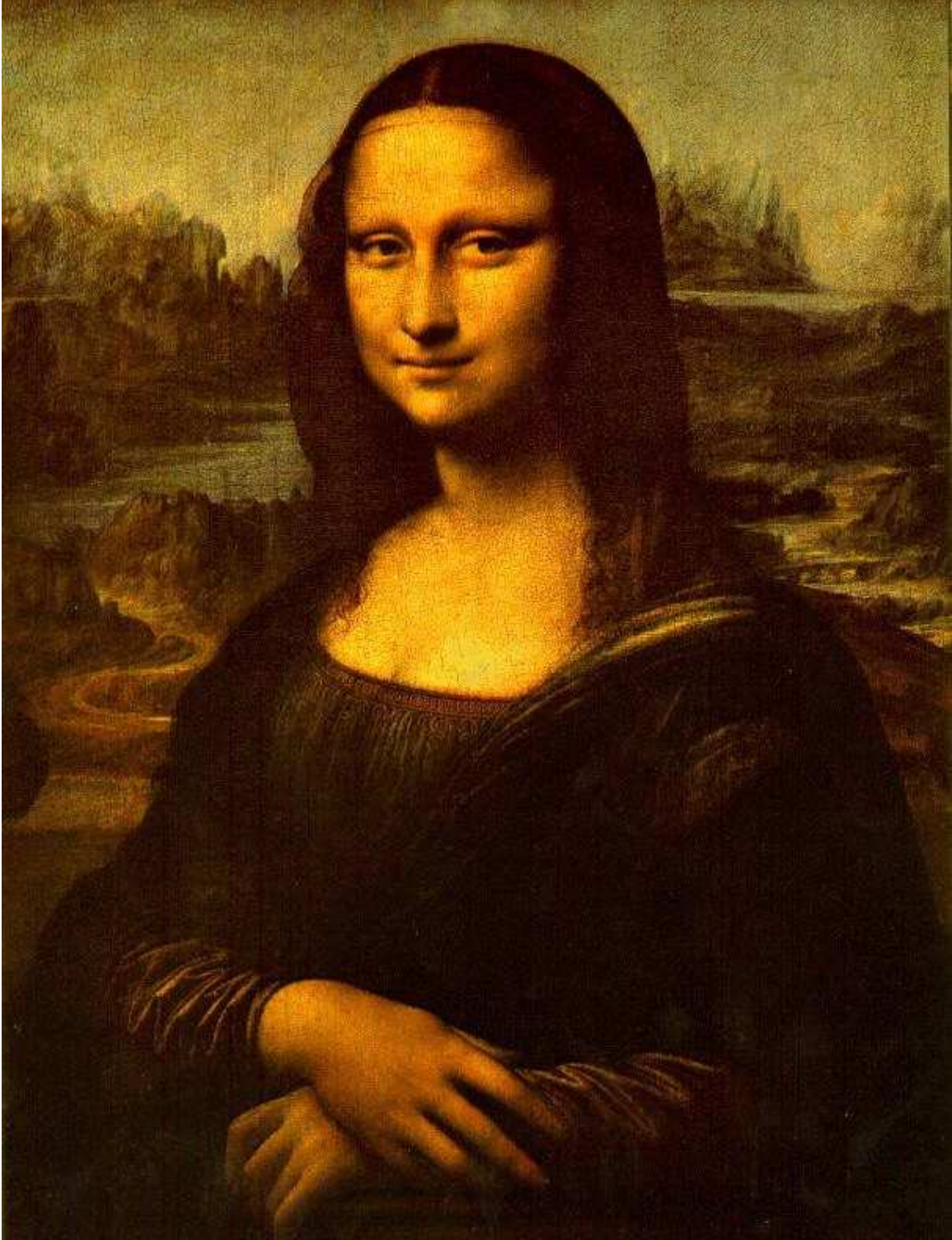


Leonardo da Vinci - **“La Gioconda”**



Leonardo da Vinci was born in 1452, the town whose name he kept as his last name, near Tuscan. From his early age his talents were so apparent that his father took him to Florence when he was fourteen, to study painting and sculpture in Andrea Verrocchio's workshop. There he met also Botticelli and Ghirlandaio. During his years near Verrocchio he studied also mathematics and geometry, as well as begun to strengthen his sense of observation, as he believed that only through observation one can achieve understanding of natural phenomena. This knowledge he used in his paintings, in order to make his images more lifelike. Thirteen years after he went to Verrocchio he started his own business as a painter. He made religious paintings for the nobility and the bourgeoisie, as well as for monasteries and people of religion. It is safe to say that Leonardo was born in a time where Art was highly appreciated and received great interest. However, his genius was bound to be revealed. In 1482 he was approved to join Duke Ludovico Sforza's court where he worked as an artist. It is there where he wrote his famous notebooks, which unveil the extent of his bright mind, and painted the 'Last Supper' in the wall of Santa Maria delle Grazie in 1493.

After leaving Duke Sforza's court, he visited the cities of Venice and Pisa to work as an engineer for many members of the nobility, including the King of France Francois I. His inner urge of questioning everything around him and inside him, gave him



excellent knowledge of physics and anatomy, as well as the ability of inventing things that would be used even 400 years later.

From 1503 to 1506, Leonardo created his most famous painting, The Mona-Lisa or better known as the Gioconda. It is supported that it was the third wife of Francesco del Giocondo, a nobleman in Florence, who was a twenty-four-year-old woman. The painting depicts the figure of a woman, sitting in front of a landscape in Florence and behind her one can see the mountains. This work of Art is an absolute breath-taking image as Mona-Lisa's expression has a magnificent beauty although she seems unreachable.

Painted on wood with oil Mona-Lisa has a unique technique of the representation of flesh one can even notice the on her neck and also one can see the perfect depiction of light on the flesh. It is essential to state that Leonardo managed to give this amazing beauty life and many will only notice how beautiful she is, but few would notice that the woman has absolutely no eyebrows. "During his lifetime, Leonardo was indeed, above all, famous for his evident talent for imitating nature to perfection and when his first biographer, the