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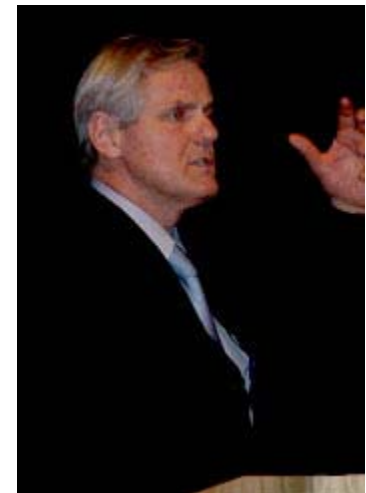


Dogged Alumnus Uncovers Da Vinci Secrets

By Ioana Patringenaru | February 6, 2006

A character stepped right out of *"The Da Vinci Code"* and onto a UCSD stage last week. The tale he told was just as compelling as Dan Brown's bestseller, though it didn't involve a secret, thousand-year-old plot by the Catholic Church. In *"The Da Vinci Code,"* Brown says that Maurizio Seracini "unveiled the unsettling truth" about Leonardo's work.

Well, sort of. In fact, Seracini, who graduated from UCSD in 1973, used cutting-edge technology to look for Leonardo's long-lost *"Battle of Anghiari"* and to shed new light on one of the master's best-known paintings, *"The Adoration of the Magi."* The UCSD alumnus, who from certain angles looks like an older, white-haired George Clooney, gave an overview of his findings during a lecture at Calit2 Thursday night.



UCSD alumnus Maurizio Seracini spoke Thursday night at Calit2.

About 300 people packed two auditoriums to hear the scientist. The audience occasionally applauded and burst into "oohs" and "aahs" as Seracini projected onto giant screen Leonardo drawings that had been hidden for hundreds of years. They be part of an exhibit at Florence's Uffizi Gallery, starting in March.

Seracini's conclusion about the Adoration is simple, but earth-shattering for the art world.

"The painting as we see it today wasn't done by Leonardo," he told his audience.

Da Vinci Decoded

For streaming video of Maurizio Seracini's lecture, choose one of the links below (each segment is approximately one hour long):

Part One: *Introduction and 'Hall of the Five-Hundred'*

But a magnificent work, drawn by the master, is hidden beneath. Here Seracini turns into a character from *CSI*, deals with works of art rather than corpses. The Adoration

Part Two: 'Adoration of the Magi' and Conclusions

a way is his crime scene. According to Seracini, Leonardo first created a drawing outline of the work, then covered it with a thin protective layer of lead white. Leonardo then added highlights to that layer with his hands, literally leaving his fingerprints on the Adoration. How does Seracini know these are Leonardo's prints? Because he found them on many of the master's other works.

Then Leonardo left for Milan. After that, something went wrong. According to Seracini, the Adoration aged and was damaged. Someone painted over Leonardo's drawing, turning the work into the painting visible today.

Seracini said he's not speculating. He reached his conclusions after scanning the Adoration with a plethora of tools. It almost seems like he aimed at the painting every possible ray in the spectrum, from ultraviolet to infrared.

"There's a whole world inside that needs to be uncovered," the scientist told the audience.

The analysis shows the paint was applied after the Adoration already had aged, yet after Leonardo was done with it, Seracini said.

Seracini didn't stop there, however. He used infrared to find what was hidden behind the dull brown veil hanging over most of the painting. Some of his findings change its meaning. For example, a temple in the painting's current incarnation is in ruin. But Seracini's infrared pictures show that Leonardo had drawn workers rebuilding it. Leonardo didn't paint a world falling apart; he drew a new world coming out of the ruins of the old one. Other findings are more whimsical, like the drawing of an elephant. Yet other findings are just plain striking. They include a bouquet of about half a dozen faces in the picture's lower left hand side. "Look at these," Seracini urged his audience. "Every single one is a masterpiece." Audience members agreed, spontaneously bursting into applause when the image appeared on screen.



Seracini used a wide array of technical tools to uncover drawings Leonardo da Vinci that were previously hidden. Images used during Seracini's lecture were courtesy of the Kalpa Group and the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

Interestingly enough, Seracini also found in the Adoration a sketch that looks a lot like the "*Battle of Anghiari*," another Leonardo work that has taken up quite a few years of his life.

Seracini started looking for this work, which has been missing for almost 500 years a few years after he graduated from UCSD. He and other researchers used ultrasound to look for Leonardo's masterpiece in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, Italy. They found tantalizing clues, including an inscription on a fresco: "Cerca Trova," meaning "seek you shall find" on the wall where the masterpiece might have been. But Seracini didn't have the tools to solve that mystery at the time. The quest was revived 30 years later after a member of the Guinness family decided to bankroll it.

Seracini faced some daunting obstacles. But he didn't let that stop him. First, he had blueprints of the Palazzo Vecchio dating back to the time when Leonardo was painting the "*Battle of Anghiari*" in the palace's Hall of the 500. Seracini used lasers to map the building. He also used heat-sensitive photography to understand how the palace changed over time. That revealed windows and doors that were filled in and staircases that were torn down. "You have the exact, objective vision of what happened to the wall," he said. Seracini cross-referenced the information with documents describing the hall in Leonardo's time and the position of the master's work. Finally, he was able to build a 3-D model of the hall, showing where the "*Battle of Anghiari*" would have been.

Seracini's theory is that architect Giorgio Vasari hid the painting behind a brick wall during a 16th century remodel of the hall, instead of destroying it. Vasari had used this technique before with at least another work of art. Seracini used a radar to show that there was indeed a small gap between the brick wall covered by Vasari's own fresco and the building's original wall. His challenge now is to prove that the "*Battle of Anghiari*" lies behind that gap. He is working on a complex device that would use neutrons to look beyond the brick wall.

After almost three hours of Leonardo talk, several audience members said they had liked the event. Warned of sold-out crowds, Michael Kielty, a 1981 alumnus, came to the lecture at least an hour before the doors opened, lured by a story about Seracini in *@UCSD*, the university's alumni magazine. After the talk, he said he was amazed by the technology Seracini used to figure out what happened to these works of art. "It's fantastic," he said.

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