



Leonardo da Vinci's
Last Supper

for King Francis I; a masterpiece in gold and silk



CHÂTEAU DU CLOS LUCÉ

PARC LEONARDO DA VINCI

Exhibition from 7th June to 8th September 2019



An historic loan from the Vatican Museums

Barbara Jatta, Director of the Vatican Museums

The Vatican Museums are taking part in the fifth-centenary celebrations of Leonardo da Vinci's death during 2019 with various initiatives. This exhibition on the precious Vatican tapestry of The Last Supper at the Château de Clos Lucé in Amboise is perhaps the most representative of these but also of the multifaceted activities carried out today in the Vatican Museums, encompassing research, restoration and collaboration with various institutions at a range of levels. The papal museums thus pay tribute to Leonardo's genius.

It was a pleasure and an honour to enter into contact with the French institutions and thus resume a relationship that dates back to 1533, when the renowned tapestry, sumptuously woven in silk with silver and gold thread and a border of crimson velvet, was presented to Clement VII by François I of France on the occasion of the marriage of his son and heir Henry of Valois and the Pope's niece Catherine de' Medici. The ceremony was performed by Clement VII himself with all due pomp in Marseille in the autumn of 1533.

The tapestry, whose origin and provenance have been the object of hypotheses and conjectures, is still so shrouded in mystery that it has even proved impossible to identify the workshop involved. The connections with François I and his mother Louise of Savoy are, however, unquestionable due to the various heraldic and symbolic references to the pious sovereigns.

The succession of studies carried out on the work up to the present have kept interest alive in its manufacture and its artistic, chronological and stylistic relations with the famous and iconic work painted by Leonardo in the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. The tapestry is identical in size to the fresco and displays only a few iconographic differences.

One of the most precious tapestries in the pontifical collections again plays a leading part in artistic and cultural exchanges between the Vatican and France on the occasion of this exhibition, which regards events that took place in the first decades of the 16th century, a time of subtle political relations between the Church and the great reigning houses but also of solid professional and human ties between Leonardo and the French monarchs. The tapestry's return to France provides an opportunity to recount its history in the setting of a series of major works that shed light on the historical, artistic and personal context in which Leonardo lived and worked.

Pietro Marani's felicitous proposal to introduce the public to an important work that is still insufficiently known even though it hangs in the famous eighth room of the Pinacoteca Vaticana won immediate acceptance and set the Vatican machinery in motion. First of all, Alessandra Rodolfo, the tireless curator of the tapestries and fabrics department, supervised a long and delicate project of research (arriving at new and convincing explanations) and restoration involving a host of professionals in complex operations. This was made possible by the support of the management of the Château de Clos Lucé and the Polo Mostre di Palazzo Reale in Milan.

Chiara Pavan, head of the tapestries and fabrics restoration workshop, and her assistants Emanuela Pignataro, Laura Pace Morino and Viola Ceppetelli worked with skill and understanding from December 2017 to April 2019. This team of professionals has breathed new life into a wonderful tapestry reduced by its eventful past to a precarious state of preservation surprisingly similar to that of Leonardo's fresco.

The results now before our eyes are extraordinary as regards the work's chromatic renewal but also and above all the many new discoveries emerging from this complex undertaking. Examination of the back of the tapestry in connection with numerous questions raised over the last few decades and analysis of the yarns and pigments have offered some crucial answers about dating and manufacture. Excellent support for the project was provided by the Vatican scientific, research department.

Archival research made it possible to retrace the history of the Vatican tapestry. Recorded in the inventories of the Floreria Apostolica as early as 1536, it was immediately recognised as an extraordinary work and often employed by virtue of its nature in the life of the Papal Curia.

The crucial element of this exhibition is, however, the restoration of the tapestry and the new luminosity and visibility it has thus gained, which the management of the Vatican Museums wishes to dedicate to the memory of the late Natalia Maovaz, a great restorer of fabrics prevented only by her selfless generosity from using her skills on this precious work of art.

Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper for King Francis I; a masterpiece in gold and silk
Château du Clos Lucé - Parc Leonardo da Vinci, 7th June to 8th September 2019

● **Exhibition curator** ●

Pietro C. Marani, Professor of History of Modern Art at the Politecnico di Milano

● **Scientific Committee** ●

Pietro C. Marani

Luisa Cogliati Arano, Professor at the University of Pavia

François Saint Bris, President, Château du Clos Lucé

Romain Descendre, Professor of Italian Studies, École Normale Supérieure, UMR Triangle, Lyon

Laure Fagnart, Director of the "*Unité de recherches Transitions, Moyen Âge & première Modernité*" at the University of Liège

Maria Teresa Fiorio, Vice-president of the Ente Raccolta Vinciana, Milan

Nello Forti Grazzini, specialist on Renaissance Tapestries, Milan

Barbara Jatta, Director of the Vatican Museums, Vatican City

Alessandra Rodolfo, Curator of the Department of 17th-18th Century Art

and of the Department of Tapestries and Fabrics, Vatican Museums, Vatican City

Marino Viganò, Director, Fondazione Trivulzio, Milan

● **Restoration of the Last Supper tapestry** ●

Restorers at the Tapestries and Textiles Restoration Laboratory of the Vatican Museums:

Chiara Pavan

Emanuela Pignataro

Laura Pace Morino

Viola Ceppetelli

WHY THIS EXHIBITION?

500 years!

2 May 1519–2 May 2019: after five centuries and in commemoration of this special anniversary, the Presidents of France and Italy came to the Clos Lucé in Amboise to celebrate the “universal genius” and embodiment of knowledge and talent, that was Leonardo da Vinci. The ‘Immortal’ Da Vinci, who in the year we celebrate his genius, will shine the spotlight on his last residence, where he lived from 1516 to 1519, through a range of events including an exceptional exhibition designed around a prestigious work, exhibited for the first time outside the Vatican Museums and Italy.

The prestigious work in question is the Last Supper tapestry, a masterpiece in silk, gold and silver thread, finished with a velvet crimson border and representing the iconic mural painting painted by the Tuscan master between 1494 and 1498 on the wall of the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie Convent in Milan. The tapestry formed a link between France and Italy back in 1533 when King Francis I had it sent to Marseille to present it as a gift to Pope Clement VII of the de' Medici family to celebrate the marriage of his niece, Catherine de' Medici, to Henry of Valois, the king's son and heir to the throne.

Exhibited along with a collection of major works providing the historical, artistic and personal context of Da Vinci's time in Amboise, this pontifical treasure comes to the Clos Lucé and plays a leading role in the artistic and cultural exchanges between the Vatican and France.



Empoli, Jacopo da (Chimenti, Jacopo 1551-1640)
Wedding of Catherine of Medici and Henry II of France.
Florence, Galleri degli Uffizi.
Oil the canvas, 227 x 235 cm.
Inv. 1890 n°5470 (restored in 2007).
© 2019. Photo Scala, Florence

Caron Antoine (1521-1599)
Gifts exchange between Clément VII and François I in Marseille
RF29752-12-recto
Paris, musée du Louvre, D.A.G.
Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Michel Urtado



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

How to view the collection

In the magnificent Halle Eiffel in the heart of the Parc Leonardo da Vinci, the Chateau du Clos Lucé presents the monumental Last Supper tapestry and sheds light on different elements of the work.

The objects on display in the rooms off the main space explore the context of the masterpiece. Preceding the tapestry is a section exploring the relationship between the French court, Leonardo Da Vinci and his disciples, with the works of Andrea Solario, Andrea del Santo and Bernardino de Conti which were commissioned by prestigious members of the court. Another section explores the rich iconography of Francis I and his mother, Louise of Savoy, who commissioned the tapestry.

In further rooms, paintings, drawings, medals and gold and silverware evoke Da Vinci's works and their copies, his pupils, his fortune and his legacy through a multitude of documents and works of art from public and private collections such as the famous Ingres painting Francis I Receives the Last Breaths of Leonardo da Vinci.

The exhibition's showpiece is the presentation of the recent restoration of the tapestry in the workshops of the Vatican, a vital prerequisite for the tapestry before it could leave Italy for the first time in its five-hundred-year-old history.

