

Le MOSTRE[®]

IMPOSSIBILI

THE WORKS OF ART IN THE AGE
OF DIGITAL REPRODUCTION

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THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The *Impossible Exhibitions* project derives from an instance of cultural democracy that has its precursors in Paul Valéry, Walter Benjamin and André Malraux. The project is also born of the awareness that in the age of the digital reproducibility of the work of art, the concepts of safeguarding and (cultural and economic) evaluation of the artistic patrimony inevitably enter not only the work as itself, but also its reproduction: “For a hundred years here, as soon as the history of art has escaped specialists, it has been the history of what can be photographed” (André Malraux). When one artist's work is spread over various museums, churches and private collections in different continents, it becomes almost impossible to mount monograph exhibitions that give a significant overall vision of the great past artist's work. It is even harder to create great exhibitions due to the museum directors' growing – and understandable – unwillingness to loan the works, as well as the exorbitant costs of insurance and special security measures, which are inevitable for works of incalculable value. *Impossible Exhibitions* start from these premises.



Chicago, Loyola University Museum of Art, 2005



Naples, San Domenico Maggiore, 2013/2014

THE WORKS OF ART IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL REPRODUCTION



THE PROJECT

In a single exhibition space, *Impossible Exhibitions* present a painter's entire oeuvre in the form of very high definition reproductions, making use of digital technology permitting reproductions that fully correspond to the original works. Utmost detail resolution, the rigorously 1:1 format (Leonardo's *Last Supper* reproduction occupies around 45 square meters!), the correct print tone – certified by a renowned art scholar – make these reproductions extraordinarily close to the originals. The reproductions are printed on a transparent, backlit textile. This method gives the paintings special fascination but also lets one appreciate details and nuances the original canvases make difficult to enjoy. *Impossible Exhibitions* let very vast public admire works of art which could thus far only be seen on site or – at best – spotted in small format reproductions: catalogues, low-quality web images, posters and TV documentaries.



Naples, San Domenico Maggiore, 2013/2014



Rome, Mercati di Traiano, 2010

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Visitaron 186 mil personas la exhibición 'Una muestra imposible'

Por Notimex

lun, 20 abr 2015 16:34



Foto: Arturo López / Conaculta

México, DF. Con un total de 186 mil 14 visitas concluyó la exhibición de "Leonardo, Rafael, Caravaggio: una muestra imposible. Las obras de arte en la era de la reproducción digital", en el Centro Nacional de las Artes (Cenart).

El Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (Conaculta) informó que el número de visitantes que disfrutó de la exposición, del 15 de enero al 19 de abril, marcó un hito de asistencia para el Cenart desde su inauguración, en 1994.

La muestra, integrada por 57 pinturas y frescos de estos tres grandes artistas, reproducidos rigurosamente en escala 1:1 y en alta resolución, fue montada en cuatro galerías del Cenart: la Central, la Juan Soriano, Arte Binario y Espacio Alternativo.

