

The Leonardo anniversary: a retrospective

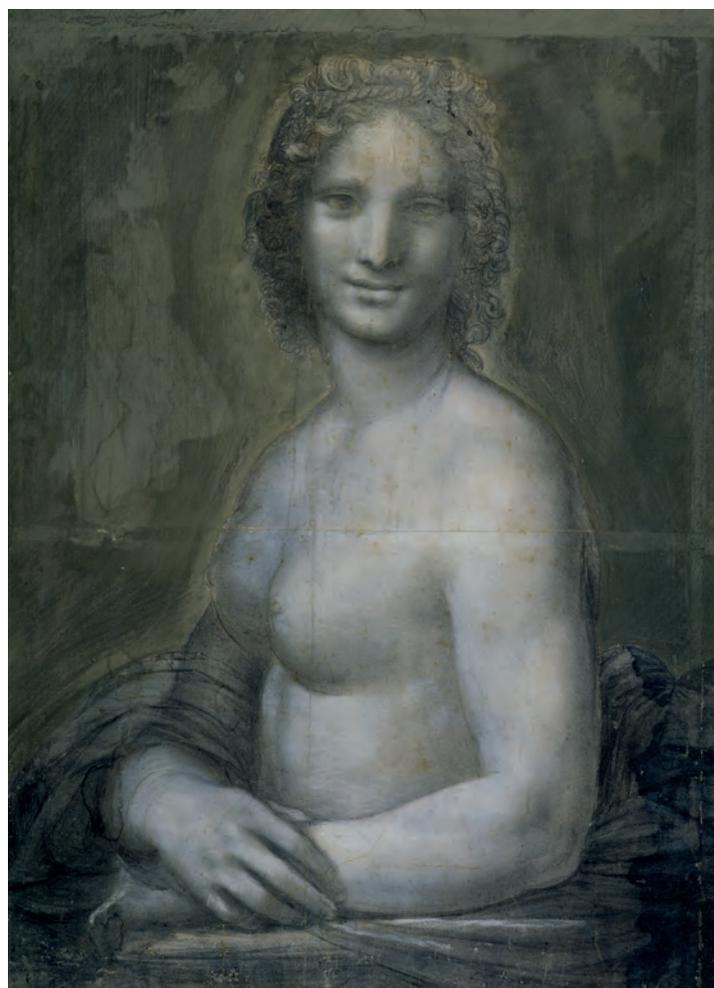
The five hundredth anniversary of Leonardo da Vinci's death in 1519 was marked across the world by a remarkable number of exhibitions and books, of which the most significant were the Musée du Louvre's survey of his career and Carmen C. Bambach's monumental four-volume monograph.

by MICHAEL COLE

NO RENAISSANCE PAINTER attracts public interest like Leonardo da Vinci, and never have so many of his works been exhibited as in 2019, the five-hundredth anniversary of Leonardo's death. January saw the conclusion of an exhibition at the Teylers Museum in Haarlem on the artist's representation of the human face.¹ February brought the launch of a series of exhibitions featuring drawings from the Royal Collection at Windsor: groups of these were displayed simultaneously at twelve institutions across the British Isles; when these local shows had ended, some two hundred drawings were placed on view at Buckingham Palace, before a smaller selection moved to Edinburgh.² An exhibition that opened at the Accademia in Venice in April celebrated Leonardo's 'Vitruvian Man'.³ Beginning in June there was a smart, well-conceived exhibition at Chantilly on the history of the 'nude Mona Lisa' (Fig.1), a design from Leonardo's workshop that had a significant afterlife in painting, both in Rome and in France.⁴ In the same period in London, the British Library displayed pages from the Codex Arundel (British Library), the Codex Forster (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) and the Codex Leicester (private collection) in an exhibition organised around the theme of 'motion'.⁵ The Vatican Museums' *St Jerome* constituted the exclusive subject of a small exhibition in July at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.⁶ Beginning in September, Ginevra de' Benci anchored the exhibition *Verrocchio: Sculptor and Painter of Renaissance Florence* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, a variation on the earlier *Verrocchio, Master of Leonardo* at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence.⁷ Numerous other shows, in Milan, Rome and elsewhere, treated specific themes or highlighted holdings of local collections.

The biggest event of the year was unquestionably the exhibition that opened at the Musée du Louvre, Paris, in October, which surveyed

1. *The nude Mona Lisa*, by a follower of Leonardo da Vinci. Early sixteenth century. Charcoal, black chalk, and white heightening on paper, with later reworking in brown gouache or tempera, pricked for transfer, 74.8 by 54 cm. (Musée Condé, Chantilly; Bridgeman Images).



