

FAMOUS ARTISTS

By Rita Wenberg, of
Cobbity

Let's take a peep at the Sydney National Art Gallery, which contains a number of valuable paintings, including canvases by such celebrated artists as Landseer, Herkomer, Van Prinseps, McWhirter, David Murray, Colin Hunter, Tennyson Cole, Clausen, A. C. Cow, T. Sidney Cooper as well as statuettes by Hamo Thornycroft, R.A. and fine samples of bronze repoussé work.

One of the best known works is George Lambert's famous Australian painting called "Across the Black Soil Plains". The artist has caught the very spirit of that remarkable area around Pilliga, known as the Black Soil Plains, in which he depicts a fine team of horses hauling a wagon laden with wool.

When it was first exhibited critics went into ecstasies over the masterpiece, but the first bushman to see the picture was horrified at the artist's mistake; not one horse in the team had a belly-band. Incidentally, the horses are still without them. Perhaps you'll say you have seen horses in the country working without a belly-band. Sure, but never in a team hauling such a load as in Lambert's painting.

Hans Heysen was another Australian painter, who painted "South Australian Pastoral" which shows the very fine work done on the Australian Gum Trees. He painted with water-colours. There are more famous paintings from all over the world. One of my favourite artists is Leonardo da Vinci, who lived in Florence.

"The life that is well spent is a long life." Leonardo da Vinci wrote these words. In addition to being one of the greatest painters in the golden age of painting, he was also a multiple genius of Science. He was a modern man, born in that morning of today which we call the Renaissance. He foresaw or invented much that science, since his time, has spent 400 years in finding out. Da Vinci was left handed, eccentric in style of writing from right to left. To read what he wrote one would have to view it in a mirror.

His mother was Caterina, 16 years old daughter of a peasant family and his father was Piero da Vinci, a lawyer.

During Leonardo's early years he was an only child, and spoiled, but his startling beauty and quick wit made it easy to forgive his faults.

When Piero da Vinci discovered his boy's first drawings, he placed him as an apprentice in the studio of Verrocchio in Florence. Verrocchio was jack of all trades, at which Leonardo was to become master-painter, sculptor, architect, musician, natural historian. In and out of Verrocchio's studios were other young artists—among them one named Botticelli, who we can remember became Leonardo da Vinci's best friend.

From the memories of his boyhood was born "Virgin of the Rocks", where landscape and flora enhance with their wild sweetness the holiness of the adorable Mother

the Angel as beautiful as we dream an angel to be, and the child curling baby fingers in blessing over his play-mate, St. John.

This painting was commissioned by a religious fraternity in Milan for a niggardly 20 ducats. He believed the finished work was worth a hundred ducats, but finally the King of France bought the picture and hung it in the palace.

What was once one of the world's greatest paintings, "The Last Supper", Leonardo painted on the wall of a convent refectory, on plaster unsuited to pigments. Within 20 years a creeping damp caused mildew and flaking to disfigure the painting.

Da Vinci learned why birds take off into the wind, understood how the slotted wings help them mount more steeply. His earliest plans for a flying machine suggest a dragonfly or again a bat.

He expected the wings to flap, and so planned an articulated fuselage of stitched leather. Having no power, save the man in the machine, he imagined his aviator as lying face down in the frame and rowing the air with the wings. Then, first of men, Leonardo hit on the idea of a propeller for locomotion. In his model the 'prop' beats, horizontally, with the fuselage hanging below it, like a helicopter. But in his cardboard model he used a tightly wound spring for power. As da Vinci saw it, the machine would rise straight into the air, his theories were sound, but lacking a light engine, he could never see them realised.

He designed prefabricated portable houses, rolling mills, a screwcutting machine, a bulldozer, a spinning machine, and a harbour dredge. He was the first man to mount a magnetic needle on a horizontal axis, thereby giving us the compass as we know it today. He was the inventor of what we now call a differential gear, and of an anemometer, or wind gauge.

He devised a diving bell and a life preserver, and planned large cruising submarines, but destroyed his plans for he said there was too much wickedness in the hearts of men to trust such a secret to them, lest they 'practice assassination in the bottom of the sea'!

Leonardo was the first scientist to understand fossils as being the impression of extinct animals that lived when the rocks in which they are found were by sediment on the bottom of the sea, for the earth, he told men, was not just 5,000 years old. His pioneering studies in geology persuaded him that it must have taken the River Arno 200,000 years to build its flood plains.

From the self-portrait, done about 1510, Leonardo was an old man at 58. He had to flee to Milan when it was invaded by the French and the Sforzas were driven out, but he escaped to Mantua, wandered to Venice, and