Mexico City, Centro Nacional de las Artes, 2015



Mexico City, Centro Nacional de las Artes, 2015



Mexico City, Centro Nacional de las Artes, 2015

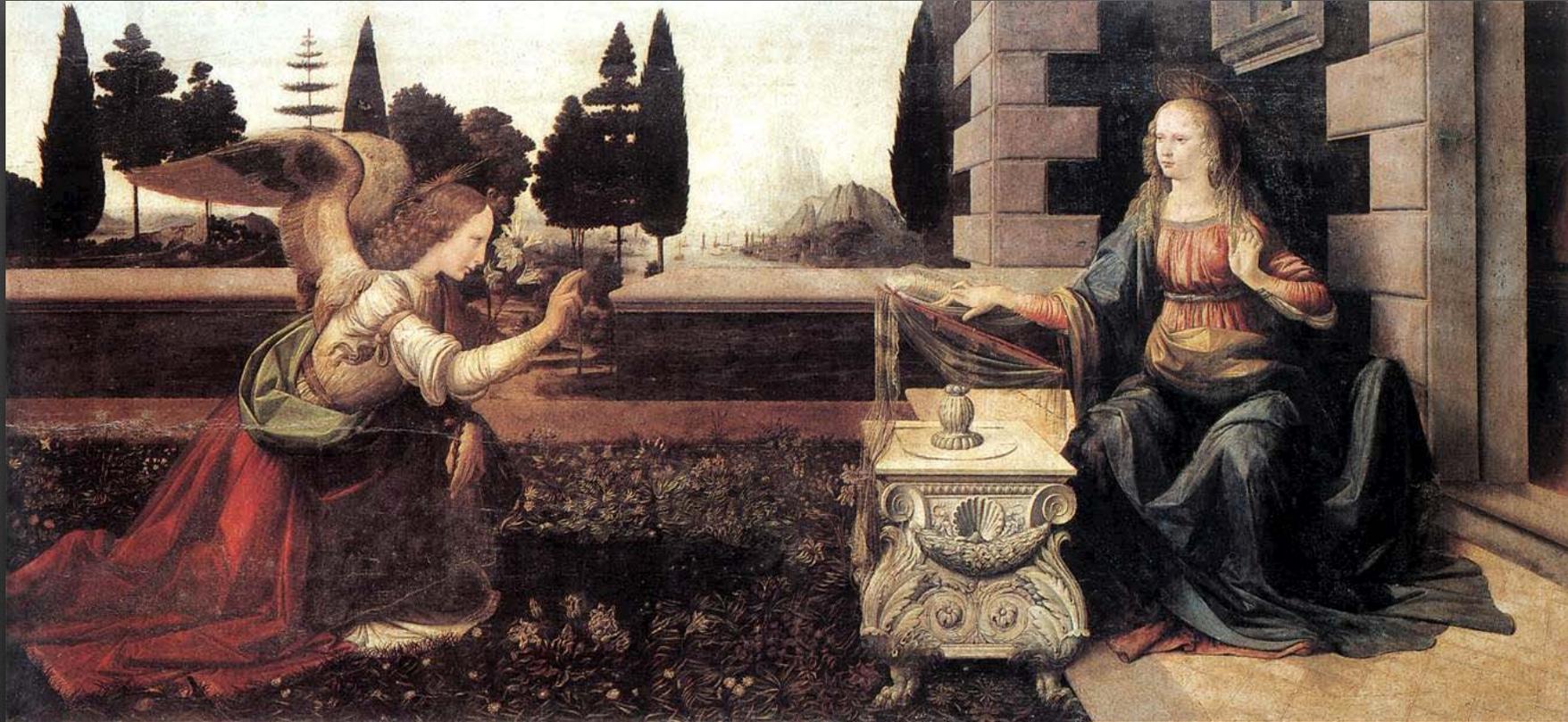
LEONARDO

AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION



Leonardo, an Impossible Exhibition presents, arranged in chronological order, twenty-five oeuvres by the artist reproduced in very high definition, slightly backlit and in real size, including the Last Supper (8,80 x 4,60 meter). This overall view of his masterpieces arouses great emotion because nobody - not even Leonardo himself - had been able to admire all his paintings one by the other: from the youth works of the seventies of the fifteenth century realized in Florence, to the Cenacle of the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, up to the masterpieces later, immediately prior to the transfer of Leonardo to France, to Amboise, at the service of King Francis, where he died on May 2, 1519. The rich multimedia didactic apparatus, which visitors can easily consult on their smartphones, is edited by art historian Claudio Strinati.

LEONARDO AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION



Annunciation (98 x 217 cm) - Florence, Uffizi Gallery

In the *Annunciation* Leonardo portrayed a garden. In this painting the Annunciation does not take place inside the Virgin's home, as narrated by the Holy Scriptures, but in a magnificently luxuriant garden. Leonardo imagined the Virgin seated in front of a reading desk and with a magnificent *commode* at her side. She is elegantly dressed, as if expecting an illustrious visitor: and the visitor effectively arrives. The angel is painted by the Maestro as he lands and falls on his knees before the Virgin Mary. They are both very beautiful youths, and everything around them is seeped with beauty, health and well-being. The herbs and flowers growing in the garden, the appropriate clothes they are wearing, and the springtime fresh air that envelops them all contribute towards creating a setting of tranquillity and inner peace. In the Gospel, the Virgin is frightened by the words of Archangel Gabriel as he tells her that she will be conceiving a child. Whereas there is no surprise, fear or perturbation in Leonardo's portrayal. Leonardo was still in his early youth when he created this painting. He was working in the studio of his maestro Verrocchio, the most illustrious professor of art in Florence; Verrocchio was an expert in every field of art, from sculpture to painting, and he taught self-assurance to his students. He wanted them to be capable and confident; and in light of this, Leonardo painted the *Annunciation*.



Naples, San Domenico Maggiore, 2013/2014

LEONARDO
AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION

Madonna of the Carnation
(62 x 47,5 cm)
Munich, Alte Pinakothek

The title of the *Madonna of the Carnation* comes from the fact that the painting depicts the Virgin Mary in the act of handing a carnation to the Baby Jesus. The Child is plump and robust, as traditionally portrayed during that period in Florence. In the imagination of artists from the close of the 15th century, a mother had to have the appearance of a young noblewoman with a gentle and pensive demeanour; while the Child had to be fat and chubby, looking healthy and lively. Leonardo da Vinci followed the fashion of the time, but his personal interpretation was very different. What counted for Leonardo was the intimacy and relationship between mother/son that he represented in his painting, based upon tenderness – a very delicate feeling that the Maestro had never experienced since he lost his mother at a young age and, as the illegitimate child of a famous notary, had lived a life of solitude. Leonardo was young when he created this painting and it is blatantly sense.



LEONARDO
AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION



Ginevra de' Benci

(38,1 x 37 cm)

Washington, National Gallery of Art

Ginevra de' Benci is perhaps Leonardo's most important female portrait, as much and perhaps even more than the *Mona Lisa*. Firstly because we are sure that the person portrayed is Ginevra de' Benci, whereas a great shroud of mystery still envelops the *Gioconda*. The painting, that was created in the year 1500 upon the Maestro's return to Florence from Milan, was damaged over the course of time. Part of the painting has been sawed off and eliminated, proven by the fact that the figure was once a half-bust including the woman's hands. Ginevra has a rapt and contemplative expression. According to Leonardo's views, a painting in general had to be a representation of the thoughts of the central figure more than his/her features; to the point that, according to some scholars, probably Leonardo's portraits were not necessarily a faithful likeness of the figure in question, but certainly perfectly mirrored the soul of the main character.



