

Milan seen through the eyes of Leonardo da Vinci

To celebrate the fifth centenary of Leonardo da Vinci's death in 2019, a series of events and initiatives were organized up and down the country. At the heart of celebrations was the city of Milan, where Leonardo spent a large part of his life over two different periods. The first period, which lasted from 1482 to December 1499, was under the energetic and ambitious Duke Ludovico Sforza ("il Moro"), the most munificent and generous of his patrons. The second ran from 1508 to 1513, under the leadership and patronage of Charles II d'Amboise, who governed the Duchy of Milan on behalf of the King of France.

Leonardo left an indelible mark on the city that he considered his own more than any other. He left his mark in fragile and timeless masterpieces such as the Last Supper, visited every day by thousands of people from every corner of the globe, and he left it also in the superhuman compendium of his studies into every field of human knowledge, some of which are to be found in the Codex Atlanticus that has been in the safekeeping of Biblioteca Ambrosiana (the Ambrosian Library) since 1608. His works are imbued with an ineffable legacy of speculative thought that transcends the works themselves, being a reflection of Leonardo da Vinci's unquenchable thirst for knowledge and his inexhaustible curiosity. Invisibly, the "restlessly encyclopaedic character" of Leonardo became interwoven with the cultural fabric of the city, the effects of which became apparent over time.

For this is a city naturally devoted to science, discovery and progress, with an energy like a life force that animates those who, like Leonardo, choose to build their fortunes here.

It is endlessly interesting to think about what Milan must have been like during Leonardo's years there. What greeted his eyes when, in his thirties, he arrived in the city from the Florentine court of the Medici? With this exhibition, which is our homage to the multifaceted genius that was Leonardo, we try to provide an answer to this question by revisiting through contemporary eyes the sort of places that came under his gaze. What he saw was a city with a heart as red as the bricks of its houses, and as blue as its dense network of waterways and canals. We propose a virtual journey to places and buildings that existed in Leonardo's day and have survived into the present.

We propose a conversation conducted through words and images. The words include stories told by M. Alessandra Filippi, while the images are the work of five young photographers of more or less the same age as Leonardo in 1482, who have gone out armed with their eye for detail and a camera to (re)discover what Leonardo might have seen, and whose pictures show how these places are perfectly interwoven into the urban fabric of today, and how for centuries they have been part and parcel of the everyday life of Milan.

Bracco Foundation

As supporting new generations and emerging talents in both the scientific and artistic fields is one of the key elements of the Bracco Foundation's mission, we are delighted to host this exhibition, just as we are delighted to team up once again with Accademia Teatro alla Scala, a top-rated school of excellence, with which we have completed many projects for the stage and world of culture and entertainment, from dance, music, singing and scenography to costume making, make-up artistry and photography.

This, however, is a very special exhibition that follows its own peculiar path to explore the genius of Leonardo. We encouraged five graduates of the Stage Photography Course of the Academy to seek out buildings, places and perspectives in today's Milan that correspond to what Leonardo must have seen upon his arrival in the city at the invitation of Ludovico il Moro.

Leonardo arrived in Milan in 1482 and, all told, was to spend almost twenty years in the city. It was one of the most intense and productive periods of his life. The first place he stayed as a guest of Ludovico il Moro was Corte Vecchia, where the Royal Palace now stands. From his windows he would have watched the cathedral being built, and followed its construction with some misgivings about its stability. At the time, Milan was one of the most populous cities in Europe. Leonardo da Vinci imagined and drew up plans for an ideal city, with less dirt and confusion than the Milan of his day, a city of rationally laid out navigable canals, the Navigli, corresponding to today's Zone C and pedestrian areas. Another site closely associated with Leonardo da Vinci's life in Milan is the Cà Granda, a pioneering hospital where da Vinci's sharpened his exceptional understanding of the human body by participating in many anatomies. Nor should we forget that the great polymath had complete liberty of access to and was a frequent visitor to the Sforza Castle. On Corso Magenta, stand the church of San Maurizio Maggiore and the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, home of The Last Supper and of the famous vineyard that he received in payment.

Leonardo da Vinci epitomizes an unbeatable combination of natural talent and dedication to research that even now continues to shape our enterprise culture, ensuring that the "Made in Italy" label remains a trusted badge of quality that is appreciated across the globe. Behind the successes of many Italian companies are men and women who have dedicated their lives to research, to finding solutions, to setting new challenges, and to spotting new opportunities. Innovators still exist, and their work becomes evident every time something is added to the box of ideas from which future products, innovations or inventions are made. Innovation stems from ingenuity, talent, intelligence, creative vision and imagination, all of which are national characteristics for which Italy is known in the world.

This is the Bracco Foundation's homage to Leonardo's genius. For it is our firm belief that Italian genius lives on among our young talents and manifests itself through their insights and actions, which form part of a tradition that has been unbroken for more than five hundred years and must never be allowed to lapse.

Diana Bracco

Chair of Bracco Foundation

We were delighted to take up the proposal for a photographic project offering a present-day perspective of places that Leonardo knew and frequented during his long stay in Milan. The idea was naturally conducive and attractive to the sort of creative people who know how to work with images, convey ideas through indirect messages, explore new paths and build atmospheres and moods. The Academy's annual course in stage photography and video prepares professionals for projects that demand both technical ability and creative vision.

Five course graduates, Noemi Ardesi, Marta Baffi, Margherita Gnaccolini, Anna La Naia and Erica Locatelli, working under the aegis of Laura Ferrari, a highly experienced photographer and course instructor, set out to capture images of places selected by the curator of the exhibition, Alessandra Filippi, and through them evoke simultaneously something of the atmosphere of late fifteenth-century Milan and something of the atmosphere of the same places in the city of the present.

These young women photographers thus enable us to take a fresh perspective to familiar places such as the fourteenth-century bell tower of the Church of San Gottardo, the medieval Gorani Tower, the remnants of the Romanesque basilica of San Giovanni in Conca (Leonardo da Vinci saw the basilica when it was still standing, but for us today, only the crypt remains), and Ospedale Maggiore, now the seat of Università degli Studi di Milano, having been transformed into a university in 1958. We can imagine Leonardo da Vinci passing by or entering these places whose essential character is recaptured by the photographers.

With this exhibition, the Scala Academy, which trains the entertainment artists and professionals of tomorrow, has been able, thanks also to support from the Bracco Foundation, to give these emerging new talents an opportunity for cultural and human growth.

Luisa Vinci

Director of Accademia Teatro alla Scala

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