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LEONARDO IN DIALOGUE
The Artist Amid His Contemporaries

edited by
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Marsilio

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LEONARDO IN DIALOGUE
THE ARTIST AMID HIS CONTEMPORARIES

TOWARD LEONARDO'S DIALOGUES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The original idea for this volume arose out of a conference held at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz–Max Planck Institut in September 2015. The initial roster of papers has been revised and expanded considerably to include peer-reviewed versions of the original submissions as well as additional contributions. The ambition to produce a volume that would be useful to Leonardo specialists and non-specialists alike has required extensive editorial work to bring all contributions up to speed with the latest trends in Leonardo research—a complex and constantly expanding bibliographical corpus, especially in the years leading up to the 2019 anniversary celebrations. Given the nature of this publication, which combines the voices of many scholars new to publishing on Leonardo, the organizers of the conference have deliberately limited their role to that of editors.

The initial conference and the present volume have become a deposit for many accumulated debts. For the liveliness of the discussion that characterized the event, we are thankful to our participants, speakers and chairs, in particular Diane Bodart, Marzia Faietti, Pietro C. Marani, Alina Payne, and Jessica Richardson. We are also and particularly grateful to our colleagues at the KHI for the many challenging conversations that accompanied the evolution of this project. It is no coincidence that *Leonardo in Dialogue* was developed at the KHI: the institute's atmosphere of openness and intellectual exchange inspired the dialogue that structures this project. Among the many to whom we are indebted we would like to mention Robert Brennan, Dario Donetti, Maja Häderli, Fabian Jonietz, Christine Klöckner, Francesca Marzullo, Mandy Richter, and Tim Urban. The help of Lisa Shea, Stefano Grandi, Silvio Mara and Antonia Goetz has been invaluable in bringing the volume to completion.

This collection of essays presents two immediate paradoxes. First, while the title suggests a book about Leonardo da Vinci, a drawing by Albrecht Dürer appears on the cover, followed by the names of several other Renaissance artists in the table of contents. Many more populate the ensuing pages, as one sees in the index. Second, the absence of Leonardo specialists among the list of contributing authors is noteworthy. Instead, the roster of authors features art historians active in a variety of different fields: from early modern art theory to print culture, painting, sculpture and architecture, both north and south of the Alps. Most of them are new to publishing on Leonardo. The combination of their expertises and approaches points to the experimental nature of this Leonardo publication and distinguishes it from previous ones.

Leonardo is often considered an artist apart, isolated in his greatness. This book is designed to set him in conjunction with broader conditions of painting, at his time and shortly afterward. It is also designed to bring the rich and challenging nature of Leonardo studies under the collective consideration and scrutiny of scholars, irrespective of methodological training and across geographic and institutional boundaries. The introduction that follows explains why this volume offers views of Leonardo that originate from outside the field of Leonardo studies: why, simply put, it aims to foster Leonardo's dialogues—those between the artist and his contemporaries, as well as between Leonardo specialists and Renaissance art historians writ large.

* * *

In 1973, Leo Steinberg opened his masterful study of Leonardo's *Last Supper* with two questions: «Is there anything left to see? and, Is there any-

thing left to say?»¹. When embarking on a project on Leonardo, the fear of exhausting interpretation, after decades of unrelenting publications, seems to be a common scholarly concern—one that is often found among the first lines of many Leonardo volumes. This was our necessary point of departure: addressing the exceptionality not of Leonardo himself, but of this specific field of research.

In the last decade, an avalanche of Leonardo literature has accumulated at an overwhelming speed. On average, thirty new monographs are published annually in Europe and North America²: an outpouring of publications that is likely to increase, due to the quincentennial anniversary of Leonardo's death. This is not a recent trend. Since Leo Steinberg's statement forty years ago, an estimated fifteen thousand volumes have appeared. This is three times more than those dedicated to Leonardo's peer, Michelangelo³. Despite this considerable disparity, the number of Michelangelo publications has still provoked scholarly exasperation and sarcastic commentary, leading non-specialists to wonder if Michelangelo scholars have perhaps started to «milk the bull»⁴.

