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Nationwide exhibitions of drawings by Leonardo da Vinci from the Royal Collection to open in 2019

In **February 2019**, to mark the 500th anniversary of the death of Leonardo da Vinci, 144 of the Renaissance master's greatest drawings in the Royal Collection will go on display in **12 simultaneous exhibitions across the UK**.

Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing, a nationwide event, will give the widest-ever UK audience the opportunity to see the work of this extraordinary artist. Twelve drawings selected to reflect the full range of Leonardo's interests – painting, sculpture, architecture, music, anatomy, engineering, cartography, geology and botany – will be shown at each venue in **Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Southampton and Sunderland, with a further venue to be announced**.

Following the exhibitions at Royal Collection Trust's partner venues, in **May 2019** the drawings will be brought together to form part of **an exhibition of over 200 sheets at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace**, the largest exhibition of Leonardo's work in over 65 years. A selection of **80 drawings** will then travel to **The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse in November 2019**, the largest group of Leonardo's works ever shown in Scotland.

Revered in his day as a painter, Leonardo completed only around 20 paintings; he was respected as a sculptor and architect, but no sculpture or buildings by him survive; he was a military and civil engineer who plotted with Machiavelli to divert the river Arno, but the scheme was never executed; he was an anatomist and dissected 30 human corpses, but his ground-breaking anatomical work was never published; he planned treatises on painting, water, mechanics, the growth of plants and many other subjects, but none was ever finished. As so much of his life's work was unrealised or destroyed, Leonardo's greatest achievements survive only in his drawings and manuscripts.

The drawings in the Royal Collection have been together as a group since the artist's death, and provide an unparalleled insight into Leonardo's investigations and the workings of his mind. Leonardo firmly believed that visual evidence was more persuasive than academic argument, and that an image conveyed knowledge more accurately and concisely than any words. Few of his surviving drawings were intended for others to see: drawing served as his laboratory, allowing him to work out his ideas on paper and search for the universal laws that he believed underpinned all of creation.

The exhibitions *Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing* will include examples of all the drawing materials employed by the artist, including pen and ink, red and black chalks, watercolour and

metalpoint. They will also present new information about Leonardo's working practices and creative process, gathered through scientific research using a range of non-invasive techniques, including ultraviolet imaging, infrared reflectography and X-ray fluorescence. The findings will be brought together in a groundbreaking new book, **Leonardo da Vinci: A Closer Look**, published by Royal Collection Trust in February 2019.

Leonardo used ink made from oak galls and iron salts, which is transparent in infrared light, allowing his black chalk underdrawing to be seen for the first time. Examination of **A Deluge, c.1517–18** (to be shown at the National Museum Cardiff) revealed that beneath the pattern-like arrangement of rain and waves in brown ink, Leonardo drew a swirling knot of energy in black chalk at the heart of the composition. Similarly, in **Studies of water, c.1510–12** (to be shown at the Millennium Gallery, Sheffield) he built up the image in stages, first creating an underlying structure of water currents in chalk and then adding little rosettes of bubbles on the surface in ink, almost as decoration.

All the drawings by Leonardo in the Royal Collection were bound into a single album by the sculptor Pompeo Leoni in Milan around 1590 and entered the Collection during the reign of Charles II. What appear to be two completely blank sheets of paper from this album will be on public display for the first time at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace. Examination in ultraviolet light has revealed these sheets to be **Studies of hands for the Adoration of the Magi, c.1481** and among Leonardo's most beautiful drawings.

Leonardo executed the studies of hands in metalpoint, which involves drawing with a metal stylus on prepared paper. One of the sheets was examined at the UK's national synchrotron, the Diamond Light Source at Harwell, Oxfordshire, using high-energy X-ray fluorescence to map the distribution of chemical elements on the paper. It was discovered that the drawings had become invisible to the naked eye because of the high copper content in the stylus that Leonardo used – the metallic copper had reacted over time to become a transparent copper salt. By contrast, **A design for an equestrian monument, c.1485–8** (to be shown at Leeds Art Gallery), which is drawn with a silver stylus, is still fully visible.

