



XXXII Workshop of Leonardo, after a design by Leonardo and with Leonardo's participation
Christ as Salvator Mundi, 1507 or later (?)
 Oil on walnut, 65.5 x 45.1–45.6 cm
 Private collection, planned for Louvre Abu Dhabi

The *Salvator Mundi*, painted on a walnut panel, was rediscovered in April 2005 at an auction in New Orleans, presented to the public for the first time in summer 2011, shown in November that same year in an exhibition at the National Gallery in London (Syson/Keith 2011), and in November 2017 auctioned by Christie's in New York. This *Salvator Mundi* is probably identical with a painting documented at the start of the 20th century in the possession of Sir Francis Cook, which was at that time considered a workshop product from Leonardo's circle and which received no attention in the earlier literature on account of its poor condition. Between 2005 and 2017 the picture underwent several restorations by Dianne Dwyer Modestini. The findings and results of these restorations have only been partially published to date (Wintermute in: Gouzer/Wetmore 2017, pp. 17–22; Modestini in: *ibid.*, pp. 63–93; Modestini 2014). A definitive assessment of the painting is therefore not yet possible.

Technical investigations have thus far revealed no underdrawings. They have, however, brought to light traces of spolvero in the area of the lips and incised lines along the upper contour of the head, as well as a number of pentimenti, for example in the fingers of the left hand and the thumb of the right hand, from which an argument for the panel's attribution to Leonardo is also derived. Further details on the results of the restoration are found in the above-mentioned reports by the conservator, in which parallels in terms of painting technique between the *Salvator Mundi* and Leonardo's works and artistic theory are also discussed. In contrast to every other

painting produced after 1496 and undisputedly attributed to Leonardo, there is no mention of a *Salvator Mundi* by his hand either in contemporary documents or early biographies. Only in the inventory of the Milan estate of Leonardo's pupil Salai, drawn up in 1525, do we find a reference to "Uno Cristo in modo de uno dio Padre" (Shell/Sironi 1991, p. 398). Since this "Christ in the manner of a God the Father" is valued in the inventory substantially less, for example, than the *Virgin and Child with St Anne* (Cat. XXV) and the *Mona Lisa* (Cat. XXVII), the object in question was probably a workshop painting from Leonardo's circle – possibly even the New York *Salvator Mundi*.

The 1525 inventory of Salai's estate suggests only the possibility that Leonardo may have produced at least one design for a *Salvator Mundi* painting. More reliable information about a Leonardo *Salvator Mundi* is provided by a number of paintings of the same subject by his school (Heydenreich 1964; Snow-Smith 1982; Vezzosi 1983, pp. 147–150; Fiorio 2005; see also Preface) and two sheets in Windsor Castle with in part autograph drapery studies by Leonardo (Cat. D40–41). A 1650 etching by the Bohemian artist Wenzel Hollar, with its "Leonardus da Vinci pinxit" inscription, even seems to indicate that Leonardo not only designed a *Salvator Mundi*, but also executed a corresponding painting (Snow Smith 1982, pp. 28–31; Gouzer/Wetmore 2017, p. 38). In view of the fact that Hollar worked for the English royal family, it has also been conjectured that his etching was based on an original painting by Leonardo in the collection of the English king. According to this theory, the *Salvator Mundi* copied in 1650 by Hollar would still have been in the estate of Charles I, executed in 1649, in 1651 and in the possession of James II at the latest in 1666; the picture subsequently entered the collection of John Sheffield, from whose estate it was sold in 1763 (Syson/Keith 2011, p. 302; Gouzer/Wetmore 2017, pp. 14 and 18).

