

Press Release

May 4, 2021

Exhibition: “Leonardo’s Intellectual Cosmos” at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin May 11 to June 28, 2021

Leonardo da Vinci is commonly known as the great inventor of creative machines, the artist of the famous drawing of the Vitruvian Man. But Leonardo was also an avid reader: his personal library contained nearly 200 books on science and technology, literature, and religion. The Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG), with the Museo Galileo and the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, has now reconstructed the lost book collection for the exhibition “Leonardo’s Intellectual Cosmos,” where visitors can marvel at many of these outstanding old works.

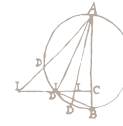
The exhibition will run from May 11 to June 28, 2021, at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer-Saal, subject to pandemic regulations. An online vernissage, streamed on YouTube, will also take place on May 10 from 17:00 to 19:00. The exhibition illuminates the intellectual cosmos of Leonardo through some of the most precious books and illustrations of his time. The innovative virtual exhibition also enables visitors to dive into the intellectual world of the renowned artist-scientist.

Which works did Leonardo read? What knowledge did he possess when he embarked on his own studies? The reconstruction of his library and of how it developed throughout his life offers a new perspective that shows Leonardo as a man of letters—as an intellectual striving to find the connections between microcosm and macrocosm in all aspects of nature, as well as of human existence. Since his own books have unfortunately been lost over time, the exhibition presents comparable contemporary works made available by various Berlin libraries. In addition to books, visitors can also admire objects including printing cabinets and a printing press, providing a unique insight into Leonardo's atelier as well as the context of his life.

“The exhibition is truly eye-opening and makes the rich intellectual world behind Leonardo’s great creations visible,” says Prof. Dr. Jürgen Renn, director of the MPIWG and one of the two leaders of the Leonardo’s Intellectual Cosmos project. “It is but a small exhibition, but as Leonardo remarked, ‘every part of a thing contains something of the nature of the whole’.”

An Exhibition Without Walls

In addition, a virtual tour invites everyone to experience “Leonardo’s Intellectual Cosmos” remotely. Thanks to the newest digital technologies, Leonardo’s precious manuscripts and the printed works of his



book collection have now been digitized. The virtual exhibition, which complements the exhibition at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, is open access and available to the public worldwide. Along with a catalog listing all of the books owned or consulted by Leonardo, the digital library contains descriptions of the contents of each of these works and are linked to the pages in the artist's notebooks referring to them. The virtual exhibition also serves as a tool for future scholarly investigations.

It is enriched by the virtual exhibition "The Library of Leonardo" of the Museo Galileo in Florence. "An extraordinary resource available in eight languages resulting from the collaboration between the Museo Galileo, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministero degli Affari Esteri*), and the National Committee for the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Leonardo da Vinci's death" explains Prof. Dr. Paolo Galluzzi, Scientific Director of the Museo Galileo. "Thanks to the digital representation of all the manuscripts and printed works collected by Leonardo, his library returns to life on the websites of the Museo Galileo, of the Italian Cultural Institutes in Germany and on "Italiana" the new Internet portal of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the promotion of the Italian language and culture abroad."

The exhibitions, both physical and virtual, enable the visitors to enter the laboratory of Leonardo's mind and trace his continual development as an artist and scientist. More than 500 years after his death, the exhibition "Leonardo's Intellectual Cosmos" provides a new look at one of the most fascinating figures in cultural history.

Collaboration Partners

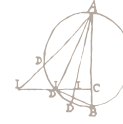
The exhibition is based on the work of Leonardo scholar Prof. Dr. Carlo Vecce and the exhibition "Leonardo and His Books: The Library of the Universal Genius," shown at the Museo Galileo in Florence in 2019. It is organized in cooperation with the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin–Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Museo Galileo, Italian Embassy in Berlin–Ambasciata d'Italia Berlino, NOMIS Foundation, Max-Planck-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften e.V., Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Stiftung Deutsches Technikmuseum Berlin, Museum für Naturkunde Berlin–Leibniz-Institut für Evolutions- und Biodiversitätsforschung, Stiftung Planetarium Berlin–Standort Archenhold Sternwarte, Fritz-Haber-Institut der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft.

Links

- Project page: <https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/research/projects/leonardos-intellectual-cosmos-0>
- Feature article: <https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/feature-story/leonardos-intellectual-cosmos>
- Virtual exhibition Museo Galileo: <https://mostre.museogalileo.it/bibliotecaleonardo/> (publication on May 5, 2021)
- Italiana: <https://italiana.esteri.it/italiana/en/>
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About the MPIWG

Founded in 1994, the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG) in Berlin, Germany, is one of the more than 80 research institutes administered by the Max Planck Society. It is dedicated to



the study of the history of science and aims to understand scientific thinking and practice as historical phenomena, with projects spanning globally and across all eras of human history.

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