

Leonardo da Vinci Society Newsletter

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Recent and forthcoming events

The Annual General Meeting and Annual Lecture, 2010.

The Society's Annual General Meeting was held on Friday 7 May 2010 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 again most grateful to the Courtauld Institute for their generous hospitality of this event. This year's Annual Lecture, entitled "A New Portrait by Leonardo. How do we know?", was delivered jointly by Martin Kemp and Pascal Cotte who took it in turn to discuss key aspects of the newly-discovered portrait which has been dubbed *La Bella Principessa*. The result was a lively account of the reasons why this portrait can be attributed to Leonardo da Vinci.

Martin Kemp began by explaining his involvement in the study of the portrait. He was a relatively latecomer into the discussion. The portrait first appeared in a sale at Christie's on 30 January 2008, with the attribution to 'German School' and dated to the early nineteenth century. In September 2008 a report was commissioned from the art historian Nicolas Turner, who concluded that it was a remarkable drawing which fitted stylistically in Leonardo's oeuvre. Other scholars, including Carlo Pedretti and Alessandro Vezzosi, agreed with the attribution, and Pascal Cotte was asked to undertake a scientific examination. Kemp explained that when he was sent a reproduction of the portrait in March 2008, his initial reaction was to question its authenticity. His actual involvement took place only in October 2008, after viewing the work in the original and becoming aware of Cotte's important findings.

Having previously undertaken scientific analyses of the *Mona Lisa* and of the *Lady with the Ermine* with his innovative multispectral



digital scanner, Pascal Cotte was able not only to study the materials and technique of the portrait of *La Bella Principessa*, but also to undertake revealing cross-comparisons. Cotte explained how his camera works and demonstrated the exceptional range and quality of the images it provides. Due to a new lighting system, the camera produces a series of digitised images with unprecedented resolution and colour accuracy, scanning the surface under ultraviolet at one end of the spectrum, and at the other end, infrared. It shows aspects of the work that are invisible to the naked eye, and also allows a virtual reconstruction of the original colours of the work. The camera uses thirteen different filters to gauge the reflected light on the various layers of the painting (or drawing).

The portrait was then discussed by Kemp in relation to two of Leonardo's well-known portraits, the *Isabella d'Este* and the *Lady with the Ermine*, and in connection with a silverpoint drawing of a *Young woman in profile*, now at Windsor. In spite of the different medium, the latter exemplified Leonardo's use of a parallel-hatching shading technique comparable to that of *La Bella Principessa*. Leonardo also adopted this technique in his skull studies of 1489. The quality of the profile and the knots decorating her sleeve also support an attribution to Leonardo. Kemp explained that the fact that the *La Bella Principessa* is on vellum (parchment), rather than on paper, is very unusual. The drawing is executed on animal skin with coloured chalks and pen and brown ink. However, there are passages in Leonardo's notebooks, as Kemp pointed out, in which the use of chalks is recorded and linked to the French painter, Jean Perréal. Leonardo most likely experimented with and developed this technique (the 'method of dry colouring') following his contact with the French painter in Milan around 1494.

Cotte, in his turn, singled out six key points that have emerged from his scientific examination of the portrait. He showed that the technique of coloured chalks employed in the portrait is consistent with Leonardo's procedures, as is the left-handed hatching that is particularly visible to the left of the sitter. He also revealed the existence of a fingerprint, which matches one in Leonardo's Vatican *St Jerome*, and, furthermore, that the ink that produced the fingerprint in the portrait is the same ink in which it was executed. Significantly, this ink contrasts to another one, used by a later, right-handed restorer. The fingerprint was further studied by Peter Paul Biro in the context of Leonardo's works. Cotte also demonstrated that there is a mark of the palm of a hand in the neck of the sitter, and that in Leonardo's *Lady with the Ermine* there are similar marks. Leonardo probably used both his fingers and palms as part of his drawing process. Cotte's innovative camera and findings about Leonardo's technique also allowed him to distinguish the original parts of the portrait from those resulting from later restoration.

