

“Dialogo della Pittura...one act play”.

By

Kikki Ghezzi

Cast

Leonardo Da Vinci: Florentine painter and Sculptor. “An artist of outstanding physical beauty who displayed infinite grace in everything he did and who cultivated his genius so brilliantly that all problems he studied he solved with ease. He was a man of regal spirit and tremendous breadth of mind; and his name became so famous that not only was he esteemed during his lifetime but his reputation endured and became even greater after his death.”¹

Titian of Cadore: Venetian painter. “Titian was born in Cadore, his family, the Vecelli, was one of the noblest in the district. He grew into a boy of fine spirit and lively intelligence, and at the age of ten he was sent to stay with his uncle, a respected Venetian citizen, who saw that he was anxious to become a painter and so placed him with Giovanni Bellini, a very famous painter”. Titian, who during his life has adorned “with great pictures the city of Venice, or rather all Italy and other parts of the world, deserves the love and respect of all craftsmen, who ought to admire and imitate him in many things. For he is a painter who has produced works which command unstinted praise and which will live as long as the memory of illustrious men endures.”²

¹ Vasari, Giorgio, *Life of the Artists*, p. 255.

² Vasari, Giorgio, *Life of the Artists*, p. 443, 462.

Ludovico Dolce: Italian theorist of painting. He was a broadly-based Venetian prolific author, translator and editor; he is now remembered for his *Dialogue on Painting*. Dolce's youth was difficult. His father, a former steward to the public attorneys (*castaldo delle procuratorie*) for the Republic of Venice, died when the boy was only two. For his early studies, he depended on the support of two patrician families: that of the doge Loredano, to whom he dedicated his dialogue and the Cornaro family, who financed his studies at Padua.

Leon Battista Alberti: Florentine architect. “ He devoted himself to the study of Latin and the practice of architecture, perspective, and painting, and he left to posterity a number of books which he wrote himself. Leon Battista was an admirable citizen, a man of culture who was the friend of talented men and very open and courteous with everyone; and he always lived honorably and like the gentleman he was.”³

Plato: Greek philosopher, writer of philosophical dialogues and founder of the Academy in Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world. Plato was originally a student of Socrates, and was as much influenced by his thinking as by what he saw as his teacher's unjust death.

Andre' Breton: French writer, poet, and surrealist theorist. He is best known as the principal founder of Surrealism.

Paolo Pino: Italian painter and writer. He was born in Venice. He studied under the painter Giovanni Savoldo, and very likely was a portrait specialist (there are only three surviving painting signed by Pino, two of which are

³ Vasari, Giorgio, *Life of the Artists*, p. 208, 213.

portraits). In 1458 he wrote *Dialogo di pittura*, where he states the supremacy of the Venetian School over the Florentine School of painting.

Narrator: Kikki Ghezzi, undergraduate painting student at Pratt. Born in Italy. Lives and works in Brooklyn.

Narrator: During the Renaissance, visual artists as well as poets and writers have often reflected upon the meaning of painting. Through letters and written dialogues Vasari, Leonardo, Paolo Pino, Dolce Aretino and many others have argued with friends about the role of painting as a liberal art as well as about the importance of *disegno* and *colorito*. This discussion has been carried on for centuries and still is very much alive among artists. Imagine Plato, Leonardo, Tiziano, Paolo Pino, Leon Battista Alberti, Ludovico Dolce and Andre' Breton having a comfortable conversation on my old living room couch...

Leonardo: You're right, in saying we should cut down the demands we make on ourselves in our drinking. I'm one of those who were completely sodden yesterday.

Titian: That's right! I've got no stamina either. I am still recovering from yesterday morning, when instead of being served my usual breakfast I was surprised by a knock on my door by a very slim man, wearing a black suit who informed me that I was under arrest for burning the Dodge's palace! What a nightmare!

Andre': Well, my dear friend, you are well aware that *the dream of sleep is not inferior to the sum of the moments of reality. Surreality is the true absolute reality!*

Anyhow, it's lucky that you, who have a strong drinking head, have given up, I can drink or not drink and I will be fine anyway, but please, if I fall asleep on this comfortable couch, let me dream, as you know *the poet is working!* ”.

Titian: but...Andre', if I wake up as ...Danae?

Andre': Maybe that's what you are then...

Ludovico: Please, stop with this nonsense! Let's hear what the rest of us have to say. Paolo what's on your mind?

Paolo: I don't want to go too far in drinking either. I've still got a hangover from the night before.

Narrator: At this point Leonardo stands up, grabs a glass of wine and speaks.

Leonardo: We have all agreed not to make the present occasion a real drinking-session, but just drink as much each of us wants. My next proposal now is that we send away the flute-girl who has just come in and we choose a topic for discussion.

Narrator: They all agree and tell him to make his proposal.

Leonardo: I propose that each of us should make the finest speech he can in praise, or not, of painting, *disegno* and *colorito*, and then pass the ball to the one on his right. Plato should start, because being the oldest he is in the top position.

Narrator: All the rest agreed with this and told Plato to do as Leonardo said.

Plato: The other day I was talking to my friend Glaucon about the fact that any given plurality of things, which have a single name, constitutes a specific type. Is it clear to you?'

Chorus: Yes.

Titian: No, no, no!

Plato: But Titian, *the type itself is not manufactured by any craftsman. How could it be?* Imagine that we have got three beds. *First, there's the real one. It is the product of divine craftsmanship...I mean, who else could have made it? God has produced that one real bed. Then there's the one the joiner makes by looking at the idea of bed made by God and finally there's the one the painter paints, a reproduction of the bed's image.*

Glaucon agreed with me when I continued by saying that the painter is a mere representer, who is two generations apart from reality and his creations are mere shadows, not the real things.

