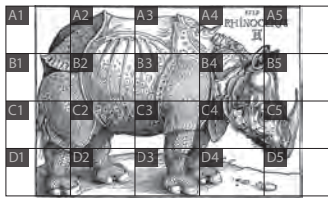
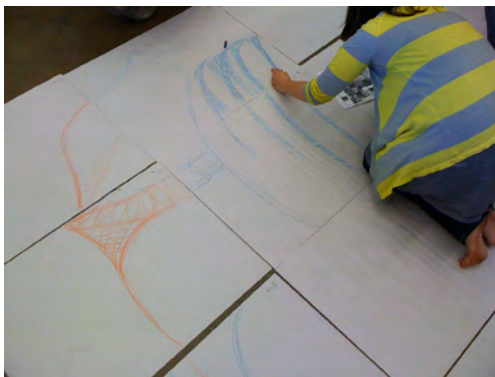


Rhino Woodcut by Albrecht Dürer, 1515



Grid dissection and students at work planning new drawing for life-size scale transformation



Seen and Unseen by Patrick Grigsby
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Albrecht Dürer never saw the rhino depicted in his famous 1515 woodcut. Drawing from other artists' drawings, accounts and descriptions, the prolific draftsman fashioned a close approximation to what some infer to be an Indian Rhinoceros. The account of the doomed meeting of Dürer and the rhino made for great invention by ten printmaking students in the School of Art + Art History at the University of Florida.

The challenge for my class exploring figure/ground relationships was to make a life-sized treatment after Dürer's investigation. I'll pause here to mention that this course emphasizes contemporary studio practice and materials and that the students were tested to achieve more than a meticulous enlargement of Dürer's infamous line work. I hoped to stimulate the students' collective mind's eye—I wanted them to see skin, wrinkles, and folds; find light, shadow and space—flexing form and space in two dimensions. A large image was anticipated, but however well it related to the original woodcut was to be affected by complementary mark making among the three student teams. I dared them to see this semi-familiar creature anew while losing themselves in the marks, rather than its "rhino-ness".

How much more rhino savvy these students were than Dürer is highly suspect. Yes, most could claim seeing a rhinoceros at a zoo, theme park, on video or as animal cracker, but like Dürer, they did not occupy shared space with one for study or observation. Not a completely level playing field, but demanding that they struggle to transform Dürer's rhino to a life scale seemed comparable to his own undertaking—having never done such a thing. Dürer's woodcut was their vehicle for exploring how to do it.

These print students are aware of emerging technology and methods to ease fabrication. Laser devices to plot and cut enough wood panels or other 21st century materials and masking agents come to mind for a spot on enlargement. Indeed their time was short at about four weeks. Instead, all I provided them was a grid division of Dürer's rhino in conjunction with our course method preceding this final collaborative project. Earlier projects had emphasized the exchange of positive and negative shapes to reveal eye flexing optical definitions of form in place of outlines. Edges revealed themselves as bristling networks of marks and systems of lines within abutting and overprinted shapes. Positive and negative shapes simultaneously defined each other through a drifting equilibrium of figure/ground.



