

The Arts

Arts Editor Deirdre Falvey e-mail arts@irishtimes.com



Tomorrow Why Pat Moylan wants to 'demystify' the Arts Council

The artist as a (relatively) young man?

CONOR POWER

Research into the 'Irish' province of Basilicata in southern Italy has unearthed a painting that experts are now claiming is the only image of the younger Leonardo da Vinci yet discovered. But did he paint it himself?

ALMOST 500 YEARS after his death, the life and genius of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) continue to fascinate the world. He knew fame and celebrity during his lifetime and many aspects of his life and work are well documented. But much of it is unaccounted for: we know little of his private life, for example. Nor do we really know what he looked like as a young or middle-aged man, as all portraits in existence depict the balding da Vinci in the autumn of his life.

The unearthing of a mysterious painting - dating from 1570 or earlier - could be about to change all that, and the news of its discovery has been attracting a flurry of attention in the Italian press and television.

During the course of research on the Templar and Irish connections with the southern Italian region of Lucania, medieval historian Nicola Barbatelli came across a painting belonging to an aristocratic family from the region. The oil painting on panel, measuring 60cm x 44cm, was believed by the owners (who for now, have chosen to remain anonymous) to have been a portrait of Galileo Galilei, but from the first time he laid eyes on it, Barbatelli sensed that he was dealing with something more special. "I knew straight away that it wasn't Galileo."

The poplar timber panel on which the image is painted was, according to Barbatelli, "assembled in a very particular way - it's made of three smaller panels which are slotted together on two mountings which are perpendicular to the panels... This sort of construction is very specific and does not exist elsewhere".

"When we cleaned the back of the painting, it revealed an inscription in Latin," Barbatelli adds. "I recognised the lettering style in this inscription from the *Codex Atlanticus*."

The *Codex Atlanticus* is a 12-volume bound collection of drawings and writings by Leonardo, considered by many to be one of the most important of its kind, which is conserved in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan.

The Latin inscription reads "Pinxit Mea" and is a *quatre de chiffre*, a symbol denoting a

brotherhood of cathedral constructors of which the researchers believe, Leonardo was a member.

The painting precedes the more famous Leonardo portrait hanging in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence by 30 years or more. That portrait was for many years considered to be a self-portrait of the great Renaissance painter and scientist, until carbon-dating technology revealed it to have been a portrait by one of the great masters but not a self-portrait. When this fact was established, it begged the question as to who *did* paint it. And, as it was painted after Leonardo's death, then on what basis was it painted?

The newly discovered painting could be the original on which that Uffizi one was based. Barbatelli himself is in no doubt of the clear link between the two - both show the same man in three-quarter profile, except the new one is of its subject as a fortysomething.

"The one in the Uffizi is a copy of our one," he says. "We're certain of it. We know that when Leonardo was around 50 years of age, he made a visit to southern Italy - south of Naples somewhere - and we think that this portrait was very possibly done during that visit. Leonardo was connected to a great mathematician named Bartolomeo Luca da Pacioli. Together they wrote a thesis called *De Divina Proportione*. They were both part of a brotherhood of like-minded mathematicians, which included monks based in the south, and Leonardo, we believe, went south to carry out more studies on the principles of Divine Proportion and the Golden Ratio, principles which he held very dear."

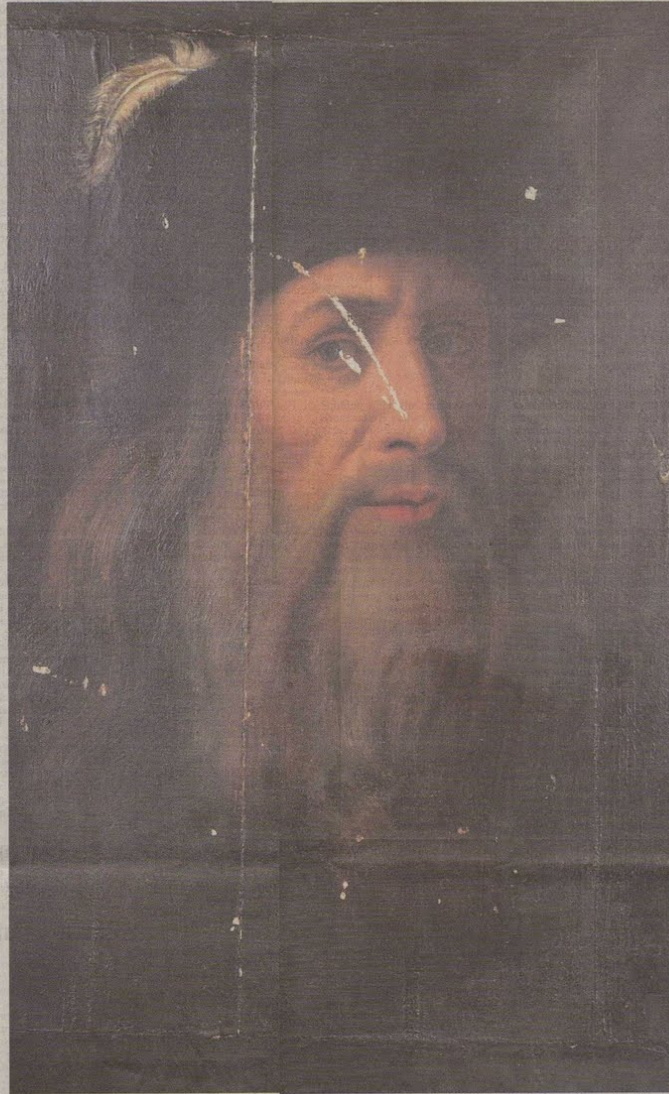
The painting was handed over to Prof Alessandro Vezzosi, a leading world expert on all things da Vinci and director of the Museo Ideale Leonardo da Vinci, a museum dedicated to the artist in his home town of Vinci, some 45 kilometres west of Florence, where the painting now resides under his observant eye.