Workshop of Jean Clouet
Portrait of Louise de Savoie,
mother of François I
after 1516-1518
Oil on panel,
22.6 × 17.7 cm
Toulouse,
Fondation Bemberg,



Pierre Révoil (1776-1842)
Portrait of François I (copy after Titian)
Early decades of the 19th century.
Oil on canvas, 81 × 65 cm
Private collection, Château du Clos Lucé



CONTRIBUTORS AND PARTNAIRS

- Vatican Museums, Roma •
- National archives of Florence, Florence •
- Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris •
- Bibliotheca Ambrosiana, Milan •
- Château Royal de Blois, Blois •
- Ente Raccolta Vinciana, Milan •
- Trivulzio Fondation, Milan •
- Bemberg Fondation, Toulouse •
- Uffizi Gallery, Florence •
- Giulio Melzi d'Eril, private collection •
- Marco Brunelli, private collection, Milan •
- Civic Museums, Pavie •
- Chambéry Museums, city of Chambéry •
- Musée du Louvre, Paris •
- Saint-Vic Museum, Saint-Amand-Montrond •

Silk, Silver and Gold threads, the Enigma of The Last Supper tapestry

Although the Last Supper tapestry, which has always been frequently exhibited, has been restored several times over its long history, it was in a precarious state before its recent restoration, renewing its colours and restoring its original splendour. The exhibition sheds light on the delicate restoration work and precious revelations that it uncovered.

The tapestry, whose provenance and origin has been the object of speculations and assumptions holds a great many more secrets, including which workshop it was made in, probably in Flanders. The relationship with Francis I and his mother, Louise of Savoy, is unquestionable due to the various heraldic and symbolic references linked to them.

A study of the back of the tapestry and analysis of the threads and colour pigments have provided crucial information about the date and manufacture of the tapestry. Woven after Francis I had ascended the throne, it dates to between 1516 and 1524. It is not known who had the arduous task of creating the cartoon for the tapestry. The artist who copied Da Vinci's Last Supper could have been one of the artists who worked at the French court, it could even have been Da Vinci himself.

The tapestry displays clear references to Da Vinci's drawings, his knot patterns and his landscape sketches of Italy and France. The anonymous tapestry hangs in the new Pinacoteca Vaticana together with masterpieces by Raphael.

Thus, from the outset, an iconographic reading of the work has enabled scholars to connect the commissioning of the tapestry with the mother and son, and to suggest a date prior to François I's ascent to the throne (1515). This is based on the fact that the salamanders are not crowned, but above all on the theory that the addition cited in the document of 1533 refers to the royal coat of arms.

Thus it was thought that the work was executed before 1515 during the reign of Louis XII, an ardent admirer of Leonardo's work, so much so that, according to sources, he wanted to find a way of bringing to France the mural painting of The Last Supper he had seen during his visit to Milan in 1499.

The hypothesis regarding the later addition of the coat of arms could only be verified by examining the back of the tapestry, which was made possible during recent restoration. This proved, however, that the coat of arms was in actual fact part of the original design, since the weaving showed no signs of any additions.

Therefore, the tapestry was woven after 1515, the year François ascended the throne. Moreover, further confirmation of this is the double string of the collar of the Order of Saint Michael, surrounding the coat of arms.

In fact, shortly after ascending the throne, in one of the first meetings of the Order held in Blois in September 1516, he decided to modify the collar of the Order by replacing the original aiguillettes linking the shells with a double string of knots, thus evoking the Franciscan cord and the maternal House of Savoy, just as it appears in the tapestry.

Alessandra Rodolfo, Curator of the Department of 17th-18th Century Art and of the Department of Tapestries and Fabrics, Vatican Museums, Vatican City

A visual language of Italy and France

Considered the oldest full reproduction among the most renowned Italian compositions, it is an impressive size (5m X 9m) and its weft displays sophisticated technical prowess. This spectacular tapestry was discovered for the first time in France during an inventory at the Château of Blois of the textiles selected to be sent to Marseille. The main scene of Christ and his twelve disciples sitting at the table is copied with remarkable precision, however the background of Da Vinci's iconic work is represented differently on the tapestry. The sober and austere architecture that surrounds the banquet is replaced by Renaissance-style architecture. The background appears to represent the visual language of Italy and France, with touches here and there of Flemish influences where the tapestry was probably woven.

