

'Holy Things': Dürer's *Feast of the Rosary* in the Rudolfine Court



Miranda Lee Elston
University of North Carolina Chapel Hill

*Abstract: Rudolf II's passionate appetite for works by celebrated German artist Albrecht Dürer led to an aggressive campaign to acquire original works and promote his court artists to create imitations of Dürer's works. This paper explores the question of how and why Emperor Rudolf set about collecting works of art by Dürer that were originally intended for a religious devotional context and how his interest in Dürer's religious works can be connected to representations of Rudolf's cultural and imperial legacy. By examining Dürer's *Feast of the Rosary* (1506), this paper will consider how the artist's legacy and German heritage became interwoven with the changing perception of the status of the art object which positioned Dürer's artworks as an allegorical representation of himself and his heritage. Within the Rudolfine court, Dürer's altarpieces functioned as representations of Rudolf's cultural legacy through the appropriation of religious images of his imperial claim and lineage. Through the shifting veneration of the artist, a new material culture of Empire was established through the collecting habits of the Rudolfine Court.*

His manuscripts and other plainly designed drawings on paper and parchment are regarded by artists and other admirers as holy things; his panels and paintings are displayed and preserved as the highest and noblest relics, so that, for several, one must pay money simply to see and scrutinize them.¹

– Matthias Quad von Kinckelbach, *Teutscher Nation Herligkeit*

What is immediately striking about Matthias Quad von Kinckelbach's passage from *Teutscher Nation Herligkeit* (1609) is his positioning of the works of Albrecht Dürer,

¹ 'Seine manuscripta und andere schlecht hin entworffene papierlin und pergamentlein werden von den Kunstnern und anderen admiratoribus für Heilig thum verwaret: Seine Tafeln und Schildereien für die högste und edelste Kleinoder aufgesetzt und gehalten, das man von etlichen auch gelt geben muß sie nur besehen und abspiculiren wil.' P. Kutter, 'Des Matthias Quad von Kinckelback Nachrichten von Künstgeschichte', *Wallraf-Richartz Jahrbuch* 3-4 (1926-1927), p. 429. As quoted in Joseph Leo Koerner, *Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 50.

the celebrated German artist, as noble relics to be collected and studied. Although not directly insinuating a negation of the iconography, Kinckelbach inverts the notion of the veneration of the sacred in a religious context to the veneration of Dürer. Moreover, the context in which such panels and paintings were to be viewed was in the princely collections of Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (1552-1612). Rudolf II's passionate appetite for works by Dürer led to an aggressive campaign to acquire original works and to promote his court artists to create imitations of Dürer's works. Through this collecting, Rudolf II helped usher in a period that has been termed by Hans Tietze and Erika Tietze-Conrat as the 'Dürer-Renaissance', and brought to prominence by Hans Kauffmann.² For instance, in Karel van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck* (1604), van Mander listed Rudolf as owning Albrecht Dürer's *Adoration of the Magi* [fig. 1], the *Madonna with the Siskin*,³ the *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand Christians*,⁴ and *The Adoration of the Holy Trinity (Landauer Altarpiece)*.⁵

Clearly, simply based on the titles themselves, religious subjects and themes are central to each of these paintings as altarpieces that were originally commissioned for a chapel or sacred space. This begs some questions. Firstly, how and why did Emperor Rudolf set about collecting works of art by Dürer that were originally intended for display in religious and/or devotional contexts? In what ways did the Emperor's interest in Dürer's religious works connect with representations of his cultural and imperial legacy?

² For more information, see Andrea Bubenik, *Reframing Albrecht Dürer: The Appropriation of Art, 1528-1700*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 3-10; Giulia Bartrum ed., *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy: The Graphic Work of a Renaissance Artist* (London: British Museum, 2002), p. 226.

³ Albrecht Dürer, *Madonna with the Siskin*, 1506. Oil on poplar panel, 91 x 76 cm. Staatliche Museen, Berlin. https://www.wga.hu/html_m/d/durer/1/05/06siski.html

⁴ Albrecht Dürer, *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand Christians*, 1508. Oil on canvas transferred from panel, 99 x 87 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. https://www.wga.hu/html_m/d/durer/1/06/6martyr.html

⁵ Albrecht Dürer, *The Adoration of the Holy Trinity (Landauer Altarpiece)*, 1511. Oil on lindenwood, 135 x 123.4 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

<https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/615/?offset=11&lv=list>



Figure 1. Adoration of the Magi.
Albrecht Dürer, 1504. 99 × 113.5 cm. Oil on wood. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

These questions can be addressed by tracing the narrative of Dürer's altarpiece, the *Feast of the Rosary* [fig. 2]. Dürer completed the altarpiece, commissioned for the San Bartolomeo al Rialto by the German expatriate merchants living in Fondaco dei Tedeschi, during his second journey to Venice. The subject of the altarpiece is the Blessed Virgin giving Rosaries as a tool against heretics and this theme reflects the Confraternity of the Rosary that commissioned the piece. Dürer positioned the Blessed Virgin with Christ Child upon her lap at the center of the composition, framed by two small cherubs crowning her in front of a green *baldacchino*. Surrounding the Virgin and Child on either side is a large congregation of religious and secular figures placed within a lush outdoor setting that recedes into a mountainous background. The Virgin is in the act of placing a rosary upon the



Figure 2. Feast of the Rosary.

