

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Leonardo da Vinci

Elisa Leonelli · Friday, May 31st, 2024

I explored the fascinating exhibit “LEONARDO DA VINCI: Inventor. Artist. Dreamer” at the California Science Center (March 2-September 2, 2024), developed by Leonardo3 Museum of Milan.

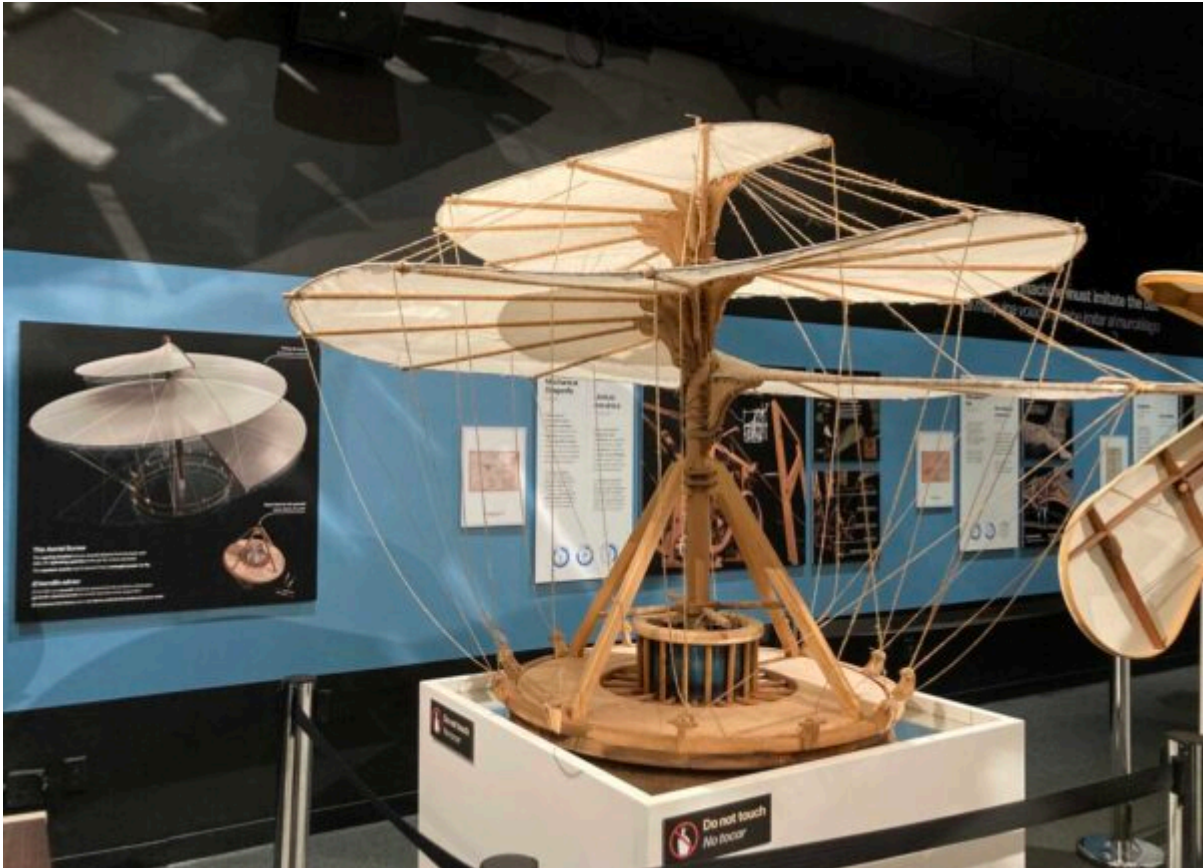


Leonardo, often called a genius and a [Renaissance Man](#), was a creative person well versed in every discipline of its time, such as anatomy, astrology, carpentry, engineering, mathematics, painting, sculpture, etc.



Mechanical Eagle, Flying Bicycle

It was amazing to see suspended overhead Leonardo's giant machines the Flying Bike and the Mechanical Eagle, as well as the Great Kite and the Aerial Screw on the ground. These wooden models were reconstructed from the visionary inventor's detailed drawings and express his belief in the possibility of human flight.



Aerial Screw



Great Kite (Grande Nibbio)

There's a Mechanical Lion, that was actually built by Leonardo for the King of France Frances I, and would open his chest at the end of his walk to offer a bunch of lilies. You can see a video demonstration of this impressive feat of engineering.



Mechanical Lion

A Robot Soldier was built for the Duke of Milano Ludovico Sforza.



