

National Gallery

Galileo's Moon

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One of the most fascinating things about Galileo was his versatility. Not only was he a great scientist but also a skilled technician – as shown by the precision instruments he built – and an excellent draftsman whose mastery of perspective enabled him to produce his marvellous three-dimensional drawings of the moon.

I would like to highlight the interdisciplinary nature of Galileo's work – something we find to an even greater extent in Leonardo Da Vinci. As you will remember, two years ago here at the National Gallery, we presented Leonardo's wonderful preparatory drawing for the "Adoration of the Magi", since this work is a common thread with the world of Finmeccanica and, to a certain extent, explains our interest in these matters.

Since today's world is so complex and ever changing – and seems to be getting more and more so – it is important to remind ourselves that the instruments we use today are much more sophisticated and powerful than those which Galileo had available.

Looking at the images of the moon produced by Galileo – beautiful in themselves as well as being extremely realistic – we can draw an interesting parallel.

Galileo not only possessed the skill to design and make highly complex components – the lenses – but he also had the ability to assemble them into

innovative systems, combining concave and convex lenses so as to obtain more efficient instruments.

Furthermore, Galileo was able to make up for the lack of sensors to reproduce the images captured by his telescope with his exceptional ability as a draftsman.

Finally, Galileo had the knowledge that enabled him to analyse the data and to draw the right conclusions from his observations.

The result was an achievement of exceptional value, which radically changed scientific thinking at that time, moving it towards the modern era.

The challenges facing Finmeccanica today – while being very different – are of similar complexity.

Certainly, Galileo had the advantage of being able to handle the whole process himself, avoiding the difficulties that arise from combining the skills and know-how of many people – more and more frequently between different laboratories or even between different companies.

But the path marked out by Galileo is clear: only a clear overview of the task and complete mastery of all the elements – technology, engineering and science – will enable us to achieve great discoveries and expand our knowledge.

My hope is that this evening's event will be an inspiration for all those who work for Finmeccanica – and for others as well – to aim for new and more

ambitious goals with the same dedication and determination that made Galileo the father of modern science.

Finally, it gives me great pleasure to announce that the achievements of Galileo Galilei will be discussed in depth during a conference on the dialectic between science and religion, to be held in Rome towards the end of November.

This international conference, organised by Finmeccanica and involving top scientists and academics, will be the opening event for the wide-ranging programme to celebrate the International Year of Astronomy, and Galileo, in 2009.

Thank you.