Often used in papal ceremonies, the tapestry was exhibited during celebrations at the Vatican such as the washing of feet on Maundy Thursday. It was also exhibited during special events— twice in 1929 in Saint Peter's Square for a Eucharistic procession of reconciliation, and again in the Belvedere courtyard to welcome the Catholic youth association in the heart of the new Vatican City State.

Studies carried out on the work up to now have kept the interest alive for its manufacture and its artistic, chronological and stylistic connections with the iconic Da Vinci mural painting. A tribute from the papal museums to the genius of Leonardo da Vinci, the exhibition of this masterpiece at the Clos Lucé is one of the highlights of this year's anniversary celebrating an immortal genius.

*Coat of arms
of the king of France*



*Monogram
of Louise de Savoie*



*The Salamander
emblem of François I*



14 month's work

Before restoration began, the Last Supper tapestry underwent a detailed preliminary analysis to assess how well it had been conserved. The purpose of this was to devise the most appropriate restoration method to avoid placing too much strain on the work.

Because it was in such a precarious state, a methodology drawing on **a specific conservation protocol** was put into place. At the same time, the Vatican Museums' Scientific Research lab carried out diagnostic tests, in particular on the central scene. Infra-red and ultra-violet investigations were carried out on it to better identify the type of dyes that had been used.

These analyses led to a purely **mechanical dry cleaning**, with the entire surface of the tapestry being "vacuumed". Then, a substantial layer of particles, which were obscuring the colours of the scene, were removed. This operation was carried out by placing protective netting over the tapestry to prevent any loss of material. This was monitored with the help of filters capable of controlling the eliminated grime.

To rehydrate the dried fibres, the restorers decided to carry out a **controlled humidification** of the whole surface. For this operation, a PVC sheet was laid out on the ground, on top of which was placed a cotton sheet, dampened with pH-neutral, deionised water, before the tapestry was laid on it. Natural sponges, dampened with the same water, were used to sponge the front of the work so as to remove surface dirt and restore the brightness of its colours.

The tapestry was then wrapped round two rollers and placed on tables so that **fragile parts could be strengthened** with running stitches sewn in fine thread and using a surgical needle. The sandwich technique was used. This textile restoration method consists of placing the work between two pieces of cloth; one serves as a support so as to secure the work, and the other is sewn onto the work so as to protect it. In this case, the lining that was already there was used as the support cloth. For protection, a nylon mesh, with its special honeycomb structure, fulfilled all the essential requirements of transparency, softness and elasticity. Placed so as to protect the most damaged parts of the tapestry, this mesh was shaped and tinted to fit each different spot where it was used. **The dyes used for the mesh were researched so that they would bring out the colours in the tapestry, enabling restorers to recover part of the original palette. In all, some 30 colour recipes were created.**

A different type of intervention was chosen for the tablecloth which was particularly badly damaged by rips, tears and disintegration. Reinforcement in silk organzine, dyed the same colour as the fragments to be restored, were inserted where needed. These supports were stitched in place using silk thread of the appropriate colour. In this case too, in order to add extra protection to the whole surface, it was judged essential to cover the affected area with crepline fabric, again stitched in place with silk thread. A gentle adhesive with the right degree of elasticity, adherence and reversibility was used.

The final operation consisted of **creating a lining in very light cotton**, using the lozenge technique. This allows for the most even distribution of weight and tension as possible when the work is hung.

Chiara Pavan,

Tapestries and Textiles Restoration Laboratory manager,
Vatican Museums, Vatican City

Upper left: Application of Klucel G adhesive

Upper right: Choosing different colored meshes

Detail: seam

Behind the restoration inside Tapestries and Textiles Restoration Laboratory, Vatican Museums

Photo © Gouvernorat du S.C.V. - Direction of Vatican Museums



PIETRO C. MARANI

Exhibition curator,

Professor of History of Modern Art at the Politecnico di Milano

Full Professor in Modern Art History, he teaches Modern Art History and Museology in the Politecnico of Milan. Member of the Design Ph.D Professor Team. He has been Director of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Artistici e Storici and Vice-Director of the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, co-Director of the restoration campaign of Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper.

