

St. Jerome

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Take a deep look at the print I have just put into your hands. Does it not fill you with magnificent ideas and gorgeous feelings? It took me many a month of hard, diligent work to carve the copper plate from which it was made. My father, a goldsmith, trained me for his profession, so I am quite proficient at working with the basic precious metals: gold, silver, and copper. But, as you and the whole world know, I have become much more than a goldsmith. I have become an artist of exceedingly rare skill and prodigious accomplishment who has gained the attention of kings and even an emperor!

My aide, Herr Hans Fuchsjäger, said that you are an Englishman with education, wealth, experience, and favorable associations with lords and even a duke. That you are on your way south to visit the great cities of Florence, Siena, and Rome. And that you have a profound appreciation of art and of my work in particular.

Is it true that you desire to view my paintings? Well, that is impossible! For two reasons. First, nearly every painting I have done belongs to the man or institution for which I have painted it. They are not here in my studio, but rather reside in the palaces, churches, and city buildings for which they were intended. Second, I once kept in my studio the paintings I did for myself. But that ended the day Philip (the Contentious), Count Palatine and Duke of Palatinate-Neuburg, came to see me to purchase what he called a true Albrecht Dürer artwork, that is to say, a painting and not a print. I told him none were for sale, and he countered by saying he had 800 seasoned soldiers from the Palatinate outside the city in route to Vienna to fight the Mohammadans. Yes, he was trying to bend me like a nail into selling him a painting. I forceably said no again and showed him out of my studio. He did not turn his 800 onto the city nor onto me, but the experience was thoroughly unpleasant, something I care not to have again.

Of course, I agree that we should go back to discussing this print, the *Holy St. Jerome in His Study*. When you look at it, what do you see and what do you feel? Yes, the image is abundant with symbols and meanings. Some are traditionally associated with St. Jerome and some come from me. Yes, St. Jerome is revealed as a saint who thinks instead of a saint who suffers. After all, that is why St. Jerome is a Doctor of the Church. Yes, he is looking at the crucified Christ and the human skull beyond because he is contemplating the great question of what happens when we die. St. Jerome is a thinker and word crafter. He isn't one who just assumes he is going to

tumble into heaven after he dies. And, yes, he does indeed have many things in common with me. For instance, he communicated to all of Christendom his power as a linguist by translating the bible books into the holy language Latin. Just like I have communicated to all of Christendom, and well beyond, my power as an artist by creating beautiful prints that serve as ambassadors for and testaments to my skill. I must say, sir, that I am surprisingly happy with your observations and conclusions!

You may keep this print you hold now, and I will write a note to Herr Fuchsjäger telling him to give you the other two of my master prints, *Melencolia I* and *Knight, Death, and Devil*, as well as any extra woodcut prints we have. I will also tell him to write a note of introduction from me to Kaiser Maximilian that you can employ when you reach Innsbruck. You should be amicably received since it is all agreed that I will paint a portrait of the Kaiser when he next visits Nuremberg.

When you arrive in Innsbruck, show my introduction at the Kaiser's court and ask to visit the Court Church which is directly next to the Royal Residence. There you will see the magnificent future tomb of Maximilian I with a growing parade of larger-than-life bronze figures that depict the Kaiser's illustrious ancestors. Several of these I have designed including the statue of the English king named Arthur, who you certainly know and respect, that Peter Vischer the Elder cast in bronze for me!

So, sir, please take this note to my aide Herr Fuchsjäger, and may your travels enlighten your mind and enrich your soul.

