

Leonardo da Vinci Society Newsletter

Editor: Maya Corry
Issue 44, July 2017



Forthcoming event

Conference

Latin and the vernacular in fifteenth-century Italy
Friday 1 December 2017, Warburg Institute

A one-day conference on the relationship between Latin and the vernacular in fifteenth-century Italy at the Warburg Institute. Speakers include Amos Edelheit (Maynooth University), Simon Gilson (University of Warwick), David A. Lines (University of Warwick), Letizia Panizza (Royal Holloway) and Ben Thomson (Birkbeck). Organised by Stephen Clucas (Birkbeck) and Guido Giglioni (Warburg).

Further details of this event will appear in due course on the Society's website.

Recent Events

Leonardo da Vinci Society Annual Lecture

Leon Battista Alberti's *Historia*: the art of persuasion and motions of the soul

Pietro Roccasecca, Accademia di Belle Arti, Rome

5 May 2017

Professor Roccasecca introduced his talk with a slide of Leonardo's *Last Supper*, in this instance an ironically relevant image. Placing Alberti's *De pictura* in the context of Aristotelian philosophy and humanist discourse, Professor Roccasecca explained the significance of Alberti's text as a cognitive theory of vision, the first to propose a systematic theory of visual representation, particularly in reference to the *historia* and the motions of the soul, taking into account conventions of anatomy, decorum, rhetoric, poetics, and humanist theatre. Alberti divided composition into three parts: surfaces, members and bodies. To tell a story in painting the latter must become characters whose feelings can be understood by the viewer. A charming and attractive *historia* will hold the eye and afford the spectator pleasure. It is not a question of how a painter reproduces what he sees but how the depiction involves the spectator emotionally. The pleasure of the story is sensual, the painting a banquet for the senses, which should include an abundance

and variety of people and other elements. But in a balanced composition how many figures should there be? Using the example of Marcus Varro who limited his dinner guests to nine, Alberti specifies nine or ten figures: too few alas for the Last Supper.

The optimum number of characters in a painted story mirrors that of characters in a stage play. Alberti had written his own Latin comedy *Philodexeos fabula* and he understood how movements and expressions could reveal feelings on stage. Though he did not speak Greek, he knew the principle of empathetic participation expounded in Xenophon's account of Socrates' dialogue with Parrhusius, and he mentions Pliny's admiring accounts of Apelles and Aristides of Athens. Alberti writes that we 'mourn with the mourners, laugh with those who laugh'. In this he is reflecting the classical concept of the dual personality whereby each individual has two characteristics: *ethos* formed by education, custom and self-discipline, and *pathos* the reaction to outside stimuli. A person's character can be read in his face and posture, and imitated by a painter.

Capturing from nature the movements of the body and accurately depicting them is not the same as capturing the motions of the soul. To engage the viewer the painter has to choose what parts of his subject to depict and 'leave more for the mind to discover than is apparent to the eye'. It is not the precision of a portrait that matters but the ability of the painter to make an observer think beyond what he sees. A painted story is an invention, its narration a work of the intellect, and this is where Alberti's experience as a dramatist becomes relevant. The staging of humanist dramas was limited to actors miming the action while someone read the text aloud. This is clearly how Alberti envisages a painted narration. He approves of 'tragic and comic poets telling their story with as few characters as possible', of bodies moving 'in relation to one another with a certain harmony in accordance with the action', and he likes there to be 'someone in the *historia* who tells the spectators what is going on'. He cites *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia* by Timanthes in which Agamemnon covers his face with a veil to hide his emotions, and in so doing reveals them to the viewer. He also praises Giotto's *La navicella* for the variety of ways in which the apostles reveal their agitated feelings as they observe Jesus and St Peter walking on the water.

Such painted narratives conform not only to the philosophical principles that Alberti derived from antiquity but also to his experience as a writer of theatrical texts. He wanted painters to introduce a character, like the stage narrator, who would tell the spectator what was happen-

ing. He believed that a pictorial representation of a story relies on the cognitive ability of our vision to recognise people's feelings, not just on the painter's ability to depict gesture and expression and the spectator's empathetic reaction to them but also, crucially, on the power of images to make us think of more than what we actually see.

