

# Leonardo's anatomical sketches fascinate modern-day anatomist

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The superficial anatomy of the shoulder and neck from Leonardo da Vinci's Folio 2V, part of the artist's "Anatomical Manuscript A." This print is one of dozens included in 'Leonardo da Vinci: The Mechanics of Man,' an art catalog co-authored by Ron Philo, Ph.D., of the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and Martin Clayton, deputy curator of the Print Room at Windsor Castle, England. The catalog was produced by the Royal Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in association with the Vancouver Art Gallery. Credit: Royal Collection © 2010, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Sketched at a time when few dared oppose prevailing medical dogma, the anatomical drawings of Leonardo da Vinci display his rare and

courageous curiosity, says a Texas anatomist who co-authored a new art catalog of the medieval drawings.

Ron Philo, Ph.D., senior lecturer of cellular and [structural biology](#) at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, teaches anatomy to bioscience students through the art of cadaveric dissection, the same activity that attracted Leonardo later in his life.

Dr. Philo is the co-author of "[Leonardo da Vinci](#): The Mechanics of Man," a catalog produced by the Royal Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in association with the Vancouver Art Gallery in Vancouver, British Columbia.

## **Manuscript A commemorated**

This catalog features the renowned drawings of Leonardo's "Anatomical Manuscript A." Dr. Philo's co-author is Martin Clayton, deputy curator of the Print Room at Windsor Castle, England, and a noted authority on Leonardo's drawings. The drawings' permanent home is the Royal Library at Windsor Castle.

The catalog debuted in conjunction with the exhibition "Leonardo da Vinci: The Mechanics of Man," which is on view at the Vancouver Art Gallery until May 2. Generously loaned from the Royal Collection by Queen Elizabeth II for presentation during the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games, this exhibition presents the entire suite of Manuscript A — the artist's finest anatomical drawings — for the first time in history.

## **Studies conducted in Florence, Milan**

"The Mechanics of Man" stems from Leonardo's interest in sketching

the anatomy of the deceased in hospitals, mostly in Florence and Milan. The 160-page catalog begins with a historical section by Mr. Clayton. The next section presents facsimiles of each drawing, followed by facsimiles with Leonardo's extensive notes translated into English, together with commentary by Mr. Clayton and Dr. Philo. The book also contains many labeled close-ups of anatomical systems.

This is the second Royal Collection collaboration for Dr. Philo, who annotated a 1992 volume, "Leonardo da Vinci: The Anatomy of Man," which has been translated into French, Spanish and Japanese. A portion of the anatomical sketches being shown in Vancouver traveled to Houston in 1992, and the host museum wanted a local anatomist to be the commentator on a new book about them. A colleague in 1991 recommended Dr. Philo to Martin Clayton, beginning a 19-year partnership.

Years later, Leonardo still holds Dr. Philo's fascination.

## **Amazing detail, given the era**

"Leonardo's drawings are so precise they appear to have been drawn robotically," Dr. Philo said. "They were not 100 percent correct, and much of that was probably because he was drawing from material that was not embalmed. You can't take days to do a dissection under those conditions. He did much of this work in the cool months of the year.

"He was ahead of his time," Dr. Philo added. "He was dissecting and drawing while others were not. He drew according to the medical philosophy of the day but didn't always agree with it."

Leonardo got even by making comments such as, "This is what is believed, but I've never seen it that way because it is too small," Dr. Philo said.

## A self-taught dynamo

Artists of the day were not scholars and Leonardo was therefore self-taught, but he pushed the Renaissance envelope with creativity and curiosity.

"One cannot appreciate what a good artist he was," Dr. Philo said. "The closer you look at a sketch, the more detail there is. It is almost microscopic. He's not only a better artist than you have been told, he's a better artist than you can imagine."

**More information:** "Leonardo da Vinci: The Mechanics of Man," by Martin Clayton and Ron Philo, is listed at \$29.95 and is available through U.S. booksellers and online.

Provided by University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio

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