1 *Leonardo da Vinci: The Language of Faces*, Teylers Museum, Haarlem, 5th October 2018–6th January 2019. Catalogue: *Leonardo da Vinci: sprekende gezichten*. Edited by Michael W. Kwakkelstein with Michiel Plomp. 224 pp. incl. numerous col. ills. (Uitgeverij Thoth, Bussum, 2018), £32.50. ISBN

978-90-68-68760-6; English edition, ISBN 978-90-68-68767-5.

2 *Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing*, The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, London, 24th May–13th October 2019, and The Queen's Gallery, Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh, 22nd November 2019–15th March 2020. Catalogue: *Leonardo*



2. Installation view of 'Leonardo da Vinci' at the Musée du Louvre, Paris. 2019. (Courtesy Musée du Louvre, Paris; photograph Antoine Mongodin).

Leonardo's career across media though more than 160 objects.⁸ Organised more or less chronologically and featuring one famous work after the next, the loans were a diplomatic triumph, not likely to be repeated anywhere in the near future. The visitor entered into a gallery centered on *Christ and St Thomas* (Museo di Orsanmichele, Florence; cat.no.1), the monumental bronze group that was under way in the workshop of the polymath Andrea Verrocchio while Leonardo was with him in the 1470s. Surrounding this was the series of drapery studies produced by Verrocchio, Leonardo and possibly others – the attributions remain contested – in the same period. From there, the visitor passed through a gallery that included the works leading up to Leonardo's unfinished *Adoration of the Magi* from the early 1480s (Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence; not exhibited) and early Virgin and Child paintings. A room organised around the subject of Leonardo in Milan showed drawings connected to the court entertainments and emblems he invented there as well as his *Jerome* (no.51), his *Belle Ferronnière* (no.64), his *Portrait of a musician* from the Ambrosiana, Milan (no.61) and

the Louvre version of his *Virgin of the Rocks* (no.53). Passing along a wall hung with a series of paintings by Leonardo's Milanese students Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio and Marco d'Oggiono, the visitor then entered a large space, the near part of which was occupied by a row of vitrines in the form of inclined surfaces, much like the desks used in Renaissance libraries, filled with scientific studies from various moments of Leonardo's career (Fig.2). At the far end, the ceiling rose and space opened up, allowing a presentation of Marco d'Oggiono's copy after Leonardo's *Last Supper* (Château d'Ecouen; no.114) in a position comparable to that of Leonardo's mural in the refectory of S. Maria della Grazia, Milan. (The painting, commissioned in 1506, is, notably, on canvas, a support Leonardo himself never used.) Next came a small gallery on portraiture just after 1500, then a long room with Leonardo's designs for his lost *Leda and the Swan* and *Battle of Anghiari*. Here the exhibition also offered a rare opportunity to compare two versions of the *Madonna of the Yardwinder*, both from private collections (nos.134 and 135), that are sometimes attributed to Leonardo. A smaller space beyond included the 'Ganay' copy after the *Salvator Mundi* designed by Leonardo (private collection; no.158), his late *John the Baptist* (no.159) and large *Holy Family*, both from the Louvre's collection, and the

da Vinci: A Life in Drawing. By Martin Clayton. 256 pp. incl. 200 col. ill. (Royal Collection Trust, London, 2018), £24.95. ISBN 978-19-09-74147-8.

3 *Leonardo da Vinci: Man is the Model of the World*, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, 17th April–14th July 2019.

4 *La Joconde nue*, the Domaine de

Chantilly, 1st June–6th October 2019. Catalogue: *La Joconde nue*. Edited by Mathieu Deldicque. 224 pp. incl. 162 col. ill. (In Fine éditions d'art, Paris, 2019), €29. ISBN 978-29-51-98516-2.

5 *Leonardo: A Mind in Motion*, The British Library, London, 7th June–8th September 2019. Catalogue: *Leonardo:*

A Mind in Motion. Edited by Juliana Barone. 248 pp. incl. 70 col. ill. (British Library Publishing, London, 2019), £25. ISBN 978-07-12-35283-3.

6 *Leonardo da Vinci's 'St Jerome'*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 15th July–6th October 2019.

7 Reviewed by Alexander Röstel in this

Magazine, 162 (2020), pp.4–13.

