



LEONARDO: ARTE COME PROGETTO

Studi di storia e critica d'arte
in onore di Pietro C. Marani

A	R	T	E
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COLLEZIONI LUOGHI ATTORI

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COLLEZIONI LUOGHI ATTORI

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Il titolo della collana sottolinea l'intenzione di considerare l'Arte come un sistema dinamico caratterizzato storicamente dalla molteplicità dei suoi attori. Se la creazione costituisce il cuore dell'arte, fulcro e motore del processo di produzione e di fruizione delle opere sono spesso figure che assumono e svolgono altre funzioni. Dai committenti ai collezionisti, dai conservatori dei musei ai destinatari di una più generica ma sempre più vasta educazione all'arte: lo sviluppo attuale della disciplina impedisce ormai di valutare semplicemente come secondario e accidentale il loro ruolo. Secondo questo approccio l'opera d'arte è "opera aperta": l'attenzione ad aspetti largamente interdisciplinari e alla sociologia dei fenomeni artistici intende infatti collegare il collezionismo e le sue pratiche, anche museologiche, a contesti e congiunture, a circuiti polivalenti e multiformi di cultura e di mercato. L'interesse, anche metodologico, è rivolto a tutte le possibili forme di diffusione e mediazione; la volontà è quella di considerare l'ampliamento di orizzonti che caratterizza oggi il dibattito sull'Arte e anche di perseguire l'idea che i documenti d'archivio o gli allestimenti museali possano proporre una Storia non meno significativa di quella degli oggetti evidenziando preferenze culturali ed estetiche.

The title of the series draws attention to its intent to regard Art as a dynamic system, characterized throughout history by a multiplicity of actors. While the heart of art may be creation, the linchpin and driving force to the production and consumption of works of art often rests with figures who take on and carry out other functions. Those who commission works of art and those who collect them, museum conservators and the recipients of a general but increasingly broad art education – the current development of the discipline makes it impossible to consider the roles played by such people as simply secondary or accidental. According to this approach, the work of art is an "open work": indeed, the attention to largely interdisciplinary aspects and to the sociology of artistic phenomena aims to link collecting and its practices, including its museological practices, with contexts and circumstances, with the multipurpose and multiform circuits of culture and market. The series' interest, including its methodological interest, is toward all possible forms of art diffusion and mediation; the purpose is to consider the broadening of horizons that currently characterizes the debate on Art and also to pursue the idea that archive documents and the way exhibitions are mounted in museums can convey a History as meaningful as the one set forth by artifacts, highlighting cultural and aesthetic preferences.

Tutti i contributi pubblicati nella collana sono sottoposti a double-blind peer review.
All contributions published in the series are subject to double-blind peer review.

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a cura di

Paola Cordera e Rodolfo Maffei

Il volume è stato pubblicato con la collaborazione del Dipartimento di Design,
Politecnico di Milano



POLITECNICO
MILANO 1863

DIPARTIMENTO DI DESIGN

Si ringraziano:

Mons. Francesco Braschi, Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milano
Dominique Cordellier, Musée du Louvre, Parigi

Fondazione Bologna University Press
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tel. (+39) 051 232 882
fax (+39) 051 221 019
www.buponline.com
info@buponline.com

ISSN 2465-0811
ISBN 979-12-5477-099-3
ISBN online 979-12-5477-100-6
DOI 10.30682/9791254770993

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Progetto grafico e impaginazione: DoppioClickArt, San Lazzaro di Savena (Bo)

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Prima edizione: settembre 2022

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Leonardo's *Portrait of a Woman*: a Portrait of Beatrice d'Este?

