



Leonardo Da Vinci

ITALY FRANCE



INTRODUCTION

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), a Florentine artist, one of the great masters of the High Renaissance, is celebrated as a painter, sculptor, architect, engineer, and scientist. His profound love of knowledge and research was the keynote of both his artistic and scientific passion.

His innovations in the field of painting influenced the course of Italian art for more than a century after his death, and his scientific studies anticipated many of the developments of modern science.



EARLY LIFE IN FLORENCE

Leonardo was born in the small town of Vinci, in Tuscany, near Florence, from a wealthy Florentine notary and a peasant woman. Once settled in Florence, a major intellectual and artistic center, Leonardo was given the best education. He rapidly advanced socially and intellectually. He was handsome, persuasive in conversation, and a fine musician and improviser. In 1472 he was entered in the painter's guild of Florence. In 1478 Leonardo became an independent master. His first commission, to paint an altarpiece for the chapel of the Palazzo Vecchio, the Florentine town hall, was never executed. His first large painting, *The Adoration of the Magi* (begun in 1481, Uffizi), left unfinished, was ordered in 1481 for the Monastery of San Donato a Scopeto, Florence.

YEARS IN MILAN

In 1482 Leonardo entered the service of the duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, having written the duke an astonishing letter in which he stated that he could build portable bridges; weapons, such as cannons; ships as well as armored vehicles, catapults, and other war machines; and that he could execute sculptures in marble, bronze, and clay. He served as principal engineer in the duke's numerous military enterprises and was active also as an architect.

The most important of his own paintings during the early Milan period was *The Virgin of the Rocks*, two versions of which exist (1483-1485, Louvre, Paris; 1490s to 1506-1508, National Gallery, London); he worked on the compositions for a long time, as was his custom, seemingly unwilling to finish what he had begun.

He returned to Florence in 1500.



RETURN TO FLORENCE

In 1502 Leonardo entered the service of Cesare Borgia, duke of Romagna and son and chief general of Pope Alexander VI. As the duke's chief architect and engineer, Leonardo supervised work on the fortresses of the papal territories in central Italy.

After returning to Florence, Leonardo painted several portraits, but the only one that survives is the famous *Mona Lisa* (1503-1506, Louvre). One of the most celebrated portraits ever painted, it is also known as *La Gioconda*, after the presumed name of the woman's husband. Leonardo seems to have had a special affection for the picture, as he took it with him on all his subsequent travels.

LATER TRAVELS AND DEATH IN FRANCE

In 1506 Leonardo again went to Milan, at the summons of its French governor, Charles d'Amboise. The following year he was named court painter to King Louis XII of France, who was then residing in Milan. For the next six years Leonardo divided his time between Florence and Milan, where he continued his engineering projects. From 1514 to 1516 Leonardo lived in Rome under the patronage of Pope Leo X. He was housed in the Palazzo Belvedere in the Vatican and seems to have been occupied principally with scientific experimentation. In 1516 he traveled to France to enter the service of King Francis I. He spent his last years at the Château de Cloux, near Amboise, where he died.

Leonardo da Vinci's tomb in the chapel of Saint-Hubert.



THE MONA LISA OR GIOCONDA

The Mona Lisa is a half-length portrait of a woman by the Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci, which has been acclaimed as "the best known, the most visited, the most written about, the most sung about, the most parodied work of art in the world."

The painting, thought to be a portrait of Lisa Gherardini, the wife of Francesco del Giocondo, is in oil on a white Lombardy poplar panel, and is believed to have been painted between 1503 and 1506, although Leonardo may have continued working on it as late as 1517. It was acquired by King Francis I of France and is now the property of the French Republic, on permanent display at The Louvre museum in Paris since 1797.

The *Mona Lisa* is Leonardo's most famous work and it's known for its mastery of technical innovations as for the mysteriousness of its legendary smiling subject.

The ambiguity of the subject's expression, which is frequently described as enigmatic, the monumentality of the composition, the subtle modeling of forms and the atmospheric illusionism were novel qualities that have contributed to the continuing fascination and study of the work.