The historiography on Leonardo da Vinci is not only exceptionally abundant, but also formidably authoritative. This intimidating bibliographical corpus includes some of the founding figures of art history: Bernard Berenson, Kenneth Clark, Ernst Gombrich, André Chastel, Wilhelm von Bode and Heinrich von Geymüller, just to name a few, have all authored important contributions to the field⁵. A number of institutions, societies

and journals have chosen Leonardo as their privileged object of study: in Vinci, the *Biblioteca Leonardiana*, with its book series *Studi e documenti* and the yearly *Lettura Vinciana*; in Milan, the *Raccolta Vinciana* and its eponymous journal; in Brescia, the *Centro Ricerche Leonardiane*, active until the 1980s, and its two periodicals, *Frammenti vinciani* and the *Notiziario vinciano*. Outside Italy, the list includes the *Leonardo da Vinci Society* and its *Newsletter*, the now ceased *Achademia Leonardi Vinci* issued by the Armand Hammer Center for Leonardo Studies at UCLA, as well as the more recent *Leonardo Studies* series published by Brill. *Michelangiologisti* and *raffaellisti* can hardly boast a similarly unflagging zeal. Indeed, in 1961 John Shearman ironically distinguished between *us*, «ordinary art historians», and *them*, the «far better organized» Leonardo specialists⁶.

To this, one must add the exceptional amount of writing produced by Leonardo himself. This is the largest written legacy of any Renaissance artist: out of the fifteen thousand pages that he likely penned during his lifetime, roughly six thousand sheets survive, filled with notes and drawings⁷. The vast quantity of material discourages extemporaneous approaches: it is an overwhelming obstacle that every Leonardo scholar must encounter. It is this mountain of paper that divides *leonardisti* and *non-leonardisti*.

As a matter of fact, the emergence of the professional figure of the specialist in Leonardo studies during the 1950s occurred as a direct consequence

¹ L. Steinberg, «Leonardo's Last Supper», in: *The Art Quarterly*, xxxvi, 1973, pp. 297-410: 297, later in id., *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper*, New York 2001, p. 12.

² This estimate is based on *Kubikat*, the union catalogue of the holdings of four specialized art history libraries (Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Bibliotheca Hertziana, and Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte).

³ Both numbers result from a *WorldCat* search for 'Leonardo da Vinci' and 'Michelangelo Buonarroti' respectively and only include non-fiction books printed between 1973 and 2019.

⁴ See B. Nicolson, «Milking the Bull», in: *The Burlington Magazine*, cxvii, 1975, pp. 131-132 and the response in W. Wallace, «Why more Michelangelo?», in: *Michelangelo in the New Millennium. Conversations about Artistic Practice, Patronage and Christianity*, ed. by T. Smithers, Leiden-Boston 2016, pp. vii-x.

⁵ H. von Geymüller, «Les derniers travaux sur Leonard de Vinci», in: *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, xxxiii, 1886, pp. 357-76; xxxiv, 1886, pp. 143-64; 274-96; B. Berenson, *The Drawings of the Florentine Painters: Classified, Criticised and Studied as Documents in the History and*

Appreciation of Tuscan Art, 2 vols., London 1903; W. von Bode, *Studien über Leonardo da Vinci*, Berlin 1921; K. Clark, *Leonardo da Vinci: An Account of His Development as an Artist*, Cambridge 1939; A. Chastel, *Léonard de Vinci par lui-même*, Paris 1952; E. H. Gombrich, «Leonardo's Methods for Working out Compositions», in: *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, Oxford 1966, pp. 58-63; id., «The Form of Movement in Water and Air», in: *Leonardo's Legacy: An International Symposium*, ed. by C. D. O'Malley, Berkeley 1969, pp. 171-204.

⁶ J. Shearman, review of *Raccolta Vinciana, fascicolo xviii*, in: *The Burlington Magazine*, ciii, 1961, pp. 474-475, here p. 474 «Ordinary art historians have to admit that the Leonardo specialists are far better organized than the rest of us».