Finally, Kemp examined the portrait in the context of the Sforza court. Leonardo's portraits of women are intrinsically linked to poetry. For instance, the *Lady with the Ermine*, which shows one of the duke's mistresses, Cecilia Gallerani, was the subject of verses by the poet Bernardo Bellincioni. The portrait of *La Bella Principessa* shows on physical examination that the left-hand margin is not original; it was probably cut out from a manuscript (it has needle holes which indicate that it was sewn into a manuscript) which, most likely, had accompanying laudatory verses. As for the identification of the sitter, Kemp concluded the lecture by suggesting an identification for the sitter: the young lady may well be Lodovico's illegitimate daughter (later legitimised) Bianca, who married Galeazzo Sanseverino in 1496 and died a few months later. Bianca was the subject of poems, by Bellincioni at the time of her marriage, and by Niccolò da Correggio following her early death. Characteristic of official Milanese portraiture, the representation of the sitter in strict profile, the elaborate hair style (*coazzone*) and the colours of her dress, all point to the representation of a Sforza lady of the highest ranking. The combined talks of Kemp and Cotte on style, medium, context, technical and scientific examination

revealed a set of interlocked, compelling evidence, which is further discussed in their book, 'The story of the new masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci, *La Bella Principessa*.'



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

This conference will take place on Friday 22 October 2010, at St. John's College Oxford and the Ashmolean Museum. Entitled 'Approaches to art and science after Berenson', the conference will address the 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.

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 2011. 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.

The 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’; Professor Pietro C. Marani (Politecnico di Milano); 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; Professor Frank Zöllner (University of Zurich); 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’.

Details of the timetable of events on Friday 22 October will be circulated to members of the Leonardo da Vinci Society in due course.

The Annual General Meeting and Annual Lecture, 2011.

Next year’s AGM and Annual Lecture will be held on Friday 13 May 2011, in the Kenneth Clark Lecture Room at the Courtauld Institute of Art (subject to confirmation). The lecturer will be Dr Jill Burke (University of Edinburgh), who expects to speak about Leonardo da Vinci’s treatment of the female nude in his paintings and drawings.

Leonardesque news

The Lettura Vinciana 2010

The fiftieth Lettura Vinciana was delivered at Vinci on Saturday 17 April 2010 by Fabio Frosini (University of Urbino). His title was ‘Vita, tempo e linguaggio (1508-1510)’ and the lecture was subtitled with a quotation from Leonardo himself: ‘...perché al continuo variano di seculo in seculo e di paese in paese, mediante le mistion de’popoli che per guerre o altri accidenti al continuo si mistano...’. This appears on Windsor, Royal Library 19045v, described by Kenneth Clark and Carlo Pedretti, in their catalogue of Leonardo’s anatomical drawings in the royal collection as a ‘Page of notes treating of the muscles of the tongue, the mechanism of speech, the variety of languages and the tendency to an infinite number of them, the alchemists and their inventions, the impossibility of making gold, etc.’

The new Museo Leonardiano at Vinci

On 22 May 2010 the redesigned Museo Leonardiano on the Piazza del Castello in Vinci

was reopened to the public. On show is a historical collection of Leonardo's machines, refurbished after a series of important changes. The exhibition display and circulation route has been updated and enriched, and the museum has been made fully accessible to the disabled.

The renovated Museo Leonardiano houses one of the largest and most original collections of machines and models designed by Leonardo the inventor, the technologist and the engineer. The renovation of the Museo Leonardiano marks a further milestone on the path of innovation embarked on by the enterprising museum team. Following the opening of the new museum area in Palazzina Uzielli and the inauguration of Piazza de' Guidi, redesigned by Mimmo Paladino and from where the new entrance to the museum is accessed, the plans for the renovation of the Museum dedicated to Leonardo da Vinci come to completion with the reopening of the Conti Guidi Castle. The result is an even richer Museum, with new content which highlights the Leonardo machines and models and puts them in their historical context.

