**Art Research Paper**

**Zach Sergi**

The artist I will be analyzing for this paper is the famous Renaissance man, Leonardo Da Vinci. Given away by his nickname, Da Vinci’s works came from the Renaissance time period in Italy. From lecture, Leonardo was known for his amazing paintings, innovative techniques, and also for his research into inventions and human form. Before I go into depth about the artist himself, I will describe and analyze his era, being the Italian Renaissance.

Leonardo is categorized into the High Renaissance in Italy, being more or less the peak of the Renaissance as a whole, beginning at the start of the sixteenth century (Dewitte 468). This art movement brought change to how people saw the world around them. The focus before was on human perfection or historical stories/ facts, however, this all changed. “…the purpose of Renaissance art was the expression of the individual countenance and form” (Rose 132). Artists began expressing themselves and the world around them; individuality had emerged. Even though the Renaissance is considered by most to have started in the 1400s and ended around 1750, its innovative ideas, techniques and individuality are still present in the art world to this day (Rose 132). An important note to add is the invention of the printing press, a major contributor to this rapid spread of the Renaissance’s new ideas (Dewitte 464). There are plenty of other Renaissance artists important to mention alongside Leonardo for their works. One of these artists being the famous Michelangelo. To have the Pope himself request for you to paint the entire ceiling of the Vatican’s Sistine Chapel, shows just how highly respected Michelangelo was (Dewitte 469). One source describes his works as “… Michelangelo Buonarroti created a multitude of powerful forms and figures which, taken together, may be said to constitute a world of almost cosmic and overwhelming dimensions, in which the materiality of our human condition is ideally depicted, constantly transcended, and brought into visible relationship with the superhuman and the divine” (Beall 235). Michelangelo took the human perfection of the ancient world, stories of the Bible and mixed it with his own individuality to create art never before done and still admired. One other Renaissance artist I will briefly mention is Andrea Palladio. He was a famous architect during the Renaissance, a practice sometimes pushed out of mind by more popular paintings and sculptures. The innovation or rebirth of architectural techniques such as columns or domes from the ancient times, allowed for impressive new building designs to be built all throughout Italy (Dewitte 471). Palladio’s works are a present day example of this rebirth, such as the Villa Rotunda that shows off the structural and appealing designs of ionic columns, a central dome, and an identical view from all four sides of the building (Dewitte 473).

Moving back to the main Renaissance man, Leonardo was without a doubt the most suited for this title. This is because of his work in a multiple of different fields ranging from painting to science and engineering (Dewitte 468). Leonardo had many impressive strengths in intelligence and skill but he because of his social status early in his life, his literary skills were low and he had no concept of Latin ("LEONARDO DA VINCI" 804). Even without those useful skills, early teens Leonardo was able to work in the studio of an artist named Verrocchio, who performed human dissections for the study of muscular anatomy ("LEONARDO DA VINCI" 804). Leonardo who was most likely inspired by such an act, would later also performed such experiments, even branching out to other aspects of the human body ("LEONARDO DA VINCI" 804).

Throughout his whole life, Leonardo made observations and invention ideas that were considered to be ahead of his time, all of which were recorded in several notebooks of his. Interestingly enough, he wrote everything down in his notebook using another invention, “… mirror writing, apparently adopted as a sort of cipher but relatively easy for him to write, since he was left-handed ("LEONARDO DA VINCI" 804). These recording by Leonardo contained inventions of the future but were somehow brought into the artist’s mind. On one of the pages, the design for a working parachute is drawn with great detail and a description of its materials and successfulness (Squeri 6). Mentioned earlier was Leonardo’s research in the human body, one notebook page holds extremely detailed drawings of a human spine and the individual vertebral disks that make it up (Squeri 8).

A more practical invention to his own work was the use of a new painting technique called sfumato (Dewitte 468). This technique involved the application of a hazy/ misty like glaze to a painting, which created the presence of blended areas instead of vivid outlines (Dewitte 468). One could infer by now that Leonardo was an individual who was not afraid to think outside the box with farfetched ideas. This, of course, applied also to his art, even with his famous piece, *The* *Last Supper,* he used an experimental media that could have potentially failed and ruined the piece (Dewitte 468).

Finally, I will analyze two pieces of art created by Leonardo himself. The first is *The* *Last Supper*, a timeless piece still admired and studied to this day. This piece was originally painted to be put up in the dining hall of a group of friars who commissioned Leonardo to do so (Dewitte 468). This piece is considered to be a fresco, a popular painting technique during the time period (Wasserman 15). The influence for this piece was the biblical scene of Jesus’s last dinner before the crucifixion, where he explains to his disciples that one of them will betray him. This moment is depicted by the detailed faces of disciples, each given their own individual, unique expression to the news. Leonardo uses several techniques to put emphasis on Jesus in the painting. Jesus is placed in the center, with the linear perspective of the painting (walls, faces, hands) leading the eyes to a vanishing point just behind Jesus (Dewitte 468). Other techniques utilized by Leonardo was the precise framing of Jesus’s head by the light background of the window painted behind him (Dewitte 468). Symbolism is a key feature in *The Last Supper,* for example, Jesus was painted roughly into the shape of a triangle, hinting at the holy trinity in the Christian religion. In the present day, this piece of art is considered sacred to the art community and is famous worldwide. It is currently housed in Santa Maria Delle Grazie, Milan (Wasserman 15).

The second piece of art created by Leonardo that will be analyzed is the *Mona Lisa*. Leonardo began working on this piece at around 1503, and it remained relatively silent in history for a while because of it not being commissioned by any patron of importance (Dewitte 34). The piece was created by applying oils onto a wooden piece, and is currently located in Musee du Louvre, Paris (Dewitte 35). Very little is known about the influence Leonardo had for creating this portrait, however, the women is believed to be Lisa Gherardini, a silk merchant’s wife from Florence (Dewitte 34). Because she was a common woman of no high status, and Leonardo spent such time and effort on a portrait of her gave rise to a lot of attention and mystery to the piece. Once again, individualism is present from the mysterious facial features created. The stare of her eyes and slight grin from the corner of her mouth are nothing close to what the usual stern, blank looks of past portraits would show, like *Isabella d’Este,* by Titian (Dewitte 35). The facial features to me feel as if Leonardo is sending a message to the viewer of something that only he knows, a unique self-expression in its own right. One article even goes into the question of whether or not the unusual portrait background is actually another self-expression of his own mind or just an unknown landscape he found somewhere (Carbon 183). These questions over the presence of self-expression by Leonardo and other mysteries unanswered have without a doubt been a factor in the tremendous stature the *Mona Lisa* has. “…a portrait that is now probably the most famous painting in the world…” (Dewitte 34).

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