

Ferretti, Emanuela, Cecilia Frosinini, Roberta Barsanti, and Gianluca Belli, eds.

La Sala Grande e la Battaglia di Anghiari. Dalla configurazione architettonica all'apparato decorativo.

Biblioteca Leonardiana. Studi e Documenti 8. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2020. Pp. xxiv, 596 + 168 ill. ISBN 978-8-8222-6670-5 (paperback) €60.

Did Leonardo da Vinci ever paint on the walls of the Sala Grande? This is the simple question the authors of this outstanding volume asked and, with it, they radically revised long-standing views on Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*. Moving away from the traditional question scholars asked—Where did Leonardo paint his *Battle*?—this interdisciplinary team made of archeologists, historians, art historians, architects, historians of architecture, conservators, and literary scholars clarified that Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari* existed only at the level of preparatory cartoons, never as a mural painting. They put to rest decades-long controversies on Leonardo's *Battle*—the ultimate “lost masterpiece” of Renaissance art, which, these authors show, is not lost because Leonardo never painted it.

The authors reached this important conclusion thanks to their interdisciplinary methodology that combined historical, artistic, architectural, archeological, scientific, and documentary research. They worked on two integrated fronts. First, they concentrated on a careful reading—or re-reading—of known archival sources, rectifying the chronology and interpretation of many documents, which they newly transcribed and published in an appendix. They also re-read well-known medieval and Renaissance manuals on painting techniques, building materials, the making of cartoons, and the preparation of walls for painting. Then they integrated their rigorous analysis of textual sources with an equally careful study of the physical evidence provided by the Priori Palace, from its foundations above a Roman theatre to the wall structure of its upper levels, documenting the many changes of its halls and spaces over the centuries (in another appendix they list relevant events of the palace's construction). They paid special attention to the east and west walls of the Sala Grande, which scholars had previously identified as possible sites for Leonardo's *Battle*, and to the historical, cultural, and political circumstances of this commission.

Emanuela Ferretti opens the volume with an effective account of earlier attempts to find Leonardo's *Battle* underneath Vasari's frescoes, which—it

was traditionally thought—Vasari painted over Leonardo's scene, including the stripping down of Vasari's paintings and their piercing to collect pigment samples underneath them. Bruce Edelstein and Giovanni Ciappelli discuss previous reconstructions of the hall, while its building phases are addressed in four essays: a collaborative essay by Monica Salvini, Susanna Bianchi, Paolo Lelli, Valeria Montarini, Riccardo Santoni, and Pasquino Pallecchi, and three single-authored ones by Marco Frati, Riccardo Pacciani, and Marco Collareta. Collectively, these scholars show that most likely Leonardo had to paint his *Battle* on the east wall, but that the east wall went through such extensive changes from the early sixteenth century onward that it is today impossible to establish where exactly he had to paint the scene.

Nicoletta Marcelli, Amedeo Belluzzi, Francesca Funis, Giorgio Caselli, and Francesca Borgo write about the cultural and political circumstances of Leonardo's commission, while Marco Campigli, Roberta Barsanti, and Marco Ruffini focus on the fortune and reception of Leonardo's *Battle*. Massimiliano Pieraccini and Massimo Colli examine the wall composition of the Sala Grande. Mauro Matteini analyzes afresh the samples of materials taken from those walls in previous decades, demonstrating that they are consistent with any wall or painting palette of the period and thus cannot prove the existence of Leonardo's *Battle* underneath Vasari's frescoes.

Roberto Bellucci and Cecilia Frosinini conclude the volume with an important essay that sums up our new knowledge of Leonardo's *Battle*. According to them, from 1503 to 1505, Leonardo worked on the cartoon and made a second copy to transfer his design onto the wall. In 1505 he moved to the Sala Grande and started to prepare the wall, following Leon Battista Alberti's advice on how to smooth and make a wall shine in preparation for painting on it. In that same year he received materials, which scholars had previously considered materials for the actual painting on the wall but which instead, Bellucci and Frosinini show, were materials to prepare the wall according to Alberti's advice. Leonardo applied a layer of oil and gesso that required warming up the wall so that the oil would penetrate better, as Alberti recommended and as Leonardo himself had done for the *Last Supper* a few years earlier. Leonardo's mistakes with the oil and gesso process, which are documented in period sources and which scholars have traditionally associated with the actual painting, relate instead to the preparation of the wall before paint was applied. Since the process to prepare the wall was unsuccessful, Leonardo never painted

on it. Based on this careful reading of the materials Leonardo acquired and of Alberti's advice, Bellucci and Frosinini show that Leonardo's *Battle* existed only as a cartoon, never as a painting on a wall. Leonardo's *Battle*, which is documented as displayed in the Sala Grande in the following centuries, was not Leonardo's mural but a section of his second cartoon which, in the absence of the mural, the Signoria decided to frame and hang in the place where the mural was supposed to be. It is this framed cartoon that later artists copied.

The authors of this volume were able to achieve this level of clarity on this hotly debated work by Leonardo because they were able to bring together humanistic and scientific research and to focus on the materiality of Leonardo's works. This approach is part of a broader art historical shift that is grounded in the rigorous examination of documentary and physical evidence, in the open sharing of conservation and diagnostic data, and in the acknowledgement that sources of the period do not document everything we would like to know about the art of the past, including Leonardo's *Battle*, but that, nonetheless, if properly interrogated, they offer important insight on a work's history, making, and uses. Thanks to this team's insightful work, we now know that Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*, which was long regarded as a "lost masterpiece," was never lost—because Leonardo never painted it.

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Gallagher, Lowell, James Kearney, and Julia Reinhard Lupton, eds.

Entertaining the Idea: Shakespeare, Performance, and Philosophy.

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This book is yet another superb result of the long-standing publishing joint venture of the UCLA Clark Memorial Library Series and University of Toronto Press. The volume's editors have brought together twelve stimulating and original essays that consider Shakespeare from the intersection of philosophy, aesthetic and performance history, theory, and criticism. Most contributors are scholars of English literature, but some work in comparative literature, comparative