The historical collection of Leonardo da Vinci's machines is enhanced by an even more rigorous, comprehensible and contextual presentation of Leonardo's studies. 3D digital animation and interactive applications complement the reconstructions of Leonardo's models. The focus of the exhibition is on Leonardo da Vinci's thinking in the technical-scientific field, ranging from construction sites to the study of physics, from mechanics to architecture and civil engineering. All this is framed by the artists, architects and engineers who were his contemporaries, affording an accurate historical presentation which shows Leonardo's debts, merits and originality.

Leonardo da Vinci, "La Bella Principessa". The profile portrait of a Milanese woman, by Martin Kemp and Pascal Cotte. London (Hodder & Stoughton), 2010. ISBN 978 1 444 70626 0

At the outset, it must be acknowledged that the drawing that is the subject of this book is a highly unusual object. It is drawn in three colours of natural chalk – black, red and white – which is almost unique in fifteenth-century Italy.

Moreover, it is a highly finished drawing on parchment, and the needle-holes along the left-hand border indicate that it was cut from a manuscript, for which it was probably the frontispiece. No such extant manuscript has been identified, although that this one was a collection of laudatory poems about the portrait's sitter seems likely. Nor is there any parallel for a manuscript picture being drawn, in three colours of chalk, rather than painted in the standard technique of a manuscript illuminator. To work in a novel technique, and one untested in its context, suggests a technically unorthodox artist, and seems to rule out any possibility that this drawing is a modern fake.

The scientific evidence assembled by Pascal Cotte and his colleagues in the second half of the book sets out a comprehensive case, analysing the use of natural chalks and pen and ink, and defining the handling of these materials by the artist, including the use of left-handed hatching. Less convincing are the arguments over the palm print, and the fragmentary finger-print that is compared with a finger-print on Leonardo da Vinci's Vatican *St Jerome*. Cotte also extensively discusses the drawing's restoration history, seeking to return the drawing to its pre-restoration state. He also productively examines details in the drawing – the eye, the interlace patterns and the handling of the contours – in comparison with Leonardo's *Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani*.

Most of the controversy surrounding this portrait drawing has arisen over the construction of its historical context, the identification of the sitter, and the attribution, all issues dealt with in Martin Kemp's sections of the book. Kemp identifies the sitter as Bianca Sforza, Duke Lodovico's daughter who married Galeazzo Sanseverino in mid-1496; but he makes it clear that this remains hypothetical. It is perhaps the least unlikely of a number of possibilities, assuming in any case that the sitter was indeed a Milanese princess. The character of the drawing certainly has much in common with Milanese portraits of the 1490s, and the use of the 'trois couleurs' technique suggests the influence of the French painter Jean Perréal, who was in Milan in Charles VIII's retinue in 1494. Arguing his case that the drawing is by Leonardo requires Kemp to date the so-called 'Ligny memorandum' in the Codex Atlanticus, in

which mention is made of Perréal's drawing techniques, to 1494 rather than the usual 1499 (when Perréal was again in Milan, with Louis XII). There may be sound evidence in favour of this earlier date, in for example the style of the handwriting and the sketches on this sheet of the Codex Atlanticus; but this is not pursued here. Much of Kemp's contextual argument however, is firmly historically based and persuasive, and the conclusion that he reaches as a result of his acute visual analysis, that the drawing is indeed by Leonardo da Vinci, may well be correct.

One critic has written that '*La Bella Principessa*... is not art history – it is advocacy'. This is unjust: the art-historical argument is cool and balanced. The advocacy comes rather from the publisher, with the use for example of a rather pretentious pseudo-'Leonardo handwriting' font for the chapter headings, and the header on the dust-jacket: 'The story of the new masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci'. However, the illustrations throughout the book are excellent, and help the reader to recognise the extremely high quality of style and execution of this rare object.

Leonardiana. Studi e saggi su Leonardo da Vinci, by Pietro C. Marani, Milan (Skira) 2010

The publication is announced, in June 2010, of this volume of collected studies written by the leading Leonardo scholar, Pietro Marani, over the past thirty years. In his introduction, Marani writes that 'my personal scholarly journey results, perhaps, in a sort of autobiography'.

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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