Laure Fagnart

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In 1642, Pierre Dan published a historical description of Château de Fontainebleau in his *Trésor des merveilles de la maison royale de Fontainebleau*.¹ This account is valuable as it describes the content of the French royal painting collection, which, in the middle of the 17th century, was largely conserved in the Bellifontaine residence. The thirteenth chapter of the book is dedicated to the «Cabinet des peintures». Dan lists thirty-six works, of which five are attributed to Leonardo, namely the *Virgin of the Rocks*, the *Saint John the Baptist/Bacchus in a landscape*, a *Salvator Mundi*, which is undoubtedly the painting currently at the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Nancy, the *Portrait of a Woman*, which, since the early 19th century, has been incorrectly designated as the *Belle Ferronnière*, and the *Mona Lisa*. The way in which the *Portrait of a Woman* is described could help to clarify the identity of the model, which, even today, remains uncertain. The author described it using the words «un portrait d'une Duchesse de Mantoue»,² a city with close links to the Este family. Yet, we can give a certain amount of credit to Pierre Dan: a historian of Château de Fontainebleau, as he probably gathered traditions that circulated about the works while they were conserved in the royal residence. Consequently, it is plausible to consider that Leonardo painted Beatrice d'Este in the *Portrait of a Woman*.³ The princess, who was the youngest sister of Isabelle d'Este, arrived in Milan in January 1491 after her wedding to Ludovico Sforza. If the painting, which is currently kept in the Louvre, was pro-

¹ L. Fagnart, *Léonard de Vinci à la cour de France*, Rennes, PUR 2019, pp. 197-198.

² P. Dan, *Le trésor des merveilles de la maison royale de Fontainebleau*, Paris, Sébastien Cramoisy 1642, p. 135.

³ This hypothesis is old; it has already been formulated by A.E. Hewett, *A Newly Discovered Portrait by Ambrogio de Pedris*, «The Burlington Magazine» February 1907 (10, n. 4), pp. 309-313, particularly p. 311.



1. Gian Cristoforo Romano, *Beatrice d'Este*, about 1489-1490, marble. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. ML10. © RMN Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre)/Stéphane Maréchal

duced around 1493-1495,⁴ as the stylistic analysis suggests, the young woman, who was born in 1475, would be shown around the age of twenty.

There are other portraits of Beatrice d'Este, including the bust sculpted by Gian Cristoforo Romano around 1489-1490, possibly after the preparation of the marriage contract with il Moro (fig. 1).⁵ Yet, the marble, which is conserved in the Louvre (inv. ML10), maintains close links with the Leonardo's portrait.⁶ In addition, in 1877, Louis Courajod suggested attributing it to the Tuscan master!⁷ The women share common physiognomical traits (big eyes, a straight nose, round cheeks, a curved chin); both have Spanish hairstyles that Beatrice d'Este helped make popular in the court of Milan (gathered in a braid in a *coazzone*, their hair

⁴ L. Syson, L. Keith (eds.), *Leonardo da Vinci. Painter at the court of Milan*, exh. cat. (London, The National Gallery), London, National Gallery Company 2011, pp. 123-127, cat. 17 (entry by L. Syson); P.C. Marani, M.T. Fiorio, *Leonardo da Vinci 1452-1519. Il Disegno del mondo*, catalogo dell'esposizione (Milano Palazzo Reale), Milano, Skira 2015, pp. 528-529, cat. III. 6 (entry by P.C. Marani); C. Bambach, *Leonardo da Vinci rediscovered*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press 2019, vol. 1, p. 358.

⁵ V. Delieuevin, L. Frank (sous la direction de), *Léonard de Vinci*, catalogue de l'exposition (Paris, Musée du Louvre), Paris, Hazan 2019, p. 410, cat. 63 (entry by S. Tullio Cataldo).

⁶ A.E. Hewett, *A Newly Discovered Portrait by Ambrogio de Pedris*, cit., p. 311, later taken up by other scholars.

⁷ L. Courajod, *Conjectures à propos d'un buste en marbre de Béatrice d'Este au Musée du Louvre*, «Gazette des Beaux-Arts» 1877 (XVI, 2nd series), pp. 330-354.



2. Anonymous copy after Boccaccio Boccaccio?, *Beatrice d'Este*, about 1500-1510, metalpoint, pen and ink and wash on prepared paper. Firenze, Gallerie degli Uffizi, inv. 209F. © Gallerie degli Uffizi

held back from the head with a *cuffia* and a *lenza*);⁸ the decoration of the *sbernia* which covers one of the princess' shoulders in the marble and that of the *coazzzone* recall the embroidery that adorns the neckline of the dress painted by Leonardo. Finally – and perpetuating a suggestion made by Pietro C. Marani⁹ – we highlight the sculptural aspect of the master's work, which, in its composition, introduces a parapet. The presence of this parapet recalls the large marble pedestal. Could Leonardo have transposed the Gian Cristoforo Romano's bust into a painting, showing his long-established but still active interest in the subject of the «parallel of arts»?¹⁰

As already pointed out by Gigetta Dalli Regoli and Luke Syson, a drawing (fig. 2) – today conserved in the Gallerie degli Uffizi (inv. 209F) – supports the hypothesis of a portrait of Beatrice d'Este.¹¹ The work belonged to the collector

⁸ P. Venturelli, *La moda alla corte degli Sforza. Leonardo da Vinci tra creatività e tecnica*, Milano, Silvana Editoriale 2019, pp. 24-25.

