

# Leonardo da Vinci Society Newsletter

editor: Francis Ames-Lewis

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## Recent and forthcoming events

### The Annual General Meeting and Annual Lecture, 2007.

The Society's Annual General Meeting was held on Friday 11 May 2007 at 5.30 pm, in the Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre at the Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, and was followed by the Annual Lecture at 6.00 pm. We are deeply grateful to the Courtauld Institute for their hospitality of these events. This year's lecture, entitled 'Leonardo and his circle: inventing, mixing and matching' was given by Dr Juliana Barone (University of Oxford). Opening with a quotation from Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting* about the inventive powers of the painter, Dr Barone set out to demonstrate how Leonardo da Vinci used his own inventive powers, and how his inventions were reused by others. Her lecture was based around close visual and technical examination of four cartoons by Leonardo and members of his circle. These were the *Madonna and Child with St Anne* in the National Gallery, London, the copies in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, after the Louvre cartoon for the 'Portrait of Isabella d'Este, and after the cartoon for the head of Niccolo Piccinino in the *Battle of Anghiari*, and a drawing (now at Chatsworth) of the heads of the Virgin and the Christchild by Boltraffio.

The National Gallery cartoon evolved from an extraordinary, vigorous 'brainstorm' sketch (London, British Museum), a revolutionary drawing practice anticipated, however, in drawings for the 'Madonna and Child with a Cat' some twenty-five years earlier. The cartoon was never used for a painting: its incompleteness suggests that it is still provisional and exploratory. It survives as an invention, and a stimulus for further invention: it could provide figural motifs for later reuse. Francesco Melzi, for example, used the head of the Madonna in his *Vertumnus and Pomona*, and Bernardino Luini reused the same motif in a *Holy Family*.

The Ashmolean drawing for the portrait of Isabella d'Este, in which Leonardo and his assistant reconsidered the pose of the arms and hands, almost certainly returned to Florence with Leonardo in 1500 and served as the stimulus for further reworking in the

*Mona Lisa*. Here the sitter's hands follow the corrected pose in the Ashmolean copy, while Leonardo adapted the pose of Isabella d'Este's torso and head in the Louvre original. The pure profile, doubtless required by the sitter for reasons of decorum, was rejected, and the slight twist of the torso was reversed, to evolve a more satisfying, and very influential, portrait composition.

The ferocious, shouting head of Niccolo Piccinino appears already in a 'brainstorm' drawing for the central episode – the 'Fight for the Standard' – of the *Battle of Anghiari*, and his expression is further studied in a polished black chalk drawing in Budapest. In close, forensic scrutiny of the surface of the Ashmolean sheet, Dr Barone has discerned spolvero dots on the underlying drawing, which was later much overdrawn in graphite. These spolveri show that the copy was transferred directly from Leonardo's cartoon for this head. On this basis it is possible to calculate the original size of the 'Fight for the Standard' group, which is consistent with the quantity of paper that Leonardo purchased in 1505 for his cartoon. This head, and perhaps this very copy, was reused in an anonymous early sixteenth-century painting of the *Mocking of Christ*.

Leonardo's works were extensively copied and recycled by 'mixing and matching' details which were reassembled in other compositions. Boltraffio's Chatsworth drawing reuses details from Leonardo's cartoon for the earlier version of the *Madonna of the Rocks*: the Christchild's head was transferred from the cartoon head of St John the Baptist, and for the head of the Madonna Boltraffio reversed and re-angled the detail of the Madonna's head in Leonardo's cartoon. The reuse of part-cartoons in the conception and development of new compositions was a method endorsed by Leonardo for the diffusion of his inventions. Other examples of this practice show a method of collaging to create what Dr Barone calls 'jigsaw' compositions. This technique is in complete contrast to Leonardo's own inventive 'brainstorm' sketching: both coexisted in the workshop, the former approved by Leonardo for the production of generically 'Leonardesque' paintings.

## **A Symposium on ‘Leonardo da Vinci and his Patrons’**

The Leonardo da Vinci Society’s autumn Symposium this year will be held at 43 Gordon Square, London WC1, home to Birkbeck College’s School of History of Art, Film and Visual Media, on Friday 21 September between 2.00 pm and 5.00 pm. There will be four presentations and time for discussion. Speakers are invited to consider a series of issues around relationships between Leonardo and his patrons: what opportunities did patrons present to Leonardo, and how stimulating (artistically or intellectually) were these for him; to what extent did he respond creatively to the opportunities presented by these projects; how did he respond to his patrons’ hopes and expectations of his productivity; and how did his patrons respond to his efforts on their behalf. The following will speak:

Dr Monica Azzolini (University of Edinburgh), on ‘Leonardo in Context: Science and Patronage at the Sforza Court’; Professor Francis Ames-Lewis (Birkbeck College, School of History of Art, Film and Visual Media), on ‘Isabella d’Este and Leonardo da Vinci: an unproductive relationship?’; Dr Jill Burke (University of Edinburgh), on ‘Leonardo in Republican Florence’, and Dr Tom Tolley (University of Edinburgh), on ‘Leonardo and the French before Francis I’. There will be a small fee, of £5.00, for members of the Society, to help us to cover our costs.