⁷ M. Kemp, «Preface», in: Leonardo da Vinci, *Notebooks*, rev. ed. by I. Richter, T. Wells, Oxford 2008, p. v; C. Pedretti, *Leonardo da Vinci on Painting: A Lost Book (Libro A)*, Berkeley 1964, pp. v-viii, here p. v; C. Farago, M. Landrus, «Leonardo da Vinci», in: *Oxford Bibliographies in Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. by M. King, DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780195399301-0151 <27 .02 .2019 >.

of the systematic publication of Leonardo's writings. Critical editions and facsimiles had begun to appear in the late nineteenth century with Charles Ravaisson-Mollien's edition of *Manuscripts A–M* (Paris, 1881-1891) and Giovanni Piumati's *Codex Atlanticus* (Milan, 1894-1904), continuing steadily during the first half of the following century⁸. The publication of this material brought along with it the duty to follow Leonardo's thought beyond his pictorial and graphic production. With facsimile reproduction elevating the notebooks to a new rank as aesthetic objects, Leonardo studies quickly became a fully-fledged, independent art-historical field that now included, alongside paintings and drawings, a vast corpus of writings that could be easily called upon in the interpretation and analysis of Leonardo's artistic and scientific practice. As a result, the field began to be subdivided into more and more circumscribed areas of research, corresponding to a division of knowledge that did not necessarily reflect that of Leonardo's own intellectual pursuits. The divide between art historians and Leonardo specialists grew bigger and bigger⁹.

While encouraging specialization, this trend, inevitably, also inhibited exchange with the outside. Scholars started to plunge into the depths of this unwieldy body of writings, uncovering an all-encompassing universe characterized by an extraordinary range of themes. Exegesis did not appear to require reference to many notions imported from outside its borders. Unconstrained by disciplinary boundaries and encouraged by Leonardo's fluency of thought, the infinite play of analogies allowed for sustained internal cross-referencing: between the infinitively small and the infinitively large, micro and macrocosm, processes of generation and destruction,

⁸ See A. Marinoni, «I manoscritti di Leonardo da Vinci e le loro edizioni», in: *Leonardo: saggi e ricerche*, ed. by A. Marazza, Roma 1954, pp. 231-273; J. E. Housefield, «The Nineteenth-Century Renaissance and the Modern Facsimile: Leonardo da Vinci's Notebooks, from Ravaisson-Mollien to Péladan and Duchamp», in: *The Renaissance in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Y. Portebois, N. Terpstra, Toronto 2003, pp. 73-88. The *Edizione Nazionale dei Manoscritti e dei Disegni*, begun in 1964 and entrusted to Giunti, superseded all earlier editions of Leonardo's autograph manuscripts and drawings.

⁹ On this phenomenon, see P. C. Marani, «Leonardo nella storia dell'arte, della critica artistica e nel restauro, intorno al 1952», in: *Leonardo '1952' e la cultura dell'Europa nel dopoguerra*, ed. by R. Nanni, M. Torrini, Firenze 2013, pp. 241-255, here p. 247.

rules for harmony and disproportion, strategies for observation and invention, notes on materials and techniques, artistic theory, the aesthetics of production and reception¹⁰.

By the 1980s, with the various fragments and sheets dated and ordered thanks to the painstaking philological work of scholars such as Gerolamo Calvi, Anna Maria Brizio and Carlo Pedretti, Leonardo's universe had transformed into a fully-charted cosmos that allowed, for the first time, a relative ease of navigation¹¹. As a result, due to a new degree of thoroughness and accuracy, the manufacturing of new contributions acquired a curiously ritualistic air: it moved towards gleanings, short notes and specialized commentaries on the field's historiography, breaking little ground «in the centre of the field of action»¹².

