



LEONARDO DA VINCI

THE EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY OF THE LAST PORTRAIT

The rationale for authentication

A Lecture by

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Cristina Geddo is an art historian who works in Milan, and an expert in Milanese “Leonardesques”, as well as in 17th and 18th Lombard paintings and collections.

Dr. Geddo is an arts graduate of Università Cattolica of Milan, pupil of Prof. Miklós Boskovits, specialized in medieval and modern art history at the same university, and holder of a Ph.D from the Université de Genève under the direction of Prof. Mauro Natale. She is also “Maître de Conférences” in France for both modern art history and Italian literature.

Dr. Geddo began her career with a thesis on Gianpietrino, Leonardo da Vinci’s most prolific student. Her two following theses, one on the marquis Cesare Pagani and the other on the cardinal Angelo Maria Durini, rediscovered two exemplary figures of Milanese patrons and collectors, who were involved in the politico-cultural life of Lombardy and Europe, respectively, at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries and during the Enlightenment.

For over twenty years, she has focused her research on these two particular fields of study, using a method that combines *connoisseurship* and archival research.

In the domain of collections, she has lead the way in exploring individual collections, but has also examined the response by 17th and 18th century collectors to the protagonists of Milanese painting from the Baroque period to that of the Enlightenment, such as Cerano, Cairo, Cornara, Nuvolone, Jacob-Ferdinand Voet, Paolo Pagani, Magnasco, Ceruti and Londonio. Following in Leonardo da Vinci’s footsteps, she rediscovered Pseudo-Boltraffio and retraced the little-known figure of Gianpietrino and his chrono-stylistic itinerary in a number of articles that have appeared over the years. After publishing a book on the cardinal Durini (Silvana Editoriale, Milan), she is now preparing the first ever monograph of Gianpietrino, which will include a complete catalogue raisonné on the works of the master and his atelier.

INTRODUCTION

First of all I would like to thank the *Société genevoise d'études italiennes*, and in particular its president, Mrs. Noëlle del Drago, and Mrs. Adele Hetcht Massaro / the *Cercle Menus Plaisirs*, and in particular the owners Mrs. Rachel Dudouit Elkaïm et Mr. Frédéric Elkaïm, for devoting this day / one of the lectures of their art expertise workshops to the discovery of this new Leonardo da Vinci, and giving it the full attention it deserves.

Given the interest that this incredible discovery has aroused just about everywhere, let me introduce the subject of this talk by a personal recollection of the stages that preceded its disclosure.

When you are dealing with the discovery of a new Leonardo da Vinci that has come out of nowhere after five centuries of obscurity, your legs begin to shake and your mind refuses to follow what your eye is telling you. That's what happened to me in the spring of 2008, when I first looked at the transparency of the work that had been sent to me for an opinion, as an expert in the master's Milanese atelier, by Mr. Giammarco Cappuzzo, the owner's art consultant. So my first reaction was tempered by caution and suspicion: "It's too good to be true".

However, in this *Profile of a Young Woman*, as intriguing as it was insidious, there was not only the ineffable beauty of it that was fascinating, but also the left-handed hachure "signature", the Milan location at the end of the 15th century established by the subject's costume, and above all the "dry coloring" technique, that gave away Leonardo's autograph. Having studied the Strasbourg pastels by his student Gianpietrino, I knew that this technique had been tested by the master himself before 1500, but the proof up to now had not yet surfaced. Was it not, perchance, a work fallen from heaven?

That was what pushed me to take up the challenge and start the research leading to the study which presented the work to the scientific community as a new Leonardo da Vinci.

I was well aware of the risk and responsibility that I would take on, all the more so as at that time the Leonardist Prof. Martin Kemp had not yet come on stage, and there were only two favorable opinions, those of Dr. Nicholas Turner and Prof. Mina Gregori.

So I went to Paris to examine the original with the owner, Mr. Peter Silverman, and to visit the laboratory of Lumiere Technology to confirm my impressions. The scientist Pascal Cotte and computer expert Jean Pénicaud showed me the first results of a cutting-edge technological analysis which, in a difficult case such as ours, would play a key role in the process of learning about the work.

In June 2008 I had finished my study. After being held up by a series of silences and refusals, it was finally published a year and a half later in the journal of the University of Pavia [C. Geddo, 'Il "pastello" ritrovato: un nuovo ritratto di Leonardo?', in *Artes*, no. 14, 2008-2009, p. 63-87].

Then Kemp and Cotte's exemplary monograph was published, in which the portrait is named "La Bella Principessa". This was followed more recently by the dazzling discoveries made by the two authors on the suggestion of Prof. Edward Wright, which brilliantly finalize the process of authentication of the work [M. Kemp, P. Cotte, con introduzione di N. Turner e un contributo di E. Schwan, *"La Bella principessa" di Leonardo da Vinci, ritratto di Bianca Sforza*, Firenze 2012 (first English edition, London 2010)].

