

H. H. RUMBLER



ALBRECHT DÜRER
(1471 - 1528)

Five Figure Studies – The So-Called Desperate Man.

Etching on iron.

18.4 x 13.3 cm (7 1/4 x 5 1/4 inches)

Circa 1514/15

Bartsch 70; Meder 95/Ia (of IIb); Schoch-Mende-Scherbaum 79

Striking impression regarding both contrasts as well as depth effects, rarely as beautiful as here.

With abundant ink remaining in the shadows, resulting in effects of three dimensionality, as mentioned by Meder for the best impressions.

Becoming detectable only by degrees – and in particular compositions, so-to-speak experimentally – is the tonal process, associated with great expenditures of time and effort, which Dürer must have developed deliberately. There can be little doubt that here, around 1515, the five loosely rendered figures of the etching B. 70 were chosen for the purpose of achieving a new level of painterly modelling, as well as a new degree of artistic heightening, achieved by leaving abundant ink on the printing plate ...

According to virtually unanimous opinion, the artist's first attempt at etching on iron.

Responsible for the initial experiments with the new technique was Daniel Hopper, an etcher of armory and an artist, in Augsburg between 1501 and 1507.

To date, attempts to conclusively identify the various figures or to relate them to one another have been unsuccessful. The man seen in profile on the left may depict Dürer's brother Endres (Andreas); this figure – whose Michelangesque features are unmistakable – corresponds to a drawing that is dated 1514. The central figure too would be difficult to imagine without Michelangelo's precedent.

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The mysterious group of figures stands out in Dürer's work. The neutral title given here was first used by Dürsch in 1898, but the print has also been entitled 'The Dismayed Husband' (Hüsgen, 1798, 'The Bath' (Heller, 1827) and 'The Desperate Man' (von Retberg, 1871). Panofsky interpreted the print in terms of Dürer's continuing interest in types of melancholy to affect the human condition that so preoccupied medieval men of the day, with the man in the center, for example, who apparently tears his hair, signifying choleric melancholy, the sleeping figure representing phlegmatic melancholy and the pleasure-seeking satyr representing sanguine melancholy. (G. Bartrum)