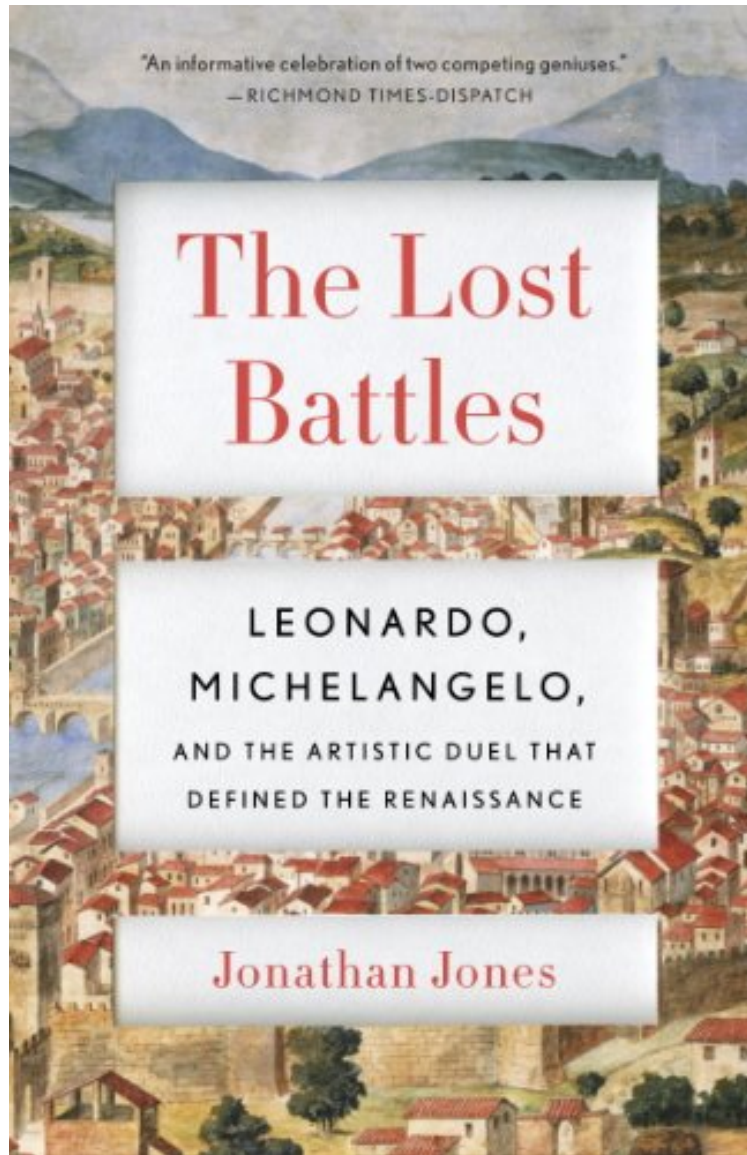


(Ebook pdf) The Lost Battles: Leonardo, Michelangelo, and the Artistic Duel That Defined the Renaissance

The Lost Battles: Leonardo, Michelangelo, and the Artistic Duel That Defined the Renaissance

Jonathan Jones

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Jonathan Jones : The Lost Battles: Leonardo, Michelangelo, and the Artistic Duel That Defined the Renaissance before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Lost Battles: Leonardo, Michelangelo, and the Artistic Duel That Defined the Renaissance:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. TediousBy JohnAlthough for a while able to hold my interest, it was not long before this work became, for me, rambling, tedious, and without real form. Rather than delivering on the

title's promise of an "artistic duel", the book came across as just another outlet for the art critic's variegated opinions on the two artists'(and other artists') Renaissance undertakings. Too much harping on Leonard's and Michelangelo's supposed homosexual proclivities and too little substantive development of the supposed theme (per the title) of this book.9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Lots of potential but...By CustomerThe story is dangled before you: Michelangelo vs. Leonardo da Vinci in a head-to-head "paint-off". I managed to struggle about halfway through it before losing interest. The book mires its way through too much detail and repeats itself (particularly about a reported argument Michelangelo and Leonardo had in a town square in Florence). I may have had higher hopes for this storyline but it just didn't pan out for me. I never even got to the actual painting contest, or what happened in the end, thanks to the "too-much-detail" formula...0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Well done Johathan JonesBy zbrushputs the reader right in the middle of high renaissance and the characters involved

From one of Britain's most respected and acclaimed art historians, art critic of The Guardian—the galvanizing story of a sixteenth-century clash of titans, the two greatest minds of the Renaissance, working side by side in the same room in a fierce competition: the master Leonardo da Vinci, commissioned by the Florentine Republic to paint a narrative fresco depicting a famous military victory on a wall of the newly built Great Council Hall in the Palazzo Vecchio, and his implacable young rival, the thirty-year-old Michelangelo. We see Leonardo, having just completed *The Last Supper*, and being celebrated by all of Florence for his miraculous portrait of the wife of a textile manufacturer. That painting—the *Mona Lisa*—being called the most lifelike anyone had ever seen yet, more divine than human, was captivating the entire Florentine Republic. And Michelangelo, completing a commissioned statue of *David*, the first colossus of the Renaissance, the archetype hero for the Republic epitomizing the triumph of the weak over the strong, helping to reshape the public identity of the city of Florence and conquer its heart. In *The Lost Battles*, published in England to great acclaim (‘‘Superb’’—The Observer; ‘‘Beguilingly written’’—The Guardian), Jonathan Jones brilliantly sets the scene of the time—the politics; the world of art and artisans; and the shifting, agitated cultural landscape. We see Florence, a city freed from the oppressive reach of the Medicis, lurching from one crisis to another, trying to protect its liberty in an Italy descending into chaos, with the new head of the Republic in search of a metaphor that will make clear the glory that is Florence, and seeing in the commissioned paintings the expression of his vision. Jones reconstructs the paintings that Leonardo and Michelangelo undertook—Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*, a nightmare seen in the eyes of the warrior (it became the first modern depiction of the disenchantment of war) and Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina*, a call to arms and the first great transfiguration of the erotic into art. Jones writes about the competition; how it unfolded and became the defining moment in the transformation of ‘‘craftsman’’ to ‘‘artist’’; why the Florentine government began to fall out of love with one artist in favor of the other; and how—and why—in a competition that had no formal prize to clearly resolve the outcome, the battle became one for the hearts and minds of the Florentine Republic, with Michelangelo setting out to prove that his work, not Leonardo's, embodied the future of art. Finally, we see how the result of the competition went on to shape a generation of narrative paintings, beginning with those of Raphael. A riveting exploration into one of history's most resonant exchanges of ideas, a rich, fascinating book that gives us a whole new understanding of an age and those at its center.

.com QA with Jonathan Jones Q. Leonardo and Michelangelo were both highly celebrated artists in Florence when they were commissioned to paint the two frescos you write about. How could their work become ‘‘lost’’? A. In 1503 the city state of Florence commissioned Leonardo da Vinci to paint *The Battle of Anghiari* in its new Great Council Hall. He was in his early fifties and had already painted *The Last Supper* in Milan. This was to be his home city's answer to *The Last Supper*—a permanent memorial to his genius. But in 1504, with Leonardo enjoying a state salary yet still nowhere near starting to paint in the Hall, his young rival Michelangelo was asked to paint *The Battle of Cascina*, another victory, in the same room. A competition was born. It was called by an eyewitness ‘‘the school of the world’’ but both the full-size drawings the artists finished have vanished. So has Leonardo's unfinished wall painting. (Michelangelo never transferred his design to the wall.) Even allowing for the artists' own egos and the demands on them—Michelangelo was called to serve the Pope—why have these works been so comprehensively effaced? To understand this story we need to get into the mind of Florence in the 1500s. This was a city that loved art but it was also a city obsessed with politics. The battle paintings of Michelangelo and Leonardo were commissioned for political reasons—and ‘‘lost’’ for political reasons. Everyone knows the Florentine Renaissance was bankrolled by the Medici family—but it was not that simple. Florence was a republic, a city governed by its own citizens. The Medici family dominated it unofficially in the fifteenth century, as ‘‘first among equals.’’ In 1492, that influence broke and a revolution kicked out the Medici. The new radical republic commissioned the pictures I call ‘‘the lost battles.’’ When the Medici reconquered the city and eventually anointed themselves Grand Dukes of Tuscany, everything that remained of these works of art vanished. This was no coincidence. The lost battles are lost because their republican associations did not

fit the Medici legend of a Renaissance bankrolled by one family. Q. You write that competition was at the heart of Renaissance art. Have any modern periods of artistic achievement embodied that same spirit? A. Competition was set in the genes, so to speak, of western art by the great rivals of the Renaissance. At the birth of modernism a century ago, Picasso and Matisse constantly checked what the other was doing and tried to outdo it. Their relationship was quite similar to that of Leonardo and Michelangelo—Picasso and his friends threw darts at a painting by Matisse of his daughter that Matisse had given Picasso as a gift. Artistic competition is very much alive today. To speak from my own patch, British art revolves around the Turner Prize that pitches artists like Damien Hirst and Anish Kapoor against one another. This controversial prize may not have spawned any new Leonardos but it has given British art a lot of ambition. I was a judge of the Turner Prize while I worked on *The Lost Battles*. I found it fascinating to compare the competitive spirit in different times and places. Q. *The Lost Battles* provides exquisite detail about the city of Florence. How much time did you spend in the city during your research? A. I first visited Florence as a child with my parents and it is the place where I fell in love with art. But after becoming an art critic for a newspaper and being lucky enough to travel around seeing art all over the world—including New York, where the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum have taught me so much—I had not been back to Florence for many years. Then I got interested in the story of how Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo once had a competition to decide who was the greatest artist of their day. I was commissioned to write a newspaper article on it. A flying visit my wife and I made to Florence to research this was so exhilarating that I fell in love a second time with my favorite city. Writing a book was the perfect chance to know it better. So I traveled to Florence as often as possible over a period of several years, ranging from long stays to day trips (you can just about do Florence as a day trip from London). It is a place of inexhaustible beauty and fascination. Q. You've crafted fascinating portraits of Leonardo and Michelangelo's personalities (including descriptions of Leonardo's colorful wardrobe). Did you find yourself "rooting" for one artist or the other? A. I started out rooting for Leonardo because he has always struck me as an enigmatic and dazzling thinker as well as artist. As I got deeper into the research—and, on one of my visits to Florence, explored its forgotten fortifications where Michelangelo held off a besieging army in 1529—I started to prefer Michelangelo. He leaps out of his poems, letters, and 16th-century biographies as a man of deep principle and great courage. I think it was his brave and daring personality that made his contemporaries prefer him to the mysterious Leonardo. But, when I finally started to believe I was getting "under the skin" of Leonardo, so to speak, my sympathies reversed again: I love his freedom of mind and determination to follow his creative impulses. What other famous artist tried to make a flying machine when he was meant to be finishing a great public commission? Q. What did Leonardo and Michelangelo's works say about the nature of war? A. Leonardo and Michelangelo took opposite views of war in their battle pictures. Michelangelo, a young man who had never been near a battle, believed strongly in the Florentine Republic and thought citizens should fight for their city state. He created a homage to the heroism of volunteer militiamen. Like his statue of David, his picture *The Battle of Cascina* celebrated youth and courage and looking your enemy in the eye. By contrast Leonardo da Vinci had worked as a military engineer and knew mercenary soldiers up close. His work *The Battle of Anghiari* was a hellish vision of war as a savage, futile outburst of rage. Leonardo portrayed horses biting each other as their riders hacked with swords. In his notebooks he says the first weapons were "nails and teeth". In this picture, he showed how the evolution of weapons enhances but cannot change the primitive nature of battle as an intimate, cannibalistic confrontation between frenzied warriors pumped full of adrenaline and testosterone. Meanwhile at the same time he was painting the *Mona Lisa*—the smiling face of maternal love. Leonardo saw war as a male pathology.