We now know that this portrait on parchment (vellum) was almost certainly cut out from the Warsaw National Library's *Sforziada*, an incunabulum illuminated by Giovan Pietro Birago. This book on vellum had been ordered by the duke Ludovico Sforza called il Moro, Leonardo's patron, on the occasion of the marriage in 1496 of general Gian Galeazzo Sanseverino and his legitimized daughter Bianca Sforza, age about fourteen, who died the same year, and with whom *La Belle Principessa* was duly identified.

The aim of this talk is not to discuss the discoveries of colleagues, but to introduce you to the study of the work and to try to convince even the most die-hard sceptics and detractors that the arguments in favor of its attribution to Leonardo hold together perfectly.



1. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Portrait of a Young Woman known as "La Bella Principessa"*

(Private collection, deposited at the Free Ports of Geneva). Black chalk, red chalk and white chalk, pen and ink, on vellum.

ANALYSIS

PARS “DESTRUENS”:

ELIMINATING THE ALTERNATIVES

Before beginning our analysis, it would be appropriate to present the physical aspect of the work. It is the *Portrait of a Young Woman* shown in profile to the left (fig. 1), drawn and colored in black chalk, red chalk and white chalk, and highlighted in pen and ink, on a 333 x 238 mm sheet of parchment mounted on an ancient oak board. On the left margin you can see the three needle holes of the original binding.

My talk will be divided into two parts: the first “destruens”, the second “construens”. In the demolishing part we will examine and then rule out the alternatives to the theory of Leonardo’s paternity. In the building part we’ll get to the heart of the matter by explaining the reasons for the attribution.

So let’s see why the alternative hypotheses don’t hold, whether they surmise either of the following:

- 1) A 19th century Leonardesque-style work
- 2) A forgery
- 3) A copy after a lost Leonardo
- 4) A work from the school of the master

First hypothesis:

I. A 19th century Leonardesque-style work

This portrait – coming from France, as attested by the two Paris customs stamps on the back of the panel – during the second half of the 20th century was preserved in Geneva. It was part of the collection of Jeanne and Giannino Marchig, a well-known painter-restorer who considered it to be a 15th century Florentine original, maybe by Domenico Ghirlandaio. On the other hand, when it appeared at Christie’s in New York in 1998 – it’s a known fact – the portrait was listed with some degree of imagination as being from the German school of the beginning of the 19th inspired by the Renaissance, which implies a reference to the Nazarenes.

But why couldn’t it be a Leonardesque-style work, stemming from the Neo-Renaissance tastes of the second half of the 19th century?

Because this hypothesis is excluded by two factors:

- 1) The Carbon 14 test, which dated the vellum between 1440 and 1650, implicitly bringing it back to the 15th century, in other words to the period of the young woman’s costume.
- 2) The state of preservation of the work and the restorations it underwent.

Even with the naked eye one can very well see the degradation of the material, testifying to the age of the work. But Lumiere-Technology’s infrared false color reflectography (fig. 2) allows us to view the gaps and abrasions in the color, which correspond to yellow spots on a blue background and which are evident in particular on the neck, cheek and above the upper eyelid.



2. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *La Bella Principessa* (Private collection),
IR false color reflectography, 900 nm. (Lumiere Technology).

However, it is the “Restoration map” drawn up by Cotte (fig. 3), which identifies and displays with false colors all the repaints and retouches made during the course of former restorations, that provides us with an objective evaluation tool for the state of the work.

We can infer from this map, which confirms our visual impression, that the drawing, the relief and the colors are the original ones and for the most part intact. However, the work seems to have been heavily retouched, and these interpolations cloud the reading and weigh down the whole. The first restorer, in addition to reinforcing the lines with ink, did not respect the “dry color” technique of the original, using liquid colors such as watercolor and white lead.

It is this *fin de siècle* make-up that led the Christie expert astray, but I invite you to look with your naked eye at the difference between the pale pink diaphanous complexion of the original skin color in crayon, and the thick, mawkish pink pigment of the pictorial restoration, spread inconsistently with a brush on the cheek and forehead.



3. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *La Bella Principessa* (Private collection),
Restoration map by Pascal Cotte (Lumiere Technology).

Second hypothesis:

II. A forgery from the 20th century

Couldn't this all be the result of trickery and dishonesty? We know that the most cunning 20th century forgers used the same supports and materials as those used during the period, as well as sophisticated techniques for the ageing process.

However, the hypothesis that *La Bella Principessa* is a huge fake in the style of Leonardo da Vinci dating from the first half of the last century must counter two objections that are difficult to surmount:

1) The forger would have failed to meet his goal, because the portrait always remained in the obscurity of anonymity and, when it appeared on the market, was sold as a 19th century work.