⁹ P.C. Marani, *Léonard de Vinci, une carrière de peintre*, Paris, Actes Sud 1999, pp. 182-183.

¹⁰ It is likely that both men were in contact in Milan: in the notes accompanying the staging of *Danaé*, which appears on the drawing conserved at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (17.142.2v), Leonardo wrote «acrisio gio[n]cristofano», indicating that the role of Danaé's father (Acrisius) was played by Gian Cristofano, that is, undoubtedly Gian Cristoforo Romano.

¹¹ C. Pedretti, G. Dalli Regoli, *I disegni di Leonardo da Vinci e della sua cerchia nel Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe della Galleria degli Uffizi a Firenze*, Firenze, Giunti 1985, pp. 76-77, n. 26; L. Syson, L. Keith (eds.), *Leonardo da Vinci*, cit., pp. 126-127.

Sebastiano Resta;¹² he included it in *Trattenimenti pittorici*, a book of drawings offered in 1701 to Philip V of Spain (recently become governor of Milan), and he annotated it with an inscription identifying the woman depicted and its presumed author: «Beatrice Estense figlia d'Eleonora moglie del Moro 1491 presente in Milano sua madre con feste reali morì Duchessa 1497 11 gennaio» and «di Leonardo da Vinci che doppo Bramantino diede i maggiori lumi dell'Arte in Milano prima del 1500 cioè dalla morte di Gio. Galeazzo alla quale il Moro tornato dall'esilio si pose in figura di Presidente del Senato Guelfo e di tutore del figlio di Gio. Galeazzo poi Duca di Genova e sposata questa Beatrice sino alla fuga et esilio de Sforzi del 1500 che fu spazio d'anni tredici e partendo vi lasciò una bella Academia durata per molto tempo sino al tempo del Lomazzo cieco».¹³

Although the Uffizi drawing cannot be attributed to Leonardo, it undoubtedly depicts Beatrice d'Este, with *cuffia*, *lenza*, *coazzone* and *sbernia* on her shoulder. The work also testifies to the early fame of the *Portrait of a Woman*. In fact, the piece imitates the composition that the Tuscan adopted in his painting (the woman is also shown in the form of a bust, in three-quarter profile, her gaze focusing on the viewer). The elements of the Spanish hairstyle are also carefully reproduced, along with the ribbons that secure the removable sleeves to the *camorra*. However, the neckline of the dress and its front differ from those depicted in the master's portrait. The design of the jewel on her forehead, with a stone fixed to a quatrefoil base and enhanced with four pearls, is also more inventive than what we see in the Louvre piece.

A jewel comparable to the one depicted in the Uffizi piece appears in another earlier derivation of *Portrait of a Woman*. This is a large engraving, of which only two proofs have survived: one is kept at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (inv. Ea 32c res. Cl C 32663), the other at the British Museum in London (inv. 1845,0825.586, fig. 3).¹⁴ The work is not signed; due to its affinities with Lombard art from the end of the 15th century and, particularly, the presence of moiré effects and very fine crosshatching to mark shadows, Arthur M. Hind, Mark J. Zucker and Gisèle Lambert attributed it to Zoan Andrea,¹⁵

¹² F. Grisolia, «Vero lume»: il Leonardo e i Leonardo di padre Resta, «Horti Hesperidum» 2019 (IX, II), pp. 271-386, particularly p. 309.

¹³ I owe this transcription to Stefania Tullio Cataldo and I am endlessly grateful to her for it.

¹⁴ This print has been widely circulated, in Italy as well as north of the Alps. A niello print, attributed to the Lombard school, a proof of which is conserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (inv. Ea 27 res., p. 31 Cl. 96 A 74388), shows the model in front of a background decorated with plant motifs. An earthenware tile, conserved in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (BK-1967-141), is dated to around 1535. It is attributed to the workshop of Guido di Savino (or Guido Andries) who was originally from Castel Durante and moved to Antwerp in around 1508, where he became one of the main producers of majolica. A painting in a poor state of conservation and painted on a linden panel, a material favoured by German painters of the 15th and 16th centuries, is conserved at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (inv. 49.7.27).

