

Leonardo da Vinci Society Newsletter



editor: Francis Ames-Lewis

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Recent and forthcoming events

The Annual General Meeting and Annual Lecture, 2009.

The Society's Annual General Meeting was held on Friday 8 May 2009 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 as ever very grateful to the Courtauld Institute for their generous hospitality of this event. This year's Annual Lecture was given by Professor Philip Steadman (University College London), on 'Light and Shadow in Vermeer'.

'Vermeer's work is admired for many qualities, first among them his miraculous rendering of light and shadow', Professor Steadman declared. In *The Music Lesson* we can see in action the effect of a tonal gradation from brightness into increasing shadow described by Leonardo da Vinci when light strikes a surface at an increasingly oblique angle. Equally, the shadows cast onto, and by, the terrestrial globe in *The Geographer* replicate Leonardo's celebrated experiments with light and shadow, and with highlights (or what Leonardo would call 'lustre'). Vermeer's unflinching truth to the relative values of light and shade enabled him to echo Leonardo's precept that 'shadows and lights are the most certain means by which the shape of any body comes to be known'. He was able to develop his aesthetic of light and his perfect tonality because, Professor Steadman convincingly argued, he extensively used the camera obscura.

This artist's aid, a box with a lens (or merely a small hole) in one wall through which an image of the scene in front of the lens is projected onto a screen or a sheet of paper within, was first described by Leonardo ('... you will receive these

images on a white paper placed within this dark room rather near to the hole; and you will see all the objects in their proper forms and colours...'), and was much used by Dutch seventeenth-century painters. One of its principal functions was to help painters to map out accurate perspective schemes for interior scenes. By analysing the perspective layouts of ten of Vermeer's interiors, Professor Steadman was able to demonstrate that they were all painted in the same room. It had solid rafters, a wall with windows to the left, and black and white floor-tiles. By comparing the scale of the furnishings – a chair, the virginals in *The Music Lesson*, the terrestrial globe – with the real pieces that Vermeer copied, Professor Steadman showed that Vermeer set up his scene in full scale, using humans (not dolls) as his models.

But unlike other painters of his time, it was not principally to generate an accurate perspective scheme that Vermeer used his camera obscura: indeed, there are no perspective construction lines or marks under his paint surfaces. In Professor Steadman's view, his primary intention was to study very precisely the effects of light and shadow within his interior. These would have been laid out on his screen as a mosaic of luminous patches of 'condensed' colour, softened through being slightly out of focus. Vermeer might well have valued and exploited these idiosyncracies of the camera obscura image. He was a supremely intelligent, intellectual painter, but he had an extraordinary capacity for switching between his rational eye and an 'idiotic' eye that saw these areas of colour and tone only as an abstract pattern. As though replicating the soft focus of the image, in works like *Girl with the Pearl Earring* Vermeer used no linear contours

around the facial forms but painted entirely in tonal patches. His genius, Professor Steadman concluded, was to recognise that if he could match in pigment the relative tonal values of these luminous patches, then the observer's intelligent eye would work with these to recognise the forms represented. Vermeer did not have to be particularly precise in detail or outline, so long as he was 'uncannily' true to tone.

The Society's forthcoming conference on 'Approaches to art and Science since Berenson'

On Friday 13 November 2009, St. John's College Oxford and the Ashmolean Museum will host a one-day conference on the relationship between scientific models in nature and the theory and practice of art, entitled 'Approaches to art and science after Berenson'. It will address results of forty years of progress in approaches to the histories of art and science. The main reason for this conference is to honour Emeritus Professor Martin Kemp, a former Hon. President of the Leonardo da Vinci Society, who retired from the University of Oxford in 2008. The conference is being organized by Dr Matthew Landrus and Dr Juliana Barone, both former doctoral students of Martin Kemp. The Society has applied to the British Academy for financial support for this international conference.

At issue is the role of Professor Kemp's research and collaborations in bringing together historians of art and science (as well as artists and scientists) in an interdisciplinary dialogue that is now considered a crucial discourse in both fields of historical inquiry. Essays presented at the conference will be published in a monograph of the same title in 2010. Reference to Bernard Berenson (1865-1959) in the title evokes a contrast between foundations of the history of art favoured until as late as the 1970s, and the interdisciplinary foundations of the field today. In a number of ways, speakers invited to the conference have collaborated with Professor Kemp on studies of the sciences of optics, anatomy, natural history, art theory, and technology during key episodes from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. Increasingly this collective body of work has addressed issues of visualisation, modelling and representation common to science and art.

