Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

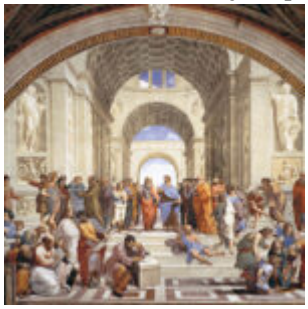
Leonardo vs. Coronavirus

Rick Meghiddo · Wednesday, March 25th, 2020

Raphael (1483-1520) was twenty-six-years old when he started to paint The School of Athens at the Vatican. To represent Plato arguing with Aristotle at the center of the fresco, Raphael depicted him as Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519), who, at the time, was fifty-seven years old.

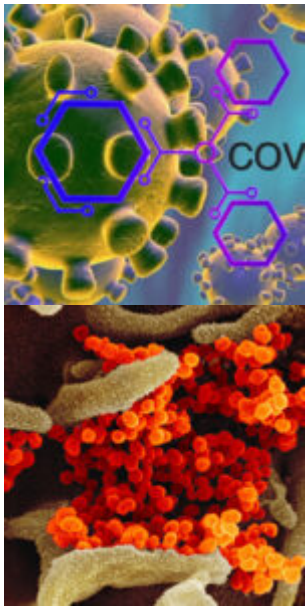
He is making a gesture characteristic of Leonardo: his right index is pointing up to the heavens.

School of Athens by Raphael, 1509-11

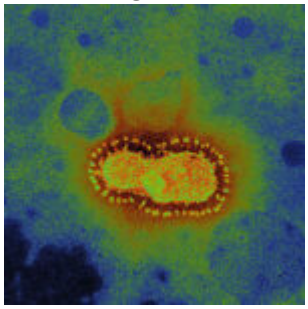


School of Athens by Raphael, at the Vatican

Five hundred and one years after Leonardo's death, the heavens have fallen upon Planet Earth with a virus, COVID-19, commonly known as Coronavirus. What would Leonardo have done if he had to confront such a pandemic?



In this image from a scanning electron microscope, the new coronavirus is in orange.



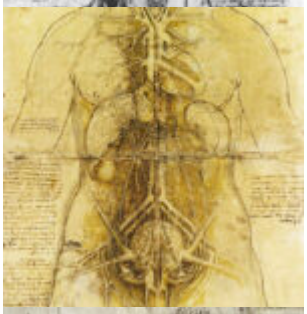
Leonardo’s areas of interest included drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture, science, engineering, literature, scenography, pageantry, astronomy, botany, paleontology, and cartography. The meaningful importance of immersing himself into such a wide range of subjects is in bringing the experiences in one field into another.

His skills as an artist allowed him to draw the human anatomy that he learned through dissections, and his learning from anatomy allowed him to express muscles and gestures on the surface of his subjects. Mona Lisa’s mysterious smile could not have been painted without his understanding of how the lips muscles function. He designed flying machines after observing how birds fly. His observation of rivers helped him to conceive a new capital for France, Romorantin, which included two palaces and waterways for outdoor spectacles, irrigation, street cleaning, flushing out horse stables and carrying away rubbish.

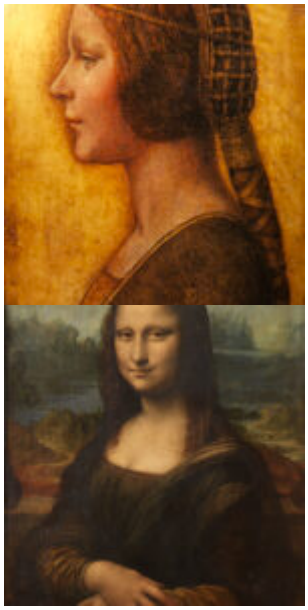
Leonardo’s self portrait, 1515

Vitruvian Man, 1490

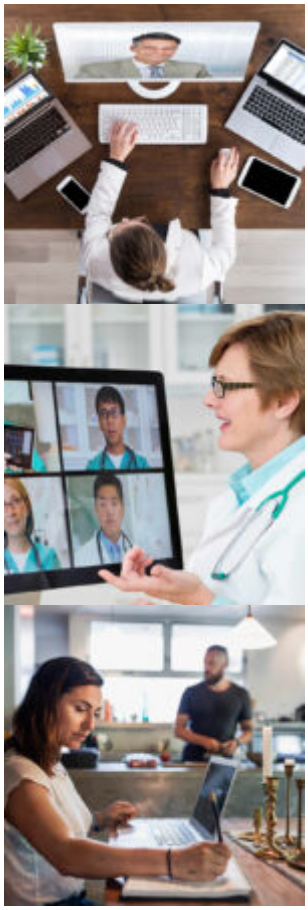
Cartoon of St. Anne, c. 1498-1510

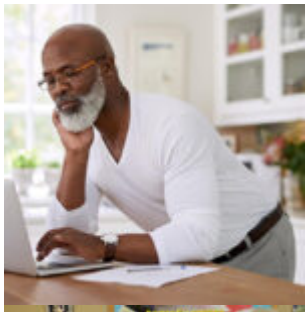


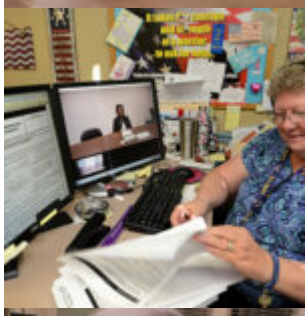
Leonardo’s Battle of Anghiari as painted by Peter Paul Rubens



Learning from Leonardo include being relentlessly curious, seeking knowledge for its own sake, retain a childlike sense of wonder, observe details carefully, get distracted, find time to loaf, let the perfect be the enemy of the good, think visually, wander across all the disciplines of the arts, sciences, engineering, and humanities, indulge fantasy, create for yourself, not just for patrons, collaborate, take notes, be open to mystery. Practicing mental mapping and lateral thinking may help.







There is some good news from having to get secluded in our home. We learn that much of the work we do can be done without having to spend hours driving and burning tons of carbon. Despite all the fear that the Coronavirus is spreading in the world, perhaps there is also good that will come of this, perhaps this is the time to rethink our value systems, to reunite with family members and even wit ourselves.

Coronavirus won’t be the last cataclysm that humanity will have to confront. As the world population continues to grow towards 10-12 billion people by the end of the century. We are challenged by colossal problems such as sustainability, climate change and increasing urbanization. We must change our lifestyle, and to do that, we must change our way of thinking. The renaissance way of looking at reality offers us an important path.

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