

the Whitworth

Audio Descriptions transcript

June 2023

AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

Audio descriptions of artworks from the collection of the Whitworth, The University of Manchester.



AUDIO DESCRIPTION: The Monstrous Pig of Landser 1496, by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)

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An unusual pig stands dead centre in the square-shaped print before us. Despite only living for one day the proportions of the animal resemble an adult pig. It is depicted in side-profile, its head facing off toward our right. At first glance, the artist engraved one pig standing directly behind another- rendering the second pig mostly invisible behind the pig in the foreground. Closer inspection of this engraving reveals something else. The pig is a conjoined birth with one head but two tongues, which protrude from its gaping mouth like the forked tongue of a serpent. The outline of some teeth can be vaguely made out from the dark outline of its gaping jaws.

A small, beady eye looks down toward the ground. Two ears sit directly upon the creature's head. They stand upright like the alert, pointy ears of a collie. The animal also has another pair of ears situated in the usual place for a pig; on top of the head and off to the side, with one ear being situated on either side. Moving our gaze further along the sow's body, we can see that the animal has two backs. A pair of legs jut out from each back, around the shoulder area. They arc upwards and the cloven feet at the end of these legs point towards the creature's rear end.

Thick bristles run along both of the animal's backs. The backs of the pig separates towards the rear end to give the pig two rear ends, although one is obscured by the rear in the foreground. Born with eight legs and shown standing on six, the animal has two sets of forelegs, one pair situated upon its shoulders, the other in the usual place. Each rear end has a tail situated in the normal place. The way the animal has been depicted, as a large adult with an almost distressed expression, make it uncomfortable viewing.

Behind the pig, Landser Castle can be seen, its drawbridge down, surrounded by trees. A rocky outcrop rises from distant rolling hills to the right of where the creature stands. Further to the top right, mountains slink down to meet a still lake or flat ocean, with the small outline of a town nestled in a valley between the mountains.

In the foreground of the piece, to our bottom left, what appears to be another rocky formation disappears into the bottom left corner. The top of the formation is covered with a smooth mound of grass. The bottom of this formation stretches out towards the centre of the piece and tapers off. Just above the formation, but underneath the standing figure of the strange pig, there sits a small, round rock. Another, smaller rock can be spotted off to the bottom right of the piece, with the pig appearing to glance down toward it.

Right in the centre of the bottom of the piece there is a monogram. A large 'A' stands above a smaller 'D' and surrounds it like an architectural A-frame. These are the artist's initials, letting us know that the piece is an engraving by Albrecht Dürer. This piece is called 'The Monstrous Pig of Landser' and it is a depiction of what was really a harmless, if unusual piglet born in Landser, Alsace in 1496 which became a newsworthy story. The engraving dates to the same year the piglet was born.