

By Gerd Winter

An innovative pathway to collaboration

“What if they never existed”, a new book making its mark by supporting international scholarships

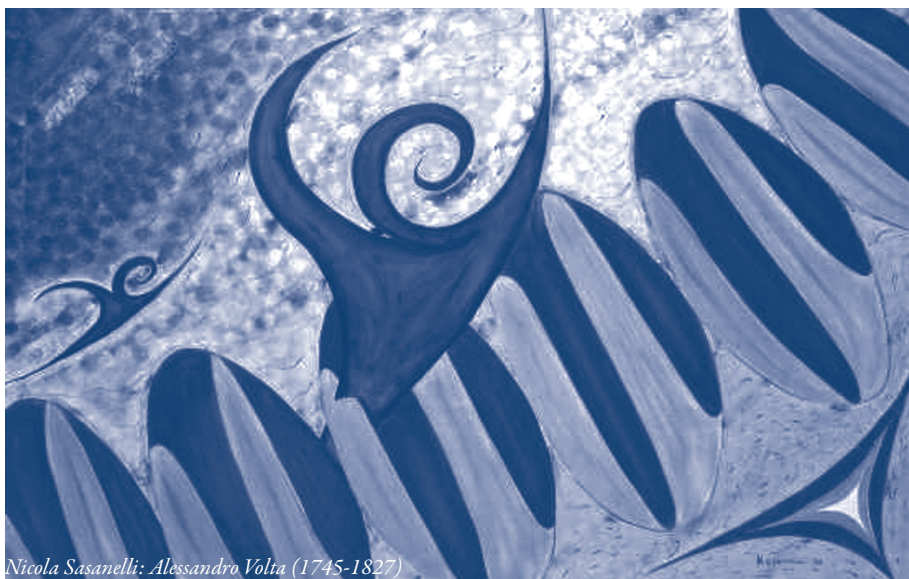
The socio-cultural evolution of mankind is inextricably linked to innovative progress and scientific discovery. Human capacity for abstract thinking, to rationalise and deduce logically is at the basis of all our advances. Beyond individual ingenuity, however, what kept the train of progress going were driving forces such as curiosity, fascination, passion, the will to pioneer new frontiers and, most importantly, a social context providing necessary opportunities.

Human history is marked by milestones of innovation that define the world we live in and ultimately, who we are. We rarely spare a thought to reflect on the individuals but also the circumstances that made them possible. ‘*What if they never existed?*’ asks Dr Nicola Sasanelli, scientific attaché of the Italian embassy and adjunct Professor at the University of Canberra, who wrote a book designed to stop us in our tracks and reflect.

The book is more than just a beautifully crafted homage to 9 scientists and researchers that changed the world. It marks itself as an innovative new pathway for supporting young scientists. With the help of his editor Paula Nagel, Sasanelli found a corporate sponsor, Vodafone, and committed the proceeds of the book to funding scholarships for early career researchers in an exchange between Australia and Italy. Launched in July, the sales have already generated more than \$10 000 for the cause. Nancy Pritchard, manager of International Programs at the Australian Academy of Science (AAS), describes Sasanelli’s efforts as “Excellent and commendable - a novelty!” The AAS has now also committed financial support to the project.

Since his arrival in Australia in 2001, Sasanelli has dedicated himself to fostering scientific exchange between Australia and Italy and in recognition of his contributions was appointed Officer of the Order of Australia in 2007. His passion found shape in his book, which is designed to reach out and draw people closer to the world of science, in particular young people.

What makes the book special is that it does not shy away from an important message: scientific endeavour has an emotional impetus, both for those who create and those who look upon the process of creation. Introducing us to his book, Sasanelli recounts childhood impressions visiting his father in his physics department in Bari (Italy),



Nicola Sasanelli: Alessandro Volta (1745-1827)

emotional imprints setting him on a path to his own research career in electronic engineering. An accomplished artist, he takes up the thread of his fascination for science and the scientists he writes about by using an alternative strategy of communication, abstract paintings serving as additional commentary on each portrayed innovator.

The books sets out some other clear messages.

Innovative progress never happens in a vacuum but in the context of time and social circumstances.

Also, the world of science and knowledge is global by nature and has always been; both the process of discovery and the benefits resulting from it are felt across political, cultural and geographical boundaries.

Further, the support for scientific endeavour bears huge rewards. However, with most great discoveries the potential impact could not be foreseen at the time of their creation.

Most importantly, those involved in science need to reach out to the community and inspire a new generation of discoverers.

Sasanelli’s book, and the process it stands for, are an important contribution to this principle.

‘*What if they never existed*’ can be ordered directly from Ms Paula Nagel who is responsible for administering the Scholarship Fund (paulanagel@internode.on.net). There is a 20% discount price available for orders of ten and more copies.

The ten canvas oil paintings are now permanently displayed at the National Information Communication Technology Australia (NICTA) in Canberra.

Digital images can be viewed at the ARDR website gallery (www.ARRD.com.au).



Nicola Sasanelli: Leonardo Di Ser Piero Da Vinci (1452-1519)