

***“Geniuses don’t  
work together...”***

**Michelangelo vs.**

**Leonardo**

Leonardo da Vinci was a great influence on his time and of the time of today.

Leonardo was known as many things; he was known as a sculptor, architect, writer, musician, philosopher, engineer, and scientist, but most of all he was known for his impressive paintings that influenced the world (LaBarre).

Leonardo was born in Anchiano, Italy in April 1452, to Piero da Vinci, a prominent public official in Florence, and a peasant woman named Caterina. In 1469, by the age of 17, his father sent him to study in the workshop of a well-known Italian Renaissance master named Andrea del Verrocchio. He remained there until 1476 and Leonardo had picked up a variety of skills. He spent several years there practicing a variety of things, drafting engineering, architecture, and building, but most of all he studied painting and drawing (Creighton).

The education Leonardo received from Verrocchio was very practical. For his first project, Leonardo was assigned to build a golden sphere and cross to sit on top of the domed cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiori (LaBarre). It was a huge undertaking that required complicated mathematical calculations and casting techniques. The project taught Leonardo that scientific knowledge and art could work together. Although most people think of Leonardo da Vinci as an artist, he was also known for other things. Throughout his life, he has made an incredible headway in the area of science. He sketched out many amazing designs for working machines and technology, such as the airplane or glider. The amazing thing about this was that none of da Vinci's inventions or creations were even recognized or expanded upon until some 300 to 400 years later. He was also known as a man of science because of his drawings of the human body. In his free time, Leonardo decided to figure out how the human body works. In this time, around 1503, he dissected over 25 human bodies and made sketches and notes of all kinds in order to figure the human body out. Not only did Leonardo have a wonderful mind, but

we all know that he also had wonderful hands that painted like none of us could ever dream of doing. Some of his paintings like “The Last Supper” and the “Mona Lisa” are among the most widely popular and influential paintings of the Renaissance period (White).

In 1493, Leonardo began to paint one of his most famous works, “The Last Supper” in a convent located shortly outside of Milan. This painting took Leonardo roughly about three years to complete and has been hailed as the ultimate mark of the Renaissance; it was finished in 1496. After that, he spent most of his time shuttling back and forth between Milan and Florence, working on a variety of scientific, engineering and artistic projects. He undertook some of the first geological surveys and maps of the Lombard region of Italy. However, the crucial achievement of these years is surely the painting of the widely talked about painting, the “Mona Lisa” (White).

The “Mona Lisa”, also known as the “La Gioconda”, is the most famous, most visited and the most studied portrait ever painted, and also has a lot of questions to it. It is truly the great mystery of the art world. Previously, it was thought to have been painted in 1503, it is now thought to have been completed sometime between 1514 and 1516. Another question of this famous painting is that everybody wants to know who exactly posed for this painting? There are a different variety of people that they have in mind, Francesco del Gioconda (a nobleman's wife who may have inspired the name of the painting), or one of the two duchesses -- the Duchess Constanza d' Avalos or Pacifica – both mistresses of Giuliana de Medici (White)

Another possible suspect for the painting is Leonardo da Vinci himself. Leonardo has recorded in his notebook all of the models that posed for him, their real names, where they were from, that kind of stuff, but there is no record of the model for the Mona Lisa anywhere. Dr. Lillian Schwartz suggested that Leonardo painted himself. How did she come up with this? By the

facial expressions and other features. What she did is she flipped the self- portrait of Leonardo and lined it up with the Mona Lisa and merged it together and the facial features and expressions were identical. However, one thing is certain: the Mona Lisa is Leonardo's most famous work (Schwartz).

During the last years of his life, Leonardo worked for Francis I, who felt that “no other man had ever been born into the world who knew as much as Leonardo”. In 1516, Leonardo developed a paralysis in his arm, which caused him not to be able to paint as much, if not at all. Instead of painting he went back to many of his other talents, he designed a new court for his patron and planned a series of canals that would connect the Loire and Seine Rivers. However, he knew his time was coming, in April 1518, he made a will leaving his work to Francesco de Melzi, who had been his student for many years. In May 1519, the great scholar died at the age of sixty-seven.

An artistic and scientific genius, Leonardo had a deep effect on the world of then and now, he helped usher in the Renaissance and the scientific revolution. Leonardo will always be remembered by all generations and I think his paintings, inventions, sculptures, and great words of intelligence will never die, but give hope, encouragement and motivation to the kids of the future. Michelangelo as well was arguably one of the most inspired creators in the history of art and one of the contributory forces to the Italian High Renaissance (Slate).

Michelangelo, born in the sixteenth century, was possibly one of the greatest artisans of all time. Michelangelo's artistic career can be divided into two periods. In the early period he focused on realism. During this early period Michelangelo's works included the Pieta and the David. At the age of 24 he completed a statue called the "Pieta," which is still in its original place in Saint Peter's Basilica. This marble sculpture shows the dead Jesus Christ in his mother's arms.

In 1501 Michelangelo returned to Florence, Italy to sculpt the famous nude sculpture called the "David." The "David" measures 18 feet tall, and is so massive that it took 40 men to move it from Michelangelo's workshop (Hibbard).

