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DID LEONARDO ALWAYS PRACTICE WHAT HE PREACHED? DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN LEONARDO'S DIDACTIC VIEWS ON PAINTING AND HIS ARTISTIC PRACTICE*

MICHAEL W. KWAKKELSTEIN

And you, painter, who desire a great deal of practice, must understand that if you do not work on a good foundation of things studied from nature, you will produce works of little honor and less profit; but if you do them well, your works will be few and good, bringing you great honor and much benefit.

(LEONARDO DA VINCI, Codex Urbinas, fols. 131r-131v)

First study science, and then follow the practice born of that science.

(LEONARDO DA VINCI, Codex Urbinas, fol. 32r)

THE purpose of this essay is to examine the relationship between some of Leonardo da Vinci's well-known precepts on how to study and represent the human figure in narrative painting and his own artistic practice. In doing so I seek to answer the question whether regarding this particular aspect of his art Leonardo practised what he preached as a theoretician. Though his precepts for the painter have been the subject of numerous scholarly studies, the nature of their relationship with his own artistic practice and how that evolved over time has never been systematically examined.¹ Thus far individual precepts have often been cited in the context of discussions of Leonardo's artistic projects in order to clarify the working methods he adopted, thereby suggesting that as an artist Leonardo consistently applied his own rules. For instance, authoritative commentators on the *Last Supper* have stated that «passages from Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting* might almost be read as a commentary on his own pictorial work» or that Leonardo «has given us the ideal demonstration of his treatise on painting».² Though similar statements have also been made regarding Leonardo's

* This essay comes from a more complete research that is in progress on Leonardo's figure studies. I wish to thank Bette Talvacchia for kindly sharing her thoughts on these matters with me and making helpful comments.

¹ E. H. GOMBRICH, *The 'Trattato della Pittura': Some Questions and Desiderata*, in *Leonardo e l'Età della Ragione*, eds. E. Bellone and P. Rossi, Milan, Scientia, 1982, pp. 141-158: p. 141 noted that a critical edition of Leonardo's *Trattato* with detailed commentary on the relation between his theories and practice, among other things, was one of the *desiderata*.

² L. H. HEYDENREICH, *Leonardo: The Last Supper*, London, Allen Lane, 1974, p. 59, referring to Leonardo's notes on the expression of emotions in art; K. CLARK, *Leonardo da Vinci. An Account of his Development as an Artist*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1939, p. 98.

other projects for paintings, much less attention has been devoted to the discrepancies that exist between his artistic theory and practice and the explanation for them. This is not the moment to pursue a systematic examination of all instances where Leonardo's practice is at odds with his theory and to explain the reasons for it. However, I hope that the following few examples may suffice to show that, at least with regard to the depiction of the human figure, Leonardo as a painter, teacher and close observer of Nature did not always – intentionally or unintentionally – apply the rules he had written down for the benefit of the painter and surely also for himself.

In the early 1490s, while in Milan, Leonardo began writing down notes for a projected treatise on painting. The extant manuscript in the Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France in Paris, known as Manuscript A, is only a draft for a book on painting. That Leonardo may well have brought this project to completion is suggested by Luca Pacioli in the introductory letter to his *Divina proportione*, published in Venice in 1509, addressed to Lodovico Sforza and dated 9 February 1498. Following the completion of this particular «libro de pictura e movimenti humani» («book on painting and human movements»), now lost, Leonardo increased his activity as a theorist of art envisioning a more comprehensive treatise on painting on which he continued working until at least 1515. Not a single word of his theoretical writings on art was published during his lifetime and the codex that is commonly known as containing Leonardo's *Trattato della Pittura* or *Treatise on Painting* is in fact a posthumous collection of Leonardo's notes on painting, the majority of which is lost. The manuscript (Codex Urbinas Latinus 1270) is actually entitled *Libro di Pittura* and was compiled between 1523-1570 by Francesco Melzi, Leonardo's devoted pupil who had inherited his master's manuscripts when he died in 1519.¹

In reading Leonardo's notes on the representation of the human figure in narrative painting one is led to conclude that the incentive to start writing on painting had been provided by the work of his fellow painters, since he so often refers to their faulty practices and reproachable habits. The knowledge that no theory of painting had yet been published must have made the urgency to embark on such a project even greater. Though Leonardo had been living in Milan for almost ten years when he began to write, possibly upon request of Lodovico Sforza, the characteristics of the kind of painting and fresco painting he criticizes in Manuscript A suggests that he had in mind the work of predecessors and fellow painters from Florence. In fact, the only painter Leonardo mentions by name is Botticelli, about whom he states that he paints «tristissimi paesi» («very dull landscapes»)² When around 1492 Leonardo condemned the practice of many painters who «show the same muscles prominent in the arm, backs, breasts, and legs in different actions of their figures» he was probably thinking of the muscular nude figures he had studied in Antonio del Pollaiuolo's work

¹ For critical editions and in-depth studies of the Codex Urbinas, see *Treatise on Painting [Codex Urbinas Latinus 1270]* by Leonardo da Vinci, transl. and annotated by A. Ph. McMahon with an introduction by L. H. Heydenreich, 2 vols., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1956; C. PEDRETTI, *Leonardo da Vinci. On Painting. A Lost Book (Libro A)*, Berkeley-Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1964; *Leonardo da Vinci. Libro di Pittura. Codice Urbinas lat. 1270 nella Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, a cura di C. Pedretti, trad. di C. Vecce, 2 vols., Firenze, Giunti, 1995.

² *Treatise on Painting*, cit., 1, § 93 (Codex Urbinas, fol. 33v).



FIG. 1. ANTONIO DEL POLLAIUOLO, *Battle of nude men* (engraving; after Hind).

(FIG. 1).¹ After 1500 Leonardo continued to warn painters not to make such mistakes «per parere gran disegnatori» («in order to appear great draughtsmen») and it has often been suggested that by then his criticism of exaggeratedly pronounced muscles was principally aimed at Michelangelo's nudes for the *Battle of Cascina* and the frescoes on the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel.² With even greater frequency and fervour Leonardo wrote about another shortcoming he had often witnessed in painting:

It is an extreme defect when painters repeat the same movements and the same faces and manners of drapery in the same narrative painting and make the greater part of the faces resemble that of their master.³

¹ «[...] e non farà come molti] che in diversi atti sempre fanno quelle medesime cose dimostrare in braccia, schiene, petto e gambe [...]» (*Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, § 124/Codex Urbinas fols. 43v-44r). A. Chastel (IDEM, *Leonardo da Vinci. Studi e ricerche 1952-1990*, Torino, Einaudi, 1990, p. 61) pointed out that since Leonardo often condemns the practice of «molti», he was not blaming any particular painter or sculptor, but a whole school of painting. For Leonardo's study of Pollaiuolo's work, see M. W. KWAKKELSTEIN, *New copies by Leonardo after Pollaiuolo and Verrocchio and his use of an écorché model. Some notes on his working method as an anatomist*, «Apollo», CLIX, 503, 2004, pp. 21-29, with references to previous bibliography.

² *Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, § 329 (Codex Urbinas, fol. 118v). Similar notes by Leonardo dating to the years 1497-1502, 1504 and 1513-1514 are discussed by CHASTEL, *Le note sulla pittura dal nuovo codice di Madrid*, cit., p. 61. See also M. KEMP, *Leonardo da Vinci. The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man*, London, Dent, 1981, pp. 336-337.

³ «Sommo difetto è de' pittori replicare li medesimi moti e medesimi volti e maniere di panni in una medesima istoria, e fare la maggiore parte de' volti che somigliano al loro maestro [...]» (*Treatise on Paint-*

Many more examples of Leonardo's criticism of painting could be cited which indicates that he held the work of his peers in little esteem.¹ In fact, in Leonardo's brief but famous outline of the evolution of Italian painting, written about 1490, he talks about the decline of painting and attributes it to the practice of painters who imitate each other's works rather than Nature. In this outline he mentions only two painters by name, Giotto and Masaccio, whom he praises because they took Nature as their model.²

In Leonardo's time it was common practice for a painter's pupil to learn to draw by copying, following a course of stages of increasing difficulty. From the first step of copying from two-dimensional objects such as drawings, prints and painted works, preferably by the hand of great masters, the pupil proceeded gradually to the second step of copying sculpted works, after which he turned to the last and most difficult step: the study of the live nude model. Leonardo's notes on the sequence and substance of the educational program of the beginning painter reflect the order of study that prevailed in mid-fifteenth-century Florentine workshops. Aspects of this program had already been set down by Cennino Cennini (c. 1400), Leon Battista Alberti (1435), Lorenzo Ghiberti (c. 1450-1455) and Antonio Averlino il Filarete (1460-1464), all of which suggests that Leonardo received a similar graduated drawing instruction.³

Writing around 1492 Leonardo still adhered to the traditional teaching program as he urged the young student to:

copy after the hand of a good master to gain the habit of drawing the parts of the body well; and then work from nature, to confirm the lessons learned. View from time works from the hands of various masters. Then form the habit of putting into practice and working what has been learned.⁴

ing, cit., I, § 86/Codex Urbinas, fols. 44r-44v). The repetition of facial types, attitudes and patterns of drapery is characteristic of the painted works of Perugino, Filippo Lippi and Botticelli with which Leonardo was well familiar.

