

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

LEONARDO da Vinci

Vinci 1452 – Amboise 1519

One of the many tantalising puzzles about Leonardo is the early, if not earliest, use of pastel with which he is widely credited. He notes in the Codex Atlanticus (fol. 669), around 1495, his intention to get the way to draw with dry colour from Jehan de Paris (Jean Perréal, *q.v.*) [*“piglia di Gian di Paris il modo de colorire a secco”*]. This he may have done during Perréal’s trip to the Milanese court with Louis XII in 1499. In the Codex Forster (II.2, fol. 159r) he provides a recipe for making pastel sticks: *“Per fare pu[n]te da colorire a secco; la t[em]pera co[n] vn po’ di ciera e no[n] cascherà, la qual ciera dissoluerai co[n] acque, che, temperata la biacca, essa acqua stillata se ne vada in fumo a rima[n]ga la ciera sola, e farai bone pu[n]te; Ma sappi che bisogna macinare i colori colla pietra calda.”* But did he use them?

Particularly in Milan in the late 1490s, Leonardo experimented with coloured chalks among a range of softer materials (black and red chalks, charcoal etc.), applying stumping to create sfumato and shadow. Among these materials was a yellow ochre that may have been fabricated, as in the celebrated cartoon of Isabella d’Este. The attribution of this work (made in Paris 1500–01) has itself been disputed, but is now generally accepted; however even the most recent sources disagree as to whether the yellow chalk is a natural stone or pastel. The pastel head of Christ in the Brera is widely accepted as by Leonardo (although Kemp & Cotte 2010 reasonably suggest an attribution to Boltraffio, *q.v.*, on the grounds the execution is not left handed), but it has been so heavily reworked that it is difficult to assess his exact contribution (nor is it clear that the tiny touches of coloured pigments are correctly described as pastel). A number of artists in Leonardo’s circle of pupils or followers, among them Boltraffio, Luini, Giampietrino and Solario (*qq.v.*), also experimented with coloured chalk drawings and developed the medium further; to these are frequently indiscriminately attributed the “pastels” which are patently not by Leonardo.

The main authority for Leonardo as pastellist is Lomazzo 1584, who mentions (1598 translation, drawing from Bernardus de Campo Cremonesi) *“roules with sharp points made of colours, first ground into powder...much used by Le Vincent, who wrought the heads of Christ & the 12 Apostles, in this sort most exquisitely”*. Perhaps these drawings have been lost; but it seems more likely that Lomazzo refers to the two series of drawings in chalk and pastel relating to the *Ultima cena* which were at one stage considered to be by Leonardo himself. Their attribution and even date remain greatly contested; the usual names, and especially that of Boltraffio, have been suggested. Even the provenance of the two groups has caused considerable confusion, most recently resolved in Wolk-Simon 2011. It seems that both groups originated in Milan, and may both have belonged to the Arconati family. One group, of which six cartoons are in Strasbourg, passed through the collections of the marchese Casnedi and procuratore Zaccaria Sagredo, from whom

Robert Udny bought them in Venice in 1778. It is now known that the drawings in the other group were in the Ambrosiana before being acquired by Sir Thomas Baring c.1800; they remained together in the collections successively of Sir Thomas Lawrence (there were 10 sheets in the group at this stage, as is evident from an anonymous 1830 print showing the artist’s private sitting room); Samuel Woodburn, the dealer who bought Lawrence’s much of collection (but only 7 of these heads); Willem II van Oranje, koning der Nederlanden; and the Großherzogen von Sachsen-Weimar, where they remained until 1968 when the group was broken up in a sale in London. They are now scattered: two are in the National Gallery of Art, Melbourne; a third, the head of St Simon, was sold at Sotheby’s, London, 23.III.1978, Lot 106, two more were in New York, Christie’s, 25.I.2005, Lots 24 and 25. It has plausibly been suggested that the Saxe-Weimar group may be by Boltraffio, while the Strasbourg sheets are copies of these by an anonymous hand; but it seems safest for the moment to regard both groups as anonymous copies of Leonardo’s work.

Black, red and white chalk, rather than gouache (and not pastel), was employed in a drawing sold without attribution in 1998 but which some now believe to be by Leonardo, and refer to as *La Bella Principessa*. Although obscured by later restoration, scientific analysis reveals that some of the colouring is achieved either by leaving the surface of the vellum uncovered (including flesh tints and the amber-coloured iris) or by strokes of black chalk (amphelite, a fine-grained black argillite), which when applied to the yellow vellum is responsible for the green appearance of the sitter’s dress. Whether or not by Leonardo (a question which is outside the scope of this *Dictionary*) it illustrates the difficulties faced in categorising coloured chalk drawings with the naked eye.

