

Renaissance painter's secrets revealed at WISTEC

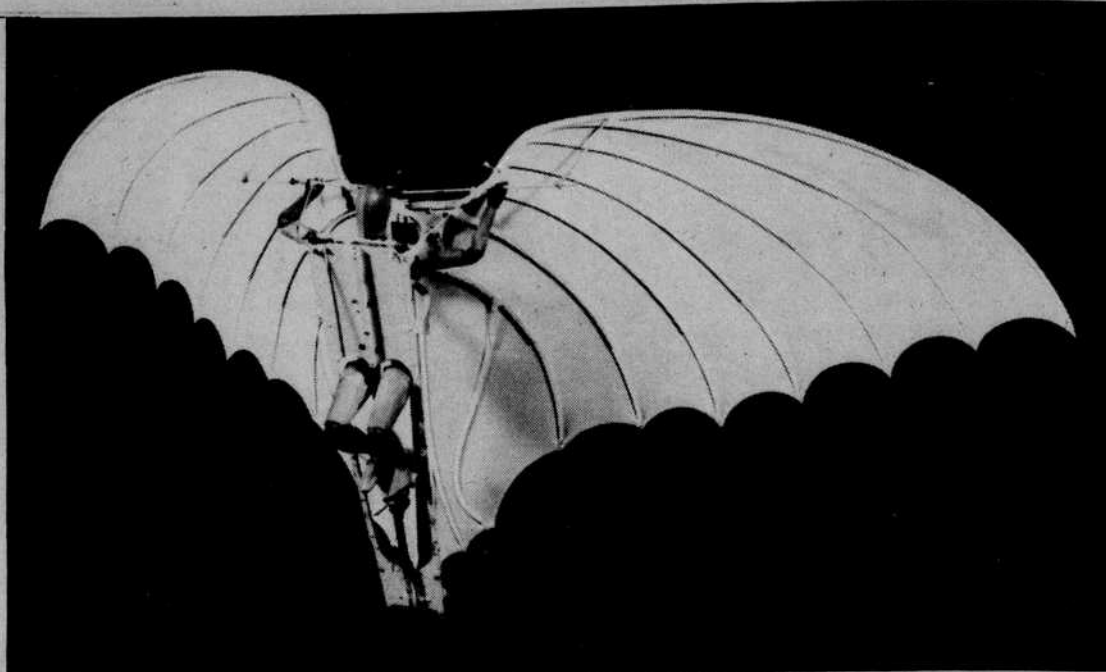
by Muriel Willingham

How many people did it take to invent the helicopter, revolving bridge, bullet-proof tank, diving bell, and the science of comparative anatomy? Visitors to WISTEC's exhibit "Leonardo da Vinci, 1452-1619" will discover it took only one, a true Renaissance man. The 24 viewer-operated models in the exhibit, which opens July 27, are only a few of his countless designs and are guaranteed to fascinate children of all ages. Leonardo's multi-faceted genius is so amazing that people have speculated he might have been a reincarnated soul brining with him the accumulated wisdom of previous lifetimes, or even a being from outer space. Actual facts of his life are less exotic but equally remarkable.

Leonardo was born in 1452, the illegitimate son of a country girl and a small-town lawyer in Vinci,

near the Italian city of Florence. This was the early Renaissance, and the times were much like the 1960s. A sense of change was everywhere: in the political upheavals, the exploration of new ideas, and in an increased valuing of individuality. Leonardo's bastard birth denied him entrance to the university in Florence, so he was apprenticed as a teenager to the city's leading painter and goldsmith, Verrocchio. In the workshop Leonardo was exposed to the world of ideas while learning the skills of sculpture, painting, drawing, and the making of musical and surgical instruments. He developed amazing powers of visual perception; he could watch flying birds or running water, then go home and draw them accurately from memory.

Several models in the exhibit illustrate his ideas about flight. A



This "flying machine" is one of the 24 models built from the sketches and notes of Leonardo Da Vinci which will be on display at WISTEC July 27-Sept. 28.

pyramid-shaped parachute and a helicopter are included, along with a flying machine doomed to failure by its bird-like, flapping wings. One of Leonardo's students appeared in a cast the day after a trial of one of these machines, and Leonardo's interest in human flight diminished rapidly afterwards.

Leonardo's working life provided endless challenges to his creativity. During the 20 years of his employment by the Duke of Milan he was a jack-of-all-trades designing buildings, weapons, and an air-conditioning system for the palace, in addition to his masterful paintings *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*. After the Duke died in prison Leonardo worked for Cesare Borgia as a military engineer and map-maker, leaving after two years to resume his own experiments in anatomy and mathematics. The last four years of his life he served Francis I, the

king of France, as architect and painter.

Several models in the WISTEC exhibit demonstrate engineering and mechanics; roller bearings in a wagon axle and various uses of gears are examples. Leonardo invented a way to measure nearly everything; models on display include a two-faced clock which shows both minutes and hours, and devices for measuring distance, humidity, wind velocity, and the amount of slant of a surface.

Leonardo considered war "a bestial madness," but he was required to design weapons and fortifications for his employers. A cone-shaped tank and a scaling ladder much like modern fire-trucks use are part of the exhibit. Other models demonstrate Leonardo's experiments in boat design, such as hull shapes which increase stability while reducing friction, and an unsinkable

double-hulled ship.

Specifications for these inventions come to us in one of Leonardo's greatest legacies, the 8000 surviving pages of his *Notebooks*. They are filled with countless drawings illustrating every kind of phenomenon in the fields of both art and science. Most of the notebooks were lost, sold, or traded, thanks to the carelessness of the friend—and his heirs—to whom the notebooks were bequeathed. Leonardo never got around to organizing the notebooks, and they are a jumble of laundry lists, anatomical drawings, accounting records, and inventions. He used reversed writing, perhaps to hide some of his ideas which might have been considered heretical at the time (for example, that the sun does not revolve around the earth). Or he may have used mirror writing merely because he was left-handed. His imaginative designs far outstripped the technology and materials available in his time. He was less interested in construction than in solving problems, and he did that so accurately that his specifications can be followed today.

The touring exhibit on display at WISTEC from July 27 through September 28 is owned by IBM Corporation and is co-sponsored in Eugene by *Front Row*, Oregon's regional arts magazine. WISTEC is located at 2300 Centennial Blvd., next to Autzen Stadium. The museum is open to the public Tuesday through Sunday, 12-5 pm, and is open to groups by reservation. The exhibit is free with WISTEC admission: \$2 for adults, \$1 for seniors and college students, and 75¢ for children 3 to 18 years. The WISTEC staff is excited to be hosting this exhibit, and we expect to spend many hours on the display floor enjoying the models!

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"Watershed" Art Show

Watershed is Eugene's First Annual Vietnam Generation Art Show with the theme being Vietnam Era/Vietnam Veteran Experiences. Entries for all media are needed and the no-fee, juried show is open to all Northwest artists. The show will hang at the Fifth Street Public Market September 25th through October 1st. To enter the show, send a slide of your work with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Gerald Kamp, 606 Blair Boulevard, Eugene 97402. Deadline is September 1st!

The show will run at the same time as the exhibit of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall replica in Skinner's Butte Park. Vietnam Veterans of America, local chapter 144 are still needing to raise \$1000 to cover the \$3000 cost of bringing the Wall to Eugene. Donations will be accepted anytime; you can mail them to Will Morningsun, 30900 Blanton Road, Eugene 97405. If you have any questions, call Irwin at 343-1937.

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