

Ponticella di Ludovico il Moro

[The Bridge of Ludovico il Moro]

Under the Sforza family, the castle went from being a battle fortress to one of the largest palaces of Italy and home to the most famous court in Europe. It was under Ludovico il Moro that the castle reached the apex of development. It was here that Leonardo was the grand director of memorable festivities, for which the munificent patron spared no expense. The most memorable of all were the “Paradise” festivals celebrating the weddings of Gian Galeazzo Maria to Isabella of Aragon and of Ludovico il Moro to Beatrice d’Este.

Da Vinci vexed his patron by acting with the customary slowness for which he was well known. In 1496, a frustrated Ludovico il Moro wrote to the bishop of Milan, in Venice at the time, asking him to send Pietro Perugino to do the work. Da Vinci frescoed the “studiolo,” a private place of study set inside the elegant “ponticella”, an airy loggia designed by Bramante that served as a “little bridge” connecting the Duke’s private apartments with a pleasure garden on the far side of the castle moat. It was in this small room, beneath Leonardo’s unfinished frescos (since lost to time), that Ludovico il Moro shut himself away for days, disconsolate and weeping bitter tears for the sudden death of his wife, who died after childbirth at just 21 years of age on 3 January 1497. For this reason, the room was re-christened the black room by order of the Duke.

A few months later at a nearby site, in addition to his painting of Sala del Gonfalone, Leonardo would begin creating an immense theatrical space, the Sala delle Asse, the “Room of Trunks” in reference to the eighteen sturdy mulberry trees painted on the pilasters of the room, their branches intertwining to form a canopy covering the vaulted ceiling, at the centre of which is inscribed the Sforza-Este coat of arms. The room was open to the public for a limited time ending in 2020 during restoration.

Castello Sforzesco, Piazza Castello

photos Noemi Ardesi
text M. Alessandra Filippi