8 *Leonardo da Vinci*, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 24th October 2019–24th February 2020. Catalogue: *Leonardo da Vinci*. Edited by Vincent Delieuvin and Louis Frank. 480 pp. incl. numerous col. + b. & w. ill. (Hazan, Paris, 2019), €35. ISBN 978-27-54-11123-2.



3. Reconstruction of the model used by Leonardo to produce the drawing in Fig.4, by Leticia Leratti. 2019. Clay and linen sheet, 75 by 70 by 25 cm. (Courtesy Musée du Louvre, Paris; photograph Antoine Mongodin; exh. Musée du Louvre, Paris).

Burlington Cartoon from the National Gallery, London (no.136), which shows the same subject as the Louvre *Holy Family* at only slightly smaller scale; each got their own walls. A small final room with just three objects evoked Leonardo's final years in France.

The exhibits had minimal labels – discouraging the show's seven thousand daily visitors from stopping to read may have been a form of crowd management. (I also saw only two benches, both in dark alcoves where there was nothing to look at.) The relationship between the longer wall texts and the objects, moreover, was not always clear. There

were four numbered explanatory wall panels, with the titles '*Ombre, Lumière, Relief*'; '*Liberté*'; '*Science*'; and '*Vie*'. This might imply that the exhibition, like the catalogue, was conceived in four parts, except that the third and fourth commentaries appeared in the same room. In addition to these panels, moreover, there were several wall texts without numbers ('*Léonard à Milan*', '*La Retour à Florence*' – which was in the gallery following the one that introduced the *Mona Lisa* – '*Le Départ en France*'). Above each label was a number that corresponded not to the sequence of objects in the exhibition but to that of the entries in the catalogue. These numbers were larger than any other text in the show, but for them to be useful one would have had to walk through the exhibition with catalogue in hand. In the catalogue itself some entries included substantial discussions, others just a few lines of basic data.

9 M. Landrus: 'This was the most prolific year for Leonardo scholarship in history – here is a detailed guide to the best books', *The Art Newspaper* (20th

December 2019), <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/review/the-most-prolific-year-in-history-for-leonardo-scholarship>, accessed 13th May 2020.

10 *Leonardo da Vinci Rediscovered*. By Carmen C. Bambach. Four vols, 2,350 pp. incl. 1,319 col. + b. & w. ill. (Yale University Press, New Haven

and London, 2019), £400. ISBN 978-03-00-19195-0.

11 *Léonard de Vinci à la cour de France*. By Laure Fagnart, 280 pp.

If all of this sometimes made it difficult for the visitor to follow the curators' line of thinking, several fundamental ideas that guided the installation were particularly effective. The first object in the dark first room was not a work by Leonardo at all, but a three-dimensional version of the drapery study by Leonardo on the opposite wall (Figs.3 and 4). This was lit with a spotlight from above and to the left, allowing visitors to get a strong sense of the optical conditions that would have been necessary for the young artist to translate three dimensions into two. Other comparisons in later galleries, for example between Leonardo's portrait of Isabella d'Este (Louvre; no.119) and a bust attributed to Gian Cristoforo Romano (Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth; no.118) that is believed by some scholars to depict her as well, returned to this topic (Fig.5). Interspersed throughout the show, more daringly, were infrared reflectographs of Leonardo's paintings, at 1:1 scale (Fig.6). Some of these supplemented paintings on display; others must have been intended to function as stand-ins for paintings that could not travel to Paris. As substitutes especially, they were brilliant. They clued visitors into the kinds of technical tools conservators now have at their disposal, revealing underdrawings that would not have been visible if the original works had been present instead. Printed in greyscale and lit subtly from behind – it took me some time to realise that they were transparencies and were not illuminated from the exhibition's remarkable overhead lighting system – they called no more attention to themselves than the drawings beside them, despite the fact that transparencies were nearly always larger. This allowed the curators to present a more-or-less complete history of Leonardo's activities as a painter, maintaining a focus on paintings even when none was present. The reflectographs also contributed substantially to the stories of inventive process that the exhibition pursued throughout, while giving the show as a whole a scientific tone that seemed perfectly appropriate for its subject.

The volume produced by curators Vincent Delieuvin and Louis Frank for the Louvre show, joined the catalogues to the Teylers, Chantilly, British Library and Windsor exhibitions in a deluge of new books on Leonardo – a survey by Matthew Landrus in the *Art Newspaper* in December put the year's count at an astonishing 250.⁹ Among these new publications, the one that will deservedly get the most attention is Carmen C. Bambach's mammoth *Leonardo da Vinci Rediscovered*.¹⁰ Running to 2,350 pages of double- and triple-column text in four volumes, it is probably the longest monograph ever written, bearing comparison with the still-useful five-volume study of Michelangelo that Charles de Tolnay produced in instalments between 1943 and 1960.

