

Italy Honors Leonardo da Vinci 500 Years After his Death



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ROME -- On May 2, 2019, Italy and the world honor the day, 500 years ago, when Leonardo da Vinci died. In fact, a host of celebrations are planned here and will last much of the year. In March the celebration committee created by the Ministry for Culture and Tourism elected Prof. Paolo Galluzzi, who is director of the Galileo Museum of Florence, its president. Other committee members include Prof. Vincent Deleuvin, curator of Italian 16th C. painting at the Louvre; Prof. Luke Syson, curator of European sculpture and decorative arts at the Metropolitan of New York, and Pinin Brambilla Barcilon, restorer of "The Last Supper."

When Leonardo's patron Giuliano de'Medici died, Leonardo quit Italy for France in 1516, when he was 64, to live in a fine manor house at Clos-Luce near Amboise. He was unwell and his hand too crippled to paint, but he and his admiring new patron, Francis I, the youthful king of France, became close friends who discussed everything from philosophy to art, architecture and engineering. Writing in



1550, Giorgio Vasari, in his *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, recorded that Leonardo actually died in the king's arms, with the king "supporting his head to give him such assistance and do him such favour as he could, in the hope of alleviating his sufferings." Vasari's account inspired artists like Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres to paint, that death scene with the king in 1818 (see [>>](#) [2])

This touching scene of the king cradling the artist's head is unproven but is possible albeit, "With Leonardo, nothing is so simple," writes Walter Isaacson in his carefully researched *Leonardo Da Vinci, The Biography* (Simon and Schuster, 2017). Leonardo was buried in the cloister of the Church of Saint Florentin at Amboise, "but the current location of his remains is another mystery," writes Isaacson. The church was demolished in the early 19th C., and, although excavation decades later revealed bones, they are cautiously described as Leonardo's "presumed remains."

One of the main events of the 500th anniversary of his death begins this October at the Uffizi Galleries of Florence, with the exhibition "The Leicester Codex of Leonardo da Vinci: Water as Microscope of Nature." The 72-page Codex, which discusses the movement of water, fossils, and moonlight (among other topics) is being loaned by Bill Gates, who purchased it in 1990 for over \$30 million. Already on view in Turin at the Biblioteca Reale is the famous self-portrait of Leonardo after two years of restoration. Works on view with the self-portrait will be Italian Renaissance drawings called "Intorno a Leonardo, Disegni italiani del Rinascimento," from July 8 through Sept 15. "For 2019 we are planning to open a permanent display of the 13 Leonardo drawings which we own, in addition to the Codex of the Flight of Birds," says director Enrica Pagella.

In Milan after Feb. 7 a pavilion at the Borsa Internazionale del Turismo (Bit) travel fair will, in the words of the Bit organizers, "illustrate Leonardo's works through contributions from the major cultural venues associated with him: the Sforzesco Castle, the Museum of the Vinciano Cenacolo, the Ambrosiana Library and Art Gallery, the da Vinci National museum of Science and Technology and the Stelline Foundation." Reproductions of some of the machines invented by Leonardo will be on view. As an aside, tourism in Milan has increased notably, thanks partly to a 20% increase in youngsters under 18. (For information, see: [Borsa Internazionale del Turismo](#) [3])

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[2] http://web.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/web%20publishing/Vasari_daVinci.htm

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