Monographic exhibitions

Leonardo 2001: *Il genio e le passioni – Leonardo e il Cenacolo: precedenti, innovazioni, riflessi di un capolavoro*, Milan, Palazzo Reale, 2001. Cat. ed. Pietro C. Marani & al.

Leonardo 2003: *Leonardo da Vinci, master draftsman*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 22.I.–30.III.2003. Cat. ed. Carmen C. Bambach

Leonardo 2011: *Leonardo da Vinci: painter to the court of Milan*, London, National Gallery, 9.XI.2011 – 5.II.2012. Cat. Luke Syson & al.

Bibliography

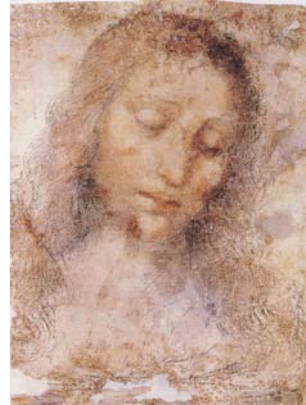
Bätschmann & Griener 1997; Kemp & Cotte 2010; Leonardo 2003; Lomazzo 1584; Meder 1919, p. 136; Monbeig Goguel 2009; Shelley 2002

Drawings with coloured chalks

ISABELLA d’Este (1474–1539), cr. cl., 60x46, 1499 (Louvre MI 753). Lit.: Goldscheider, *Leonardo*, 1967, pl. 24; Sani 1991, fig. 4; Leonardo 2003, fig. 17, p. 182; Hepova 2006, p. 12 repr.; Burns 2007, fig. 2; Kemp & Cotte 2010, fig. 26 ♀



Head of Christ, black, red, chl., pstl/green ppr, 40x32 (Milan, Brera, Reg. Cron. 862). Exh.: Leonardo 2001, no. 40. Lit.: Alexandre 1903, repr.; Leonardo 2003, fig. 101; Monbeig Goguel 2009, fig. 1; ♀



~Leonardo pnt., *Ultima cena*
Testa di un Giovane, con Chioma incoronata, di alloro, pstl (Cardinale Giovanni Carlo de’ Medici, Florence, inv. 1663)

Jeune homme à longs cheveux blonds, vêtu d’un manteau noir qui laisse voir des manches de couleur rosée, coiffé d’un petit bonnet à bords relevés, de ¾ vers la dr., au fond, un mur à hauteur d’appui, cr. cl., 62.5x48 (F. Ravaisson 1879). Exh.: Paris 1879, no. 45 n.r.

Testa di una Madonna, pstl (Gaspar de Haro y Guzmán, Conde-Duque de Olivares, Rome, inv. 7.IX.1682 – 1.I.1683)

Anon. related drawings

Ultima cena (Milan, Santa Maria della Grazie):
St James the Less, black chl., pstl/ppr br., 67.3x50.8; & St John the Evangelist, black chl., pstl/ppr br., 67.9x50.2 (conte Arconati. Marchese Casnedi. Sir Thomas Lawrence; London, Christie’s, 17–19.VI.1830, Lot 434/430, 30/92 gns; Samuel Woodburn; Willem II, Koning der Nederlanden; The Hague, 12–20.VIII.1850, Lot 10/13, as Leonardo da Vinci, D/8000 with six other heads from the series; Großherzog von Sachsen-Weimar; desc., London, Sotheby’s, 28.VI.1962, Lot 77, as Andrea Solario; David Griffiths; London, Sotheby’s, 28.III.1968, Lot 8/5, as Andrea Solario. Dr Bernard Breslauer; New York, @1@Christie’s, 25.I.2005, Lot 24/25 repr., attr. Boltraffio, \$57,600/\$96,000. Mr & Mrs John M Angelo, New York, 2011).