The first page of the preface states that the books seek to understand nothing less than 'the totality of Leonardo's career and vision'. Briefly in the introduction and then in great detail through the later chapters and an appendix, the book guides the reader through each of the codices that comprise the majority of Leonardo's writings and drawings, laying out their history, format and contents. Breathtaking illustrations, many of them uncropped to show the edges of pages, give a sense of the material objects and their scale. There is nothing else like this in the literature; every student wishing to get a handle on the scope and nature of Leonardo's corpus should start here. For the four chapters that cover the period 1482 to 1503, the majority of which Leonardo spent in Milan, the book is organised thematically; two begin with questions of patronage, two with Leonardo's writings from the period. Apart from these, and apart from a chapter on Leonardo's treatment

of the theme of the Virgin and Child with St Anne between 1500 and 1519, the book unfolds in chronological order. Its starting point is biography, but the material is mostly grouped around projects, as though it were itself the catalogue to an impossibly complete Leonardo exhibition.

It is enormously rewarding to have a scholar of Bambach's authority guide one through these successive undertakings. Particularly valuable are her accounts of projects that did not result in surviving paintings: the 'Madonna of the Cat', St Sebastian, Neptune, Leda and the Swan, the Trivulzio monument, to name just a few. Bambach's book is the best thing I have read on Leonardo's interest in the proportions of horses. It provides extensive accounts of Leonardo's time in Venice and in Rome, which tend to get short shrift in the other literature. Its discussion of his work in France is good as well, though not consistent in all factual details with two other new books on the topic, Laure Fagnart's *Léonard de Vinci à la cour de France* and Jan Sammer's *Leonardo da Vinci: The Untold Story of his Final Years*.¹¹ What stands out above all are Bambach's vivid, careful and deeply knowledgeable descriptions of how the drawings were made. It is evident throughout that she has studied each of the objects she illustrates in person, most of them repeatedly, over many years. She directs attention to processes and materials that resulted in the images on the sheets, to the hands both of drawings and inscriptions, and to the history of how the drawings were reworked, bound and unbound. One narrative that emerges through the book is that of Leonardo's changing technique. Future scholars should look to Bambach before finalising any captions.

Anyone who has waded into the world of Leonardo studies can only approach Bambach's volumes with humility. Still, her approach is not without its trade-offs. She tends to emphasise documentary

4. Drapery study for a seated figure, by Leonardo da Vinci. c.1475–82. Tempera on linen, 19.6 by 15.3 cm. (Musée du Louvre, Paris).



incl. numerous col. ill. (Presses universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, 2019), €30. ISBN 978-27-53-57703-9. *Leonardo da Vinci: The Untold Story*

of His Final Years. By Jan Sammer, 334 pp. incl. numerous ill. (independently published, 2019), £32.41. ISBN 978-17-97-97608-2.

and technical evidence over intellectual history. Although she draws attention in passing to Leonardo's analogic reasoning, she seldom conveys the strangeness of the way he saw the world, whether he was considering geology or human sexuality. For many writers, past and present, what is interesting about Leonardo are the continuities of his thinking across heterogeneous material: the likeness he saw in a whirl of water and curl of hair, his comparisons between military machines and human anatomy, his treatment on the same sheet of veins and staircases (Fig.7), his fixation on forms of antithesis (light/dark, beautiful/ugly, near/far, painting/writing). Bambach's often taxonomic approach loses much of this, and her discussions simply decline to engage with a considerable part of the relevant literature. Few if any living scholars could have achieved what she has, specifying the date of every work she discusses and framing it in terms of Leonardo's location, employment and interests at that particular moment. But when Francesco Melzi, the heir on which Bambach sheds much light, organised Leonardo's papers, he saw coherence in ideas that Leonardo had formulated at different moments of his life. Many since have seen this as well. Bambach has much to say about Leonardo's study of water in various groups of drawing he produced late in his career in Milan and in France but not about their relationship, or about the way these pick up on interests he had sustained throughout his career. The rich discussions of his anatomical drawings and architectural drawings from different moments remain largely separate. The book's length and organisation make it difficult to find any through-line.

