

Leonardo da Vinci Society Newsletter

editor: Francis Ames-Lewis

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Recent and forthcoming events

The Annual General Meeting and Annual Lecture 2011

The AGM and Annual Lecture next year will be held as usual in the Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre at the Courtauld Institute of Art, on Friday 13 May 2011. The AGM will be at 5.30 pm and the Annual Lecture at 6.00 pm. The Annual Lecture will be given by Dr Jill Burke (University of Edinburgh), whose title is 'Leonardo da Vinci and the Perfect Body: Nakedness and Humanity in Renaissance Italy'. *Dr Burke writes:* Why were Leonardo da Vinci and other artists working around 1500 so obsessed with representing the perfect nude? Normally it is assumed that this was simply a facet of the classical revival, but this lecture will consider other possible factors. Voyages of discovery in Africa and the New World, the tales of the naked natives to be found there, and the burgeoning fashion for African slaves amongst the Italian elite all may have contributed to a burgeoning interest in an "essential" humanity, and concomitantly how to represent a timeless, perfected human form. Moreover, rediscoveries of (or renewed enthusiasm for) classical texts, notably Vitruvius' *On Architecture* and Lucretius' *On the Order of Things*, both of which Leonardo knew, provided alternative models to the Old Testament story of Adam and Eve for human history. This lecture will put Leonardo's drawings and writings in the context of Renaissance thought about the nature of humanity.

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

This conference took place on Friday 22 October 2010, at St. John's College Oxford and the Ashmolean Museum. It addressed the results of forty years of progress in approaches to the histories of art and science. The main reason for this conference was 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 was excellently organized by Dr Matthew Landrus and Dr Juliana Barone, both former doctoral students of Martin Kemp. There follow the abstracts of, or reports on, the papers delivered.

Professor Frank Zöllner (Universität Leipzig), *Automimesis – The History of an Idea:* In this paper on "automimesis" the speaker dealt with Leonardo's physiological understanding of the process of drawing. He discussed his ideas of how the body and the mind works when an artist draws, and how the mind can be trained in order to improve an artist's ability to draw correctly and to avoid mistakes such as "automimesis". From an analysis of Leonardo's countermeasures Zöllner passed on to the reception of automimesis in the following centuries.

Professor Donald Preziosi (UCLA), *Pausanias' Polygnotos and the Parallax of Parnassos:* This talk dealt with the interpretation of the remains of the ancient Greek sanctuary at Delphi. The speaker was concerned with the problem of reconciling disparate bits of evidence about the origins, nature, functions, and historical evolution of that remarkable artifact. His interest equally concerned the fabricatedness – the artistry, if you will – of what has conventionally been taken as *evidence* itself. Among the phenomena he discussed were (1) the very ancient traditions we distinguish as "mythological" or "religious"; (2) the archaeological record (the "facts on the ground," so to speak, whose facticity is in no small measure itself an artifice of hypotheses about their significance and function); and (3) the writings of ancient visitors and users of this extraordinary artifact known as Delphi. The latter tradition alone spanned over a millennium of recorded commentary and interpretation, while the archaeological record is some three millennia older than the classical period.

Our very pragmatic challenge is to reckon with the fact that what art creates is no “second world”, but the very world in which we really do live. The modes of practice we might create that build upon that foundation may be better able to form and foster links with diverse forms of knowledge-production, whether conventionally referred to as artistic or scientific or philosophical. We are today realizing such vividly imagined new syntheses of art, science, and philosophy, one of whose pre-eminent practitioners and most vivid imaginers has been the person whom we were honoured to gather to honour. Like Polygnotos the *multiply-knowing*.