Professor Kemp has summed up these approaches as addressing "structural intuitions," a way of understanding shared starting points in art and science. A pioneer in this approach, Professor Kemp is now joined by numerous colleagues in Europe, the US and Asia who are also devoted to what he calls a "New History of the Visual," which embraces the wide range of artefacts from science, technology and the fine and applied arts that have been devised to articulate our visual relationship to the physical world. He notes that "a scientific diagram or computer graphic model of a molecule is as relevant to this new history as a painting by Michelangelo". History of Art degree programmes have been slow to adopt these approaches over the past forty years, though the significance of this multidisciplinary role of the field is now the standard at research universities worldwide. Moreover, there are no significant monographs that address the results of this combined approach to the histories of art and science. Now, at Professor Kemp's retirement, there is an opportunity to draw needed attention to this development in the fields of the histories of art and science.

Speakers will include: Professor Claire Farago (University of Colorado), on the use and abuse of the early modern art treatise; Dr Carmen Bambach (Curator, Department of Drawings and Prints, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), on the technology of drawing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; Dr J.V. Field (Birkbeck, University of London), on 'Panofsky on Perspective'; Francis Wells (Papworth Hospital, Cambridge), on accuracy in Leonardo's anatomical studies; Professor Domenico Laurenza (University of Florence), on sixteenth-century anatomical drawings and Leonardo's comparative anatomy; and Professor Philip Steadman (University College, London), on Renaissance and early modern optical tools. Finally, David Hockney, CH, RA, will offer some 'Reflections on the Lost Techniques of Old Masters'.

Full details of this important conference will be made available in due course. Meanwhile we hope that you will want to join us at the conference: please ensure that it is firmly recorded in your diary now.

Leonardesque news

The Lettura Vinciana 2009

The forty-ninth Lettura Vinciana was delivered at Vinci on Saturday 18 April 2009 by Louis A. Waldman (University of Texas at Austin). His title was ‘Leonardo ed i suoi due “padri”: l’artista attraverso la lente delle sue opere perdute (Leonardo and his two “fathers”: the artist through the lens of his lost works). Recent scholars have unearthed much new material about Caterina who gave birth to ser Piero da Vinci’s illegitimate child, Leonardo, on 15 April 1452. We know also of his four *matringhe*, Albiera (d. 1464), Francesca (d. 1473), Margherita (d. 1486) and Lucrezia (d. after 1520): it is a well-known fact that Leonardo da Vinci had many mothers. Less familiar, however, is the story of Leonardo’s two “fathers”.

Leonardo’s own writings reveal his affection for the brother of his biological father, that is, Francesco da Vinci (d. 1507). It was Francesco who raised him as a youth in Vinci, while ser Piero lived in Florence, and it was Francesco – and not his real father – who provided a legacy for him in his will. Vasari’s mistake in the first edition of the *Lives*, where he called ser Piero the affectionate *uncle* he was raised by suggests that ser Francesco functioned for Leonardo very much *in loco parentis*. An unpublished inventory of ser Piero’s home, drawn up in 1504, sheds important new light on Leonardo’s relationship with both his “fathers” and on his lost works. Along with several small sculptures the text mentions a “testa cioè el ritracto di Francesco”, which we can almost certainly interpret as a reference to a (now lost) portrait by Leonardo of his uncle.

Perhaps it is not too daring to revive a hypothesis – mentioned in a desultory way by a small number of writers but rarely given much weight – that a reflection of Leonardo’s lost portrait of his “second father” has come down to us in the famous Turin “Self Portrait”, probably dating from the 1490s. Scholars have often pointed out its physiognomic similarity to contemporary portraits of Leonardo. Yet the sitter in the Turin sheet appears too old to be Leonardo at the time he drew it. The confirmation that a painted “ritracto di Francesco” once existed suggests a neat solution to this paradox, albeit one that remains speculative. Other new documents presented here offer new hypotheses about other lost works: the first, a possible architectural

commission by Leonardo in the 1470s, and the second, one of the cartoons for *the Sant’Anna Metterza* (ca. 1501/15).

The publication of the Society’s conference on Leonardo da Vinci’s *Treatise on Painting*

Claire Farago (ed.), *Re-Reading Leonardo: The Treatise on Painting across Europe, 1550-1900*. Ashgate, Surrey, 2009. ISBN 978-0-7546-6532-8

Dr Jill Burke writes: Leonardo da Vinci’s *Treatise on Painting* is far from a straightforward text. The treatise we know today is a shortened version of a volume compiled by Leonardo’s pupil, Francesco Melzi, after his master’s death in 1519, and now in the Vatican library. Attempts to publish a still shorter version of this text before 1582 failed; the first successful publication of the treatise, which attributed Leonardo as sole author, was only issued in Paris in 1651, more than 130 years after his death.

The early story of the *Treatise* is ably outlined in Clare Farago’s introduction, and the volume ends with an exhaustive bibliography of the printed editions of Leonardo’s *Treatise* by Mario Valentino Guffanti. As the latter suggests, the focus of this weighty and handsomely-produced volume is not its creation, but its European reception.