Albrecht Dürer, 1506. 162 x 192 cm. Oil on poplar wood. Sternberg Palace collection, National Gallery, Prague.

head of Emperor Maximilian I, while the Christ Child places one upon the figure of the Pope Julius II.⁶ Clustered behind Emperor Maximilian I are the portraits of German merchants, businessmen, and professionals including Burkhard Speyer, the almoner of San Bartolomeo, and Master Hieronymus who had the Fondaco dei Tedeschi rebuilt.⁷ Importantly, off to the far-right hand-side is a self-portrait of Dürer

⁶ For a comparison, see *Portrait of Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor* by Albrecht Dürer, 1519, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna and Lucas van Leyden *Portrait of the Emperor Maximilian*, 1520, British Museum, London.

⁷ Larry Silver and Jeffrey Chipps Smith ed., *The Essential Dürer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 247.

holding a *cartellino* with his signature and a short inscription that reads '*Exegit quinque / mestri spatio Albertus / Dürer Germanus / MDVI / AD*'.⁸

The iconography and composition of the altarpiece helps to secure the links between the *Feast of the Rosary* and its geographical and political environment, to the rationale behind Rudolf's acquisition. Central to the examination of this altarpiece is the expression of the German community who had commissioned the piece. As Andrew Morrall has pointed out, the detailed portraits of key German figures emphasize Dürer's intention to acknowledge the status and wealth of German expatriates in Venice.⁹ The artist's own description of the commission reinforces his artistic intentions. In a letter by Dürer to his friend Willibald Pirckheimer on January 6th 1506, he states 'for I have to paint a picture for the Germans...'.¹⁰ The emphasis on the German identity of his patrons reveals that the altarpiece was meant to represent the regional community.¹¹ If this allusion to the patron's nationality is tentative in understanding the iconography of the altarpiece, the depiction of Emperor Maximilian I as well as the artist himself within a Germanic landscape supports this reading. Morrall suggests that the inclusion of Maximilian I could be a reference to the Emperor's growing power during this period, with his coronation as Holy Roman Emperor scheduled to take place in Rome later that year.¹²

The emblematic associations related to the representation of a Germanic identity and the Holy Roman Empire are punctuated by Dürer's own self-portrait and self-fashioning as '*Dürer Germanus*'.¹³ Similar to the goldsmith's practice of

⁸ 'The German, Albrecht Dürer, executed this in the space of five months'. Andrew Morrall, 'Dürer and Venice', in *The Essential Dürer*, ed. by Silver and Smith, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 109.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Albrecht Dürer, *Dürer's Record of Journeys to Venice and the Low Countries*, ed. by Roger Fry (London: Dover Publications, 1995), p. 11.

¹¹ Morrall, 'Dürer and Venice', p. 108.

¹² *Ibid.*, 109; In a letter from September 8, 1506, Dürer alludes to the alliance of the papacy, France, and Venice against Germany and to the buildup of troops in Venice.

¹³ This is the first known instance where Dürer includes a self-portrait in an altarpiece. Bubenik, *Reframing Albrecht Dürer*, p. 60.

declaring authorship with plate-marks, Dürer highlighted his artistic and national relationship to the altarpiece through the use of his monograph, inscription, and a self-portrait, all of which function as signs of his authorship.¹⁴ Compositionally, Dürer achieved this by depicting himself gazing directly towards the viewer and in a standing position that distinguishes him from his patrons.¹⁵ Dürer's inclusion of his secular self into a religious work elevates his authorship in relation to the sacred imagery, fusing his profane image with the sacred. In one sense, this is evident in Dürer's assertive choice to even place himself into a religious context depicting himself standing and directly confronting the viewer with his gaze. In another sense, his fusion connects to the notion of the divine genius of the artist. Dürer's artistic skills and the inclusion of his self, draw a visual association between himself and the sacred imagery he is placed in.

The reception of the completed *Feast of the Rosary* emphasizes Dürer's artistic prestige.¹⁶ Following its completion, Christoph Scherl wrote in 1508: 'There are many proofs of Dürer's divine genius. The German colony in Venice is proud that the best painting in the city is by Dürer. This includes the portrait of the Emperor, which seems so lifelike that all it lacks is breath [...] These paintings surely place him in a class with Apelles.'¹⁷ Similar to Kinkelbach's description of his works as almost holy relics, Scherl labelled Dürer as the *divino artista* while simultaneously reinforcing the German context of the altarpiece. The framing of Dürer's artistic ability as divine

¹⁴ Scholars such as Joseph Leo Koerner have argued that Dürer's training as a goldsmith may have influenced his later use of a monogram. See e.g. Joseph Leo Koerner, 'Albrecht Dürer: A Sixteenth-Century *Influenza*', in *Albrecht Dürer and His Legacy*, ed. by Bartrum, p. 18, 20.

