PARAGONE
LEONARDO
IN COMPARISON

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Abbildung auf dem Umschlag: Workshop of Leonardo, after a design by Leonardo and with Leonardo's participation, Christ as Salvator Mundi, after 1507, oil on walnut panel, 65.7 x 45.7 cm, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (photo: 2017 state)

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INHALTSVERZEICHNIS

PARAGONE. LEONARDO IN COMPARISON

JOHANNES GEBHARDT / FRANK ZÖLLNER

Comparison is the most potent concept in the world of scholarship, so powerful and influential that it is today deemed a "key method in the sciences and humanities".[1] In cultural and media studies, the comparative approach is seen as offering very far-reaching potential and perspectives, above and beyond the current methodological trend.[2] In the particular case of art history, the "evidential character" of comparison has caused it to become a kind of methodological "imperative".[3] This is attested not only by traditional art history, with its comparisons of styles and epochs, but also by the comparative visual studies pursued by Aby Warburg, who is considered one of the discipline's early driving forces.[4] Artists, artworks, styles, genres and epochs have been and continue to be constantly compared, whereby – consciously or unconsciously – comparative seeing seems to be the tacitly accepted and practised basis on which art history does business.[5] Recently, the question has even been posited as to whether comparativism may be of particular importance for a future of the discipline, with regard to a global art history.[6]

Antiquity, the yardstick for so many subsequent epochs, was already practising comparison.[7] Thus Pliny (*Natural History*, Book 35), for example, discusses the painters and sculptors of antiquity and compares their various achievements. At the beginning of early modern art historiography, Dante alludes to Cimabue and Giotto in his *Divine Comedy* and notes that the younger has surpassed the elder in the field of painting (*Purgatorio*, XI, 94–95). Lorenzo Ghiberti and other theorists of the early Renaissance, including Leonardo da Vinci, take up this comparative model and extend it to contemporary names.[8] Frequently interwoven into comparisons of artists is their mutual rivalry. This rivalry becomes palpable in the system of competitions for commissions, exemplified in the reliefs submitted by Lorenzo Ghiberti and Filippo Brunelleschi for the bronze doors of the Florentine Baptistery. From that point on, the theme of artist

1 Willibald Steinmetz, *The Force of Comparison: A New Perspective on Modern European History and the Contemporary World*, New York and Oxford 2019, p. 23.

2 Lisa Gotto and Annette Simonis, Medienkomparatistik – Aktualität und Aufgaben eines interdisziplinären Forschungsfelds, in: *Medienkomparatistik. Beiträge zur Vergleichenden Medienwissenschaft* 1 (1), 2019, pp. 7–20.

3 Heinrich Dilly, Einleitung, in: *Kunstgeschichte. Eine Einführung*, ed. by Hans Belting et al., 7th edition, Berlin 2008, pp. 9–19, here p. 14; *Sehen als Vergleichen. Praktiken des Vergleichens von Bildern, Kunstwerken und Artefakten*, ed. by Johannes Grave, Joris Corin Heyder and Britta Hochkirchen, Bielefeld 2020, p. 17.

4 Uwe Fleckner, Ohne Worte. Aby Warburgs Bildkomparatistik zwischen wissenschaftlichem Atlas und kunstpublizistischem Experiment, in: *Aby Warburg, Bilderreihen und Ausstellungen*, ed. by Uwe Fleckner and Isabella Woldt, Berlin 2012, pp. 1–18.

5 Matthias Bruhn, Gegenüberstellungen. Funktionswandel des vergleichenden Sehens, in: *Der vergleichende Blick: Formanalyse in Natur- und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. by Matthias Bruhn and Gerhard Scholtz, Berlin 2017, pp. 11–40, here p. 15f.

6 Stanley Abe and Jaś Elsner, Introduction. Some Stakes of Comparison, in: *Comparativism in Art History*, ed. by Jaś Isner, New York 2017, pp. 1–14.

