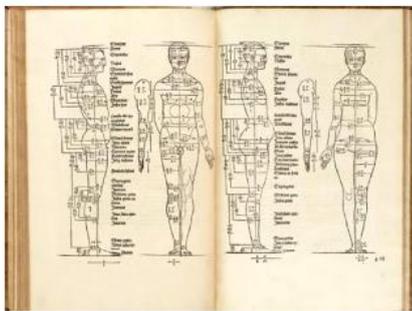


# The art of anatomy

Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) was a German painter, engraver and mathematician. He is best known for making master prints using woodcut, engraving and etching techniques. Dürer often made his prints in a series based on a single subject. His prints made him famous across Europe before the age of 30 and he is widely believed to be the greatest Northern European artist of the Renaissance period and possibly the greatest printmaker of all time.

Dürer was particularly admired for his skills of observation and his meticulous approach to perspective and proportion which he demonstrated in many works that focused on the anatomy of humans and animals.

Albrecht Dürer was hugely influenced by Leonardo da Vinci, which is particularly apparent in his *Four Books on Human Proportions* (see extract above) produced between 1532 and 1534. In these books, Dürer investigated ideal human proportions which showed the very technical approach he used towards anatomy. He used his mathematical abilities to simplify the complex structure of the human body into sections using shapes such as spheres, cylinders, cones, cubes and pyramids. He also used the science of measuring volume to make drawing easier by solving the problem of foreshortening.



Dürer's *Praying Hands*, completed in 1508, has been universally admired because of the sophisticated realism and the expressive detail of the hand's topography. He used finely applied brushstrokes, outlining the contours and filling in the darkest areas with grey wash and the lighter areas with opaque white.



## Techniques

Dürer's woodcut printing technique involved carving an image into a block of wood. Only the lines and shapes of the drawn design are left standing; all other areas of the wood are carefully cut out with sharp tools such as gouges, chisels and knives. Ink is then applied to the raised surface by dabbing or rolling with a brayer. This image is then transferred onto a sheet of paper by rubbing it against the inked surface of the block or by using a printing press. The image on the block appears in reverse on the paper.

**master:** an original copy used to produce other copies

**meticulous:** done very carefully with attention to detail

**volume:** the amount of space that an object occupies  
**foreshortening:** depicting something shorter than its actual length

**topography:** depicting physical shapes and features

**contours:** shapes or surfaces, often of curving forms

**gouges:** tools with a curved blade

**chisels:** tools with long blades and sharp edges

**brayer:** a small roller for spreading ink by hand

**printing press:** a machine used for printing



## Vocabulary