¹⁵ It has been suggested that the figure standing next to Dürer could be that of Leonhard Vilt, the founder of the Brotherhood of the Rosary in Venice. Martin Bailey, *Dürer* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p. 90.

¹⁶ The *Feast of the Rosary* had such a great impact that not only did the Doge of Venice and the artist Giovanni Bellini admire the use of color, Dürer was later offered a position as an official painter in Venice. Dürer turned down the position and shortly afterward, he returned to Germany. Bubenik, *Reframing Albrecht Dürer*, p. 60.

¹⁷ *Albrecht Dürer and His Legacy*, ed. by Bartrum, p. 13. Original quotation from Christoph von Scheurl, *Libellus de Laudibus Germaniae et Ducum Saxoniae* (Leipzig, 1508); *Dürer: Schriftlicher Nachlass*, ed. by Hans Rupprich, 3 vols (Berlin: Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft, 1956), I, p. 43.

genius draws on Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*, which narratively connected an artist's abilities as being gifted from a divine power.¹⁸ Contemporary writings on the divinity of the artist's genius positioned Dürer as deific; a status that in turn becomes embedded within his works.

Considering these iconographical references, it is not surprising that during the early seventeenth century, Emperor Rudolf II sent Bernardo Rosso to acquire the altarpiece for his private collections. Perhaps Rudolf's desire for the altarpiece responded to a personal and imperialistic motive, since Maximilian I's inclusion in the altarpiece would have directly resonated with Rudolf. Maximilian I was an eminent ancestor of Rudolf and a foundational figure of the Hapsburg line, drawing a connection to Rudolf's own imperial legacy. Likewise, images of regional identity connect to a founding principle of the RudolFINE *KunstKammer* and its reinforcement of Rudolf's legitimacy as an emperor. The display of Rudolf's lineage directly related to specific categories that were to be included in the *KunstKammer* as outlined by Samuel Quiccheberg's *Inscriptiones Vel Titoli Theatri*, first published in 1565. Quiccheberg divided objects held within the *KunstKammer* into five categories. The first category included objects that reflected upon the founder of the collection, his dynasty, and territory, terming these 'images of sacred history'.¹⁹ As Quiccheberg noted in this category, 'Here I give prominence to those panels that are sacred and most select ... immediately next, I add the founder's genealogy ...'.²⁰ The *Feast of the Rosary* may be considered a hybrid of these two items within Quiccheberg's First Class, as they represent sacred imagery merging with the personal genealogy of the Emperor in the portrait of Maximilian I. Similarly, they incorporated a clear imperial

¹⁸ For more information on the idea of the Renaissance comparison to Apelles and the anecdote of the artist, see Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

¹⁹ Katharina Pilaski, *The Munich KunstKammer: Art, Nature, and the Representation of Knowledge in Courtly Context* (PhD Diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2007), p. 30. Samuel Quiccheberg, *The First Treatise on Museums: Samuel Quiccheberg's Inscriptiones, 1565*, trans. by Mark A. Meadow and Bruce Roberts (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013), p. 2.

²⁰ Quiccheberg, *The First Treatise on Museums*, p. 2.

component in their collections. Established by Albrecht V, Duke of Bavaria in the 1560s, the Munich *Kunstammer* included objects that represented the Bavarian territory through the inclusion of imperial portraits, documentary maps and genealogical charts as well as depictions of Bavarian cities.²¹ Katharina Pilaski has argued that this was an intentional program reflecting the centralization of power in his collections.²² The inclusion of Emperor Maximilian I in the *Feast of the Rosary* may have served a similar function in Rudolf II's collection, and given cause for Rudolf's initial desire for the altarpiece itself, to further establish his imperial genealogy.

Following demanding negotiations with the Church, Rudolf II purchased the *Feast of the Rosary* in 1606 for 900 ducats.²³ Joachim von Sandrart's 1675 account of the acquisition recorded the expense and difficulties associated with the purchase. As part of the original negotiations for the acquisition, a copy was to be made as a replacement of the original.²⁴ This condition underscores the importance of the original to Rudolf as well as the contextual nature of the original iconography. The subject matter of the altarpiece represents the history of the church of San Bartolomeo through the selection of religious figures associated with the Confraternity of the Rosary based in Venice.²⁵ However, Rudolf's acquisition of the altarpiece removed it from its intended ecclesiastical function. In this way, Dürer's *Feast of the Rosary* is more than a painting valued for its aesthetic qualities, it is a functional object aided by its aesthetic qualities in its representation of religious imagery.

A comparable account of the tensions around removing a piece of artwork from the original context may be seen in Rudolf II's acquiring of *The Adoration of the*

²¹ Pilaski, 'The Munich Kunstammer', p. 9-58.