Angela Sheehan

30th Anniversary Lecture

The Failure of Pictures: From Description to Diagram in the Circle of Galileo
Professor David Freedberg, Warburg Institute
Friday 4 November 2016



Giovanni Battista Ferrari, *Hesperides* (Rome, 1646)

How do images encode and transmit information? In what ways do they do this differently from text? What distinguishes diverse forms of communication from one another, whether words, representational pictures or diagrams? These questions, which have long been of fundamental importance to the histories of art and science, were at the heart of David Freedberg's lecture. Delivered in celebration of the Society's 30th anniversary, Freedberg's talk was replete with echoes of Leonardo's preoccupations. It explored the representation and classification of the natural world, the codification of knowledge in visual and diagrammatic forms, the early modern fascination with the revelation of macrocosmic

forces in the microcosm of a plant, flower or the human body – and monstrous lemons!

In 1633 the first illustrated horticultural text on flowers, Giovanni Battista Ferrari's *De florum cultura*, was published. The book was based on observations Ferrari had made in Cardinal Francesco Barberini's garden. Ferrari, a Jesuit scholar, was part of a circle of men at the papal court who were fascinated by natural science and botany. This was an era in which new plants were arriving from the Americas, garden design was in ascendance and efforts at the classification of species were intensifying. This last pursuit involved both scientific and artistic knowledge and skill. Ferrari's interest in hybrids led him to focus on citrus fruits, which he analysed in the *Hesperides sive de Malorum Aureorum cultura*. Published in 1646, this was one of the most lavishly and beautifully illustrated botanical works of the period, with images of fruits by the leading artists of the day, including Domenichino, Nicolas Poussin and Guido Reni. Although the primary focus was always on observation from nature, in Ferrari's books allegorical illustrations appeared alongside botanical ones. Horticultural knowledge, and its cultural significance, was expressed through both visual forms.

The desire to catalogue, classify and meticulously describe nature's wonders was shared by many of Ferrari's contemporaries. The drawings which were engraved to illustrate his horticultural works came from the collection of Cassiano dal Pozzo, the famed collector and patron of the arts. He assembled thousands of watercolours, drawings and prints in his 'paper museum', the Museo Cartaceo. (The bulk of these works have since found their way into the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle and British Museum.) Their subject matter ranges from zoology, botany, ornithology, ethnography and geology to the architecture of antiquity; they represent an extraordinary endeavour to study and comprehend the wonders of the natural world and mankind's creations. This impulse even extended beyond the boundaries of the planet: in the same years Galileo was conducting his investigations into sunspots, the planets and the surface of the moon. Here too, visual representation was central to the communication of scientific discoveries.

Maya Corry
University of Oxford

Conference reports

Ingenuity in the Making: Materials and Techniques in Early Modern Europe

10-12 May 2017, University of Cambridge

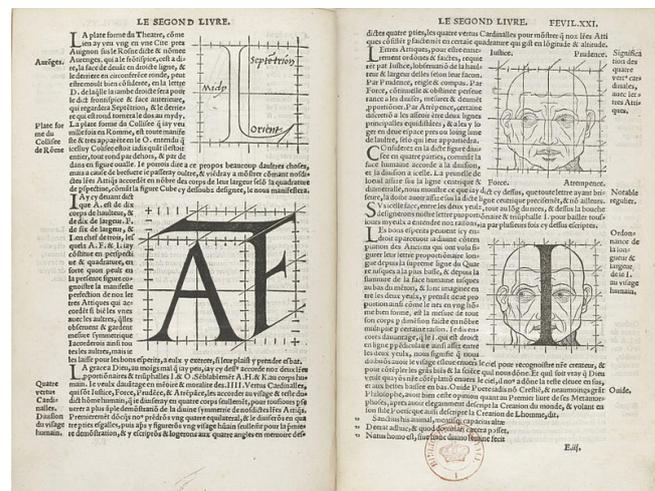
Leonardo's achievements – bridge-building, painting, casting, theorising nature's motions – spanned an impressive array already in his own time. But early modern admirers had categories to hand that drew these various forms of invention together. In particular, 'ingenuity' was a key Renaissance term for naming engineering, fertile invention, and crafty insight. A hoary genealogy furnished theorists with language for powerful invention: Cicero and Quintilian had described the inborn powers of speech, painting and craft as *ingenium*; builders became *ingegneri*, while Vasari and Castiglione defined artists and courtiers by their *ingegno*. But as ingenuity became a defining category of Renaissance culture, it developed ever richer dimensions particularly around activities of *making*. To explore this range of practices and materials, the European Research Council funded project *Genius before Romanticism: Ingenuity in Early Modern Art & Science* (University of Cambridge) held a conference on 10-12 May 2017.