2) What forger would have considered producing a convincing and sellable "Leonardo da Vinci" using a support and a technique that had never before been used in the artist's *œuvre*?

Here is a Leonardesque-style drawing in ink (fig. 4) by a famous forger of old masters, Eric Hebborn, author of a most instructive book, *Il manuale del falsario* (*The Art Forger's Handbook*, 1995).

I'll let you be the judge of the quality of this drawing. As for inventiveness, he uses a stratagem typical of forgers, combining three different sources (the hand of the *Lady with an Ermine* and two studies for the *Virgin of the Rocks* in red chalk), roughly imitating Leonardo's left-handed hachure.

Given the results, Hebborn was right in advising his colleagues to not compare themselves with the giants of art, such as Raphaël or Leonardo: on the one hand because they could not rival their talent; on the other, because when a great name is discovered, experts are so suspicious that they often dismiss even authentic discoveries!



4. ERIC HEBBORN, *Bust of a Woman*, Leonardesque-style drawing, before 1995. Pen and ink on paper.

Third hypothesis:

III. Period copy of a lost Leonardo model

If it is not a forgery, then it is a period copy after a lost Leonardo original.

This hypothesis does not hold given the extreme sensitivity of the work, which is not characteristic of copies, but above all because of the presence of numerous *pentimenti* (reworkings).

One can see them better in Lumiere Technology's infrared reflectography (fig. 5).

Look at the trace of the parallel line along the contour of the face and neck, as well as on the back part of the neck, which was originally much finer; the halo of the preliminary contour of the shoulder; and the lines erased around the nape of the neck, suggesting a modification in the position of the head.

All these corrections made by the author during the carrying out of the work testify to the process of creation of an original work and of a portrait most probably drawn from life.



5. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *La Bella Principessa* (Private collection), *IR reflectography, 900 nm.* (Lumiere Technology).

Fourth hypothesis:

IV. A work from the school of Leonardo

We now come to the last hypothesis: could it have been a work from Leonardo da Vinci's circle or atelier? In the last decade of the 15th century there were, other than Leonardo, two portraitists working in Milan for the court of Ludovico il Moro and who were strongly influenced by the Tuscan master: the Maestro della pala Sforzesca and Giovanni Ambrogio de Predis.

The former, distressed by the arrival of Leonardo, combined the innovative style of Leonardo and the Lombard school of the Renaissance, with a heavy and somewhat awkward result.

Here is a detail from the portrait in profile of the wife of il Moro, Beatrice d'Este, in the retablo of the Brera Pinacoteca in Milan (fig. 6), which provided the master with the name, and which was ordered by il Moro in 1494.



6. MAESTRO DELLA PALA SFORZESCA, *The Virgin with Child, Four Saints and the Family of Ludovico il Moro* (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan), 1494-1495, detail of Beatrice d'Este. Oil on panel.

De Predis, a friend and associate of Leonardo's in the contract for the *Virgin of the Rocks*, is a more coherent and distinguished portraitist, but was also influenced by the official rules.

Look at, for example, the *Portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza* at the National Gallery of Washington (fig. 7), datable ca. 1493, the year of her marriage with the Emperor Maximilian I.

Contrary to the author of our portrait, de Predis reproduces, faithfully and with a few errors in perspective, the inaesthetic and inexpressive profile of the model, and contents himself with depicting the brocade and jewelry denoting her rank of princess.

In fact, *La Bella Principessa* is closer in spirit to the *Lady with a Pearl Hairnet* at the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana (fig. 8), dated a few years earlier, a beautiful and flawless portrait that in my opinion should be attributed to de Predis, assisted by Leonardo.

The comparison highlights the difference in hand, but also the strong Leonardesque characteristics of this brilliant portrait: notably the outline of the profile, the net of knotted ribbons and the embroidered frieze on the dress recalling the "nodi vinciani", while the brightness of the gold and the pearls in the darkness recalls the effects of the *Virgin of the Rocks*.

Compared to the court portraits from the same *milieu*, *La Bella Principessa* is not a celebratory work, as it is characterized by a tremendous restraint intended to bring out the natural beauty and elegance of the model. A passage from the *Libro di pittura* comes to mind, where Leonardo praises beauty without artifice.



7. AMBROGIO DE PREDIS, *Portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza* (The National Gallery, Washington), ca. 1493. Oil on panel.



8. AMBROGIO DE PREDIS, *Portrait of a Lady called "La Dama con la reticella di perle" (The Lady with a Pearl Hairnet)* (Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan), ca. 1488-1490. Oil on panel.

If you examine Leonardo's atelier at the time of his first stay in Milan, the student who obviously profited most from his teaching was Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio.

Boltraffio was an excellent portraitist, and in addition had such a strong personality that it is impossible to confuse his hand with that of the master's.