Professor Claire Farago (University of Colorado at Boulder), *The Artless Art of Leonardo's Treatise on Painting, c. 1570*: What if the history of Renaissance painting had not been initially organized in terms of signature style by Bernard Berenson and other connoisseurs? What other questions might we raise about the function of naturalism in sacred painting, and about the interrelationship of art and science? This paper reconsidered Melzi's original compilation of Leonardo's *Treatise* and its immediate abridgment as an ongoing response to church reform in light of the efficacy attributed to devotional images, including the viewer's role in projecting his/her own imagination into images. Farago argued that the virtual reality of artistic images endorsed by Tridentine church reformers, such as Archbishop of Bologna Gabriele Paleotti and Archbishop of Milan Carlo Borromeo (in office 1565-1584), can help us to understand the abridged version of Leonardo's broadly disseminated text. Read differently, the abridged text might have a lot to tell us about the institutionally sanctioned function of artifice in religious images, even about the un-thought ground of art-historical methods of connoisseurship.

Professor Francesca Fiorani (University of Virginia), *Leonardo's Shadows*: This paper examined Leonardo's lifelong interest in the depiction of blurred, coloured shadows from the point of view of painting technique, optics and natural philosophy, giving special emphasis to the artist's early Florentine years. Since no writing by Leonardo exists to document his optical knowledge in the 1470s, this inferential investigation emerges from a detailed analysis of

the artist's early paintings and drawings and a consideration of the practical uses of optics in late fifteenth-century Florence.

Professor Domenico Laurenza (Museo Galileo, Florence), *Sixteenth-century Anatomical Drawings and Prints. How Scientists were indebted to Artists: New Evidence*: The study of anatomy by artists reached a remarkable level in sixteenth-century Italy. Artists studied anatomy in order to achieve a realistic representation of the human figure in art and, in the case of Leonardo, even aimed to renew anatomy as a science.

However, Renaissance artist-anatomists never succeeded in printing and publishing anatomical books. Leonardo is not the only example of an artist-anatomist who worked on an anatomical treatise, planned (at least on one occasion) to print it, but never succeeded in doing so.

Sixteenth-century illustrated anatomical books were published by scientists, the professional anatomists who were not only authors of the texts but also became skilful organizers and supervisors of the editorial enterprise. Nevertheless, in this paper Laurenza sought to demonstrate just how much scientists owed to artists, even though the latter always stayed behind the scenes.

This substantial debt to artists, which the speaker considered, is not the well-known instrumental use of artists as illustrators of the anatomical books which scientists wrote and published, but rather a debt consisting in scientists using visual formulae, printmaking techniques and even anatomical contents developed in the world of the artist-anatomists.

Laurenza presented an anatomical drawing by Raphael as the possible source of one of the plates in an important anatomical book published by the anatomist Berengario da Carpi. He analysed how the increasing interest of professional anatomists in minute anatomy matched new printmaking techniques first developed by artists; and how at the same time artists, by limiting themselves to the study of “gross anatomy”, distanced themselves from the new interests of contemporary anatomists.

Anatomists considered included Berengario da Carpi, Andrea Vesalius, Juan Valverde de Hamusco, Bartolomeo Eustachius and others. Artist-anatomists considered included Antonio Pollaiuolo, Raphael, Battista Franco, Ludovico Cigoli and others.

Francis C. Wells (Cambridge University), *Leonardo and the heart: accuracy and modern relevance*: It may surprise readers to know that even today there remains a considerable disconnect between studied anatomy and observed function in thought about cardiac pathophysiology. By this the speaker meant that didactic teaching heavily predominates in the dissemination of perceived knowledge about the way the heart works and fails to work. In heart surgery this is fuelled by the ‘fear factor’ that exists when learning to operate on this most vital of organs. Time to stop, look and learn is limited by experience and confidence. Hence there is much dependence upon ‘accepted truths’ and much less utilisation of original thought.

Wells’ studies of Leonardo, and particularly his method of working with thoughtful observation and logical deduction at its core, has been a real stimulus to him to approach that which he sees every day in the operating room in the same way. This and learning how to look *and* see, which is central to the joy that he finds in drawing, has been transforming.

The speaker hoped to reveal some of this in his paper, along with the beautiful accuracy to be found in Leonardo’s words and drawings on the heart.