¹ For example *Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, §§ 91-97 (of painters who are not versatile); I, § 433 (of painters who improve on the works of nature and depict ill-proportioned children); I, § 442 (of those who paint hair as if plastered with glue «making faces appear as if turned to glass»); I, § 79 (of those who, «because they have studied little, must live by the beauty of gold and azure»); I, § 92 (of those who fail to observe decorum); I, § 265 (of those who in their frescoes paint compositions with figures one above the other each time with different viewpoints) and, I, § 322 (of painters who «through inability to draw, give old men the limbs of young ones»).

² See *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci. Compiled and edited from the original manuscripts*, ed. J. P. Richter, 2 vols., London, Phaidon, 1970 (3rd edn.): I, § 660. Similar advice is given in *Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, § 77, the source of which is lost: «I say to the painter that nobody ought ever to imitate another's manner, because he will be called a grandson and not a son of nature, with respect to art. Since natural things exist in such great abundance, we wish and we ought to resort to nature rather than to those masters who have learned from her. This I say, not for those who by means of art desire to attain riches, but for those who from this art desire fame and honor».

³ M. W. KWAKKELSTEIN, *Copying Prints as an aspect of artistic training in the Renaissance*, in K. LOHSE BELKIN, C. DEPAUW, *Images of Death. Rubens copies Holbein*, Antwerp, Snoeck, 2000, pp. 35-62; p. 36.

⁴ «[...] poi di mano di bon maestro, per asuefarsi a bone membra; poi da naturale, per confermarsi la ragione delle cose imparate; poi veder un tempo, di mane di diversi maestri; poi fare abito a metter in practica et operare l'arte». (*Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, § 59/Codex Urbinas, fol. 31r). However, in a note in

But about 1508 he no longer believed that there were good masters around to learn from. Leonardo now admonished the young student to make rapid sketches of the actions of people one encounters in the street and city squares after having first studied the form and mechanism of the limbs. The student should skip the traditional steps of copying after the work of others altogether because:

The method will be good, if it is based on works of good composition and by skilled masters. But since such masters are so rare that there are but few of them to be found, it is a surer way to go to natural objects than to those which are imitated from nature with great deterioration, and so form bad methods; for he who can go to the fountain does not go to the water-jar.¹

Taking into account Leonardo's low appreciation of Italian painting and his theoretical endeavour to bring about a revival of good painting by urging the painter to imitate nature and nothing else, we must now take a look at his earliest known figure studies. Though at that time Leonardo had not started writing about painting, it allows us to see to what extent his first ideas on painting, as recorded in Manuscript A, reflect his own previous experience as a painter. At the same time, looking at his early work allows us to define to what extent Leonardo's scientific investigations of nature and the closely connected theoretical views on imitation he was to develop from the mid 1480s onward enabled him to improve upon the work of the painters he was associated with during his first Florentine stay.

Between the late 1460s and early 1470s Leonardo had been apprenticed to Andrea del Verrocchio, who ran a highly successful, multifaceted workshop and was the leading sculptor in Florence after Donatello had died in 1466. Verrocchio's drawings, paintings and sculptural works provided the primary models for Leonardo's artistic formation. Especially in his sculptures Verrocchio achieved an unprecedented level of verisimilitude that must have further inspired Leonardo's interest in the close observation of nature. Indicative of the increasing concern of Florentine artists with the lifelike depiction of nature – in particular of man – Maso Finiguerra, Benozzo Gozzoli, and Antonio del Pollaiuolo had made various studies of the nude form set in different poses and drawn from different angles.² Though no such drawings from the nude model by Verrocchio are known, his sophisticated knowledge of the male form is shown in a terracotta sculpture of a *Sleeping Youth* in Berlin. The strikingly naturalistic rendering of the youth's naked body confirms Vasari's reference to Verrocchio's habit of making

the Codex Atlanticus, also datable to c. 1490-1492, Leonardo stated that «L'imitatione delle cose antiche è piv laudabile che quella delle moderne» («It is better to imitate [copy] the antique than modern work», *The Literary Works*, cit., I, § 487).

¹ «[...] che questo abito sarebbe bono, essendo fatto sopra opera di boni componimēti e di studiosi maestri; e perché questi tali maestri son sì rari che pochi se ne trova, è piv sicuro andare alle cose naturali che a quelle d'esso naturale cō grā peggio ramēto imitate e fare tristo abito, perché chi può andare alla fonte nō vada al uaso» (*The Literary Works*, cit., I, § 490).

² See C. L. RAGGHIANI, G. DALLI REGOLI, *Firenze 1470-1480. Disegni dal modello: Pollaiuolo / Leonardo / Botticelli / Filippino*, Pisa, Università di Pisa, 1975. For a brief survey of the development of the study of the nude figure in Italian Renaissance draughtsmanship, see F. AMES-LEWIS, J. WRIGHT, *Drawing in the Italian Renaissance Workshop*, London, The Victoria and Albert Museum, 1983, pp. 177-217. For nude studies by Maso Finiguerra, see L. MELLI, *Maso Finiguerra: I disegni*, Firenze, EDIFIR, 1995.

life casts of various parts of the human body «per poterle con più comodità tenere innanzi e imitarle» («so he could see and imitate them with greater ease».¹

Unfortunately all the drawings from the period of Leonardo's training with Verrocchio (which officially ended in 1472) are lost. Except for the famous Arno landscape drawing, dated by Leonardo 5 August 1473, a study of a sleeve and perhaps one or two profile heads, his earliest known drawings are all datable to the late 1470s, when he already worked as an independent painter.² Surprisingly, a fair number of these drawings, such as the famous double-sided sheet at Windsor (FIGS. 2, 3), usually dated to about 1478, correspond to the kind of drawings exercises a beginning pupil was traditionally required to make. In those precepts Leonardo would later specifically address to the young painter, he insisted on the importance of memorizing forms and motifs by constant practice after nature. He urged the student that even when not drawing he should try to recall the outlines of forms studied earlier in order to fix them in his memory. It seems that this advice reflects the practice Leonardo had adopted more than a decade earlier when he repeatedly drew the same type of profile heads on both sides of the sheet at Windsor.³

However, practicing his hand in drawing the easiest motifs (consisting of a limited range of profiles, some of them even drawn quite poorly) in order to commit them to memory is not exactly what we would expect of Leonardo in his mid twenties. One might assume that around 1478, six years after he had joined the confraternity of St Luke, an exceptionally gifted artist such as Leonardo would by then have perfected his innate draughtsman's skills, fully assimilated the drawing style, forms and motifs of his master, practiced life drawing and developed his own inventive faculties. Having been around a multi-talented and innovative artist as Verrocchio for so many years, it is difficult to accept that Leonardo had never sought to surpass his master in, for instance, drawing foreshortened views of the male or female head as Verrocchio had done.⁴ Instead the extant drawings from these years show that Leonardo continued to draw the same profile heads he had drawn on both sides of the Windsor sheet. Surprisingly, they were not copied from nature, but, as was observed long ago, are indebted to the ideal heads sculpted by Andrea della Robbia, Desiderio da Settignano, and above all, Andrea del Verrocchio.⁵

¹ For Verrocchio's sculpture of a *Sleeping Youth*, see A. BUTTERFIELD, *The Sculptures of Andrea del Verrocchio*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 86. For Vasari's reference to Verrocchio's use of life casts, see *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori scritte da Giorgio Vasari pittore aretino con nuove annotazioni e commenti di Gaetano Milanesi*, in *Le opere di Giorgio Vasari*, a cura di G. Milanesi, 9 vols., Firenze, Sansoni, 1906: III, p. 373.