²² *Ibid.*, p. ix.

²³ Bubenik, *Reframing Albrecht Dürer*, p. 61; Joachim von Sandrart, *Teustche Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675. Leben der berühmten Maler, Bildhauer und Daumeister*, ed. by Rudolf Arthur Peltzer (Munich: G. Hirth, 1925), p. 223.

²⁴ Bubenik, *Reframing Albrecht Dürer*, p. 61; Sandrart, *Teustche Academie*, p. 223.

²⁵ Silver and Smith ed., *The Essential Dürer*, p. 108 & 246-247.

Holy Trinity (Landauer Altarpiece) altarpiece. Dürer executed this oil on panel altarpiece in 1511 for the chapel of the *Zwölfbrüderhaus* in Nuremberg. The dedication of the chapel to the Trinity and All Saints established the program for the altar, depicting the Trinity at the top center of the painting above a crowded composition of devotional figures that divides the painting into three levels. The central two figures are the Pope, located on the left with palms upraised and dressed in radiant golden robes, and the Holy Roman Emperor, as noted by his distinctive crown. The Emperor faces the figure of the donor Mattäus Landauer, who is bowed in prayer. Placed at the bottom right of the scene, in an expansive landscape, is the self-portrait of Albrecht Dürer holding a *cartellino* with his name and the date.

The visual similarities in the *Feast of the Rosary* and *The Adoration of the Holy Trinity* perhaps explains Rudolf's wish to acquire the latter from the Nuremberg council in 1584. In a series of increasingly aggressive letters to the Nuremberg council, Rudolf suggested a copy be made in place of the original, so that he could purchase the painting for his collections.²⁶ However, the Nuremberg council continually refused to give in to Rudolf's requests. At the core of their argument was that the altarpiece was commissioned for the *Zwölfbrüderhaus*, and that the religious context should be valued and the painting left *in situ*.²⁷ What is striking about this series of letters is the awareness of the original function and context of the altarpiece. Suggested in the Nuremberg council's argument is that the inclusion of Germanic iconography and the promotion of the artist did not negate the altarpiece's connection to ecclesiastic communities who commissioned the work; therefore, the altarpiece should stay where it was intended. Nonetheless, this argument proved fruitless as Rudolf responded that there would be political consequences if the city of

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Nuremberg did not give in to his demands. As a result of these threats, Nuremberg sold the altarpiece in spring 1585 for 700 gulden.²⁸

The question, then, is what cultural perception had shifted to allow a ruler the authority to move religious items into secular collections?²⁹ Bubenik has argued that the handing over of altarpieces is a testament to the power of collectors during the period, which is demonstrated in the narrative of *The Adoration of the Holy Trinity*.³⁰ Moreover, it speaks to the shifting role by which these objects were viewed. Specifically, these changes related to a new interpretation of iconography paired with the shifting status of the artist and the artistic culture being established at the RudolFINE court. These altarpieces' function shifted away from that of religious objects to an expression of the artist and of Germanic identity by forsaking certain iconographical elements intended to relate to the original location.

The exaltation of Dürer during his lifetime, and after, creates a mythos around him that links to his lasting fame. This is not to argue that Dürer's lasting fame is a product of the *KunstKammer*, but that even before the development of the Dürer-Renaissance he was engaged in a broader Renaissance rhetoric around the changing awareness of the status of the artist that began during his lifetime. Through Dürer's use of signatures and self-portraits, combined with his celebrity, his art subsequently became an allegorical representation of himself as an artist.³¹ As Koerner reasons, in many of Dürer's works, 'the art and the artist are consubstantial' as the value of the image derives from it being by him.³² Therefore, transposed onto the image itself is the identity of the person who created it. The awareness of this consubstantial value may be viewed through Dürer's own writings. Dürer wrote that he wished to 'make

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Koerner, *Moment of Self-Portraiture*, p. xviii.

³² Ibid.

himself seen in his works'.³³ Consequently, the conflation of the artist with the work of art establishes a different vantage point from which to view his work: not as contextual or functional items, but as a reflection of the great 'German' artist himself. A fashioning that must have particularly appealed to Rudolf.

The changing perception towards the art object as a bodily relic of Dürer can be further understood by briefly considering Walter Benjamin's theory of art and reproductions from 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.' Though written well after our focus period, his insight into the shifting function of the art object is helpful in highlighting how a similar reasoning on the status of the art object would explain the new position that Dürer's works held in the RudolFINE court. Most simply, Benjamin argues that there is a unique existence in the original, which connects to its location in time and space.³⁴ When Rudolf removed Dürer's works from their original spaces, he subsequently modified the works through a new perception connected with his own era, one in which the German artist is venerated in place of the original subject matter. As Benjamin points out,

This is comparable to the situation of the works of art in prehistoric times when, by the absolute emphasis on its cult value, it was, first and foremost, an instrument of magic. Only later did it come to be recognized as a work of art. In the same way today, by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions....³⁵

By reflecting on Benjamin's example and the ritualized object in itself, a similar shift could be understood in Rudolf's collecting habits, where the work of art is later recognized for its exhibition value over its original religious function. Furthermore,

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), p. 221-222.