Madonna and Child with Flowers

(48 x 31 cm)

Saint Petersburg, Hermitage Museum

The *Benois Madonna* is perhaps the first time that a smile was depicted in one of Leonardo's paintings, a smile that would subsequently make the *Mona Lisa* so famous. The Virgin is nearly laughing in amusement at her son and appears like a very young maiden, which is quite different from the graceful lady portrayed in the *Madonna of the Carnation*. No one knows exactly who Leonardo painted this sublime Madonna for. But the studies he carried out on light and the artist's skills in dosing it according to the expression of feelings make one think that Leonardo might have created this small painting already at the beginning of his new productive period in Milan: once he reached the lavish court of Ludovico il Moro, the Maestro was engaged in carrying out the most diverse functions in the field of architecture and engineering; hence his specifically artistic activities were limited to the creation of few, but revolutionary, works of art.

LEONARDO

AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION



St Jerome

(103 x 75 cm)

Vatican City, Musei Vaticani

St. Jerome is a very damaged painting. Centuries after Leonardo had created it, the painting was accidentally found in disastrous conditions. At the beginning of the 19th century, the panel was used for practical purposes: not as a painted panel, but as a closet door and deprived of the saint's head. Hence it was discovered by Cardinal Fesch, Napoleon Bonaparte's uncle, who purchased it and managed to recover the head as well. Actually, not only has the painting been damaged by the neglect of men, but it is also unfinished. He character's tormented gaze, the twisted yet beautiful drawing, the simple fact that the surface appears to be nearly monochromatic, are all elements that lead us into believing that the Maestro must have created this work during the most difficult and distressing period of his career: Leonardo was a very unusual man and his few public appointments were not very relevant.



Vinci, Santa Maria delle Grazie, 2008

LEONARDO

AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION

Adoration of the Magi (246 x 243 cm) Florence, Uffizi Gallery

The *Adoration of the Magi* is one of the very few works commissioned to Leonardo during his youth in Florence. He painted it in 1481 for the monks of San Donato a Scopeto. The work was not completed and never reached the church. Leonardo began the work by drawing on a great panel and when he finished drawing, he painted over it. But the actual painting was interrupted at a very early stage, so much so that what we can observe today is for the most part only his wondrous sketch. It is indeed the most masterful design that Leonardo has ever left us. The subject is the contrast between peace and war. As the Redeemer is born and introduced to the shepherds and then to the mighty persons on earth, a furious clash is raging in the background. Leonardo's nervous, subtle, very refined and extremely trenchant drawing denotes the hand of an exceptional artist who did not uphold many relations with the mighty of his times – including Verrocchio. The *Adoration* therefore is similar to a giant metaphorical X-ray of the Leonardesque soul.



La Vergine delle rocce



Virgin of the Rocks
(199 x 122 cm)
Paris, Musée du Louvre



Virgin of the Rocks
(189,5 x 120 cm)
London, National Gallery

There have been two versions of the *Virgin of the Rocks*: the present one from the Louvre and the other one that is preserved at the National Gallery in London. The painting from the Louvre is a sublime meditation of the relation between the human being and Nature. The rock formations, before which Leonardo set the holy images in both of his versions, are the symbol of an ancestral and mysterious world where the human being can contemplate a near-fossil past. The accumulation of stalactites and stalagmites inside the cave are proof of the passage of millennial times in which Nature slowly formed and slowly destroyed itself – according to a scientific hypothesis that Leonardo adumbrated in his writings. It is a pessimistic vision on one hand and a utopian one on the other. Leonardo believed in the close and necessary relationship between Nature and the human body, both made of the same substance. In Leonardo's opinion, the earth in which we live is a living body. In the *Virgin of the Rocks*, sacred images stand out before a living kind of Nature, but one that is simultaneously inhabited by death. Leonardo was appointed by Ludovico il Moro and the Confraternita dell'Immacolata for this painting to be hung in the San Francesco Church in Milan; he worked on it together with the brothers Evangelista and Ambrogio de Predis, who were his disciples. But even in this case the painting was never perfectly completed. The Louvre version is of such beauty and stateliness as to make one think that Leonardo personally worked on it at length, but even the London version is no exception to this.



Virgin of the Rocks
(189,5 x 120 cm)
London, National Gallery



Virgin of the Rocks
(199 x 122 cm)
Paris, Musée du Louvre



Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani
(54,8 x 40,3 cm)

Cracovia, Czartoryski Muzeum

The *Lady with an Ermine* has been identified with reasonable certainty as Cecilia Gallerani, one of the mistresses of Ludovico il Moro, who appointed Leonardo to satisfy the Duke of Milan's request. The use of an ermine is rather unusual, but apparently Leonardo inserted the animal into his painting as a homage to the surname Gallerani since the Greek term "galè" means ermine. It is a very noble portrait, depicting a woman with a severe and dignified aspect, but quivering and anxious at the same time. Leonardo was a subtle investigator into female psychology, so much so that he favoured women's portraits rather than male ones. The *Lady with an Ermine* is a memorable example of this, where the contrast between aloofness and passion is magnificently blatant in the woman's gaze as it mirrors an aspect of Leonardesque psychology.



