Leonardo da Vinci:
Ten Drawings from the Royal Collection

Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne 13 February – 24 April 2016
National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin 4 May – 17 July 2016
Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery 30 July – 9 October 2016
Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea 15 October 2016 – 6 January 2017

Throughout 2016, ten of the finest drawings by Leonardo da Vinci in the Royal Collection will travel to four museums and galleries across the United Kingdom and Ireland in a new exhibition. The works have been selected to show the extraordinary scope of the artist’s interests, from painting and sculpture to engineering, zoology, botany, mapmaking and anatomy, as well as his use of different media – pen and ink, red and black chalks, watercolour and metalpoint. This is the fifth touring exhibition of Leonardo drawings from the Royal Collection since 2002. Over three quarters of a million people have now seen one of these shows in 16 venues around the UK, from Aberdeen to Truro.

Through drawing, Leonardo attempted to record and understand the world around him. He maintained that an image transmitted knowledge more accurately and concisely than any words. Nonetheless, many of his drawings are extensively annotated, including the sheet of Studies for casting the equestrian monument to Francesco Sforza, c.1492–4, and the double-sided page from a notebook of anatomical studies, The heart compared to a seed and The vessels of the liver, spleen and kidneys, c.1508. Leonardo was left-handed and throughout his life he wrote in perfect mirror-image, from right to left. Rather than an attempt to keep his investigations secret, as has been claimed, this was probably a childhood trick that he never abandoned.

There are almost 600 drawings by Leonardo da Vinci in the Royal Collection. They were originally bound into a single album, which was probably acquired in the 17th century by Charles II. Beyond the 20 or so surviving paintings by Leonardo, the artist’s drawings are the main source of our knowledge of this extraordinary Renaissance man and his many activities. According to Martin Clayton, Head of Prints and Drawings, Royal Collection Trust, ‘Leonardo’s drawings are the richest, most wide-ranging, most technically brilliant, and most endlessly fascinating of any artist.’

Studies of an infant’s limbs, c.1490
It was during the Renaissance period that artists began to sketch from live models. In this charming sheet of studies, Leonardo captures the limbs of a plump baby in a number of
poses, probably as a study for one of the paintings of the Madonna and Child that he produced early in his career.

**Studies for casting the equestrian monument to Francesco Sforza, c.1492–4**

Around 1490 Leonardo was commissioned to make a huge equestrian monument to Francesco Sforza, former Duke of Milan. The bronze sculpture, which was never finished, would have weighed many tons. Casting it and then hauling the huge cast out of its mould posed an enormous technical challenge. This sheet of studies shows Leonardo attempting to solve these problems.

**A map of a weir on the Arno east of Florence, 1504**

Leonardo was a respected hydraulic engineer. In the summer of 1504 he was commissioned by the Florentine government to survey the course of the river Arno both upstream and downstream of the city. Here he focuses on a weir in which the flow of water has damaged the bank of the Arno in two places. The study is finished in watercolour for presentation to his employers.

**A male nude, c.1504–5**

The Florentine government commissioned a huge mural of the celebrated victory of the Battle of Anghiari, to be painted on the wall of the main council chamber of the Palazzo della Signoria. As part of his preparations for the painting, Leonardo ‘surveyed’ the male body to study the form of the muscles. This is the most famous of these preparatory drawings and shows the muscles of the back and legs with great subtlety.

**Expressions of fury in horses, lions and a man, c.1504–5**

The central portion of the mural of the Battle of Anghiari was to show a passionate battle of men and horses. In this sheet Leonardo compares the expressions of fury in a horse, a man and (for good measure) a lion, with mouth wide open and nostrils flaring.

**A branch of blackberry, c.1505–10**

Around 1505 Leonardo began work on a painting of Leda and the Swan, which was to have a foreground teeming with plants and flowers. Leonardo made many minutely detailed studies for the foreground and, fascinated by what he observed, conceived of writing a botanical treatise on the forms of plants and trees.