³⁵ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', p. 225.

Benjamin's theories echo a similar idea of the art object being tied to the artist in Kinckelbach's writings. Kinckelbach, quoted at the beginning of this article, categorized Dürer's works on display in the royal courts as 'holy objects' and the 'highest and noblest relics' placed within a secular viewing space.³⁶ Benjamin's theories are simply one way to examine the shifting nature of Dürer's works of art in relation to their viewership. Rudolf's removal of Dürer's paintings from their religious contexts into secular ones, modifies the art object with a new set of perceptions.

A clear example of the shifting status of Dürer's drawings and prints can be seen in the Rudolfine *Kunstkammer*. In a letter by Johann Valentin Andreae from 1647, he wrote 'I heard from connoisseurs that his [Dürer's] *Eustace* stands at the first place among the prints of all his works. The Emperor Rudolf II, therefore, after had purchased it at a high price, would have the copperplate gilded so that it would not be worn out any further.'³⁷ Although it is debatable whether or not Rudolf actually gilded this original copperplate, such an account indicates how a functional preparatory object used by the artist to create a work of art was subsequently valued for its proximity to the hand of the artist. Thus, within the new gallery setting, functional items were now viewed as artifacts to be preserved and studied.

The changing nature of works of art, when placed in an exhibition context, is further reflected in Quiccheberg's theories on the structure of the *Kunstkammer*.

³⁶ 'Seine manuscripta und andere schlecht hin entworffene papierlin und pergamentlein werden von den Kunstnern und anderen admiratoribus für Heilig thum verwaret: Seine Tafeln und Schildereien für die högste und edelste Kleinoder auffgesetzt und gehalten, das man von etlichen auch gelt geben muß sie nur besehen und abspiculiren wil.' P. Kutter, 'Des Matthias Quad von Kinckelback Nachrichten von Künstgeschichte', p. 429. As quoted in Koerner, *Moment of Self-Portraiture*, p. 50.

³⁷ 'Ex omnibus vero ejus speciminibus Eustachium in Caelatura primas tenere, à peritvs rerum accepi, cujus cupream laminam cum Imperator RVDOLFVD II. Fel mem, mango redemisset, inaurari voluit, ne amplius attereretur.' ('I heard from connoisseurs that his [Dürer's] *Eustace* stands at the first place among the prints of all his works. The Emperor Rudolf II, therefore, after had purchased it at a high price, would have the copperplate gilded so that it would not be worn out any further'). Johannes Valentinus Andreae, *Seleniana Augustalia Iohannis Valentini Andreae* (Ulm, 1649), p. 308. As seen in Kayo Hirakawa, *The Pictorialization of Dürer's Drawings in Northern Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 112. For the translation in German see *Dürer und die Nachwelt. Urkunden, Briefe, Dichtungen und wissenschaftliche Betrachtungen aus vier Jahrhunderten*, ed. by Heinz Lüdecke and Susanne Heiland (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1955), pp. 100-1.

Quiccheberg contended that the *Kunstammer* should be a *musea et officinae*, hence libraries, workshops, and laboratories should be part of the museum.³⁸ As Katharina Pilaski has suggested, Quiccheberg understood the collection as a functional site for the production of knowledge.³⁹ Moreover, this was commonly a knowledge that reinforced the power and material culture of empire established through the collecting habits of the RudolFINE Court. The inclusion of the *Feast of the Rosary* within the *Kunstammer* structure gave the altarpiece a new function as a specimen of artistic excellency. In this new role, such works of art were imitated, adapted, and duplicated by RudolFINE artists in a pedagogical and historicizing manner. Here, clarification of the terminology is essential for the argument. Although several artists composed direct copies of Dürer's works in the RudolFINE court, these copies should be understood as a pedagogical process of studying a master's style.⁴⁰ The copying of Dürer's works connects to Benjamin's argument that in the creation of reproductions there is a loss of authenticity and a decrease the importance of the original object due to that object reflecting a specific milieu in its function.⁴¹ The use of Dürer in the collection as an instructional activity is summarized by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann's argument that Dürer became canonized as 'classic', similar to that of other Renaissance artists' treatment of ancient Roman or Greek works of art as distant, yet able to be assimilated.⁴²

The act of copying must be distinguished from the act of *imitare* [imitation]. Notably, *imitare* implies the creation of a new manner of art that draws upon an

³⁸ Pilaski, *The Munich Kunstammer*, p. 105.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴⁰ I do not address here the issue of direct copying or forgeries, such as those done by Marcantonio Raimonidi of Dürer during the early sixteenth century. For more information see Bubenik, *Reframing Albrecht Dürer*, p. 75.

⁴¹ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', p. 220.

