

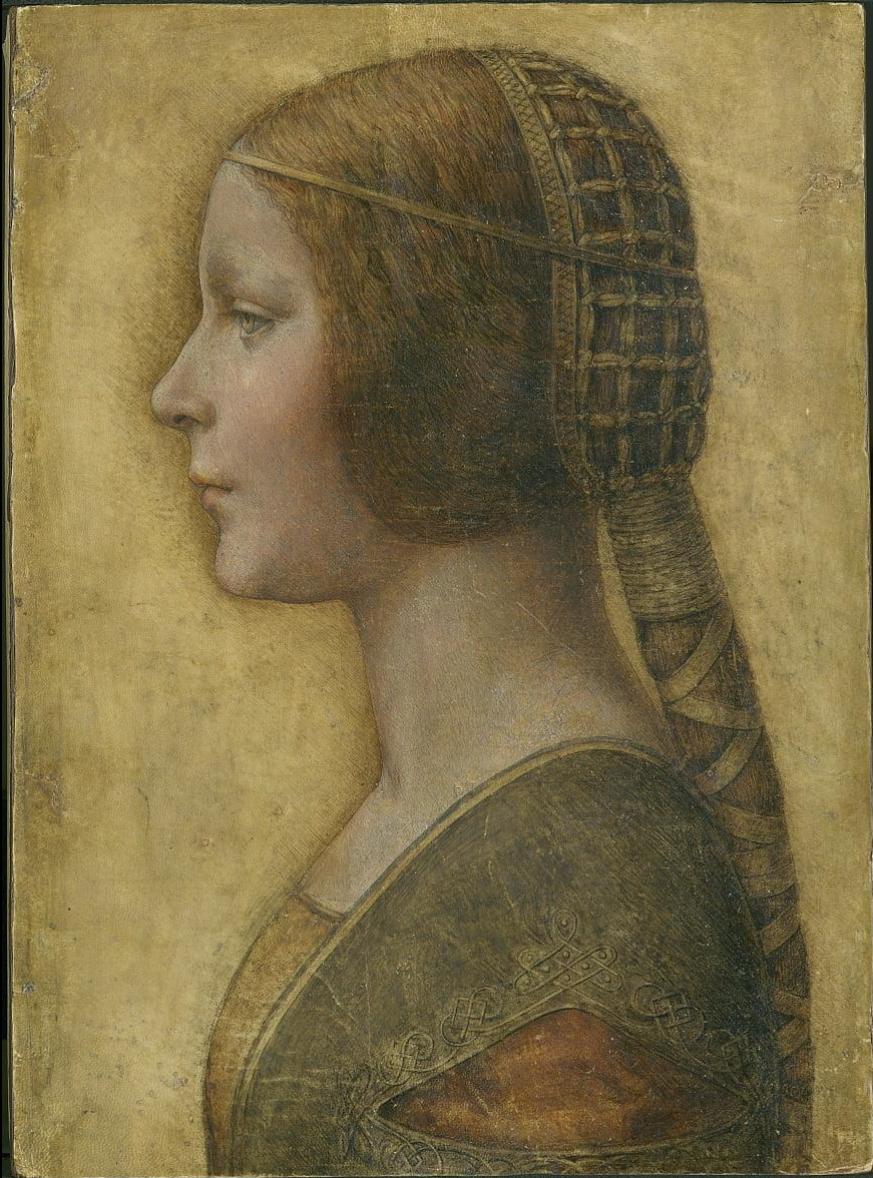
Leonardo da Vinci



# *La Bella Principessa*

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Portrait of Bianca Sforza



- Circa 1480 – 1490.
- Black, red and white chalk, pen and ink on vellum. Strengthened with oak panel backing.
- 23.87 x 33.27 cm (9 3/8 x 13 1/16 in).
- Private Coleccion, Switzerland.
- Certified by Martin Kemp.
- Statement of authenticity by:
  - Pr. Mina Gregori
  - Dr. Nicholas Turner
  - Pr. Alessandro Vezzosi
  - Dr. Cristina Geddo
  - Pr. Carlo Pedretti
  - Pr. Martin Kemp
  - Pr. Claudio Strinati

## INTRODUCTION

A major, previously unknown work by Leonardo is the rarest of rare things. A few, relatively slight drawings have appeared in the last 50 years. There have been a host of untenable attributions and a smattering of top class forgeries. But nothing like the present drawing. Indeed, the term 'drawing' is something of an understatement, since the beautifully modulated hues and tones of the portrait are produced by a subtle interplay between coloured chalks, pen in ink and tinted washes. Executed on vellum (parchment) it is a highly-finished, luxury product, exhibiting the highest level of controlled skill.