## ***Leonardesque News***

### **Lettura Vinciana XLVII**

The forty-seventh Lettura Vinciana was given at the Biblioteca Leonardiana in Vinci on Saturday 14 April 2007 by Dr Carmen C. Bambach, Curator of Drawings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Her lecture was entitled ‘Una eredità difficile: I disegni ed i manoscritti di Leonardo tra mito e documento’ – ‘A Complex Legacy: The Drawings and Manuscripts of Leonardo Between Myth and Document’.

Dr Bambach writes of her lecture: ‘My analysis of Leonardo’s legacy as a draughtsman shall begin with a discussion of his last will and testament (23 April 1519), within the context of Italian artists’ wills of his time, in seeking to distinguish the aspects of the archaeological evidence that were due to the artist’s original intentions, from those due to his later collectors. Leonardo, more than any other artist of his time, relied on the use of sketchbooks and notebooks for his creative process of invention, exploration, record-keeping, rethinking of ideas, and writing. He often explicitly alluded to such compilations, as they were a primary medium of work (for example “un libro di cavalli sc[h]izati pel cartone”, Madrid II, fol. 3r, in ca. 1503-05). The medium of the drawing-book,

often of pocket-size, served Leonardo the artist and technologist particularly well, not the least of it given the extreme mobility marking certain periods of his life and career, especially after 1499. 21 volumes of manuscript by Leonardo are extant today (an exceptional quantity in the oeuvre of an early modern artist); 3 large assemblies of his drawings and notes were also bound into volumes by later collectors; and numerous other sheets are scattered among public and private collections. At a rough possible count of about 4,100 sheets and fragments, therefore, this constitutes a vast body of concrete evidence for investigating Leonardo’s working methods. Because Leonardo’s figurative drawings are today usually preserved as mounted individual objects (at times even fetishized for public display), it is perhaps easily overlooked that their original context was very likely as part of a larger whole – a book, loose quire or portfolio – that was dismembered.

My “Lettura” shall attempt to advocate for a more integrated method of study of Leonardo’s drawings and manuscripts; his bound volumes may be compared for certain overall typologies of function, and discussed within the detailed, larger chronological structure of his oeuvre. Especial attention shall be dedicated to Leonardo’s work of ca. 1506-08, when his use of “libri” and his methods of “racolte” were at their most refined. While it is true that Leonardo’s extant volumes of manuscripts may often defy simple categorizations, they are nevertheless highly revealing ones, of methods of work which were primarily, and very elegantly analogic, rather than linear in sequence. Even his most carefully drafted illustrated manuscripts of his mature years abundantly allude to reasoning “in progress”, to a living text still to be ordered (Codex Leicester, fol. 2v).’

### **‘Leonardo and Light’: a lecture by Martin Kemp at the Louise T Blouin Institute, London W11, on 5 March 2007.**

*Dr J.V. Field writes:* As one might expect from a scholar with so long a record of research on Leonardo, Professor Kemp’s lecture followed some well trodden paths but also ventured into less well explored territory. We were told about the standard optical ideas of Leonardo’s time, which he seems to have accepted, and which are largely thirteenth-century European developments of Islamic work based on ideas that can be traced back to Hellenistic science. Leonardo gave much importance to the concept of a ‘pyramid of vision’ and a corresponding ‘pyramid of light’. Indeed, in common with many of his contemporaries, he takes these as the patterns for laws of nature in general. However, as his drawings of the eye show, Leonardo did not conceive the eye as seeing as if from a point (the mathematical apex of the pyramid) but as seeing from a finite area.

Of course, what sets Leonardo off from most other optical theorists of his day is the manner in which he

uses his theories in his paintings. Professor Kemp discussed and demonstrated a number of interesting juxtapositions of Leonardo's visual usage with his written statements. For example, we saw light reflected into shadows and forms given bright edges to increase the contrast effect, as in the *Virgin of the Rocks* (National Gallery, London). Leonardo describes coloured shadows, but does not paint them. Similarly, Leonardo describes how something that moves too fast cannot be seen, and uses the spokes of a spinning wheel as his example, but this effect was not shown in a painting until the seventeenth century, by Velázquez.

