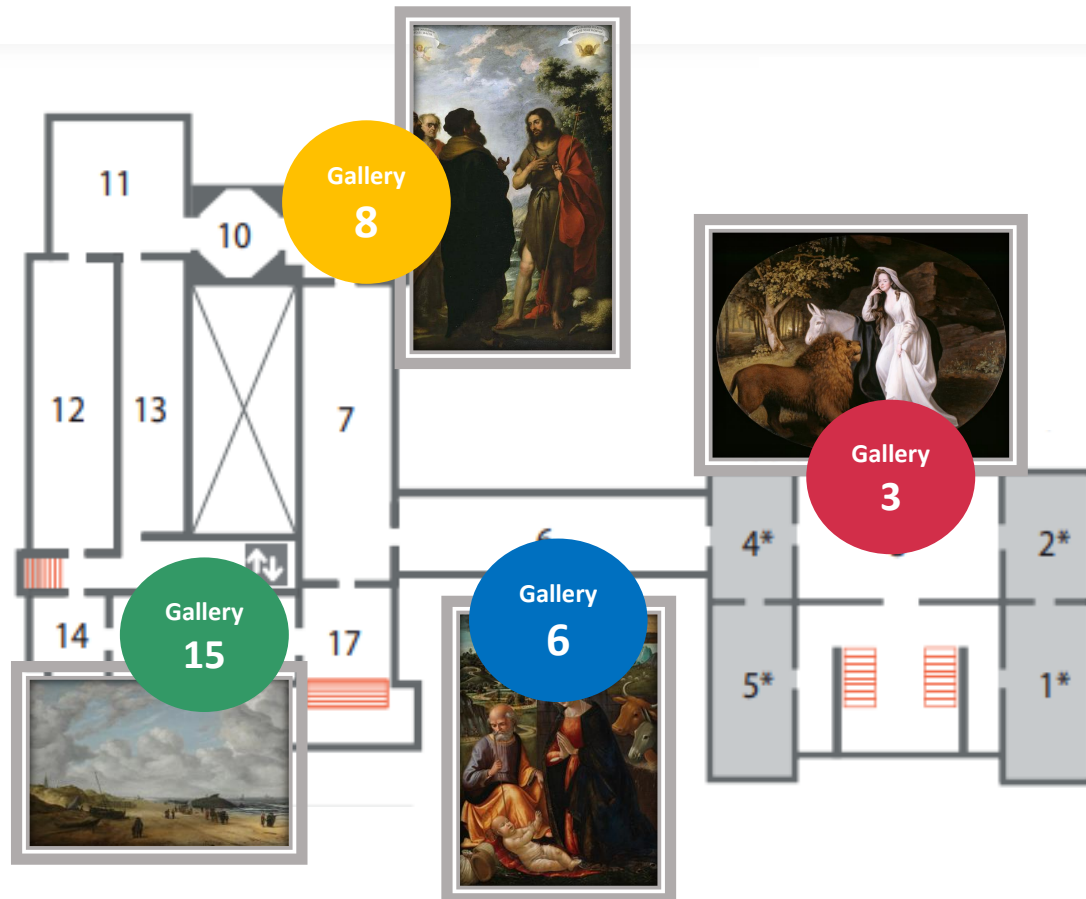


Fitzwilliam Museum ~ Top Floor

Animals & artistic licence!