Every aspect of the portrait, from its striking appearance, its scientific examination and its likely function testifies to its authenticity. Let us begin with the hard facts of its physical properties.

## MEDIUM AND SCIENTIFIC EXAMINATION

The drawing is executed on a relatively large sheet of vellum (33.0 x 23.9 cm), currently laid down on an old oak board. There is evidence, particularly in the diagonal hatching to the left of the woman's profile, that Leonardo first used an unusually fine and hard black chalk, sharpened to a point. The main features of the image were then established with great delicacy and subtlety in pen with a relatively translucent brown ink of a kind with which we are familiar in Leonardo's drawings. Coloured chalks, mainly red with traces of black in the shaded areas were used to -

Establish the flesh tones, with the natural colour of the vellum used to establish the yellowish tint that would normally be provided by yellow pigment. Areas of the flesh have been softly worked over with more opaque pigments containing white lead. Washes of pigment, probably vegetable dyes in a gum binder, provide the colour of the costume. The colour of the hair is established with a thinned wash of brown ink. Details of the hair, headdress and costume, such as the knot designs, have been emphasised in a darker ink applied with a brush.

A sliver of parchment was taken from the lower left margin and subjected to carbon dating at the Institute of Particle Physics in Zurich. The result gives a certain date range of 1440-1650, which effectively rules out the portrait being a 17th-century forgery.

The main examination was undertaken by Pascal Cotte of Lumiere in Paris, using his unique Multi-spectral Scanner. This scanner records optical data at unprecedentedly high resolution across the spectrum from ultra-violet, through the frequencies of visible light, to three bands of infrared. Infrared data was also obtained by transmission through the image. The spectral composition of the light from specific areas was matched against the known spectral composition of pigments. "False colour" images were produced to highlight differences in pigments, not least in areas subject to retouching. Images in raking light from the side and below were obtained. The data from various scans were combined to produce comprehensive pictures of the "archaeology" of the portrait. The parchment and panel were also X-rayed.

## THE MAIN OBSERVATIONS ARE

1. The vellum and the pigments have undergone the kinds of damage, abrasion and restoration that are expected with an object of this age;
2. The shaded areas were first laid in with extensive parallel hatching in Leonardo's distinctive left-handed manner, i.e. the strokes passing from upper left to lower right. Such hatching is seen more extensively in the IR images than by naked eye. The hatching in the background to the left of the woman's profile appears to have been started at the inked contour, passing upwards to the left rather than downwards in order to minimise the transgressing of the contour;
3. The more opaque areas of pigment on the cheek and neck have been diplomatically reinforced during an old campaign of restoration, to cover areas of damage to the original surface;
4. The darker ink reinforcements added with the brush, most evident in the headdress and costume, also result from restoration, undertaken carefully, piously and with no little skill. It is evident that the retouchings were produced by a right-handed artist;
5. The lightish brown wash added to the diagonal shading to the left of the profile and elsewhere at the edges of contours may date from the time of the main restoration;

6. The base colour of the vellum is left uncovered or little covered in some regions of the head as a way of endowing the flesh with colour. This effect is used notably in the iris of the eye. The sheen in the upper regions of her hair is achieved in the same way;

7. The contours of the facial profile reveal some minute manoeuvring to establish just the right outline;

8. The upper, right and lower edges of the sheet are consistent in appearance and may be original. The left edge, on the other hand, has been cut somewhat irregularly. A crooked vertical incision within the margin in the lower left third of the sheet bears witness to a knife having slipped when the sheet was being cut. This evidence indicates that the sheet was once bound in a manuscript or codex, before being excised and laid down on board;

9. The relatively regular distribution of tightly-spaced follides suggests that the parchment is made from the skin of a lamb.

## CONCLUSION

The lady in profile, whom for the moment I am calling "la Bella Milanese", is an important addition to Leonardo's canon.

I would, at this stage, not recommend any restoration or removal from the board, which would be a perilous procedure.