His love for the synthesis of forms and volumes, highlighted by a clear section of light and shadow, which differs from Leonardo's analytical investigation and "sfumato", emerges from this charming *Portrait of a young Woman* at the Ambrosiana, dated ca. 1502 (fig. 9). The pastel has a fine pictorial flow and is done with a technique stemming from that of *La Bella Principessa*.

Can you really consider that either of these painters had the talent required to be the author of *La Bella Principessa*? It certainly does not appear to be the case.

Furthermore, it's not only a matter of style; it's a question of hachures, sloping towards the right or towards the left. In fact, after a quick examination of the drawings of the master's followers one realizes that they are all right-handed: Leonardo was the only left-handed painter working in il Moro's court.

This observation is enough to rule out the possibility we just examined.



9. GIOVANNI ANTONIO BOLTRAFFIO, *Portrait of a young Woman*, preparatory study for the *Saint Barbare* of the Berlin National Gallery (Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan), ca. 1502. Charcoal, brown, yellow, red and ivory pastel on prepared paper.

Now let's address the pars "construens".

**PARS "CONSTRUENS":
IN DEFENSE OF LEONARDO DA VINCI'S PATERNITY**

Now that we have cleared the field of all the traps and alternatives possible, we can turn to the theory of Leonardo da Vinci's paternity.

We are going to defend this thesis on the basis of the six following arguments, of which the first and the fifth constitute in my opinion irrefutable proof:

- 1) The left-handed hachures
- 2) The hairstyle of the model, which situates the portrait in Milan at the time of Leonardo's first stay
- 3) The typological and stylistic characteristics of the portrait
- 4) The supreme mastery of the execution
- 5) The experimental technique, which relates to passages from the master's manuscripts
- 6) The logic of the work's integration in Leonardo's artistic trajectory

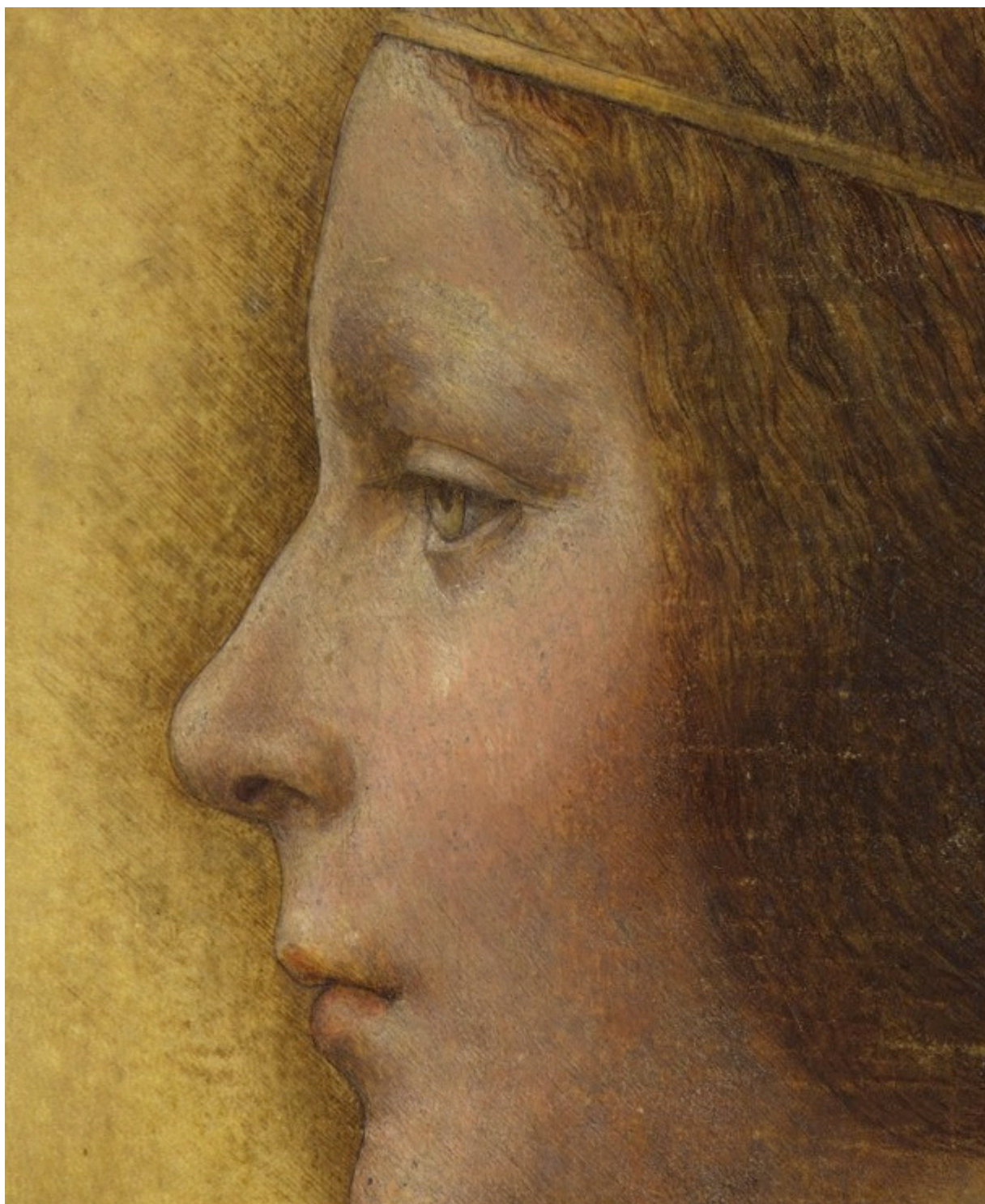
First argument:

