

The story goes that in the fifteenth century, in a tiny village near Nuremberg, Germany, lived a family with 18 children. In order to keep food on the table for his large family, the father—a goldsmith by profession—worked almost 18 hours a day. Despite their hopeless situation, two of the Dürers' elder children had a dream. They both wanted to pursue their talent for art, but they knew full well that their father could never afford to send either of them to Nuremberg to study at the academy. After many long discussions, the two boys finally worked out a pact. Albert said, "I'll go down in the mines. With my earnings, I'll support you while you attend the academy for four years. When you complete your studies, you'll support me, either with the sales of your artwork or, if necessary, also by working in the mines." His brother Albrecht agreed and went off to Nuremberg to study art at the academy. Meanwhile, Albert went down into the dangerous mines and, for the next four years, financed his brother, whose work at the academy was almost an immediate sensation. Albrecht's etchings, his woodcuts, and his oils were far better than those of most of his professors, and by the time he graduated, he was beginning to earn high fees for his works. When the young artist returned to his village, the Dürer family held a festive dinner to celebrate Albrecht's triumphant homecoming. After a long and memorable meal, Albrecht rose at the head of the table to thank his beloved brother for the years of support that had allowed Albrecht to fulfill his ambition. His closing words were, "And now, Albert, blessed brother of mine, it is your turn. Now you can go to Nuremberg to pursue your dream, and I will take care of you. All heads turned to the far end of the table where Albert sat, tears streaming down his pale face, shaking his lowered head from side to side while he sobbed and repeated, over and over, "No, no, no... no." Finally, Albert rose, wiped the tears from his cheeks and said, "No, brother. I cannot go to Nuremberg. It is too late for me. Look what four years in the mines have done to my hands! The bone in every finger has been smashed, and lately I have been suffering from arthritis so badly in my right hand that I cannot make delicate lines on parchment or canvas with a pen or a brush. No, brother, for me it is too late." And in order to show his gratitude to Albert, Albrecht Dürer drew his brother's abused hands with palms together and thin fingers stretched skyward. He called his powerful drawing simply Hands, and the whole world almost immediately opened their hearts to his great masterpiece. k 10 9