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LEONARDO

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“LEONARDO DA VINCI FIVE HUNDRED YEARS ON: THE SALVATOR MUNDI AND OTHER STORIES”

A lecture by Professor David Ekserdjian

As part of the official celebrations for the anniversary of 500 years from the death of Leonardo da Vinci, the Italian Embassy in Cyprus in collaboration with the art historian Maria Paphiti, organises this year’s second lecture on the famous Renaissance artist. The speaker, Professor David Ekserdjian, is one of the world’s most renowned art historians. The lecture will take place on 2nd December 2019, at 7:15 p.m. and it will be hosted by the Bank of Cyprus at its headquarters in Nicosia.

The event is generously supported by the Nicosia Tourism Board, the supermarket AphaMega, the Classic hotel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Byzantinist Society of Cyprus.

Leonardo da Vinci (15.4.1492-2.5.1519) is the most famous artist of all times. He died 500 years ago and to celebrate his life and legacy, Italy and many other countries, have dedicated this year to his memory via a multitude of exhibitions and events that culminate currently with the largest ever exhibition on the artist at the Louvre museum in Paris. Cyprus could not but participate in commemorating the distinguished artist. The present lecture follows the one that was successfully staged last May.

Leonardo’s outstanding talent was expressed early in his life and as a teenager he was educated in the studio of Andrea del Verrocchio in Florence. He soon became an accomplished artist who excelled in painting, drawing, sculpting and architecture. In fact, he was a polymath who practiced science, music, mathematics, engineering, literature, anatomy, geology, astronomy, botany, writing, history, and cartography. He worked for the most prominent art patrons

of the time, including Lorenzo de' Medici, Ludovico Sforza Duke of Milan, Pope Leo X and the King Francis I of France. Leonardo's unconventional personality, as well as his tremendously detailed and intriguing paintings, exudes a mystery that has been captivating the interest of scholars and the general public alike since their creation.

The sale of the painting "Salvator Mundi" at Christie's New York in November 2017 for 450,312,500 US\$ broke all records and proves indeed that Leonardo's art, which so rarely comes up in the market, is still the most sought after of all. One wonders why? Is it because Leonardo's paintings are the utter masterpieces? Or do collectors seek to acquire a piece of Leonardo's tangible genius? Professor David Ekserdjian, one of the world's foremost art historians in Renaissance art and one of the privileged few that actually examined the "Salvator Mundi" and other paintings by Leonardo, will narrate his own stories about the Italian master!



Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Salvator Mundi, painted circa 1500, oil on walnut panel, 65.5 x 45.1 cm, © Christie's

A concise biography of Professor David Ekserdjian:

Professor David Ekserdjian is a world-renowned authority on Italian Renaissance paintings and drawings, with particular specialities in the artists Correggio and Parmigianino, who are the subjects of his two Yale monographs of 1998 and 2006. He is also an expert on the history of collecting, a specialisation that informs his work as an adviser to auction houses like Sotheby's and Christie's, international museums and galleries such as the National Gallery and Tate Britain, as well as private collectors.



David Patrick Martin Ekserdjian
 Photographed by Lucy Anne Dickens
 C-type colour print, February 2001
 14 in. x 14 in. (355 mm x 357 mm)
 Purchased, 2001
 Primary Collection NPG P948 (13)
 © Lucy Dickens / National Portrait Gallery,
 London

Bronze sculpture is another of his areas of expertise and it formed the topic of one of the most recent of the many exhibitions that he has conceived and curated. "Bronze" at the Royal Academy of Arts in London (co-curated with Cecilia Treves) drew international acclaim and almost a quarter of a million visitors. His book of the exhibition was described by the Wall Street Journal as "the most beautiful book published in the world this year", and went on to win the Association for Cultural Enterprises award for the best new publication.

Professor Ekserdjian held the prestigious Slade Professorship at Oxford University for 2017-18. Currently, alongside his academic position at Leicester University where he teaches Art and Film History, Professor Ekserdjian is one of the two organisers of the major forthcoming exhibition on Raphael to take place in 2020 at the National Gallery in London on the occasion of the artist's 500th anniversary of his death. Professor Ekserdjian has published extensively – books, articles and reviews – and he frequently appears on television and on radio.

Statement by the Ambassador of Italy in Cyprus, Mr. Andrea Cavallari

The Embassy of Italy is very pleased and honoured to host Professor David Ekserdjian as part of the program of conferences that has been organized in Cyprus in collaboration with the art historian Maria Paphiti to celebrate Leonardo da Vinci's 500th anniversary. My gratitude goes to all those who made this event possible and in particular to the Bank of Cyprus foundation, with which the Embassy has a longstanding tradition of excellent cooperation.

I believe that Leonardo da Vinci's legacy goes beyond borders and time. Besides being a reason of particular pride for us Italians, his life and works have become part of our common heritage that we are glad to share with anyone who cares about culture, science and humanity.

It is in that spirit that, after the brilliant conference of Professor Maurizio Seracini last May, we are now pleased to bring to the Cypriot public the extraordinary research on Leonardo that has been made by Professor David Ekserdjian. I am sure that Professor Ekserdjian's presentation will be fascinating and enlightening, both on the case of the *Salvator Mundi* and with regard to many other aspects of Leonardo's work.

Statement by the art historian, Maria Paphiti

The recent sale of the "*Salvator Mundi*", a painting that was owned by three kings, was subsequently lost and then rediscovered, sparked once again the discussions about Leonardo's art. According to Giorgio Vasari, who composed the artist's biography, Leonardo attracted the interest, admiration, and sometimes anger or dislike of his contemporaries. His talent and excellence of his works, nonetheless, were undisputed and that is why "the loss of Leonardo saddened beyond all measure everyone who had known him, for no one ever lived who had brought such honour to painting". Leonardo's paintings had turbulent lives of their own and to recount but a few, one may refer to the 1939 theft by the Nazis of the *Lady with an Ermine* from Krakow, the sale of the portrait of *Ginevra de' Benci* in 1967 by the princely house of Lichtenstein to the National Gallery of Washington for five million US\$ (37,956,640 US\$) and to the

legendary *Mona Lisa*, which had been stolen from the Louvre in 1911 and was insured for the world-record amount of 100 million US\$ (current value 846,532,980 US\$) in 1962 in order to travel to exhibitions in Washington D.C. and New York. Even Leonardo's missing paintings, like the *Battle of Anghiari* and the *Leda and the Swan* continue in their absence to excite the scholars and general public. On 2nd December Professor David Ekserdjian will share with us his many wonderful experiences around the art of the unsurpassed Leonardo!

The lecture will be in English. It is open to the public and free of charge. Seat reservations are necessary and can be booked via the Italian Embassy: nicosia.culturale@esteri.it

We extend our sincere thanks to the following organisations, whose invaluable contribution made the lecture possible.

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