7 Ulrich Pfisterer, Paragone, in: *Handbuch Rhetorik der Bildenden Künste*, ed. by Wolfgang Brassat, Berlin 2017 (= Handbücher Rhetorik 2), pp. 283–312, here pp. 187–188.

8 *Lorenzo Ghibertis Denkwürdigkeiten (I Commentarii)*, ed. by Julius von Schlosser, 2 vols., Berlin 1912, I, pp. 35–36; *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. by Jean Paul Richter, 2 vols., 3rd edition, Oxford 1970, § 660 (*Codex Atlanticus*, fol. 141rb/387r).

5. Master ES, The Saviour, c. 1460, engraving, second state, 15.7 x 11.6 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Felix M. Warburg and his family, 1941.

very traditional forerunners, lacking in originality, which remained the Italian norm. It is possible he did so at the request of a patron; a plausible explanation for why he should have dispensed with the dynamism customary in his other works is otherwise hard to find. In his painterly execution of the static composition, Leonardo nevertheless introduced an innovative element absent from all previous variants of the subject: the auratization of Christ by means of *sfumato*.

The New York *Salvator Mundi* is indebted to tradition to a – for Leonardo – astonishing degree in one of its details, too: Christ's corkscrew curls. In contrast to other paintings by Leonardo, such as the *Mona Lisa*, the ringlets of hair in the *Salvator Mundi* are rendered in a very schematic fashion. They seem to be artificially curled and in this respect do not quite correspond to the idea of naturally falling hair. From an artist such as Leonardo, who in his treatise on painting repeatedly recommends making studies of the real world, we might expect a more naturalistic treatment of Christ's locks. These schematic ringlets, too, have a forerunner within the tradition of Salvator representations, namely a famous portrait of Christ by Jan van Eyck, painted around 1438. Today lost, but preserved in several good copies, van Eyck's original exerted a profound influence that can be traced right up to the beginning of the sixteenth century.[31]

It is possible that Leonardo at some point lost interest in his *Salvator Mundi*, because the traditional pictorial formula initially adopted at a patron's request left too little room for dynamism and ruled out compositional innovations. The New York painting, which is currently probably in Saudi Arabia, was therefore left unfinished – or Leonardo, at least, did not finish it. This thesis is supported by a number of clues, which emerge above all from a comparison of the New York painting with other versions of the *Salvator Mundi* that were created directly or indirectly on the basis of Leonardo's design. In these variants Christ always has a beard, in line with the traditional pictorial formula. A case in point is the *Salvator Mundi*, itself a painting of very high quality, that once belonged to the Marquis de Ganay (Fig. 6). A comparison with the version from San Domenico Maggiore in Naples, also based on Leonardo's design and attributed by some authors to Girolamo Alibrandi, is also interesting (Fig. 7). The most recent restoration of the Naples panel has shown that this Salvator, too, has a beard. In the original and in good close-up photographs, numerous fine, gently curling beard hairs are visible running right around Christ's chin (Fig. 8).[32] The artist of this painting seems to have attached great importance, in fact, to rendering this detail with particular subtlety. The opposite is the case in the New York *Salvator Mundi*, where not the slightest trace of a beard was detected during the panel's very thorough restoration.[33]

The contributions in the present volume devote themselves to Leonardo's oeuvre against this backdrop of the *Salvator Mundi* as the most recent example of research based on comparative considerations. On the basis of the manifold semantic expressions of the term *paragone*, they aim to illuminate the rich diversity of this prominent field of activity in art-historical scholarship, and in so doing take a more differentiated look at Leonardo da Vinci the person, the artist and the inventor. The qualities such as artistic innovativeness and scientific inventiveness that characterise Leonardo's exceptional talent, and which

31 Miyako Sugiyama, Jan van Eyck's Head of Christ, in: *Simiolus* 39, 1–2 (2017), pp. 5–14.

32 *Leonardo a Roma* (exhibition catalogue, Rome 2019), ed. by Roberto Antonelli et al., Rome 2019, pp. 358–360 (Antonio Forcellino), pp. 425–434 (Cinzia Pasquali).

