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LEONARDO (I)

Frank Zöllner
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LEONARDO (I)

One of the most accomplished human beings who ever lived, Leonardo remains the quintessential Renaissance genius. Creator of the world's most famous painting, this scientist, artist, philosopher, inventor, builder, and mechanic **epitomized the great flowering of human consciousness that marks his era.** And yet, so wide-ranging and prolific were his interests that he brought hardly any major undertaking to a final end.

If Leonardo seems so modern, it is perhaps because of his non-speciality, his magpie mind and curiosity, and his thousands of notes and sketches. In these pages he would **anticipate some of the great discoveries and inventions that would follow him**, from key points in anatomy—such as the principles behind blood circulation—through to plans for armoured military vehicles, planes, helicopters and submarines.

Leonardo also advanced numerous artistic techniques, and implicated a complex psychology into his paintings of *The Last Supper* and the enigmatic *La Gioconda*, or *Mona Lisa*. Famous horseman, rival to Michelangelo, military engineer to the Borgias, he died in 1519 in a chateau given to him by Francis I, King of France. Not bad for the illegitimate son of a Florentine notary.

About the Series:

Each book in TASCHEN's Basic Art Series features:

- a detailed chronological summary of the life and oeuvre of the artist, covering his or her cultural and historical importance
- a concise biography
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The author:

Frank Zöllner wrote his doctoral thesis on motifs originating from Antiquity in the history of art and architecture of the Medieval and Renaissance periods (1987). He is also the author of a postdoctoral treatise on motion and expression in the art of Leonardo da Vinci, published in 2010. He has published numerous works on Renaissance art and art theory, and on 20th-century art. Since 1996 he has been Professor of Medieval and Modern Art at the University of Leipzig. For TASCHEN he has authored the XL monographs on Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

#arte #logosedizioni



There is by no means unanimous agreement on the attribution of this painting of the Madonna and Child. There is only agreement that the ingenuity—comprising the interlaced pattern and parts of the landscape on the work of Leonardo—and, in fact, a study by Leonardo for the right arm of the angel has survived in this drawing. p. 17. Similarly the miniature being finally seen the meeting point in the background are distinctly reminiscent of work by the young Leonardo of Florence, who was often in return to this theme in later works. Leonardo's touch is particularly evident in the carefully treatment of the anatomy, water, air and light, which become increasingly atmospheric, diffuse around the steep foothills of the almost alpine ridges and peaks in the distance. Leonardo was later to describe similar phenomena in several passages in his *Treatise on Painting*: "Such features in painting are most beautiful to see. Of course to offer what they may be some knowledge of anatomy, as the disposition of veins in great distance distant" (Vol. 20/1).

Evidence of Leonardo's close attachment to his master is also to be found in the small Madonna, which is regarded as the first independent work, the so-called Madonna with the Carnation in the Abu Dhabi collection in Munich (Vol. 2, p. 10). Most likely painted during his time with Verrocchio, in this work—with its small outline in the middle ground and landscape in the background—Leonardo is drawing on aspects of work by the Old Dutch Masters. The figures of the Madonna and the infant Jesus, on the other hand, clearly pay allegiance to the painter's own (Leonardo's) workshop. Such Madonnas, around his domestic use and private worship, were found widely in 15th century Florence. Besides portraying the loving relationship of Mary and the infant Jesus, Leonardo also includes symbols of sacramental elements of Christian belief: in an unexpected gesture the Holy Child reaches out with his little hands for a red carnation, the symbol of the Passion of Christ, pointing to the depiction of childlike innocence in the face. The carnation, equally important for its symbolism in the original, was filled with flowers at the right lower edge of the painting, an unmistakable indication of the purity and 'ingenuity' of Mary. In the same sense, motifs such as the carnation and the crystal vase, which demand great skill on the part of the artist, allowed Leonardo to give an impressive demonstration of his talent, as also in the mannerly but of the fabric across the Madonna's lap, with its various textures that give life to the deeply shaded and otherwise unobtrusive foreground.

Characteristically Leonardo made about ten copies of the work in his possession. From these we can tell that during his first years in Florence he made several small versions of the Madonna. This is not only borne out by the few surviving works but also by a number of sketches (Vol. 17). In these sketches there are clear signs of the young painter's urge to test out—within the limits of convention—the possibilities of movement and expression. At the same time, however, there are also experiments in pure flights of fancy which, using the medium of drawing, take the value of completely free artistic expression not possible in painting.

The influence of Flemish style and pictorial forms, which may be seen in Leonardo's Madonna with the Carnation and in his later *Adoration of the Magi* (Vol. 2, p. 12), was at its most striking in the *Portrait of Ginepro de' Medici* (Vol. 17). This portrait is the first fixed point of reference in the oeuvre of Leonardo the painter. It is in the earliest extant work for which we have reliable documentation and information. Much more than his original paintings, so far, it leads away from the



Hands and feet with a blue carnation and one small carnation. London, British Museum.

Portrait of Ginepro de' Medici, 1495-1497. Oil on copper, transferred from the original. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.

