

# Mona Lisa

**Mona Lisa**  
c.1503-1506,  
Oil on wood panel,  
77cm x 53cm, Louvre.

When I first look at the 'Mona Lisa', I notice the intriguing look that is on her face. The expression is one that reminds me of a lady that is neither happy nor sad, smiling nor frowning. Her skin is very smooth and she has no blemishes, but also she has no eyebrows, which makes her look quite strange. At different times the expression on Mona Lisa changes. Sometimes she is giving a cheeky smile and others she looks puzzled. This is very strange and almost magical.

Also, when looking at the Mona Lisa, I notice that her face is bathed in light. This light is almost heavenly and gives the impression that she is angelic. But on the contrary, another thing I notice is the dark clothing and gloomy mysterious background setting. The dark clothing and the veil covering her hair give the impression that she has been to a funeral or is in mourning. The background setting is very mysterious. The winding roads, ravenous mountains and the gloomy fog all add to the mystery. It is as if the background is right out of a fantasy story. Another weird thing that the background does is makes the beholder unsure on which time of day it is in the picture.

The painting is Oil on a poplar wood panel. This was Da Vinci's main style. It may have helped to create the Sfumato technique. The size of the painting is 77cm x 53cm, this is quite a small size for such a great painting. Da Vinci may have done this to make it look more lifelike so the beholder could relate to it and think of the Mona Lisa as equal to themselves. If the picture was too big, it would belittle the beholder and make them feel uneasy, and if it was too small, Da Vinci would not have been able to add such detail. The background of the Mona Lisa is an early example of aerial perspective. Da Vinci uses aerial perspective to add depth to the painting. Leonardo da Vinci was a very keen scientist and regularly dissected human bodies to aid his art work and overall knowledge of the human body. This is evident in his work, e.g. if you look closely at the Mona Lisa's hands you realise how lifelike they are.

The artist, Leonardo da Vinci, painted the Mona Lisa while in Florence from 1503 to 1506. Da Vinci uses a technique known as Sfumato to make the Mona Lisa's expression look like it is changing.

**Sfumato** - In painting, the technique of blurring or softening sharp outlines by subtle and gradual blending (feathering) of one tone into another. The smoke like haziness of this effect slightly lessens the perception that a still image is entirely still, instead lending a vague sense of movement. Da Vinci's most prominent use of Sfumato is in the corner of the Mona Lisa's mouth and the corner of her eyes. He deliberately merged the corners of the eyes and mouth into a shadow because he discovered that you must leave the beholder something to guess. If you don't draw the outlines so firmly and you leave them a little vague, as though disappearing into shadow, the impression of dryness and stiffness will be avoided.

This explains why we are never quite certain in what mood Mona Lisa is looking at us. Her expression always seems to elude us.

Some people have come to the conclusion that the Mona Lisa was actually a self portrait of Leonardo da Vinci as a woman. Also it has been said that it could be his mother in the painting, or even a fusion of the two! If this is true, it would show even more skill from Da Vinci, as it would show his expert knowledge of the human body and the especially the construction of the human skull.