Notes

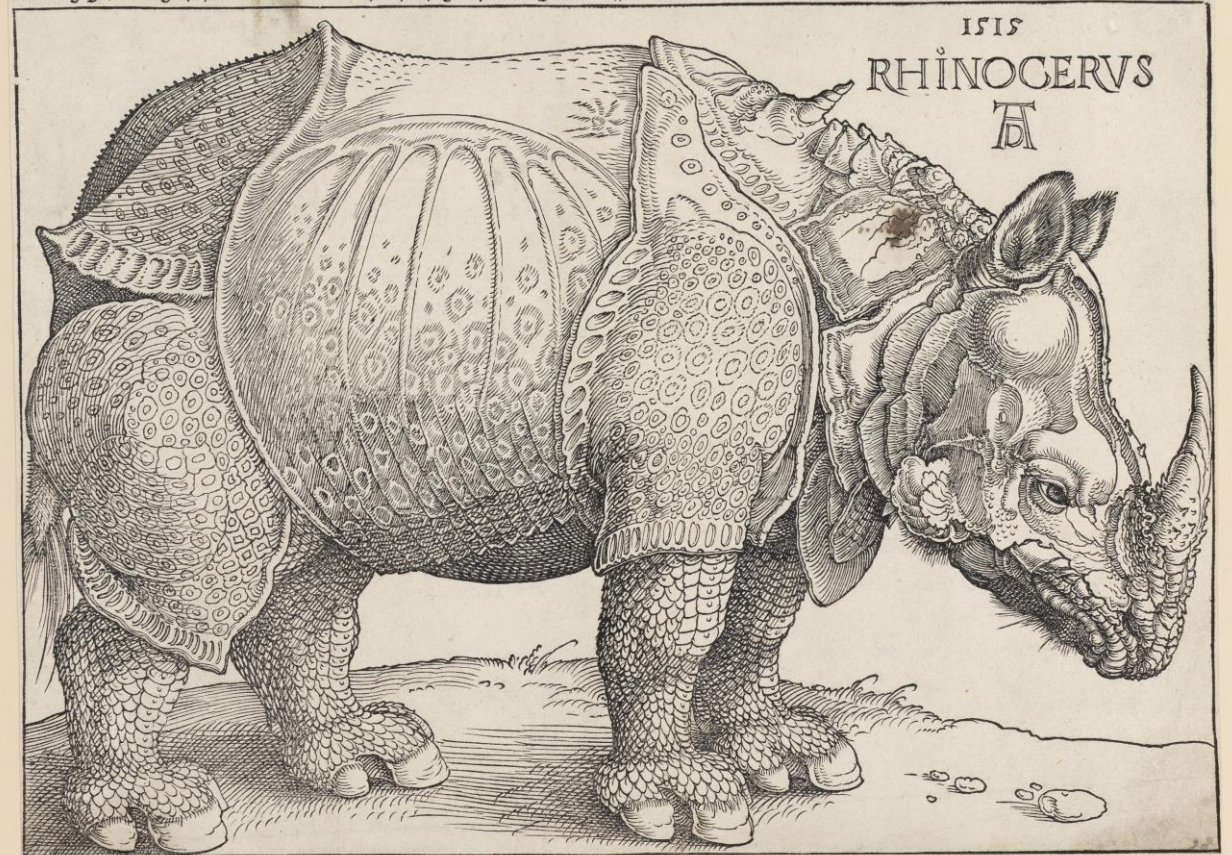
The
Fitzwilliam
Museum
CAMBRIDGE

Museum Walk

Animals & artistic licence!

How artists have portrayed animals to capture our imaginations and tell stories

1515 Christus gepurt. 1513. Jar. Abt. 1. May. Hat man dem großmechtigen König von Portugall Emanuel gen Lysabona pracht auß India/ ein sollich lebendig Thier. Das mannen sie Rhinocerus. Das ist hie mit aller feiner gestalt abgesondert. Es hat ein fard wie ein gespiedte Schildkröt. Und ist vñ dicken Schalen vberlegt fast fest. Und ist in der groß als der Hellsandte Aber nyderrechter von paynen/ vnd fast wehastig. Es hat ein charff starck Horn vom auff der nase/ Das begynnt es albeg zu wegen wo es bey staynen ist. Das dösfig Thier ist des Hellsandte todt seynde. Der Hellsandte fürcht es fast vbel/ dann wo es In antumbt/ so laufft In das Thier mit dem kopff zwischen dye södern payn. vnd reyst der Hellsandte vnder am pauch auff vñ erwürgt In/ des mag er sich nit erweern. Dann das Thier ist also gewapent/ das In der Hellsandte nichts kan thun. Sie sagen auch das der Rhynocerus Schnell/ strydig vnd listig sey.



Broadside on a rhinoceros

1515, Albrecht Dürer (1471 -1528) German

Is this rhinoceros wearing armour? Dürer, who made this print had never seen a real rhino, instead he used a written description and sketch by someone else as his source material. The picture does though combine's his passion for science with his gift for the awesome and fantastic. Across Europe, Dürer's rhino was taken to be the real-deal well into the 18th century, when actual rhinos toured the continent and dispelled the illusion.

Gallery
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St. John the Baptist with the Scribes and Pharisees

1665 by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682) Spanish

Like artists before and indeed after, Murillo faced a complex challenge in this picture, how to represent Jesus, the Son of God, in the form of a lamb?

This couldn't be a lamb in its natural state, leaping, romping, grass munching, this needed to be a lamb that conveyed the qualities associated with 'The Divine, with God'.

Murillo created an animal that looks like a lamb, but at the same time conveys 'un-lamblike' qualities, for example: loyalty, this lamb sits quiet and close to St John, at his feet; modesty and sweetness, this lamb gazes downwards with dark eyes and pert ears; and beauty and dignity, this lamb has a deep, luxurious fleece and sits with an elegantly placed legs.

Gallery
6



The Nativity

Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494) Italian

When first looking at this picture our eyes are drawn to Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child, but where do they go after that?

Perhaps our eyes travel to the other occupants of the slightly derelict stable, the cow (ox) and donkey (ass) as they look on, faces gentle and innocent, adding to the tender reverence of the scene.

Although we might imagine that both these animals would prefer to be in the fields, our artist has placed them here, painting them with the same sensitivity, rich palette and delicate brush strokes as the other figures – a nod perhaps towards ideas of equality and humility, at the heart of this story?

Isabella Saltonstall as Una in Spenser's 'Faerie Queene'

1782 George Stubbs (1724-1806) British

Gallery
3



This scene from an epic poem centers around six virtues, six ideas that the artist needed to communicate in one image!

The 'Queene' takes care of three virtues 'holiness, chastity and temperance'; how then might the lion and donkey represent the remaining three?

Stubbs, one of the most celebrated animal artists of his time, had a real challenge here, to depict with anatomical correctness, the mighty lion and humble donkey, and to imbue them with the virtues of 'friendship, justice and courtesy'.

Some visual ideas which perhaps indicate these are; the normally fierce lion shown with a gentle adoring gaze in a respectful, humble stance (friendship and courtesy) and the donkey, a beast of burden shown towering above the Lion with glowing, white coat (justice?).

View of Scheveningen Sands

c.1641
Hendrick van Anthonissen (1605-1656) Dutch

Gallery
15



Why is this whale sitting upright on the shoreline? It doesn't look as though it's in distress. Has it been beached, or could it simply have come to look at what's happening on land?

The beaching of whales on this coastline would have caused much interest and may have helped with supplies in winter months; is that why the artist has painted it with a lack of sentimentality, or could it be that it's just not a very good depiction of a whale?

Whilst we don't know the answer to this, we do know that this whale hasn't always been admired. For many years it was missing from the picture having been painted over, possibly because beached whales were viewed as unlucky. In 2014 a keen conservator, intrigued by the lack of focus in the picture revealed its secret when carefully scraping away layers of paint that had hidden the whale for many, many years.