Martin Clayton, Head of Prints and Drawings, Royal Collection Trust, said, 'The drawings of Leonardo da Vinci are a national treasure, both incredibly beautiful and the main source of our knowledge of the artist. We hope that as many people as possible across the UK will take this unique opportunity to see these extraordinary works, which allow us to enter one of the greatest minds in history, and to understand the man and his achievements.'

Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing (1 February – 6 May 2019)

Exhibitions of 12 drawings at the following locations

Ulster Museum, Belfast
Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery
Bristol Museum & Art Gallery
National Museum Cardiff
Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow
Leeds Art Gallery
Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool
Manchester Art Gallery
Millennium Gallery, Sheffield
Southampton City Art Gallery
Sunderland Museums & Winter Gardens
A further location to be announced

Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing (24 May – 13 October 2019)

Exhibition of over 200 drawings

The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, London

Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing (22 November 2019 – 15 March 2020)

Exhibition of 80 drawings

The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh

Visitor information and tickets for The Queen's Galleries,

www.royalcollection.org.uk

Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing by Martin Clayton will be published by Royal Collection Trust in October 2018, £12.95 in paperback, £19.95 in hardback from Royal Collection Trust shops, www.royalcollection.org.uk/shop and partner venues.

Leonardo da Vinci: A Closer Look by Alan Donnithorne, former Head of Paper Conservation, Royal Collection Trust, will be published by Royal Collection Trust in February 2019, £35.00 from Royal Collection Trust shops and www.royalcollection.org.uk/shop.

A selection of images is available from www.picselect.com. For further information and photographs, please contact the Royal Collection Trust Press Office, +44 (0)20 7839 1377, press@royalcollection.org.uk.

An embeddable short film introducing the *Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing* exhibitions can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/253809896>.

Notes to Editors

Royal Collection Trust, a department of the Royal Household, is responsible for the care of the Royal Collection and manages the public opening of the official residences of The Queen. Income generated from admissions and from associated commercial activities contributes directly to The Royal Collection Trust, a registered charity. The aims of The Trust are the care and conservation of the Royal Collection, and the promotion of access and enjoyment through exhibitions, publications, loans and educational programmes. Royal Collection Trust's work is undertaken without public funding of any kind.

The Royal Collection is among the largest and most important art collections in the world, and one of the last great European royal collections to remain intact. It comprises almost all aspects of the fine and decorative arts, and is spread among some 15 royal residences and former residences across the UK, most of which are regularly open to the public. The Royal Collection is held in trust by the Sovereign for her successors and the nation, and is not owned by The Queen as a private individual.

The Royal Collection contains by far the greatest collection of drawings by **Leonardo da Vinci**. The group of more than 550 sheets has remained together since Leonardo's death in 1519. Because of the potential for damage from exposure to light, these very delicate works on paper can never be on permanent display and are kept in carefully controlled conditions in the Print Room at Windsor Castle. All the drawings can be viewed online on the Royal Collection Trust website.

Infrared reflectography records the way objects reflect infrared light. Some materials, such as iron-gall ink, are transparent at infrared wavelengths, so what lies beneath becomes visible.

Ultraviolet (UV) imaging is used to distinguish between materials that look the same in visible light. Metalpoint lines that have faded can mask the luminescence of an underlying substance or layer, which will be revealed when illuminated by UV light.

The Diamond Light Source is a synchrotron that is 10,000 times more powerful than a traditional microscope (similar to the Large Hadron Collider at CERN in Switzerland). It accelerates electrons to nearly the speed of light and emits a light 10 billion times brighter than the sun. In a process known as **X-ray fluorescence scanning**, the electrons are used to map the distribution of chemical elements.

Ends