The second period of Michelangelo's career was based upon his own imagination. In 1505 Michelangelo was summoned by Pope Julius II to fabricate a monumental tomb for him. We have no clear sense of what the tomb was to look like, since over the years it went through at least five conceptual revisions, and was never actually finished due to frustrating delays. A short time after starting the tomb, Pope Julius II selected Michelangelo to fresco the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

Pope Julius' chief architect questioned Michelangelo's experience with frescos, but as he was a friend of the Pope, it was insisted upon that he be given the job. Michelangelo worked on the ceiling from July of 1508 to October of 1512. He had hired five assistants to aid him in painting process. All in all, Michelangelo had painted three hundred and thirty-six assorted figures on the Sistine ceiling. This was an incredible feat and in the present, three hundred thirty-five and one-half of these figures still remain (Hibbard). The overall organization of the fresco consists of four large triangles at the corner; a series of eight triangular spaces on the outer border; an intermediate series of figures; and nine central panels, all bound together with architectural motifs and nude male figures. The corner triangles depict heroic action in the Old Testament, while the other eight triangles depict the biblical ancestors of Jesus Christ. Michelangelo conceived and executed this huge work in only four years, the first half taking almost three years to complete. The paintings were done with the brightest colors that attracted attention to the whole ceiling as one entered to look. The ceiling was completed just a little after

the Pope had died but has given the Sistine Chapel tremendous appeal for having the best fresco ever done.

In painting "The Last Judgment," Michelangelo was given the chance to incorporate all that he had learned about the human body. He was able to show the way the body moved, as well as its displays of unrestrained passion, overwhelming grief, or endless torment. Michelangelo received a commission from Pope Clement VII to paint "The Last Judgment" on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel in 1534 (Beck). He was also commissioned at this time to paint a "Fall of the Angels" on the entrance wall, but this second work was never executed (Brandes). Although he had painted the ceiling of the chapel twenty-eight years earlier, the style of "The Last Judgment" was greatly different. On the ceiling, the ideas of hope and exaltation seem to rule, but on the altar wall, there is the depiction of Christ as the unforgiving Judge. "The Last Judgment" has a "drastically plain and direct style, with squarish rather than supple figures," (De Tolnay) whereas the ceiling has a more complicated style. Also, the figures on the altar wall do not have the same amount of beauty as the figures of the ceiling.

Michelangelo followed the tradition of others in having Christ at the top with his hand raised, and also brighter than the rest of the angels and demons. Christ seems to have a harsh and cold expression that furthers Michelangelo's depiction of Christ as the Judge. Christ puts into motion the inevitable separation, with the saved ascending on the left side of the painting and the damned descending on the right into hell (Beck). The saved souls rise from their graves and then begin their ascent toward Heaven. One may expect there to be as much joy on the left as there is torment on the right, but these souls don't even look happy as they all rush past each other. Michelangelo has filled them with a similar amount of horror as those who are on the right. The chosen ones are not even greeted with a smile from Christ who seems far less inclined to acquit

than to condemn. (Liebert) It was completed in October of 1541 and unveiled on Christmas Day two months later. Many were appalled to see the great amount of nudity which filled the painting. They did not feel that it was appropriate for such holy people to be depicted without clothes on. Michelangelo felt that it was the body which ascends to Heaven, not the clothes. Unfortunately, Michelangelo's masterpiece only remained intact for fourteen years, at which point artists were commissioned to paint clothes on the "most beautiful nudes."(Brandes)

"The Last Judgment" seems to stress the importance of the human body and the ways in which the body can move. Michelangelo's skill with the human anatomy allowed him to capture the feelings and emotions which were very characteristic of this time. The torment and horror we can see in the fresco are also perhaps an indication of the hardships which Michelangelo felt during this time in his life. "The Last Judgment" however is a beautiful painting by the master artist, Michelangelo. This painting along with many others, allows a greater understanding of the Renaissance era as well as an insight into his own feelings.

Although born in the small village of Caprese, Michelangelo continued to have a deep attachment to his city, its art, and its culture throughout his long life. However, in his will he left instructions that he be buried in Florence, and his body was laid rest in a fine monument in the church of Santa Croce (Beck). Michelangelo was arguably one of the most inspired creators in the history of art and one of the contributory forces to the Renaissance. Even after his death, this sculptor, architect, painter, and poets' many contributions have exerted a tremendous influence on his generation and on subsequent western art in general.

Works Cited:

Aimee Erhas, G. Artists Volume 2 Thompson Publishing Co. Pages 250-256.  
Copyright 1995.

Beck, James. The Three Worlds of Michelangelo, 1999

Brandes, Georg. Michelangelo, His Life, His Times, His Era. New York: Frederick  
Unger Publishing Co., 1963.

Callaways, Ben Slate, Chip LaBarre, Kurtis. Da Vinci, A Man of Both  
Worlds. [http://www.advanced.org/3044/adv\\_sci.html](http://www.advanced.org/3044/adv_sci.html) 1998

De Tolnay, Charles. The Art and Thought of Michelangelo. New York: Random  
House, 1964

Gilbert Creighton. Leonardo da Vinci. The McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of  
World Biography. McGraw-Hill Publishing Company. Pages 437-442.  
Copyright 1973.

Grolier Encyclopedia. Copyright 1997.

Hibbard, Howard. Michelangelo, 1974

Leonardo Biography Notes. [http://www.leonet.it/comuni/vinci/in\\_vidiv.html](http://www.leonet.it/comuni/vinci/in_vidiv.html)  
1998

Leonardo da Vinci. <http://www.ultranet.com/~rsarkiss/DAVINCI.htm> 1998

Liebert, Robert S MD. Michelangelo, A Psychoanalytic Study of His Life and  
Images. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Moss, Joyce and Wilson, George. Profiles in World History. Volume 4  
Thompson Publishing Company. Pages 66-73. Copyright 1996.

Schwartz, Lillian. Why is the Mona Lisa Smiling?  
<http://www.advanced.org/13681/data/link2.htm> 1998

White, Michael. Leonardo: The First Scientist, 2000