Who is this book for? The main text is occasionally polemical, referring, say, to 'a proposal that has met with considerable debate' or what 'two scholars' have 'unconvincingly' argued. To reinforce her doubts about the recently sold *Salvator Mundi* (private collection), she illustrates it only in an unflattering photo of its stripped-down state, something she does not do with, for example, Leonardo's likewise heavily restored *Last Supper*. The details of all the disputes, however, happen in the notes, and understanding them requires the reader to keep a separate large volume open so as to follow text and arguments in parallel. These are books to be read at a table, not in a chair. Their overall conception, format, design and scale indeed suggest they are not meant to be read from cover to cover at all, but rather to serve as a reference work. And as a reference work, the set is not user-friendly. The fourth volume concludes with a dense thematic index, eighty-one pages of tiny type. Yet if one wants to determine whether and where Bambach has discussed a particular drawing, this is not easy. One must go to the LEONARDO DA VINCI entry, decide whether to look under the subheading 'Drawings' or 'Manuscripts', then find the right sub-subheading, then, among sub-sub-subheadings, determine how Bambach has described the subject. I wanted to confirm that I had read all of Bambach's comments on

Leonardo's longstanding interest in the crossbow and in staircase design. I could not figure this out. Nor can one determine whether, for example, she discusses a particular drawing in the Codex Atlanticus, unless one intuitively how she has classified the relevant page.

Bambach's was not the only new biographical account of Leonardo published last year. Less thorough but more readable, to name but one standout, is Bernd Roeck's *Leonardo: Der Mann, der alles wissen wollte*.¹² This enriches our understanding of several of Leonardo's projects, proposing new reconstructions both of the original setting of the *Virgin and Child with St Anne* (Louvre) and of the *Battle of Anghiari*, and giving a notably coherent account of the competition for the *tiburio* of Milan Cathedral. More distinctively, it attempts to bring Leonardo the person more to life, considering, for example, the foods he liked and the musical instruments he built and played, and even attempting a forensic reconstruction of the young Leonardo's face (Fig.8).

Nor was Bambach's the only 2019 book to offer a 'complete' presentation of Leonardo's work. Prestel published Alessandro Vezzosi's *Leonardo da Vinci: The Complete Paintings in Detail*.¹³ From Callaway there was Martin Kemp's *Leonardo by Leonardo*, likewise a collection of the complete paintings.¹⁴ Both have minimal commentary. Abrams offered a new edition of Pietro C. Marani's *Leonardo da Vinci: Complete Paintings*, Taschen a new edition of Frank Zöllner's *Leonardo: The Complete Paintings and Drawings*, the only book in print to illustrate Leonardo's graphic work more or less in its entirety.¹⁵ Readers of these volumes will encounter numerous disagreements on just what should be included in a complete list of Leonardo's independent, mostly autograph paintings, which ranges from perhaps fourteen to twenty-three, depending on what one counts. Most complementary to Bambach may be *Leonardo da Vinci: A Closer Look*, published in connection with the Royal Collection exhibitions by Alan Donnithorne, its former Head of Paper Conservation.¹⁶ The book consists of short, informative chapters on Leonardo's materials, from the papers he used to the instruments he held, along with spectacular photographs, most of them new, to illustrate the effects Leonardo could achieve with different tools on different supports.

Two books – *The Last Leonardo*, by Ben Lewis, and *Leonardo's Salvator Mundi*, by Margaret Dalivalle, Martin Kemp and Robert Simon – focus on a painting now famous above all for its price.¹⁷ Juliana Barone and Susanna Avery-Quash have edited an excellent anthology on *Leonardo in Britain: Collections and Historical Reception*, a topic that turns out to be surprisingly engaging even for those of us who don't live there.¹⁸ Dalivalle, who conducted provenance research on the *Salvator Mundi*, has contributed to this as well, although for me the highlight of the volume was Alessandro Nova's essay 'John Shearman's Leonardo'. With Francesca Borgo and Rodolfo Maffei, Nova also published his own edited volume, *Leonardo in Dialogue*, the fourth in a series of anthologies connected to the exciting series of conferences on

12 *Leonardo: Der Mann, der alles wissen wollte*. By Bernd Roeck, 429 pp. incl. 72 col. + 32 b. & w. ills. (Verlag C.H. Beck, Munich, 2019), €28. ISBN 978-3-406-73509-7.

13 *Leonardo da Vinci: The Complete Paintings in Detail*. By Alessandro Vezzosi. 288 pp. with 230 col. ills. (Prestel, New York and London, 2019), £65. ISBN 978-37-91-38497-9.

14 *Leonardo by Leonardo*. By Martin Kemp. 192 pp. incl. numerous ills. (Callaway Arts & Entertainment, New York and London, 2019), £49.99. ISBN 978-09-35-11282-5.