J.V. Field (Birkbeck, University of London), *Panofsky on perspective*: Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) was a distinguished historian of art. However, his essay ‘Perspective as symbolic form’ (*Die Perspektive als symbolische Form*; 1927) takes him into an area where art and science overlap. Moreover, Panofsky asserts that Renaissance perspective introduced the modern idea of space and thus influenced the development of science. This paper examined the essay in the light of today’s knowledge and methods. Despite some serious shortcomings, particularly in regard to mathematics, Panofsky’s text presents interesting insights and has exerted considerable influence. Panofsky’s notion of ‘symbolic form’ comes from the philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945); so does his definition of the ‘modern’ sense of ‘space’. However, Panofsky seems to be confusing physical space with the purely mathematical abstract space of artists’ perspective constructions. There is also confusion about the meaning of ‘infinite’.

Mathematical weaknesses lead to various other assertions that have not stood the test of time, such as that physically correct perspective should use curved lines not straight ones and that trecento painters used a ‘vanishing axis’ rather than a single vanishing point. More happily, Panofsky notes that small passages of apparently correct perspective construction are found in some Byzantine and Romanesque compositions. Progress to a central vanishing point is implied to have been by trial and error (a mechanism that seems implausible in the light of today’s knowledge). The first correct pictures in the Northern and Italian traditions are asserted to be Jan van Eyck’s *Arnolfini Wedding* and Masaccio’s *Trinity* fresco. The use of a single vanishing point is taken to indicate an understanding of infinity.

The story effectively finishes with these correct pictures. Panofsky has considered only the origins of perspective, but he ends by referring to profound cultural effects of perspective as affecting Man’s view of his place in the Universe. Panofsky’s method throughout the essay has been to rely heavily upon his eye, that is upon his interpretation of the visual evidence. This is no doubt a reasonable strategy for an art historian, but it does not lead to solid results in writing a history of perspective. In contrast, the closing paragraphs draw on philosophical and historical concepts that have played no part in the main body of the essay and the conclusion thus seems curiously detached from what precedes it. It does, however, find echoes in later writings on perspective.

Philip Steadman (University College London), *2D to 3D: Adventures with Martin Kemp in reconstructing the space of paintings*: This was not so much a paper, more a series of reminiscences about the several occasions, since the late 1980s, on which the author has collaborated with Martin Kemp to make 3D reconstructions of the spaces seen in paintings. Some points are made about the techniques used for such reconstructions – drawings, physical models, computer models – and the purposes that they can serve, either illustrative, didactic or to investigate serious questions in art history.

The first of these joint ventures was the production of five short computer-animated films for an exhibition of the work of Leonardo da Vinci in 1989. One of these films was devoted to

the perspective problems of Leonardo's 'Last Supper'. Another used the computer method of 'ray tracing' to re-work and confirm Leonardo's hand calculations of the shapes of shadows cast by simple geometrical bodies. The second collaboration was in a BBC film of 1992, 'The Piero Trail', in which Kemp and the author discussed the perspective of Piero della Francesca's 'Flagellation' with the help of a large physical model of the space of the painting. The third topic that has brought Kemp and the author together is the hypothesis that Johannes Vermeer made use of the camera obscura. The author originally reconstructed the spaces of eleven of Vermeer's interiors with plan and section drawings made by hand. Later he built a 3D physical model, and several others have since built 3D computer models. Vermeer's studio has been reconstructed at full size on at least three occasions. These drawings and models have been used variously to study effects of light and shade in Vermeer's work; to investigate possible methods of composition; and to test techniques for applying paint, working inside the camera obscura.

