

GERMANISCHES
NATIONAL
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Ein Forschungsmuseum der

Leibniz
Leibniz
Gemeinschaft

GLOBAL

NUREMBERG

1300–1600

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RHINOCEROS

Albrecht Dürer

Nuremberg, 1515

Woodcut and letterpress

119.1

H. 24.8 cm; W. 30.2 cm

GNM, inv. no. H7589, on long-term loan from the Sammlung Bernhard Hausmann

Photo: GNM/Georg Janßen

119.2 (not illustrated)

H. 21.2 cm; W. 29.8 cm

Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen-Nürnberg, Erlangen, inv. no. H 62/AH 266

References:

Schoch, Mende, and Scherbaum 2002, pp. 420–24, cat. no. 241 (Yasmin Doosry).

More than almost any other work of art, Albrecht Dürer's *Rhinoceros* woodcut epitomizes Nuremberg's global connectedness in the early modern period. The Indian rhinoceros that is the subject of this print was shipped as a diplomatic gift from Goa to Lisbon in May 1515. It caused a sensation at the royal court of Portugal. No living rhinoceros had been seen in Europe since antiquity; they were known only from hearsay and ancient texts. That same year, Dürer created his iconic *Rhinoceros* based on a description sent from Lisbon to Nuremberg, presumably accompanied by a sketch.

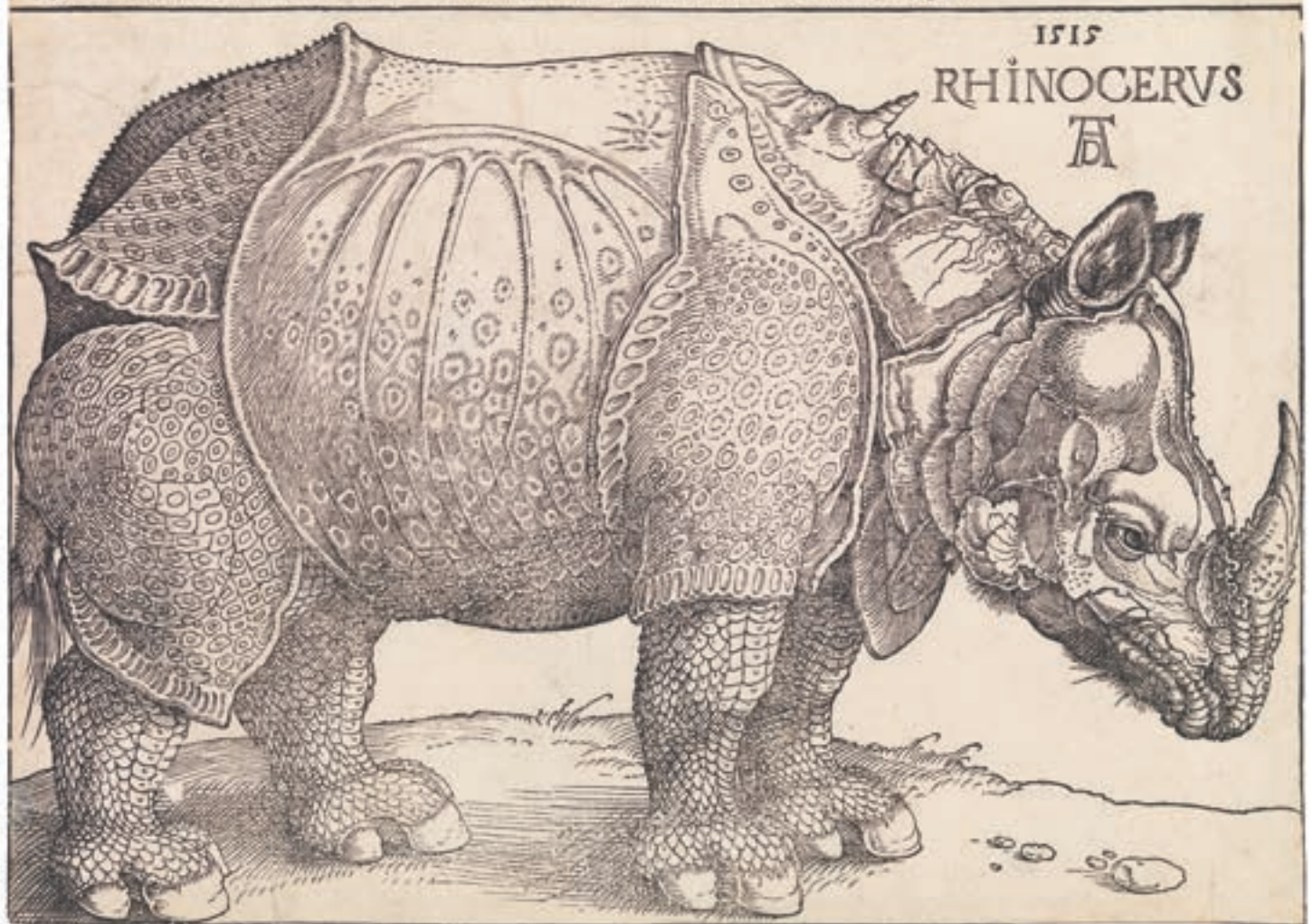
Dürer, who never encountered this nor any other rhinoceros firsthand, depicted the animal in profile. Above its head, he placed the title "RHINOCERVS," the year of the woodcut's creation, and his famous "AD" monogram, which identifies him as the author of the image. The rhinoceros is framed tightly against the border lines. It appears to stand motionless, its powerful hooves firmly planted on the patch of ground below. Bold lines describe the textures and patterning of the armor-like plates covering the animal's body. The profile view and absence of a background cause the viewer to focus on the subject's physical features. For that reason, scholarship has repeatedly raised the question of whether Dürer's main interest lay in creating a zoologically accurate depiction, or rather in spreading the spectacular story surrounding the animal. That story took a dramatic turn when, after surviving the long journey from India to Portugal, this rhinoceros drowned in a shipwreck on its way to Rome.