⁴² Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *The Eloquent Artist: Essays on Art, Art Theory, and Architecture, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Century* (London: The Pindar Press, 2004), p. 10; Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *The School of Prague: Painting at the Court of Rudolf II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 174.

earlier precedent as a form of imitation.⁴³ The artistic practice of imitation within the Rudolfine court shifted Dürer's religious works so that they became valued as relics of the artist, and thus resulted in new artistic production that depended on the original while reflecting the contemporary moment. As DaCosta Kaufmann maintains, *imitatio* relies on a process of active interpretation based on the elements chosen to imitate as well as the rejection of certain aspect from the original source, which in turn creates something unique.⁴⁴ It is revealing that once the original *Feast of the Rosary* is placed in the secular gallery of Rudolf II, it is used as a model for new ecclesiastical paintings. Here Dürer's *Feast of the Rosary* is taken as aesthetic inspiration through its inventive qualities and composition more so than its religious subject matter. Through the act of imitation, the function of the now secularized altarpiece became valued as a relic of the artist's ability. Furthermore, paintings on the subject of Dürer's *Feast of the Rosary* are themselves a unique interpretation of the original that aligns as the prime example of how the artists used Dürer's works within the collection as more than merely a source to be copied.

Rudolfine artists continued to reproduce images by and of Dürer as a form of adoration of the artist in building on the traditions set by Renaissance theories of *imitare*. *Portrait of Albrecht Dürer* [fig. 3], by Lukas Kilian from 1608, should look strikingly familiar to the self-portrait of Dürer in the background of the *Feast of the Rosary*. Kilian displays the recognizable characteristics of Dürer's features in the half-length three-quarters pose that is depicted in the *Feast of the Rosary*. Dürer looks out to the viewer in an arresting sideways glance, with his coiled tresses flowing over his shoulders onto his elegant fur-trimmed robe. The detail in which Kilian illustrates Dürer shows the meticulous examination he undertook in translating Dürer's oil-on-

⁴³ Bubenik, *Reframing Albrecht Dürer*, p. 75-76. For more information on the process of assimilation that is encountered in Dürer's works see DaCosta Kaufmann, 'Hermeneutics in the History of Art: Remarks on the Reception of Dürer in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries', in *The Eloquent Artist*.

⁴⁴ DaCosta Kaufmann, *The Eloquent Artist*, p. 6.

panel self-portrait into an engraving. In Dürer's hands, he holds a piece of folded paper inscribed with 'C.S.C.M. / PRIUIL'. Mirroring the upper inscription is one at the bottom of the engraving that gives the provenance of the Dürer imagery as being done by Lukas Kilian and based on a copy by Johann Rottenhammer.⁴⁵



Figure 3. Albrecht Dürer.

Lukas Kilian, 1608. 33.7 x 19.8 cm. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

⁴⁵ *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy*, ed. by Bartrum, p. 88.

Within these two inscriptions, Dürer's likeness and German identity is placed in association with the two subsequent artists who attempted to capture his prestige. Bubenik argues the engraving was after Rottenhammer's copy and suggests an emphatic interest in Dürer's likeness that began around this period.⁴⁶ Moreover, the emphasis on Dürer as a German artist continues as the central identifying element. The conversion of Dürer's image into a different and reproducible medium reinforces its separation from the original. That Dürer's self-portrait was extrapolated from the altarpiece as an act to enshrine his image as one of the great northern German artists is further reflected in Joachim von Sandrart's use of Kilian's engraving as an illustration of Dürer in *Teutsche Academie*.⁴⁷ The extraction of Dürer's likeness and circulation of it through its reproduction, made easier by its medium, connects it to the theoretical notion of *imitare* by actively selecting specific elements to reproduce an artistic form in a different fashion than the original.

The veneration of Dürer by quotations of his work and image also aligns RudolFINE artists with Dürer's own artistry and reputation. This admiration of Dürer is best typified in a later Kilian engraving, *Double Portrait of Dürer* [fig. 4] from 1628. As part of this single engraving, Kilian appropriates two different self-portraits of Dürer from altarpieces owned by Rudolf II. The figure standing on the right-hand side of the engraving directly mimics Dürer's self-portrait from *Adoration of the Trinity*, with his fur-trimmed robe that he gathers around himself. Standing across the central table, filled with mathematical instruments and classical figures is Dürer's extracted self-portrait from the *Heller Altar*.⁴⁸ Framing the two images of

⁴⁶ Bubenik, *Reframing Albrecht Dürer*, 29. Additionally, the popularity of Kilian's print can be seen in its imitation by Francis Delaram's *Half-Length Portrait of Albrecht Dürer*, from 1616-1620 that circulated in London.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Albrecht Dürer, *Heller Altar*, 1508-09. Tempera and oil on wood, 198 x 138 cm. Historisches Museum, Frankfurt. <https://www.kunst.uni-frankfurt.de/de/forschung/projekte/mittelalterliche-retabel-in-hessen/albrecht-duerer-und-der-heller-altar/>

Dürer is a classical arch balanced with various objects associated with Dürer's work in painting, engraving, and as an art theoretician. At the base of the composition is a detailed inscription that explains the inspiration of the two representations for this engraving to honor Dürer, the 'Pictorum Germani Principisæ.' ('Principle German Painter').⁴⁹ Through the appropriation of Dürer's self-portraits from two altarpieces, the emphasis again was put on the artist's paragon and Germanic status instead of on the original sacred iconography. The theme of devotion still feeds into the function of the appropriated images, but in terms of a secularized ritual centered on the artist rather than associations with their original ecclesiastical function.