*There is another point to consider, dear friends. If we claim as a general principle that there are three areas of expertise: usage, manufacture and representation, a representer knows nothing of value about the things he represents, because he does not acquire knowledge from making use of the object, or by spending time with the person that manufactured the object he paints. Therefore, I think that painting and visual arts in general is a kind of game and should not be taken seriously. It can only be described as sorcery and it forms a close relationship with a part of us, which is far from intelligence. Nothing authentic can emerge from this relationship.*⁴ There is my speech, Leonardo.

Titian: But Plato, if I may say, why, the user, the manufacturer and the painter have to be different persons? Why not the same one?

⁴ Plato, *The Republic*.

Plato: Since when, somebody who believes to be a woman is allowed to question me!

Titian: Calm down my dear Plato. If you read our friend Nietzsche you will understand that there is no such a thing as an absolute true idea or concept of bed! Truth is only a human construct, an illusion. See, Plato, Nietzsche says that I could call these spaghetti 'stones' and it would be the same. If I say how beautiful the leaves on those trees are, in reality I have said nothing. We believe that when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers, we have knowledge of the things themselves, and yet we possess just metaphors of things which in no way correspond to the original entities. *Truth is a conventional lie.* God, the craftsman has made innumerable, individual leaves and we humans have made the 'type', the world 'leaf', which does nothing but takes us away from the true leaves out there around us! There, I sort of made my speech, now it's your turn Leonardo.

Leonardo: My dear friends *who speaks ill of painting speaks ill of nature, because the works of the painter represent the works of nature, and therefore such a detractor lacks feeling. Painting can be shown to be philosophy because it deals with the motion of bodies in the promptitude of their actions, and philosophy too deals with motion. Painting extends to the surfaces, colors, and shapes of all things created by nature; while philosophy penetrates below the surface in order to arrive at the inherent properties, but it does not carry the same conviction, and in this is unlike the work of the painter who apprehends the foremost truth of these bodies, as the eye errs less.*⁵ *If you despise painting,*

⁵ Leonardo, *Paragone*, Trat. 9(2), 9(3), 10, 12, 30-32.

which is the sole imitator of all visible works of nature, you certainly will be despising a subtle invention which brings philosophy and subtle speculation to bear on the nature of all forms-sea and land, plants and animals, grasses and flowers- which are enveloped in shade and light. Truly painting is a science, the true-born child of nature. For painting is born of nature; to be more correct we should call it the grandchild of nature, since all visible things were brought forth by nature and these, her children, have given birth to painting. Therefore we may justly speak of it as the grandchild of nature and related to God.⁶

Paolo: Thank you, Leonardo. *However many writers in every field I heard celebrating it (painting) with a diversity of examples, none of them, ancient or modern, ever explained in full what sort of thing painting might be. It is true that Pliny wrote about it many worthy things and you, Alberti, wrote a treatise on painting in the Latin tongue. Hence, I am resolved within myself to say as much on it as my intellect might bear.*

The other night I was talking to my friends Lauro and Fabio about the fact that *all of the mechanical arts are called artisanal, but not ours. That is because painting is a liberal art, conjoined with the four mathematical art, and you can be certain that within the third of the three First Causes – that is to say, God, nature and art – painting, as a part, is reckoned and bound up and celebrated with art as such for being one of its noble members. This is the highest invention to be undertaken by men. Given that all of the arts imitate nature, this one imitates nature more completely than any other. Painting illustrates the effects of love; it*

⁶ Kemp Martin, *Leonardo on Painting*, p. 13-15.

*uncovers adulation's falsehood, disdain's fire, strength's quickness, labor's heaviness, fright's terror, nature's actuality, the spirit's essence, art's ingenuity, and what is more, life and death.*⁷ Do you want to add something to my speech dear Leon?

Leon: Dear friends, *I say, only, that we ought to know that a point is a figure, which cannot be divided into parts. I call a figure here anything located on a plane so the eye can see it. No one would deny that the painter has nothing to do with things that are not visible. The painter is concerned solely with representing what can be seen*⁸.

Paolo: Thank you Leon, what you say is very interesting . Dear Dolce, you have been so quiet, what are your thoughts?

Ludovico: *Dulcis in fundum*...I agree with all of you and anyhow it's too late for me to give a speech.

Narrator: At that particular moment Andre' is woken up from his sleep by the agitated voices of his friends. It is nearly dawn. He starts drinking from a nice glass bowl. After pausing for a second he speaks.

Andre': While asleep a wise woman sat beside me. She told me that art is magic and marvelous, and that the role of the painter in society is to create a balance between the world of imagination and reality and to fuse that distinction entirely. Painting represents something essential about the human being, it is based on the fact that a man receiving through his sense of sight another man's expression

⁷ Pardo, Mary, *Paolo Pino's Dialogo Di Pittura: A Translation with Commentary*, p. 297, 317-318.

⁸ Alberti, Leon Battista, *On Painting*, translated by John R. Spencer, p. 43.

of feeling, is capable of experiencing the emotion which moved the man who expressed it. It is a means of union among people. By using lines and colors, artists transmit consciously or subconsciously something that others may experience as well. Suddenly everything seemed so clear: painting is an indispensable means of communication. What do you think about my dream?

Narrator: Having no reply, Andre' suddenly realizes that all the others had fallen asleep on the couch and entered the world of dreams, where everything is possible...for them too.

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