David Hockney, CH, RA, *Reflections on the Lost Techniques of Old Masters*: The speaker opened by asserting that artists always use the latest technology available. He prefers the notion that such technologies may be 'lost' to us, but were not 'secret' at their time. He observed that cast shadows are not used in any pictorial art outside Europe (in China, Japan, India, or Persia, for example), while the representation of shadows cast by the sun, or by artificial light sources, develops slowly in western art: starting in the 1420s there is a development during the Renaissance, and then a rapid move forward in Caravaggio's work. Hockney considered the use of the camera lucida in portraiture: as an aid to measurement this was a useful tool for good draughtsmen. It was used by Ingres to develop the 'guided line' (as opposed to the 'groped-for line'): Holbein also used this, as most obviously did Andy Warhol, using a projected image. He expressed surprise that art historians did not explore more the use of photography as an aid to the painter. For example, neither the catalogue of the recent Købke exhibition nor that for the van Gogh exhibition at the Royal Academy mentions

the use of the camera, although their use of photography is evident in their paintings and drawings. However, there are problems with using photography, because this technology makes the world look dull. But there are grounds for hope in the potential of new technologies, such as the iphone or video cameras. Using an ipad Hockney has recently made drawings that can be played back, so that the artist can observe and revisit his own artistic process. He has also recently made videos using nine video-cameras mounted on his Land Rover, and the results are visually compelling.

Leonardesque news

Martin Kemp and Juliana Barone, eds., *I disegni di Leonardo da Vinci e della sua cerchia. Collezioni in Gran Bretagna*

Publication has recently been announced of the version in Italian of the long-awaited catalogue of drawings in British collections (apart from the Royal Library, Windsor) by Leonardo da Vinci and his circle. This limited edition of 998 copies with illustrations in facsimile has been edited and presented by Martin Kemp and Juliana Barone, and published in Florence by Giunti as a volume in the series *Edizione Nazionale dei Manoscritti e dei Disegni di Leonardo da Vinci*. The publisher's blurb may be translated: The numerous drawings held today in Great Britain offer a wide range of techniques and functions, from preliminary sketches to the most complete cartoon of his work. Some drawings are produced with meticulous and controlled lines, while others seem jotted down in a few seconds. Subjects range from nature studies to fantastic inventions, from secular allegories to religious compositions. Most of the drawings are connected with finished works of art, but some are technical and scientific studies; in general, they together constitute the basis for a thematic evaluation of Leonardo's creative procedures, from 'random' inventions to systematic explorations of motifs. Of the 139 drawings in the catalogue, around seventy are by Leonardo himself, the rest being by his followers or by artists in his circle. The facsimile illustrations are accompanied by catalogue entries by Martin Kemp and Juliana Barone, two of the world's most authoritative Leonardo scholars, and complemented by a further one hundred

comparative illustrations. Studies by Catherine Whistler, of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and Antony Griffiths, of the British Museum, offer information on their respective museums' collections. A bibliography assembled by Uta Kornmeier completes the catalogue. The collection includes the Leonardesque drawings scattered across British collections: the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham; the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; the Devonshire Collection at Chatsworth; the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh; the British Museum, the Courtauld Gallery, the National Gallery and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London; and the Ashmolean Museum and Christ Church Picture Gallery in Oxford.

I disegni di Leonardo da Vinci e della sua cerchia. Collezioni in Gran Bretagna, eds. Martin Kemp and Juliana Barone, Florence (Giunti Editore) 2010. 240 pp + 112 facsimile illus. ISBN 9788809050044; 3,500 euro.

Domenico Laurenza, *Leonardo. L'anatomia*

Also recently published is a new study of Leonardo da Vinci's anatomical drawings, by Domenico Laurenza (University of Florence and Museo Galileo, Florence). The text is lavishly illustrated with high-quality reproductions of all of Leonardo's anatomical drawings (including the recently-discovered drawing of the left side of a human skull, on the back of *the Madonna and child with St Anne* in the Louvre, Paris), and with many complementary plates of anatomical prints and drawings by Leonardo's contemporaries and by later artists. The book is arranged chronologically, so that the development of Leonardo's thoughts on the workings of the human body and mind can be tracked. But why a new book on Leonardo's anatomical work? the author asks in his introduction. 'Because in history the last word does not exist': each generation tells it anew, enriching what has been set forth earlier. The principal difference between this study and the many books on Leonardo's anatomical work that have preceded it over nearly two centuries is that Leonardo's drawings are for the first time analyzed in the context of scholastic anatomical iconography, the schematic illustrations used in the medieval and early Renaissance Italian university's medical schools. The reader can thus better understand how

revolutionary were Leonardo's researches and anatomical representations.

