

Leonardo, 501 Years After

Marylanders Join In An Unusual Tribute

By JAMES H. BREADY

STARTING Sunday, and continuing more than a month, Baltimore and Maryland will pay honor to Leonardo da Vinci. The scope of the observance is unusual. Other long-dead, nonpolitical figures—foreigners, too—have been similarly singled out, at this distance—Beethoven, for instance, in churches and concert auditoriums in 1927, and Gutenberg at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in 1940. But never before in this area have so many institutions and persons joined, in the unashamed service of art and intellect and culture, to fashion a co-operative tribute.

The exhibition of "Models of Leonardo's Inventions" opening at the Walters Art Gallery on Sunday is physically the largest. Other exhibitions have been announced by the Pratt, the Welch Medical Library and Goucher College. At least seven free public lectures have been scheduled at these institutions and at the Museum of Art. The Johns

nate this question is to ask a few others. The mere half dozen or so authentic Leonardo paintings still extant continue to arouse enormous acclaim, even from addicted avantgardists—why? The host of Leonardo's scientific notions, now mostly disregarded, still swell his renown—why? His curiously disjointed writings, mostly taken from his vast notebooks, fill more than 1,000 pages in printed translation, yet still beguile us—why?

If these seem to be paradoxes, so was Leonardo, in many ways. Illegitimate at birth and a man without personal interest in women, he attained and kept high social position and he painted women with uncanny understanding. He could be military engineer for Caesar Borgia and paint the Virgin, almost simultaneously; live amid the endless petty wars of Italian city life and ponder the principles of geology and nasal sinuses.

He resolved paradoxes. He unified life. So, of course, to some extent, did a great many Renaissance men. But Leonardo, "the universal man," specifically reconciled art and science.

The key to Leonardo's approach is made plain by his notebooks, on page after page of left-handed penmanship, written from right to left. First, he was intensely interested in all life, in the whole world about him. Second, he was amazingly observant, and could capture what he saw or analyzed for later use. Third, he had the mental capacity to induce and deduce—to proceed from the specific to the general, and then from the principle back to the application.

Only the beautiful appears in the major works of the man who did the world's two most famous paintings—"Mona Lisa" and "Last Supper"; but his notebooks examined the ugly, too. And he could study the most commonplace phenomenon—say, a moving cloud—as if he had never seen one before, and to work out air currents from a wholly fresh point of view. Finally, in art and in science alike, to him the big problem was the same—the conception, the basic plan and the guiding technique.

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LEONARDO, by Nardelli
From the Miniature Collection
of A. J. Fink, of Baltimore

Hopkins University is conducting a high-school essay contest; the Johns Hopkins Science Review is planning a television program. A film on Leonardo's life will probably be shown to schoolchildren.

The occasion is the five hundredth anniversary of Leonardo's birth. The calendar date of this occurrence fell almost eighteen months ago; an interval that brings to mind other slowly gathering momentums, such as the Columbian Exposition of 1893.

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...ten almost eighteen months ago; an interval that brings to mind other slowly gathering momentums, such as the Columbian Exposition of 1893, 101 years after the discovery of America, and the Louisiana Purchase celebration to be held in New Orleans in 1954, 151 years after the purchase. Actually, an autumn, 1953, Leonardo observance has a peculiar timeliness. Half his life Leonardo was bemused by the problem of human flight, which was solved just 50 years ago by the Wright brothers. Leonardo's ornithopter (flapping wings worked by a windlass), his aerial screw (a sort of helicopter) and his "tent of linen" parachute stand out among the Walters models.

Large or small, no memorial ceremony comes off unless somebody in the background is contributing unemotional hard work. Maryland's Leonardo observance may be said to have originated in the artistic devotion of one man, Louis Rosenthal, the sculptor of miniatures. The actual arrangement of events has been done by a group including Dr. H. Carrington Lancaster, chairman; James K. Dickson, R. P. Harriss, Dr. Richard H. Howland, Edward S. King, Miss Dorothy Miner, Mr. Rosenthal and Dr. Edward Williamson.

What is it about Leonardo da Vinci that moves them, and other persons in other cities where observances have been held? Somebody is always having an anniversary, and usually it prompts no more than a bow and a wave. Why Leonardo?

Perhaps the best way to illumi-

problem was the same—the conception, the basic plan and the guiding technique.

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This is, to be sure, only one phase of Leonardo's appeal, the breadth of which defies any brief classification. Despite many reservations, the most recent of his critics still hails him as "the fullest man of the Renaissance, perhaps of all time." One aspect or another of Leonardo's achievements, or inquiries, is likely to interest almost any active mind.

It should not be supposed that Leonardo, the apostle of free research, would want to be a stolid idol loaded on the backs of later generations. The sponsors of Maryland's observance themselves point out changes in the last half millennium. The basis of scientific inquiry, for instance, to Leonardo was natural observation; today it is the controlled experiment. Again, Leonardo did not conceive of the revolution ahead in power sources—steam, electricity and so on in place of human muscle. Among painters, the attempt to rival Leonardo in depicting subtlety of facial expression has been partly abandoned; for better or worse, other means often convey emotion and state of mind. Nor did Leonardo, artist and scientist, speculate upon politics and economics and other forms of human interaction *en masse*.

But what he did do, between 1452 and 1519, makes Leonardo a man for Twentieth Century Baltimoreans to honor, and study. As the coming observance recaptures the spirit of Leonardo da Vinci, so it will "renew our faith in the possibilities of mankind."

Mr. Billopp