² See A. E. POPHAM, *The Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1946, nos. 8A («Study of a Sleeve»), 253 («Landscape»), 130A («Profile of a Man») and 130B («Portrait of a Man in Profile»).

³ See *Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, §§ 60, 66 (Codex Urbinas, fols. 31r, 37v).

⁴ Reproduced in BUTTERFIELD, *The Sculptures of Andrea del Verrocchio*, cit., p. 188, fig. 250. If the dating of a sheet with *Studies of a Woman's Head and Shoulders*, reproduced in POPHAM, cit., no. 22, to the late 1470s is accepted, then it represents the only known instance from those years in which Leonardo, inspired by Verrocchio's approach to sculpture, moved around a live model to explore the human form and its expressive qualities from different angles.

⁵ J. THUIS, *Leonardo da Vinci. The Florentine Years of Leonardo and Verrocchio*, London, Herbert Jenkins, 1913, p. 161, and W. R. VALENTINER, *Leonardo and Desiderio*, «The Burlington Magazine», LXI, 353, 1932, pp.



FIG. 2. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
Studies of the Virgin and Child and Saint John and other studies (pen and ink).
Windsor, Royal Library, The Royal Collection.



FIG. 3. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Studies of heads in profile* (pen and ink).
Windsor, Royal Library, The Royal Collection.

The tenacity with which Leonardo throughout his entire career would stick to facial types he had borrowed from Verrocchio was noted by Kenneth Clark. According to Clark, two types in particular, that of «bald clean-shaven man, with formidable frown, nut-cracker nose and chin» and that of an epicene youth, remained «as it were, the armature round which his types are created».¹ Leonardo's habitual preference for certain inherited types is puzzling because it conflicts with his emphatic insistence on facial variety and his criticism of painters who repeat the same faces in their work. Inspired by Clark's observations, Ernst Gombrich noted that even Leonardo's famous drawings of grotesque heads are essentially variations of the 'nutcracker head'. To explain this phenomenon Gombrich pointed to Leonardo's notes in which he warns the painter to beware of the natural tendency in any artist to repeat his own type. Given the frequency and fervour with which Leonardo dealt with this problem, Gombrich believed that the resemblance of the grotesque heads to the standard profile means that Leonardo «must have struggled hard against the innate tendency to repeat what he took to be his own type in art».² Indeed Leonardo's lack of creative inventiveness or observation of Nature is most manifest in his depictions of head types and one wonders if his renderings of human figure seen full-length are equally dependent on the inventions of other artists. In order to answer this question, we will have to turn our attention to Leonardo's *Adoration of the Magi* at the Uffizi (FIG. 4).



FIG. 4. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
Adoration of the Magi (oil on wood).
Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi.

In March 1481 Leonardo received a commission from the monks of the monastery of San Donato in Scopeto, near Florence, to paint a high altarpiece of the *Adoration of the Magi*. This project provided Leonardo with the opportunity to demonstrate his skill in depicting the animated human figure in action and at rest within the context of a large scale narrative composition. The drawings connected to this commission are numerous, ranging from studies of individual limb motifs to a composition

53-61. For Leonardo's dependence on tradition for the depiction of ideal facial types, see E. H. GOMBRICH, *Ideal and Type in Italian Renaissance Painting*, in IDEM, *New Light on Old Masters. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance IV*, London, Phaidon, 1986, pp. 89-124: pp. 110-112. See also M. CLAYTON, *Leonardo da Vinci. The Divine and the Grotesque*, London, The Royal Collection, 2002, pp. 51-70.

¹ CLARK, *Leonardo da Vinci. An Account of his Development as an Artist*, cit., pp. 68-69.

² E. H. GOMBRICH, *The Grotesque Heads*, in IDEM, *The Heritage of Apelles. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance III*, Oxford, Phaidon, 1976, pp. 57-75: p. 69. For Leonardo's concern with the artist's tendency to self-representation, see F. ZÖLLNER, «Ogni Pittore Dipinge Sé». *Leonardo da Vinci and «automimesis»*, in *Der Künstler über sich in seinem Werk. Internationales Symposium der Bibliotheca Hertziana Rom 1989*, ed. M. Winner, Weinheim, VCH, 1992, pp. 137-160.

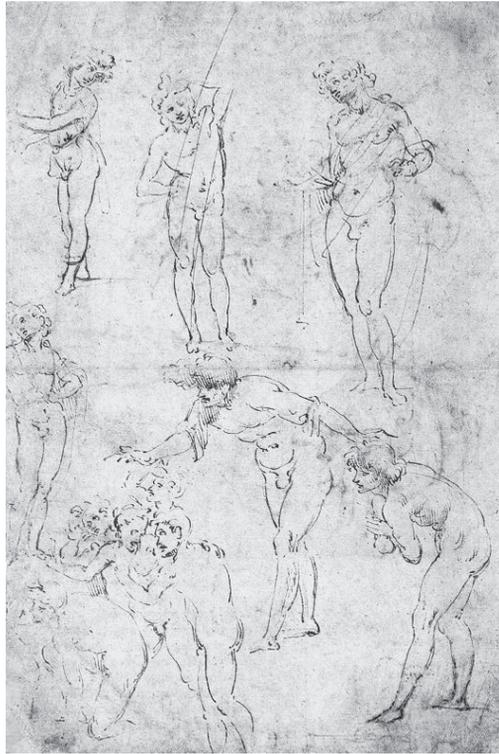


FIG. 5. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
Figure studies for the Adoration of the Magi (pen and ink).
 Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum-Foundation Corbound,
 Graphische Sammlung.

sketch. But for our purpose it will be sufficient to look at two sheets with figure studies – one in Cologne (FIG. 5), the other in Paris (FIG. 6) – and two sheets with studies of hands that are both at Windsor.

In the drawings at Cologne and Paris Leonardo explored the expressive potency of a range of figural poses, something which he also did in related studies. The figures, many of them nude, are sketched freely with summary bodily outlines and little or no internal modeling. They effectively anticipate Leonardo's theoretical concern with expressive and varied figural poses. On various occasions Leonardo recommended the painter to observe the attitudes and motions of men as they might occur spontaneously in life and to draw these movements with a few lines in a «piccolo libretto» («little book»). He then pointed out that such sketches should be preserved carefully because they teach the painter how to compose narrative paintings while they also show which pose a nude model has to assume to enable study of the limbs employed in these actions.¹

¹ The notes on the study of natural movements made by men are given in *Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, §§ 248-251, 258 (Codex Urbinas, fols. 38v; 46r; 49r; 58v-59r; 60r-60v).



FIG. 6. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
Figure studies for the Adoration of the Magi (pen and ink).
 Paris, Département des Arts Graphiques
 du Musée du Louvre.

As a theoretician Leonardo attached great importance to life drawing and the various practical instructions on how to draw from the nude in Manuscript A may well be based on his own experience. However, whether that experience in drawing from nude models assuming poses corresponding with movements Leonardo had observed in life is reflected in these two drawings is not easy to establish.¹ The fact that Leonardo compiled the figure studies onto single sheets and was merely interested in drawing their outlines, strongly suggests that he copied his own earlier sketches for future reference. It is unlikely that these earlier sketches, now lost, were based on the study of natural poses made spontaneously by men. The expressive attitudes of the figures in the drawings at Cologne and Paris are adapted to suit the context of the *Adoration* while, as we will now see, at least one figure pose is based on a pictorial source rather than a life model.²

¹ The notes on life drawing in Manuscript A are given in *Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, § 112 (Codex Urbinas, fol. 39v); I, § 119 (Codex Urbinas, fol. 42v), and I, §§ 121-123 (Codex Urbinas, fols. 41r-43r).

² Commenting upon the sheet with figure studies in Cologne, M. KEMP in *Leonardo*, eds. M. Kemp and J. Roberts, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1989, p. 55 states that «these studies appear to



FIG. 7. SANDRO BOTTICELLI, *Adoration of the Magi* (tempera on panel).
Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi.

In looking at three versions of the *Adoration of the Magi* Botticelli had painted during the 1470s, we discover that Leonardo was familiar with these works. As observed long ago, from Botticelli's version in the Uffizi (FIG. 7) Leonardo borrowed the new concept of placing Mary at the centre of a pyramidal composition (FIG. 4). From Botticelli's version in the National Gallery of Art in Washington (FIG. 8), Leonardo borrowed the pose of the kneeling youth wearing a blue mantle in the left-hand foreground for his figure of a kneeling youth that occupies the same place within the

have been taken from life». Referring to the same sheet, C. Bambach (in *Leonardo da Vinci. Master Draftsman*, eds. C. Bambach et alii, New Haven-London, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and New York, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 323) argues that the style of these drawings suggests that Leonardo was synthesizing the poses of various figures based on antecedent drafts, rather than exploring them anew. In the preparatory stage of the *Adoration of the Magi*, Leonardo also compiled sketches of horses, based on his own drawings, onto single sheets; see M. W. KWAKKELSTEIN, *The Young Leonardo and the Antique*, in 'Aux Quatre Vents'. A Festschrift for Bert W. Meijer, eds. A. W. A. Boschloo et alii, Florence, Centro Di, 2002, pp. 25-32: p. 27.