He is President of the Ente Raccolta Vinciana, founded 1904, in the Castello Sforzesco, Milan. He was member of the Commissione Nazionale Vinciana, founded 1903, in Rome, and now member of the National Committee for the celebration of the anniversary of Leonardo's death (1519-2019).

He has written more than two-hundred essays and books on Leonardo da Vinci, Francesco di Giorgio Martini, the Lombard artists of the Renaissance: Ambrogio Bergognone, Bramantino, Bernardino Luini, and on the painting and the architecture of Italian Renaissance, and, finally, on problems of museology and restoration.

He collaborated to the catalogue of the works of art preserved in Milanese Museums: Pinacoteca di Brera, Pinacoteca del Castello Sforzesco, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Quadreria dell'Arcivescovado. He was the curator of the catalogue of paintings kept in the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum, and of the works of art in the Certosa Museum, Pavia (with B.Fabjan). He has published the Catalogue of the Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci and His Circle kept in French Public Museums (2008). He has collaborated to the two important exhibitions devoted to Leonardo Drawings and manuscripts held in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (2003) and in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (2003).

He has organized and curated various exhibitions in many important cities (Montreal, Musée des Beaux-arts; Venice, Palazzo Grassi; Milan, Palazzo Reale; Milan, Castello Sforzesco; Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera; Florence, Palazzo Pitti; Rome, Palazzo del Quirinale; Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana; Rome, Musei Capitolini; Florence, Casa Buonarroti; Tokyo, The Art Museum). Some of his books are translated in eight languages. He was the curator (with M.T.Fiorio) of the Milan Palazzo Reale Show "Leonardo da Vinci 1452-1519. The Design of the World" held in 2015 at the occasion of the Universal Exhibition.

BARBARA JATTA

Director of the Vatican Museums

Barbara Jatta was born in Rome on 6 October 1962, has been married to Fabio Midulla since July 1988 and has three children: Marco, Fabiola and Giorgio.

She obtained a degree in Letters, with a thesis on the History of drawing, engraving and graphics, in 1986 from the "La Sapienza" University of Rome, and concluded a three-year specialist course in History of Art at the same institution in 1991. She undertook several specialist internships in England, Portugal and the United States.

From 1981 to 1996 she collaborated with the National Institute for Graphic Design, working first as a restorer of graphic materials and then on the cataloguing of the Institute's portfolios of drawings, engravings, woodcuts and lithographs. From the 1990s to the present day she has taught at various institutions and on specialist courses. From 1994 to 2016 she ran the course on the History of techniques and graphic arts at the Faculty of Letters at the "Suor Orsola Benincasa" University of Naples, where since 2014 she has also served as a member of the managing board of the Pagliara Foundation.

From 1996 to 2016 she was the director of the Cabinet of Prints at the Vatican Apostolic Library, where she was also a member of the Exhibitions, Accessions, Acquisitions, Publishing and Cataloguing commissions.

On 8 September 2010 she was appointed by the Holy Father Benedict XVI as Curator of Prints at the Vatican Apostolic Library. In 2005 she was co-opted into the Gruppo dei Romanisti.

From 2010 to 2016 she was a full member of the International Advisory Committee of Keepers of Public Collections of Graphic Art, the international association of Directors of Cabinets of drawings and prints. Since 2010 she has served as a member of the Scientific Committee of the journal Grafica d'Arte.

She has collaborated in and personally organised several exhibitions and has participated in numerous publishing initiatives in the field of the history of graphics and art.

After being appointed on 15 June 2016, as Deputy Director of the Vatican Museums, from 1 January 2017 she was called by Pope Francis to guide the papal collections in the role of Director of the Vatican Museums.