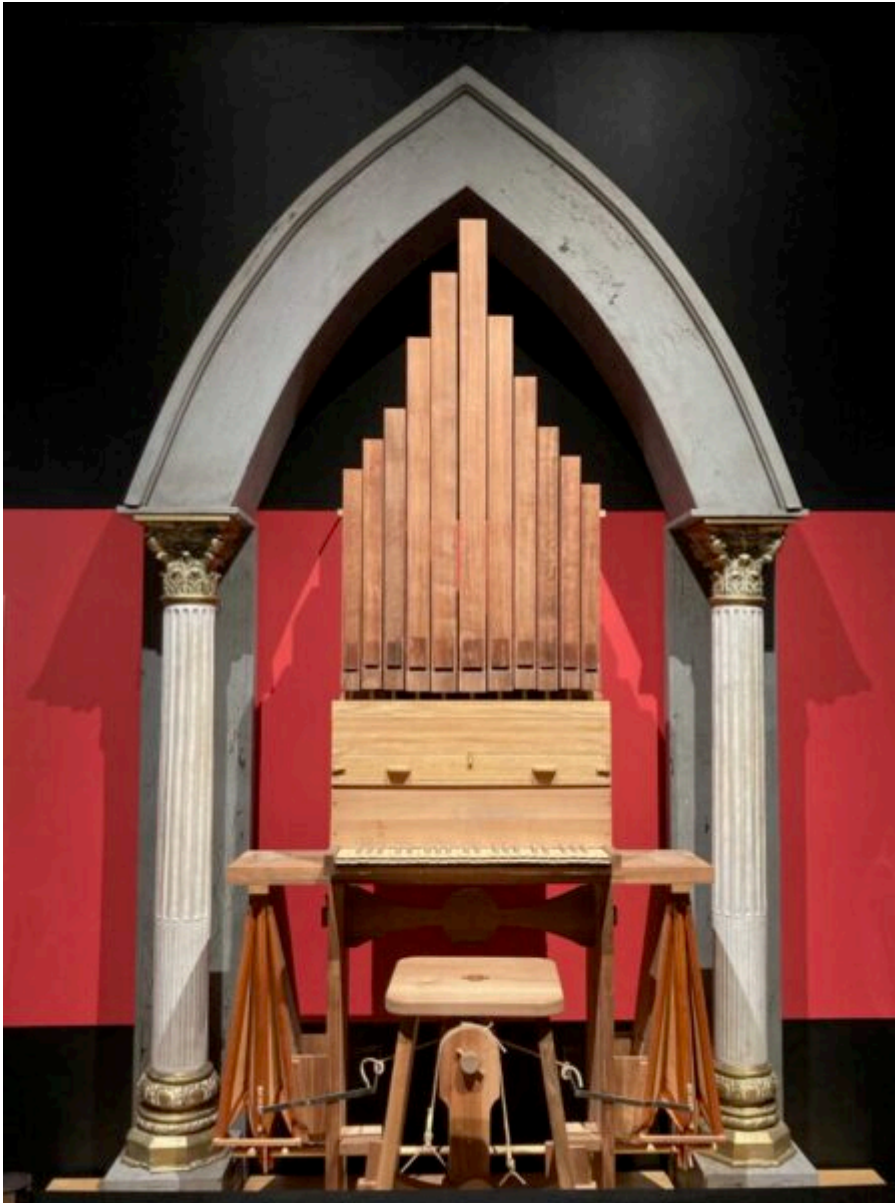
Robot Soldier

A wooden structure was an experiment on the possibility of Perpetual Motion.



Perpetual Motion

An innovative bellows system provided continuous sound in a musical organ.