Sven Dupré opened the conference with a public lecture on how technical manuals as recipe books became sites for recording and even codifying error. Recipes would seem a good place to find technique and consideration of materials; but as Dupré and Jenny Boulboulé both showed, technical books themselves are often short on experience. Instead of transparently revealing ingenuity caught in the act, as it were, they demanded it of their users.

Indeed, the equivocal quality of ingenuity as innate to something or someone, but only drawn out in performance, formed one of the underlying themes of the conference. A classic view of ingenuity as the province of engineers manipulating nature informed Denis Ribouillault's paper on the role of mathematical conceits in certain Renaissance gardens. Sundials in particular not only displayed the owner's character, taste and judgment, but were evidently intended to spark a certain kind of conversation. A similar point could be drawn from Vera Keller's rich paper on Burgrave's *Lamp of Life and Death* (1610), a book written in the 'vitalistic argot of chymia' in order to invoke a tradition of marvellous invention, and also to incite from readers the accusation of malignant ingenuity – the charge of charlatany. Christina Nielson also considered the thin line religious statuary straddled between ingenuous and ingenious representation. The likeness of a bleeding Christ was praised as devout mimesis or rebuked as fakery.

In the first instance, then, ingenuity was the framework for the praise or blame of artful making. Marieke Hendriksen took on this framework directly in a sweeping account of *ingegno* in art theory, yielding acute observations on the eighteenth-century move towards *technique* or *technik* to note the skill of makers. This framework also informed Andrew Morrall and Caroline van Eck's accounts of ingenuity within artistic invention, at each end of the period, respectively. Morrall discussed Geof-

froy Tory's *Champ Fleury* (1529), in which mathematics underpins ingenious allegories of the mythic and formal origins of letters. Similarly Van Eck turned to Giovanni Battista Piranesi's construction of artefacts out of ancient Alexandrian motifs. What made these authentic to his contemporaries was Piranesi's practice of bricolage, seen as reflecting the distinctive Roman genius for layering styles of different periods.



Geoffroy Tory, *Champ Fleury* (Paris, 1529)

Ingenuity could serve as a discourse of appreciation precisely because it linked hand to mind. Hannah Murphy explored this tension among exceptional practitioners of handwriting. Calligraphic masters such as Neudörffer created scripts as imitative forms of artisanal making, while simultaneously presenting them as a seamless link to handwriting and ultimately to thought. As a marker of mind, making therefore indexed the humanity of makers and, as Europeans marvelled over the crafted objects of societies beyond Europe, the concept of ingenuity could become central for measuring the humanity of others. Stefan Hanß explored the microscope's usefulness for historians, showing the tiny techniques in Andean featherwork that so awed Europeans. Anna Grasskamp talked of the ways *Kunstkammer* brought to view ingenious objects from the Indies, contrasting Spanish reception of the works of the native inhabitants of the Americas with Germanic reception of ingenuity in the Indies. The point of ingenuity was that it enabled people to reason from objects to the minds of makers.

But ingenuity was more than a way to classify makers' minds. For one thing, as Michael Bycroft pointed out, there was no clear line between making and other practices of manipulation. Diamond-cutting devices required and displayed a certain kind of skill used primarily for testing. And matter itself could be seen as ingenious. Jennifer Rampling discussed how works such as Pseudo-Lull's *Testamentum* demanded a mutual dependency of art and nature for producing effects. The subtle wit of nature, as alchemists put it, called forth the ingenuity of humans. Doina-Cristina Rusu showed the centrality of

spiritual matter to Francis Bacon's account of transformation, in which the experimenter's ingenuity *deceives* the native powers of natural bodies. The close link of matter and manipulator also emerged in **Tilmann Taape's** study of Hieronymus Brunschwig, who as a surgeon and distiller described particular skills with matter inseparable from the senses. Such skills can be contrasted with moments Brunschwig reported of fast cognition, when he swiftly adapted his knowledge to an emergency – a kind of claim to ingenuity.

