

Joe's Nadkarni Award Talk. notes. about 10 min. with slides in background

The Spirit of Leonardo

Slide 1 Art and Physics (1991), Leonardo's Brain (2014), both by Leonard Shlain

Some 35 years ago a few people thought Utah needed a place to foster and facilitate critical, objective, and creative thinking and doing. At the time the then-Hansen Planetarium and its Board said, 'we need a science center'.

Some years later, thanks in part to a 1991 book titled *Art and Physics*, they expanded their interests to include the arts and humanities - and adopted the name **The Leonardo** - a place and organization to facilitate and encourage the spirit of Leonardo da Vinci.

Slide 2 old man da Vinci image

Tomorrow is Leonardo da Vinci's 570th birthday - April 15. He died 503 years ago at the age of 68. Much of society and civilization recognizes Leonardo as a symbol, an icon, a hero of sorts, even a genius - embodying deep thinking, intense creativity, and concern for the needs and problems of Earth and its peoples.

Slide 3. Jacobsen Gallery Poster

In the pre-pandemic time of 2019, The Leonardo celebrated the 500th anniversary of da Vinci's death by expanding its special Leonardo Award to honor individuals who embody the spirit and accomplishments of Leonardo da Vinci. The 2019 award was given in honor of Stephen Jacobsen. The posthumous award was accepted by his family. His Leonardo-esque qualities and accomplishments were recognized in a short video and via remarks by his associates and family. He is very briefly profiled in The Leonardo Award Gallery just outside this auditorium. Leonardo would have loved the work of Steve and his coworkers, as the pioneers of practical robotics technologies and applications. Steve was well aware of da Vinci's ideas and work on mechanical robots.

Slide 4. Johnson Gallery poster

The 2020 award ceremony was virtual, as we were in the midst of the then new Covid 19 pandemic. Chris Johnson, co-founder of the Scientific Computing and Imaging Institute (known locally as SCI), accepted the award on behalf of his colleagues and coworkers with a beautifully illustrated talk focused on scientific visualization. Leonardo would have loved it! SCI researchers have worked closely with scientists, artists, and engineers across the spectrum, including biologists, physiologists and physicians to enhance medical and therapeutic knowledge and processes. They are all fans of Leonardo da Vinci.

Chris and SCI are highlighted in the Gallery outside.

Slide 5 Nadkarni Gallery poster

And tonight's award, the day before Leonardo's birthday, will be accepted by Nalini Nadkarni, who has evolved and expanded the spirit of da Vinci into the treetops and to the misunderstood populations trapped in our prisons and jails. She is the world's premier treetop canopy researcher, educator, and communicator.

That's what happens when curious little girls are allowed to climb trees!

Slide 6 Isaacson da Vinci cover

These three awardees exemplify the spirit and genius of Leonardo.

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A modern expert on Genius is author Walter Isaacson.

He writes biographies of genius, including Ben Franklin, Albert Einstein, and Steve Jobs.

His Leonardo da Vinci came out in 2017.

Isaacson knows genius.

Of the dozens of biographies of da Vinci, Isaacson is the one who, in my opinion, really understands and presents Leonardo's genius - via the telling of his unique skills, talents, methods, and aspirations.

He expresses and extends Einstein's remark

'I am just passionately curious' to da Vinci -

and to the other 'geniuses' he's known.

Slide 7

Here are some da Vinci and Isaacson phrases... pay attention!:

Reality should inform ... but not constrain...

Innovation requires a reality distortion field.

Art and science are disciplines that must walk together, hand in hand.

Leonardo's brainstorming process flows through his pen.

He is always seeking 'unfinished perfection'.

Vision without execution is hallucination.

Be curious, relentlessly curious.

Indulge fantasy, create for yourself .. be open to mystery.

Slide 8 Words of Leo

Leonardo's favorite phrases included:

Ostinato Rigore - Italian for persistent rigor
Sapere Vedere—knowing how to see. Insert eyes close up

He also said:
I am a disciple of experience.
I never tire of being useful.

On his deathbed, it's reported he said:

'Tell me, did anything get done?
There's so much more to do.'

Our Leonardo Awardees also have some favorite quotes:

Slide 9 Jacobsen quotes

Physics does not tell lies.

Before you do it right – you have to do it at all.

Progress is a process of making mistakes - make them faster!

and Steve Jobs' 'Real artists ship.'

Slide 10 **Chris Johnson**

Thoreau's "Distrust any enterprise that requires new clothes."
I'd add to that: '...or expects one to wear a necktie!'

"It takes 20 years to make an overnight success." via Eddy Cantor

"I may not have gone where I intended to go
but I think I have ended up where I intended to be."
by author Douglas Adams

We'll hear some from **Nalini Nadkarni** in a few minutes,
perhaps including this one from her 2009 TED Talk:

"...perches aloft were my rescue from the world...
(https://www.ted.com/talks/nalini_nadkarni_conserving_the_canopy?language=en).

The Leonardo honors these awardees to draw attention to its own

Leonardo-esque goals and aspirations.

Slide 11 Science, Rigor, Creativity

Although we are almost always constrained by Spock's famous words in Startrek:

'But I cannot change the laws of physics, Captain.'

we also don't want to be too constrained by prematurely conceived limits or boundaries.

We can entertain a bit of reality distortion,
we can indulge a little fantasy,
we can be open to mystery,
we can 'fail'... and learn.

Leonardo was insatiably curious and fully fascinated with our natural world - all of it - all the time. He was always questioning its perceived constraints, its limits, its reality. He was not into magic, or spirits, or religions, or mystics. But he was never constrained by the limits of his own learning or understanding.

And thanks to his truly remarkable and exquisite visualization and drawing skills, he left a record of his learning, his invention, his understanding, his knowledge for us - and some 500 years later we are still amazed at his insight, talents, and accomplishments.

Slide 12: Scenius - via SCI and MindRiot

As The Leonardo celebrates its first decade of existence and operation, and as it moves into its second decade, it has expanded its focus to include cooperative and communal genius, something now being called *scenius*. Scenius is defined by Brian Eno as 'the creative intelligence of a community' and is expressed when interested, committed individuals work in a cooperative, communal, supporting environment.

SCI -the remarkable institute created by Chris Johnson and his coworkers - is perhaps our best example of Scenius in Action. The Leo's current MindRiot program is also an example.

Slide 13: \$\$\$

One of da Vinci's biographers said:
'Leonardo was always short of paper'.

Paper was very expensive 500 years ago.

Environments, resources, facilities are not free;
As some of you well know,
The Leonardo is always short on money.
Help us support and facilitate genius and scenius.
Give generously:
Donate at www.theleonardo.org

Slide 14: Nadkarni Book cover

Congratulations to our awardees and to the unrecognized Leonardos among us -
and to all those to come.

And now, into the trees, with The Leonardo's Awardee for 2022 - Nalini Nadkarni:

Grazie!