THE EXHIBITION

With the financial support of the Région Centre – Val de Loire

EXHIBITION CURATOR

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SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

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CONTRIBUTORS AND LENDING MUSEUMS

Blois, château royal de Blois

Chambéry City, collection of Chambéry museums

Vatican City, Vatican museums

Florence, National archives of Florence

Florence, Uffizi Gallery

Milan, Vénérable Bibliothèque Ambrosienne

Milan, Ente Raccolta Vinciana

Milan, Fondation Trivulzio

Paris, musée du Louvre, Department of Prints and Drawings

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France

Pavia, Civici museum

Saint-Amand-Montrond, Saint-Vic museum

Toulouse, Fondation Bemberg

Milan, Marco Brunelli, private collection

Pavie, Giulio Melzi D'Eril, private collection

RESTORATION OF THE LAST SUPPER TAPESTRY, Restorers at the Tapestries and Textiles Restoration Laboratory of the Vatican Museums:

Chiara Pavan

Emanuela Pignataro

Laura Pace Morino

Viola Ceppetelli

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TEXTS

Jean-Luc Péchinot, journalist

SCENOGRAPHY

Arc-en-Scène, Anne Carles and Anabelle Jeanne, set design

Cécile Philibert, graphic design

Version Bronze, socleur

Boscher, imprimeur

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Under the direction of **Pietro C. Marani** and edited by Skira editions (Milano/Genève). It is composed of 248 pages, with unpublished essays by academic experts, specialist in Leonardo da Vinci Work, and a detailed records about the tapestry's restoration.

Those scientific research and studies are improving knowledges about Leonardo da Vinci Work and life.

AUTHORS OF THE ESSAYS: Romain Descendre, Laure Fagnart, Maria Teresa Fiorio, Barbara Jatta, Pietro C. Marani, Roberta Ramella, Alessandra Rodolfo, Jan Sammer, Marino Viganò

AUTHORS OF THE CATALOGUE ENTRIES: Rosalba Antonelli, Paola Cordera, Pietro C. Marani, Giulio Melzi d'Eril, Alessandra Rodolfo, Jan Sammer, Marco Versiero

LEONARDO DA VINCI AT THE CHÂTEAU DU CLOS LUCÉ (1516-1519)

The Renaissance, a vast intellectual, artistic and humanist movement, born in Italy and Flanders, established the return to the founding sources of Greek and Roman antiquity and then spread throughout Europe. It reached France under the successive dynastic reign of three French kings from 1494 to 1547. Fascinated by Italy, the Valois sovereigns constantly crossed the Alps by inviting artisans, artists and architects to come to them, bringing from their lands over the mountains new techniques and art collections in order to build and embellish towns, chateaux and gardens and to promote a new art of living.

Great discoveries, massively bringing the gold and spices of the new world, thereby contributed to the prosperity and rapid development of the whole of Europe. Amboise then became the cradle of the French Renaissance.

François I, King of France, entranced by Leonardo da Vinci's multiple talents, invited him to reside near him in France at the Château du Clos Lucé. He crossed the Alps with his disciples Francesco Melzi, his favourite, and Battista de Villanis, his loyal Milanese servant. In his luggage, he brought with him three of his major works: *Mona Lisa*, *St. John the Baptist* and *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne*, as well as his manuscripts and notes accumulated throughout his life, to settle in the 'Château du Cloux', now called the Château du Clos Lucé.

The twenty-year-old monarch, crowned with the glory of his victory at the Battle of Marignano, named him "first painter, engineer and architect to the King". He granted him the use of his royal residence, complemented by a princely pension of 1000 gold ecus per year. The king offered him generous funds and, along with his court, showered him with steadfast affection. He had an almost filial admiration for the artist, and called him "my father," never spending a day in Amboise without paying him a visit.

It was hence at the Clos Lucé that started the French history of three of Leonardo da Vinci's masterpieces, which would join the royal collections before being held at the Musée du Louvre. The fascination felt by François I for these masterpieces and especially for the Last Supper, had already taken shape under the ascendancy of his mother, Louise de Savoie.

It fell within the continuity of the admiration and passion that the Tuscan master inspired, and the cultural and artistic influence he had exercised over three French kings – Charles VIII, Louis XII and François I – thereby establishing an exceptional bond between Leonardo da Vinci, France and Italy, during the brilliant period of the Renaissance.