SO IF THE painting pre-dates the painting that for centuries was believed to have been a self-portrait of Leonardo, is it not possible that this particular painting is a self-portrait?

Both Barbatelli and Vezzosi are careful to play down talk of such a scenario. The painting is still undergoing analysis in Vinci and nothing has yet been confirmed.

"That it is [even] a painting of Leonardo is not yet an absolute certainty," Vezzosi points out. "This painting is not a self-portrait; it is a portrait, probably of Leonardo."

In the sense that it would be the only portrait of Leonardo as a relatively young man, it is of great significance... It's another element in the mosaic of the life of Leonardo, but it's most important to find out where it came from in a definitive manner, in terms of collecting as much information around the painting, such as



The da Vinci codex? 'When we cleaned the back of the painting, it revealed an inscription in Latin. I recognised the lettering style in this inscription from Leonardo's *Codex Atlanticus*,' says historian Nicola Barbatelli, who is convinced that the painting is a portrait (and perhaps a self-portrait) of Leonardo da Vinci rather than of Galileo, as previously thought



The 2002 visit of the Irish ambassador to Lucania led to the discovery of this painting - Gianni Glinni (above)

documentation to support this idea."

But already another Leonardo scholar claims to have found a document in Naples which states that a self-portrait of Leonardo was registered in Acerenza, where this recent painting was found. The claim is as yet unconfirmed, but the scholar in question is the 80-year-old California-based Italian, Carlo Pedretti, who has written extensively on all aspects of the life and work of Leonardo da Vinci.

Moreover, Barbatelli says that "this painting was created using the skilful techniques of a great master. If you exclude Leonardo, then there aren't really many others at that time that were able to produce a painting in such a manner."

In referring to the unusual lettering style in a Latin inscription revealed on the back of the painting, Barbatelli asks: "Who else, if not Leonardo himself, would have known the *Codex Atlanticus*?"

Who else indeed?

THERE IS ANOTHER Irish twist to this particular da Vinci code. The discovery of the painting has come to light as a result of research being carried out for the last six or seven years by a team which includes Barbatelli. He is just one member of a team that includes brothers Gianni and Raffaello Glinni. The clue is in the name, because the Glinnis claim Irish ancestry and have proven that they are direct descendants from the McGilins of Co Donegal, who came to region of Lucania in the 17th century.

The team's area of research is the modern Italian province of Basilicata (known in ancient times as Lucania) in the "arch" of the foot of Italy. This sparsely populated and beautiful region - which

served as a location for Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ* - is rich in Templar treasures and architecture, as well as having a distinctly Irish character, which goes back to early Christian times.

"It is the only region in Italy where Celtic harps have been made for centuries," says Gianni Glinni, an engineer by profession, who also points to numerous place names in the region as well as Celtic symbols found in ecclesiastical sites that point to a strong Irish past. There is even a local Celtic dialect, identified as "Gallotalica", by linguist Gerhard Rohls in the 1930s.

The research begun by the Glinni brothers was sparked by a visit to the region in 2002 by the (then) Irish ambassador, Frank Cogan, who saw for himself this "Irish" province in southern Italy.

"Not only has the visit of the Irish ambassador to Lucania resulted in the discovery of this painting," says Gianni Glinni, "but we are now looking at two strong links that Leonardo had with families in the south to explain the presence of such a painting here. One was with the Segni family from Acerenza and the other was with the Sforza family, of which a certain Italian-Irish lady named Margherita Nugent was a direct descendant."

The next step will be to bring the painting back to the region from which it came. It is to be put on display, along with some other items from the Museo Ideale Leonardo da Vinci, in a special exhibition in the town of Vaglio at the end of March.

"We need to know if there is any other documentary evidence, or indeed if there might even be other similar paintings in the area," says Vezzosi. "And this is one way of bringing such evidence to the surface."

Waterford magic



All the songs I had experimented with, playable or not were