



# ***Premodern Beliefs and their Reception***

## ***2025 Seminar Series***

**Date:** Monday 18 August 2025

**Time:** 1pm (AEDT)

**Attend via Teams link [here](#)**

## **'Wonder, mourning, and pious materiality: Albrecht Dürer's 1503 record of blood rain'**

The German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) left an unprecedented number of written as well as visual sources in his personal archives. Many concerned commissions and theories of art, but others are more wide-ranging. They provide a window onto the social, religious, emotional and material dynamics of life in the city of Nuremberg – one of the most important imperial cities of the era – as well as onto Dürer's unique concerns. This paper uses one exceptional document as springboard to examine the material and emotional culture of wonders at this time. This is a single extant leaf from a now-lost notebook, known as the *Gedenkbuch* or 'book of remembrances'. Dürer added to the page over many years. It records the deaths of both his parents, anxiously tallies up his belongings and financial circumstances, and – the primary focus of this paper – reports his first-hand experiences of several wondrous events. He saw a comet in the skies over the city, and he also saw with his own eyes the evidence of a fall of 'blood rain', which left a crucifix-shaped stain on the neckerchief of a local woman. Dürer recorded this extraordinary event both textually and in a rough ink sketch on the sheet. This paper aims to demonstrate how an interest in the materiality of wonders became a hallmark of Dürer's artwork and personal records on a much wider scale – from his famous *Apocalypse* print cycle of 1498 to his terrifying dream of an unnatural flood during the Peasants' War in 1525. Secondly, it suggests that we need to reassess Dürer's unique recording of blood rain within the context of the visual art, material culture and eucharistic piety of his era.

### **PRESENTER**

**Jenny Spinks**

Jenny Spinks is Hansen Associate Professor in History at the University of Melbourne. Her publications include *Monstrous Births and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (2009), and the recent edited collection *Albrecht Dürer's Material World* (with Edward H. Wouk, 2023), as well as articles in venues including *Past & Present*, the *Journal of Early Modern History*, and *Renaissance Studies*. She currently leads the collaborative ARC project 'Albrecht Dürer's Material World – in Melbourne, Manchester and Nuremberg', and co-curated the exhibition *Albrecht Dürer's Material Renaissance* for the Arts West Gallery at the University of Melbourne in 2024 (with Matthew Champion, Shannon Gilmore Kuziow, and Charles Zika).