During these last years at the Clos Lucé (1516–1519), Leonardo da Vinci remained very active and was engaged in many projects. Artist to the court, he introduced himself as the "pittore del Re", painter to the King, and, in his Clos Lucé workshops, added the finishing touches to the works he brought with him, including *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne* and *St. John the Baptist*.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Study for Saint Anne*
1517 - 1518 © Paris, musée du Louvre, D.A.G

Borders:

Leonardo da Vinci, *floods*

1518 - 1519

Royal library Windsor castle

The Royal Collection © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

As an engineer and architect, Leonardo da Vinci worked tirelessly on several major town planning and **hydraulic projects** that were the subject of royal commissions. On horseback, he undertook **several studies into the region's hydrography**. He drew up maps of the basins of the Loire, Cher, Saône and the l'Île d'Or in Amboise. He imagined a structuring project for the kingdom, which consisted of **linking the Loire Valley to Lyon by a network of canals and locks in order to reach Italy** more easily. He planned to drain the insalubrious swamps of the Sologne and designed pavilions that could be dismantled for the constantly moving court. For the king, he conceived an **architectural project of a huge and grandiose palace** and the plans for an ideal city, in Romorantin, the kingdom's new capital, "a new Rome". **He probably inspired the architecture of Chambord** through two fundamental concepts: the centred cruciform architectural plan and the double helix staircase. As an **organiser of festivities for the king and his court**, he staged no less than four sumptuous celebrations, including the 'Fête du Paradis' (Festa del Paradiso), which he held at the "Palazzo del Cloux" on 17 June 1518. He designed stage costumes and mastered the art of special effects. And he conceived an equestrian statue project for François I.

Leonardo da Vinci said: "As a well-spent day brings happy sleep, a well-spent life brings happy death." On 23 April 1519, just before Easter, considering the certainty of his death and uncertainty of its hour, Leonardo dictated his will, written down by Guillaume Boureau, notary to the Royal Court. On 2 May 1519, deeming that "No being ends in nothing", he died at the Clos Lucé at the age of 67. Francesco Melzi, his disciple and legatee, wrote to the artist's brothers: "*He departed present life on the second day of May with all the sacraments of the Holy Mother church and well prepared.*" Leonardo da Vinci at last knew the plenitude of light and joined "*the operator of so many wonderful things*".



Leonardo da Vinci's death:

Paris, musée du Louvre, D.A.G. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Thierry Le Mage

Benvenuto Cellini later recounted the profound esteem and the huge admiration Leonardo inspired in François I, for whom there existed no "*other man born in the world who knew as much as Leonardo da Vinci did about sculpture, painting and architecture, such a great philosopher was he*".

Was François I beside the artist's deathbed, as Vasari wrote, or in Saint Germain en Laye where the court celebrated the birth of his second son, the future Henri II? The fact will probably always remain uncertain and contested.

Faithful to his last wishes, Leonardo's body was buried in the Collégiale Saint Florentin crypt within the Château Royal d'Amboise. The funeral procession consisted of canons, chaplains, nuns and Friars Minor, escorted by 60 mendicants carrying torches.

The crypt was devastated during the religious wars and the tombs were desecrated and pillaged. The Collégiale Saint Florentin was demolished in 1807, as was a large part of the Amboise fortress, by its owner Roger Ducos, a former member of the Convention who had become a dignitary under the Second Empire. Initial excavations were undertaken in 1863 by the historian Arsène Houssaye, Inspecteur Général des Beaux-Arts. These excavations revealed a stone coffin and fragments of the grave with bones presumed to be those of Leonardo da Vinci, which were transferred in 1874 to the Saint Hubert chapel of the Château Royal d'Amboise.

The Tuscan master now lies there for eternity.



LEONARDO DA VINCI, THE MYTH

The myth construction

According to the work of Paola Cordera for the catalogue *Leonardo da Vinci and France*.

In the 19th century, Leonardo da Vinci was the most popular and admired of all the Italian artists who had worked at the court of the Valois kings in France in the 16th century. This popularity grew during a revival of the “Golden Age” which was particularly strong in France, at a time when nostalgia for the monarchy created a myth of the country’s history and past splendour.*

🌀 **1568:** In his collection of biographies, *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, Giorgio Vasari was the first to memorialise the life and work of da Vinci, an artist - scientist who became an icon.

