

The Editions

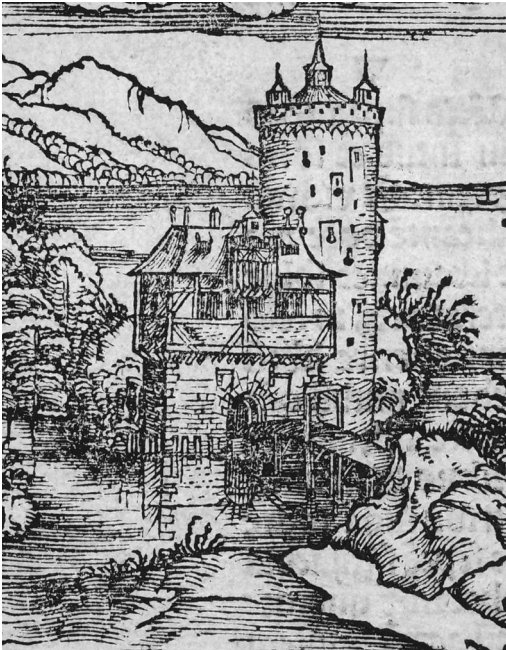
The *Apocalypsis cum figuris* (*Apocalypse with Pictures*) is a cycle of fifteen woodcut plates produced by Albrecht Dürer as the visual accompaniment to the final book of the New Testament. The volume represents the first instance of a printed work conceived and published by an artist who not only devised and designed the images, but likely also carved the corresponding woodblocks himself. It is also the earliest example of an edition in which full-page illustrations appear on the recto, with the sacred text printed on the verso: an innovation that offered readers a dual narrative, both visual and textual. Of the four known print runs, the proof copy was produced between 1496 and 1498 and bears no text on the verso. The first two editions of 1498, one in Latin and the other in German, instead feature the text printed on the reverse of the sheets. The final edition, published in 1511 and written in Latin, introduced a new illustrated title page. The woodcuts in the Pinacoteca belong to this last edition, except for the *Martyrdom of Saint John*, which lacks text and can therefore presumably be dated to the years 1496–1498.



Albrecht Dürer
Saint John Devouring the Book
(detail)

The Woodcuts of the Apocalypse

Albrecht Dürer's woodcuts illustrate the verse text of the *Book of Revelation*, also known as the *Apocalypse*. Tradition attributes the work to John the Evangelist who, while in exile on the island of Patmos, is said to have received the vision and the command to write it down. Although the author's identity is no longer considered certain, this interpretation was widely accepted in Dürer's time. Accordingly, Saint John appears on the title page, depicted gazing towards the Virgin and Child on the crescent moon as he writes. He is also the focus of the opening scene, the *Martyrdom of Saint John*, derived from the *Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine, the principal medieval compendium of saints' lives that served as a major source of inspiration for numerous artists. In the presence of the emperor Domitian, John is thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, from which he emerges unharmed. The subsequent woodcuts are specifically devoted to the vision and follow the complete text, which is arranged in accordance with the images on the verso of the preceding sheet. It is difficult to convey here in detail the vivid and highly imaginative rendering of all the scenes, rich in detail



Albrecht Dürer
Saint John before God and the Elders (detail)



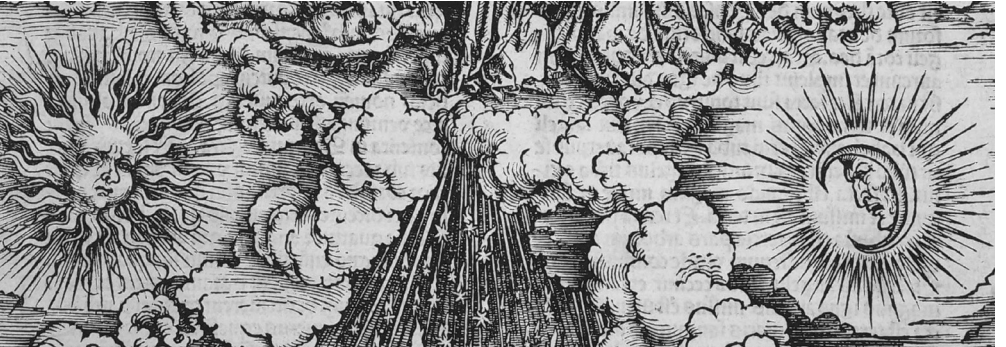
Albrecht Dürer
The Beast with Two Horns Like a Lamb (detail)