Professor Kemp further suggested that Leonardo's use of darkness for modelling and for creating spatial relationships in his pictures could perhaps be seen as pointing forward to the use of chiaroscuro by such painters as Caravaggio.

The Louise T Blouin Foundation is a creation of the Louise T Blouin Group of Companies, whose business is magazine publishing. The Louise T Blouin Institute (director: Jeremy Newton), which opened its doors last autumn, is housed in what used to be the body shop of the Rolls Royce works in Shepherd's Bush (3 Olaf Street, London W11 4BE), now elegantly converted into exhibition space and a lecture room or performance hall.

The aims of the Foundation and of the Institute are described on their website (<http://www.ltbfoundation.org/iac.html>) in rather broad terms. They include bringing together art and science as part of general cultural events. This is indeed what has been achieved in the Institute's first exhibition – of works by James Turrell, some of which employ projected light – with accompanying lectures on various aspects of light by scientists and a historian of art. The trustees of the Foundation include some visual artists (such as Anthony Gormley and Jeff Koons) but seem to be weighted towards the performing arts, and include many Americans or people who, like the Blouin Group, have US connections. The representatives of science are all from the life sciences. However, to judge from its beginnings, the further activities of the Louise T Blouin Institute seem likely to be of interest to members of the Leonardo da Vinci Society.

### **'Leonardo tra Italia e Francia': a conference at the Biblioteca Leonardiana, Vinci**

A two-day conference on this theme ['Leonardo between Italy and France'] was held at the Biblioteca Leonardiana in Vinci on 18-19 May 2007. The principal event was a study-day, on Friday 18 May, on 'Paul Valéry e Leonardo da Vinci', on which the Biblioteca Leonardiana collaborated with ITEM-CNRS/ENS, Paris, and the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures of the University of Pisa. This in turn revolved around the launch of a volume edited by Christina Vogel (University of Zurich and

ITEM, Paris) entitled *Valéry e Léonard: le drame d'une rencontre. Genèse de l' "Introduction à la méthode di Léonard di Vinci"*. Seven presentations were made on themes related to Valéry's interests in Leonardo. On Saturday 19 May an event was held called the 'Da Vinci Tour & Leonardo da Vinci: nuovi itinerari sulle tracce di Leonardo', in which the Museo Leonardiano, Vinci, collaborated with the Château du Clos Lucé, Amboise in presenting some cultural pathways dedicated to Leonardo. This was followed by a concert of Music from the Italian courts at the time of Leonardo, held in the church of Santa Croce, Vinci, and given by the Sorbonne Scholars directed by Pierre Iseline.

### **An 'e-Leo' project is launched at the Biblioteca Leonardiana in Vinci**

A one day conference to present 'e-Leo' was held at the Biblioteca Leonardiana on Saturday 12 May 2007. 'e-Leo' is a digital archive to allow users to consult Renaissance manuscripts on the history of science and technology. It is the fruit of a collaboration between the Biblioteca Leonardiana, the Centro di linguistica storica e teorica and the Department of Mechanics and Industrial Technologies of the University of Florence. For further information, please go to [www.bibliotecaleonardiana.it](http://www.bibliotecaleonardiana.it).

### **New publications of Leonardo da Vinci manuscripts**

A few months ago the Ente Raccolta Vinciana, based at the Castello Sforzesco in Milan, published the English translation, by John Venerella, of Leonardo's MS H. They now announce the publication also of MS D, which completes the series. Also recently published is *Leonardo da Vinci: Il mondo e le acque* (ISBN 88-545-0157-3), with which the Vicentine publisher Neri Pozza inaugurates the first complete Italian edition of the writings of Leonardo. In this first book of the series (volume 11 of the complete set of 15 volumes), manuscripts D and F (Paris, Institut de France) are transcribed. The Ente Raccolta Vinciana has also recently announced the forthcoming publication of volume 32 of *Raccolta Vinciana*.

### **Leonardo: Divine Proportion. The human figure and the horse in the *Treatise on Painting*. An exhibition to be held in the Sala delle Asse of the Castello Sforzesco, Milan, from October to December 2007**

This exhibition, to be mounted by the Ente Raccolta Vinciana and the Comune di Milano and curated by Pietro C. Marani and Maria Teresa Fiorio, with the collaboration of Martin Kemp, of Universal Leonardo, London, will explore Leonardo da Vinci's constant fascination with the proportions of the human figure and the horse.

