Explore *The Strange World of Albrecht Dürer* at the Clark

For Immediate Release - Digital images available upon request

WILLIAMSTOWN, MA– Considered by many to be the greatest German artist of all time, Albrecht Dürer was celebrated during his lifetime as a painter, printmaker, and writer. His innovative techniques revolutionized printmaking, and his theoretical writings transformed the study of human proportion. Deeply embedded in a tumultuous era of religious reformation and scientific inquiry, Dürer used his art to reflect the spiritual and social preoccupations of his time. *The Strange World of Albrecht Dürer*, on view at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, from November 14, 2010, through March 13, 2011, explores how and why Dürer’s visionary imagery remains arresting despite centuries of cultural change.

“Visitors will find monsters, knights, and angels in *The Strange World of Albrecht Dürer* exhibition, which focuses on Dürer’s fantastic imagination and timeless imagery,” said Michael Conforti, director of the Clark. “The Clark’s collection of works by this Renaissance master is extraordinary, and we are pleased to be presenting seventy-five powerful prints, all from our collection, in the first comprehensive display of these works in more than thirty-five years.”

*The Strange World of Albrecht Dürer* takes a unique approach to Dürer’s work by organizing his prints in themes that draw parallels to contemporary society: The Apocalypse, Symbolic Space, Battle and Anguish, Gender Anxiety, and Enigma.

Dürer’s *Apocalypse* series chronicles the end of the world as foretold in the New Testament’s book of Revelation. The fifteen prints that comprise the *Apocalypse* series are teeming with monsters, devils, angels, and saints from the artist’s fertile imagination. Originally published as a book in 1498, this series of woodcuts echoed the anxieties of a generation during which prophesies of impending doom circulated widely and were encouraged by the sixteenth-century European Christian Church. An original bound copy of the series on loan from the Chapin Library at Williams College is included in the exhibition. Today, these prints maintain their dramatic...
impact, tapping into our fascination with religious tension and our fear of the beasts that dwell between the realm of the real and unreal.

Dürer strove to create the illusion of three-dimensional space by framing the narrative action within architectural and landscape settings that heighten its subdued drama, particularly in his 1511 series Life of Virgin. The interplay between outside and inside, inclusion and exclusion, earth and heaven, are key to understanding the events that unfold in this series, which records the life of Mary from the courtship of her parents to her assumption into heaven. Unlike the highly emotive, chaotic quality of the Apocalypse woodcuts, these images are calm, contemplative, and earthbound.

Dürer explored the themes of anguish, suffering, and violence throughout history from classical, biblical, and contemporary times, often melding time periods in a single image. Around 1500, Dürer captured the horrors of the religious wars brought on by the Protestant Reformation, Christ's suffering, and the effects of his crucifixion in images of the Passion. These images were suffused with a sense of anguish that remains as potent today as in Dürer's time. Similar to the way in which the violent imagery in twenty-first century media mirrors current events, the anguish in Dürer's images reflected society's fascination with human suffering.

Dürer's frequent focus on gender relationships ranged from Adam and Eve, depicting the biblical first couple, to suggestive dream states, to violent and erotic mythological creatures. The anxiety expressed in these prints centers on the perceived power struggle between women and men and the threat of unleashed passions. The shifting meanings of these works are exemplified in their frequently changing titles; the luminous nude Nemesis was titled The Great Fortune in the seventeenth century, and Four Naked Women was referred to as The Four Witches in 1675. The impact of these prints is no less powerful today when gender equality remains a heated issue in every sphere of life.

The enigmatic nature of Dürer's prints, including Knight, Death and the Devil, Melencolia I, The Desperate Man, and his series of knots has encouraged a wide range of interpretive speculation. Scholarly investigations have incorporated philosophy, popular culture, literature, religious doctrine, and feminist interpretations in attempts to fasten meaning onto these curious images. Symbolism has been the overarching tool used to unlock elements in Dürer's compositions, but this approach has its limitations. Dürer's vast imagination allows us to interpret these works anew for each successive generation.

The Clark's collection of more than 300 Dürer prints is among the finest in North America. The bulk of the collection was acquired in 1968 from the collection of Tomáš Joseph Harris, a scholar, artist, and art dealer who served in the British Intelligence during the Second World War. The seventy-five prints included in the exhibition represent the best of the Clark's Dürer's holdings: Hercules (1496), the
Apocalypse series (1496–1498), Nemesis (c. 1502), Knight, Death and the Devil (1513), Melencolia I (1514), and others.

The Strange World of Albrecht Dürer is proudly presented by Crane & Co.

The Clark
The Clark is one of the few major art museums that also serves as a leading international center for research and scholarship. The Clark presents public and education programs and organizes groundbreaking exhibitions that advance new scholarship, and its research and academic programs include an international fellowship program and conferences. Its 140-acre campus in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts includes Stone Hill Center, designed by Tadao Ando and opened in 2008, which houses galleries, meeting and classroom facilities, and the Williamstown Art Conservation Center. The Clark, together with Williams College, sponsors one of the nation’s leading master’s programs in art history.

In June 2008, the Clark opened Stone Hill Center, the first phase of its expansion and campus enhancement project. Designed by Tadao Ando, the 32,000-square-foot, wood-and-glass building houses galleries, a meeting and studio art classroom, an outdoor café, and the Williamstown Art Conservation Center.

The Clark is located at 225 South Street in Williamstown, Massachusetts. The galleries are open Tuesday through Sunday, 10:00 am to 5:00 pm (daily in July and August). Admission is free November through May. Admission is $15 June 1 through October 31. Admission is free for children 18 and younger, members, and students with valid ID. For more information, call 413 458 2303 or visit clarkart.edu.

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FUNDING PROVIDED IN PART BY
 MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL