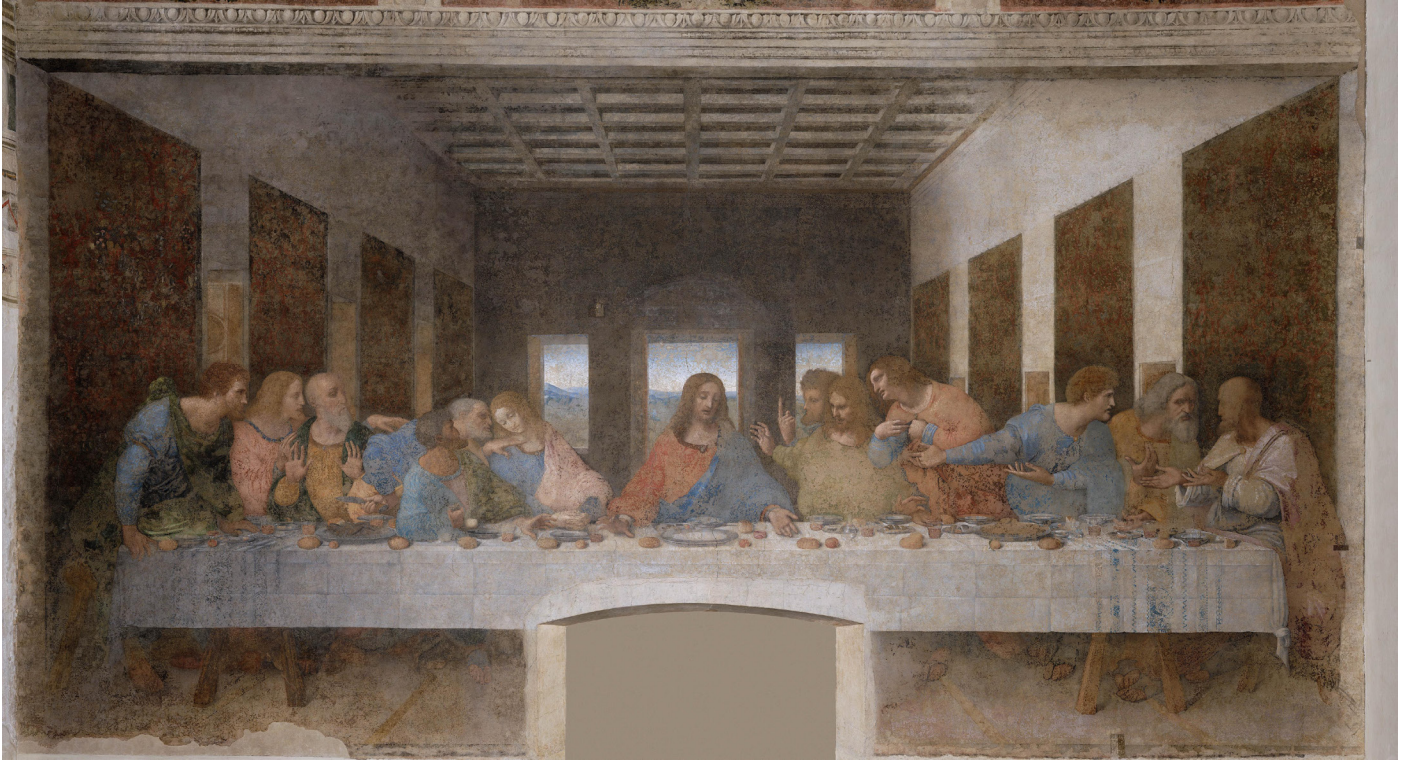


# Can art and science get along?

Franco Bulian



One of Leonardo da Vinci's most famous masterpieces is certainly the Cenacle that can be admired in Milan, in the convent adjacent to the sanctuary of Santa Maria delle Grazie.

This fresco, which in reality cannot be properly defined as such, is a clear example of Leonardo's eclectic personality, which has always ranged between art and science with a strong tension towards research in every field.

Unfortunately, in this particular case, the great Master's desire of innovation did not take into account the particular conditions under which the great masterpiece would have been exposed and which led to its rapid deterioration: the placement of the painting on the north-facing wall and which also acted as a separation from the kitchens, determined particularly severe climatic stresses (temperature and humidity) which deeply damaged it, also due to the particular "dry" technique used by the Master.

As is well-known, these phenomena were revealed just a few months after the conclusion of the painting and even today the Cenacle is necessarily subject to continuous restoration and recovery.

The "misadventure" of the great Leonardo can perhaps lead us to broader thoughts about the relationship that should exist between art and technical knowledge, because the former could evidently derive certain advantages from it.

Continuing on this path and allowing ourselves to enter into our world of furnishing, we can perhaps also derive a teaching on what should represent the "constraints" for art (design) applied to a piece of furniture.

We have deliberately written the word "constraints" in quotation marks, because it could actually be interpreted with a negative meaning, a limit to the imagination and to that creative thought that, according to some schools of thought, should not have any "constraint".