FIG. 8. SANDRO BOTTICELLI, *Adoration of the Magi* (tempera on panel).
Washington, National Gallery of Art.

composition. In addition, the youth standing slightly bent forward with his arms across his chest in the right-hand foreground of Botticelli's picture, provided the model of Botticelli's right of the beardless bald old man to the right of the Virgin in Leonardo's picture (FIG. 9). Although in Leonardo's picture only the youth's tilted head is visible, the preparatory study for this figure just above the centre of the sheet in Paris (FIG. 6), showing him full-length, supports this dependence on Botticelli. Furthermore, the man standing to the extreme left in Leonardo's picture, holding his hand at his chin in contemplation, was clearly inspired by the same motif that recurs in the left side of Botticelli's painting. Given these connections, it is not unreasonable to assume that Leonardo also borrowed from Botticelli a more conventional *motif* in Florentine painting (e.g., recurring in Fra Angelico's work): that of a man watching attentively from close proximity the reaction of a fellow bystander to the holy event (FIGS. 4 and 5). This *motif* appears, for instance, in the version of the *Adoration* Botticelli painted with Filippino Lippi, now in the National Gallery in London (FIG. 10). That Leonardo may have actually borrowed it from this painting is suggested by a drawing he made on highly colored paper of a draped figure, seen from behind (FIG. 11), which corresponds to the richly dressed man, also seen from behind, at the centre of the London picture.

In the same way Leonardo borrowed the motif of the standing youth at the far right of his picture, sometimes seen as Leonardo's self-portrait, from Botticelli's versions in the Uffizi and in the National Gallery in London (FIG. 12). The youth turning his head towards the spectator in the foreground of the latter version bears a striking



FIG. 9. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Adoration of the Magi* (detail; oil on wood).
Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi.

similarity with the youth Leonardo drew in the top left-hand corner of the sheet with studies in Paris (FIG. 6). In addition to these works, Leonardo may well have been familiar with Fra Angelico's *Adoration of the Magi* in Cosimo de' Medici's chapel at San Marco. The pose of the figure he drew at the centre of the sheet in Paris recalls that of the figure of the prostrate king in Fra Angelico's fresco.¹

On two sheets in Windsor Castle (FIGS. 13 and 14) Leonardo drew various studies of hands, some of which can be connected to hands he depicted in the *Adoration of the Magi*. Like the figure studies on the two sheets we have just seen, the naturalistic

¹ The connections between BOTTICELLI'S Washington-*Adoration* and Leonardo's work, if accepted, would favor a date of the former work to shortly before Botticelli left for Rome in 1481. For Fra Angelico's fresco, see D. COHL AHL, *Fra Angelico*, London, Phaidon, 2008, p. 153. For other examples of Leonardo's drawings connected with the *Adoration of the Magi* that suggest his indebtedness to Botticelli's *tondo* of the *Adoration of the Magi* in the National Gallery in London, see M. WIEMERS, *Bildform und Werkgenese. Studien zur zeichnerischen Bildvorbereitung in der italienischen Malerei zwischen 1450 und 1490*, München-Berlin, Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1996, pp. 292-306.



FIG. 10. SANDRO BOTTICELLI, FILIPPINO LIPPI, *Adoration of the Magi* (tempera on panel). London, National Gallery.

appearance of these hands suggests that Leonardo studied them from life. It may come as a surprise to find that the hand in the lower left corner of the drawing illustrated in Figure 13, used for the right hand of the Virgin in the picture, was copied from one of Verrocchio's stock types. It recurs in Verrocchio's painting of the *Madonna and Child* in Berlin and in paintings from his workshop, such as the *Tobias and the Angel* recently re-attributed to Verrocchio with the assistance of the young Leonardo (FIG. 15). The similarity between the hand drawn on the right of the sheet and the right hand of *Charity* in Antonio del Pollaiuolo's painting of that name in the Uffizi of about 1469-1470, suggests likewise that Leonardo preferred to turn to the works of established masters rather than to nature.¹ In addi-



FIG. 11. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Studies for the Adoration with mechanical studies* (metalpoint on red-ocher prepared paper). Firenze, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi.

¹ For a discussion of the recurrence of this hand motif in the paintings by Verrocchio and his immediate followers, see G. PASSAVANT, *Andrea del Verrocchio als Maler*, Düsseldorf, Schwann, 1959, pp. 119-120. For the theory of Leonardo's collaboration with Verrocchio on the picture of *Tobias and the Angel*, see D. A. BROWN, *Leonardo da Vinci. Origins of a Genius*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 47-56. P. C. MARANI, *Leonardo da Vinci. The Complete Paintings*, New York, Abrams, 2000, p. 112 also notes that the hands in



FIG. 12. SANDRO BOTTICELLI, *Adoration of the Magi* (tempera on panel).
London, National Gallery.

tion, the fact that the right hand of the angel in Leonardo's *Annunciation* at the Uffizi is nearly identical to the right hand of Saint John the Baptist in the so-called *Madonna di Piazza* altarpiece in the Cathedral in Pistoia, designed by Verrocchio during the second half of the 1470s and executed by Lorenzo di Credi, suggests that Leonardo borrowed this *motif* from Verrocchio. If this connection is convincing then the commonly accepted date of Leonardo's *Annunciation* to 1472-1473, wholly based on its style, may well have to be changed by at least four to five years.¹

That Leonardo used stock motifs and borrowed figure poses from the work of other painters is perfectly in keeping with common fifteenth-century workshop practice yet conflicts with his later advice not to imitate the work of others but to turn to nature only.² Another characteristic of the unfinished *Adoration* that conflicts with Leonardo's future precepts is the strikingly limited variety of facial types. The by-

the Windsor sheets are close in style to those painted by Antonio del Pollaiuolo. Leonardo drew similar hands on a sheet datable to the late 1470s, reproduced in POPHAM, cit., no. 18. This sheet is usually connected to LEONARDO's portrait of *Ginevra de' Benci* in the National Gallery in Washington DC.

¹ This would support a dating of LEONARDO's Uffizi *Annunciation* to 1478-1480, as proposed by C. PEDRETTI, *Leonardo. A Study in Chronology and Style*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1973, p. 30.

² F. AMES-LEWIS, *Modelbook Drawings and the Florentine Quattrocento Artist*, «Art History», x, 1987, pp. 1-11.



FIGS. 13-14. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Studies of hands* (silver-point).
Windsor, Royal Library, The Royal Collection.

standers, though numerous, are either bearded elderly men with similar physiognomic features or angelic youths. In addition, their position in close proximity of each other is in conflict with the following precept:

Ordinarily, in usual narrative compositions, introduce few old men, and separate them from the young ones, because old men are few and their habits do not agree with those of the young, and where there is no conformity in habits there is no friendship, and where there is no friendship, separation is created. But where, in narrative compositions, there is gravity and men are taking council, introduce few young men, because young men deliberately avoid councils and other noble things.¹

In the same way the presence of many bystanders in the *Adoration* who do not look at the Christ Child conflicts with Leonardo's following precept for the painter:

¹ «Per l'ordinario nelli componimenti comuni delle istorie usa di fare rari vecchi, e separati da' giovani, perché li vecchi son rari, e li loro costume non si convengono co' li costume de' giovani, e dove non è conformità de costume non si fa amicizia, e dove non è amicizia si genera separazione. E dove si fa componimenti d'istorie apparenti o di gravità e consiglio, fagli pochi giovani, perché li giovani volentieri fuggono li consigli e l'altre cose nobili» (*Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, § 391/Codex Urbinas, fols. 125v-126r). It should be noted that Leonardo changed his views on this issue; see the following passages in *Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, § 268 (Codex Urbinas, fol. 61v); I, § 270 (Codex Urbinas, fols. 59v-60r); and I, § 271 (Codex Urbinas, fol. 61r-v).



FIG. 15. VERROCCHIO workshop,
Tobias and the Angel (tempera on panel).
London, National Gallery.