Other artists used Dürer's preparatory sketches for the *Feast of the Rosary* that Rudolf II displayed in his *Kunstkammer* as a source for inspiration and emulation of the artist. That Rudolf collected not only the altarpiece but the preliminary drawings by Dürer as well, further extends the argument that such objects shifted in their value during this period. Preparatory drawings are a simple, functional object in the creation of the final artistic product, which then became venerated itself as an artistic object. Furthermore, that Rudolf owned the drawings and copperplates as well as the finished engravings and paintings suggests that Rudolf attained a multiplicity of objects in connection with Dürer and his work. Not only would visitors marvel at Dürer's finalized *Feast of the Rosary*, but also at the preparatory sketches and subsequent imitations that constituted the work involved in realizing the final product. The artistic process was on full display of the artist.

⁴⁹ *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy*, ed. by Bartrum, pp. 89-90; Bubenik, *Reframing Albrecht Dürer*, p. 31.



Figure 4. Alberti Dureri Noribergensis, Pictorum Germaniae Principis effigies genuina duplex (Double Portrait of Dürer).

Lukas Kilian, c.1628. 38 x 26.4 cm. Engraving. London, British Museum, no. E,2.105 (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

The use of drawings as a form of emulation is best seen in a brief examination of Dürer's *Head of an Angel (Feast of the Rosegarlands)*, from 1506.⁵⁰ This brush drawing with black ink highlighted with white on blue Venetian paper depicts a study for the lute-playing angel sitting at the feet of the Virgin Mary in the completed *Feast of the Rosary*. Composed as a close frame, the angel's body is off-center with the angel's fleshy face extending upward, tilting to the right-hand side of the drawing. Intensifying Dürer's full modeling of the figure are his meticulous brush strokes that create fine lines, giving an impression of light and shadow. On the left-hand side of the paper is the intertwined monograph 'AD' placed above '1506'. This particular drawing was acquired by Rudolf from the Imhoff collection and displayed in bound albums in the Rudolfine *Kunstammer*. As Hans Kauffmann and DaCosta Kaufmann have pointed out, a kind of historicism or artistic competition was employed in the act of imitation, where the canonized Renaissance masters were used as a comparison to assess the ability of the contemporary court artist.⁵¹

Two key figures actively engaged in the artistic competition around Dürer were Hans Hoffmann and Aegedius Sadeler. Hans Hoffmann, appointed as an imperial Rudolfine court painter in 1585, has been long considered one of the leading representatives of the Dürer-Renaissance within the Rudolfine court. This notoriety was gained through his close attention to Dürer's style and form when copying his drawings, as seen in Hoffmann's *Angel (Feast of the Rosengarlands)*, from around 1580.⁵² Although Hoffmann mimics Dürer's original form, an angel with an upwards-tilted head, he pushed the figure towards the center of the paper, extending the angel's shoulder outwards. Furthermore, Hoffmann transforms

⁵⁰ Albrecht Dürer, *Head of an Angel*, 1506. Brush drawing on blue Venetian paper, 27 x 20.8 cm. Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna.

https://www.wga.hu/html_m/d/durer/2/11/3/01angel.html

⁵¹ Hirakawa, *The Pictorialization of Dürer's Drawings*, 101; DaCosta Kaufmann, *The Eloquent Artist*, 7-13; Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Mastery of Nature: Aspects of Art, Science, and Humanism in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 79-99.

⁵² Reprinted in Bubenik, *Reframing Albrecht Dürer*, fig. 65.

Dürer's brush drawing into a study on the contrast of light across the figure's face that emphasizes the figure's musculature. Hoffmann's bright white ink stands out against the darker-drawn forms creating a more rounded modeling of the figure. This technique brings attention to the light playing across it. Replacing the delicacy of Dürer's original are Hoffmann's bold, contrasting lines, which stress the medium of the work. Decisively, Hoffmann removes the recognizable Dürer monogram.