I. Left-handed hachures

As I just explained, the parallel hachures done with the left-hand are the "signature" of Leonardo's drawings.

You can compare the hachures of the right-handed Boltraffio (fig. 9), which start at the left bottom and go up to the top right, with those of the left-handed Leonardo (fig. 1), which go from the bottom right up to the top left (or vice versa).

The entire face of *La Bella Principessa* is modeled by hachures of this type, but in this detail (fig. 10a) we can see the hachures in pen and ink in the background more easily. They are similar to the ones in other drawings by the artist, such as the British Museum's *Study of a Man in Profile*, also dated from the years 1490 (fig. 10b).



10a. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *La Bella Principessa* (Private collection), detail of the profile.



10b. LEONARDO DA VINCI, Study of a Man in Profile (The British Museum, London), ca. 1490-1495. Pen and ink on paper.

Second argument:

II. The hairstyle of the model, situating the portrait in Milan at the time of Leonardo's first stay

For this second point, I'd like to call your attention to the very special hairstyle of the young woman, which we already saw in the portraits of the *Pala Sforzesca* and of de Predis (fig. 6-7). Her hair is gathered in a long tail held in place by ribbons, called *coazzone*, as well as to the little headdress on the back of the head and the *lenza*, which were in line with the latest fashion in Milan during the last decade of the 15th century and which disappeared with the arrival of the French conquerors in 1500.

The *coazzone* turns out to be a determining factor linking the portrait to the time when Leonardo was in Ludovico il Moro's service.

I will put forward the third and fourth arguments together, that is:

III. The typological and stylistic characteristics of the portrait

IV. The supreme mastery of execution

A few remarks concerning the typological and stylistic characteristics of the portrait, as well as the remarkable mastery of its author, as I don't want to bore you with an overly-detailed analysis.

What struck me the most was the forceful magnetism of the eye (fig. 11), its perfect anatomical structure but above all the transparency of the yellow-green iris that reflects the daylight using the natural color of the vellum. Leonardo is one of the few painters of the Italian Renaissance giving preference to light-colored eyes.



11. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *La Bella Principessa* (Private collection), detail of the eye.

We can also see the line of the contour of the profile, as sharp as it is sensitive, which takes us back to the Florentine school of the Renaissance and to the *Profile of a Lady* by Pollaiuolo at the Museo Poldi Pezzoli in Milan, that is to Leonardo's roots.

This type of eye and the flow of the line, which retraces its path to come as close as possible to the model's physiognomy, can be found as well in the *Profile of a Woman* at Windsor Castle (fig. 12), drawn in silverpoint towards the end of the first Florentine period and the beginning of the stay in Milan.



12. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Profile of a Woman* (The Royal Library, Windsor Castle, no. 12505), ca. 1480-1485.
Silverpoint on pale buff prepared paper.

We can also admire this marvelous curly hair, animated by a subtle graphic texture, slightly botched by the retouchings: it seems to tremble in the air, capturing the light of the sun in its gold and copper reflections. Note that this view, capturing the smallest detail of an object immersed in the atmosphere, is typical of Leonardo, and is not shared by any of his disciples.

We can also appreciate the impeccable perspective of the hairnet, shortened on top to underline the convexity of the head.

And finally let us emphasize such an obviously Leonardesque element as the interlacing that covers the frieze of the hairnet and the strange triangular opening of the dress (the only anomaly of the portrait), which is related to the famous *nodi vinciani* drawn by Leonardo for the engravings of the “Accademia Leonardi Vinci” in the Ambrosiana (ca. 1495) and in the trompe-l’œil cradle of the Castello Sforzesco’s “Sala delle Asse” in 1498.

Let me add two last remarks, which lead us in the same direction.

