

Abstract of the introduction written by Professor Carlo Pedretti
of the monograph
LEONARDO INFINITO
La vita, l'opera completa, la modernità
di Alessandro Vezzosi
Introduzione di Carlo Pedretti
published next July in Italy by
Pr. Alessandro Vezzosi, Director of the Museo Ideale at Vinci, Italy.
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After overcoming an initial moment of stunned surprise upon opening this imposing and spectacular book, the reader who is not totally ignorant of the present state of Leonardo studies cannot fail to feel a sense of *déjà vu*—not simply because of the splendid reproductions of the works of art (not only by Leonardo) that it features, but also for the very original and attractive, yet scientifically impeccable way in which they are presented. This approach is, moreover, the same as that applied to the exhibition programmes of the Museo Ideale in the center of Vinci, founded in 1993 by its current director, Alessandro Vezzosi. ...

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This and other new findings allow the reader to make discoveries for himself, without the help of systematic indices or listings, and I actually think that it is better not to mention too many of these new findings—in order not to deprive the reader of the excitement that these will arouse. An exception, however, must be made for one new previously unpublished item—too important to be skimmed over lightly. I refer to the large drawing on parchment of a *Young Woman Seen in Profile to the Left, dressed in a lavish Renaissance outfit without jewellery, and presented as a presumed portrait of a “betrothed bride,” the sort of portrait that one could imagine being sent to a distant prospective groom—as was the case of Emperor Maximilian, who lived a long distance from Bianca Maria Sforza, the niece of Ludovico il Moro. This fascinating story, which concluded with the lavish marriage festivities in 1494, and other similar stories in the political manoeuvres on the part of her astute uncle, not to mention the various aspects of the portrait’s complex attributional problems, are told by Vezzosi with the same restrained eloquence with which he has tackled every other theme or problem. I owe to him my knowledge of this extraordinary work of art, in the first instance from a digital image and then first hand in the original.*

Other notable critics and art historians before me have seen and examined it—none of whom wish to be mentioned by name. The exception is Nicholas Turner, who has issued a declaration in which he limits himself to describing and commenting on what he has seen of the original, with particular attention paid to the left-handed execution. According to him, the strokes in the background beyond the sitter’s profile move from lower right to upper left: since he did have access to a technical examination, this process needs to be checked, since it can be demonstrated that the direction of the strokes in Leonardo’s celebrated drawings of skulls of 1489 in the Royal Library at Windsor is the opposite. I must confess that

my first impression, perhaps influenced by the wooden panel to which the parchment has been attached, on the back of which one sees two old customs stamps, was that this is the sort of wooden support applied to boxes of chocolates in the middle of the nineteenth century. It is also curious that on the only occasion that the work has been described in print, when it was sold at Christie's, New York, in January 1998, it was attributed to a nineteenth-century German artist and estimated at between \$12,000 and \$16,000. It was, in fact, sold for \$21,850—a surprising result for a work attributed to an anonymous nineteenth-century German hand.

Another reason to be perplexed is the costume, where one would expect to see a detachable sleeve held in place by laces. Here instead one has a triangular opening (but not large enough to squeeze an arm through) with elegant, embroidered Leonardo-style knots along the sides. Impeccable, however, is the typical Lombard hairstyle, with the hair gathered in a “coazzone”, which falls along the back of the sitter and is held in place at various points with ribbons—all drawn without a single perspectival error. Moreover, the sitter's profile is sublime, and the eye is drawn exactly as it is in so many of Leonardo's drawings of this period. On these grounds, the suggested identification with a nineteenth-century German artist seems to me unsustainable. Certainly, the insidious possibility of a fake must always be considered, bearing in mind the ability of an artist like Giuseppe Bossi (1777-1815), a noteworthy Leonardo scholar, who assembled a distinguished collection of drawings by the artist, now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Vezzosi concedes the necessity of carrying out further laboratory examinations, which will allow the date of the parchment support, as well as the drawing materials, to be established with certainty. Notwithstanding the questions raised by the lack of any known earlier provenance, this work constitutes—at least for the moment—the most important discovery since the early nineteenth-century re-establishment of the *Lady with the Ermine* in Krakow as a genuine work by Leonardo. There were also curious aspects to the story of the re-attribution of that painting, which are brought to light in my essay on it as a political allegory, published in 1990 in the volumes of miscellaneous studies in honor of Luigi Firpo. In his sober and essential account of the new study on vellum, Vezzosi dwells on the naturalistic elements of the image, including the head-and-shoulders portrait format, as an attribute of movement or timely decorum, which gives it its extraordinary and unexpected power: “Looking at the compositional schema, the curvilinear system is of such extreme purity that it has always made me think of an innovation on the scale of that of *Mademoiselle Pogany* by the twentieth-century sculptor Brancusi.”

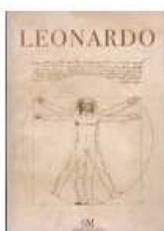
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University of California, Los Angeles
e della sua sede europea presso l'Università degli Studi di Urbino
(translated from Italian by Nicholas and Jane Turner)*

- Dr. Nicolas Turner, independent scholar, United Kingdom (formerly Curator of Drawings at the Getty Museum, Los Angeles [1994-1998] and Deputy Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, London (1974-1994))

SCRIPTA MANEANT



LEONARDO INFINITO
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*di Alessandro Vezzosi
Introduzione di Carlo Pedretti*

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