Ingenuity ultimately then emerged as a category for animate and inanimate capacities. **Tina Asmussen** spoke of the once abiding twin of ingenuity: labour. Miners deployed new water-hoisting engines and mechanical inventions, which – far from relieving labour – forced miners to go deeper, their ingenuity forever linked to managing risk. **Evan Ragland** described the way anatomists developed a view of medical talent as a particular combination of experience and hard work, citing the 'blood-spattered' experimentalism of medicine at Leiden. **Viktoria von Hoffman** turned to a sensitive locus of hierarchical tension: hands, so often emblematic of manual labour. Surgeons and dissectors valued manual skill, and the conceptual framework of ingenuity presented their hands as devices and tools capable also of inspired subtlety.

The conference was rounded off by reflections on the nature of ingenuity from an anthropologist's perspective by **Tim Ingold**, in a conversation with **Sven Dupré**, chaired by **Alexander Marr**.

Richard Oosterhoff
University of Cambridge

Renaissance Society of America conference

Chicago, 31 March – 2 April

This year's RSA conference in Chicago was once again a stimulating gathering of scholars from all disciplines working on the early modern period. Delegates were lucky enough to be able to visit the very recently opened Deering Family Galleries of Medieval and Renaissance Art, Arms, and Armour at the Art Institute of Chicago. In these beautifully curated rooms nearly 700 objects from the period 1200 to 1600 are on display. A number of papers given at the conference related to Leonardo, abstracts of which appear below.

Fabio Cafagna, "Sapienza," Università di Roma ***Homines sunt vitra: Transparent Bodies from Leonardo to Cervantes***

The paper rethinks this topic in a very particular way, calling into question the unusual quality of some bodies to be able to be crossed by light rays. From these assumptions, the paper discusses the fortune of the well-

known iconography of the 'transparent body' by Leonardo da Vinci, clearly and first of all in the field of artistic anatomy. Some of the most illuminating evidence of this legacy can be found in the *laminas* realised in Paris at the end of the 17th century by the mysterious Valencian engraver Crisóstomo Martínez. These incredible documents are strictly connected to the odd vogue of transparency that, in the same years, seems also to affect European literature, i.e. the pastoral novel *Le Berger extravagant* by Charles Sorel, the science fiction stories by Cyrano de Bergerac and the famous and 'exemplar' tale *The Glass Graduate* by Miguel de Cervantes.

Marietta Cambareri, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston **Leonardo da Vinci and the Della Robbia Technique**

Leonardo praised the innovative glazing technique invented and perfected by Luca della Robbia and his family workshop as way of making painting permanent, foreshadowing Giorgio Vasari's description of Della Robbia sculpture as 'quasi eterna' or 'almost eternal'. This paper will consider why Leonardo, who consistently and ambitiously experimented with traditional techniques of painting and sculpture, would have been intrigued by the technique, which he also likened to enamel 'painting' on metal. The paper explores this contemporary recognition of the *ingegno*, or creative ingenuity, embodied by Della Robbia sculpture around 1500, and considers how modern scientific analysis can be interpreted in this context, as a way of celebrating this quintessentially Florentine Renaissance episode of technical experimentation.

Brad Cavallo, Temple University

Leonardo da Vinci, Paragone, and the Reifying Impetus for Painting on Metal- and Stone-Supports

Scholars like Isabel Horovitz generally link the phenomenon of early modern, copper-supported paintings to their optical effects and their material novelty within the 'display culture' of elite collecting practices. Alternatively, 16th-century painters chose metal and also stone supports in an attempt to synthesise sculpture's physical durability and painting's polychromatic verisimilitude – the most salient characteristics of each artistic medium – and thereby materialise their superiority vis-à-vis sculptors within the aesthetic debate known as the Paragone. Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of Ginevra de' Benci from the 1470s reified this idea by depicting a faux stone slab of porphyry on its verso, thereby establishing an example of how painters could overcome the Paragone in their favor. In this context, copper plates represented a lighter, less expensive alternative to stone panels for deployment as painting supports, but shared with them an origin in the practice and theory of Leonardo, and a sustained relevance within the Paragone.

