

# *Leonardo da Vinci Society Newsletter*

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across Italy and France. Rather, the conference sought to take a more direct route into the figural and rhetorical structures of the works themselves, hoping that the reconstruction of Leonardo's period eye will contribute to a better understanding of the art of his time. By forcing Leonardo's cumbersome figure into a comparative perspective, the conference intended to resist the reductive approach that centres exclusively on his authorial presence. Because this is more easily done in studies of Leonardo's reception, his followers or afterlives were not our primary concern. On the contrary, while focusing on Leonardo, we sought to develop more general hypotheses on his contemporaries; to use Leonardo's exceptionally large corpus of writing to look at the broader—and often oral—culture of his times.

By inviting scholars who are not, strictly speaking, Leonardo specialists, my co-organizers and I intended to extend our comparative approach beyond our object of study, to the field's own structure and methodology. Our aim was to counterbalance the distance that traditionally separates the field of Leonardo studies from the many methodological turns that, time and again, have encouraged art historians to rethink the discipline: upheavals that, while sometimes ephemeral, often helped to fundamentally and productively challenge art history's central notions and assumptions. This dialogue, we believe, has the advantage to better assess and elucidate the field of Leonardo studies through comparison and contrast with other fields; to hone its methodological acuity by exploring the methods of others; to identify questions and issues that resonate beyond its borders; to initiate a theoretical conversation able to both validate and enrich its highly-specialized approach.

The conference opened with a map of Leonardo's direct and indirect interactions: in Mantua, Parma, Milan, Florence, Rome—with Isabella D'Este, Correggio, Fra' Bartolomeo, Bramante, Michelangelo and Raphael. This predominantly geographic focus was combined with four panels that looked at Leonardo's dialogues both thematically (through notions such as nature, the grotesque and the non-finito) and by media (sculpture, architecture). The program included a visit to the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, where Cecilia Frosinini and Roberto Bellucci brought the participants up to date on the last stages of the

restoration of Leonardo's *Adoration*.

The polyphony of voices, approaches and themes that characterized the event makes a summary of these three days an impossible task: for an overview, I refer the reader to the abstracts provided below. Several of these papers outlined new problems and issues, pointing to some aspects of Leonardo that had so far escaped the attention of other specialists. Other contributions proposed novel approaches to long-standing questions: these new directions of research were developed, for example, by either a shift in perspective (i.e., from Italian to Northern design procedures; from the single commissioner to a network of patrons; from the individual master to the larger workshop practice), by a broadening up of traditional notions (i.e., allegory, or academy), or by a radical rethinking of a few key ideas brought forward by a close re-reading of texts (i.e., the non-finito, the universality of the painter).

We are aware that many other voices could enrich this conversation. As we work towards the publication of the proceedings, and to build on the spirit of openness that characterized this event, I invite the readers of the *Leonardo da Vinci Newsletter* to contact the organizers of the symposium with proposals and suggestions about artists, contexts and issues that should be brought into the discussion to productively rethink Leonardo's dialogues.

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