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Leonardo: A Restless Genius

Antonio Forcellino
Lucinda Byatt, Translator
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Genius is as genius does. With fortuitous circumstances, genius can do more. Take Leonardo: The illegitimate son of a notary in the 1450s, he was blessed with paper and ink for playthings, and it became the material he used to express his thoughts—a habit continued all his life. He was also born just a few miles from Florence, with the Renaissance in full blossom, offering endless artistic and creative inspiration. Those details surely gave him a lift, but let's not quibble—along with the likes of Plato, Archimedes, and Newton, Leonardo is a titan of Western culture.

As a leading restorer of, and expert on, Renaissance art, Antonio Forcellino is uniquely positioned to validate Leonardo's talent and is an ultimate chronicler of his life. And what a life. From metallurgy to anatomy, optics, mechanics, and geology, Leonardo's interests knew few bounds. Forcellino also makes it clear that Leonardo was innovative on the canvas. His skills of observation and willingness to show chubby infants in all their ungainliness, for example, was extraordinary for the time. In reference to Leonardo's *Madonna of the Carnation*, Forcellino writes, "We are looking at one of the first 'real-life' paintings of the Renaissance and at one of Leonardo's first successful attempts to capture and reproduce the natural world."

MATT SUTHERLAND (May/June 2018)

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