A strong attachment to notions of authorial agency and individual creativity has lent art historical readings of Leonardo an additional, discipline-specific burden. The hesitation to analyze the artist's work alongside that of his close contemporaries has roots that reach back to the key position Giorgio Vasari awarded Leonardo in the trajectory of the *Lives of the Artists*. Presenting his oeuvre as an introduction to the Third Age, Vasari put Leonardo in command of a pictorial history inaugurated by himself alone¹³. His status as the harbinger of the artistic development that

¹⁰ On this approach see A. Nova, «Valore e limiti del metodo analogico nell'opera di Leonardo da Vinci», in: *Leonardo da Vinci. Metodi e tecniche per la costruzione della conoscenza*, ed. by P. C. Marani, R. Maffei, Varese 2016, pp. 25-36.

¹¹ See for example G. Calvi, *I manoscritti di Leonardo dal punto di vista cronologico, storico e biografico*, Bologna 1925; Leonardo da Vinci, *Scritti scelti*, ed. by A. M. Brizio, Torino 1952; C. Pedretti, «Saggio di una cronologia dei fogli del "Codice Atlantico"», in: *Studi vinciani: documenti, analisi e inediti leonardeschi*, Genève 1957, pp. 264-289; Leonardo da Vinci, *Fragments at Windsor Castle from the Codex Atlanticus*, ed. by C. Pedretti, London 1957; id., *Corpus of the Anatomical Studies in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle*, ed. by K. D. Keele and C. Pedretti, 3 vols., London 1978-1980.

¹² Shearman, 1961 (as in n. 6), p. 474.

¹³ On Vasari's *Life of Leonardo*, see P. Rubin, «What Men Saw: Vasari's Life of Leonardo da Vinci and the Image of the Renaissance Artist», in: *Art History*, XIII, 1990, pp. 34-46; R. Turner, «Giorgio Vasari Invents Leonardo», in: id., *Inventing Leonardo*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1992, pp. 55-67; A. Conti, «Osservazioni e appunti sulla "Vita" di Leonardo di Giorgio Vasari», in: *Kunst des Cinquecento in der Toskana*, ed. by M. Cämmerer, Mün-

followed framed Leonardo as the gatekeeper of perfection. In Vasari's construct, his innovations were presented as so foundational for what came afterward that their original context became increasingly remote to subsequent interpreters. Leonardo soon came to be regarded as a radically proleptic figure: the archetype of the artist ahead of his time and out of step with the world around him¹⁴.

The myth of Leonardo's uniqueness contributed to distancing the field of Leonardo studies from the many methodological turns that periodically encourage art historians to rethink the discipline. Leonardo might have thereby escaped the pressure of many ephemeral trends unscathed; however, in doing so, the field has also resisted those upheavals that fundamentally and productively challenged art history's central notions and assumptions. Over time, Leonardo studies suffered from this propensity to withdraw from the rest of the scholarly world, functioning as a perfectly self-contained entity, sufficient in and of itself, with little need of external validation.

In recent years, scholarship has begun to shift gears. Increasingly frequent collaborative projects have aimed to better assess Leonardo's place within the philosophical, literary and scientific culture of his time. In the realm of anatomy, optics and mechanics in particular, scholars have been able to contextualize his research more precisely within contemporary networks of scholars, humanists and doctors, as well as within the Classical, medieval and Arab traditions¹⁵. Contributions focusing on his library have

chen 1992, pp. 26-36; R. Battaglia, «La vita torrentiniana di Leonardo», in: *Giorgio Vasari e il cantiere delle Vite del 1550*, ed. by B. Agosti, S. Ginzburg, and A. Nova, Venezia 2013, pp. 247-271; C. Hope, «The Biography of Leonardo in Vasari's "Vite"», in: *The Lives of Leonardo*, ed. by T. Frangenberg and R. Palmer, London 2013, pp. 11-28; S. Feser, «Vom Künstlerhelden zum Actionhero. Vasaris "Leonardo" und die Folgen», in: *Künstlerhelden? Heroisierung und mediale Inszenierung von Malern, Bildhauern und Architekten*, ed. by K. Helm, H. W. Hubert, C. Posselt-Kuhli und A. Schreurs-Morét, Merzhausen 2015, pp. 51-86; C. Vecce, «La vita di Leonardo, da Vasari a Lomazzo», in: *La réception des Vite de Giorgio Vasari dans l'Europe des XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles*, ed. by C. Lucas Fiorato, P. Dubus, Genève 2017, pp. 113-128.

