

RA

Royal Academy of Arts

Art Detectives A guide for young visitors

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Renaissance Impressions

You will need a pencil
to write and draw

Introduction

Renaissance Impressions: Chiaroscuro woodcuts from the Collections of Georg Baselitz and the Albertina, Vienna

The chiaroscuro woodcut technique revolutionised printmaking in the 16th century. But what does it mean?

‘Chiaroscuro’ is an Italian word which means ‘light/dark’ and describes the way artists can use light and shade to create a sense of volume when depicting an object, such as a human figure. Layers of coloured inks are used to give prints on paper some of the rich depth and 3D qualities of painting.

These woodcuts were the world’s first mechanically made colour prints. Many printmakers tried to claim the glory of inventing the chiaroscuro method, which was seen as revolutionary. This exhibition explores the history of the prints, how they were made and what they were based on.

Look out for the film at the entrance of the exhibition, which illustrates this complicated printing process!

Section 1.



Find number 2:
Hans Burgkmair the Elder, *Emperor Maximilian on Horseback, 1508 and 1518, Chiaroscuro woodcut*

This is a portrait of the Emperor Maximilian by the German artist Hans Burgkmair. Like many rulers, Maximilian was very concerned with what his people thought of him. He commissioned many portraits and images of himself as a fearsome and glorious leader.

How would you describe the figure of the Emperor in this woodcut?

Look at his armour and his horse. Do you think he looks like a soldier?

This image would have been sent out across his empire. What kind of message do you think Maximilian was trying to convey?

Section 1. (continued)



Find number 18:
Albrecht Dürer, *Rhinoceros*, 1515
and c. 1620, Chiaroscuro woodcut

This woodcut is of an Indian rhinoceros who was given as a gift from the Sultan Muzafar, ruler of Gujarat, to the governor of Portuguese India. Dürer never actually saw the animal himself, but based his drawing on descriptions in newsletters and from sketches that were sent to him.

Choose some words from the selection below that best describe how this rhino look to you:

Strong Cuddly

Fierce Funny Dangerous

Exotic Beautiful

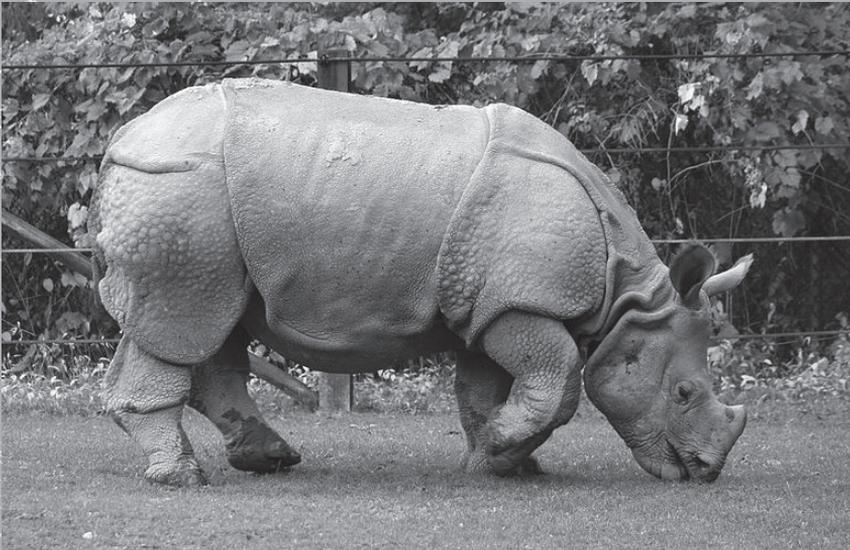


Find number 18:
Albrecht Dürer, *Rhinoceros*
(continued)

Here is a photo of a modern-day Indian rhino.
Compare this photo with Dürer's woodcut.

What has he captured accurately?
Is anything incorrect in his depiction?

Make a list of the differences between
the drawing and the photo.



Section 2.



Find numbers 53/54/55:
Antonio da Trento, after Parmigianino
Narcissus, c. 1527–30/31,
Chiaroscuro woodcut

The story of Narcissus comes from a Greek myth. As punishment for spurning the maiden Echo, the handsome youth Narcissus was made to fall in love with his own image, which would always be beyond his grasp: whenever he reached out to touch his reflection in a pool of water, it broke up. He was left heartbroken and faded away to nothing. Only a flower – the narcissus – remained in his place.

