



The Foetus In The Womb (c. 1490-12)



Apocalypse Then: If Leonardo Da Vinci was alive today he wouldn't get an Arts Council grant, or a show of his drawings at the Hayward Gallery (to April 16). He was not the sort of artist we have today, even if this drawing, *A Cloud-burst Of Material Possessions*, conveys a strangely modern sensibility and subject matter. For Leonardo the technical skill of painting objectively was something to be respected; careful observation and scientific knowledge were to help him achieve this. He would play at God, understanding nature and exploiting his insights to give us a clever simulation on canvas; images like the foetus above conveyed with optical truth and neutrality.

He is not so hard on himself when it comes to drawing and, as this exhibition shows, an expressive, irrational element begins to appear towards the end of his life. This can be seen in a small series of apocalyptic drawings of deluges, with ominous overtones of violence and destruction, the forces of na-

ture erupting like spiritual wrath. No wonder, when a thunderstorm must have seemed like a psychic outburst of the earth itself to a man who thought that fluids on the land (rivers) did the same job as fluids in a person (blood).

The exhibition also has models built from Leonardo's designs for tanks, guns and flying machines. It is hard to know how important all those famous machines really were to Leonardo himself. He invented a lot, and seemed to enjoy it, but you get the feeling that the hope of financing his art was what really pushed him on. I can imagine him between patrons, broke and frustrated, scribbling out wild ideas in the hope of attracting a sponsor and a fortune. Maybe his feelings are expressed in this drawing from near the end of his life. The engineer's tool-kit comes crashing down in a violent storm. In his own caption, Leonardo laments: 'O human misery - how many things must you serve for money.' •

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