

ENTREVISTA

Ricardo Mansilla Corona*

Interview with Prof. Damiano Cosimo Iacobone

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DR. DAMIANO COSIMO IACOBONE is a leading researcher of Leonardo da Vinci's work. He is Associate Professor in History of Architecture at the Polytechnic of Milan and former Permanent Researcher at the same University.¹

Prof. Damiano Iacobone: As an outstanding specialist that you are from Da Vinci's work, the previous year must have been very exciting. Can you tell us what activities you participated in?

Many thanks for the question. First of all, I'd like to say that specially in Italy there have been many exhibitions, congresses and seminars about Leonardo da Vinci, and in particular cities in which Leonardo lived have organized some events. Also Politecnico di Milano—the University in which I teach— has organized its own celebrations, with a cycle of 4 conferences referred to Leonardo's studies about astronomy, architecture, fortifications and Milano. Considering my previous studies, I did on May 7th the conference "L'architettura fortificata al tempo di Leonardo", in which I analysed the contribution of Leonardo to the field of defences and fortifications, who summarized previous contributions such as those of Valturio and Francesco di Giorgio, analysing especially his designs for the improvements of the Sforza Castel in Milano, till the works for Cesare Borgia that we can consider advances of systems of fortifications used later in the 17th century.

After this, I have organized —always for Politecnico di Milano— the exhibition "Memorie della Leonardesca. Una mostra storica", from September 26 to December 8, in which I've recollected materials and memoirs of the famous exhibition dedicated to Leonardo in 1939, starting with archival documents of the first steps, to original pictures and movie of the exhibitions, catalogues of the

* Investigador del CEIICH, UNAM.

Correo electrónico: mansy@unam.mx

¹ Prof. Iacobone agreed to this interview at the request of the Editor of this journal.



period, and thought and impressions of the literary man C.E. Gadda, projecting to the future with the reconstruction in 3D of a project of Leonardo about a central plan church.

Another work realized for the celebrations of Leonardo has been an essay referred to the *Sala delle Asse* (in comparison with a previous example of a room entirely decorated with trees and foliage that I recognized in the Papal Palace in Avignon) published by the *Journal of the Sforza Castle* (“Rassegna di Studi e Notizie”).

To end with a congress about Leonardo and Valtellina (a mountain area in the north of Lombardy) in which I analyse the contribution of Leonardo to the landscape, from the first drawings only representing the paysage as principal subject, to the scientific representation of mountains in the red series of the Royal collection to landscape used in theatrical works and stage equipment, in a kind of route, from interior worlds to a fantastic expression.

In our life cycle we cannot have a closed anniversary just like the one we celebrated the previous year, which was a grieving anniversary. This makes us look to the future. How do you anticipate that Da Vinci's work influences the future of our species?

The question seems to be: which is Leonardo's legacy? I think it's not referred to specific objects (no robots, no spaceship etc.), but the great contribution for the future that Leonardo gave is the method of complexity to analyse a subject, that is to say to view, study and improve each thing through many different aspects, each of them contributing to a specific knowledge but comparing quickly their information. So that, different disciplines are compared and verified in each single subject. This is the knowledge of the future and this Leonardo did in the 16th century by his own.



In the last decades starting from the works of E. Macagno of the University of Iowa, the books of Fritjof Capra "Learning from Leonardo" and Toby Lester "Da Vinci Ghost" and the biography of Walter Isaacson a vision of a Leonardo as scientific as an artist has been shaping. Do you think this will generate a break in Leonardo's conception or help to perfect it?

All these authors insist on the idea of Leonardo as inventor of the empirical scientific method, that he saw the world as an integrated whole and his connections of art, science and society. This is certainly true, but first of all we can say that still in the Thirties (if not even before), scholars (just to quote one of them: Ignazio Calvi) recognized Leonardo's multidisciplinary approach and scientific method based on the observation and that in some catalogues and books of that period this was surely underlined. Which has been immediately after, is that scholars started to analyse Da Vinci's work in relations with their own knowledge, subdividing different disciplines and field in relation with their own field of studies, so that we have Leonardo's painting, architecture, hydraulic etcetera.

What has happened is a question of historiography not a question related to Leonardo's approach.

To do only an example: trees and rocks are represented by Leonardo as background of portraits, as geological and botanical creations, as symbols to celebrate the power, for plant properties, to create theatrical scenes and representations and so on: a multidisciplinary approach ever known, but from the Fifties studied with specialist knowledge by different scholars.

Recently you have been working on a subject that, judging by its title, has a clearly interdisciplinary character: architecture and neurosciences. Can you tell us what it is about?

With much pleasure, thanks! The beginning has been the knowledge of the deep relationship among physio-psychology of William Wundt and the projects and works of the architect Richard Neutra, such as the sense Haptic used by Charles Moore in his houses; starting from this interest, I decide to edit a volume with 10 essays: some to introduce the question by a theoretical point of view; others developed the question with historical aspects in the time of Art Nouveau till contemporary projects for public spaces; the last refer to detailed questions: materials, restoration and real project, such as that for a hospital for children in which each possible knowledge in terms of perception, sense of body, quality of the habitat has been applied.

The volume has been a complicated work, but interesting and useful to open new fields and questions especially for students and scholars. **ld**