**Recto: The heart compared to a seed; Verso: The vessels of the liver, spleen and kidneys, c.1508**

Of all his scientific researches, Leonardo devoted most time to (and made the most far-reaching observations in) his anatomical studies. This double-sided sheet from a densely packed notebook dates from the period in which he began to conduct human dissections. In both drawings and notes, Leonardo attempts to resolve the ancient debate about the centre of the vascular system – whether in the heart or the liver – by using the analogy of a plant.

**A study for the head of St Anne, c.1510–15**

Leonardo worked on the painting Madonna and Child with St Anne and a lamb over the last two decades of his life, making studies as the painting progressed. In this atmospheric drawing he captures the delicate fall of light on the face of St Anne and the complexities of her delicate headdress with a single piece of black chalk.

**Studies of cats, lions and a dragon, c.1513–18**

Leonardo was fascinated by the sinuous movements of animals and considered writing a
treatise on the subject. In this lively sheet of studies he draws cats sleeping, grooming themselves and fighting, lions stalking, and imagines the serpentine forms of a dragon.

A deluge, c.1517–18
Towards the end of his life Leonardo became obsessed by destruction and wrote long passages describing the effects of a mighty deluge overwhelming the earth. He also made a series of drawings of a deluge, in which a vast cloudburst destroys mountains and sweeps away cities, leaving nothing solid on the earth. These drawings, unique in the Renaissance, were not studies for any larger project, but were simply done for his own satisfaction.

Jonathan Marsden, Director, Royal Collection Trust, said:
'The drawings of Leonardo da Vinci in the Royal Collection are among the greatest artistic treasures of this country. Through this touring exhibition, we aim to bring these extraordinary works of art within easy reach of people across Great Britain and Ireland.'

Julie Milne, Chief Curator of Art Galleries at Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, said:
'We are honoured to be chosen as the first venue to host this exhibition of ten Leonardo da Vinci drawings on its tour of the UK and Ireland. This will be a rare opportunity for people in the North East of England to see the exquisite work of one of the greatest artists of all time. We take pride in showcasing world-class art at the Laing Art Gallery and partnerships with esteemed organisations such as Royal Collection Trust are vital to helping us achieve this. We are very grateful to be given this opportunity.'

Sean Rainbird, Director, National Gallery of Ireland, said:
'This is a rare and wonderful opportunity for the National Gallery of Ireland to show these exquisite drawings by Leonardo da Vinci from the Royal Collection. The drawings, reflecting Leonardo’s wide interests from anatomy to nature, will bring so much pleasure to our visitors.'

Deborah Dean, Visual Arts Manager, Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, said:
'We are proud to have been chosen as one of the four venues to host this remarkable exhibition, and to have the opportunity to work with the partners and Royal Collection Trust. The exhibition will be the catalyst for an exciting programme of related events and activities in Nottingham and, as Nottingham Castle embarks on the planning of a major re-development, it also signals our continuing ambition to bring art of world class significance to the city.'

Jenni Spencer-Davies, Curator, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, said:
'We are pleased that Leonardo’s drawings will be coming to Swansea as part of Royal Collection Trust's tour. It will be a unique opportunity for our communities to see these wonderful, inspiring drawings. They will be of interest to both local and international audiences at the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, and the exhibition will greatly enrich our programmes in 2016, following the Gallery’s redevelopment. We are grateful to Royal Collection Trust for this partnership.'
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.

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 13 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 group of nearly 600 drawings by Leonardo da Vinci in the Royal Collection is unrivalled in terms of size and breadth of subject-matter. 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 Royal Library at Windsor Castle. Since 2002, through ten exhibitions at The Queen’s Galleries, loans to 38 venues around the world and four UK touring exhibitions, around 300 of the drawings by Leonardo in the Royal Collection have been on public display. 568 of the drawings can be explored on line at www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection, and through the iPad app Leonardo da Vinci: Anatomy.