

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 Volland 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,



the simple vase of flowers on the window ledge was a symbol of his lover. Her classical features link most of the images, both as lover and as work of art - an almost electric charge tangible between the model and the sculptor. Picasso explores classical mythology, using Ovid's Metamorphosis to show how art becomes life, and later the symbol of the Minotaur transforms that gentle love into a violent passion. The dark shadow of a looming war begins to prefigure images that would feature in his masterpiece, Guernica.

It's hard to get away from the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in London right now, but you don't have to be a fan of royalty to find the **National Portrait Gallery** exhibition of **The Queen: Art and Image** (until 21 October) interesting. There are photographs of her posed throughout her reign, some of the most familiar being by Cecil Beaton, but those that draw your eye are those like Lord Litchfield's unusual one of her laughing aloud. The portraits range from deferential formal images in the Fifties through to the subversive 1977 Sex Pistols poster and Lucien Freud's miserable 2001 offering that is the size of a large postage stamp. They also trace the arc of the public view of royalty as it teetered on oblivion. That tension between tradition and modernism is cleverly played on in a 2007 image called Elizabeth vs Diana, where Korean artist Kim Dong-Yoo uses tiny images of Diana to build a picture of the queen. It is not easy bringing something new to such a truly iconic image, and yet Andy Warhol's 1985 silkscreen prints of a very glamorous queen do just that, while German artist Gerhard Richter's familiar blurring technique and the exaggerated features of his second portrait give a slightly surreal look. Finally, Chris Levine's *Lightness of Being* (2007) shows the Queen with her eyes closed, poised perhaps between person and position.

Sometimes design can still feel modern nearly a century later, and certain items that date from the Bauhaus era are startlingly fresh, such as the tubular steel chair by Marcel Breuer from the mid-twenties. The movement is associated with architecture largely because Mies van der Rohe was at the helm when the Nazis closed it down in the Thirties, but all forms of functional design were part of its teachings. The founder Walter Gropius advocated a marriage between art and technology that underlies much of our modern view of design.

It is fitting to see an exhibition of the Bauhaus movement in the stark surroundings of the **Barbican**, but what surprised me was how long the queue was. **Bauhaus: Art as Life** (until 12 August) is a detailed exploration of the 14-year movement whose influence is still felt today. It covers a huge array of examples of work from photography to textiles, printing, sculpture, theatre and film by teachers and pupils alike. The two great artists who taught there from the early Twenties to its closure were Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee and the show includes a few significant works by both of them.



(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 Lucien Freud, 2001 The Royal Collection © Lucien 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 Volland Suite (VS 27)., Etching & aquatint. *Nude bearded sculptor working on statue with model (Marie Therese) posing*; plate 59 of the Volland Suite (VS 59). 1933. Etching. Copyright of Succession Picasso/DACS 2011

