

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY PRESENTS RENOWNED GROUP OF LEONARDO DA VINCI DRAWINGS FOR THE FIRST TIME

LEONARDO DA VINCI THE MECHANICS OF MAN

VANCOUVER, BC – Some of the most important drawings of the human body ever created are on view at the Vancouver Art Gallery from February 6 to May 2, 2010. For the first time in history, the anatomical drawings of Leonardo da Vinci's *Anatomical Manuscript A* are being presented in their entirety in the exhibition *Leonardo da Vinci: The Mechanics of Man*. Generously loaned from the Royal Collection by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for presentation during the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, this once-in-a-lifetime exhibition is free to the public during the 17 days of the Olympic Games as the result of a partnership with the Province of British Columbia.

“The drawings included in this magnificent presentation reveal the beauty and wonder of the human body in ways that had never been conceived before. They are extraordinary images and it is with great pride and much appreciation to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II that the Vancouver Art Gallery presents them to the world during this exciting time in our city's history,” said Vancouver Art Gallery director, Kathleen Bartels. “Together with an exceptional program of exhibitions during the time of the Winter Games, this landmark exhibition allows us to excel in our mission to present the best of the world's visual culture, both past and present, to audiences from far and wide.”

Leonardo da Vinci: The Mechanics of Man is the most substantial body of drawings by Leonardo ever shown in Canada. This historic exhibition presents the entire suite of Leonardo da Vinci's renowned *Anatomical Manuscript A*—the artist's most skilled and definitive group of anatomical drawings—for the first time. Comprised of a series of 18 sheets created during the winter of 1510, 16 of which have drawings on both sides, this celebrated group of exquisitely rendered compositions represents stunning achievements in both art and science. Executed in minute detail and with remarkable technical precision, the drawings illustrate Leonardo's unsurpassed skills of observation and investigation. With more than 240 individual drawings and 13,000 words written in Leonardo's unique mirror-image script, *Anatomical Manuscript A* is a treatise on the human body created centuries ahead of its time.

“It is futile to try to enumerate all of the firsts embodied in these drawings,” writes Martin Clayton of the Royal Collection, the exhibition's curator, in an essay for the catalogue accompanying the exhibition. “Virtually every drawing is the finest depiction of a particular structure to that date and, in some cases, for several centuries to come.”

Leonardo was born in 1452 near the town of Vinci in central Italy. By the age of twenty, he was working as an artist in nearby Florence, and his career took him to Milan, Rome and finally France, where he died in 1519. Considered the most



prominent figure of the Renaissance, Leonardo defined this remarkable period, exploring a wide range of intellectual pursuits with unparalleled success. In addition to painting some of the greatest works of western art, including the *Last Supper* and the *Mona Lisa*, Leonardo undertook sculptural, architectural and engineering projects, and studied many areas of the sciences, including geometry, optics, geology, botany and hydraulics.

During the 1480s, Leonardo began to plan a treatise on the central subject matter of Renaissance artists—the human body. This anatomical work became the most brilliant and sustained of all his scientific investigations. Leonardo combined manual dexterity in dissection, an acute understanding of physical structure and great skill as a draftsman to produce some of the most incisive studies of the human body ever made.

Early in his career, Leonardo's access to cadavers was limited and most of his anatomical observations were based on received wisdom, guesswork and dissections of animals such as bears, dogs and monkeys. As his reputation as an artist grew, opportunities to conduct human dissections became increasingly available. In time, Leonardo gained access to the bodies of executed criminals or people who died in charitable hospitals with no family to claim them. During the winter of 1510, he travelled to the University of Pavia, where he collaborated with a professor of anatomy to create one of the finest anatomical investigations of the human body ever committed to paper—*Anatomical Manuscript A*.

For the first time in history, the renowned drawings of *Anatomical Manuscript A* are on display in their entirety in *Leonardo da Vinci: The Mechanics of Man*. These extraordinarily detailed drawings are displayed in double-sided frames, allowing for close study of both sides of each sheet and enabling unprecedented access to Leonardo's meticulous and intimately sized renderings. On the surrounding walls, aspects of the drawings are reproduced on a massive scale along with English translations of his textual observations. To place the drawings in context, the exhibition presents computer animations of the artist's numerous inventions and a display of important anatomical drawings by other scientists and artists dating from before the time of Leonardo until the publication of *Gray's Anatomy* in the 19th century.

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