

Leonardo da Vinci machines 'like works of art'

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It's rare to be able to touch genius.

Saturday, visitors at opening day of the Witte Museum's "The Genius of Leonardo: Machines in Motion" will be able to get the full, hands-on effect of doing just that.

And they're gorgeous, too.

"They're beautiful. They're like works of art," said Jim Dalglish, Witte vice president of communications, about the new blockbuster exhibit

"It could be an art exhibit it's so beautiful, but it is also completely functional. Most everything in the exhibit, people can get their hands on and actually experience how they work."



The touring exhibit - making its American debut here and touted as the world's largest exhibit of Leonardo da Vinci machines - features 40 full-scale, operational models of Leonardo's designs.

A fun, problem-solving area, "Leonardo's Workshop," and virtual reality apprentices and actors are also part of the exhibit that runs through Sept. 7. A \$3 surcharge will be added to museum admission for the exhibit.

San Antonio-based Evergreen Exhibitions owns "The Genius of Leonardo," which was developed in Florence, Italy, and makes use of materials and construction methods that would have been used in the 15th century.

Museum officials and experts have noted that the vast majority of Leonardo's inventions existed only on the page and in small-scale model form.

Here, one can actually get inside Leonardo's version of an armored tank.

A small number of the models fall into the look-don't-touch category, including Leonardo's winged designs, a bicycle, parachute and multibarrel machine gun.

An automated, motorized armored suit will move when one passes near it. "He'll be out in the lobby to greet people," said Dalglish with a chuckle.

Suspended inside the H-E-B Treehouse, the giant Bicycle-Ornithopter is one of his most futuristic concepts.

Quite impressive are designs for flying machines, military applications, gears and chain-driven devices, cranes and lifting tools and floats for walking on water.

“Leonardo's Workshop” is especially suited to younger guests.

“We wanted an area for children,” said Dalglish, “to give them something fun to do, as well as spark their imagination.”.