1) This portrait seems to conform to the theories regarding figurative representation advanced by Leonardo in his *Libro di pittura* and applied to his works. For example, the gold reflection on the top of the head shows us that the light is falling from on high, to the left, and Leonardo recommends lighting from the top as it produces charming shadows on faces. It is precisely the transparent shadows and abundant white highlights that gently model the *sfumato* of *La Bella Principessa*, while the highlights in ink detach it from the background and give it the moulding force of a bas-relief.

For its easy flow and sculptured effect, this chiaroscuro can well be compared to that of the cartoon of the *Saint Anne* of London (fig. 13), produced with the same *media*, except for the sanguine, towards 1500.



13. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Saint Anne, the Virgin and the Child Jesus Blessing St. John the Baptist* (The National Gallery, London), ca. 1500, detail. Black chalk and white chalk on dark beige paper.

2) The second consideration has to do with the in-depth knowledge of human anatomy shown by the author of *La Belle Principessa*. If you look carefully at the head, you can see the structure of the skull, the orbital cavities, the jaw and the high cheekbones.

Who, other than Leonardo, who dissected corpses, would have had such a penetrating vision so as to see beyond what meets the eye?

Also note that he makes us see the hollow of the cheek and the relief of the ear below the gathered hair. It is no coincidence that we find this same delicacy in the *Head of a Woman almost in Profile* of the Louvre (fig. 14), a charming portrait drawn from life in metalpoint, preparatory to the *Madonna Litta* of the beginning of the 1490s.



14. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Head of a Woman almost in Profile* (Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, Paris) ca. 1490-1492. Metalpoint and highlights in white on light gray prepared paper.

Fifth argument of our demonstration:

V. Experimental technique, related to two passages from the master's manuscripts

Contrary to these drawings, designed as intermediary steps in the process of creation of a final work of art, *La Bella Principessa* is a definitive and autonomous work in itself. This explains its very accomplished and formal aspect, though weighed down by repaints, which does not match the freshness of touch of the drawings, as the style of a work of art is closely related to its function.

In fact, the work we have before us is a unique work, executed with a unique technique that fluctuates between drawing, painting and miniature.

It's precisely in the new and experimental procedure that you can find the indisputable proof of Leonardo's autograph. It is a rare mix of materials and techniques: parchment, an unusual support for drawings and in this period generally used only for miniatures or fine books; the highlights in pen and ink; the combination of black and red chalk and of white chalk, which, spread on the hachures and toned down on the yellowish background of the vellum, give this portrait an almost naturalistic coloring (the pink flesh of the complexion, the golden brown of the hair, as well as the gray-green and the copper color of the clothing).

It is based on a French technique known as "du crayon", and more specifically "des trois crayons", from which the pastel evolved.

This new technique, which goes back to Jean Fouquet and really took off in 15th century with the two Clouets (as of 1516) and Holbein – precursors of the European boom of the 18th century – was absolutely unknown in Italy at the end of the 15th century.

It was Leonardo Da Vinci who was the first to learn and perfect it, as he himself indicates in two crucial passages of his manuscripts, undated but which can be dated to the second half of the 1490s.

1) In a passage from *Codex Atlanticus* (Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan), i.e. a list of things to do before leaving Milan known under the name of "Ligny Memorandum", Leonardo says he intends to learn from the French painter Jean Perréal, also called Jean de Paris (ca. 1460-1530), who was at the time sojourning in Milan with the army of the king of France, "his way to dry color", as well as his paintbox, the tempera of his flesh tints, and the way to dissolve shellac, in other words the crayon fixative.

"Piglia da Gian di Paris il modo de colorire a secco, e 'l modo del sale bianco e del fare le carte impastate, solie in molti doppi, e la sua cassetta de colori. Impara la tempera delle carnage. Impara a dissolvere la lacca gomma".

In fact, the only crayon drawing by Perréal that has seen the light of day up to now is the *Portrait of Jean Le Veneur*, the bishop-count of Lisieux as of 1505, preserved at the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg (fig. 15a), which was done using the technique known as the "deux crayons", in other words black and red chalk, as well as the *Portrait of King Charles VIII*, considered a copy after Perréal (fig. 15b).



15a. JEAN PERRÉAL, *Portrait of Jean Le Veneur* (Hermitage, Saint Petersburg), first decade of the 16th century. Black and red chalk on paper.

15b. JEAN PERRÉAL (copy after), *Portrait of King Charles VIII* (Hermitage, Saint Petersburg), before 1498. Black and red chalk on paper.

In order to contextualize the meeting between Leonardo and Perréal, which establishes the *terminus post quem* of our portrait, it would be advisable to give you a general idea of the issue regarding the dating of the “Ligny Memorandum”.

This passage, written in cipher, reveals a secret project of Leonardo, which at the end failed. The artist contemplated leaving Milan to go to Naples with Louis de Luxembourg, comte de Ligny, captain in the French armies, to settle in the city under the wing of this new French lord and patron, who was also the sponsor of Perréal and Bramantino.