Vinci, Santa Maria delle Grazie, 2008

LEONARDO
AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION



Portrait of a Musician

(43 x 31 cm)

Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana

Luca Beltrami first attributes the work to Leonardo, and considering the musical scroll connects the lacking inscription CANT[UM] ANG[ELICUM] to *Angelicus ac divinum opus* (*Angelic and divine opus*) (1508), a tract composed by the master of the Chapel of the Franchino Gaffurio Milan Dome, recognizing his countenance in the Vincean painting. But there was also the prospect of a hypothesis of identifying the subject with the French musician Josquin des Prez in the service of Ludovico Sforza, called the Moor, up to 1484. In the concentration of the figure, taken at three quarters, the artist is able to focus on the subject's character with admirable swiftness and offer an introspective rendering of the portrait, using discoveries relating to the "movements of the soul".

Portrait of Mona Lisa

La Gioconda

(77 x 53 cm)

Parigi, Musée du Louvre

The *Mona Lisa* is perhaps the most famous painting in the world, surrounded by a shroud of mystery that no one has been able to explain. Certainly the melancholy that exudes from the figure and her sublime immobility in front of an open window over a very remote kind of nature, that fading atmosphere sensed at dusk where the outlines of objects are not clearly distinct, are all convincing elements leading one to believe that inscrutability is a peculiar characteristic of Leonardo's works. The landscape behind the woman has been identified as various places in Tuscany and there is no doubt that Leonardo was particularly fond of those places. The *Mona Lisa* was one of the paintings that Leonardo kept with him during the final years of his life, when he moved to the Amboise Castle in France and eventually died there. No one knows the exact date of the *Mona Lisa*. It bears no signature and the fact that it represents Monna Lisa del Giocondo, a famous figure in Florentine circles, is not certain.



LEONARDO

AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION

Portrait of a Lady
La belle Ferronière
(63 x 45 cm)

