

“Evaporating Dürer”

Although Albrecht Dürer’s images of earths real and imagined – mountain, cliffs, watery gorges, ravines, and quarries – has long fascinated scholars, a vast literature has left unnoticed the fact that Dürer’s own anguished theory resided *in* the idea of art as extraction: “For truly art is implanted in nature, and if you can draw it out then it will be yours” [*Dan warhaftige steckt dy kunst jn der natur. We sy raws kan reissen, der hat sÿ.*] Dürer’s Neoplatonic terms seem to frame an inchoately transalpine conceptualization of noble art *ad vivum*. But Dürer’s verb *reissen* also yokes the image of drawing-out to a gesture – a conditionally-tensed one - of geological violence, of rocky difficulty. Art-making, particularly that as rehearsed in some of Durer’s least-known landscape watercolors of the 1490s, indeed pictures itself as a kind mining. Less humanist exhumation (and elevation) of the buried and neglected, its material gesture towards its “sources” seems perhaps larceny, theft, even madness.

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