Numerous paragraphs in the third part of the *Treatise on Painting* are dedicated to the proportions of the human limbs. Here can also be found various paragraphs concerning the 'membrificazione' of animals and their movements (paragraphs 284, 300, 304, 374 etc), and moreover descriptions of battles and of fighting horses. But it was above all the process of designing the equestrian Sforza Monument that provided Leonardo with the opportunity to apply to the horse the systems and techniques that he had already adopted for the analysis of the human body. Such studies on the modular division of the body of the horse (like those on human proportions) were also to be pursued by Dürer.

Taking the *Treatise on Painting* and a select group of Leonardo drawings of the human figure and of the horse as its point of departure, the exhibition will include a drawing attributed to Leonardo for the *Leda* (in the Castello Sforzesco), a Verrocchio drawing on the proportions of the horse (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), a Leonardo equine proportions study from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle, and the study for the Sforza Monument in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan. Exceptionally, the exhibition will include a 'modello' of the Sforza horse, also attributed to Leonardo (in an English private collection), which has not been seen in public for some fifty years.

There follows, as the exhibition is laid out, a group of rare, beautifully illustrated, cinque- and seicento manuscript copies of the *Treatise*, some of which are unpublished, belonging to the Ente Raccolta Vinciana at the Castello Sforzesco and in private hands. Amongst these are three manuscript versions written by Cassiano dal Pozzo with drawings of the human figure by Nicolas Poussin (Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan). Next come some miniatures of the Sforza period showing the 'great horse' of Milan, and some fifty printed editions of Leonardo's text, from the first edition published in Paris in 1651 to others of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some of which are very rare and not held in public libraries, to nineteenth-century editions, principally from the historic holdings of the Ente Raccolta Vinciana and from private collections. These testify to the huge reputation enjoyed by the *Treatise* and by the drawings of Leonardo up to the present day. The exhibition will be further enriched by engravings, small bronzes, reproductions and facsimiles, including engravings by Antonio Canova and prints by Giuseppe Bossi, based on Leonardo's studies, through which the theme of the proportions of man and of the horse continued to be explored at the height of Neoclassicism.

#### **'Da Vinci sleuth invited to find lost masterpiece'**

Thus ran the headline of a piece from Rome published in *The Independent* on 1 February 2007, in which *Peter Popham* wrote: An Italian 'art detective' who has been tracking a great lost masterpiece of the

Renaissance for more than half his life has been given consent, and the funds, to carry the quest to its conclusion.

Maurizio Seracini, 60, has been trying since 1975 to learn the truth about the vast fresco *The Battle of Anghiari*, painted by Leonardo da Vinci in Florence's Palazzo Vecchio, a painting described by contemporaries as 'the best work of art, the masterpiece of all'.

Da Vinci was commissioned to paint the work in 1504, during Florence's brief republican period, and the 60ft-wide fresco in the city's most important building was to immortalise Florence's victory 60 years earlier over the hated Milanese.

Sketches of the work that survive show Leonardo meant it to be his definitive statement on the ferocious insanity of war, that 'most beastly madness' as he called it. In work that prefigures Goya's work and Picasso's *Guernica*, Da Vinci drew soldiers on horseback as coiled bundles of manic energy, slicing and hacking while their maddened mounts rear, bray and sink their teeth into each other.

In his papers, Leonardo described what he was driving at. He wanted to evoke 'the smoke of the artillery mingled with the dust thrown up by' the horses and soldiers. 'Make the conquered and beaten pale', he wrote, 'with brows raised and knit, and the skin above their brows furrowed with pain...'

But Leonardo's painting was dogged by bad luck. The cartoon, the full-size design of the painting, was apparently damaged by rain, the oil paints the master used instead of the usual water-based ones refused to dry and, before the work could be completed, he skipped off to Milan to work for the enemy. Contemporaries were awed by his achievement but after the Medicis returned to power, the painter and historian Giorgio Vasari was commissioned to replace the painting.

It was long thought that Vasari merely whitewashed over Leonardo's work. But Maurizio Seracini doubted it. An expert in using modern technologies – X-rays, infra-red photography, fluoroscopy, adapted ultra-sound and thermography – to probe ancient paint without damaging it, Mr Seracini previously exposed the drawings underneath Leonardo's *Adoration of the Magi*. He was also named in Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*. 'Vasari was a great admirer of Leonardo', Mr Seracini said. 'He did not have any reason to destroy, damage or remove Leonardo's painting. Maybe he saw he had a chance and saved it'. He had taken the trouble to preserve one masterpiece, leaving a narrow void over a fresco by Masaccio in Florence's Santa Maria Novella church rather than paint over it. Might he not have done the same with the Leonardo? Mr Seracini has already established that there is a void under the Vasari work.