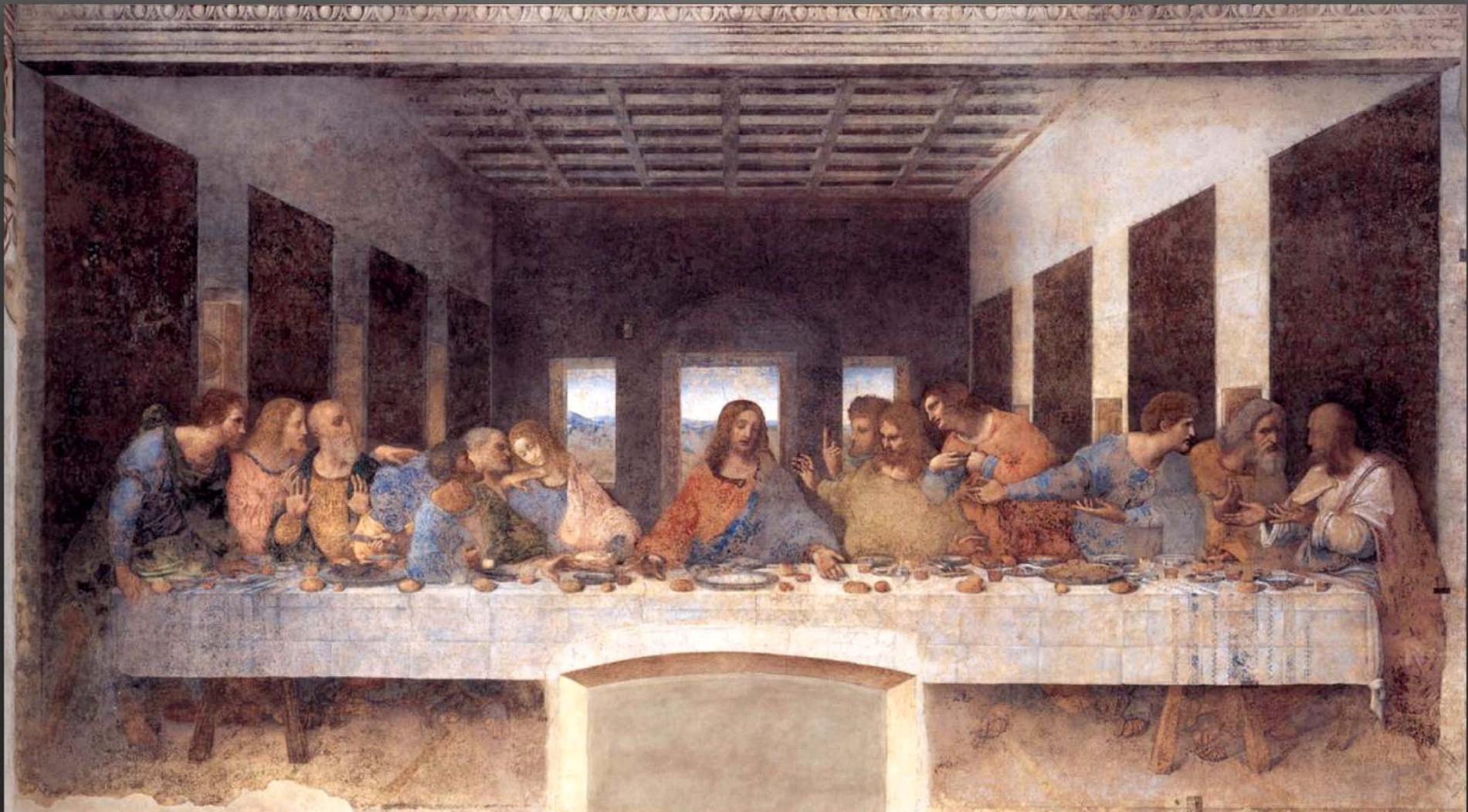
Paris, Musée du Louvre

After the *Mona Lisa*, the so-called *La Belle Ferronière* from the Louvre is the most famous and beloved female portrait by Leonardo. It is a painting of sublime beauty, entirely based upon the criteria of harmony, expressed through the circle that not only surrounds the woman's hair but was the geometric criterion Leonardo used in constructing the portrait. The woman is another one of Ludovico il Moro's mistresses, although scholars cannot identify her with certainty (perhaps she is Lucrezia Crivelli). The portrait depicts a woman who is steadfast in her determination, a woman who is strong and very self-conscious. A female model that is somewhere between the melancholy and dreamy *Gioconda*, and the anxiously fiery *Lady with an Ermine*. Leonardo wanted to highlight the great human archetypes and did so through these female portraits, with very private destinations but with a profound universal meaning.