33 See the report by Diane Dwyer Modestini, https://salvatormundirevisited.com/ Copies [12.12.2020].

6. Follower of Leonardo, after a design by Leonardo, Christ as Salvator Mundi, before 1519 (?), oil on panel, 68.3 x 48.6 cm, private collection, formerly Marquis de Ganay collection.

LEONARDO ON READING PICTURES: THE PARAGONE IN THE WORKSHOP

CLAIRE FARAGO

Three decades ago passionate debates over the nature of signification in art history taught us that context is never neutral, never a given, but produced by the author's interpretative strategies, as much in need of elucidation as the "event" it ostensibly explains.[1] There are many ways *not* to contextualize Leonardo's *Paragone*, the famous passages collected in the *Parte prima* of his *Libro di pittura* compiled by his student Francesco Melzi (1491/3–1567), still in progress at Melzi's death.[2] First of all, the title *Paragone* is not original, but inserted by the nineteenth-century editor of the first printed edition, Guglielmo Manzi.[3] It is telling that there is no Renaissance genre by that name and even cognates of *paragone* occur rarely in art criticism before the mid-sixteenth century. The sixteenth-century literary debates on the relative merits of painting and sculpture (and other media, sometimes dealing with other kinds of material evidence altogether), occasionally mention the oral exercise of "dar paragone" and "far paragone".[4]

What we know as the comparison of the arts began as a meta-discourse about the many acts of visual judgment that go into making individual works of art. The surviving literary evidence highlights the performative, improvisatory nature of *paragoni*. The common Italian verb *paragonare* simply means to compare differences or similarities between things through an act of sense discrimination. There is no question that inter-art comparisons were widely practiced in both print and oral culture, and demonstrated

My warm thanks to Frank Zöllner for inviting my contribution and to my colleagues in Leipzig for a very stimulating and collegial conference. I am also grateful to Janis Bell and Edoardo Villata for reading earlier drafts, and to George Bisacca, Sue Ann Chui, Nancy Turner, and Elizabeth Walmsley for sharing their knowledge of painting technique. Bibliography is limited in the present format to the most essential sources.

1 "Context" was a subject of extensive debate among art historians in the late 1980s and 1990s, see for example, Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, Semiotics and Art History, in: *The Art Bulletin* 73, 1991, pp. 174–208; Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, New Haven 1985; Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and its institutions*, Norman (OK) 1988, who emphasizes that context is not given but produced, determined by interpretative strategies and "as much in need of elucidation as events" (p. xiv).

2 The current critical edition is *Leonardo da Vinci: Libro di pittura*, 2 vols., ed. by Carlo Pedretti, transcribed by Carlo Vecce, Florence 1995. Passages are cited from his edition as: *LdP*. See also, *Leonardo da Vinci, Il Paragone delle arti*, ed. by Claudio Scarpati, Milan 1993; Claire Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci's 'Paragone': A Critical Interpretation with a New Edition of the Text in the Codex Urbinas*, Leiden/Cologne 1992. Melzi's date of death was recently established as 1567 by Rossana Sacchi, Per la biografia (e la geografia) di Francesco Melzi, in: *Acme* 2, 2017, DOI http://dx.doi.org/10.13130/2282-0035/9362, p. 152, n. 42. There is no consensus on the dating of his compilation, and most recently the continuity between Leonardo and Melzi has been receiving the most attention at conferences. I thank my colleagues who shared their work in progress, as noted with their permission individually below.

3 *Trattato della pittura di Lionardo da Vinci*, ed. by Guglielmo Manzi, 2 vols., Rome 1817.

