

Albrecht Dürer



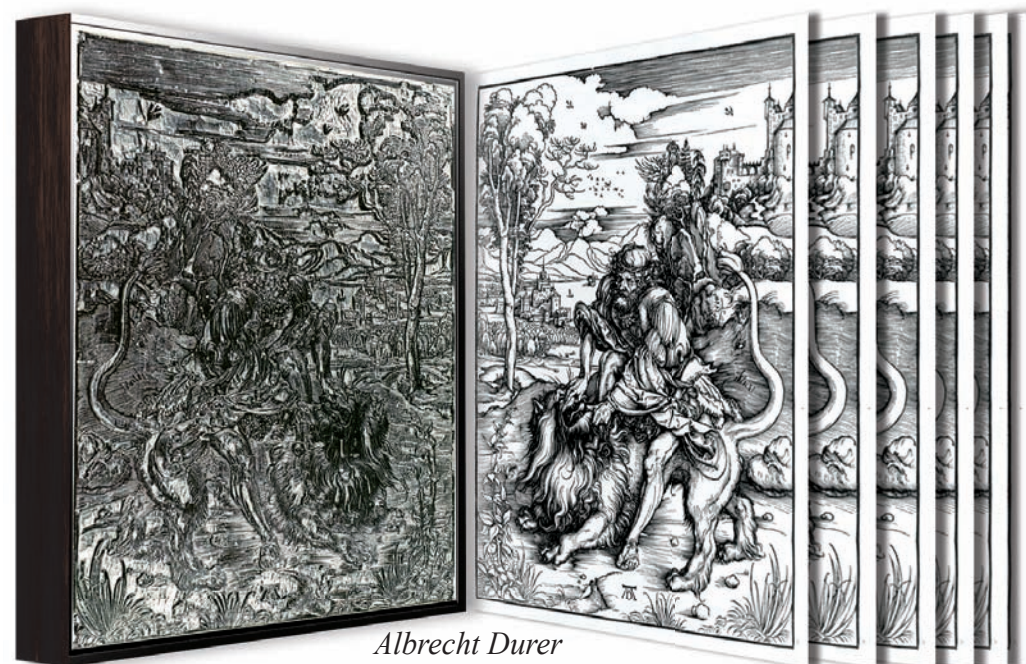
The idea of standardization affected the content of texts and images as well as their production. Knowledge that could not be conveyed in language became standardized through the publication of images, extending a dependence on visual information that had been integral to Medieval sciences, such as botany. The repeatability of printed images was critical to establishing a consensual knowledge-base in many fields. The first medium for making multiple copies of images was the woodcut. It was a relief form that could be printed side by side with typographic texts. In a relief print, negative spaces are carved away from the block, and what remains is inked and printed. Thus, fine lines require tedious labor and significant skill. The art of creating tonal values through line patterns became part of the graphic vocabulary of Renaissance art.

Albrecht Dürer's immensely popular woodcuts were printed on broadsheets, collected into suites, and published as illustrations in his books. His ability to achieve spatial and lighting effects through tonal variation and to organize complicated groupings into legible forms demonstrate tremendous graphic skill. His work gains its force from a combination of this technical virtuosity, and the emotional and spiritual energy of its imagery.



It remains an open question whether Dürer cut his own woodblocks or drew the design on the block and commissioned a highly skilled woodcutter to do the actual carving. The unparalleled subtlety with which the image was chiseled into the surface has been used as evidence both for and against Dürer's participation. The intricacies involved in shaping the patterns of curving and tapering lines in order to create pictorial effects

never before achieved in woodcut must certainly have required Dürer's close supervision, if not his hand on the knife. The block, still in use more than a century after the artist's death, was recut in places to strengthen the image, which had begun to wear away. This is one (below) of two Dürer blocks in the Metropolitan Museum's collection.



Albrecht Dürer
Samson Rending the Lion, 1497-98