Naples, San Domenico Maggiore, 2013/2014

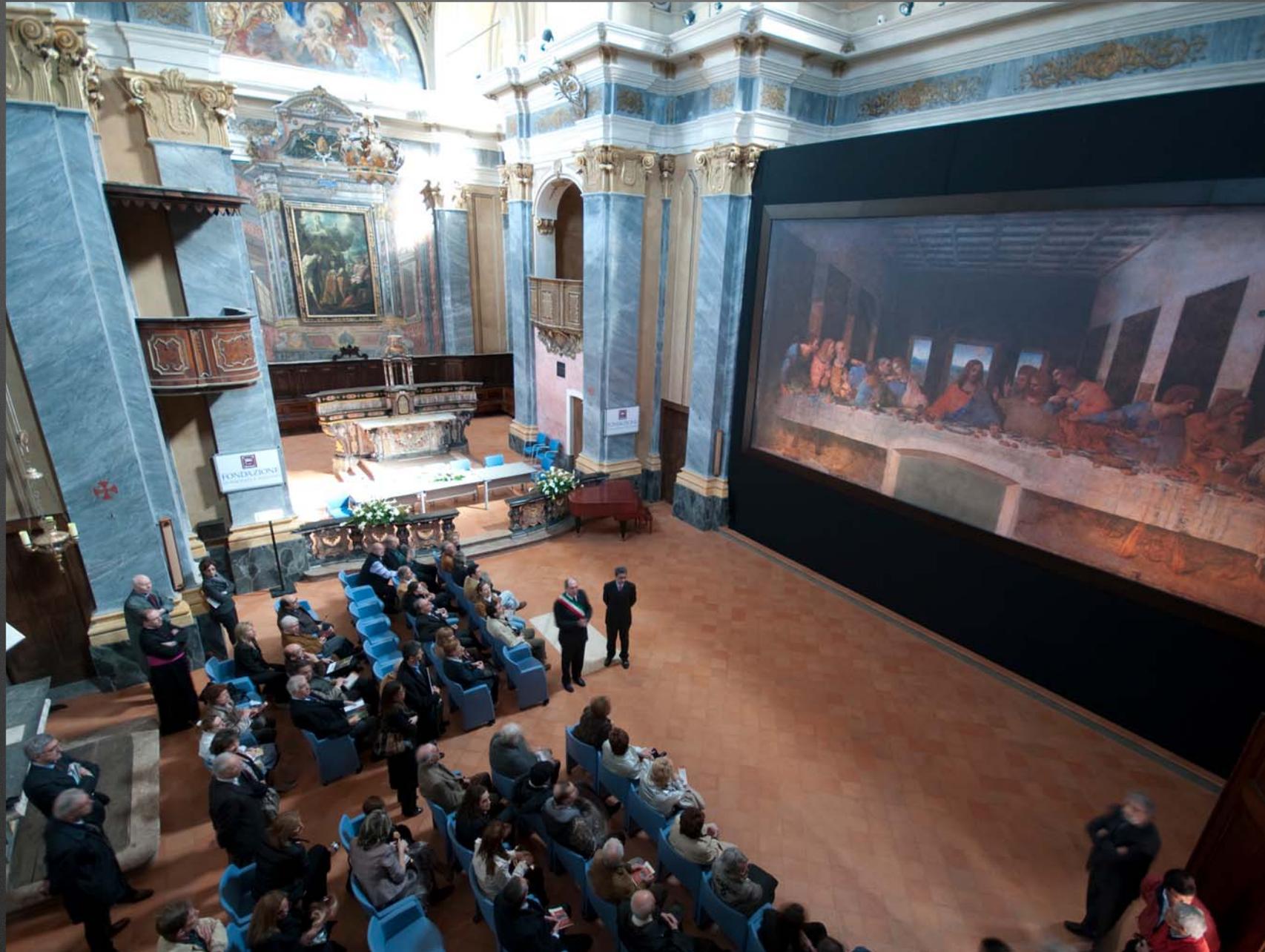


Last Supper (460 x 880 cm) Milan, Refettorio di Santa Maria delle Grazie

The *Last Supper* is Leonardo da Vinci's most famous painting and one of the most important in the entire universe of art. Leonardo painted it during the final years of the 15th century, as it was completed in 1498. It was commissioned by Ludovico il Moro. Leonardo experimented with a new technique for painting murals, a blend of fresco and oil painting that allowed the Maestro to work at a slow pace (whereas frescoes usually imply a remarkably swift execution), but the final result was disastrous. The work began to stain, perhaps an effect of the humidity in the area, immediately after its completion; fifty years later it was already very ruined, according to Giorgio Vasari, who saw it and described the figures as nearly unrecognisable. The mural has been restored many times over the course of centuries, and repeatedly damaged to the point of fearing its disappearance; today it can be admired after its latest restoration work, which lasted years and was entrusted to Pinin Brambilla Barcillón – one of the most illustrious 20th century restorers. The *Last Supper* is the symbol itself of Leonardo's psychological attitude, who represented in Christ and in the Apostles a whole series of human emotions, from love to hatred, from respect to contempt, concentrating the essence of goodness and justice in the figure of Christ and the sense of order and geometric rigour of art in the laid table: simultaneously scientific precision and emotional passion.



Vigevano, Castello Visconteo, 2009



Vigevano, Castello Visconteo, 2009



*Saint Anna, the Madonna,
the Child and the Lamb*

(168 x 130 cm)

Paris, Musée du Louvre

The *Virgin and Child with St. Anne* from the Louvre has been recently restored; after this restoration, most scholars have sustained that the painting is most certainly the work of Leonardo. In fact, there exists a marvellous cartoon of *St. Anne* (whose story, however, is rather obscure) preserved at the National Gallery in London; it fully demonstrates the hand of the Maestro, with that sort of brush-stroke that swathes the figures in the atmosphere of *sfumato*, that can only be truly expressed through the drawing. After all, the story of the *Adoration of the Magi* demonstrates how Leonardo always favoured drawing and considered it a complete work rather than simply a preparatory stage. The *Virgin and Child with St. Anne* demonstrates the participation of pupils, who are difficult to identify, who translate Leonardo's authentic *sfumato* into distinct, clean colour ranges and in a brush-stroke that is also definitely distinct and clean: a simplified manner for implementing Leonardo's ideas.

LEONARDO

AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION

Head of a girl
La scapigliata
(24,7 x 21 cm)

Parma, Pinacoteca Nazionale

The head of the so-called *Scapigliata* is one of Leonardo's most famous drawings, together with his self-portrait and the *Vitruvian Man*. It could be a preparatory study for the painting of Leda with her twin sons that Leonardo might have painted and that has gone lost, but a series of ancient copies still do exist. Realized in umber and inverted amber on poplar wood prepared with a white lead, the sketch of this evocative female head converges into the Galleria Palatina of Parma collection during 1839, holding the correct Vincean attribution. In the 1500's it may have belonged to Margherita Paleologa, wife of Federico II Gonzaga. A 1627 inventory of the Gonzaga family indicates: «a picture painting the head of a woman, windblown, sketched... work of Leonardo da Vinci». The stylistic assonances and physiognomic similarities to the angel in the second version of the *Virgin of the Rocks* at the National Gallery in London are evident.





Bacchus – St John the Baptist

(177 x 115 cm)

Paris, Musée du Louvre

Bacchus, formerly *St. John the Baptist*, from the Louvre is one of Leonardo's final works. It is ambiguous even in its subject, as it has both the characteristics of a sacred painting (St. John) and of a profane one (Bacchus). It is a work of average quality, was repainted many times during the 17th century, is entirely based on the *sfumato* criterion and on that of the enigmatic smile that certainly characterizes the Bacchus figure: it possesses both a feral and a divine nature (a clear prefiguration of Christ) within, making the painting one of elegant and graceful emphasis. But, once again, the modesty of its execution must be ascribed to the hand of a pupil who carefully followed the instructions of the Maestro while lacking his personality and skills.

LEONARDO
AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION



Saint John the Baptist

(69 x 57 cm)

Paris, Musée du Louvre

This is the last painting executed by Leonardo (1513-19). It shows a languid *Saint John the Baptist* with a mocking smile and an index finger pointing upwards, a gesture repeated by Saint Thomas in the *Last Supper* of Santa Maria delle Grazie at Milan. As in the *Head of an angel* (Turin, Biblioteca Reale) – a preparatory drawing to the *Virgin of the Rocks* –, in the *Mona Lisa* and *Bacchus*, there here «emerges an ideal of ambiguous, androgynous beauty», reached through the calibrated dosage of shadow and light which, coming from the left, emphasises the vaporous golden curls and intense softness of the limbs.