🌀 **1781:** The paintings of François-Guillaume Ménégoz (1744-1816), Joseph-Marie Vien (1716-1809), Jean Gigoux (1806-1894) and Joseph-Nicolas Robert-Fleury, (1797-1890) and the 1818 work of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Francis I Receives the Last Breaths of Leonardo da Vinci*, contributed to the construction of a myth that was widely celebrated in the iconography of the 19th century.

In literature, Arsène Houssaye (1814-1896), author of *History of Leonardo da Vinci*, published in 1869, Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire with their use of rich symbolism confirmed the trend. Leonardo da Vinci was portrayed as a “superhuman” with extraordinary skills and knowledge.

🌀 **Late 19th century:** The twelve manuscripts by Leonardo da Vinci which had been kept at the library of the Institut de France since 1796 were translated, offering a scientific, historical, and realistic interpretation of the figure of the artist.

🌀 **20th century:** Paul Valéry in his *Introduction to the method of Leonardo da Vinci* discussed the link between the scientist and artist, inventor and creator . Sigmund Freud provided his own study of the artist’s personality in *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*. The myth came in for some debunking at the hands of the surrealist painters, Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia. Leonardo da Vinci continues to be admired, interpreted and sometimes even hijacked, from Andy Warhol to Dan Brown, a trend that is sure to continue in 2020 in Leonardo DiCaprio’s upcoming biopic based on the novel by Walter Isaacson.



Francesco Melzi, *Leonardo da Vinci's portrait*, 27.5 x 19 cm, c.1515-18
© Photo Royal Collection Trust



Leonardo da Vinci *Vitruvian man*
Inv. 228,
© Venice, Gallerie dell'Academia



Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*
© Paris, Musée national d'Art moderne

Transmettre l'héritage de Léonard de Vinci La mission d'une famille

The Château du Clos Lucé, Leonardo da Vinci's residence, is intended to be a place of reference and synthesis dedicated to knowledge about Leonardo da Vinci and to the interpretation of his œuvre. In 1854-1855, the Saint Bris family acquired the Domaine du Clos Lucé. In 1954, one hundred years later, Hubert Saint Bris and Agnès Saint Bris passionately tackled a new adventure and made the decision to open Leonardo da Vinci's house entirely to the largest public. They devoted themselves to restoring this home, stone by stone, with assistance from the artisans of the Monuments Historiques, fashioning stone, wood and stained glass in the same way as their ancestors from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in order to give the building the character it had during Leonardo's time, during the dazzling period of the Renaissance.

In 2016, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the artist's arrival at the Clos Lucé, Leonardo's workshops were restored and reconstructed in the spirit of a Renaissance bottega. **Since then, the Saint Bris family, honouring the Château du Clos Lucé's vocation, has pursued its cultural mission of passing on the heritage, memory and knowledge of Leonardo da Vinci in the actual place where he lived.**

The Clos Lucé project for the 2020–2030 decade is to create a new cultural hub in the Domaine, an “international research centre of Leonardo da Vinci, the Renaissance and the 21st century.” **The goal of the family's cultural undertaking is to show the range of Leonardo's knowledge in a space that is unique in the world so that our visitors discover in a single journey and site Leonardo da Vinci's entire universe.** This will be a definite stage in the life of the Clos Lucé and its development.

Like a new breath, a new impetus towards the future...

Leonardo da Vinci embodies the archetype of the Renaissance man who was capable of carrying out the perfect synthesis between arts and sciences. Five hundred years after his death, Leonardo has attained immortality and eternity. He is at once very current, very present and very modern. He is the man of every talent and all knowledge. Leonardo da Vinci tackles all areas of knowledge.

Through his protean and multidisciplinary œuvre, he achieved universality.





1519 - 2019

Commemorations
of the 500th anniversary
of

Leonardo da Vinci
at the
Château du Clos Lucé



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Val de Loire entre
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inscrit sur la Liste du
patrimoine mondial en 2000



DOMAINE DE CHANTILLY

