Leonardo da Vinci’s *Codex Leicester* On View at MIA

JUNE 21 - AUGUST 30, 2015

MIA Uses Text of the World’s Greatest Renaissance Thinker To Examine Creative Process of Contemporary Artists and Designers

"Leonardo da Vinci, the *Codex Leicester*, and the Creative Mind," offers rare insights into one of history’s most celebrated thinkers in the context of some of today’s most interesting creative minds. Leonardo da Vinci’s *Codex Leicester*—a notebook examining the properties of water to investigate larger questions that range from the internal workings of the planet to the composition of the moon—is paired with contemporary works by artists and designers like Bill Viola, Margaret and Christine Wertheim of the Institute For Figuring, Scott Olson, and others to explore how the creative process unfolds. The exhibition, which is on view June 21—August 30 in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts’ Target Galleries, explores the relationship between creativity, curiosity, innovation, and thinking on paper.

“The MIA’s Art Remix program, which pairs historic and contemporary works of art, was the perfect preparation for this exhibition and allows us to present the *Codex Leicester* in fresh and relevant ways,” says Alex Bortolot,
MIA Content Strategist and curator of the exhibition. He adds, “It is Leonardo’s approach to examining the world, as much as what he revealed about it, that is his greatest legacy. He combined acute powers of observation, omnivorous curiosity, and intellectual rigor to explore the world around him and push beyond existing boundaries into new realms of understanding. By juxtaposing works from today with the Codex, we’re making connections between Leonardo and the creative potential of today’s artists, engineers, and designers.”

It is estimated that only 31 of Leonardo da Vinci’s notebooks, just a third of the total he created, survive. Essential tools to his creative process, Leonardo used his notebooks to frame questions, record observations, develop theories and experiments to test them, and further refine his ideas based on the results. Through drawings, texts, and observations recorded in the Codex Leicester, Leonardo explored and sought to explain the properties of water and, by extension, gain a greater understanding of the earth and celestial bodies. Leonardo compiled the Codex Leicester in Milan—an intellectual center of Renaissance Italy—between 1508 and 1510. He wrote on 18 double-sided sheets of loose-leaf, linen paper, each one folded to make a total of 72 pages. The notebooks are distinctive for two reasons: his use of ‘mirror writing’—writing from right to left—and the links he created between image and text. He recognized the power of combining words and images to develop and communicate ideas.

The MIA enriches its presentation of the Codex Leicester with the Codascope, a digital, interactive platform that provides a comprehensive transcription, translation, and explanation of the entire, 72 page text of the Codex Leicester. On content-rich, multi-touch screens, audiences can zoom in, explore the document in depth, and take in a contemporary interpretation of the document. The Codascope is designed by Second Story, a company dedicated to pioneering new interactive experiences.

The exhibition is organized to explore the ways in which “thinking on paper,” curiosity, and observation lead to innovation. Contemporary scientific research on human thought confirms what Leonardo demonstrated in his work: that sketching, or “thinking on paper,” helps us comprehend complex, often abstract, ideas by externalizing thought processes, managing information, and escaping the limitations of verbal communication. For Leonardo, thinking on paper facilitated his understanding of the world around him.
A presentation of Bill Viola’s dynamic video and sound installation, *The Raft* (May 2004), invites visitors to share Leonardo da Vinci’s process of observing and identifying universal truths about the physical world. Shot in 35 mm high-speed film and dramatically slowed down, the video presents a group of bystanders subjected to powerful jets of water. As their bodies are buffeted about by high pressure water hoses, the characters transform before the viewers’ eyes: the facades they maintain in public give way to their true selves. The notebook in which Viola planned the piece—also on view—reveals his creative process.

The exhibition also showcases sketches from 20th century inventors to trace the development of their ideas and observations. Dr. Barry Kudrowitz, Assistant Professor and Program Director of Product Design in the College of Design at the University of Minnesota, consulted with the MIA on this portion of the exhibition, lending his expertise on creativity, concept sketching, idea generation, and innovation. A series by St Paul-based industrial design firm Don E. Harley & Associates of exploratory sketches for safety cars with swiveling cockpits and child car seats, created from 1959–1973, shows how sketching helps ideas emerge, often in dynamic, non-linear ways. The exhibition also features drawings and prototypes by Scott Olson, an inventor who refined the inline skate concept and successfully marketed it as Rollerblades. Inspired by patent drawings from as far back as the 1860s, Olson’s drawings show the evolution and differentiation of a core concept.