LEONARDO AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION



Andrea del Verrocchio, Leonardo da Vinci
The Baptism of Christ (detail)
(177 x 151 cm)
Florence, Uffizi Gallery



When Leonardo worked under Verrocchio he participated in many works including Verrocchio's *The Baptism of Christ*. The gentle modelling of the left angel's head and the fact that the paint at this point contains oil supports the general attribution of this section to Leonardo. The painting was probably produced for the church of San Salvi in Florence and was mentioned as early as 1510 by Albertini, who stated that Leonardo painted the angel's head. A drawing of the angel's head is kept in Turin.

LEONARDO
AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION



The Burlington House Cartoon
The Virgin and Child with
St Anne and the St John the Baptist
(141,5 x 106 cm)
London, National Gallery

One of the most precious and fragile works in the National Gallery, the cartoon now hangs in a specially built recess in the wall of a darkened little room. The drawing covers eight sheets of paper glued together. A reduced light level is necessary to prevent the chalk and charcoal from fading, but the reverential atmosphere it creates seems appropriate. As in the *Virgin of the Rocks* Leonardo has represented four figures in rapt communion charged with theological significance and intense human emotion. Shared glances and introspective smiles play across their faces, enigmatic expressions which Leonardo made famous.

LEONARDO

AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION

Salvator Mundi (66 x 45 cm) Private collection

In 2011, by consensus decision, facilitated by National Gallery director Nicholas Penny, the attribution of Leonardo da Vinci was confirmed. Once it was cleaned and restored, the painting was compared with, and found superior to, twenty other versions of *Salvator Mundi*. It was exhibited by London's National Gallery during the *Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan* from November 2011 to February 2012. One of the world's leading Leonardo experts, Martin Kemp, who helped authenticate the work, said that he knew immediately upon first viewing the restored painting that it was the work of Leonardo: "It had that kind of presence that Leonardos have ... that uncanny strangeness that the later Leonardo paintings manifest." Of the better-preserved parts, such as the hair, Kemp notes: "It's got that kind of uncanny vortex, as if the hair is a living, moving substance, or like water, which is what Leonardo said hair was like."



LEONARDO
AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION



Madonna with the Yarnwinder
(50,2 x 36,4 cm)
Private collection

The composition of the *Madonna of the Yarnwinder* shows the Christ child twisting his body away from his mother's embrace, his eye caught by her yarnwinder whose spokes give it the shape of a cross; he precociously recognises it as a symbol of his destiny. The Virgin's reaction is ambiguous, a mixture of alarm at the harm her son will come to and resigned acceptance of it. The gesture of suspense made with her right hand is repeated from Leonardo's Milanese altarpiece *The Virgin of the Rocks*. The use of a symbol of the Passion as an object of childish play recurs throughout Leonardo's painted oeuvre, appearing for instance in the *Benois Madonna* and the *Virgin and Child with St Anne*.³¹ As with later works by Leonardo, the figures appear in a vast unpopulated landscape. The rocky outcrop in the foreground of the *Bucclench Madonna* is painted with a minute attention to geological detail.

LEONARDO
AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION



Madonna Litta
(42 x 33 cm)

Saint Petersburg, Hermitage Museum

Employing tempera, already superseded by oils that permitted finer chiaroscuro modelling, Leonardo presents the traditional image of the Virgin of Humility through the contrast of tender flesh tones, her scarlet blouse and blue cape, echoed by the azure distances beyond the arched windows. Enclosed by masterly drawing in a sculptural form, these resonant colours form an absolute balance of earthly and heavenly.

LEONARDO

AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION

Head of a girl

(18,1 x 15,9 cm)

Turin, Biblioteca Reale

This study, dated 1483, is in silverpoint on prepared paper. Of all Leonardo's drawings this is probably among the most polished and eloquent. The drawing is of a young girl. As angels were deemed to be asexual, Leonardo made the gender of the figure more ambiguous in the final painting. This exceptionally beautiful face is powerfully presented with the eyes regarding the viewer directly but with a dispassionate gaze. The beautiful handling of the tonal hatching gives the whole head a three-dimensional quality and the drawing of the features is both subtle and vigorous. The soul of this young person seems visible in her eyes. The fluid, loose lines of the outline of the hair and figure emphasize the power of the face. What a remarkable artist this man was, that in so few lines he presents us with a living being. We are indeed seeing the divine spirit in the human face.