At any event worthy of notice all the bystanders react with various gestures of amazement while they consider the event, as when justice punishes malefactors. And if the occasion is one of devotion, all the bystanders direct their eyes to the object of devotion with varying expressions of piety, as the elevation of the Host at the sacrifice of the mass and similar manifestations [...].¹

From these few comparisons between Leonardo's early practice as a designer of narrative compositions and the first precepts for the painter he wrote almost ten years later, one could infer that by the early 1490s Leonardo's ideas had become opposed not only to Florentine painting in general, but also to his own early style of painting. Perhaps the various errors Leonardo warned the painter not to commit are essentially references to his own early Florentine experience as a painter. By the early 1490s Leonardo had developed a concept of good painting to

which his Florentine works did not fully correspond. Interestingly, scholars have regarded the *Adoration of the Magi* as a prelude to most of what Leonardo would later design or paint. If that means that Leonardo continued to limit his artistic vocabulary to the few expressive formulae he had absorbed during his first stay in Florence, then this not only means that his subsequent theoretical insights did not influence his contemporaneous practice as a painter, but it also means that this awareness has never affected the general appreciation of Leonardo as a creative, innovative and versatile artist.²

In addition to the drawings that survive from Leonardo's first Florentine stay, his early interests as an artist are documented in a list of works of art he compiled presumably upon moving to Milan in 1482-1483. If we accept that the items «molti nvdii iteri» («many complete nudes») and «molte braccia gambe piedi e attitudini» («many

¹ «Tutti li circostanti di qualunque caso degno d'esser notato stanno con diversi atti admirativi a considerare esso atto, com'è quando la giustizia punisce li malfattori; e se 'l caso è di cosa divota, tutti li circostanti dirizzano li lor occhi con diversi atti di divozione a esso caso, com'è li mostrare l'ostia nel sacrificio, e simili [...]» (*Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, § 394/Codex Urbinas, fol. 115v).

² CLARK, *Leonardo da Vinci. An Account of his Development as an Artist*, cit., p. 33: «The Adoration is an overture to all Leonardo's work, full of themes that will recur». ZÖLLNER, cit., p. 146 rightly argued, in my view, that despite Leonardo's tremendous effort to achieve variety in the *Last Supper*, also in an attempt to avoid expressing himself, contemporary viewers of the mural may well have realized that the painter had not been entirely successful in achieving that aim.



FIG. 16. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
Study of a male nude
(silver-point on blue prepared paper).
Windsor, Royal Library,
The Royal Collection.



FIG. 17. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
Adoration of the Magi (detail; oil on wood).
Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi.

arms, legs, feet and postures») Leonardo recorded in this inventory refer to his drawings, then we may safely assume that he had practiced life drawing in Florence.¹

Of the «many complete nudes» Leonardo listed, only very few drawings of that period have survived. One of these nude studies, now at Windsor (FIG. 16), has often been related to the figure of St John the Baptist in Lorenzo di Credi's *Madonna di Piazza* in Pistoia, mentioned earlier. To the best of my knowledge it has escaped notice that in style and type the model's head in Leonardo's drawing is very close to that of the youth he represented directly behind the Madonna in the *Adoration of the Magi* (FIG. 17). This connection would confirm a pre-Lombard date for the drawing and, of course, illustrates Leonardo's practice of re-using his own motifs. Yet he did not only repeat his own motifs, but also those he borrowed from Verrocchio. The model's pose in the Windsor drawing is derived from Verrocchio's design for the figure of St John the Baptist in the Pistoia altarpiece. The pose, especially the position of the legs, though ultimately invented by Pollaiuolo, became a stock pose in the work of Pe-

¹ Quoted from *The Literary Works*, cit., I, § 680. The list also contains items that indicate that Leonardo had made portrait drawings, e.g.: «una testa in faccia di giouane»; «vna testa i faccia riccivta»; «vna testa del Duca»; «vna testa ritratta d'Atalâte che alzava il uolto»; «la testa di Geronimo da Fegline» and «la testa di Giâ Francesco Bosio».

rugino and artists from his workshop.¹ Though it is difficult to establish whether Leonardo's drawing was made from a live model or whether he drew the nude from memory, it again shows his dependence on established formulae.

Leonardo's experience in drawing from the nude model before moving to Milan is possibly also suggested by the item «8 sã Bastiani» («8 Saint Sebastians») he listed in the inventory. A drawing at Bayonne (FIG. 18), sometimes classed as Leonardo's first known nude study, may well be identifiable with one of these eight drawings. But if the drawing really represents a study from life is uncertain. The position of the model's legs is identical to that of the figure of St John the Baptist in the Windsor drawing (FIG. 16), while his facial type and the upward movement of the head is repeated for one of the figures standing near the monumental staircase in the background of the *Adoration of the Magi*. Moreover, it should be noted that, in pose and physical type, the nude figure bears a striking resemblance to Antonio Rossellino's life-size marble statue of *St Sebastian* in Empoli, datable to 1460-1470.²

Since no comparable studies of the nude figure from Leonardo's first Florentine period are known, I should like to turn our attention to the representation of the human figure in Leonardo's picture of *St Jerome* in the Vatican Pinacoteca (FIG. 19). Despite the complete absence of references to it in written sources of the time, the *St Jerome* is commonly dated to the end of Leonardo's first Florentine period. The item «certi sã Girolami» («certain Saint Jeromes») in Leonardo's inventory would favor this dating as does the picture's technical and stylistic affinity to the equally unfinished *Adoration of the Magi*. Furthermore, the pose of St Jerome is close to the movement of devotion and piety Leonardo explored in preparatory drawings for the *Adoration* and to the pose he finally adopted for the kneeling Magus seen from behind in the left foreground of the picture. As has been noted, St Jerome's head seems to be the reverse image of that of the elderly man in the crowd to the right of the Virgin and Child.³ These parallels show that Leonardo continued re-using his own inventions rather than study figure poses afresh from the nude model, although an item such as «many complete nudes» seems to suggest the contrary. That Leonardo adopted this working procedure is further suggested by the fact that the pose of St Jerome recurs in a study of a kneeling angel of about 1480-1483 (FIG. 20), in a small sketch of the Virgin adoring the Christ Child of about 1485, and in the recently discovered under-

¹ See PASSAVANT, cit., pp. 56-57, for examples of the recurrence of this particular pose. For additional examples, see the figure of a youth to the far left in the anonymous *San Bernardino, post mortem, healing a blind man* from the series of eight panels depicting miracles of Saint Bernardino by painters from the so-called «Workshop of 1473» in the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia. Possibly around 1480, the so-called Maestro della Pala di Villamagna, whose style reveals familiarity with the works of Verrocchio and Lorenzo di Credi, adopted the pose for the figure of St John the Baptist in his altarpiece of a *Sacra conversazione* at Villamagna, near Florence. Many years later, and quite surprisingly given the exploratory nature of these studies, Leonardo would demonstrate a similar dependence on existing formulae in a number of his anatomical drawings of a muscular male figure, the outlines of which were copied from nude studies by Antonio del Pollaiuolo; see KWAKKELSTEIN, *New Copies*, cit., pp. 21-24.

² Reproduced in J. POPE-HENNESSY, *An Introduction to Italian Sculpture*, 3 vols.: II, *Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, London, Phaidon, 1958, fig. 53.

³ H. OST, *Leonardo-Studien*, Berlin-New York, de Gruyter, 1975, p. 69.



FIG. 18. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
Study of a male nude (black chalk).
Bayonne, Musée Bonnat.



FIG. 19. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
St Jerome (oil on wood).
Città del Vaticano, Pinacoteca Vaticana.

drawing beneath the surface of the *Virgin of the Rocks* in London, datable to the early 1490s.¹

Examination of the saint's body has revealed anatomical inaccuracies, especially in the shoulder area, which are difficult to explain if Leonardo had worked from the live model.² Leonardo was interested in the physical appearance of elderly persons before he moved to Milan, as shown by the items «molte teste di vechi» («many heads of old men») and «molte gole di vechie» («many throats of old

¹ See L. SYSON, R. BILLINGE, *Leonardo da Vinci's use of underdrawing in the 'Virgin of the Rocks' in the National Gallery and 'St Jerome' in the Vatican*, «The Burlington Magazine», CXLVII, 1228, 2005, pp. 450-463. Based on the similarity between the discovered pose of the Virgin and that of *St Jerome*, the authors propose a date of the latter picture to c. 1491-1493.