As Ligny had led the two French campaigns in Italy, the “Ligny Memorandum” was related either to the expedition of Charles VIII against the kingdom of Naples (1494-1495), and thus to his visit to Pavia in 1494; or else to the conquest of the Duchy of Milan by Louis XII in 1499.

In my mind, all the elements seem to point to the second hypothesis: the failure of de Ligny’s diplomatic plans to take over the kingdom of Naples, which would explain the failure of Leonardo’s project; the search by the artist for a new patron among the French conquerors after the fall of il Moro; the reuse of Perréal’s crayons at the beginning of 1500 in the *Portrait of Isabella d’Este* (fig. 23); and finally the visits by Perréal and Ligny to Milan, which are documented only in 1499.

Whatever the case, it is certain that Leonardo and de Ligny met. Concerning this point, I think that this small portrait, sketched in red chalk on a page of the *Codex on the Flight of Birds* (fig. 16a), is the portrait of the French captain done by Leonardo during this meeting. I suggested this because of its strong physiognomical resemblance with the *Portrait of Ligny* by Jean Perréal at the Musée Condé in Chantilly (fig. 16b), drawn in silverpoint ca. 1500 (large light-colored and divergent eyes, aquiline nose, prognathism, closely-cropped beard and type of hat).



**16a. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Portrait of Louis de Luxembourg, Earl of Ligny?*
(*Codex on the Flight of Birds*, Biblioteca Reale, Torino), 1499? Red chalk on paper.**

**16b. JEAN PERRÉAL, *Portrait of Louis de Luxembourg, Earl of Ligny*
(Musée Condé, Chantilly), ca. 1500. Metalpoint on paper.**

Now about the second note in Leonardo's manuscript, which is also of interest to us.

2) In a neglected passage of the *Codex Forster II* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) Leonardo notes the formula for making dry color crayons, by mixing the colors in powder form with wax.

"Per fare punte da colorire a secco, tempera con un po' di cera e non cascherà. La qual cera dissolverai con acqua, che, temperata la biacca, essa acqua distillata se ne vada in fumo e rimanga la cera sola".

We thus discover that the invention of wax pastels, whose origin was unknown, is due to Leonardo himself, a genius obsessed with technical matters and experimentation.

From this passage we can infer that Leonardo perfected and enriched the technique he learned from his French colleague, after having tested it first.

A small *corpus* of pastel drawings of a remarkable quality testify to the existence of a real Leonardesque school of pastel, ignored by the studies until very recently, of which Leonardo was obviously the leader.

This school, which prospered from 1500 until the 1520s, involved the principal disciples and followers of the master that came between the first and second generation "Leonardesques", such as Boltraffio, Marco d'Oggiono, Andrea Solario, Gianpietrino and Bernardino Luini.

Here are some examples.

The earliest of these pastels is the *Portrait de femme* by Boltraffio at the Uffizi (fig. 17), in preparation for the Virgin of the *Pala Casio* dated 1500 (Musée du Louvre, Paris).



17. GIOVANNI ANTONIO BOLTRAFFIO, *Portrait of a Woman*, preliminary study for the Virgin of the *Pala Casio* at the Louvre dated 1500 (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence), 1500. Charcoal, yellow and red pastel, white chalk on greenish prepared paper.

This *Portrait of a man* by Solario from the first decade of the 1500s, at the Uffizi (fig. 18), is the only Leonardesque crayon drawing on parchment that I have been able to locate (I plan to extend my research).



18. ANDREA SOLARIO, *Portrait of a Man* (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence), ca. 1506-1508. Charcoal and red chalk, with touches of white lead, on used parchment.

Here is the *Portrait of a Lady*, a charming pastel by Luini (fig. 19).



19. BERNARDINO LUINI, *Portrait of a Lady, probably Ippolita Bentivoglio* (Albertina, Vienna), ca. 1520-1522. Charcoal, black chalk, yellow, red and white pastel on paper.

To conclude, I will show you two examples from the famous series, *Heads of Christ and the Apostles* of the Musée de Strasbourg (fig. 20-21), copied after the *Last Supper* by Leonardo in the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, which are the same size as the original. These admirable pastels were considered works by Boltraffio before I attributed them to the young Gianpietrino, by linking them to the copy on canvas of the Royal Academy of Arts, which you recently saw at the exhibition on Leonardo da Vinci in London [C. Geddo, 'Disegni leonardeschi dal *Cenacolo*. Un nuovo nome per le *Teste* di Strasburgo', in *Tutte le opere non son per istancarmi*. Raccolta di scritti per i settant'anni di Carlo Pedretti, F. Frosini (ed.), Roma 1998, p. 159-172].