Hoffmann's negation of the original artist's monogram and his use of bold, contrasting lines places his copy in the Rudolfine court style, with its rounded forms and twisting figures that emphasize musculature. On full display in Hoffmann's drawing is the act of *imitare*, where Hoffmann appropriates Dürer's general style, yet adapts it in a Rudolfine manner. Koerner has argued that Hoffmann's work shifts between facsimile and forgery, as he used his 'Dürerian affection' to celebrate Dürer's original genius.⁵³ As evidence, Koerner notes how Hoffmann's imitations of Dürer shift between including Dürer's original monogram to the replacement of Dürer's monogram with own personal 'Hh' signature.⁵⁴ Although Hoffmann's copies of Dürer's drawings have been widely remarked upon, particularly his studies of Dürer's nature drawings, in the case of Hoffmann's *Angel* he used Dürer's drawings as a source of knowledge and play.⁵⁵ By placing himself in a dialogue with Dürer's work, Hoffmann situated himself as equal to, or worthy of imitating Dürer's style.

Paralleling Hoffmann's imitation of Dürer's *Angel* is engraver Aegidius Sadeler's *Head of an Angel* from 1598 [fig. 5]. Much like Hoffmann, Sadeler mimics Dürer's basic composition of the upward-titled head of an angel. However, Sadeler pulls the frame back on the picture revealing more of the figure's chest and clothing, therein elongating the neck and face of the angel. A key difference in Dürer's

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Koerner, *Moment of Self-Portraiture*, p. 49.

⁵⁵ For more information on Hans Hoffmann's nature studies after Albrecht Dürer see Bubenik, *Reframing Albrecht Dürer*.

original and Hoffmann's copy is that Sadeler translates Dürer's ink brushwork into smoothly-flowing engraved lines. Here Sadeler captures the contours and intensifies the fleshiness of the face by heightening the musculature and titling of the figure's head through dark, undulating lines. In the upper right-hand corner, Sadeler includes Dürer's monogram lightly outlined, however without the date. An inscription at the bottom of the painting names Dürer and Sadeler together, linking the two artists.⁵⁶ Like the Kilian engravings, Sadeler's piece reflects a type of commemorative image in the removal of the date, and a credit to the original. Sadeler's completed engraving and copperplate were in turn placed in the RudolFINE *KunstKammer* along with the original preparatory drawings, located near the picture gallery where the original altarpieces were displayed.⁵⁷

Whether emulating the original altarpiece or copying the preparatory sketches, the RudolFINE artists participating in the Dürer-Renaissance at the Hapsburg court seemed to view the religious works and functional studies as sacred. By virtue of having been created by the master's hand, it was imbued with the character of a corporeal relic.⁵⁸ As suggested by Koerner, the use of Dürer's likeness, as seen through the appropriation of Dürer's self-portraits, is a relic twice as sacred, as it is concurrently a drawing of and by the artist.⁵⁹ Building on the traditions set by artist's imitation of Dürer, later artists would continue to venerate and reproduce images of Dürer as a form of adoration and of secularized devotion.

⁵⁶ 'ALBERTVS DVER ALMANVS FECIT ANNO M D VI / EGIDIVS SADELER SCALPSIT ANNO M D XCVIII.' Albrecht Dürer of Germany, created in the year 1506 / Egidius Sadeler carved in 1589.

⁵⁷ Hirakawa, *The Pictorialization of Dürer's Drawings*, p. 115. Additionally, the copperplates for Sadeler's three engravings were owned by Rudolf II and appear in the *KunstKammer* inventory from 1607-1611: '1986. Ein stuckh geschnitten kupfer von Eg: Sadler nach A.D. zaichnus, ist ein alter magerer manskopf mit einer zipfelhauben'; '1988. Ein geschnitten kupfer, kombt nach A.D. zaichnus, ist ein St. Johannes kopf, hatt Egidius Sadeler geschnitten Ao. 1589'; and 'Ein ander kupfer von Eg. Sadler geschnitten Ao. 1589, ist unnser frauen bildtnus nach A.D.' Furthermore, these copperplates were kept in the same 'kästlin' as the fifteen original copperplates of Dürer's prints.

⁵⁸ Koerner, *Moment of Self-Portraiture*, p. 50.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*



Figure 5. Head of an Angel.

Aegidius Sadeler II. Series: Heads After Dürer, 1598. Engraving, 35.8 x 22.4 cm. London, British Museum, no. 1845,0809.607 (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

The inversion of religious terminology for the secular display of art stresses a status in which the veneration of Dürer positioned his works as a source of

knowledge. When Kinckelbach's theories are placed in dialogue with Benjamin's models on artwork's shifting status, a theoretical understanding on Dürer's work as a corporeal relic to be valued within a secularized space of the emperor's gallery becomes visible. This positions the *Feast of the Rosary* as a holy relic in the veneration of the artist within a secular gallery space in the RudolFINE court. Furthermore, within the RudolFINE court, Dürer's altarpieces functioned as representations of Rudolf's cultural legacy through the appropriation of religious imagery to his imperial claims and past heritage. Through the shifting veneration of the artist, a new material culture of empire was established through the collecting habits of the RudolFINE Court.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Any images contained within this article that are reproduced with permission are specifically excluded from the Creative Commons License. They may not be reproduced under any circumstances without the express written permission of the copyright holders.