

# the Whitworth

## Audio Descriptions transcript

May 2022

### AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

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



**AUDIO DESCRIPTION:** St John's Vision of Christ and the Seven Golden Candlesticks (from The Apocalypse) by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)

**All of the Audio Descriptions are available to listen to at:**

<https://aplacebetweenthetrees.com/audio-description/>

**Social tags:**

**Instagram** – @whitworthart

**Twitter** – @whitworthart

**Hashtag** – #WhitworthAudioDescriptions #TheWhitworthAtHome  
#GalleryInThePark

Albrecht Dürer's *Apocalypse* was the first book to be both illustrated and published by an artist. Unlike the usual combination of text and small images on one page, Dürer made full-page images with the text at the back, giving the illustrations to the mystical text great dramatic impact. This print is no exception.

This Biblical themed relief print is part of a series of intricate woodcut prints from *Apocalypse* by the artist. A cloud formation in a figure of eight, binds the scene together and forms the stage for the scene to play out. The scene is contained within a portrait format, a singular fine black line forms the border. Despite being a woodcut, the ornate detail of the lines has the appearance of a fine nibbed pen. There is no colour in the print, Dürer has singularly used black ink which has been applied to the wood block. However, the fine cuts he made onto the wooden block has built up tonal contrast in the scene between black and white. The whitest areas contain no lines, whereas the darkest areas contain a build up of fine lines, building up to crosshatched lines in the darkest areas. It is evident from the high level of intricate detail achieved through woodcut printing, that Albrecht Dürer is a master of print. The cuts into the wooden block are fine, confident and precise.

The print depicts a dreamlike scene, with Christ in the top centre of the figure of eight. Christ is positioned sitting atop one of two curved bows. Both bows extend from the clouds forming the bridge in the centre of the print. Christ wears a long flowing garment, belted at the waist. The shape of the garment falls loosely around Christ's body. However, the way the fabric drapes around the lines of his body, we can clearly see that his legs are crossed over at the ankles, and his knees are splayed out. Christ's feet are crossed at the ankles and rest on the lower bow.

A heightened sense of drama is created from the poses and expressions of the figures. Christ is portrayed as an elderly man, with a long curly beard and hair. He stares directly at the viewer, breaking the fourth wall of the scene. We are confronted by his gaze and reminded of his power. As the half-millennium of 1500 approached, the faith of many Christians was sustained by the expectation of Christ's imminent second coming. The stories of the *Apocalypse* found in the Book of Revelation were widely known, and these foretold the destruction of the wicked, the overthrow of Satan and the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. Many disasters and unexplained events of the day were interpreted as punishments from God on the sinful world. A number of unnatural events were widely reported (made possible due to the invention of printing), and Dürer's

woodcut version of the Apocalypse story captured the spirit of the times with the drama of its illustrations.

All the descriptive passages in the text are difficult to translate into black and white images, however Dürer manages to convey the heightened drama within the vision, the original text reads as follows,

*"And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot... His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire...And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead."*(The Revelation of St. John the Divine: I, 12-16).

Dürer is able to convey this story and narrative through allegorical imagery. Christ is not depicted with a circular halo. Instead, holy beams of light radiate from Christ's head, North, East and West. Flames reach out from his brow, giving the figure a mythic quality, which contrasts the much more humble figure of St John who kneels at his feet. The hilt of a sword hovers at his lips, and tilts down to his left. Below the thin blade of the sword Christ holds an open book in his left hand. His fingers clasp the bottom of the book which is turned to the viewer. Christ's right arm is extended out, with the palm also facing towards us. Seven stars circle around Christ's extended palm. The stars are small and hexagonal, with lines shooting from their centres, giving them a shimmering effect.

The scene is not flat, there is a sense of depth created by the formation of the candles and staging of the candlesticks. Seven candles are arranged in a circular formation beneath Christ, who hovers above this formation. Perspective is created through the scale of the candles, the layering of the clouds and also through the darker fine lines behind the clouds in the very background. The clouded areas are free from detail, only their edges are delineated through bubbled and rounded lines. This contrast and use of perspective gives the clouded areas a solid feel, with St John and the candlesticks standing on these areas. Three candlesticks are positioned on either side of the scene, with the last in the centre foreground.

The candlesticks are ornate and traditional with a circular base, thin stem and a smaller circular plate where the candle is placed in the centre. The candles themselves are also a traditional shape; long, thin, and uniform, stuck into the middle of the top plate. Although the general size and shape of the candle sticks are the same, the detail of the stems for each

is different in character. Some with bulb-like spindles, twisting up from their bases. Some of the bases display leaves, thorns and floral motifs, which decorate the bases and thread up the stem in knots, ridges and twists. Within the original text, God commands St. John to write down his visions of the seven stars he holds in his hand, and the seven candlesticks, explained as the seven angels of the seven churches, and the seven churches themselves. The candlesticks are a fine example of this intricate attention to detail in this print, each with a distinct personality to convey this symbolism.

Although the scene depicts St John's vision, St John is set within the scene, behind the centre foreground candle. St John is knelt humbly at Christ's feet to our left. He is turned away from us, so that only the right profile of his face is partially visible. His hands are held before him, in prayer, and he gazes down towards them. His expression is almost fearful, as if humbled by his vision. His hair is shoulder length and falls around his face. St John wears a simple robe, the lengthy fabric trails down to the ground, we can see the soles of his feet from beneath his robe indicating that he is kneeling. The folds and crinkles in the fabric are highly textured and detailed, created using really fine lines which follow the folds of the fabric, and crosshatching where there are dark folds. Where the train of his robe ends, are the letters AD. The letter A, with a smaller capital D nesting under the legs of the A. Albrecht Durer's famed signature.