15 *Leonardo da Vinci: Complete Paintings*. By Pietro C. Marani. 400 pp. incl. 300 col. ills. (Abrams,

New York, 2019), \$100. ISBN 978-14-19-74067-1. *Leonardo: The Complete Paintings and Drawings*. By Frank Zöllner. 704 pp. incl. numerous ills. (Taschen, Cologne, 2019), £40. ISBN 978-38-36-57625-3.

16 *Leonardo da Vinci: A Closer Look*. By Alan Donnithorne. 204 pp. incl. 150 col. ills. (Royal Collection Trust, London), £49.95. ISBN 978-19-09-74146-1.

17 *The Last Leonardo: The Secret Lives of the World's Most Expensive Painting*. By Ben Lewis, 416 pp. incl. numerous ills. (William Collins, London, 2019), £20. ISBN 978-00-08-31341-8. *Leonardo's Salvator Mundi and the Collecting of Leonardo in the Stuart*

Courts. By Margaret Dalivalle, Martin Kemp and Robert Simon. 416 pp. incl. numerous b. & w. ills (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019), £35. ISBN 978-01-98-81383-5.

18 *Leonardo in Britain: Collections and Historical Reception*. Edited by Juliana Barone and Susanna Avery-Quash. 456 pp. incl. 56 col. ills. (Olschki, Florence, 2019), £60. ISBN 978-88-22-26624-8.

19 *Leonardo in Dialogue: The Artist Amid his Contemporaries*. Edited by Francesca Borgo, Rodolfo Maffei and Alessandro Nova. 472 pp. incl. numerous ills. (Marsilio, Venice, 2019), €38. ISBN 978-88-31-74245-0. The earlier volumes are D. Laurenza and A. Nova,

eds: *Leonardo da Vinci's Anatomical World*, Venice 2011; F. Fiorani and A. Nova, eds: *Leonardo da Vinci and Optics: Theory and Pictorial Practice*, Venice 2013; and F. Frosini and A. Nova, eds: *Leonardo da Vinci on Nature: Knowledge and Representation*, Venice 2015.

20 *Leonardo da Vinci: Nature and Architecture*. Edited by Constance Moffatt and Sara Tagliagamba. 448 pp. incl. 114 col. ills. (Brill, Boston and Leiden, 2019), €149. ISBN 978-90-04-39243-4.

21 *Leonardo da Vinci: Der Impetus der Bilder*. By Frank Fehrenbach. 136 pp. incl. numerous ills. (Matthes & Seitz, Berlin, 2019), €12. ISBN 978-39-57-57800-6.

