und ist von dicken Schalen überlegt fast fest. Und ist in der gröz als der Helffand Aber nydertrechtiger von paynen / und fast werhafflig. Es hat ein scharff starck Horn vorn auff der nasen / Das Begyndt es albeg zu werzen wo es Bey staynen ist. Das dosig Thier ist des Helffantz tott feyndt. Der Helffandt fürcht es fast ubel / dann wo es In ankumt / so laufft Im das Thier mit dem kopff zwischen dye fordern payn / und reyst den Helffandt unden am pauch auff un erwirgt In/ des mag er sich nit erwern. Dann das Thier ist also gewapent / das Im der Helffandt nichts kan thun. Sie sagen auch das der Rhynocerus Schnell/ Fraydig und Listig sey.”* I have used Giulia Bartrum’s clear translation of the inscription from *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy* (pp. 285–86) as the basis of this translation, with some minor modifications to the language.

¹⁷ Charles Talbot, in *Dürer in America*, 191n4, claims that *Schalen* in the plural form suggests separate pieces like scales or plates, rather than the singular *Schale*, which denotes a protective outer covering such as that on an egg, fruit, snail or turtle, or like a hide. See also Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (online vol. 14, cols. 2060–67, <http://germazope.uni-trier.de/Projects/DWB>; accessed 12/14/2010). Panofsky’s description of the rhinoceros’s exterior seemingly refers to *Schalen* as well: “a combination of scales, laminae, and shells”; Panofsky 1955:192. There is a seventeenth-century rhinoceros constructed of shells at Schloss Weissenstein in Pommersfelden.

¹⁸ See for example Panofsky 1955: 192

¹⁹ Koerner 2002: 31

²⁰ The artist’s engraved 1496 *Monstrous sow of Landseer* is most like the rhinoceros in conception: a depiction of an exotic creature, unseen by Dürer but modelled on another image that claimed to offer an accurate portrayal based on an eyewitness account. On the engraving, its model and the legend of the pig, see Talbott 1971: 116.

²¹ Perhaps the horn signifies the woodcutter’s most important instrument, the sharp and pointed carving knife.

²² In her ‘Notes on the index’, Krauss notes a similar strategy in Marcel Duchamp’s 1918 *Tu m*: “Duchamp places a realistically painted hand at the centre of the work, a hand that is pointing, its index finger enacting the process of establishing the connection between the linguistic shifter ‘this ... ’ and its referent”; Krauss 1985: 198–199). In the case of the rhinoceros, the horn establishes the connection between the linguistic monogram, title and date and the referent, the depicted rhinoceros.

²³ Koerner 2002: 26

²⁴ The inscription on a broadsheet of a giraffe printed by Hans Adam in 1559 after a drawing by Melchior Lorch conveys a similar sentiment: the giraffe “because of its wondrousness [was] sent to a good friend in Germany.” See Parshall 1993: 562–563.

²⁵ Quoted in Smith 2004: 68. For the original passage see Dürer, *Schriftlicher Nachlass* 1: 293.

²⁶ Koerner 2002: 29



Susan Dackerman, 'The rhinoceros,' was first published in *Prints and the pursuit of knowledge in early modern Europe*, ed. Susan Dackerman, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Art Museums, 2011: 163–83. It is republished with the kind permission of Harvard Art Museums and the author.



The narrative of Ganda, Dürer's rhino, is that King Manuel I of Portugal quickly grew disenchanted with the Indian rhino, as it failed to meet his expectations of fiercely warring with his menagerie elephants. A few months after arriving at the Ribeira Palace in Lisbon, Ganda was adorned with a golden garland of roses and carnations, along with a green velvet collar, then tethered with chains and sent as a gift to Pope Leo X in Rome. The ship was caught in a storm and sank near Marseille. Unable to escape, the rhino drowned, and the floral wreath floated to the surface of the water.

In 2016, India adopted the marigold as the national symbol of remembrance for those lost to WWI. Saffron represents the colour of sacrifice. In Hindi, *genda* is the word for marigold, and *ganda* is the word for rhino.

Exhibition detail.
Photograph: Fritha Langerman

Exhibition detail.
An engraving of an Indian rhinoceros
from Conrad Gessner's *Historiae
animalium*, 1551. Gessner's image
is closely based on Albrecht Dürer's
woodcut of 1515. Stitched into this
spine are titles of books that used
Dürer's image as a primary reference
for the rhino.

Photograph: Fritha Langerman





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