² See OST, cit., pp. 43-44 for the theory that Leonardo's *St Jerome* is based on a sculpted model. For an analysis of the errors Leonardo committed in rendering the forms of the body of Saint Jerome see B. SCHULTZ, *Art and Anatomy in Renaissance Italy*, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1982, pp. 68-69.



FIG. 20. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
Study of a kneeling angel (pen and ink).
London, The British Museum.



FIG. 21. ANONYMOUS, *Study of the head
and neck of an old man* (red chalk).
Amsterdam, Amsterdam Historisch
Museum, Fodor Collection.

at Palazzo Pitti in Florence. In addition, Verrocchio is reported to have modeled in clay a head of St Jerome, now lost, which may well have been the prototype for both depictions of the Saint. The fact that a sculpted model of a man's head, illustrated in an anonymous Florentine late fifteenth-century drawing, now in Amsterdam (FIG. 21), bears a striking resemblance to the head of St Jerome in Leonardo's picture seems to support this connection.¹

The noted errors in anatomical detail suggest that Leonardo constructed his *St Jerome* by combining the familiar motif of the kneeling figure in devotion with Ver-

women») that are listed in the inventory and, of course, by the various examples that occur amidst his early drawings. Curiously, however, he does not seem to have used any of these apparent life drawings for his *St Jerome* as the saint's head is close in type to the head of Verrocchio's *St Jerome* in the Galleria Palatina

¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 63-64. As suggested by M. W. KWAKKELSTEIN, *The use of sculptural models by the Master of the Pala Sforztesca*, «Raccolta Vinciana», xxx, 2003, pp. 147-178: p. 169.

rocchio's sculpted head-type. He may further have used figures and detail studies by other artists, because the saint's extended arm is similar to the right arm of the left-hand nude in Pollaiuolo's influential drawing of a *A nude man seen from three angles* at the Louvre.¹ Though this connection suggests a two-dimensional source for Leonardo's *St Jerome*, it has often been pointed out that Pollaiuolo's drawing records a sculpted model. This theory is strengthened by the fact that a closely similar muscular arm, possibly copied after Pollaiuolo's model, is studied from various angles on two sheets in the so-called Raphael-sketchbook in Venice.² The difficulty of adopting an eclectic working method without the necessary anatomical knowledge to convincingly combine different parts into an organically unified whole may well have caused Leonardo to abandon work on the picture. Leonardo's reliance on Pollaiuolo's figure studies, also manifest in his anatomical drawings, accords well with Benvenuto Cellini's statement in the introduction to the *Trattati dell'oreficeria e della scultura*, written in 1567, that Pollaiuolo:

was such a great draughtsman that not merely did all the goldsmiths use his most beautiful drawings, which were of such excellence, but also many sculptors and painters, and I speak of the most accomplished in these arts, also used his designs, and through them achieved the greatest honour.³

Given the huge loss of Leonardo's drawings and writings it will always remain conjectural to what extent his study and depictions of the human figure, as they developed over the years, kept equal pace with the development of his theoretical views. On the basis of what has been preserved and taking into account the accepted chronology of the works here discussed, it must be concluded that some of the ideas Leonardo developed once he began to write on painting conflict with his previous artistic experience. Surprisingly, it seems that even after he had begun to write down his views on the characteristics of good painting and the working methods connected to it, he did not change his old habits as a painter. Perhaps it was easier for Leonardo to formulate ideas about how painting ideally should be, than actually putting all those theories into practice.

In light of these ideas the first and perhaps most astonishing element is his lifelong use of a limited repertory of facial types. Likewise, despite all his efforts to make the painter aware of the importance of expressive figure painting, providing him with practical advice on how to study animated gestures, bodily movements and facial ex-

¹ The connection with Pollaiuolo's drawing in Paris was suggested by J. NATHAN, *Motiv und Methode*, in *Leonardo da Vinci. Natur im Übergang*, hrsg. von F. Fehrenbach, Munich, Fink, 2002, pp. 347-370: p. 356. A similar right arm was drawn by Maso Finiguerra; see MELLI, *Maso Finiguerra: I disegni*, cit., p. 118, fig. 24.

² KWAKKELSTEIN, *New copies*, cit., p. 24.

³ «e fu sì gran disegnatore, che non tanto che tutti gli orefici si servivano dei sua bellissimi disegni, i quali erano di tanta eccellenzia, che ancora molti scultori e pittori, io dico dei migliori di quelle arti, si servino dei sua disegni, e con quegli ei si feciono grandissimo onore» (*I Trattati dell'oreficeria e della scultura di Benvenuto Cellini*, a cura di C. Milanese, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1857, p. 7). English translation quoted from J. WHITE, *Paragone: Aspects of the relationship between sculpture and painting*, in *Art, Science and History in the Renaissance*, ed. CH. S. SINGLETON, Baltimore (MD), The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967, p. 101.

pressions, the range of emotional states he depicted in his work is not only strikingly limited but often also ambiguous. With the exception of a very small number of head studies for the *Last Supper* and the *Battle of Anghiari*, no comparably finished drawings of facial expressions conveying recognizable emotional states are known.¹

Considering Leonardo's recurrent advice to study from the nude model not only to become familiar with its form, proportions and mechanisms, but also as an integral part of the design process of narrative paintings, one would have expected to find numerous life studies among his drawings. Drawings – one may add – comparable to those made by, for instance, Filippino Lippi and Botticelli after models assuming various active poses. Instead, Leonardo's extant drawings of the nude figure after 1500 are few in number and illustrate a male who stands with his legs apart and arms spread out from the sides. Not only is this interest in a static pose remarkable, but also Leonardo's enduring dependence on Pollaiuolo, who in his drawings illustrated a similar muscular nude model assuming a similar pose.²

Secondly, and closely connected with the apparent lack of bodily and emotional variety and certainly no less astonishing, is Leonardo's occasional dependence on the medieval pattern book tradition for constructing the human figure. It may come as a shock that an artist who devoted half his life to the meticulous study of nature and advocated as no one else had done before that good painting imitates nature faithfully, should himself stick to patterns of individual limbs, stock poses and facial stereotypes when working out compositions for his narrative paintings (or when recording the findings of his anatomical researches).³ In the case of the picture of *St Jerome*, Leonardo's designing of the saint's body as a composite of individual limb motifs or details borrowed from exemplary models by leading artists shows that he still treated movement as a pattern. This practice would explain why the contrast between the age of the saint as shown in his face does not correspond to the age suggested by the rest of his body. From a now lost manuscript, Francesco Melzi compiled a note in which Leonardo responds to Alberti's comments on the importance of observing decorum when depicting the human figure:

Let the parts of living creatures be in accordance with their type. I say that you should not take the leg of a delicate figure, or the arm, or other limb, and attach it to a figure with a thick chest

¹ Reproduced in POPHAM, cit., nos. 165, 166, 167, 198 and 199. Leonardo's depictions of the so-called warrior type, without exception, have a stern expression. D. FRANKLIN, *Painting in Renaissance Florence: 1500-1550*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2001, p. 24 refers to Leonardo's theoretical concern with the expression of emotions through bodily movements and facial expressions, and the difficulty in identifying the emotional states of the figures in his paintings. According to Franklin the problem in identifying the characters in Leonardo's *Adoration of the Magi*: «widens the gap that could exist between artistic theory, as expressed in Leonardo's notebook writings, and the more pragmatic reality of practice» (*ibidem*).

² For examples of life drawings by Filippino Lippi and Botticelli, see RAGGHIANI, DALLI REGOLI, cit.; Leonardo's drawings from the nude model after 1500 are reproduced and discussed in CLAYTON, cit., pp. 42-45. For Leonardo's use of Pollaiuolo's drawings, see KWAKKELSTEIN, *New copies*, cit.

³ IDEM, *The use of sculptural models by Italian Renaissance painters: Leonardo da Vinci's «Madonna of the Rocks» reconsidered in light of his working procedures*, «Gazette des Beaux-Arts», 133, 1999, pp. 181-198 argues that the facial stereotype Leonardo used for his depictions of the Virgin is based on a sculptural model the artist had made in clay.

or neck. And do not mix the limbs of the young with those of the old, nor limbs that are vigorous and muscular with those that are delicate and fine, nor those of males with those of females.¹

In light of this advice one wonders why Leonardo chose to represent *St John the Baptist* (FIG. 22) not as an emaciated and unkempt ascetic, as he was commonly depicted, but as an androgynous handsome clean-shaven young man. We know that this resulted from Leonardo's choice to convert an earlier design for the *Angel of the Annunciation* into a *St John the Baptist*.² It is precisely because of this method of adopting interchangeable physical types for different characters that Leonardo's depiction of *Saint John the Baptist* conflicts with his notes on *decorum*:



FIG. 22. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
St John the Baptist (oil on panel).
Paris, Musée du Louvre.