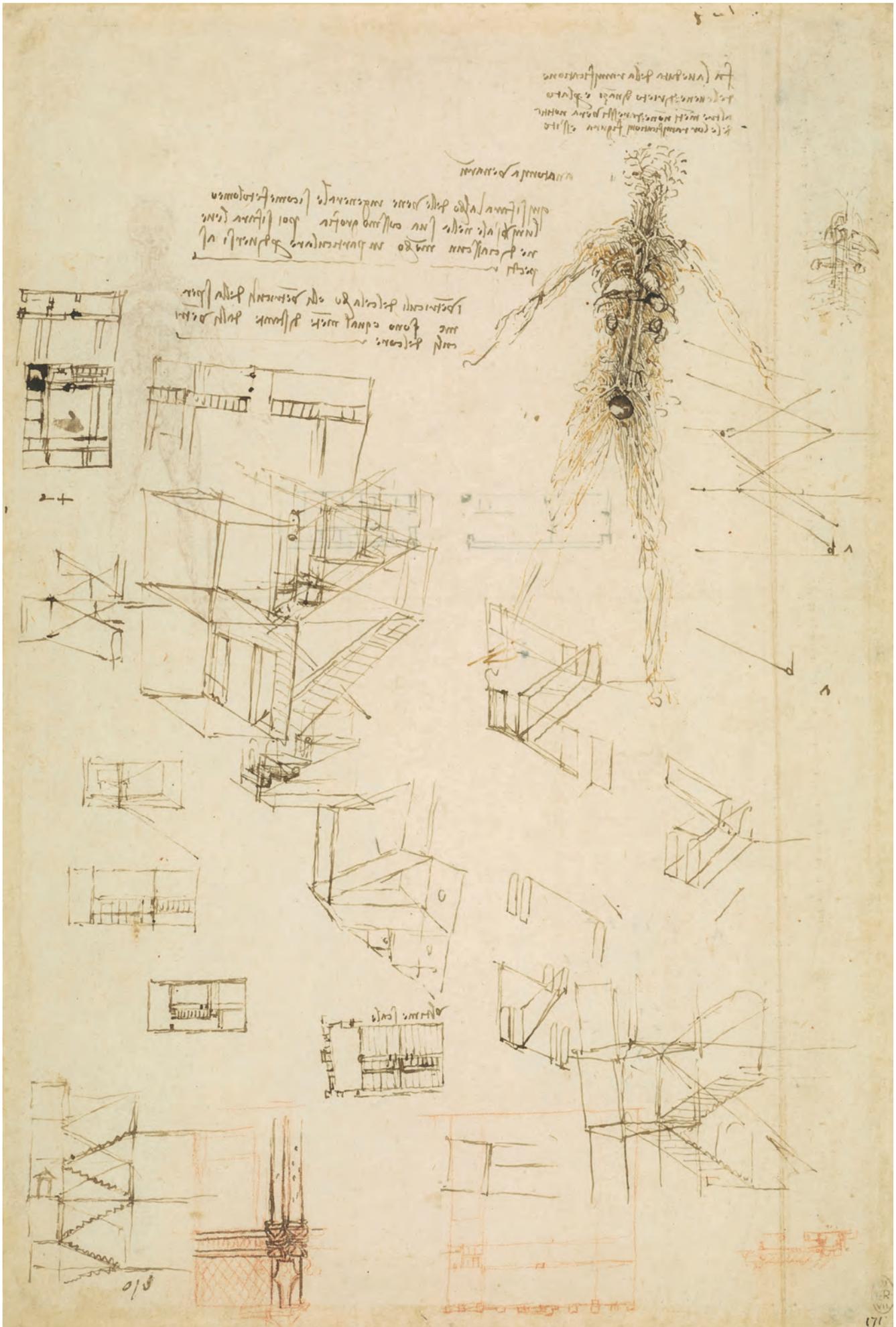
Leonardo that Nova has convened in recent years at the Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence.¹⁹ This book joins the equally significant *Leonardo da Vinci: Nature and Architecture*, edited by Constance Moffatt and Sara Tagliagambara, likewise a collection of conference papers.²⁰

In a different vein entirely were a group of more essayistic books. From Frank Fehrenbach, there was *Leonardo da Vinci: Der Impetus der Bilder*.²¹ This takes up the theme of ‘force’ that is central to Leonardo’s

5 and 6. Installation views of ‘Leonardo da Vinci’ at the Musée du Louvre, Paris. 2019. (Courtesy Musée du Louvre, Paris; photograph Antoine Mongodin).

art and thought, connecting it to other guiding concepts in Leonardo’s writing, from *relievo* to *amore* to *permanenzia*. With Barone’s rich catalogue to the British Library exhibition, it is one of the rare new monographs by a Leonardo specialist to approach him from the point of view of the history and philosophy of science. Instructors looking for new books to assign undergraduates in the English-speaking world, however, will be more tempted by two titles published by Reaktion: François Quiviger’s *Leonardo da Vinci: Self, Art and Nature* and Joost Keizer’s *Leonardo’s Paradox: Word and Image in the Making of Renaissance Culture*.²² Within the new literature, Quiviger’s is the most compelling







7. Studies of blood vessels and staircases, by Leonardo da Vinci. c.1506–10. Pen with different shades of brown ink and red chalk on paper, 29.5 by 19.8 cm. (Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020).

8. A reconstruction of the face of the young Leonardo, from Bernd Roeck's *Leonardo: Der Mann, der alles wissen wollte* (Verlag C.H. Beck, Munich).

attempt to present a compact survey in English of Leonardo's career as a painter. Traditional in its organisation, its chapter divisions correspond to Leonardo's movements between the cities where he resided, with a separate chapter on Leonardo's writings on painting. The initial chapter, on Leonardo's early years in the Verrocchio workshop, is the shakiest. The angel in Verrocchio's *Baptism of Christ*, which Quiviger dates to 1475, was certainly not, as he writes, one of Leonardo's first opportunities to assist his master, nor was 'master' the right word to describe Verrocchio's position relative to Leonardo by this point. Quiviger describes the *Benois Madonna* (c.1478–80; State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg) as 'the first demonstration of Leonardo's pictorial independence', a perplexing assertion inasmuch as Quiviger dates Leonardo's Uffizi *Annunciation* to c.1472. It is not clear why such 'firsts' matter; in any case, they are impossible to establish. As Laurence Kanter remarked in the provocative catalogue to his 2018 exhibition *Leonardo: Discoveries from Verrocchio's Studio*, at Yale University Art Gallery, the entire early chronology is inferential. There is no documentary evidence that allows a secure dating of any painting by Leonardo before 1481.²³

