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Mysterious Anomaly in Da Vinci's Salvator Mundi

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | OCTOBER 23, 2017



Salvator Mundi
(Public domain image)

Mystery continues to hound the recently authenticated “Salvator Mundi”, which has been attributed to [Leonardo da Vinci](#) and pegged at \$100m by Christie’s for

its auction next month. Certified as a genuine Da Vinci work six years ago, the painting, depicting Jesus Christ with a crystal orb in his left hand and his right hand upheld in benediction, has been described as the only Da Vinci painting in private hands. However, Walter Isaacson points out a “puzzling anomaly” in his upcoming study titled “Leonardo da Vinci: the Biography”. Is it conceivable that Da Vinci, who was also a scientist and engineer apart from being a genius artist, would fail to portray the refraction and distortion of light when it passes through solid glass or crystal? Yet, on close examination, the orb is indeed shown to reflect Christ’s robes and arms as is, instead of the reduced and inverted image that scientific laws would demand. This lapse is something Isaacson is unable to digest, wondering if perhaps Da Vinci wanted to create a distraction or that was his way of imbuing the orb with magical properties.

It was 2011 when Luke Syson, the then curator of the National Gallery, chose to feature Salvator Mundi in his epic Leonardo exhibition, notes [The Guardian](#). However, not all experts are convinced about the painting’s authenticity. In 2013, Frank Zöllner, from the University of Leipzig remarked in an art journal that the artwork could be a “high-quality product of Leonardo’s workshop.” Michael Daley, the director of ArtWatch UK also feels that the Salvator Mundi is too “dead-pan flat, like an icon, with no real depth in the modelling.” He also points towards the fact that the figure is heavily cropped, something uncharacteristic of Da Vinci. Reportedly, Christie’s has defended the work saying that Da Vinci probably did not want to distract the viewer from the main subject of the painting. Whatever the truth, the story is intriguing enough that Paramount Pictures has purchased the rights to Isaacson’s book and a biopic by Leonardo DiCaprio may be in the works.