

Thursday, March 31, 2011

Events NYC | Paolo Galluzzi "The Shadow of Light:
Leonardo's Mind by Candlelight"



The Shadow of Light: Leonardo's Mind by Candlelight A lecture by Paolo Galluzzi

Spirals of smoke, and energy rising from air hitting a flame was the seminal image shown by Paolo Galluzzi last evening in his presentation "The Shadow of Light: Leonardo's Mind by Candlelight". From the Codex Atlanticus of ca. 1508-10, this image crystallized Galluzzi's theme of unity--the unity in which Leonardo perceived the earth, the human body, and physical phenomena. To Leonardo, this unity linked all the phenomena from the microcosm to the macrocosm, in a vision of reality—a concept preceding by several centuries our contemporary Gestalt or System Thinking.

"Leonardo," says Prof. Galluzzi, "records the extraordinary chain of thoughts triggered by the candle burning on his table", as recorded in a double folio in the Codex Atlanticus of c. 1508-10 – a fairly long and organic text, at least by Leonardo's standards, entitled *On the motion of flame*. The sequence of ingenious observations and penetrating reflections echoes experiments and analyses recorded in other manuscripts of the same years. Leonardo's daring analogies offer a fascinating journey through his unified vision of man and the physical world, a vision reaching from natural philosophy to meteorology, from the 'science of painting' to cosmology, from anatomy to geology. The candle's

flame is transformed by Leonardo's sharp eye into a powerful microscope that reveals the universal principles which govern all natural phenomena."

Most daring, perhaps, was Leonardo's likening the streaming water in the earth to the blood in the body. Or most fascinating was Leonardo's "making art" as process used to understand the working of things, which would be expressed in modern terms as "form follows function".

The metaphor of the candle flame revealing the universal principles Leonardo perceived as governing all natural phenomena was made all the more convincing by the speaker's evidence gleaned from Leonardo's manuscripts and paintings. Interestingly, after ca. 1510, Leonardo veered away from this train of thought.

Would Leonardo be known as an artist were he working today? Wide-ranging discussion followed the talk, with one scholar positing a more scientific role for Leonardo in our time--molecular biologist, cosmologist, or something unknown to us that he would have pioneered.

Elizabeth Davis

Prof. Galluzzi has lectured and taught at the Universities of Siena and Florence, and at Harvard, Princeton, UCLA, and NYU as well as at the University of Hamburg, the Centre Koyré, at the Ecole des Haute Etudes (Paris). Paolo Galluzzi has been Director of Florence's *Museo Galileo* (formerly the Institute and Museum of the History of Science) since 1982. He is a member of the Royal Academy of Science in Stockholm and socio of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. He is the author of more than 200 publications on the activity of the scientists and engineers of the Renaissance, on several aspects of science during the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution, on scientific terminology, on the activities of Galileo and his school, on the history of the European scientific academies and on the birth and development of the historiography of science.

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