I remind you again to pay great attention to giving the figure limbs that will appear to be suitable to the size of the body, and also to its age; that is, young men with little muscle in their limbs, few veins, and a soft surface rounded and with an agreeable color. Mature men should be sinewy and full of muscles, while old men should have / skin full of wrinkles, folds and veins, with conspicuous sinews.³

Given Leonardo's recurrent warnings not to represent the nude with all its muscles clear and emphasized, the sudden emergence in his drawings after 1506 of a standing male nude with overtly emphasized muscles is also surprising (FIG. 23). It has been

¹ «Sia fatto le membra alli animali convenienti alle loro qualità. Dico che tu non ritragghi una gamba d'un gentile, o braccio, o altre membra, e l'apicchi ad un grosso di petto o di collo. E che tu non mischi membra di giovani con quelli di vecchi; e non membra prosperose e muscolose con le gentili e fievoli, e non quelle de' maschi con quelle delle femmine» (*Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, § 288/Codex Urbinas, fol. 107v). In a sketch in Oxford of about 1481, reproduced in POPHAM, cit., no. 51, Leonardo has mixed the body of a youth with the head of an old man. For Alberti's comments on the «similarity of kind in the composition of members», see *Leon Battista Alberti. On painting*, ed. C. Grayson, London, Penguin, 1991 (1st edn. 1972), p. 74.

² See CLARK, cit., pp. 173-175, who was not only puzzled by this procedure but also considered LEONARDO'S *St John the Baptist* «an unsatisfactory work». However, according to PEDRETTI, *Leonardo. A Study*, cit., p. 169, «the nocturnal *St John* was painted to illustrate an artistic theory, and was therefore intended as a paradigmatic work».

³ «E ti ricordo ancora che tu abbi grand'avvertenza nel dare le membra alle figure, che paino, dopo l'essere concordanti alla grandezza del corpo, ancor similmente all'età; cioè i giovani con pochi muscoli nelle membra, e vene e di delicate superficie, e membra rotonde di grato colore. Alli uomini sieno nerbose e piene di muscoli. Ai vecchi sieno con superficie grinze, ruvide e venose, e nervi molto evidenti». (*Treatise on Painting*, cit., § 323/Codex Urbinas, fols. 126v-127r).

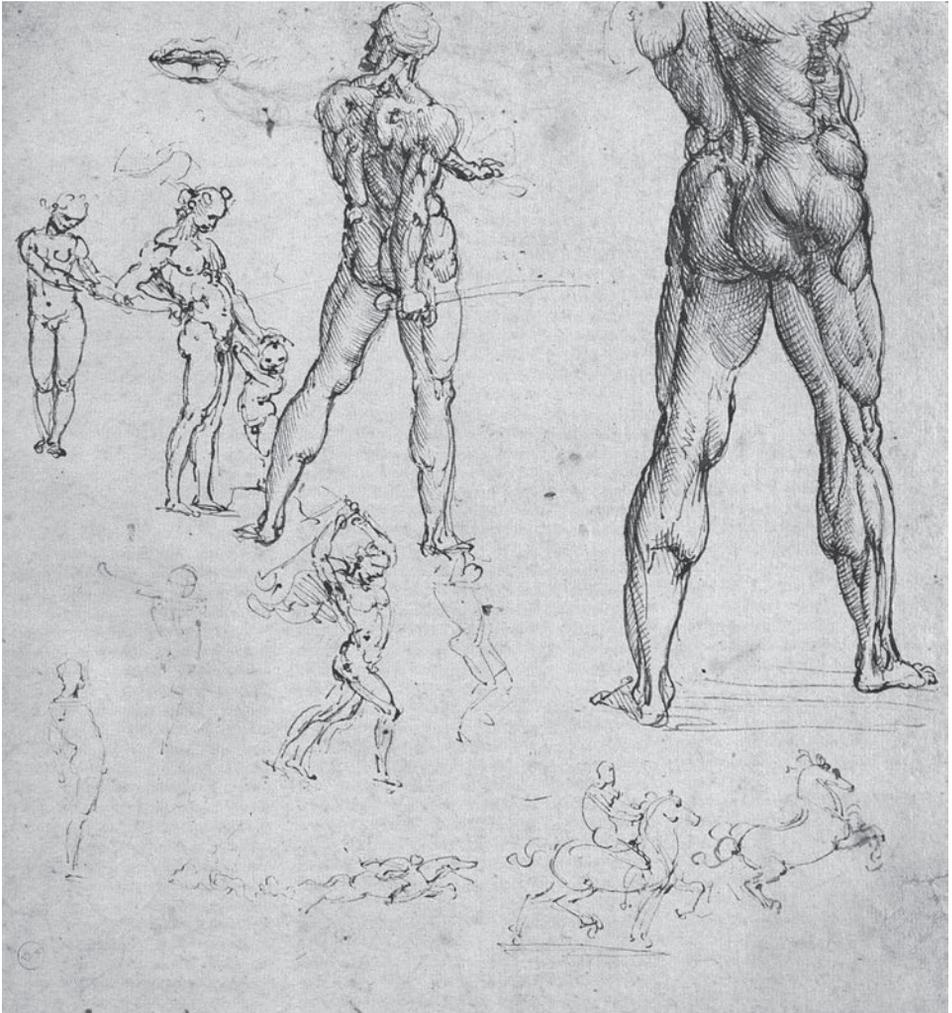


FIG. 23. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
Two studies of a muscular male nude seen from the back and other figures (pen and ink).
 Torino, Biblioteca Reale.

suggested that Leonardo's interest in the muscular heroic nude should be seen as his response to Michelangelo's art.¹ Although that may be true in the instance of a figure of Hercules, as seen in a few drawings of about 1506-1508, the inactive pose of the

¹ MARANI, cit., p. 275. See also F. ZÖLLNER, *Leonardo da Vinci. The complete paintings and drawings*, Cologne, Taschen, 2003, p. 174, stating that Leonardo was «impressed» by the muscular display of Michelangelo and pointing out that Leonardo's «renewed enthusiasm for the anatomy of the human body, which resulted in some very expressive drawings of muscular male nudes, comes as something of a surprise, for during the period 1500 to 1506 he had been sharply critical of depictions of exaggeratedly muscular male bodies». For Leonardo's study after Michelangelo's *David*, see POPHAM, cit., no. 206.

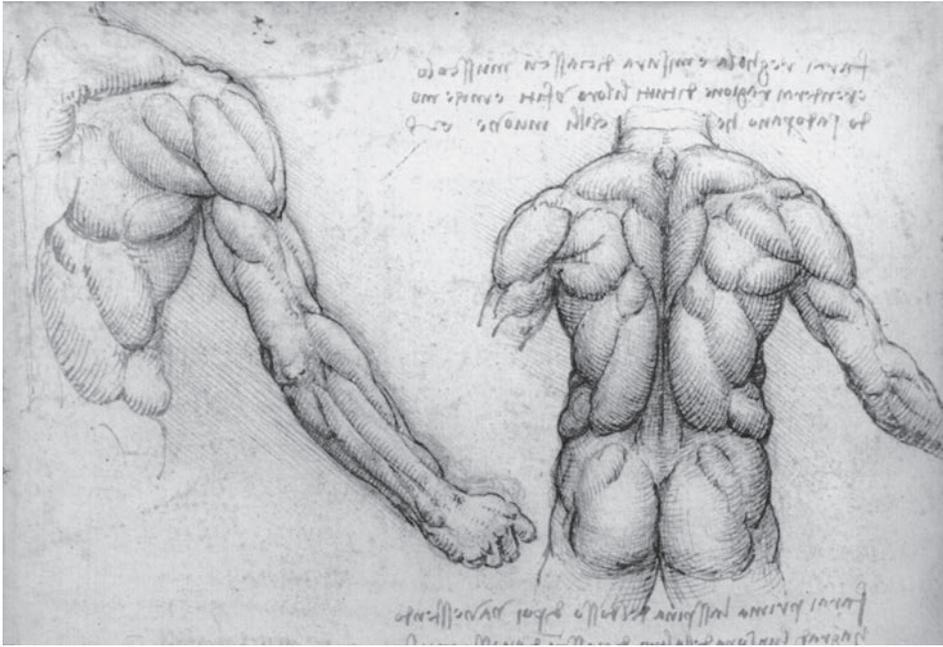


FIG. 24. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
Ecorché studies of the torso of a man seen from behind (pen and ink).
 Windsor, Royal Library, The Royal Collection.