Emily J. Hanson, Washington University in St. Louis **The Desire Outran the Performance: Confronting Leonardo's Unfinished Works**

The most significant unfinished work of Leonardo's

career is his equestrian monument for the Duke of Milan, a project on which he toiled for the better part of two decades. Had it been executed, this work would undoubtedly have been the artistic achievement of Leonardo's career. This paper analyses his plans for the doomed monument, reconstructs it, dissects its feasibility, and considers its evolving reception in the study of Leonardo. Drawing from my dissertation on the unfinished projects of both Leonardo and Michelangelo, my work argues that the lure of an artist's proposed project may have been more important to his reputation than its eventual abandonment. Leonardo undoubtedly saw sculpture and his chosen patron as crucial to the establishment of a career outside of Florence. My paper contextualises Leonardo's impossible task and interrogates how he was able to navigate his own career in light of this famously incomplete monument.

Caroline Hillard, Wright State University

A Drawing by Leonardo da Vinci and the Reception of Etruscan Architecture in Sixteenth-Century Italy

An enigmatic drawing by Leonardo da Vinci in the Louvre presents a conical mausoleum in a hilly landscape, crowned with a round temple. In 1977, Marina Martelli observed similarities between the drawing and early descriptions of an Etruscan tomb at Castellina in Chianti, the discovery of which caused a sensation in sixteenth-century Florence. Subsequent scholars agree that this find inspired Leonardo's work. Yet the drawing's precise symmetry, regularity, and organization differ from the accounts of the Castellina tomb. These deviations are usually attributed to the artist's imagination or architectural ideals, especially that of the centrally planned church. In contrast, this paper argues that all aspects of the drawing make tangible reference to Etruscan architecture as it was understood from archaeological discoveries and Pliny and Vitruvius. The paper thus provides insight into Leonardo's work, contemporary ideas about Etruscan architecture, and a major episode in the Renaissance recovery of antiquity.

Veronica White, Princeton University Art Museum

The Destructive Force of Nature: Leonardo da Vinci's Grotesque Figures Reconsidered

Leonardo's grotesque figures have inspired numerous writings focusing on the artist's scientific approach to the study of nature and his notes discussing the painter's imagination. Most historians have either contextualised the drawings within the field of physiognomy, or have approached them from a psychoanalytical perspective. This paper instead focuses on the aged nature of Leonardo's grotesque subjects. While some of the grotesques are carefully worked drawings, others are schematic sketches that speak to Leonardo's adaptation of suggestive lines and ambiguous forms. Several small-scale drawings in Windsor Castle, for example, explore extreme convex and concave features through a carefully controlled manipulation of the pen. This paper will place the grotesque figures within Leonardo's practice of

drawing and will argue that they can be interpreted as statements about the passage of time and destructive force of nature.

News

The Search for Leonardo's Last Supper

A new film exploring the fresco's first copy

The 19-year project to restore Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* painting at the Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan has revealed a rather sobering fact: only some 20 per cent of the original painting is still visible. The subtle chiaroscuro, the attention to texture and optical effects that are the hallmarks of Leonardo's style are all but lost – victims of the artist's experimentation with oil-based pigments and the corrosion of the wall, due to the moisture from an adjoining kitchen. Does that mean that we will never be able to see what the original painting may have looked like?



This question is the starting point for a new film, produced by Pantheon Studios, based on a book by art historian Jean-Pierre Isbouts and his co-author, Dr. Christopher H. Brown. The book, *Young Leonardo* (St. Martin's Press, 2017), traces Leonardo's development from his early years in Florence to the culmination of his work at the court of Duke Ludovico Sforza in Milan. The last two chapters take the reader on a hunt across Europe for a life-size canvas copy of the painting, which the authors believe was commissioned by the King of France, Louis XII, some five years after the completion of Leonardo's work. Louis XII had invaded the Duchy of Milan in 1499, just as Leonardo was putting the finishing touches on the painting.

Both the king and his faithful lieutenant, Georges d'Amboise, were deeply impressed with the fruits of the Italian Renaissance. As documented by Vasari, the king insisted on taking the painting down, intending to cart it off to France with the rest of his war loot. When Louis was denied this pleasure by his engineers (the technology of transferring a mural to canvas would not be perfected until the 19th century), the authors hypothesise that the king chose the next best option: to commission an exact,

life-size copy of the painting, executed by Leonardo's workshop under his direct supervision. This is the essential plot of the film, which diligently follows the trail of tantalising clues from Milan to Florence, and from Paris to the Chateau de Gaillon, the residence of Georges d'Amboise, before locating this mysterious copy in a remote convent.

