

Show peels back Leonardo's flights of fancy to flap like a bird, create robots and dissect the human machine

The guts of da Vinci's genius

Review | Hamish Heard

ARTIST, engineer, inventor, anatomist: a new Southbank exhibition delves beneath the many hats of Leonardo da Vinci to profile a man of extraordinary genius.

Many know da Vinci as the hand that painted the Mona Lisa, while others will be aware of his many inventive sketches that foreshadowed such modern marvels as underwater breathing apparatus and even the helicopter.

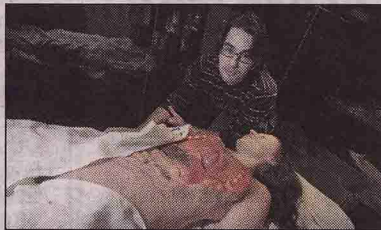
Less well known, however, is his penchant for dismembering dead human bodies.

Brutally realistic wax models of the subjects of da Vinci's dissections provide a macabre introduction to the exhibition, Leonardo da Vinci - 'Anatomy to Robots'.

The most confronting of these is a full-scale model of a dead young woman, her stomach pinned open to reveal her internal organs and the primitive tools of surgery discarded on a side table. Between that and an extraordinarily life-like model of a human womb containing an unborn baby, this is not an exhibition for the faint-hearted.

Paintings and text guide patrons through exhibits which chronicle da Vinci's life from his Tuscan village as a child to the heights of his fame at the Renaissance movement forefront in Florence.

Da Vinci's dissections, the guides explain, have nothing to do with the perverse but more an innate



Danilo Carignola, who created the anatomical models for 'Anatomy to Robots'.

need to understand everything about everything.

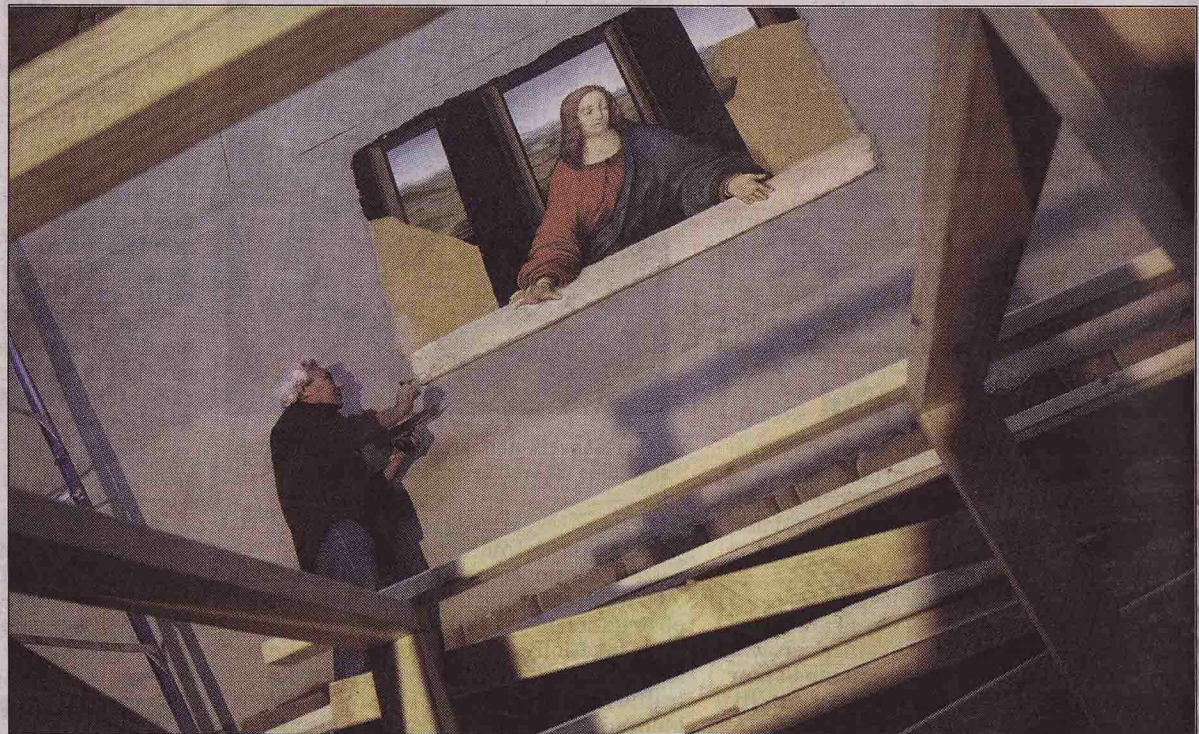
A team of highly-skilled Florentine artisans recreated the subjects of his anatomical drawings for the exhibition.

They also brought to life inventions that drew inspiration from his newfound understanding of the human physique, including a roomful of robots using wooden pulleys and ropes to replicate human bones, joints and tendons.

The man-sized robots actually work and patrons can turn handles to make them perform their various robotic tasks.

From there da Vinci's inventions become more ambitious, and an entire section of the exhibition is devoted to his obsession with human flight.

Here it is possible to try out da Vinci's giant mechanised wing systems, flapping them madly as da Vinci must have done in the 15th century as he strove to become the first human to take to the skies.



Antonio de Vito recreates Leonardo da Vinci's famous Last Supper painting for a Melbourne exhibition. Pictures: KYLIE ELSE N17ME310

Reproductions of da Vinci's painted works are scattered throughout the exhibition, leading viewers to the final section devoted to his great frescos where visiting fresco master Antonio de Vito is in the midst of reproducing The Last Supper to show audiences how the masterpiece was created.

Overall, the exhibition will find broad appeal among Melburnians with even a remote interest in technological development, human anatomy or renaissance art.

However, parents with young children might need to think twice about the section devoted to human dissection - it is realistic

enough to make even a butcher squirm.

► **Leonardo da Vinci - 'Anatomy to Robots' is on at Queensbridge Square, Southbank, 9am-9pm until January 31. Tickets: \$25.50 adult; \$18 concession; \$11 children (4-13); \$58 family (2 adults, 3 children).**