The structure of the volume takes Granducal Florence in particular and Italy more generally as its starting point, with chapters largely considering the “migration and transformation” of ideas in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (with a chronological jump to Naples to examine the first Italian edition of 1733); later parts look at the diffusion of the *Treatise* around Europe. The five chapters on France largely examine the treatise in relationship to the heated debates surrounding the establishment of the Académie royale and the relationship of art theory to national identity. As the next two chapters discuss, the *Treatise* was only published in Spain in 1784, but had considerable influence before then through other works on perspective as well as Francisco Pacheco’s 1649 *Art of Painting*. The focus of the next section shifts to Northern Europe, with a consideration of Leonardo’s theories as transmitted by Karel van Mander (1604), Samuel van Hoogstraten (1678) and Rubens.

Section 5 has 2 chapters on England, where the *Trattato* was translated in 1721, interestingly related to a promotion of “Newtonian culture and speculative freemasonry”; as elsewhere in Northern Europe, many of Leonardo’s maxims had already circulated through various other texts, including English translations of French art theory, and, as elsewhere, knowledge of Leonardo and the dissemination of his thesis bore a close – but often ambiguous – relationship to the rise of the art institution in Britain.

The final part, called “The Greek and Slavic Reception” includes two chapters - one focuses on the Greek translation of Leonardo’s text by Panagiotis Doraxas in 1726; this influenced art not just in the Ionian islands and western Greece but also the Slav painter Christopher Zepharović’s theoretical treatises (written 1736-1753). The volume finishes with a chapter on Poland, which had no tradition of art theory in the early modern period – the first formal art school was only founded in 1818. Perhaps refreshingly, it seems that Leonardo’s *Treatise* did not attract much interest in Poland, apart from amongst small artistic circles, until the twentieth century.

Taken together, these chapters provide a very interesting chronological and geographical journey that goes far beyond the tracing of a text. As Professor Farago suggests in her introduction, Leonardo’s writings, in their various versions, are used as a thread to consider how the professionalisation of the visual arts relates to intellectual context and national identity. This is the best sort of edited volume – a defined theme that can only be tackled by a number of scholars, and which results in a thought-provoking book that is considerably more than a sum of its parts.

Recent additions to LeonardoDigitale.com and Archive.org

Dr Matthew Landrus writes: Online access to free Leonardo-related resources developed at a rapid pace in the past year, particularly at the Biblioteca Leonardiana and the Internet Archive. With recent updates, their websites, LeonardoDigitale.com and Archive.org, provide immediate access to much of the literary and visual resources that inform us about Leonardo’s inventive and investigative interests.

The Biblioteca Leonardiana added the Institut de France manuscripts to LeonardoDigitale.com, completing the set with manuscripts G through M in the past four months. Thanks to this, the site, which also offers scans and transcriptions of Codices Atlanticus and Madrid, and the Windsor anatomical manuscripts, provides free access to nearly 2550 folios (5100 pages), the bulk of approximately 3800 surviving sheets. Thus most of Leonardo’s autograph written work is now online.

For images of some of the other folios, one can still visit the web sites of the Windsor Royal Collection (<http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/eGallery/>), the Victoria and Albert Museum (www.vam.ac.uk/collections/periods_styles/medieval/Med_Ren_Features/leonardo/forster_codices), the British Library (www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/tp/leonardo/accessible/introduction.html), and the Metropolitan Museum ([www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/collection database](http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/collection/database)). Windsor continues to increase the number of available scans, which is now 262, from the 634 folios. Codices Trivulziano and ‘On Flight’ are not yet available online.

In addition to LeonardoDigitale.com, the Internet Archive at archive.org is also one of first places to check for free access to full-text Leonardo-related resources. If there is a source at the site that is also at books.google.com, a link is provided to the associated PDF. Whereas Google normally provides just a PDF, archive.org also offers a full text version and several other formats. These are found via the link at the left side to “All Files: HTTP”, directing one to the most useful information about the file types and sizes available, and noting the dates of the updates. Formats often include the following: PDF, DjVu, Abbyy FineReader, FlipBook, TK3, JPEGs, TIFFs, and a link to ‘read online’. This last format is the easiest method with which to quickly view the original pages of the books.

A simpler version of the archive is in development as OpenLibrary.org. The site has a catalogue of 23 million books, which includes over a million full-text resources from archive.org. At present, however, the beta site offers much less information about the full-text books, with links only to PDFs.