painter Vasari, described the Mona-Lisa he above all insisted on the work's realism: 'Its limpid eyes had the sparkle of life: ringed by reddish and livid hues, they were bordered by lashes whose execution required the greatest delicacy. The eyelashes, in places thicker or more sparse according to the arrangement of the pores, could not be truer. The nose, with its ravishing delicate, pink nostrils, was life itself. [...] In the hollow of the throat, the attentive spectator can catch the beating of the veins' "



[<http://www.louvre.fr/anglais/collec/peint/joconde/txtjocon.htm>]

“Originally the painting was larger than today, because two columns, one on the left and the other one on the right side of Mona-Lisa have been cut. That is the reason why it is not easy to recognize the Mona-Lisa is sitting on a terrace.”

[<http://www.kausal.com/leonardo/monalisa.html>]

The Gioconda is an excellent of two techniques used by Leonardo – sfumato and chiaroscuro. Sfumato is a technique of creating a misty and cloudy environment by painting in thin layers, in order to show a distant background from the main theme of the painting. This technique is very obvious in the background of the Gioconda, the light indeterminable transformation of the colours in the landscape. Sfumato smoky in Italian, and is certainly obvious why. Chiaroscuro is a technique of using shading and illuminating in a painting, creating a wonderful contrast. It derives from the Italian words Chiaro and Oscuro, which mean light and dark accordingly. The details of the light on Mona-Lisa’s skin and the way the colour changes in certain parts of the flesh, is given by Leonardo in a very realistic way. It is important tha Leonardo was doing the painting for three years and therefore, envisaged the details of the light and shade perfectly. The Gioconda is a painting who’s equal has not being painted before and perhaps, never will be. These techniques were not only introduced by Leonardo, but also were taught by him to great artists of the Renaissance, suck as Fra Bartolommeo and Raphael.



Leonardo da Vinci was a perfectionist who not only tried to be perfect in everything he did, but also had the potential to do so. He may be one of the few people whose ambitions do not derive from arrogance but from full self-awareness. “As curiosity took him in even wilder directions, Leonardo always used this method of scientific enquiry: close observation, repeated testing of the observation, precise illustration of the subject object or phenomenon with brief explanatory notes. The result was volumes of remarkable notes on an amazing variety of topics, from the nature of the sun, moon and stars to the formation of fossils and perhaps most notably the mysteries of flight.”