Research into the phases of Hollar's career, and more recent analyses of the inventories of the English royal collection, have cast considerable doubt on this reconstruction of the "English" provenance of the New York *Salvator Mundi* (Lewis 2019). According to the current state of scholarship, the painting thus has no securely documented provenance for the 16th and 17th centuries. Nor has any reliable information yet been uncovered regarding its fate in the 18th and 19th centuries. The *Salvator Mundi* only reappears at the start of the 20th century, namely in the collection of Sir Francis Cook (1817–1901), who acquired the painting in 1900 through the agencies of his advisor Charles Robinson (1824–1913; *A Catalogue of Paintings* 1913, p. 123). After the death of Sir Francis in 1901, the painting passed to his son Sir Frederick Cook (1844–1920). On 25 June 1958 the furniture retailer Warren E. Kuntz from New Orleans bought the *Salvator Mundi* for £45 at the Cook Collection sale at Sotheby's. It is astonishing, to say the least, that the experts who attended that auction, and who included leading experts such as Sir Kenneth Clark and Ellis Waterhouse, did not recognise the painting's qualities. The *Salvator Mundi* remained in the possession of Kuntz and subsequently his heirs until 2004. In April 2005

the New York art dealers Alexander Parrish and Robert Simon purchased the painting (Simon, press release, 7 July 2011; Brewis 2011; Kemp 2018, p. 190) at an auction at the St. Charles Gallery in New Orleans (New Orleans Auction 2005, no. 664). The New York *Salvator Mundi* subsequent underwent the above-mentioned series of restorations and was presented at the major London Leonardo exhibition in 2011 (Syson/Keith 2011, pp. 300–303). It was exhibited once again towards the end of 2012 by the Dallas Museum of Art. The following year it was bought for US\$ 82 million by the Swiss art dealer Yves Bouvier, who sold it on to the Russian billionaire Dmitry Rybolovlev for US\$ 127.5 million (Kemp 2018, pp. 206–209). On 15 November 2017, finally, the painting was sold at auction by Christie's in New York for US\$ 450.7 million. Prince Badr bin Abdullah of Saudi Arabia acted as buyer. The real buyer is now considered to be Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, who, according to press reports, acquired it for the Emirate of Abu Dhabi's Department of Culture and Tourism, and specifically for its Louvre Abu Dhabi (cf. Kemp 2018, pp. 206–209). At the time of writing (January 2019), the painting has not yet arrived there.

That the design for the New York *Salvator Mundi* stems from Leonardo himself, is beyond dispute: several workshop versions of the same subject, as well as the above-mentioned drapery studies, make the existence of such a design more than likely. Whether the New York *Salvator Mundi* is a largely autograph work by Leonardo is a question that remains open. Luke Syson (2011), Martin Kemp (2011; 2018), Francis Ames-Lewis (2012, pp. 200–204) and Dianne Dwyer Modestini (2014; 2018), as well as the authors of the New York auction catalogue (Gouzer/Wetmore 2017), all attribute the work more or less unreservedly to Leonardo. Pietro Marani (2012; 2013) assumes that it is based on a prototype painting by Leonardo and considers it very probable that the New York panel can be attributed to the master. Vincent Delieuvin (2016, p. 286) is more cautious, writing that "an original version [of Leonardo's *Salvator Mundi*] appears to have resurfaced".

Several reviewers of the London Leonardo exhibition of 2011 have argued explicitly against an attribution to Leonardo (Hope 2012; Robertson 2012; Bambach 2012), as have Carlo Pedretti (2011) and Jacques Franck (Bétard 2018). A number of arguments against the attribution can be found on the ArtWatch UK website maintained by Michael Daley. I myself have expressed the view, in earlier editions of this book (2015; 2017; 2018) and in a review of the London Leonardo exhibition (Zöllner 2012), that the New York *Salvator Mundi* is a high-quality product of Leonardo's workshop, that Leonardo probably worked on the painting himself, and that its poor condition and the inadequate documentation of its restoration make a serious attribution impossible. Doubts over Leonardo's sole authorship are also harboured by Matthew Landrus (2018), who proposes Bernardino Luini as co-author of the New York *Salvator Mundi*. Jacques Franck (Bétard 2018) attributes the New York painting to the above-mentioned Salai, and Carmen Bambach (2012) to Giovanni

Antonio Boltraffio. Differences between certain details in the surviving variants of the *Salvator Mundi* had already led Ludwig Heydenreich (1964) and, following him, Maria Teresa Fiorio (2005) to conclude that Leonardo created not an original painting of the subject, but simply a cartoon that then served as the basis for a number of works by his pupils. Heydenreich's theory has received renewed support from the variants and copies of a *Salvator Mundi* going back to Leonardo that have only come to light in recent years, as well as from other evidence. Thus Leonardo's workshop practice (Delieuvin 2012; see Preface) and a letter by Fra Pietro da Novellara of 3 April 1501 (Villata 1999, no. 150) suggest that Leonardo himself painted less and less in the years after 1500 and left it up to his pupils to turn his designs into paintings, which he would then occasionally rework. Giorgio Vasari, too, alludes to this same practice in his *Life of Leonardo*.