The example of Leonardo's Last Supper is clear: a fresco for a place subjected to constant variations in temperature and humidity must certainly have been designed and built taking into account its "final use".

In the same way, therefore, a chair should first be conceived and then designed so that someone can sit

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down, as a kitchen counter must be created to prepare foods or a bed to sleep beautiful sleeps...

So designing a piece of furniture cannot be separated from a “strong thought” of its function, a priority that cannot be a constraint, just as the rules that define what characteristics these furniture objects must possess do not represent a limit to the imagination and freedom of expression, but only an aid to define the contours of a product, so that it can obviously meet the needs of end users to whom it is (or should?) be intended.

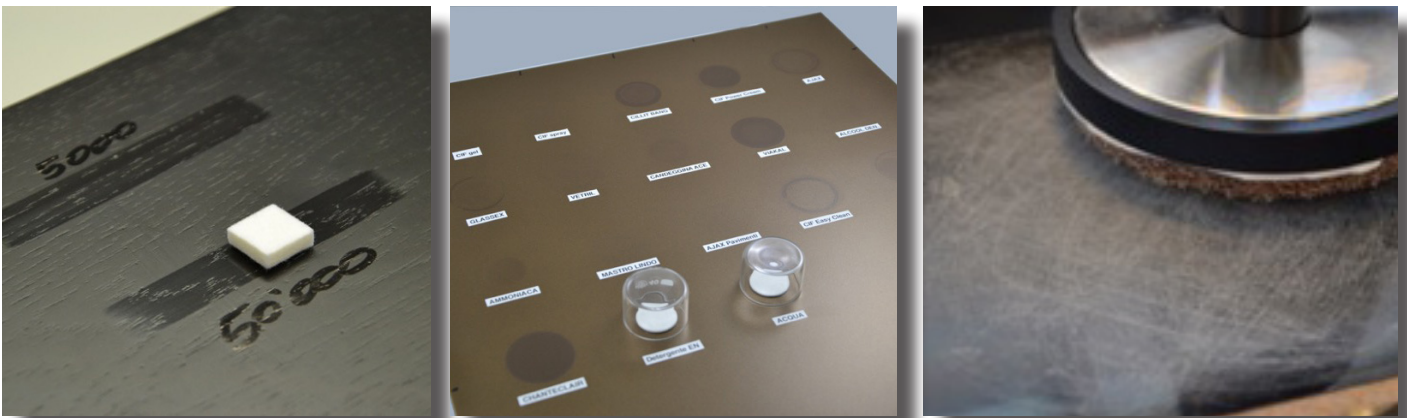
To establish that a chair must bear a certain load when used is, in fact, a simple starting point for defining what the chair object is and how it should be. A starting point, we said, that can then unleash all the imagination, the innovative ability and - why not - even the shamelessness, if you pass the definition, of the designer.

Unfortunately, the idea that a standard is an aid and not an obstacle is not yet so widespread: from our observatory laboratory to the service of companies, we sometimes notice that the search for a “fashionable” product or one that tends to neglect some aspects technical / regulatory, with the result of producing furniture that end up like so many small “Leonardo’s Cenacles” when they face the market.

There are, unfortunately, many examples, but we highlight only some of the most common limited to surfaces, a little ‘by analogy with the example shown in the first lines of this article.

The “natural” wood surfaces, protected with a few microns of paint, are certainly noticeable, considering that their pleasantness also extends to the touch, as well as to the sight.

Attention, however, to their use in a kitchen or a bathroom, which can easily lead to the onset of spots and stains even for



simple exposure to water, steam or moisture.

In the same way very porous finishes (cement-based ones, for example) have often proved to be very sensitive to staining by drinks, detergents and other types of liquids.

Finally, the surfaces with high opacity, particularly sought during this period, are another source of problems, considering that the opacity is obtained with silicas or waxes that produce a micro surface roughness. The simple repeated cleaning is able in some cases to “smooth” these tiny ridges, effectively polishing some areas and consequently creating unsightly bands or halos.

Today the tools to “test” the innovations, however, are available and a culture on the improvement of the products based on the technical standards also begins to emerge.

By measuring we will realize that the opaque surfaces are not, for example, all the same and perhaps, in this way,

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we could choose the best compromise in terms of performance/beauty, if not even trigger a virtuous process towards the search for new compatible technical solutions with the needs of design.

The union between design and technical knowledge, the latter represented by the industry standards, in addition to not being a constraint could turn out to be a very powerful tool especially for the marketing of Italian furniture: beauty joint to safety and durability of the product would certainly an invincible weapon that would also be hard to imitate.

Let us conclude with a question perhaps a little risky but that we like to ask: if during the Renaissance there were standards on frescoes, and maybe even a Catas to measure their application, today we could perhaps admire the Cenacle in the full beauty of the drawings and of the colors designed by Leonardo?

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