A major highlight of the exhibition is the world’s largest participatory art and science project: the Institute For Figuring’s *Crochet Coral Reef*. Margaret and Christine Wertheim of the Los Angeles-based Institute For Figuring developed the *Crochet Coral Reef* by adapting a crochet technique originally created by Dr. Daina Taimina, a mathematician at Cornell University, to model what is known as “hyperbolic geometry.” Many marine organisms embody this geometry in their anatomies; the Wertheims’ *Crochet Reef* not only looks like a living reef, it draws on the same underlying mathematical principles found in nature. With ties to art, science, math, and nature, the *Crochet Coral Reef* embodies the multi-disciplinary and creative spirit evinced by da Vinci.

Ancillary to the exhibition, the MIA invites the community to participate in the making of a *Minneapolis Satellite Reef*, part of the Institute For Figuring’s ongoing, worldwide Satellite Reef program. Minnesotans are encouraged to create crochet corals to contribute to the local reef through July 31, 2015—by crafting on their own, or in MIA-hosted crochet circles, held on the final Saturdays of the month through June. The *Minneapolis Satellite Reef* will be exhibited at the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization Community Facility from August 23 to September 30, 2015.

Concurrent with and thematically linked to “Leonardo da Vinci, the *Codex Leicester*, and the Creative Mind,” the MIA presents “Mark Mothersbaugh: Myopia.” Mothersbaugh is an artist, musician, and tinkerer who offers a key to understanding the current state of art, with its hybridity, subjectivity, and fluid boundaries. This retrospective reveals the creative and artistic mind of a celebrity familiar to many people as a founding member of the punk rock band Devo and for his involvement with the musical scores of *The Lego Movie*, *Rugrats*, and *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, to name a few. The exhibition will feature artworks from the beginning of Mothersbaugh’s career through his most recent work, including drawings, films, paintings, sculpture, and music, which are a unique combination of cultural criticism and personal expression.

“Leonardo da Vinci, the *Codex Leicester*, and the Creative Mind,” which opened earlier this year at the Phoenix Art Museum as “Leonardo da Vinci, the *Codex Leicester*, and the Power of Observation,” is on view at the MIA from June 21 through August 30 and will then travel to the North Carolina Museum of Art from October 31, 2015 to January 17, 2016. Each museum participating in the tour brings its own distinct curatorial approach to the Codex.
Click [here](#) to download high resolution images corresponding to “Leonardo da Vinci, the *Codex Leicester*, and the Creative Mind,” as well as an image ID sheet. Please include the corresponding image credits when reproducing an image.

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**RELATED PROGRAMING**

**Crochet Circles**
March 28, April 25, May 30, June 27
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Contribute crochet coral to the *Minneapolis Satellite Reef*—part of the Institute For Figuring’s *Crochet Coral Reef*. The Minneapolis Satellite Reef will be on view August 23–September 30 at the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization.
RSVP: (612) 870-6323; tickets.artsmia.org

**Creativity Salons**
July 9, July 30, August 6, and August 13, 2015
6:30 p.m. in Target Atrium, 1st Floor
A series of interactive and immersive talks and workshops that give participants an opportunity to make, build, and experiment on the thinking and inquiry made visible in the exhibition.
Speakers to be announced closer to date.

**Third Thursday: Creativity and Leonardo with AIGA MN**
August 20, 6–9 p.m.
Free; refreshments for sale.
Enlivened with drinks, live music, and inspiration from “Leonardo da Vinci, the *Codex Leicester*, and the Creative Mind,” audiences explore their creative side with AIGA MN.
ABOUT THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS

Home to over 87,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest wide-ranging art collections in the country—Rembrandt to van Gogh, Monet to Matisse, Asian to African—the MIA links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to the MIA is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

Museum hours: Sunday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m.; Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Thursday and Friday 10 a.m.–9 p.m.; Monday closed. For more information, call (612) 870-3000 or visit artsmia.org.

PRESS CONTACTS

MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS

Anne-Marie Wagener
(612) 870-3280; awagener@artsmia.org
Tammy Pleshek
(612) 870-3174; tpleshek@artsmia.org
Emmalynn Bauer
(612) 870-6364; ebauer@artsmia.org

RESNICOW + ASSOCIATES

Alison Buchbinder
(212) 671-5165; abuchbinder@resnicow.com
Meryl Feinstein
(212) 671-5161; mfeinstein@resnicow.com