

Nushin Elahi's London Letter

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At the time of the National Gallery's blockbuster Leonardo exhibition I remember thinking how I'd love to see more of the Queen's collection of his drawings, not knowing I'd have that pleasure so soon. His anatomical drawings wouldn't have been my first choice, but **Leonardo da Vinci: Anatomist**, at the **Queen's Gallery** until 7 October, gives a fascinating insight into the artist's work.

I can't have been the only viewer clenching muscles, tracing bones, surreptitiously poking my ribs and generally wishing I could test his findings on the body conveniently located in front of the pictures. There is probably more anatomy than I ever had at school, and for a moment you wish Leonardo had left this to a lesser artist. But then you realise that in any other hands it is doubtful we would still be seeing drawings that are in most areas entirely accurate. It's hard in this era of 3-D photography to fully comprehend the intricacy of what Leonardo achieved in his art, with the materials to hand. It was only for a short period in the later part of his life that he regularly had corpses from which to work. At other times he was trying to extrapolate the human body from animal carcasses.

Never one to finish a project before being distracted by some new problem, Leonardo's anatomical work was never finalised. He was achingly close to completing the very first comprehensive study of human anatomy, but instead, through an accident of fate, and British luck, his entire collection of studies landed up in the royal archives.

The collection is beautifully presented, with large captions and many blow-ups of the fine details, as well detailed medical discussions on the accuracy of the drawings. As one doctor said, "No medical illustration has ever produced images to surpass these." There are quirky touches to the works: a quick diagram of a castle between a dog's diaphragm, the puzzle of trying to figure out spherical muscles, the unfamiliar look of a woman's reproductive organs, which he had based on those of a cow. Using the lost wax method of bronze casting, he discovered actual shape of the ventricles of the brain. His work is the point at which ancient beliefs were finally exchanged for factual realities, which is why Leonardo captures the modern man's imagination. As you see him trace the arc that an arm can make, you see not only a man trying to penetrate the workings of the body, but an artist marvelling at the mystery of life itself.

As something of a companion-piece to the Tate's fabulous Picasso exhibition, the **British Museum** is showing the full collection of **Picasso Prints: The Vollard Suite** (until 2 Sept), a series of 100 etchings the artist completed in the mid-1930s. It is one of only a few public institutions to possess the entire series, which became a visual autobiography for the artist. Picasso completed most of them during his affair with Marie-Therese, and the work is enhanced by knowing some of the images he coded into them. For example,



(Right Page -Top Left) Queen Elizabeth II by Andy Warhol, 1985: National Portrait Gallery, London
 (Top Right) 'God Save the Queen' poster promoting the Sex Pistols Artist: Jamie Reid, 1977. © Jamie Reid. Photograph by Victoria and Albert Museum
 Elizabeth II by Gerhard Richter, 1966 Tate: Purchased 1988. © Gerhard Richter. Photograph © Tate, London 2010
 Queen Elizabeth II by Lucian Freud, 2001 The Royal Collection © Lucian Freud. Coronation Cross Gilbert & George, 1981 Tate: Purchased 1982 © Gilbert & George
 Leonardo da Vinci: A skull sectioned, 1489; Studies of the foetus in the womb, c.1510-13; The muscles of the shoulder and arm, and the bones of the foot, c.1510. The Royal Collection (c) 2011, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II / (Above) Pablo Picasso Faun uncovering a sleeping nude figure reclining on a bed; plate 27 of the Vollard Suite (VS 27), Etching & aquatint. Nude bearded sculptor working on statue with model (Marie Therese) posing; plate 59 of the Vollard Suite (VS 59). 1933. Etching. Copyright of Succession Picasso/DACS 2011