20. GIOVANNI PIETRO RIZZOLI KNOWN AS GIANPIETRINO, *Profile of Saint James the Lesser*, from the series *Heads of Christ and the Apostles* copied after the *Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci (Musées de la ville de Strasbourg, Cabinet des Estampes et des Dessins, Strasbourg), ca. 1510-1513. Black chalk, red, brown, flesh pink and white pastel on prepared paper (background repainted in watercolor?).



21. GIOVANNI PIETRO RIZZOLI KNOWN AS GIANPIETRINO, *Saint John*, from the same series.
Black chalk, brown, flesh pink, white and yellow pastel on prepared paper (background repainted in watercolor?).

The Milanese Leonardesque pastels, which introduce composite colors such as yellow, brown and pink, prove to be much more innovative and modern than Jean Clouet's French crayons. In fact, it would not be surprising if, after a needed analysis of the pigments, we discovered that some of them were wax crayons, made according to the formula developed by Leonardo in the passage of the *Codex Forster*.

La Bella Principessa played a decisive role in all this, to my mind.

Who could have painted a portrait in the style of Leonardo, using Perréal's French technique, before 1500 in Milan, if not Leonardo himself?

In the context described above *La Bella Principessa*, with its colors announcing those of real pastels, turns out to be "the pastel" that was missing from Leonardo's work – i.e. "proof positive" that he experimented with the new technique learned from the French colleague before leaving Milan – and, in the end, the "incunabulum" of pastel in Italy.

Sixth argument:

VI. The logical integration of the work in Leonardo's artistic trajectory

We have now come to the last argument of our demonstration: The logical integration of the work in Leonardo's artistic trajectory at the end of his first stay in Milan.

In this portrait, intended to decorate a book like an illumination, Leonardo adopted the classic format of the absolute profile, inspired by the antique medallions and very much in fashion at the Italian courts of the Renaissance, notably at the Milanese court of il Moro, where it was apparently mandatory for the members of the ducal family.

The subject of the profile had intrigued Leonardo since his Florentine period, as several drawings including the portrait of Windsor that we previously saw (fig. 12), attest; but how can you reconcile the heraldic rigidity of this posture with the theory of "moti dell'animo" (images that convey emotions)? The answer lies in the imperceptible deviation of the eye, turned slightly towards us, from the axis of the profile. This is what suggests a reflexive attitude on the part of the protagonist, and gives us the illusion of life.

In fact, at the end of the 1490s Leonardo recuperated the traditional formulas of the three-quarters and the profile, with the idea of renewing them from the inside.

In this context, *La Bella Principessa* finds its natural place between *La Belle Ferronnière* (fig. 22), i.e. the mistress of il Moro Lucrezia Crivelli, who also wears a *coazzone* (ca. 1495-1498), and the cartoon of *Isabella d'Este* (fig. 23), which the artist executed when he visited Mantua at the beginning of 1500, after leaving Milan in the wake of its conquest by the French.

Compare the lighting from on high, the careful modeling and the magic of the gaze, "the window to the soul", as Leonardo called it, which conveys the inner life of the subject.



22. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Portrait of Lucrezia Crivelli known as "La Belle Ferronnière"* (Musée du Louvre, Paris), ca. 1496-1498. Oil on panel.



23. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Portrait of Isabella d'Este* (Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, Paris), 1500.
Red and white chalk, with highlights in white chalk and ochre on paper pricked for transfer.

The portrait of *Isabella d'Este* (fig. 23) provides us with a very significant element of comparison as, on the one hand, Leonardo combines the antique profile and the three-quarters of his period in an original way, and on the other, he takes up again the “trois crayons” technique, with a touch of yellow chalk on the border of the dress. The procedure is used in a way that is much less intense than in *La Belle Principessa*, with a paler and more delicate color effect, since the *Isabelle d'Este* is not a definitive work, but a sketch intended for a painting.

In Leonardo's artistic trajectory, *La Bella Principessa* remains unique, but its bold experimentation will go on to play a role in the development of the black and red crayon technique, in which the evocative fusion of warm-cold tonalities results in an almost pre-Baroque pictorial flow. This is the case for the *Study of the Head of the Virgin* preparatory to the *Saint Anne* of the Louvre, preserved at the Metropolitan Museum of New York (fig. 24), which was done after about ten years and with which I would like to conclude this talk.



24. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Study of the Head of the Virgin for the “Saint Anne” of the Louvre* (The Metropolitan Museum, New York), ca. 1507-1510. Black and red chalk on paper.

It's in the light of this demonstration that the attribution of *La Bella Principessa* to Leonardo da Vinci seems to me to be irrefutable.

I hope that this lecture will have given you all the elements necessary to weigh up the matter for yourself.

Thank you for your attention.

Cristina Geddo



25. *The Bella Principessa* by Leonardo da Vinci, Private Collection.
Deposited at the LTMI - Lumiere Technology Multispectral Institute, Free Ports of Geneva.

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