Great Organ

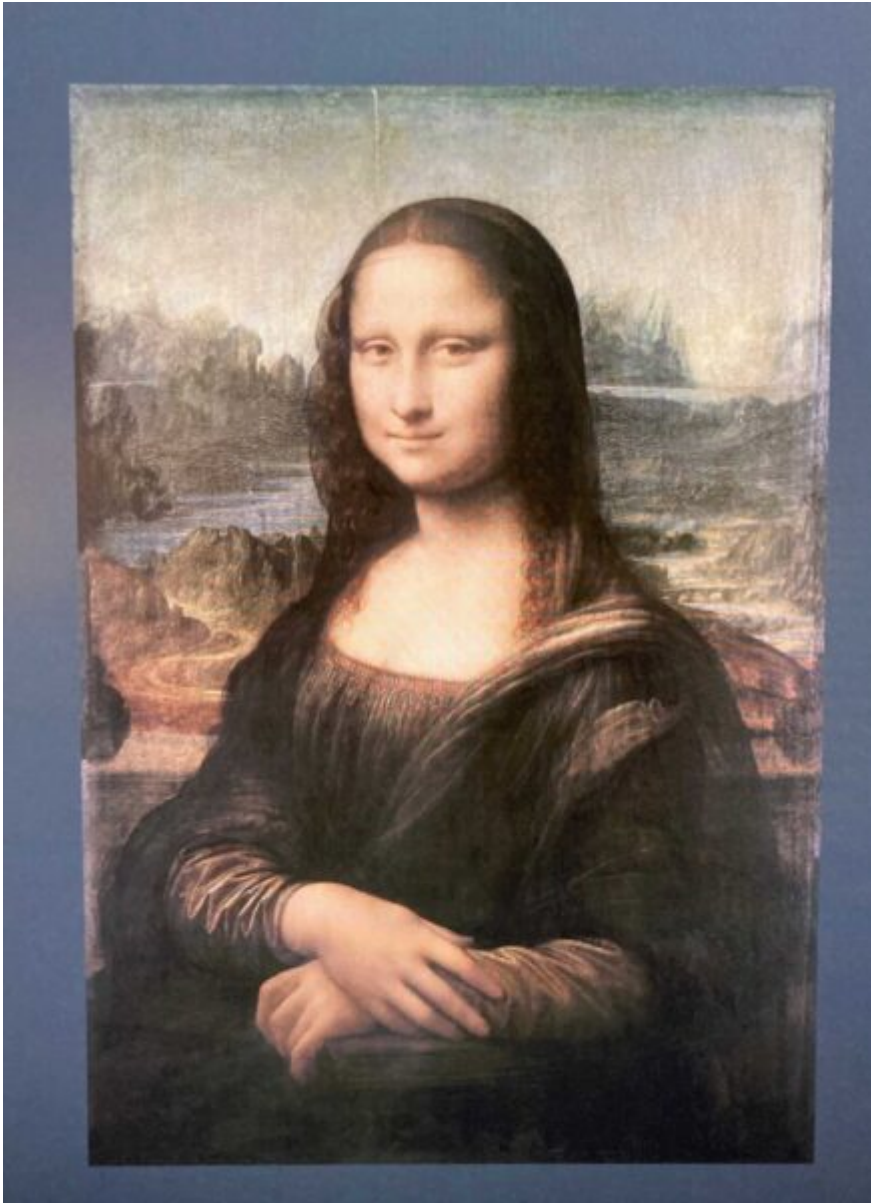
A reproduction of the [Last Supper](#) (Cenacolo) is gracing one wall. This mural, painted from 1494 to 1498 in the Refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie Church in Milano, started deteriorating almost immediately and was restored several times through the centuries. The last and definitive restoration was conducted from 1977 to 1999 by [Pinin Brambilla Barcilon](#).



Last Supper (Cenacolo)

An interactive audiovisual display examines the 20 paintings unanimously attributed to Leonardo, including the famous [Mona Lisa](#) also known as La Gioconda, identified as Lisa Gherardini wife of Francesco Bartolomeo del Giocondo, on display at the Louvre in Paris.





Mona Lisa (La Gioconda)

Growing up in Modena, Italy, where I benefited from a free classical education, I studied Leonardo's paintings in Art History classes in both high school and college, as well as the work of other Italian painters, sculptors and architects such as Michelangelo, Donatello, Giotto, Botticelli, Caravaggio, Mantegna, Raphael, Titian, Bernini, Brunelleschi, Palladio. In Italian literature classes I studied Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio, Manzoni, Machiavelli, Pascoli, Leopardi, and many other writers.



Rossana and Carlo Pedretti. Los Angeles, 1984

As a photo-journalist in Los Angeles, in 1984 I was given the exciting assignment of [photographing the cover story](#) for the new science magazine *Genius*, edited by Salvatore Giannella. I was introduced to Leonardo's scholar [Carlo Pedretti](#) and his wife Rossana, I was tasked with documenting experiments that UCLA Professor Pedretti conducted, such as computer manipulations of the Vitruvian Man, or the virtual restoration of the Mona Lisa. I met Pinin Brambilla, who was conducting a workshop on her restoration of the Last Supper at the Getty Villa.



Pinin Brambilla at Getty Villa 1984

It is talented people like these that make me proud of being Italian.

P.S. On November 18 and 19, 2024 the documentary *Leonardo da Vinci* by Ken Burns aired on PBS. You may watch it in their archives by donating \$60 or more annually to your local PBS station.

Text and photos by Elisa Leonelli

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