¹⁴ On this development see Turner, «Leonardo the Harbinger of Modernity», in: *Inventing Leonardo* (as in n. 13), pp. 100-130.

¹⁵ See, for example, D. Laurenza, «Leonardo nella Roma di Leone X (c. 1513-16): gli studi anatomici, la vita, l'arte», in: *Lettura vinciana*, XLIII, 2003; *Leonardo e Pico: analogie, contatti, confronti*, ed. by F. Frosini, Firenze 2005; *La mente di Leonardo. Nel laboratorio del*

also been instrumental in this regard: by probing his indebtedness to previous authors, Leonardo's 'exceptionality' has finally become measurable¹⁶.

This is the direction in which the contributions collected in this volume proceed. By situating Leonardo's cumbersome figure into a comparative perspective, the intention is to resist the reductive approach that centers exclusively on his authorial presence. This is more easily done in studies of Leonardo's later reception; however, his legacy is not a primary concern of the volume. While emphasizing Leonardo's surroundings, this book does not intend to underplay the extent of his novelty, nor does it aim to produce forensic reconstructions of his 'contexts'—a factual account of his peregrinations and encounters across Italy and France. Indeed, even if Leonardo painted only a few works during his long career, they were almost all 'primary objects', to use Kubler's vocabulary¹⁷: the *Madonna Benois* created a new model for the popular iconography of the Madonna with the Child, the *Last Supper* a new, more dramatic form of Albertian *istoria*; the *Virgin of the Rocks* marked a turning point in the history of the altarpiece, and the *Mona Lisa* revolutionized the way portraits were conceived.

The issues around which the essays of this book cohere delve directly into the figural and rhetorical structures of the works themselves. They explore and pose questions about images: to what extent is the complexity of Leonardo's works taken into account, embraced, modified or rejected by the other protagonists of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century? By what precise means does his status as the origin of the Third Age connect with what precedes and follows in the art historical narrative that Vasari constructed? Does his new vision of art making prove fruitful for interpreting the larger pictorial enterprise of his contemporaries? And, finally, is a shared propensity to engage with similar concerns sufficient to form an implicit bond between Leonardo and other artists traditionally regarded as unrelated? If so, can this bond be explored historically?

Genio Universale, ed. by P. Galluzzi, Firenze 2006; *Leonardo da Vinci and Optics. Theory and Pictorial Practice*, ed. by F. Fiorani, A. Nova, Venezia 2013.

¹⁶ See C. Vecce, *La biblioteca perduta: i libri di Leonardo*, Roma 2017, with references to previous studies. A digital platform hosted by the Museo Galileo is currently under construction.

¹⁷ See G. Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*, New Haven 1962.

This last point requires clarification. It is legitimate to question what relevance the ideas and concerns of single individuals can have for the analysis of their broader culture. This is especially true when dealing, as in this case, with an artist who can hardly be considered 'average'¹⁸. Leonardo's distinctiveness, however, had very definite boundaries. He still operated within a «horizon of latent possibilities»¹⁹: in dialogue with the previous artistic tradition and developing a language that previous artists had put at his disposal. His case can be considered representative inasmuch as it allows us to direct our attention to features of his contemporaries' work that have so far been construed to possess little significance; to trace ideas and practices that would otherwise be lost, or known only fragmentarily.

Tracking the presence of Leonardo's ideas brings the problem of the early circulation of his notes into play. Perhaps because of the relative lack of conclusive evidence on the early reception of Leonardo's writings before the 1651 publication of the *Treatise on Painting*²⁰, historians of art have made surprisingly little use of the six thousand pages of notes that survive. This volume attempts to make up for that neglect. These essays show that Leonardo's notes presuppose a culture that was the patrimony of a vast segment of late Quattrocento society. Taken together, they demonstrate that Leonardo's period eye can contribute to a better understanding of the art of his time.