Three years in the making, the film features dramatisations starring the Italian artist Alessandro Demcenko as Leonardo da Vinci, and commentary from a number of prominent specialists including Luke Syson (Metropolitan Museum of Art), Larry Keith (National Gallery, London), Vincent Delieuvin (Louvre, Paris), Maya Corry (Oxford University) and British author Ross King, as well as Eugenio Zanetti, the Academy-Award winning artist and director of *Restoration* and *What Dreams May Come*. The film's producers have developed a detailed restoration of what the Milanese refectory would have looked like in 1499. Derived from a great array of contemporary sources as well as the modern literature, the reconstruction was produced by a team led by Richard Yarlett of iRay3D. The film is slated for release in late 2017.

Jean-Pierre Isbouts
Fielding Graduate University, Santa Monica CA

Charles II: Art and Power

The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace
8 December 2017 – 13 May 2018

The Royal Collection Trust's next exhibition at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace will focus on the patronage and collecting habits of Charles II. Included amongst paintings of figures at court by Sir Peter Lely, miniatures by Samuel Cooper and lavish palace furnishings, will be a group of Old Master drawings thought to have been acquired by Charles II. Numbered amongst these are sheets by Michelangelo, Hans Holbein the Younger and Leonardo da Vinci.

Around 600 sheets by (and after) Leonardo da Vinci formed the core of Charles II's collection. These were the same works which had previously been in the collection of Thomas Howard, 14th Earl of Arundel – the first significant collector of drawings in England. The precise route of the Leonardo drawings into the Royal Collection is not known, but it has recently been suggested by Martin Clayton that they might have been presented to Charles II by Arundel's grandson Henry Howard as a mark of his gratitude for the restitution of the lands and titles of the Dukes of Norfolk following the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660.

Four sheets by Leonardo will be displayed in the exhibition, alongside the now empty album in which all the

Leonardo drawings entered the Royal Collection. The album had been compiled by the sculptor Pompeo Leoni following his acquisition of vast quantities of Leonardo drawings in the 1580s. The drawings selected for this exhibition are examples of Leonardo's grotesque, caricature and anatomical studies. It was these subjects that would have been most familiar to seventeenth-century audiences as they were copied by artists such as Lucas Vorsterman, and featured in the etchings of Wenceslaus Hollar.

The exhibition will run from 8 December 2017 until 13 May 2018 at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace. It will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue edited by Rufus Bird and Martin Clayton.

Lauren Porter
Curator of Works on Paper, Royal Collection Trust

The Leonardo da Vinci Society

The Secretary and *Newsletter* Editor welcome suggestions of material, such as forthcoming conferences, symposia and other events, exhibitions, publications, reviews, that would be of interest to members of the Society for inclusion in this *Newsletter* or on the website: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hosted/leonardo>. Please send items for publication to: Maya Corry, Oriol College, Oxford, OX1 4EW; maya.corry@oriel.ox.ac.uk

Officers:

President: Dr J.V. Field, Birkbeck, University of London; jv.field@hart.bbk.ac.uk

Vice-President: Emeritus Professor Francis Ames-Lewis, 52 Prebend Gardens, London W6 0XU; f.ames-lewis@bbk.ac.uk

Secretary and Treasurer: Tony Mann, University of Greenwich, London; a.mann@gre.ac.uk

Newsletter Editor: Dr Maya Corry, University of Oxford; maya.corry@oriel.ox.ac.uk

Online Editor: Dr Matthew Landrus, University of Oxford; matthew.landrus@history.ox.ac.uk

Committee members:

Dr Juliana Barone, Birkbeck, University of London; juliana.barone@btinternet.com

Professor Frank A.J.L. James, Royal Institution Centre for the History of Science and Technology; fjames@ri.ac.uk

Dr Nick Lambert, Birkbeck, University of London; nick.lambert@gmail.com

Dr Anna Sconza, Sorbonne University, Paris; anna.sconza@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr

Angela Sheehan, 73 Montpelier Rise, London NW11 9DU; asheehan@waitrose.com

Richard Talbot, Newcastle University; richard.talbot@ncl.ac.uk

Dr Susanna Avery-Quash, The National Gallery, London; Susanna.Avery-Quash@ng-london.org.uk

Dr Stephen Clucas, Birkbeck, University of London; s.clucas@bbk.ac.uk

Dr Guido Giglioni, The Warburg Institute, University of London; Guido.Giglioni@sas.ac.uk

Dr Richard Oosterhoff, University of Cambridge; ro289@cam.ac.uk