

Constructive Day Dreaming

Here's an activity that's bound to appeal if you've ever been told off for gazing into space when you should have been paying attention in class. Far from being a waste of time, constructive day dreaming can trigger the imagination and as such was heartily recommended by Leonardo as a powerful means of "arousing the mind to various inventions".

He suggested that one should begin by finding a wall that has been soiled or stained in some way, perhaps by damp or poor quality painting. Alternatively, one might use stones that have an irregular pattern of colours or, easiest of all, any number of clouds, especially as they're easily found and are ever changing.

As you stare at the shapes in front of you, try to imagine that what you are seeing is a vast landscape which, in the words of Leonardo, is "graced with mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, plains, great valleys and hills in many combinations".

Alternatively, you might choose to invent a roaring battle scene featuring, as Leonardo suggests, "figures darting about, strange-looking faces and costumes, and an endless number of things which you can distil into finely rendered forms".

Finally, there is always the option of abandoning the visual altogether and seeking inspiration by closing your eyes and listening to, for example, the sound of bells ringing or water tumbling over a brook (or even into a bath).

Let your ears and your imagination embrace the sound and you will soon find that your mind fills in the gaps, creating the illusion that the sound is in some way "speaking" to you. As Leonardo is keen to point out, "What happens with regard to such walls and variegated stone is just as with the sound of bells, in whose peal you will find any name or word you care to imagine".

Having found your name or word, let it trigger, by association, a time or a place that holds wonderful memories for you. Now try to express this feeling in your work. And should anyone ever again demand to know why you are gazing off in to space, explain to them patiently that Leonardo told you to do so.