

Da Vinci's inventions attract visitors and cybernauts

Q & A on Facebook demonstrates the modern edge of the exhibition in Toronto with Milan curator

By Rosanna Bonura

This fall the Ontario Science Centre was pleased to announce the opening of *Leonardo da Vinci's Workshop: The Exhibition*. Presented by Barilla Canada Inc., it is the first display of its kind in Canada celebrating the work of one of history's greatest inventors and artists. On February 2, the exhibition took its modern-edge to another level by hosting the first-ever Facebook live event called *Inspiring Inventiveness: Beyond da Vinci*. The groundbreaking event consisted of a discussion that examined da Vinci's contributions to modern invention and how his contributions can influence young minds today. Open to the public via Facebook, viewers were able to listen to a panel of experts which included Canadian innovator Michael Serbinis, President of *Kobo* – a leading global eReading company, da Vinci expert and exhibition curator Massimiliano Lisa, special guest and moderator, Wendy Mesley, who took questions from a live Facebook audience, Sandra Martin, Executive Editor, *Today's Parent*, and Dr. Hooley McLaughlin, Chief Science Officer, Ontario Science Centre. For those who missed the event and are interested in viewing it, you can do so by visiting: www.facebook.com/ontariosciencecentre and clicking on the Livestream tab.

The minute one enters the exhibition, they are instantly immersed in array of displays featuring fascinating models of Leonardo's inventions, cutting-edge technology allowing visitors to interact with his famous codices (notebooks), and impressive digital versions of iconic pieces such as the *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*. The exhibition also features dozens of designs and re-created models that showcase Leonardo's modern concepts and inventions that truly made him a genius far ahead of his time. Other items on display are several machines invented by Leonardo including the Aerial Screw, Double Crane, Hydraulic Saw, Mechanical Bat, Paddle Boat, Robot Knight, Self-Supporting Bridge, Wire-Controlled Bird, and several other inventions. It is without doubt one of the most unique exhibitions to be



displayed in Canada. "Leonardo was a great thinker, he observed nature and wanted to reproduce whatever he saw as a mechanical device. Very few artifacts of Leonardo have survived, except his codices and even that, half of them are lost. What we see with the models featured at the exhibition is an interpretation of those sketches," says Zoran Miscevic, Researcher/Programmer at the Ontario Science Centre.

Some of the impressive items of the exhibition include the first-ever models of his *Great Kite*, *Harpsichord Viola* instrument, and *Mechanical Lion*, that were

re-created according to Leonardo's drawings. Visitors can see first-hand, enabling them to understand the details that went into the creation of these inventions. "Leonardo never made blueprints he rather had his ideas and would sketch them down in the codices. This is an interpretation of what those sketches may mean. They are meaningful and quite accurate in terms of reproducing what Leonardo had sketched. Some of these interpretations are being showcased in this exhibition for the first time," says Zoran. One of the most impressive parts of the ex-

hibition is the world's first digital reproduction of the restored *The Last Supper* and digital version of the *Mona Lisa*, which allows visitors to take a closer look at details of the originals previously unknown to most. "We've seen reproductions of these paintings, many of which are faded, so it's quite fascinating to see an old painting being digitally restored," adds Zoran. All models in the exhibition were meticulously constructed from Leonardo's surviving codices, containing thousands of pages of notes, drawings and designs. Touch-screen technology gives



Top left: entrance to exhibition; Bottom left: Facebook event; Above (on top): Curator Massimiliano Lisa with Lesley Lewis, CEO of Ontario Science Centre and Michael Serbinis, President and CEO of Kobo Inc.; Above (on bottom): Massimiliano Lisa with Dr. Hooley McLaughlin, Chief Science Officer of the Ontario Science Centre (Photos: Ontario Science Centre)

visitors the chance to interact and look through 600 pages and secrets from the *Manuscript B*, the *Codex on Flight* and the *Codex Atlanticus*. Through these pages, visitors are able to delve into over 1,000 models and machines, many in 3-D animation, making this very interactive.

"The Ontario Science Centre is always seeking interesting and inspiring exhibitions and this one definitely fits into that category. Leonardo did innovations in his mind and that's what we're trying to promote—a culture of innovation," says Zoran. It is exhibitions such as this one that gives people a better understanding and sense of some of the world's greatest innovators of all time like Leonardo. "The scope of the exhibition is broad—you can find his models, codices, and artworks all at the same time. If you take the time to analyze and explore the codices on the touch screen computers, you will definitely get a much better idea of what Leonardo was into which was pretty much everything," continues Zoran.

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Leonardo da Vinci's Workshop: The Exhibition is curated by da Vinci experts at *Leonardo3* in Milan, Italy. Toronto is the exhibition's third stop in North America after New York and Philadelphia. *Leonardo3* founded by members Massimiliano Lisa, Mario Taddei, and Edoardo Zanon, is an innovative research centre and media company dedicated exclusively to the work of Leonardo da Vinci. The centre includes a workshop for research and study, exhibition and museum production, editorial, television and multimedia production, and a publishing company. Its mission is to study, interpret and make cultural heritage available to the public through the use of avant-garde methods and technology. One of its founders, Massimiliano Lisa was in Toronto for the live Facebook event. *Tandem* had the opportunity to speak with Massimiliano about the exhibition.

What is it about this exhibition that makes it so unique?

It's unique because the goal is to have people see Leonardo da Vinci like they've never seen and understood before. Our approach is completely different because we started from our Leonardo3 workshop in Milano where we have remaining manuscripts that no one else has. We try to interpret things from Leonardo that were previously too difficult to understand. Me, along with the other founders, Mario Taddei and Edoardo Zanon, work like Leonardo did, we're able to sketch like artists and at the same time have

degrees in industrial design. The secret is that you have to know and understand all of the projects made by Leonardo to make the reconstructions that we have.

How do you feel about the positive reaction the exhibition has received here in Toronto?

The impression is very good. Our goal is to not just impress people with the genius of Leonardo, but explain everything at the exhibition. We want people to understand that even be-

hind many of the complexities of Leonardo, there are simple single parts. We want people to understand that anything is possible if you open your mind and are curious like Leonardo was. What we've seen in Toronto like in other parts of the world, is that there is so much interest in Leonardo by the younger generation.

What is it about Leonardo da Vinci and his work that people can still learn from today?

You can learn many things

from da Vinci today. The first thing is that he was a genius because he was not scared to experiment. In everything he did he tried to always push technology by inventing technologies when they were not there and by having no fear to experiment. He did this not just with machines but also with paintings. One key point we can learn from Leonardo is to not have fear of experimenting and also not have fear of failing which he did several times. Today, we often fear to go wrong and don't

do things.

Would you say this exhibition gives people a better understanding of who Leonardo da Vinci was as a creator?

Absolutely. We show the world of Leonardo and a man who was full of art and science. These two parts of Leonardo are closely tied together—he was an artist in science and scientist in art. Today, these two things are often separated so Leonardo attracts people because he mixed these together. I believe Leonardo is the only example

we have in history of this kind of work that links together two fields of humanity. When you enter the exhibition you experience this in many ways. ♦

Leonardo da Vinci's Workshop: The Exhibition runs until March 18, 2012 at the Ontario Science Centre. For more information visit: www.ontariosciencecentre.ca/davinci.

For information on the Leonardo3 workshop in

Milan visit:

www.leonardo3.net.

— R.B.