It is unsurprising that news of the sensational diplomatic gift reached Nuremberg in just a few weeks and was then quickly disseminated in the medium of woodcut. In 1505–6, Nuremberg trading firms had been involved in a major expedition to India organized by the Portuguese crown |see cat. no. 116|. In the same years, hastily printed pamphlets advertising Indian travel and trade were issued to attract investors for further ventures |cat. no. 115|. Prints published in Nuremberg supplied the public with projections of what the people there looked like |cat. no. 117|. Nurembergers were always well informed about current events in Lisbon and the global enterprises initiated there, thanks to intermediaries such as the cartographer Martin Behaim |see cat. nos. 1, 114| and the printer Valentim Fernandes, the latter being the one who sent news of the rhinoceros to Nuremberg. With the help of Dürer's woodcut, which has the character of an illustrated broadsheet, the sensational story of the Indian rhinoceros spread like wildfire, reaching far beyond Nuremberg and southern Germany. Renditions of the motif in other visual media are found as far away as the Colombian Andes |fig. p. 29|. ¹

Sven Jakstat

¹ See the essay by Benno Baumbauer and Sven Jakstat in the present volume.

Nach Choiffiegeburt/ 1513. Jar Abt. May hat man dem großmüchtigsten König Emanuel von Portugal/ gen Lysabona aus India pracht/
 ein solch lebendig Thier. das nennen sie Rhinoceros/ Das ist hie mit all seiner gestalt Abentwesset. Es hat ein Farb wie ein gepirckeltz schädtröt/ und ist von dicken schwa-
 len überlegt sehr fest/ und ist in der groß als der Heiffande/ aber überreicher von barmen und sehr wechaffig es hat ein scharffstark Horn vorn auff der l. lassen/ das bei-
 gunde es zu weichen wo es der steynen ist / das da ein Stieg Thier ist/ des Heiffandes Todtfrende. Der Heiffande fürchet fast vber/ den wo es Ihn ankumpt/ so laufft Ihn
 das Thier mit dem kopff zwischen die fohren barm / und ruft den Heiffanten vorten am bauch auff/ und er würget Ihn das mag er sich nicht erwehem. dann das Thier ist also
 gewapnet/ das Ihn der Jülffande nichts Thun kan. Sie sagen auch das der Rhinoceros/ Schnell fraytig und auch lustig / sey.



cat. no. 119.1