Domenico Laurenza, *Leonardo. L'anatomia*, Florence (Giunti Editore) 2009. 191 pp, numerous illustrations. No ISBN.

The Robert H. Smith Annual Lecture on Renaissance Sculpture, Victoria and Albert Museum (London), 10 November 2010

This lecture was given by Gary M. Radke (Dean's Professor of the Humanities, Syracuse University, USA), whose title was 'What should a sculpture by Leonardo da Vinci look like?' *Dr J. V. Field writes:*

Prof Radke confessed, near the beginning of his lecture, that he did not propose to answer the question posed in its title. Nevertheless, some criteria did emerge from introductory discussions of Leonardo's handling of forms in other media and of the sculptural style of his teacher Verrocchio (1435–1488). The scope of these criteria became clearer in the mixture of connoisseurship and detective work in the five exercises in attribution that formed the main body of the talk.

First, however, there was a brief discussion of Leonardo's hostile remarks about sculpture, and sculptors, in his comparison between sculpture and painting in his draft *Treatise* on painting. The target is obviously the pre-eminent stone-carver Michelangelo, but the context alone ensures that Leonardo will favour painting, and it is also notable that Leonardo's own sculptures seem all to have involved not carving but modelling.

The five examples of possible surviving Leonardo sculpture were presented in order of increasing plausibility. First was the small terracotta *Madonna with laughing Child* (Victoria & Albert Museum, London), which has been ascribed to Leonardo, but was here given to Antonio Rossellino (1427-1479), one relevant matter being the elegant but apparently motiveless gesture of the Virgin's disengaged hand, which was contrasted with hands in works known to be by Leonardo, such as the *Annunciation* (Uffizi).

The second item was the roughly life size terracotta bust of the *Young Christ* (private collection, Switzerland). This was ascribed to the circle of Antonio Rossellino, largely on the basis of the rather heavy-handed treatment of the hair. Seen from above, the hair does not appear to be

growing upwards from the scalp, but rather to be glued on in lumps. The absence of ears was also noted.

The third item was the bronze statuette of a rider on a rearing horse (Budapest, currently on show in the 'Treasures from Budapest' exhibition, Royal Academy, London). The horseman's posture is unconvincing and the treatment of the tail is much more static than in any drawing by Leonardo. Upon closer examination, it appears that rider and tail were made separately from the horse, though chemical analysis shows that all three pieces were cast from the same melt. There are numerous Leonardo drawings of rearing horses with which the animal's pose can be compared, but its unsuitability as an equestrian monument is easily seen from the front view, which is grotesque, emphasising the ungainly way the animal is staggering on its hind legs. Radke suggested that the horse, but not its tail or its rider, might be from a wax by Leonardo. I took a look at the piece through the perspex case in London, and felt that in places the wax was finished more broadly than I would expect from Leonardo; but that criterion may be inappropriate for what would presumably have been a mere sketch for his private use.

The fourth item was two reliefs of angels (Louvre, Paris). On the basis of general realism, modelling and treatment of hair (compared with the *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci* (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC)) one angel was ascribed to Verrocchio and the other to Leonardo.

The final item was a silver high relief showing the *Beheading of St John the Baptist*, on the Florence Baptistery altar (Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence), for which payment was made to Verrocchio in 1474-75. Figures were formed in repoussé sheet and soldered to the background. From consideration of the quality of the modelling and the precise treatment of detail, two of the smaller lateral figures were ascribed to Leonardo (who was a member of Verrocchio's workshop at this time). The secure ascription of other figures to Verrocchio gave weight to the comparison.

The Leonardo da Vinci Society

The Secretary is very grateful for the comments and suggestions made by members and very much

regrets that she 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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