4 Sperone Speroni dealt with the theme of the *paragone* in the *Dialogo della Rhetorica*, Venice 1542; Antonfrancesco Doni, *Disegno*, Venice 1549, f. 25r, uses the expression "*dar paragone*". Cognates of *paragone* are sprinkled liberally throughout the dialogue. In his biography of Michelangelo, Ascanio Condivi used the expression "*far paragone*"; Ascanio Condivi, *Vita di Michelangelo Buonarroti*, Rome 1553, f. 4r. There are other occurrences by Francesco Sangallo (1547), Vincenzo Borghini (1563–1580); Ludovico Dolce (1556); see discussion in Farago 1992, pp. 10–17.

5. Detail of Fig. 4: Central portion without view to distant landscape.

on the Los Angeles panel. The copyist was working in the presence of the original and must have used the lost preparatory cartoon.[60] In this workshop variant, the same sleeve of Saint Anne is considerably lighter so it stands out clearly against the background, while the contour and cuff of the Virgin's left arm have been broadened, simplifying the composition in this complex area to the point of eliminating the view to the distant landscape between the figurative elements (Fig. 5). These experiments are also documented in the underlayers.

The Louvre version (Fig. 6) documents Leonardo's latest reworkings of the drapery of Saint Anne's left arm to a lighter grey. The underlayers record a large number of changes of color that "lack[s] coherence", according to Delieuvin.[61] In its current state, it is easy to distinguish from the blue landscape although the values are similar – exactly as Leonardo recommended to painters in a contemporary passage to adjust relationships of figure to ground for the sake of clarity and *grazia*, by using one's *ingegno* and knowledge of perspective to improvise a solution.[62] The unfinished sleeve documents Leonardo's extraordinary energy in its loaded brushwork. [63] The underpainting suggests a

6. Detail of Fig. 2: Saint Anne's left arm.

60 Delieuvin 2012, p. 174, cat. n. 52. The artist also changed the layout of folds on St. Anne's left arm, removed part of her gown that fell to the floor, along with enlarging the cuff of the Virgin's left sleeve.

61 Deleuvin 2012, p. 376.

62 *MS G*, f. 23v, c. 1513–1514 (chapter 334 of the 1651 edition), entitled "De' campi", Leonardo advises painters to create strong contrasts of color according to their own *ingegni*, founded on prior knowledge of optical principles. See discussion in Farago, *Non finito*, forthcoming.

63 Myriam Eveno, Bruno Mottin, and Élisabeth Ravaud, Examination of the Saint Anne, in: Delieuvin 2012, p. 376.

7. Detail of Fig. 3: The Virgin's head.

break-through moment when Leonardo invented a new painterly economy of means that anticipates the bravura style of a late Titian or Rembrandt.

The ongoing adjustments of color, relief, and contour on all three panels record attempts to arrive at the right colors and modeling to support the legibility of the relief as the overlapping figurative elements recede into the distance, without relying on lines that have no counterpart in nature. Leonardo simplified the contour, shape, and color of the Virgin's mantle draped over her left arm, eliminating the cuff altogether. One of the most significant adjustments to the Los Angeles painting from the standpoint of Leonardo's collaborative process, was a change to the contour of the Virgin's robe that was incorporated into one of the small modello-sized copies and only sketched on the Louvre panel before Leonardo altered the design again.[64]

