

Melancholia

By Didier Mutel & Nicolas Bardey
Atelier Didier Mutel. Orchamps, 2021.

Melancholia I (1514), a copperplate engraving by the German artist Albrecht Dürer, is one of the most celebrated—and mysterious—art works of the Renaissance. The image is symbolic, conceptual, cryptic, and striking in its execution. By referring to a number of artistic, religious, philosophical and scientific traditions, Dürer produced a complex composition that explores the limits and possibilities of an intellectual approach to artistic creation. With the aid of an extraordinary symbolic richness, *Melancholia I* has come to represent the rational and imaginative world of science and art.



An undisputed icon in the world of printmaking, Dürer's print has created an extraordinary labyrinth of contradictory understandings, and *Melancholia I* is the subject of infinite interpretations. These contradictory interpretations help to accentuate the enigmatic character of the engraving. Research on *Melancholia I* has led to a nearly inexhaustible mass of documents. However, no single satisfactory interpretation has followed.

In 2018, the engraver Didier Mutel and the graphic designer Nicolas Bardey began work on *Melancholia II, III, and IV*, a collaborative response to Dürer's print, which they present here in a series that combines engraving and serigraphy.

Melancholia II, III, and IV emerges from each artist's personal point of view; simultaneously the quest for a new interpretation of an emblematic and iconic work, but also a collaboration that spans several eras, merging two graphic languages into a single space. A central point of their investigation is how digital technology represents and relates to works of the past.

The portfolio consists of a set of 12 prints, engravings and serigraphs as follows:

• *Melancholia II* (2018)

1 plate, 80 x 120 cm

• *Melancholia III* (2020)

9 plates, 50 x 65 cm

• *Melancholia IV* (2020)

2 plates, 56 x 76 cm

Total of 12 plates

Please inquire for the introductory sale price of this set (until Sept. 2021), which is limited to 20 copies.



Above: Proofs from *Melancholia III* on the drying rack in Orchamps, France.

Detailed Description of the portfolio:

Melancholia I (1514) is the work of Albrecht Dürer, the initial masterpiece [not included].

***Melancholia II* (2018)**

• 1 plate (80 x 120 cm)

Serigraph on Velin d'ARCHES paper

Limited edition of 70 copies

Numbered and signed by D.M. and N.B.

Dürer's original *Melancholia I* randomly dissolves into a modern digital graphic interpretation symbolized by the grid-shaped pixilated pattern that subsumes the work.

This print raises the question of the role of electronic media, of digital graphic interpretation, of the erasure of the original, of the passage of time.



***Melancholia III* (2020)**

• 9 plates (50 x 65 cm).

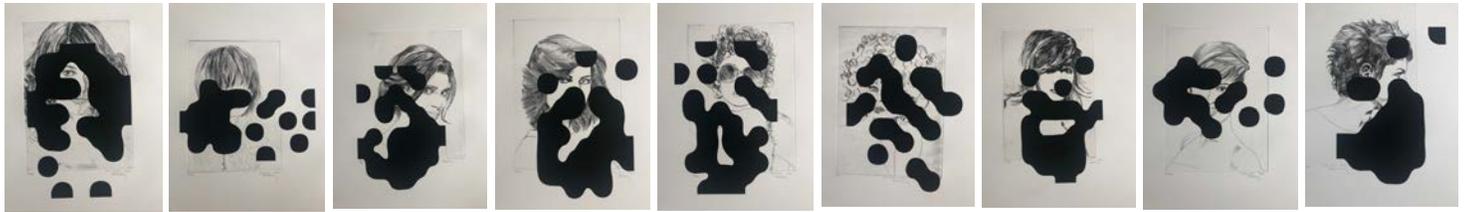
Dry point printed on Velin d'ARCHES paper.

Then serigraphy printed over the intaglio.

Limited edition of 20 copies, plus two artist proofs

Numbered and signed by D.M. and N.B.

In *Melancholia III*, Didier Mutel responds to the question of whether Dürer's central figure is a woman, a man, or an angel, with 9 engraved portraits.



Nicolas Bardey responded by scanning Mutel's original engravings, reducing their definition digitally then converting the images into extremely abstracted shapes, which were then over-printed as serigraphs that obscure the originals. Bardey's technique combines an aesthetically decorative frame with code, mathematics and a great mystery. These elements combine and participate in asking questions posed by Dürer's original work.

The nine portraits of *Melancholia III* series are an experimental attempt to discover the identity of the angel who appears in Dürer's *Melancholia I* (experts continue to ask the question: is it a man or a woman?).

Melencholia IV (2020)

• 2 plates (56 x 76 cm).

• Plate 1: embossing on Velin d'ARCHES of a computer hard drive.

Then serigraphy over this impression.

Limited edition of 20 copies, numbered and signed by Didier Mutel and Nicolas Bardey.

A computer hard drive, extracted from one of the first generations of computers, served as the matrix for this impression. The hard disk's memory asserts itself as a silent imprint of information now lost, yet it maintains its decorative role as an object.

In the center of this circle, a serigraphed disk, in black, is a response anchored in an invisible sphere.

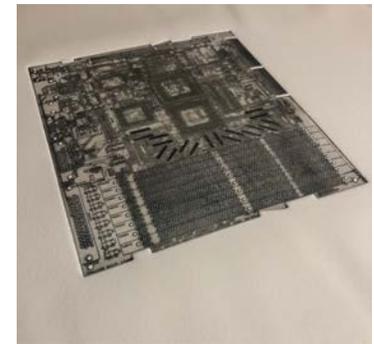


• Plate 2: intaglio printing of a computer printed circuit pressed on vellum arches.

Format 56 x 76 cm.

Edition limited to 20 copies, numbered and signed.

The dematerialization inherent in the digital is here complete, the angel is lost and no converted code can retrieve the figure, nor Dürer's engraving, which has completely disappeared into an illegible circuit.



Melencholia IV stands for the abstracted memory of a manifest work of the Renaissance.

