

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: UOA30
Title of case study: Defining authenticity in the work of Leonardo da Vinci
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Martin Kemp's research on Leonardo da Vinci has had a significant impact on the presentation of cultural heritage. Combining scientific approaches and connoisseurship, his research – presented both in academic works and through books written for a general audience – has received a high level of publicity and garnered a large and wide-ranging following. In turn, this prominence has influenced professional practice in relation to the authentication of artwork and the public understanding of the various issues surrounding artistic authenticity, as well as having a potentially significant effect on the commercial value of specific works.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>A key strand in the research carried out by Martin Kemp over thirty years – including the whole period of his work as Professor of the History of Art, University of Oxford, from 1995-2007 and since then as Emeritus Professor of the History of Art – relates to the pioneering use of scientific examination in the study of Leonardo's work, leading to new insights into the artist's working practices not available to previous generations of scholars. Kemp's work has dealt innovatively with the relationship between scientific models of nature and the theory and practice of art, primarily involving the sciences of optics, anatomy, and natural history, all of which are key themes in Leonardo's own work.</p> <p>The six outputs listed below, which constitute a fraction of Kemp's scholarship on Leonardo (28 publications in the period 1995 to 2013), are selected for their relationship to key research insights and findings. These include how scientific data, with its techniques of precision, can be integrated with other forms of evidence of varying status, ranging from documentation to judgement by eye, along with historical and contextual studies of the milieu in which Leonardo was employed and in which he created his works. The scientific techniques used to advance understanding of the techniques and practices prevalent in Leonardo's workshop and in Italian Renaissance art more broadly include pigment analysis, infrared reflectography, multispectral scanning, and X-radiography. In order to better understand the integration of practice and theory in artistic production of the past, such research has been supplemented by experimental reconstructions of works of art and engineering by Leonardo using contemporary materials and computer modelling.</p> <p>Specific uses of these scientific methods include Kemp arguing for the authenticity as an autograph work by Leonardo da Vinci of a drawing on vellum, previously unknown to scholarship, which made its appearance in the art market in 1998. Kemp was responsible for the nickname of this work as 'La Bella Principessa', and for its subsequent identification as a portrait of Bianca Sforza, daughter of Ludovico Sforza, Lord of Milan, and his mistress, Bernardina de Corradis. His work on the subject was published, with co-author Pascal Cotte (Lumiere Technology, Paris) as <i>La Bella Principessa: The Story of the New Masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci</i> in English (London, 2010) and Italian (Florence, 2012). More broadly, the research listed below provides a full understanding for the first time of the ways in which Leonardo combined individual visual observations with abstract diagrams, and balanced the conflicting claims of ancient authorities with personal sensory experience.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>Martin Kemp, <i>Behind the Picture: Art and Evidence in the Italian Renaissance</i> (New Haven and London Yale University Press, 1997) [Reviewed: <i>Leonardo</i>, 32.1 (1999), pp. 71-2; <i>Renaissance Quarterly</i>, 21.1 (1999), pp. 207-20]. [Available upon request]</p>

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Martin Kemp, “Your Humble and Faithful Servant”: Towards a History of Leonardo da Vinci in his Contexts of Employment’, *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 140 (2002), pp. 181-94 (French art history journal).

Martin Kemp, ‘Die Zeichen lesen: Zur graphischen Darstellung von physischer und mentaler Bewegung in den Manuskripten Leonardos’, in F. Fehrenbach ed., *Leonardo da Vinci. Natur im Übergang: Beiträge zu Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* (Munich, 2002), pp. 207-26 (Wilhelm Fink Verlag, major German academic press). [Available through EBSCOhost using institutional login]

Martin Kemp, ‘Drawing the Boundaries’, in C. Bambach ed., *Leonardo da Vinci, Master Draftsman* (New Haven and London, 2003), pp. 141-54 (Yale University Press, major university press) [Available upon request]

Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci: Experience, Experiment and Design*, catalogue of exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum (London and Princeton, 2006) [Reviewed: *Renaissance Quarterly*, 61.3 (2008), pp. 921-22; *Isis*, 101.3 (2010), pp. 618-22]. [Available upon request]

Pascal Cotte and Martin Kemp, *La Bella Principessa: The Story of the New Masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci* in English (London, 2010) and Italian (Florence, 2012) (published by Hodder and Stoughton, major trade/academic press). [Available upon request]