Can you spot Echo in this image? Where is she?

Why do you think the artist has portrayed Narcissus with his back to us?

Section 3.



Find numbers 93 and 94:
Master NDB, after Raphael (?), *The Massacre of the Innocents*, c. 1540–50,
Woodcut and chiaroscuro woodcut

The process of creating a chiaroscuro woodcut is a slow one, created in stages that each require a lot of skill. First, the black outline of a design is created using a 'line block'. Then a 'tone block' is used to lay down a coloured background and the highlights.

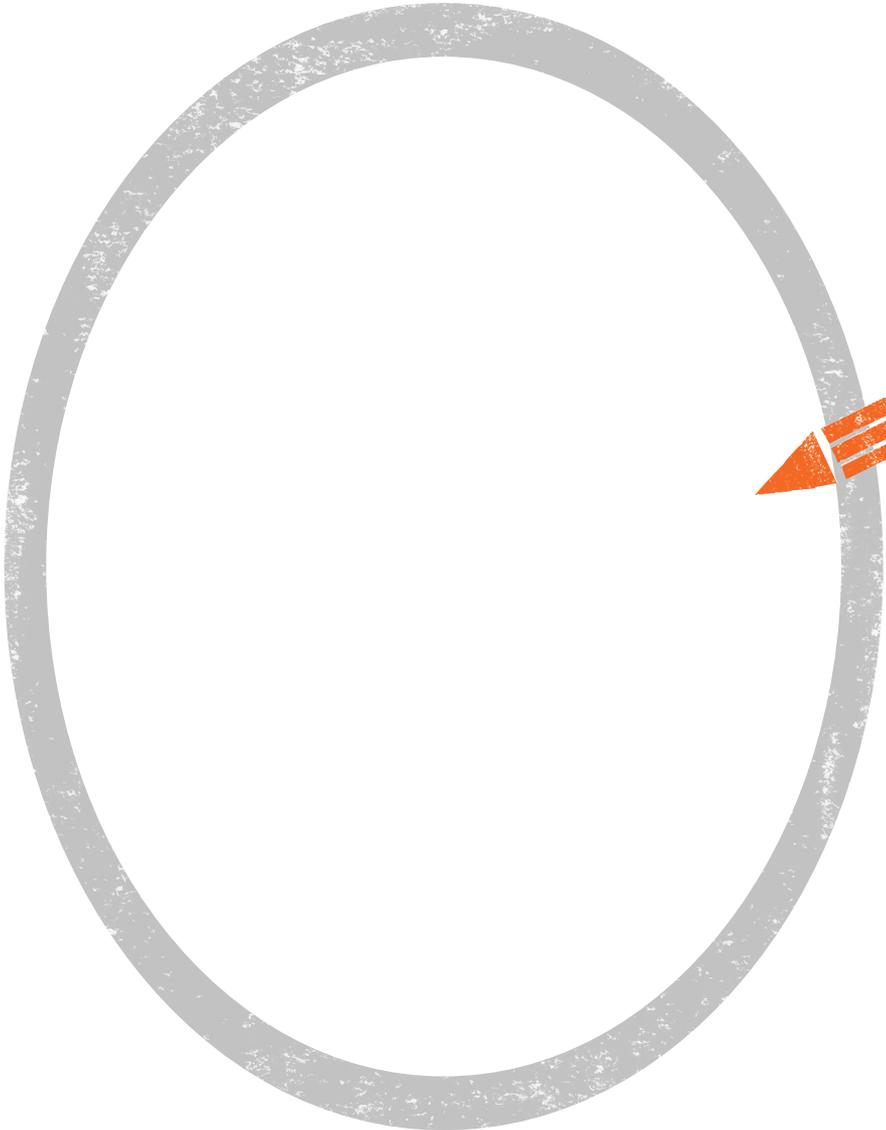
In these two works, we can see the black outline of the design, as well as the finished print, which has the coloured tones applied.

Describe the difference between the two works. Think about what effect the coloured layers have on the overall image.

How many tone blocks do you think have been used to create the final image? How can you tell?

Can you spot the white highlights where the paper has been left unprinted to show through? What kinds of shapes does the artist create with these?

Draw your favourite figure
in the shape below!



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If you would like to see your drawings on the RA website, please hand in your completed Art Detective at the Reception Desk. Alternatively, if you would like to work on your picture at home and send it to us later, you can post it to:

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