The PDF format is nonetheless the best available for many of the non-English language resources,

since their plain-text versions were transcribed with OCR (optical character recognition) software that was not ‘trained’ by the user to recognise non-English characters. To get the best plain-text resource – within which one may search for individual words – one should personally train OCR software like Readiris to recognise the non-English language TIFFs or uncompressed PDFs found at archive.org. One of the best full-text resources of Leonardo’s literary work, available since September 2002, is the (Italian) ‘Trattato della Pittura’ at www.liberliber.it/biblioteca/l/leonardo, though this is not available at archive.org. The most popular full-text Leonardo resource has been Jean Paul Richter’s 1888 *Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, donated to Project Gutenberg in April 2002 by Charles Aldarondo and the Distributed Proofreaders Team. This is also available at the Internet Archive, along with other books from gutenberg.org. By comparison, Richter’s 1883 *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci* is available at archive.org in a plain-text format that is easy to read, though with some of the usual OCR anomalies.

The University of Toronto generously contributed exceptional scans of this book along with numerous significant Leonardo-related resources, including the following: *Raccolta Vinciana* volumes 1, 7, 9, and 11, Ludwig’s 1882 *Das Buch von der Malerei (Treatise on Painting)*, Péladan’s 1910 *Manuscrits de Léonard de Vinci: les 14 manuscrits de l’Institut de France*, L. Venturi’s 1919 *La critica e l’arte di Leonardo da Vinci*, A. Venturi’s 1920 *Leonardo da Vinci pittore*, Fumagalli’s 1915 *Leonardo Prosatore*, Sirén’s 1916 *Leonardo da Vinci, the Artist and the Man*, Bode’s 1921 *Studien über Leonardo*, Hoerth’s 1907 *Das Abendmahl*, Valeri’s 1922 *Leonardo da Vinci e la scultura*, Solmi’s 1910 *Leonardo da Vinci: Conferenze fiorentine*, Rio’s 1857 *Leonardo da Vinci e la sua scuola*, and Beltrami’s 1919 *Bibliografia vinciana*. Toronto contributed these and other books on Leonardo in August-September 2008.

In addition to Ludwig’s translation of Leonardo’s *Treatise on Painting*, archive.org has the best selection of full-text translations of the *Treatise* thanks to the generous contribution of 28 e-books by UCLA’s Belt Library of Vinciana in November-December 2008. At archive.org/details/davinci, select ‘All items’ under the *Vitruvian Man* image to see the list of editions in several European languages, from the

1651 *editio princeps* by Raphaele du Fresne, to John Francis Rigaud’s revised English edition of 1877.

Also in the list are a few influential volumes that contain only portions of the *Treatise*. For example, the 1773 ‘Théorie de la figure humaine’, based on a manuscript attributed to Rubens, includes portions of Leonardo’s *Treatise* text and various illustrations that are ultimately derived from Leonardo’s drawings and Poussin’s re-drawings, versions of which would appear in the printed *Trattato* of 1651. In the early seventeenth century, Rubens possibly copied drawings by these artists, as confirmed by Juliana Barone in *Re-Reading Leonardo: The Treatise on Painting across Europe, 1550-1900*, edited by Claire Farago, Ashgate 2009, pp. 441-472.

Brief descriptions by Kate Steinitz accompany the Belt Library catalogue entries. Further information on the printed editions is provided by Mario Valentino Guffanti’s detailed bibliography in *Re-Reading Leonardo*, pp. 569-605.

The Internet Archive has a facsimile of the Codex Urbinas, Francesco Melzi’s manuscript version of the *Treatise on Painting*, though it helps to search for this by name. ‘Treatise on Painting Vol-II-Facsimile’ is the second volume of Philip McMahon’s rare 1956 edition, provided by the Universal Digital Library in 2006. The first volume of the set has the English translation and is not available online due to copyright restrictions.

Another useful resource provided by the Universal Library is Edward MacCurdy’s two volume *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* (1939). A search for ‘MacCurdy AND Notebooks’ will find these volumes, the first of which has the wrong date of 1905. This is actually the 1939 edition, whereas the second volume is the 1958 edition. Although there is no significant difference between the two volumes, the first volume is only available in DjVu, Abbyy FineReader, FlipBook, and TIFF formats.

Free access to full text and image resources, generously provided by Biblioteca Leonardiana and the Internet Archive, continues to give researchers with almost any level of expertise greater flexibility in their approaches to Leonardo. This has led to a greater familiarity with the literary and visual resources that tell us most

about the business closest to Leonardo's studies and his creative output.

I would like to thank Max Marmor for information about The Internet Archive's latest acquisitions. I am also grateful to Juliana Barone for her advice regarding the 1773 'Théorie de la figure humaine'.

The Leonardo da Vinci Society

The Secretary is very grateful for the comments and suggestions made by members and very much regrets that he has not had time to reply to them individually. 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 <N.Bradshaw@gre.ac.uk>) your current email address either in case she 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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