It is important that it is exposed to expert and public viewers in one or more exhibitions. The ideal site for the first exhibition would be the Sala dell Asse in the Castello Sforzesco in Milan. A book should be published on the occasion of the first exhibition, presenting the full body of technical and historical evidence.

***Pr. Martin Kemp***

19th October 2008.

\*I am happy to acknowledge those who first determined that the drawing was by Leonardo, namely Mina Gregori and Nicholas Turner. I have also benefitted from the opinions of Carlo Pedretti and Alessandro Vezzosi as expressed on the Lumiere site.



# Real Photos





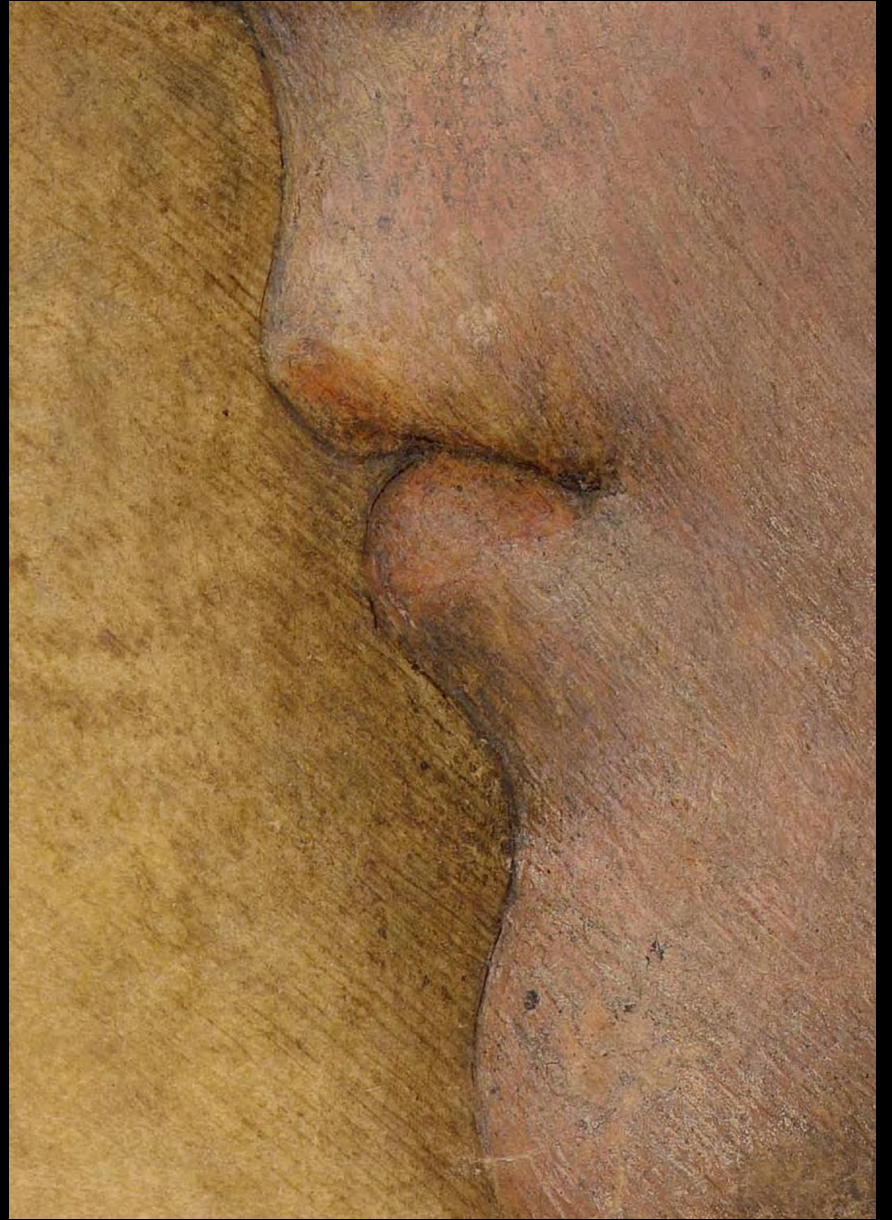
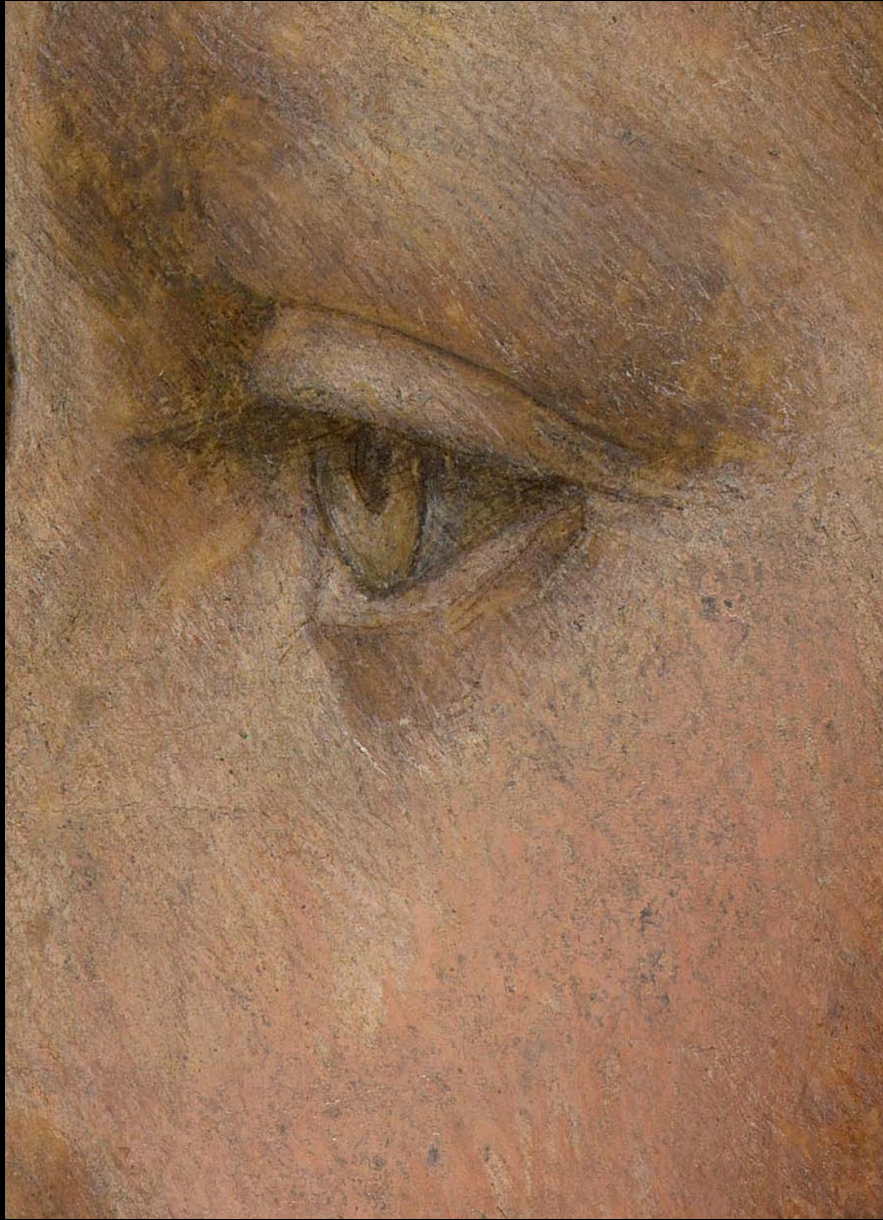