These changes taken altogether document a collaborative process among Leonardo and his leading assistants and students that allowed him to improvise on different versions of the same design at the same time with the fully autograph Louvre panel playing the central role. Among the striking differences between the autograph Louvre panel and these two workshop variants are avoidance of some of the most difficult problems of representation, a feature also of the second *Virgin of the Rocks*.[65] In both workshop copies of the *Saint Anne,* as opposed to the Louvre panel, landscape elements behind the figure group provide a dark background from which the figures project, reminiscent of the grotto setting of the *Virgin of the Rocks*, commissioned 1483, or the juniper bush in the earlier portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, c. 1474–1478.[66] Perhaps the dark background was introduced in the variants of the *Saint Anne* for the same reason: to justify a reduced lighting situation that simplifies the play of reflected color (even though the wooded landscape is actually far in the distance, not restricting the light that falls on the figures). In the Los Angeles panel, the clarity of the relief is maintained by the light-colored veil on the Virgin's head at its upper contour which is juxtaposed against the dark background scene that surrounds it (Fig. 7). The addition of this veil is one of the changes documented in the underdrawing after the main composition was transferred to the panel.[67] In the Paris panel now in a private collection, the chromatic complexity of the flesh tones is reduced even further by placing Saint Anne and the Virgin in front of a larger wooded landscape. A series of alternating juxtapositions of light edges against dark, and dark silhouettes against bright landscape and light flesh tones maintain the clarity of the relief on the fundamental optical principle of antithesis as the space recedes into the distance, but this solution is not justified by the depicted lighting situation.

64 Delieuvin 2012, pp. 163 and 191, cat. n. 56, *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*, Florence, Uffizi Galleries, inv. 1890, n. 737. Other changes to the landscape and pentimenti are visible in the reflectogram analyzed by Cecilia Frosinini. Another modello-sized copy, p. 171, cat. n. 51, Prado, Museo Nacional del Prado, P-349, also copied from the Los Angeles panel while in progress, incorporates a large cuff on the Virgin's left arm that was a revision added to the Los Angeles panel before the final changes and ornamentation.

65 Mottin in Delieuvin 2012, p. 178, notes that the Paris private collection variant is simplified. Analogous simplifications are found in the London *Virgin of the Rocks*, see Claire Farago, Leonard's Workshop Procedures, in: *Fabrication* 2018, pp. 99–102.

66 Luke Syson and Rachel Billinge, Leonardo da Vinci's Use of Underdrawing in the *Virgin of the Rocks* in the National Gallery and *Saint Jerome* in the Vatican, in: *The Burlington Magazine* 147/1228, 2005, p. 463; and Elizabeth Walmsley, Technical Images and Painting Techniques in Leonardo's Portrait of *Ginevra de' Benci*, in: *Leonardo da Vinci and Optics* 2013, p. 62.

67 Delieuvin 2012, p. 170, cat. n. 50. Leonardo used the same device in the portrait of Ginevra de' Benci.

LEONARDO AND MICHELANGELO, ANATOMISTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

DOMENICO LAURENZA

The interest in anatomy among Italian Renaissance artists found its most profound expression in Leonardo and Michelangelo. Yet it is difficult to imagine two more contrary conceptions of the relationship between anatomy and art, toward which both were driven by the shared historical conditions in which they lived. The confluence of this common context with their contradictory individual inclinations led to two parallel but opposite outcomes.

They shared the same Florentine starting point: artistic anatomy had developed there from the middle of the fifteenth century with a tendency to represent the human figure "from the inside", an awareness of how the internal anatomical structures—muscles and bones—were the basis of the external anatomical forms and movements of the body represented in art. In his *De pictura,* Leon Battista Alberti finalized the study of anatomy to the artistic representation of bodies with its limbs (head, hands, legs, and so on) proportionate to each other. Rethinking a widespread concept in both natural philosophy and rhetoric he defined a creative process that was both mental and practical as a *compositio* of surfaces in the anatomical member, more limbs in the body, more bodies in the *istoria* (the history of a given event or action with more human figures). Artistic anatomy will consist of *compositio* from the inside out: the bones, first, then the muscles, finally the skin. The procedure was further developed and standardized by the artistic academies of the sixteenth century.

