

Leonardo da Vinci at The Queen's Gallery this winter

In November 2019, to mark the 500th anniversary of the death of Leonardo da Vinci, 80 of the Renaissance master's greatest drawings will go on display at The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, in the largest exhibition of the artist's work ever to be seen in Scotland.

Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing explores the full range of Leonardo's interests – painting, sculpture, architecture, anatomy, engineering, cartography, geology and botany – providing a comprehensive survey of Leonardo's life and a unique insight into the workings of his mind. Many of the works in the exhibition will be on display in Scotland for the first time.

Revered in his day as a painter, Leonardo completed only around 20 paintings; he was respected as a sculptor and architect, but no sculpture or buildings by him survive; he was a military and civil engineer who plotted with Machiavelli to divert the river Arno, but the scheme was never executed; he was an anatomist and dissected 30 human corpses, but his ground-breaking anatomical work was never published; he planned treatises on painting, water, mechanics, the growth of plants and many other subjects, but none was ever finished.

As so much of his life's work was unrealised or destroyed, Leonardo's greatest achievements survive only in his drawings and manuscripts. The drawings by Leonardo in the Royal

Collection have been together as a group since the artist's death in 1519, and entered the Collection during the reign of Charles II, around 1670.

Leonardo firmly believed that visual evidence was more persuasive than academic argument, and that an image conveyed knowledge more accurately and concisely than any words. Few of his drawings were intended for others to see: drawing served as his laboratory, allowing him to work out his ideas on paper and search for the universal laws that he believed underpinned all of creation.



Leonardo da Vinci, The head of Leda, c.1505-8 Royal Collection Trust / (c) Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019

In the breadth of his interests, Leonardo was the archetypal 'Renaissance man', and his work is characterised by a multitude of artistic and scientific pursuits that cross-fertilised each other over many years.

Leonardo's research into the human body stemmed from a desire to be 'true to nature' in his painting, and in time anatomy became his greatest scientific pursuit. Though he never completed his planned treatise on the subject, Leonardo's later anatomical studies mark him out as one of the great scientists of the Renaissance. The exhibition includes some of the finest examples of the artist's anatomical drawings, including *The skull sectioned* (1489), *The fetus in the womb* (c.1511) and *The cardiovascular system and principal organs of a woman* (c.1509–10).

Drawings of horses abound throughout Leonardo's work, including studies for three equestrian monuments that were never realised. The sculpture that would have been his masterpiece, a monument to Francesco Sforza, the late Duke of Milan, fell victim to the turbulence of politics and warfare that was a constant shadow over Leonardo's career. Studies for the monument, which would have been the largest bronze cast in western Europe since antiquity, include *A design for an equestrian monument* (c.1485–8) and *Studies of a horse* (c.1490).

The natural world is explored by Leonardo through detailed landscapes, studies of water and in numerous botanical studies, the finest of which were developed in preparation for the now lost painting *Leda and the Swan*, including *A branched bur-reed* (c.1506–12). Leonardo's *Leda* was the only female nude that he ever painted, and the nakedness of her body was emphasised by her elaborate hairstyle of braids and coils, the focus of the preparatory study *The head of Leda* (c.1505–8).

Leonardo gained a reputation as a skilled map-maker and engineer, and in August 1502 he was appointed military architect and engineer to Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alexander VI and Marshal of the Papal Troops. Over the next few months Leonardo surveyed Borgia's strongholds to the north and east of Florence, and created his most impressive surviving map, *A map of Imola* (1502). He continued to make maps on his return

to Florence, several of which were connected with his proposed projects in civil engineering, including *A map of the Valdichiana* (c.1503–6) and *The Arno valley with the route of a proposed canal* (c.1503–4).

Towards the end of his life, Leonardo left Italy forever and moved to France. His body was failing, and in his late drawings and writings he became obsessed by the subject of a cataclysmic storm overwhelming the earth and sweeping away all matter. But far from being chaotic, these deluges were drawn and described with the dispassionate eye of a scientist. The most elaborate is *A tempest* (c.1513–18), in which wind-gods hurl thunderbolts amongst dense clouds, while a landslide peels away from the remains of a mountain and falls into the rushing waters below.

The exhibition in Edinburgh is the culmination of a year-long nationwide event, which has given the widest-ever UK audience the opportunity to see the work of this unparalleled artist. In February 2019, 144 of Leonardo's drawings from the Royal Collection went on display in 12 simultaneous exhibitions at museums and galleries across the UK, attracting more than one million visitors. In May 2019 the drawings were brought together at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace to form the largest exhibition of Leonardo's work in over 65 years.

Martin Clayton, Head of Prints and Drawings, Royal Collection Trust, said, 'The drawings of Leonardo da Vinci are both incredibly beautiful and the main source of our knowledge of the artist. As our year-long celebration of Leonardo's life draws to a close with the largest exhibition of his work ever shown in Scotland, we hope that as many people as possible will take this unique opportunity to see these extraordinary works, and engage with one of the greatest minds in history.'

Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing at

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Holyroodhouse 22 November 2019 – 15 March
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