This is why it might be beneficial to return to the most mainstream Italian Renaissance artist—perhaps to the very embodiment of the canon within the Western canon—at a moment when the discipline demands a new breadth, in terms of both method and subject matter. By returning to Leonardo, this volume aims to generate a new account of his novelty against the backdrop of prevailing clichés, and to articulate why this should count now and for the future. Most importantly, however, while pivoting on one single artist, the book seeks to develop more general

hypotheses on Leonardo's contemporaries, using his valuable corpus of writing as a way to look at the broader, and often oral, culture of his times.

To simply examine the dialogue between Leonardo and his contemporaries, the volume could have relied on the expertise of the many *leonardisti* that have been productively looking at Leonardo's contexts in the past few years. Instead—and this is an essential point—it gathers the contributions of scholars who are not, strictly speaking, Leonardo specialists²¹. This was done deliberately, in order to extend the book's comparative approach beyond its object of study, into the field's own structure and methodology. Similarly to Leonardo's dialogues, *this* dialogue has the advantage of being able to probe the field of Leonardo studies through contrast and comparison with other fields; to hone its methodological acuity by exploring the methods employed by others; to find themes of interest that resonate across different specializations; to create the basis for a theoretical conversation that is necessary to supplement and support field-specific focuses.

From this premise, the book branches out and provides a series of finely textured analyses of Leonardo's dialogues: real or imagined, peaceful or controversial, one-sided or reciprocal, unfailingly occurring beyond the traditional hierarchies of workshop and followers, master and disciples. The result is both additive and cumulative: it is not just about summing the steep and ever-growing mountain of Leonardo literature, but also about discovering a new vantage point. Together, these essays provide a bird's eye view of early modern European art and its intertwined geography of artists: from his beginnings in Florence—with Verrocchio, Lorenzo di Credi, Botticelli, Fra' Bartolomeo—the volume follows Leonardo to Milan, where we encounter Bramante, Giovanni Antonio Amadeo, Agostino de' Fondulis, Luca Pacioli, as well as the German masters at the cathedral's building site. After Rome—a primary site of artistic exchange with Raphael, Michelangelo, Paolo Giovio and, again, Bramante—the conversation continues throughout Northern Italy: in Mantua with Gian Cristoforo Romano, in Parma with Correggio, in Venice with the Neapolitan

¹⁸ C. Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi. Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500*, Torino 2009 (1976), pp. xix-xxii, with important indications on the scholarly, heuristic relevance of atypical or non-representative individual personalities on their broader context.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

²⁰ On this see *Re-reading Leonardo. The Treatise on Painting across Europe, 1550-1900*, ed. by C. Farago, Burlington 2009, and more recently *The Fabrication of Leonardo da Vinci's Trattato della pittura*, ed. by C. Farago, J. Bell and C. Vecce, 2 vols., Leiden-Boston 2018.

²¹ Two conferences (and the resulting volumes of essays) provided a guiding model in this regard: *Benvenuto Cellini. Kunst und Kunsttheorie im 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. by A. Nova, A. Schreurs-Morét, Köln 2003; *Aus aller Herren Länder. Die Künstler der Teutschen Academie von Joachim von Sandrart*, ed. by S. Meurer, A. Schreurs-Morét, and L. Simonato, Turnhout 2015.

Francesco Galli and the German Albrecht Dürer. Leonardo's dialogues, however, expand well beyond the Alps: to Flanders, with Van Eyck; Germany and Switzerland, once again with Dürer, and with Conrad Gessner; to France: first, in Chambord with Domenico da Cortona, then Paris, with a final coda on Abraham Bosse and Roger de Piles. Ultimately, this book is not so much about Leonardo as it is about multiple artistic realities seen through the prismatic figure of an artist that, like no other, left behind a finely polished lens to study the history of Renaissance art.