Quiviger's later chapters have a number of refreshing, unexpected turns. The second, entitled 'Leonardo on Painting', starts with a discussion of education in the workshop and the exercises Leonardo gave his students. It concludes with a good section on Leonardo's attitude

toward religious images. The chapter on Leonardo in Milan dwells on academic culture there. When turning to Leonardo's activities in Florence after 1500, Quiviger devotes more pages to the *Leda and the swan* than to the *Mona Lisa*.

Keizer, for his part, focuses on what might be said to be the central problem of Leonardo studies, the relationship between his writings and his art. Keizer's topics are frequently surprising: Leonardo's rebuses and pictograms, his interest in fossils, his avoidance of signatures, the style of his writing. Even the choice of objects is striking: four of the fifteen drawings Keizer discusses in his first two chapters do not appear among Bambach's 1,319 illustrations. Keizer writes beautifully and his book deserved better production values: the illustrations lack sharpness and the pages fell out of my copy as I read.

The two books illustrate the widely different approaches and conclusions Leonardo allows. Quiviger, for example, suggests that Leonardo addressed his writings to the younger men in his shop: 'His principle purpose, as an independent artist, was to form artist-assistants who could work to his standards' (p.46). Keizer, by contrast, believes those writings would have been difficult for a follower to use: 'That Leonardo filled his notebooks with difficult-to-read mirror-script, combined with the books' lack of a clear order, the confusing array of topics per book, and their cross-outs and revisions suggests that Leonardo wrote the notes primarily for himself' (p.30). (In the same vein, and in contrast to Bambach and most other scholars, Keizer asserts that Leonardo wrote without an eye to publication.) Quiviger discusses Leonardo's fascination with knots in the context of the 'Accademia Leonardi Vinci' prints, suggesting that these 'related to the academic ideal of collaboration', while also linking them to Leonardo's depictions of hair and water. Keizer speculates that Leonardo's fascination with knots had to do with language, pointing to Dante's idea that 'knots formed the structure of languages'.

When discussing the *Last Supper*, Quiviger considers it important in the first place that the painting decorated a refectory, that its perspectival construction extended a real room and that the mural was painted opposite a Crucifixion. This underwrites an interpretation of the painting as an image of the institution of the Eucharist, an idea he elaborates before remarking on the emotions expressed by the Apostles and the food Leonardo selected for the table. Keizer passes over all of this, starting instead with a description of how he thinks Leonardo set about making the painting: 'He took a pen and a piece of paper and instead of starting to draw, as was his common practice, he wrote down a scenario for the picture: a storyboard that tells what is happening in chronological order, scene by scene' (p.169).

Both books include a few pages of select bibliography, almost all of it in English. It is symptomatic of the state of Leonardo studies today that only three publications appear in both lists. Of these, only one – Luke Syson's catalogue to his 2011 exhibition at the National Gallery, London – appears in the short 'Further Reading' list that Martin Clayton includes at the end of his catalogue to the Royal Collection exhibitions.²⁴ The Leonardo literature long ago became too big for anyone to read. It would take a lifetime just to catch up on what has been published in the past decade. The response of recent authors is not even to try: it now seems sufficient to read what one likes, to indicate the debts that one recognises, and to leave it to readers to decide whether they are encountering new ideas.

22 *Leonardo da Vinci: Self, Art and Nature*. By François Quiviger. 224 pp. incl. 60 col. + 10 b. & w. ills. (Reaktion, London, 2019), £15.95. ISBN 978-17-89-14070-5; and *Leonardo's Paradox:*

Word and Image in the Making of Renaissance Culture. By Joost Keizer. 232 pp. incl. 40 col. + 25 b. & w. ills. (Reaktion, London, 2019), £25. ISBN 978-17-89-14069-9.

23 L. Kanter: 'Leonardo da Vinci, pupil of Andrea del Verrocchio', in *idem*, ed.: exh. cat. *Leonardo: Discoveries from Verrocchio's Studio*, New Haven (Yale University Art Gallery) 2019,

pp.8–101, at pp.99–100, note 26.
24 L. Syson *et al.*: exh. cat. *Leonardo Da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan*, London (National Gallery) 2011.