and populated by divine figures, the blessed and the damned, angels and demons, who move and writhe, at times set against backgrounds featuring Northern landscapes and cities. The visions begin with John the Evangelist, who, in an ecstatic state, beholds God commanding him to record what he sees in a book and to disseminate it among the seven Churches, symbolised by the seven candlesticks. This powerful image is followed by the scene of God enthroned, surrounded by the Elders, presenting the book with seven seals, upon which rests the Lamb with seven eyes and seven horns. The opening of the seals gives rise to the subsequent images, including the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – one of the most iconic motifs in Western art – bringing famine, war, pestilence, and death. Other scenes depict the earth laid waste by falling stars and earthquakes, while only



Albrecht Dürer
Saint Michael Slaying the Dragon (detail)

the martyrs and the elect are spared, protected by angels who restrain the four winds. Destruction resumes with the opening of the seventh seal, depicted in *The Seven Trumpets*. In this print, the sun and the moon are darkened, while hail, fire, and stars are hurled upon the earth, poisoning the waters. Violence continues in the scene of the four avenging angels, previously bound at the river Euphrates, who are released to destroy a third of humanity with the aid of horses with lions' heads. After John the Evangelist is ordered to swallow the book by the angel with a face like the sun and legs like columns of fire, the apocalyptic Woman appears, radiant, with the moon beneath her feet and a crown of twelve stars. Pregnant, she gives birth to a male child destined to rule the nations. The seven-headed dragon with diadems and ten horns seeks to devour him, but the child is carried to safety before the throne of God. Yet the struggle is not over: the subsequent prints alternate between scenes of the demon's defeat at the hands of Saint Michael and other monstrous beings, such as the two-horned beast worshipped in an ungodly manner, and the seven-headed creature ridden by the Whore of Babylon, a stunning woman dressed in the Venetian fashion of the time, following the depiction of *The Hymn of the Chosen*. The final scene offers a sense of resolution: an angel casts Satan into the abyss for a thousand years, while above, another angel reveals the new Heavenly Jerusalem, represented as an idyllic Northern city.



Albrecht Dürer
The Seven Trumpets (detail)



Albrecht Dürer
The Apocalyptic Woman

Albrecht Dürer

Albrecht Dürer was born in Nuremberg on 21 May 1471. After an apprenticeship in his father's goldsmith's workshop, he trained under the painter and woodcut designer Michael Wolgemut. From 1490 onwards, he embarked on a series of formative journeys through Germany, the Low Countries, and Italy, staying twice in Venice. There, he painted the *Feast of the Rosary* for the church of San Bartolomeo, now in the National Gallery Prague. His encounter with Italian art had a profound impact on his style, leading him to combine the meticulous attention to detail characteristic of Northern art with the figurative balance of the classical tradition. His printmaking work was just as important as his painting, and he produced masterpieces using woodcuts, engravings, drypoints, and etchings. A distinctive feature of his works is the geometric monogram "AD", which the artist adopted as his signature from 1496 and remains immediately recognisable today. Alongside his artistic practice, Dürer devoted himself to theoretical study, producing treatises on perspective, the proportions of the human body, and geometry. He died in Nuremberg on 6 April 1528.

Albrecht Dürer
Self-Portrait
Alte Pinakothek, Munich
(CC BY-SA 4.0)



ALBRECHT DÜRER APOCALYPSE

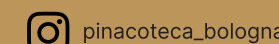
24 April - 31 July 2026
Pinacoteca nazionale di Bologna

Curated by Elena Rossoni and Giulia Adami

OPENING HOURS

Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays: 9:00–19:00
Last admission 30 minutes before closing
Closed on Mondays.

www.pinacotecabologna.cultura.gov.it



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Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna e Palazzo Pepoli Campogrande

Cover
Albrecht Dürer
The Four Horsemen (detail)



LECTURES

Thursday 28 May, 17:00

The Apocalypse by Albrecht Dürer

By Giovanni Fara
Pinacoteca nazionale di Bologna
Aula Gnudi
→ Free admission with compulsory booking via Eventbrite, subject to availability

GUIDED TOURS

Saturday 2 May, 17:00
Saturday 9 May, 17:00
Saturday 23 May, 17:00
Saturday 20 June, 17:00
→ Tours included in the admission ticket, subject to availability
→ Booking required via email: mn-bo.visitguidate@cultura.gov.it

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Sunday 24 May, 17:00

Sunday 14 June, 17:00

→ Free admission, subject to availability
→ Booking required via email: mn-bo.prenotazioni@cultura.gov.it

CREATIVE ACTIVITY AREA

Within the exhibition, a dedicated creative area is open to all, with materials and activities available for free experimentation. A welcoming space where visitors can engage with word and image and explore new expressive possibilities at their own pace.