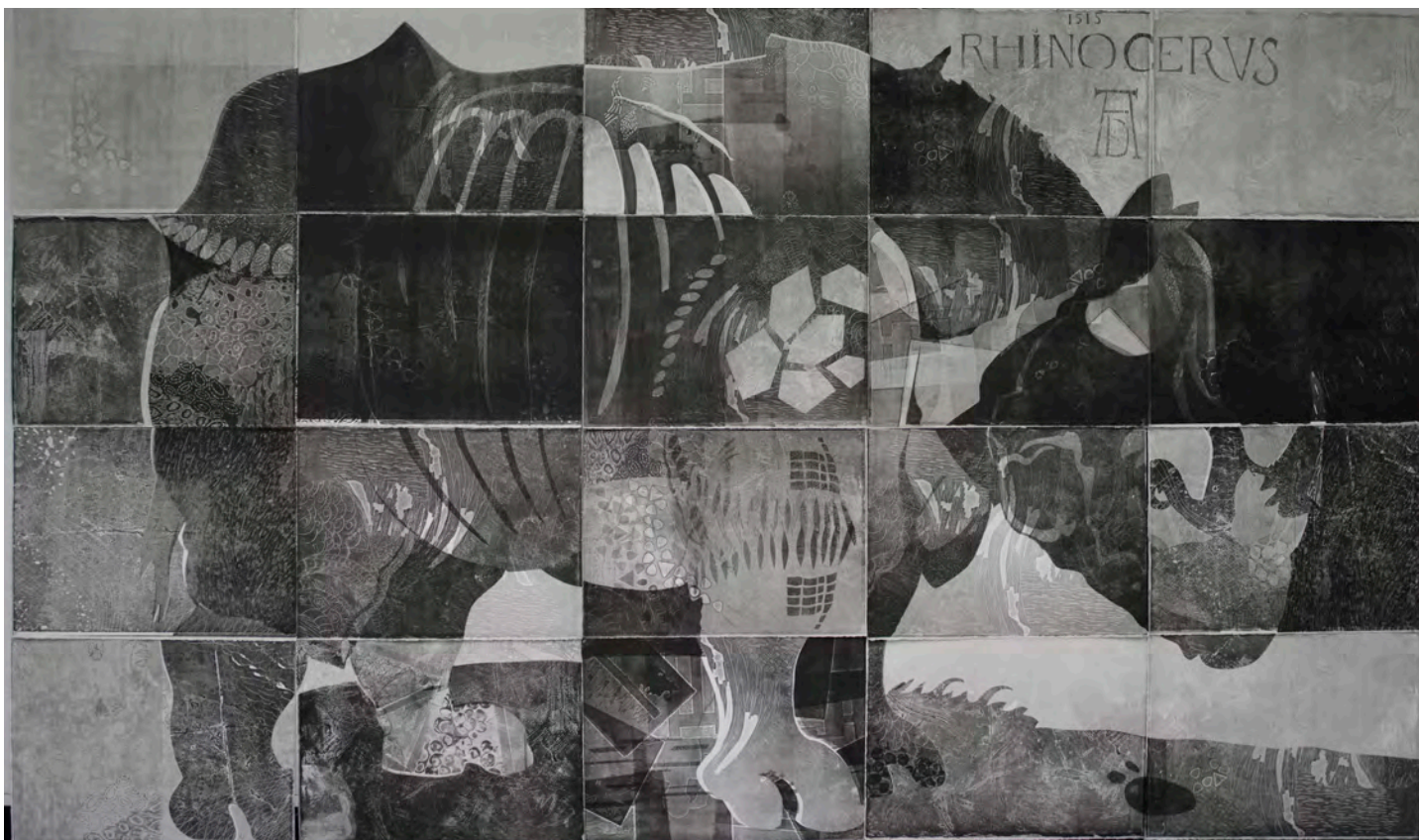
Plate construction and invention on the press



Grid comparison of Dürer's print to the students' print

BFK Rives paper, wood glue and gesso collagraph plate constructions plus inexpensive, flat, thin PVC plastic sheets used to cut images in relief were the matrices to render ink to paper. Throughout the term the students explored the iterations from their own plate constructions in conjunction with their classmates'. Multi-passed, rolled, wiped as intaglio and viscosity printed results lined the drying rack. The press became more of a drawing tool than the deliverer of editioned, transferred ink. Each successive pass revealed layers of tone and shadow closing down the unbridled light of the paper. Image construction emerged that was impossible to fully envision from planning alone. Smartly constructed plates yielded Mendelian moves of genetic investigation. The topographical bump of rolled collagraph plates transferred painterly ink strokes to paper. Subtle ink transfer by way of pressure printing the lightweight and flexible collagraph and plastiboard surfaces made for predictable wisps of grey against the bright white paper. Relief cavities of negative space from both plate constructions allowed revelatory details from earlier print choices to compound the layered results. Plates were rotated, paper masks were cut and each was placed spontaneously at the press in a cooperative mode of shared invention.

Surprise was the common denominator of the life-sized rhino prints. The biggest of which was that the 20 seamed images each sprung from the fluid permutations of three 22" x 30" collagraph plates and three 22 x 15 inch plastiboard cuts. Some prints were amended only by an additional recycled plate construction from earlier assignments. Each rhino print, whether masked, overprinted or flipped in its positive and negative relationships speaks to the goals to render a commanding presence. In and of themselves, each literal, abstract or non-representational segment makes for a confounding whole. A unity based on a master work, whose parts peel off to elicit organic revelations of surface upon close inspection.



Rhino after Albrecht Dürer, 88" x 150", 2011



University of Florida
School of Art + Art History students:
Brett Beasley
Katie Bosley
Chelsea Graubert
Chandler Holmes
Amanda O'Dell
Katherine Okins
Nathaniel Thompson
Layne Thue-Bludworth
Alexa Udermann
Lauren Wellmer



I was impressed by how these small moves empowered the students to create fearlessly in the studio. The scale and grid offered the students a freedom of marks and an important studio lesson of unhinging image making from the decision of what to make images of. They knew where they were going, but worried not about their arrival. They were looking back at Dürer to advance their way-finding.

The resulting image construction of twenty seamed 22 x 30 inch sheets of white BFK Rives paper was only finally seen assembled and installed upon completion of every print. Not a single sheet of paper was lost to poor planning or to its close cousin, over planning. One group's conflicted outcome quickly emerged as another's necessary element to yield yet another result.

This work is on exhibition as part of the University of Florida Alagarto student printmaking guild from January 9 through February 1, 2012. Photographs by Chandler Holmes. To view the prints and details online, please visit <http://www.patrickgrigsby.us/rhino/mosaicprint.html>.