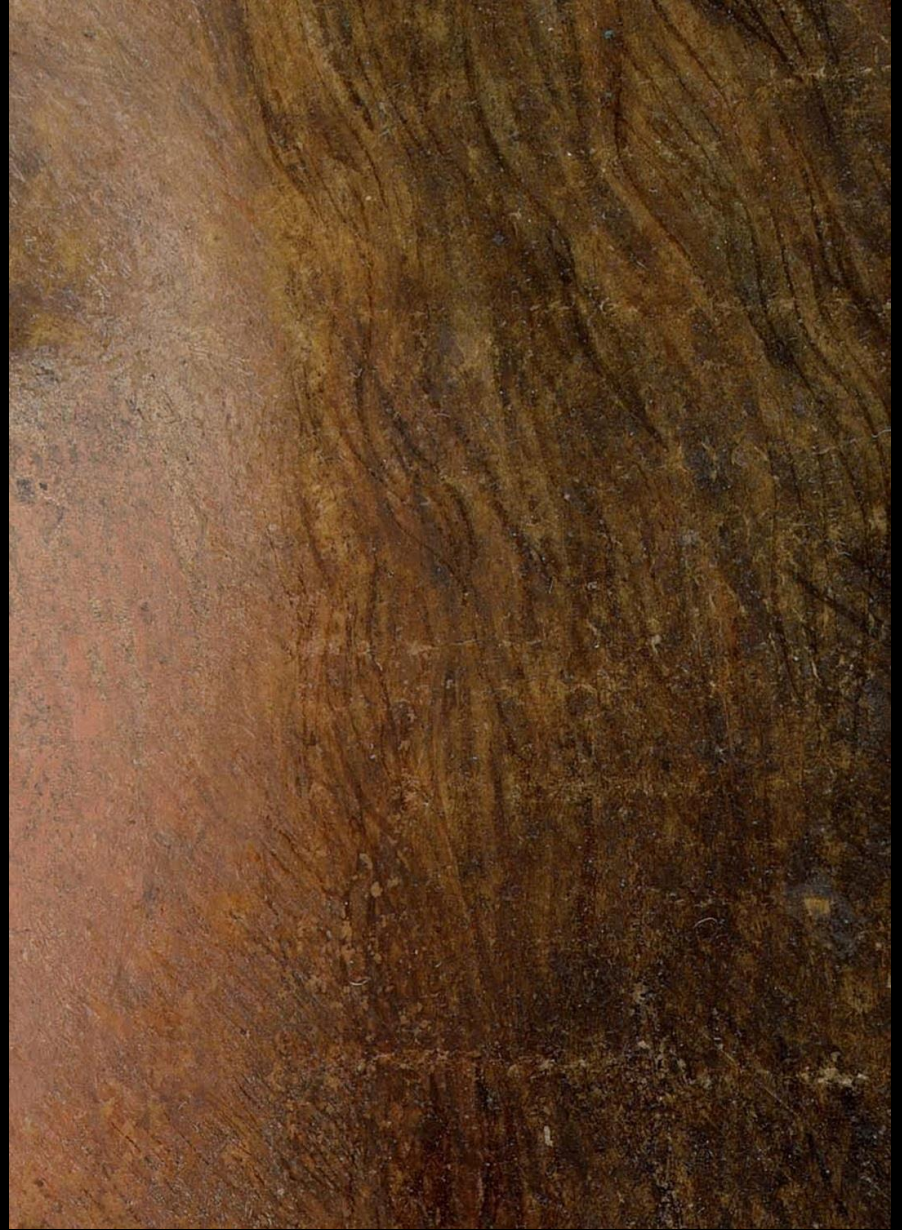


# Detailed Photos

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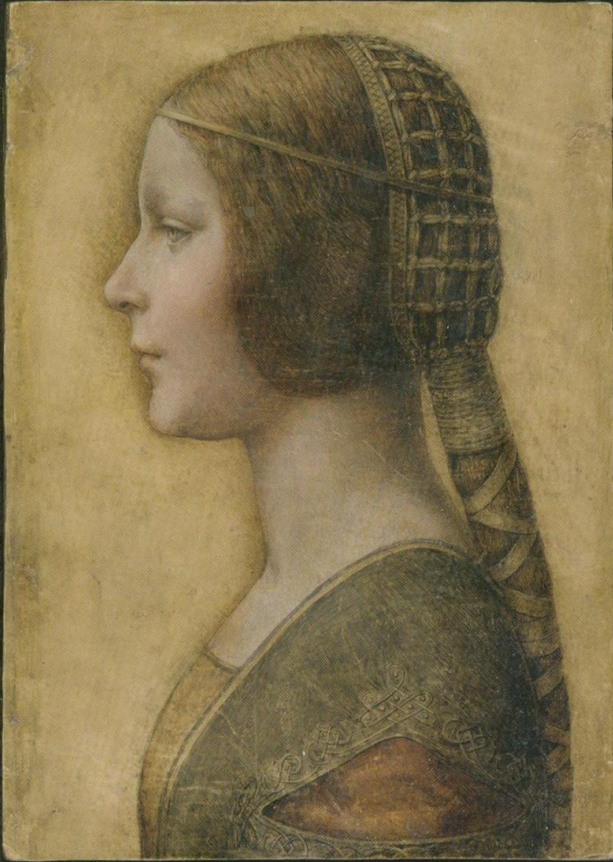








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