muscular figure illustrated in Figures 23 and 24 does not warrant the exaggerated display of muscles in the legs and back which make the figure look like a «sacho di noci» («bag of nuts»), to use Leonardo's own words.¹

It is clear that throughout his career Leonardo re-used various motifs and compositional schemes in different contexts. Some figure poses he explored in connection with the *Adoration of the Magi* were re-used for the apostles in the *Last Supper* and the horsemen in the *Battle of Anghiari*. As we have seen, he re-used the kneeling pose of *St Jerome* at least twice, while the saint's bent left arm with the back of hand seen frontally, reappears in the *Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani*, in the figure of *St Philip* in the *Last Supper*, in the figure of the *Virgin* as shown in the underdrawing recently discovered under the surface of the London version of the *Virgin of the Rocks* and, finally, in the *Saint John the Baptist* (FIG. 22). Regarding the figure of *St Philip* (FIG. 25), it has gone unnoticed that his pose is similar to that of the figure Leonardo drew after one of the bystanders in Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi* in Washington (FIGS. 6, 8), while his head is a repetition of that of the youth standing to the right of the *Virgin* in the unfinished *Adoration* (FIG. 9).

¹ *Treatise on Painting*, cit., I, § 309 (Codex Urbinas, fol. 117r). The studies of the body and lower half of a muscular nude man are reproduced in POPHAM, cit., nos. 221, 230, 231, 233, 235, 237, 239, 242. For a discussion of the so-called Hercules drawings, see BAMBACH, cit., pp. 539-556.



FIG. 25. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
Last Supper (detail; mural painting). Milano,
Refettorio di Santa Maria delle Grazie.

Leonardo's own attentive study of nature, as attested in numerous scientific studies and drawings, enabled him to improve upon the Tuscan style of figure painting he so much criticized. It was Vasari who recognized that Leonardo's paintings in terms of naturalism, design, expression and beauty were of unprecedented perfection and consequently the biographer deemed it proper to initiate the third and last style – the one he called 'modern' – with Leonardo.¹ The above-mentioned examples, however, have shown that despite the greatly improved skills of Leonardo as a naturalistic painter, he never fully abandoned the language of forms and types he had learnt in Florence as a pupil of Verrocchio.² The explanation for this is that Leonardo probably never intended to do so. At an early stage he had committed to memory motifs and forms from the works of other artists through frequent copying, as

he would later also urge the young painter to do, and he simply stuck to them while improving upon their realism. Moreover, throughout his life Leonardo kept his own drawings as his «aids and teachers».³

No wonder that his ideal of feminine beauty, as represented in his various depictions of the Virgin and of Leda, reflects that of Verrocchio. He even used this ideal type for some of his male characters such as St John the Evangelist in the *Last Supper* and *St John the Baptist* (FIG. 22). The fact that the latter's facial expression and type correspond to those of the *Mona Lisa* (FIG. 26), shows that Leonardo applied his favourite type also to Lisa Gherardini instead of producing a realistic portrait of her. In his precepts for the painter, Leonardo stated: «quella pittura è più laudabile, la quale ha più conformità

¹ VASARI, *Le vite*, cit., IV, p. 11.

² That Leonardo's dependence on tradition did not only concern his depictions of facial types but also the elements out of which he created his landscapes was pointed out by GOMBRICH, *The Trattato*, cit. VALENTINER, cit., p. 54 already noted that «there is a tendency to underestimate the importance of tradition, even though we are dealing with a genius like Leonardo». Following some connections he suggested between Leonardo's early figure studies and works from the Verrocchio workshop, Valentiner concluded that «artists of that period could not recognize reality other than by means of the forms of speech of their teachers, and that tradition had so saturated their blood that a realistic reproduction of nature was scarcely possible». See also GOMBRICH, *Ideal and Type*, cit., p. 122: «when Leonardo meditated on the representation of a beautiful figure, the schema that first flowed into his pen was Verrocchio's».

³ «[...] onde queste riserberai come tuoi [altori] e maestri» (*Treatise on Painting*, cit., § 258/Codex Urbinas, fol. 59r). The inventory of works of art Leonardo compiled when he moved to Milan in 1482, quoted earlier, attests to the importance he attached to his own drawings.

co' la cosa imitata) («that painting is most praiseworthy which conforms most to the object portrayed»). In keeping with this view of painting, he pointed out that: «le bellezze de' volti possono essere in diverse persone di pari bontà, ma non mai simili in figura, anzi fieno di tante varietà quanto il numero a chi quelle sono congiunte» («beauty of face may be equally fine in different persons, but it is never the same in form, and should be made as different as the number of those to whom such beauty belongs»).¹

Leonardo's preference for a stereotype of ideal beauty conflicts with his concept of painting only when it is repeated within the same *istoria*. It does not conflict with his views on imitation when applied to a single character or individual. In an additional note on facial beauty, contained in Manuscript A, Leonardo admonishes the painter not to represent beauty according to his own preference, but according to what is considered a beautiful face by public opinion. Therefore his continuous repetition and adaptation of Verrocchio's ideal type must mean that its form continued to appeal not only to Leonardo himself, but also to public taste whether he worked for patrons in Florence or Milan.²

As a theoretician Leonardo regarded painting as a science, yet he was clearly more dedicated to practising science than painting. This is exactly what bothered Vasari. In concluding his biography of Leonardo, he not only produces the story that on his deathbed Leonardo showed much regret for not having worked as he should have done, but Vasari also states that Leonardo «worked more by words than by deeds».³



FIG. 26. LEONARDO DA VINCI,
Mona Lisa (oil on panel).
Paris, Musée du Louvre.

¹ *Treatise on Painting*, cit., §§ 433 and 278 (Codex Urbinas, fols. 133 and 51v). On Leonardo's portraits and the extent to which they may have been idealized, see GOMBRICH, *The Grottesque Heads*, cit., pp. 69-70, and D. A. BROWN, *Leonardo and the Idealized Portrait in Milan*, «Arte lombarda», 67, 1983, pp. 102-116.

² See *Treatise on Painting*, cit., § 276 (Codex Urbinas, fols. 50v-51r). According to Vasari, *Le vite*, cit., III, p. 364, Leonardo used to imitate Verrocchio's drawings of female heads with beautiful faces and hairstyle «per la sua bellezza» («for their beauty»). See also GOMBRICH, *The Grottesque Heads*, cit., p. 69: «The *Mona Lisa* passes as a portrait and is at the same time a type that recurs in Leonardo's vocabulary, a type, we may assume, applied to an individual».

³ «[...] ancora che molto più operasse con le parole che co' fatti» (VASARI, *Le vite*, cit., IV, pp. 50-51). Indicative of Leonardo's interest in working as painter is the fact that in the famous letter of introduction he addressed to Lodovico il Moro in 1482, he referred to his abilities as a painter only at the very end and after first having mentioned his skills as a sculptor. For the letter see *The Literary Works*, cit., II, § 1340.

Remarkable though they may sound, these words by Vasari were not completely unprecedented. Such a discrepancy between Leonardo's theory and practice had already been noted during his lifetime by Baldassar Castiglione, who writing about 1513 stated:

Another, one of the first painters in the world, scorns that art wherein he is most rare, and has set about studying philosophy; in which he comes up with such strange notions and new chimeras that, for all his art as a painter, he would never be able to paint them.¹

¹ «Un altro de' primi pittori del mondo sprezza quell'arte dove è rarissimo ed èssi posto ad imparar filosofia, nella quale ha così strani concetti e nove chimere, che esso con tutta la sua pittura non sapria dipingerle». Quoted from BALDASSAR CASTIGLIONE, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, ed. W. Barberis, Turin, Einaudi, 1998, p. 176. English translation quoted from BALDESAR CASTIGLIONE, *The Book of the Courtier. The Singleton Translation*, ed. D. Javitch, New York-London, Norton, 2002, pp. 100-101. According to Simone Fornari, in his commentary to Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* of 1549, Leonardo's ideas were too marvellous to be literally realized: «Fu capriccioso, et vario: e formavasi nel concetto delle cose, che far doveva, la Idea tanto mirabile, che rade volte gli avvenne di poterla condurre à fine et perfettione» (quoted from FRANKLIN, cit., p. 253, note 16).

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