

LEONARDO DA VINCI PAINTING DISCOVERED

Painting Gains Attribution After Careful Scholarship and Conservation

A lost painting by Leonardo da Vinci has been identified in an American collection and will be exhibited for the first time this November. Titled *Salvator Mundi* (*Savior of the World*) and dating around 1500, the newly discovered masterpiece depicts a half-length figure of Christ facing frontally, holding a crystal orb in his left hand as he raises his right in blessing. One of some 15 surviving Leonardo oil paintings, the work will be included in “Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan,” to be held at the National Gallery in London from November 9, 2011 until February 5, 2012. The last time a Leonardo painting was discovered was in 1909, when the *Benois Madonna*, now in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, came to light.

DOCUMENTED HISTORY

Leonardo’s painting of the *Salvator Mundi* was long known to have existed, but was presumed to have been destroyed. The composition was documented in two preparatory drawings by Leonardo and more than 20 painted copies by students and followers of the artist, as well as a meticulous 1650 etching made after the original painting by the Bohemian artist Wenceslaus Hollar.

ROYAL PROVENANCE

The recently rediscovered painting was first recorded in the art collection of King Charles I of England in 1649. It was sold after his death, returned to the Crown upon the accession of Charles II, and later passed to the collection of the Duke of Buckingham, whose son put it at auction in 1763 following the sale of Buckingham House (now Palace) to the King. All trace of the work was then lost until 1900, when the picture was acquired by Sir Frederick Cook, but by then the painting had been damaged, disfigured by over-paint, and its authorship by Leonardo forgotten. Cook’s descendants sold the painting at auction in 1958, when it brought £45. A photograph taken before 1912 records its compromised appearance at that time. (This photograph has recently been circulated in the media, as has another photo [with Christ in a red tunic], incorrectly identified as the recently rediscovered work.) In 2005, the painting was acquired from an American estate and brought to a New York art historian and private dealer named Robert Simon for study. The *Salvator Mundi* is privately owned and not currently for sale.

CONSERVATION & AUTHENTICATION

After an extensive conservation treatment, the painting was examined by a series of international scholars. An unequivocal consensus was reached that the *Salvator Mundi* was the original by Leonardo da Vinci. Opinions vary slightly in the matter of dating, with some assigning the work to the late 1490’s, and others placing it after 1500.

Scholars were convinced of Leonardo’s authorship due to the painting’s adherence in style to the artist’s known paintings; the quality of execution; the relationship of the painting to the two preparatory drawings; its correspondence to Wenceslaus Hollar’s etching; its superiority to the numerous versions of the known composition; and the presence of *pentimenti*, or changes by the artist not found in copies.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information about the painting, provenance and conservation is at www.StacyBolton.com/leonardo. In addition, a scholarly monograph on the painting, titled *The Lost Christ of Leonardo da Vinci*, will be published by Yale University Press, London, later this year.

MEDIA CONTACT: Sara Latham sara@stacybolton.com +1 202.258.3990



Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), *Salvator Mundi*, c. 1500
Oil on walnut panel, 25 ¹³/₁₆ × 17 ⁷/₈ inches (65.6 × 45.4 cm)
© 2011 Salvator Mundi LLC