In the discussion until now surrounding the attribution and provenance of the New York *Salvator Mundi*, the view has often been expressed that the painting is a commission for King Louis XII of France (Syson/Keith 2011, p. 303; Gouzer/Wetmore 2017, pp. 14, 38). This theory ultimately goes back to a monograph by Joanne Snow-Smith (1982), who sees, in a *Salvator Mundi* from the collection of the Marquis de Ganay in Paris, an original painting by Leonardo. She thereby suspects that the picture was commissioned by Louis XII and executed between 1507 and 1513. As grounds for her argument, Snow-Smith points to the veneration of *Christ as Salvator Mundi* by the French royal family and to a specific *Salvator Mundi* iconography on which, she argues, Leonardo drew for his design. The attribution of the painting from the Ganay Collection has failed to find acceptance, however. Only Carlo Pedretti (in Pedretti/Barbatelli 2017, pp. 143–145) has recently once again put forward Joanne Snow-Smith's hypothesis.

There is no secure basis on which to situate a *Salvator Mundi* design chronologically within Leonardo's oeuvre. One starting-point are the above-mentioned two sheets with drapery studies by Leonardo (Cat. D40–41), which are traditionally dated to around 1504 (RL 12524 and 12525). Dates put forward in recent years vary widely. Maria Teresa Fiorio (2005, p. 276) assigns the creation of the design to the 1490s, while Luke Syson locates it within the period around 1500 (Syson/Keith 2011, p. 298f; Gouzer/Wetmore 2017, p. 22) and Carlo Pedretti in the years 1510 to 1515 (Pedretti/Barbatelli 2017, p. 143).

A more concrete point of orientation for the dating of the New York panel is offered by the fresco of a *Salvator Mundi* in Forlì, which Heydenreich introduced into the debate at an early stage (1964) and which is today attributed to Melozzo da Forlì, Bramante or Bartolomeo della Gatta. The New York *Salvator Mundi* does indeed come very close to the fresco in Forlì in its overall composition and in several details. This can be seen most notably in Christ's blessing hand, for example in the positions of the index finger, middle finger and thumb, and in the creases in the skin of the palm, and similarly in the air of transported reverie that characterizes Christ's expression both in the New York *Salvator Mundi* and

the Forlì fresco. None of the other possible visual sources proposed so far (Syson in Syson/Keith 2011, p. 303; Ekserdjian in: Gouzer/Wetmore 2017, pp. 127–141) exhibit comparable formal parallels. Since corresponding trips by Leonardo to Urbino are documented only as from 1502 (RLW 1034, 1038, 1041), Heydenreich considers this the earliest date from which Leonardo could plausibly have addressed the *Salvator Mundi* subject. Since Leonardo was still based at this time in Florence, however, and committed to a number of unfinished commissions (Cat. XVI, XXII, XXV–XXVI), he probably only embarked on a *Salvator Mundi* at a later date.

Other *Salvator Mundi* compositions from Leonardo's circle may also prove helpful in narrowing down the date of the New York painting (Fiorio 2005). Of particular interest in this regard is a recently discovered *Salvator Mundi* by Leonardo's pupil Salai, which is today housed in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana in Milan (Marani 2013; Delieuvin 2016; Bétard 2018). Since the painting is signed by the artist and dated 1511, it offers a concrete point of reference when considering the chronology of Leonardo's designs for a *Salvator Mundi*. Salai indeed orients himself to his master's design both in the composition and in a number of details. The almost imperceptibly higher position of Christ's right eye in Salai's painting also corresponds with the arrangement in the New York *Salvator*. On the basis of all these considerations, it is probable that Leonardo created a *Salvator Mundi* design between 1502 and 1511, whereby the New York painting could also have been painted after 1511.

