



# Leonardo da Vinci biography

## SYNOPSIS

Born on April 15, 1452, in Vinci, Italy, Leonardo da Vinci was concerned with the laws of science and nature, which greatly informed his work as a painter, sculptor, inventor and draftsman. His ideas and body of work—which includes "Virgin of the Rocks," "The Last Supper," "Leda and the Swan" and "Mona Lisa"—have influenced countless artists and made da Vinci a leading light of the Italian Renaissance.

## HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Leonardo da Vinci was born on April 15, 1452, in Vinci, Italy. Born out of wedlock, the love child of a respected notary and a young peasant woman, he was raised by his father, Ser Piero, and his stepmothers. At the age of 14, da Vinci began apprenticing with the artist Verrocchio. For six years, he learned a wide breadth of technical skills, including metalworking, leather arts, carpentry, drawing and sculpting. By the age of 20, he had qualified as a master artist in the Guild of Saint Luke and established his own workshop.

Florentine court records show that da Vinci was charged with and acquitted of sodomy at the age of 22, and for two years, his whereabouts went entirely undocumented.

## 'THE LAST SUPPER'

In 1482, [Lorenzo de' Medici](#), a man from a prominent Italian family, commissioned da Vinci to create a silver lyre and bring it to Ludovico il Moro, the Duke of Milan, as a gesture of peace. Da Vinci did so and then wrote Ludovico a letter describing how his engineering and artistic talents would be of great service to Ludovico's court. His letter successfully endeared him to Ludovico, and from 1482 until 1499, Leonardo was commissioned to work on a great many projects. It was during this time that da Vinci painted "The Last Supper."

## 'MONA LISA'

Da Vinci's most well-known painting, and arguably the most famous painting in the world, the "Mona Lisa," was a privately commissioned work and was completed sometime between 1505 and 1507. Of the painting's wide appeal, James Beck, an art historian at Columbia University, once explained, "It is the inherent spirituality of the human creature that Leonardo was able to ingenuine to the picture that raises the human figure to some kind of majesty."

Leonardo da Vinci was a leading artist and intellectual of the Italian Renaissance who's known for his enduring works "The Last Supper" and "Mona Lisa."

It's been said that the Mona Lisa had jaundice, that she was a pregnant woman and that she wasn't actually a woman at all, but a man in drag. Based on accounts from an early biographer, however, the "Mona Lisa" is a picture of Lisa Gioconda, the real-life wife of a merchant, but that's far from certain. For da Vinci, the "Mona Lisa" was forever a work in progress, as it was his attempt at perfection. The painting was never delivered to its commissioner; da Vinci kept it with him until the end of his life. Today, the "Mona Lisa" hangs in the Louvre Museum in Paris, France, secured behind bulletproof glass, and is regarded as a priceless national treasure.

## RENAISSANCE MAN

Da Vinci has been called a genius and the archetypal Renaissance man. His talents in arguably extended far beyond his artistic works. Like many leaders of Renaissance humanism, he did not see a divide between science and art.

His observations and inventions were recorded in 13,000 pages of notes and drawings, including designs for flying machines (some 400 years before the Wright brothers' first success), plant studies, war machinery, anatomy and architecture. His ideas were mainly theoretical explanations, laid out in exacting detail, but they were rarely experimental. His drawings of a fetus in utero, the heart and vascular system, sex organs, and other bone and muscular structures, are some of the first on human record.

One of da Vinci's last commissioned works was a mechanical lion that could walk and open its chest to reveal a bouquet of lilies. The famous artist died in Amboise, France, on May 2, 1519. Da Vinci's assistant and perhaps his lover, Francesco Melzi, became the principal heir and executor of his estate.

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