The painting, named after the carnation, is shown here again. It offers some of the most striking evidence of the ingenuity of Leonardo's work in oil painting. London, British Museum.

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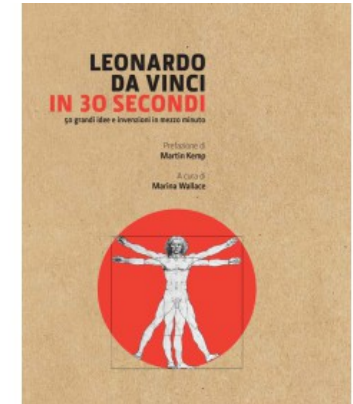
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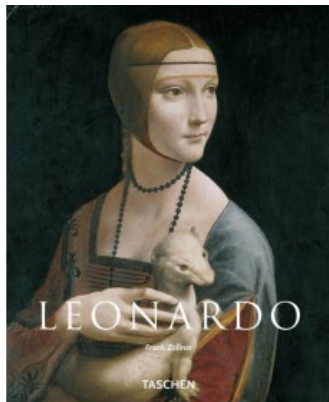
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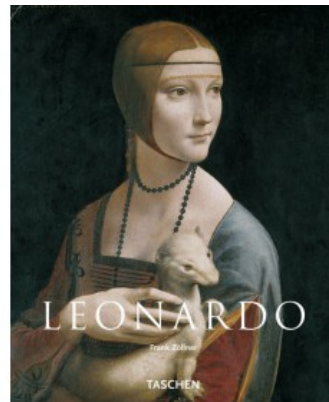
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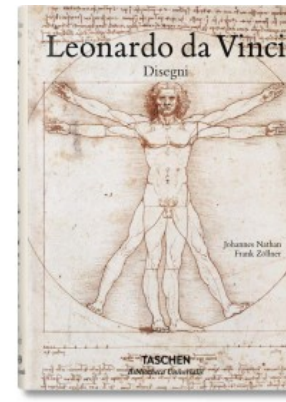
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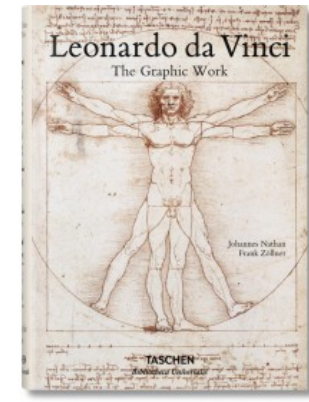
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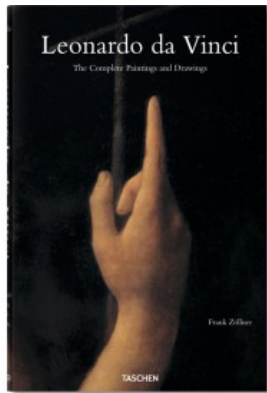


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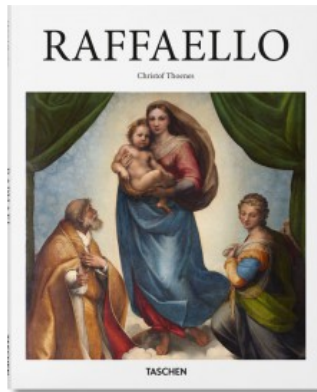
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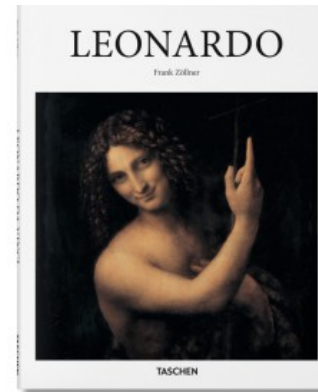
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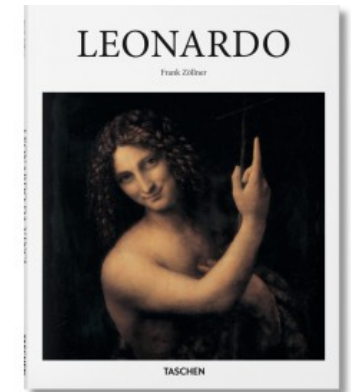
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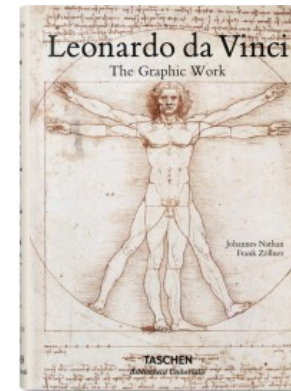
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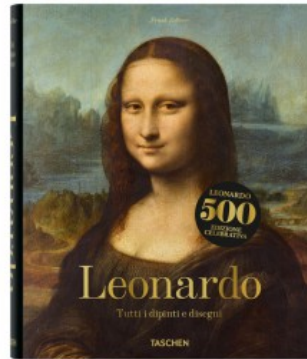
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