[<http://www.mos.org/Leonardo/scientist.html>]

The smile of Mona-Lisa may be the most discussed and most questioned detail on a painting. The real questions would be: Is the Gioconda actually smiling? And if she is smiling, who is she smiling at?

She has this thoughtful and peaceful expression on her face, like she is remembering something that amuses her slightly but is trying to hide it. Perhaps, she is trying to stay serious for the painting but unsuccessfully, so a small grin shows on her face from time to time. It also may be that da Vinci captioned in his mind her expression right before forming an actual smile. Given that Gioconda was a noble woman she may be smiling at some entertainers brought for her amusement during the long hours of the sittings. She may be even smiling to da Vinci himself, if the theory of her being his mistress is true. It is extraordinary how he



managed to give that expression and combine of the eyes, that look in a warm and peaceful manner. However, she may not be smiling at all. Her whole face and the way she looks and grins may show a sense of subtle superiority to the artist or even a slight boredom.

Da Vinci's knowledge of mathematics and observation is shown in the face of the Gioconda as "the space between the slit of the mouth and the base of the nose is one-seventh of the face" (Kemp p.123).

"The desolate waters, the mists, the dark tree, the reflected gleams of still waters- all these surround and illuminate the sitter. She is totally fleshy and totally impermeable to the artist. He observer, held rapt by her perfection of form, and shows us the this veil of her upper bodice and the delicate flushing of her throat. What she is truly as she conceals; what Leonardo reveals to us is precisely this concealment, a self-absorption that spares no outward glance."

[<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/L/leonardo.html>]

The clothing of Mona-Lisa is considered to be Florentine day dress. Her garments demonstrate nobility and her kind and modest nature is shown in the way she crosses her hands. Leonardo gives a detailed representation of Mona-Lisa's curls and her veil is very delicate and light, that the landscape is seen through it. "Many details are not visible today, because they are partially damaged and some parts are painted over."

[<http://www.kausai.com/leonardo/monalisa.html>]



The identity of the Gioconda is very vague. The most dominant theory is, as I mentioned before, that she was the wife of Francesco del Giocondo. However, there are many theories that discover different kinds of possibilities, such as being “Isabelle of Este, {...}a mistress of Giuliano di Medici or of Leonardo himself; perhaps an ideal woman; and even an adolescent boy dressed as a woman, or possibly a self-portrait.”

[<http://www.louvre.fr/anglais/collec/peint/joconde/txtjocon.htm>]

Leonardo kept the painting after he made it and sold it later, during his stay in France, to King of France Francois I. “The painting remained in the royal collection from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the creation of the Central Art Museum of Louvre.”

[<http://www.louvre.fr/anglais/collec/peint/joconde/txtjocon.htm>]

Even though the painting was famous since when it was created, it obtained world fame when it was stolen by Vincenzo Peruggia, an Italian painter, in 1911. The Mona-Lisa was later found in Italy in 1913 and was returned to the Louvre, “treated with the honours accorded to a head of state, after having occupied, throughout this period, the front pages of the world's newspapers.”

[<http://www.louvre.fr/anglais/collec/peint/joconde/txtjocon.htm>]

During the 1960's and the 1970's the Gioconda was exposed in New York and Tokyo being the only journeys she will ever make, as contemporary international rules forbid it. This moment the Gioconda hangs behind a bulletproof glass in the Louvre never to be moved again.



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Web Resources

- The Louvre Museum,
Explanation of the Gioconda by Vincent Pomarède
<http://www.louvre.fr/anglais/collec/peint/joconde/txtjocon.htm>
- Leonardo da Vinci, from "Sister Wendy's Story of Painting"
<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/L/leonardo.html>
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<http://www.kausal.com/leonardo/monalisa.html>



Some of Leonardo da Vinci's Paintings and Sketches



Vitruvian Man, Study of Proportions (1492)



Drawing of a Woman's Torso (undated)



Drawing of the Torso and the Arms (undated)



Drawing of the Heart and its Blood Vessels (undated)



Multi Barrel Gun,
Codex Atlanticus (c. 1480-82)



Drawing of the Face of the Angel (undated)



Head of a Touselled
Young Woman (c. 1490)



Madonna Litta
(c. 1490-91)



Embryo (undated)



