

great

NON-FICTION MARCUS BERKMANN

THE LAST LEONARDO

by Ben Lewis

(William Collins £20, 416pp)

SALVATOR MUNDI, (pictured right) was the first 'new' painting by Leonardo da Vinci to be authenticated in 99 years. Its discoverers paid \$1,175 (£940) for it at auction in 2005; nine years later it was sold on for \$450 million (£358 million), making it the most expensive painting of all time.

But is it the real thing? Ben Lewis isn't sure, or at least he isn't telling. This beautifully paced book, a history of the painting and all the people who've owned it, reads like a thriller. So much money is at stake it makes your head spin.

Not for the first time the unabashed greed and corruption of the art market is laid bare, but I'm not sure I have ever read a volume of art history so quickly and with such pleasure. Lewis also wrote a book about Soviet humour called Hammer And Tickle, but I think we can forgive him that.

STILL WATER: THE DEEP LIFE OF THE POND

by John
Lewis-Stempel
(Doubleday
£14.99)

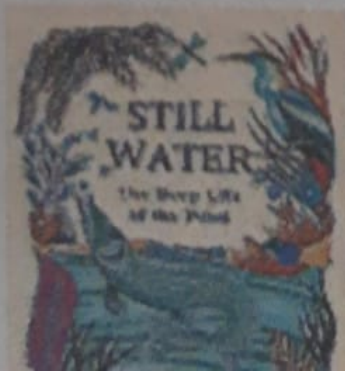


Illustration: BENJI DAVIES

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