Lit.: E. Wright, *Some observations made in travelling through France and Italy*, London, 1730, pp. 470–71, as Leonardo; C.-N. Cochin, *Voyage d'Italie*, Paris, 1758, p. 146, as Leonardo; J. Sighart, *The Lord's Supper. Christ and his twelve disciples. From the original crayon-drawings of Leonardo da Vinci in the possession of Her Royal Highness the Grand Duchess of Saxe-Weimar by John Niessen*, London, 1868, repr., as Leonardo; German ed., Munich, 1874, repr.; G. Frizzoni, "I disegni delle teste degli apostoli nel Cenacolo di Leonardo da Vinci", *Archivio storico dell'arte*, VII, 1894, 1, pp. 41–49, as ?Andrea Solario; G. Dehio, "Zu den Kopien nach Lionardos Abendmahl", *Jahrbuch der königlich preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, XVII, 1896, pp. 181–85, as a/r Leonardo; E. Müntz, *Leonardo da Vinci: artist, thinker and man of science*, New York, London, 1898, 1, p. 191, pl. X, as a/r Leonardo; Alexandre 1903, repr., as by Leonardo, of Bartholomew and John; B. Berenson, *The drawings of the Florentine painters*, New York, 1903, 1, p. 156; 2nd ed., Chicago, 1938, 1, p. 174; Italian ed., Milan, 1961, 1, p. 254, all as Andrea Solario; O. Hoerth, *Das Abendmahl des Leonardo da Vinci: Ein Beitrag zur Frage seiner künstlerischen Rekonstruktion*, Leipzig, 1907, pp. 198–222, as a/r Leonardo; K. Badt, *Andrea Solario: sein Leben und seine Werke*, Leipzig, 1914, p. 188, as a/r Andrea Solario; F. Malaguzzi Valeri, *La Corte di Lodovico il Moro, II: Bramante e Leonardo da Vinci*, Milan, 1915, pp. 534–36, 544, fig. 587, as Andrea Solario; Lugt 1921, p. 456; C. Horst, "L'Ultima Cena di Leonardo nel riflesso delle copie e delle imitazioni", *Raccolta Vinciana*, 1930–34, no. 14, pp. 172–76, as a/r Leonardo; W. von Seidlitz, *Leonardo da Vinci*, Vienna, 1935, p. 169, as a/r Leonardo; K. Clark, *Leonardo da Vinci: an account of his development as an artist*, Cambridge, 1939, p. 94, as a/r Leonardo; E. Möller, *Das Abendmahl des Leonardo da Vinci*, Baden-Baden, 1952, pp. 103–8, fig. 61, as a/r Boltraffio; D. A. Brown, *Leonardo's Last Supper: precedents and reflections*, exhib. cat., Washington, National Gallery of Art, 1983, s.n. 6, as ?Boltraffio; D. A. Brown, *Andrea Solario*, Milan, 1987, p. 270, n.98, as a/r Leonardo; K. Gottardo, "Il gusto collezionistica di un eccentrico personaggio veneziano: la raccolta di disegni di 'Zotto' Sagredo", in B. Aikema & al., *Il collezionismo a Venezia e nel Veneto ai tempi della Serenissima*, Venezia, 2005, pp. 239–58; Monbeig Goguel 2009, p. 32; Wolk-Simon 2011, fig. 2/5 ◻



Photos courtesy Christie's

Five other drawings from the series:

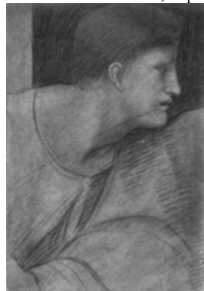
Saints ?Bartholomew; Andrew, cr. clr, 62.5x43.5/64x46.5 (conte Arconati. Marchese Cosnedi. Sir Thomas Lawrence; London, Christie's, 17–19.VI.1830; Samuel Woodburn; Willem II, Koning der Nederlanden; The Hague, 12–20.VIII.1850; Großherzog von Sachsen-Weimar. PC London 2011). Lit.: Alexandre 1903, repr.; Wolk-Simon 2011, fig. 1/3/7 ◻



Saints Judas with Peter; Thomas and James the Greater, cr. clr, 66.6x50.8/52.2x44.8 (Chapel Hill, Ackland Art Museum, inv. 77.53.1/2. Conte Arconati. Marchese Cosnedi. Sir Thomas Lawrence; London, Christie's, 17–19.VI.1830; Samuel Woodburn; Willem II, Koning der Nederlanden; The Hague, 12–20.VIII.1850; Großherzog von Sachsen-Weimar). Lit.: Alexandre 1903, repr.; Wolk-Simon 2011, fig. 4/6 ◻



?St Matthew, cr. clr, 65x47 (conte Arconati. Marchese Cosnedi. Sir Thomas Lawrence; London, Christie's, 17–19.VI.1830; Samuel Woodburn; Willem II, Koning der Nederlanden; The Hague, 12–20.VIII.1850; Großherzog von Sachsen-Weimar; London, Sotheby's, 28.VI.1962, Lot 81. London, Christie's, 6.XII.1988, Lot 73A repr., as of St Matthew, by Solario, est. £15–20,000). Lit.: Alexandre 1903, repr., as of Judas ◻



~versions: St James the Less; St Andrew; Judas; St Peter; St John the Evangelist; Christ, cr. clr, all c.56.5x43.3 (Strasbourg, mBA. ?Arconati. Casnedi. Zaccaria Sagredo. Robert Udny). Lit.: Wolk-Simon 2011, fig. 8/9/10/11/12/13 ◻