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Known internationally as a Leonardo expert, Kemp has had a wide influence on public and professional understanding of the historical, contextual, and scientific issues which surround matters of artistic authenticity. His findings have played a role in decisive interventions on issues relating to Leonardo works, most notably: the two prime versions of the ‘Madonna of the Yarnwinder’, one of which is currently in the National Gallery of Scotland and was exhibited in the 2012 National Gallery exhibition ‘Leonardo da Vinci: Painter of the Court of Milan’; the ‘Salvator Mundi’, fully revealed in the press for the first time by Kemp and exhibited publicly in the 2012 National Gallery exhibition; and the newly-discovered ‘La Bella Principessa’, an object of ongoing research and debate which Kemp, both in his book (with Pascale Cotte) *La Bella Principessa* and in a National Geographic film, argues is the portrait of Bianca Sforza cut from a vellum book in the National Library in Warsaw. The significance of this work should not be underestimated: the ‘Salvator Mundi’ and ‘La Bella Principessa’ are the first major discoveries of new art works by Leonardo since the early twentieth century to achieve a significant degree of scholarly support.

Contributing to the development of professional practice

Kemp’s research on Leonardo da Vinci has set new standards in the controversial area of the authentication of works by this major figure. The art dealer Robert Simon, responsible for the sale of the newly-authenticated Leonardo painting of ‘Salvator Mundi, has acknowledged, ‘I have had the opportunity to discuss many issues of Leonardo scholarship with Prof. Kemp – both involving the “Salvator Mundi” and not. He has been unfailingly generous in sharing his knowledge and expertise and my own research has benefitted greatly from that [...] Leonardo scholarship is a world unto itself – with an immense literature and a significant, perhaps dominant component being concerned with scientific and literary matters, as opposed to purely visual ones. In this regard Prof. Kemp’s broad knowledge across many fields has provided a depth of understanding to Leonardo studies that many have experienced through his writings and lectures and that I have been privileged to enjoy personally.’^[1] The freelance art historian Peter Silverman has further attested, ‘Prof Martin Kemp has played an absolutely vital and determining role in researching and authenticating the chalk on vellum drawing by Leonardo da Vinci representing Bianca Sforza – now universally known as the Bella Principessa [...] Without his brilliant insights and courageous intervention the world would be one Leonardo poorer.’^[2] The editor of ARTnews, Milton Esterow, confirms, ‘Martin Kemp is one of the world’s most respected experts on Leonardo. He was one of a number of distinguished scholars involved in the attribution of Salvator Mundi. I believe he was responsible for much of the research behind the attribution of La Bella Principessa. Whether you agree with him or not you must take his opinions very seriously.’^[3]

Increasing public understanding of historical, contextual and scientific issues surrounding artistic authenticity

Kemp's research interests a huge public audience of exhibition- and gallery-goers, television viewers, readers, artists, and students as much as academics. The translation of the research through books written for a general audience, and the corresponding high degree of controversy and media attention surrounding the claimed identification of a new work by Leonardo, have had a wide impact on public understanding of the historical, contextual, and scientific issues which surround matters of artistic authenticity.

His research has resulted in a large number of public outputs in forms other than conventional publication, including major exhibitions, the Universal Leonardo programme funded by Bill Gates and the Council of Europe, and a comprehensive online portal for research on Leonardo funded by the Niarchos Foundation <http://www.universalleonardo.org/>. The longer-term impact of the initiative was the major public conference on the scientific examination of Leonardo's painting held in 2012: *Leonardo da Vinci's Technical Practice: Paintings, Drawings and Influence – CHARISMA Conference* (organised jointly by the National Gallery, Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France (C2RMF) and the British Museum).

Claimed identifications of new Leonardo works are not unknown; however, Kemp's reputation as the major researcher on Leonardo's work in the English-speaking world resulted in a high degree of media and public attention upon the announcement of the research into 'La Bella Principessa', widening the demand for and understanding of the processes behind authentication. With the initial announcement of the discovery in October 2009, coverage in the UK media greatly outstripped that for a normal art world authenticity debate, and included pieces on the BBC News website, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*.^[i] Many follow-up stories ensued as the debate amongst experts increased and further findings (such as the source book for the drawing) supporting Kemp's argument came to light. Alongside continued coverage in *The Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph*, there was international coverage in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Corriere della Sera* and *The New York Post*.^[ii] Extended pieces containing interviews with Kemp, as well as detailed background to the methods of authentication appeared in *The New Yorker* and on Artinfo.com.^[iii] Numerous art blog sites also picked up on both the debate and the methods used for authentication, including *Vivante Drawings* and *3 Pipe Problem*; these pieces in turn provoked discussion and comment among followers of these blogs.^[iv]