List of Works

Frontispiece, The Virgin Appearing to Saint John

Woodcut, mm. 394×280, inv. PN 1459

The Martyrdom of Saint John

Woodcut, mm. 390×282, inv. PN 1458

The Vision of the Seven Candlesticks

Woodcut, mm. 396×282, inv. PN 1460

Saint John before God and the Elders

Woodcut, mm. 394×279, inv. PN 1461

The Four Horsemen

Woodcut, mm. 394×280, inv. PN 21893

The Opening of the Fifth and Sixth Seals

Woodcut, mm. 393×280, inv. PN 1462

The Four Angels Holding Back the Winds

Woodcut, mm. 394×282, inv. PN 1463

The Seven Trumpets

Woodcut, mm. 392×280, PN 1466

The Four Avenging Angels

Woodcut, mm. 393×282, PN 1590

Saint John Devouring the Book

Woodcut, mm. 392×284, PN 1589

The Apocalyptic Woman

Woodcut, mm. 393×280, PN 1588

Saint Michael Slaying the Dragon

Woodcut, mm. 393×281, inv. PN 1587

The Beast with Two Horns Like a Lamb

Woodcut, mm. 391×280, inv. PN 1586

The Adoration of the Lamb The Hymn of the Chosen

Woodcut, mm. 394×280, inv. PN 1467

The Whore of Babylon

Woodcut, mm. 394×279, inv. PN 24124

The Angel with the Key to Bottomless Pit

Woodcut, mm. 394×282, inv. PN 1584

The Dürer Print Collection of the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna

The series of woodcuts illustrating the *Apocalypse* forms only part of the extensive print collection by the German artist, comprising 289 pieces, preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings of the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna. It was assembled gradually over time and, unlike the prints already bound into volumes that Pope Benedict XIV donated to the Istituto delle Scienze in 1751, marked with his coat of arms, the provenance of the remaining works is difficult to establish with certainty. The available inventories are in fact very general and lack a detailed list of individual sheets, a gap that makes any precise reconstruction particularly challenging. As early as the 1715 donation by Luigi Ferdinando Marsili to the Istituto delle Scienze, from which the entire collection now held in the Pinacoteca originates, there were already 143 sheets attributed to "Alberto Duro", some of which had been acquired during the count's stay in Vienna, when he was in the service of Emperor Leopold I, Holy Roman Emperor. Further prints entered the collection with the second donation by Pope Benedict XIV in 1756, which included a volume entitled *Dürer Alberto. Stampe tedesche*. In the same year, 1756, Count Girolamo Legnani Ferri contributed fifty prints from the series depicting the *Life of Christ and the Virgin Mary*. The new acquisition prompted Pope Benedict XIV to transfer further copies to the Institute. These were joined, in 1789, by sheets from Ludovico Vittorio Savioli's collection, purchased that year: "no. 231 woodcuts by Dürer, among which are the *Life of the Virgin*, together with another engraved by Marcantonio, the *Cannon of 1518*, the *Christ in the Garden* of 1515, *Saint Lawrence with other Holy Martyrs*, and many more". If one also takes into account the woodcuts from the *Life of the Virgin* series, which entered the collection from the Society of Jesus following the Napoleonic suppressions, together with the thorough reorganisation of the holdings between the late 18th and early 19th centuries, during which volumes were dismantled and reassembled, intermingling different groups of works, it becomes clear why today the collection can only be appreciated as a layered whole. This very stratification makes the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna one of the Italian museums with the largest number of works by the German artist.



THE PRINT COLLECTION
OF THE PINACOTECA NAZIONALE DI BOLOGNA

Albrecht Dürer

APOCALYPSE

24 April
31 July
2026

PINACOTECA
NAZIONALE
DI BOLOGNA