The New York *Salvator Mundi* surpasses all other versions of the subject from Leonardo's circle in terms of its quality. Details such as the modelling of Christ's blessing hand, the execution of the filigree embroidery border around the neckline, and above all the suggestive handling of light and the sfumato all testify to a very high standard of technical accomplishment. The fingernails outlined with fine shading, which recall similar features in the *Mona Lisa* (Cat. XXV) and *St John the Baptist* (Cat. XXX), also argue in favour of an attribution to Leonardo, as do the shadowy eyes and heavy eyelids. The *Salvator Mundi* nonetheless also exhibits weaknesses. The flesh tones of the blessing hand, for example, appear pallid and waxen as in a number of workshop paintings. Christ's ringlets also seem to me too schematic in their execution, the larger drapery folds too undifferentiated – especially on the right-hand side. They do not bear comparison with the *Mona Lisa*, for example.

The restorations made to the panel, and the photographs that have been released to the public thus far (Modestini 2014; 2018, pp. 411–420; Gouzer/Wetmore 2017; Panza 2018), make it clear that the paint substance of the New York *Salvator Mundi* was no longer in its original condition even when the painting was discovered in 2005. Areas of heavy damage that have meanwhile been restored and are no longer visible concern in particular the background as a whole and Christ's forehead and hair. Parts of the draperies at the lower edge of the panel also had to be remodelled, as did the eye areas and the crystal orb in Christ's left hand. The problematic nature of some of these incursions and additions is illustrated

by the remodelling of the crystal, which was carried out on the basis of a photograph (!) of a painting inspired by Leonardo's *Salvator Mundi* design, attributed to Girolamo Alibrandi and today housed in San Domenico Maggiore in Naples (Lewis 2019; Preface, fig. 7). Lastly, if we compare the New York *Salvator Mundi* in its current state with photographs of the painting in 2005, 2008, 2011 and 2017, it furthermore becomes clear that the painting's sfumato effect to a certain extent goes back to its most recent restoration. In view of the painting's poor original condition and extensive restoration, and given that the findings of the restoration campaign have still not been published in full, the picture's attribution to Leonardo consequently remains a matter of dispute.

The controversy over the attribution and provenance of the New York *Salvator Mundi* has largely thrust questions of content into the background. This is the case, for example, with the omega-shaped drapery fold, which recalls the wound in Christ's side and his Passion (Snow-Smith 1982, p. 59). The crystal globe in Christ's left hand may allude to his role as ruler and saviour of the world (Snow-Smith 1982, p. 57f; Syson/Keith 2011, p. 302; Gouzer/Wetmore 2017, p. 31) or to Leonardo's optical theories (Kemp 2011). A reference to Leonardo's studies of geometry may be seen in the meticulously executed ornamental bands that trim Christ's robe (Snow-Smith 1982, p. 52). The intersecting ornamental bands of the outer garment have also been interpreted as a crossed stole (Heydenreich 1964, note. 23; Snow-Smith 1982, pp. 58 and 87).

An aspect of the New York *Salvator Mundi* that has been wholly ignored up till now is the exclusively blue raiment worn by Christ. This uniform drapery colour is unusual in a portrait of Christ painted on panel in this epoch, but is found in French and Netherlandish book illumination. Blue robes furthermore played a central ceremonial role in the coronation of French kings, who were anointed in a reference to the anointing of Christ. Further research in this area could be useful. A look at the book illumination of this period seems to me more promising, however. In books of hours from the beginning of the 15th century onwards, representations of *Christ as Salvator Mundi* are frequently found in conjunction with the prayer of St Veronica. This very popular prayer was recited in front of a portrait of *Christ as Salvator Mundi*. It is possible that the New York *Salvator Mundi* should be understood as an example of this practice of devotion and prayer in the early modern era (see Preface).

Literature: Heydenreich 1964; Snow-Smith 1982; Syson/Keith 2011, pp. 300–303; Kemp 2011; Bambach 2012; Zöllner 2012; Robertson 2012; Marani 2012; 2013; Modestini 2014; Gouzer/Wetmore 2017; Kemp 2018; Lewis 2019; Dalivalle/Kemp/Simon 2019.