And it was while exploring the surface of *Marciano in the Chiana Valley*, the Vasari battle scene that replaced Da Vinci's, that he found an extraordinary hint that he was on the right track: on a

banner carried by soldiers in the Vasari scene, invisible from floor level, the words 'Seek and you will find'. Now, after a five-year hiatus caused by infighting in the Italian art world, Mr Seracini is to get his chance to finish the search. The Italian government has given him permission to continue the work suspended in 2002.

On Wed Jan 10, 2007 *Reuters* had already reported that 'Italy's culture minister gave his go-ahead on Wednesday to explore behind a wall in Florence's renaissance town hall to see if it is hiding the 500-year-old "Battle of Anghiari", sometimes known as the "lost Leonardo"... Some art historians believe it may never have been completed, others say it was destroyed. But one theory suggests it was covered up by subsequent art work at the Palazzo Vecchio, the town hall, which is next to the Uffizi gallery which contains some of Renaissance Italy's most treasured works of art.

"We've decided to give the go-ahead to explore the Salone del Cinquecento to look for the Battle of Anghiari," Culture Minister Francesco Rutelli told reporters after a meeting with Florence's mayor. "We've taken this decision to find out, once and for all, if there is a wall cavity and if there are traces of the original fresco." Mayor Leonardo Domenici said the exploration would be "brief" but gave no specific timeline.'

### **A Summer School in Vinci, September 2007**

A post-graduate specialization course entitled 'The Human Body between Art and Science in the Renaissance: to dissect, to observe, to describe, to illustrate' will be held at the Biblioteca Leonardiana, Vinci, between 14-21 September 2007. The organizers introduce the course thus: 'During the Renaissance, and in particular in the fifteenth century, the conception of the human body changes completely: the anatomical works are testimony of this change but also of the way in which the body is represented. In this period anatomy, founded on dissection and on the direct observation of bodies, becomes a subject that aroused interest and curiosity not only of doctor but also of artists, philosophers, theologians and humanists. By means of a multidisciplinary approach the course proposes on the one hand to analyse the practices of different actors involved in the research and in reflections on the human body, and on the other hand to account for the complexity of the interests and of the problems (cultural, scientific, artistic and moral) concerning the "invention of the modern body"'. The course consists of lectures, workshops and conferences, visits to the Natural History Museum "La Specola" in Florence and to the National Library of Florence. It will take place from 14th to 21st September, on Friday afternoon 14th, Saturday morning 15th, and from 17th to 21st September both

in the morning and in the afternoon.

Admission applications, including a curriculum vitae, must be addressed to the Segreteria del corso and mailed to the Comune of Vinci, Piazza Leonardo da Vinci, n. 29 – 50059 Vinci (FI) – Italy, by 29th June 2007, at 12.00 a.m They can be pre-sent by e-mail to the Segreteria del corso, Eleonora Gargiulo, 9.30-13.00, from Mondays to Fridays, tel. (+39) 0571-933244, fax (+39) 0571-567930, e-mail [e.gargiulo@comune.vinci.fi.it](mailto:e.gargiulo@comune.vinci.fi.it) The complete course regulations are available on the web site [www.bibliotecaleonardiana.it](http://www.bibliotecaleonardiana.it). For further information contact the Segreteria del corso, or the Biblioteca Leonardiana (Monica Taddei (+39) 0571-933264, e-mail [m.taddei@comune.vinci.fi.it](mailto:m.taddei@comune.vinci.fi.it)) and Silvia Bracaloni, tel. (+39) 0571-933265, e-mail [s.bracaloni@comune.vinci.fi.it](mailto:s.bracaloni@comune.vinci.fi.it)).

## *The Leonardo da Vinci Society*

The Secretary is very grateful for the comments and suggestions made by members. An electronic copy of this *Newsletter* will be sent to everyone who has requested it. If you have requested an email copy but have not received it by the time that you read this, please could you convey to the Secretary (at <A.Mann@gre.ac.uk>) your current email address either in case he misread it or if it has changed.

We would always be grateful for suggestions of material, such as forthcoming conferences, symposia and other events, exhibitions, publications and so on, that would be of interest to members of the Society for inclusion in this *Newsletter* or on the webpage, which can be visited at the following address: <<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hafvm/leonardo>>

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