¹⁵ A.M. Hind, *Early Italian Engraving. A critical catalogue with complete reproduction of all the prints described*, London, M. Knoedler 1948, V, pp. 91-92, n. 15; M.J. Zucker, *The Illustrated*



3. Anonymous artist, *Portrait of a woman (Beatrice d'Este?)*, about 1500-1510, engraving. London, The British Museum, inv. 1845,0825.586. © The British Museum

a personality sometimes identified with the engraver Giovanni Antonio da Brescia.¹⁶ This is very likely to date back to around 1500-1510. The engraving shares some similarities with the Uffizi piece (the presentation of the woman, one of whose hands can be seen, and the pattern on the jewel). However, it is very difficult to consider the piece belonging to Resta as the model on which the engraving is based. The *camora*, and particularly the foliage decor that enhances it, evokes the dress painted by Leonardo rather than the one that appears in the Uffizi drawing. A common source – undoubtedly the painting in the Louvre – is more likely.¹⁷ Nevertheless, finding such similar jewels in the engraving

Bartsch, 25 (Commentary) formerly volume 13 (part 2). *Early Italian Masters*, New York, Abaris Books 1984, no. 2509.026; G. Lambert, *Les premières gravures italiennes. Quattrocento, début du Cinquecento*, Paris, National Library of France 1999, p. 268, n. 520.

¹⁶ D. Landau, *Mantegna as printmaker*, in J. Martineau (ed.), *Andrea Mantegna*, exh. cat. (London, Royal Academy of Arts and New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), Milano, Electa 1992, p. 53.

¹⁷ Luke Syson already made this observation (Exh. Cat. London, 2011, p. 127, note 17), contrary to what was suggested until that point.

and the drawing should challenge us, since Leonardo's was considered to be of summary execution,¹⁸ even as a subsequent addition.¹⁹ A supplementary similarity between the Uffizi piece and the engraving also merits our attention. In both works, some strands of hair have escaped the hairstyle and form curls on the cheeks, unlike what we see in the Louvre portrait. They barely appear in the drawing; they are more marked and even represented with a certain ostentation in the engraving, which is sometimes associated with the work of Bartolomeo Veneto²⁰ on this basis alone. Yet, this detail appears distinctly in the bust by Gian Cristoforo Romano, which we are sure depicted Beatrice d'Este because the pedestal bears an inscription describing the daughter of Ercole d'Este as heavenly («divae beatrix d. herc. f»; «to the heavenly Beatrice, daughter of Duke Hercules»). In addition, such details are also found in other portraits of the princess, such as the one which adorns ms. add. 21413 of the British Library in London. This is attributed to Giovan Pietro Birago and dated to precisely 28 January 1494.

In the *Portrait of a Woman*, could Leonardo have also depicted Beatrice d'Este? Sources and old derivations of the tableau do not contradict such a hypothesis.

¹⁸ V. Delieuvin, M. Eveno, É. Ravaud, *Sur la récente restauration de la «Belle Ferronnière»*, in P.C. Marani, R. Maffei (eds.), *Leonardo da Vinci. Metodi e tecniche per la costruzione della conoscenza*, atti del convegno (Milano 2015), Busto Arsizio, Nomos Edizioni 2016, pp. 143-154, particularly p. 151; V. Delieuvin, L. Frank (sous la direction de), *Léonard de Vinci*, cit., p. 410, cat. 64 (entry by V. Delieuvin).

¹⁹ M. Hours, *Étude analytique des tableaux de Léonard de Vinci au laboratoire du musée du Louvre*, in *Leonardo. Saggi e ricerche*, a cura del Comitato Nazionale per le onoranze a Leonardo da Vinci nel Quinto Centenario della Nascita (1452-1952), Roma, Istituto poligrafico dello Stato 1954, pp. 15-25, particularly p. 23; P.C. Marani, M.T. Fiorio, *Leonardo da Vinci*, cit., p. 529.

²⁰ A.M. Hind, *Early Italian Engraving*, cit., p. 92 or M.J. Zucker, *The Illustrated Bartsch*, cit., n. 2509.026.