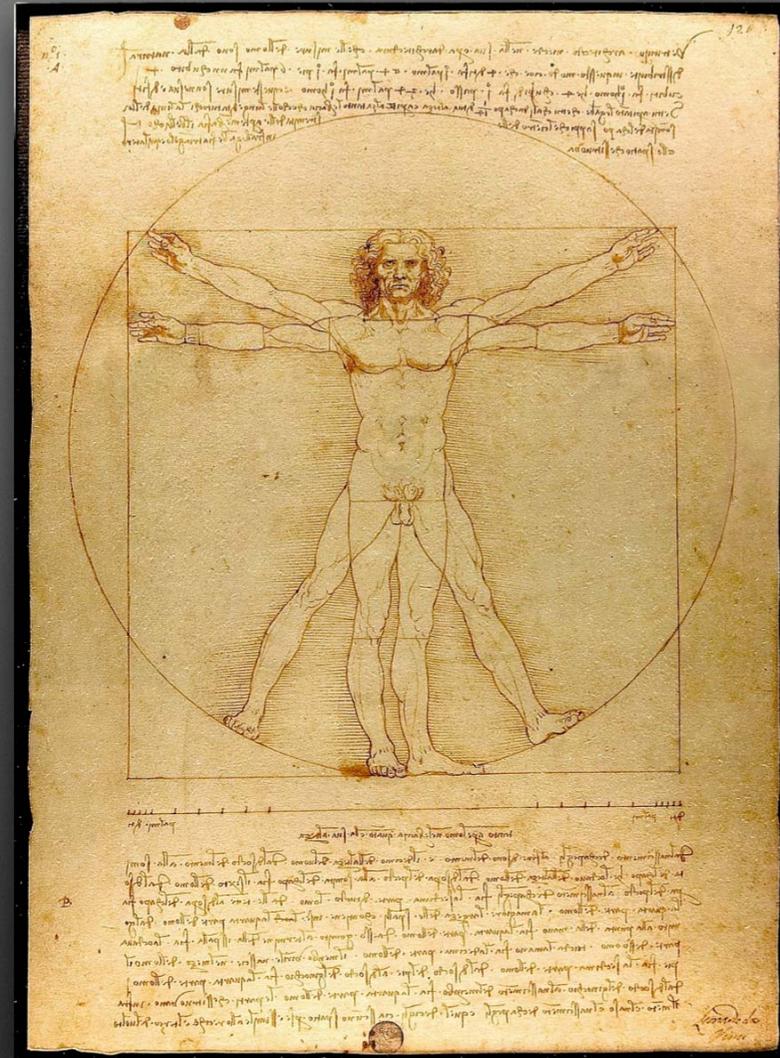


LEONARDO AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION

Vitruvian Man (34,3 x 24,5 cm)

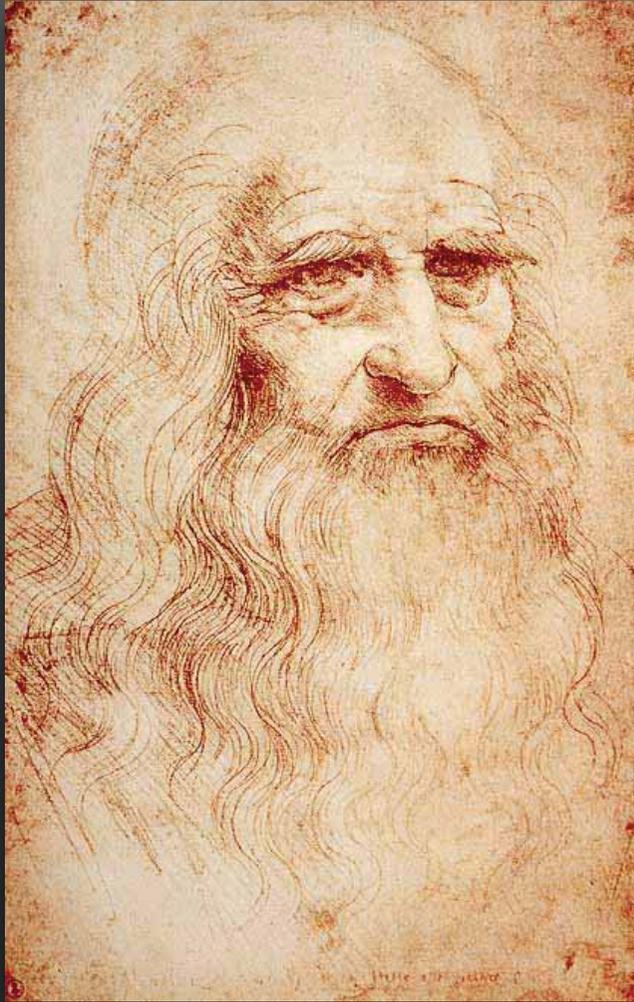
Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia

The work of art is attributed to the period (1490) in which Leonardo met Francesco di Giorgio Martini who made him a participant in the treatise by Vitruvio De architettura of which Martini had begun to translate some parts. This pen and ink drawing on paper is the most famous example of Renaissance research into proportions and harmony. The human figure is represented here with arms and legs apart, inscribed within a circle. The height of this 'perfect' man corresponds to eight times the length of his head, or ten times that of his face, which in turn is divided into three parts, through two lines passing one at the level of the nostrils and the other at the level of the eyebrows. If the legs are spread so wide that the height of a sixteenth is reduced, with the arms outstretched, the middle finger will be at the height of the line passing through the vertex of the head. The centre of the outstretched limbs shall be the navel, and the legs shall form two of the sides of an equilateral triangle.



LEONARDO

AN IMPOSSIBLE EXHIBITION



Self-Portrait
(33,5 x 21,6 cm)
Turin, Biblioteca Reale

A hand-written note from the 16th century titles the drawing "Leonardus Vincius (in red chalk) self-portrait at an advanced age (in charcoal)," so that its interpretation as Leonardo's self-portrait during the last years of his life is generally accepted nowadays. It is reminiscent of Gianpaolo Lomazzo's words from the late 16th century: "Leonardo's hair and beard were so long, and his eyebrows were so bushy, that he appeared to be the sheer idea of noble wisdom." In stylistic terms, however, including the use of parallel hatchings, the drawing could date from before 1500, which would mean that this could not be a self-portrait.

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