The case of 'La Bella Principessa' was picked up in 2012 by the National Geographic, who published an article ("A Lady with a Secret") and produced a television documentary (*Mystery of a Masterpiece*) as part of the NOVA series shown on PBS in the US and then syndicated to ARTE as *Léonard de Vinci: l'énigme de "La Belle Princesse"* in France and *Leonardo da Vinci: Das Geheimnis der schönen Prinzessin* in Germany. In the US, the program was one of the top five rated NOVA programs of the year, seen by roughly 5 million people; it is now available to buy on DVD.^[v] The senior executive producer, John Bredar, confirms Kemp's role in the production as 'integral to the program. Though he had no ownership or financial interest in the drawing, his academic interest served as the guiding force in the investigation as to the authenticity of the work. Kemp's experience and research background underpinned a classic hunch about the drawing, though true to his high standard of inquiry and research, even after the discovery of compelling evidence in the national library of Poland, Professor Kemp remained somewhat skeptical [sic] of the authenticity of the drawing.' The director, David Murdock, also felt Kemp's 'participation was absolutely essential for making the film. It simply could not have been made without him. He provided the expertise, the experience, the detective skills, and the eloquence crucial to telling the story'.^[4]

Through these forms of dissemination, issues and debates surrounding the scientific, historical, and contextual factors relating to the authenticity of individual artworks have reached a broad audience and had a considerable impact on the presentation of these facets of cultural heritage. All three works investigated by Kemp – 'Salvator Mundi', 'Madonna of the Yarnwinder', and 'La Bella Principessa' – are now much better known to the public. The Madonna of the Yarnwinder has

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remained a focus of attention at the National Gallery of Scotland, with Professor Kemp giving a lecture on the painting there on 23 February 2011 to a sell-out audience of 200. The 'Salvator Mundi' and 'Madonna of the Yarnwinder' were included in the major National Gallery exhibition *Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan*, which ran from 9 November 2011 to 5 February 2012 and was visited by 323,897 people.[vi] The justification for inclusion of the 'Salvator Mundi' was discussed by Kemp in an article in *Nature*, whilst the exclusion of La 'Bella Principessa' was examined by *The Daily Telegraph*. [vii]

Informing commercial valuations of artworks

All three examples of Leonardo artwork discussed here remain controversial to a degree, and the authentications are not accepted by all scholars. Their authenticity is of enormous commercial importance. 'La Bella Principessa' has been the subject of a court case in New York brought by the previous owner, and now settled out of court by Christie's; Kemp has advised in this matter, details of which are covered by commercial confidentiality. [viii] He has also appeared as an expert witness in the case concerning the theft of the Duke of Buccleuch's 'Madonna of the Yarnwinder', where he argued for the authenticity of both 1501 versions of this composition, an opinion with a major bearing on the work's commercial and insurance valuation. [ix]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)*Testimonials*

- [1] Correspondence with Art Dealer.
- [2] Correspondence with freelance art collector and freelance art historian.
- [3] Correspondence with Editor, Artnews magazine.
- [4] Correspondence with Senior Executive Producer of NOVA

Other evidence sources

- [i] BBC: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8304021.stm>
- [ii] Guardian: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/oct/13/leonardo-da-vinci-painting-discovered>
- [iii] The New Yorker: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/07/12/100712fa_fact_grann
- [iv] Vivante: <http://lucyvivante.net/2010/01/17/leonardo/>
- [v] National Geographic: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/02/lost-da-vinci/o-neill-text>
- [vi] <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/attfig/attfig11.pdf>
- [vii] Nature: <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v479/n7372/full/479174a.html>
- [viii] 'La Bella Principessa' case: <http://www.itsartlaw.com/2011/02/la-bella-principessa-decision-not-so.html>
- [ix] 'Madonna of the Yarnwinder' case: <http://www.scotsman.com/the-scotsman/scotland/leonardo-da-vinci-mystery-still-to-be-solved-after-trial-let-down-says-art-expert-1-2031676>