Let us examine two drawings made by Leonardo and Michelangelo when they were both about thirty years old. One of Leonardo's first anatomical sheets (Fig. 1, RL 12613v, c. 1483–1487) falls within the horizon of artistic anatomy theorized by Alberti and therefore already practiced by various artists in fifteenth-century Florence (albeit at a much lower level of anatomical knowledge): drawings of the bones and nerves of the leg and arm and, next to them, drawings of the leg and arm covered by the skin. This study of the arm is the anatomical basis for representing the form and movement of the body in art and can be compared, for example, with the Virgin's right hand in the *Virgin of the Rocks* (c. 1483–1486, Paris, Louvre).[1]

Likewise, in one of Michelangelo's early studies implying anatomical notions (Fig. 2, Casa Buonarroti, 9F; c. 1504–1505), when he represents the muscles at the base of the complex movement of the shoulder seen from behind, he gives them a particular shape, seen in the two charcoal drawings below: an inverted "L"-shaped plate including two eminences and corresponding to the muscles covering the scapula bone. This was a direct development of this part's anatomical-artistic study fixed by Antonio del Pollaiuolo, for

1 Kenneth Clark, *The Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle,* 2nd ed. with C. Pedretti, 3 vols., London and New York 1968, n. 12613v.

1. Leonardo, *Studi anatomici di gamba e braccio e, in alto a sinistra, del midollo spinale di una rana*, c. 1485–1487, metalpoint and pen and ink on blue-grey prepared paper, 22.2 x 30.4 cm, Windsor Castle, RL 12613v.

2. Michelangelo, *Study of the movement of the shoulder*, pen and ink, black chalk, c. 1504–1505, 28.4 x 21 cm, Florence, Casa Buonarroti, 9F.

example, in one of the figures in the famous engraving depicting a *Battle of Nude Men* (c. 1470).[2] Later on, the study of this anatomical part returns in a purely anatomical drawing in red chalk (Fig. 3, original or copy of a lost original, Windsor, RL 0802; c. 1518).[3] Nevertheless, its primary origin is in the world of fifteenth-century Florentine artistic anatomy.

While both these youthful studies by Leonardo and Michelangelo fall within contemporary Florentine artistic anatomy, they simultaneously surpass it using opposite forms. The top left-hand part of Leonardo's sheet includes the study of the spinal cord of a frog (Fig. 1). Based on the animal's vivisection, it aimed to demonstrate that the true seat of the origin of "life" was not the heart, but the spinal cord, on which Leonardo affixes the note *virtù gienitiva* (generative force). Thus, the study touches on complex themes of anatomy and natural philosophy, which apparently had nothing to do with the artistic anatomy of the world of Florentine artists of the time. This is the first and most macroscopic difference between Leonardo and Michelangelo. Over the years, Leonardo's research increasingly went far beyond studying the muscles and bones of artistic anatomy. He will study every field of anatomy, like a doctor; he will compare himself with the great anatomists of the past, like Mondino, and challenge them or develop their premises like a professional anatomist. In short, Leonardo will aspire to renew anatomy as a science. An enormous ambition, given that he, in the first instance, was an artist. An ambition understandable only in the historical context in which he was born, marked by a growing permeability between high and low, theoretical and empirical, scientific and artistic knowledge.[4]

On the contrary, Michelangelo remained within the horizon of artistic anatomy. The biographer Ascanio Condivi is very explicit on this point. Condivi writes that thanks to dissections, Michelangelo had achieved an anatomical knowledge equal if not superior to the professional anatomists, but, he adds,

2 Cf. Domenico Laurenza, *Art and Anatomy in Renaissance Italy. Images from a Scientific Revolution*, New York 2012.

3 Cf. Paul Joannides, *Michelangelo and his influence: drawings from Windsor Castle*, Washington 1996, pp. 134–137.

4 Among the recent studies on Leonardo's anatomy see *Leonardo da Vinci's anatomical world. Language, Context and "Disegno"*, ed. by Alessandro Nova and Domenico Laurenza, Venice 2011; *Leonardo da Vinci Anatomist*, ed. by Martin Clayton and Ronald Philo, London 2012; Domenico Laurenza, *Leonardo. L'anatomia*, Florence 2009.