

Cunningham Creek Elementary
Meet the Artist

Da Vinci, Leonardo - Mona Lisa, Warhol, Andy- Marilyn Monroe



ARTIST: DA VINCI, Leonardo

PRINT: *Mona Lisa*

Date: 1503-17

Louvre Museum, Paris Size: 30 in x 21 in

Medium: Oil on poplar wood pannel

ARTIST: Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was a painter, architect, inventor, and student of all things scientific. His natural genius crossed so many disciplines that he epitomized the term "Renaissance man." Today he remains best known for his art, including two paintings that remain among the world's most famous and admired, *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*. Art, da Vinci believed, was indisputably connected with science and nature. Largely self-educated, he filled dozens of secret notebooks with inventions, observations and theories about pursuits from aeronautics to anatomy.

But the rest of the world was just beginning to share knowledge in books made with moveable type, and the concepts expressed in his notebooks were often difficult to interpret. As a result, though he was lauded in his time as a great artist, his contemporaries often did not fully appreciate his genius—the combination of intellect and imagination that allowed him to create, at least on paper, such inventions as the bicycle, the helicopter and an airplane based on the physiology and flying capability of a bat.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was born in Anchiano, Tuscany (now Italy), close to the town of Vinci that provided the surname we associate with him today. In his own time he was known just as Leonardo or as "Il Florentine," since he lived near Florence—and was famed as an artist, inventor and thinker.

Da Vinci's parents weren't married, and his mother, Caterina, a peasant, wed another man while da Vinci was very young and began a new family. Beginning around age 5, he lived on the estate in Vinci that belonged to the family of his father, Ser Peiro, an attorney and notary. Da Vinci's uncle, who had a particular appreciation for nature that da Vinci grew to share, also helped raise him.

Da Vinci received no formal education beyond basic reading, writing and math, but his father appreciated his artistic talent and apprenticed him at around age 15 to the noted sculptor and painter Andrea del Verrocchio, of Florence. For about a decade, da Vinci refined his painting and sculpting techniques and trained in mechanical arts. When he was 20, in 1472, the painters' guild of Florence offered da Vinci membership, but he remained with Verrocchio until he became an independent master in 1478. Around 1482, he began to paint his first commissioned work, *The Adoration of the Magi*, for Florence's San Donato, a Scopeto monastery.

However, da Vinci never completed that piece, because shortly thereafter he relocated to Milan to work for the ruling Sforza clan, serving as an engineer, painter, architect, designer of court festivals and, most notably, a sculptor. The family asked da Vinci to create a magnificent 16-foot-tall equestrian statue, in bronze, to honor dynasty founder Francesco Sforza. Da Vinci worked on the project on and off for 12 years, and in 1493 a clay model was ready to display. Imminent war, however, meant repurposing the bronze earmarked for the sculpture into cannons, and the clay model was destroyed in the conflict after the ruling Sforza duke fell from power in 1499.

PRINT: The *Mona Lisa* is quite possibly the most well-known piece of painted artwork in the entire world. It was painted by the Leonardo Da Vinci, the famous Italian artist, between 1504 and 1519, and is a half body commission for a woman named Lisa Gherardini. Her husband, Francesco Del Giocondo requested the work by Da Vinci just after the turn of the century. It is perhaps the most studied piece of artwork ever known. The subject's facial expression has brought about a source of debate for centuries, as her face remains largely enigmatic in the portrait. Originally commissioned in Italy, it is now at home in the French Republic, and hangs on display in the Louvre in Paris.

The work was requested by subject's husband, Francesco Del Giocondo. Lisa was from a well-known family known through Tuscany and Florence and married to Francesco Del Giocondo who was a very wealthy silk merchant. The work was to celebrate their home's completion, as well as a celebration of the birth of their second son. Not until 2005 was the identity of *Mona Lisa's* subject fully understood, though years of speculation have suggested the true identity of the painting's subject.

The *Mona Lisa* is famous for a variety of reasons. One of the reasons, of course, for the popularity of the painting is the artist himself. Leonardo da Vinci is perhaps the most recognized artist in the world.

Not only was Da Vinci an artist, but he was also a scientist, inventor, and a doctor. His study of the human form came from the study of actual human cadavers.

Because of his ability to study from the actual form of the human, he was able to draw and paint it more accurately than any other artist of his time. While the *Mona Lisa* may be revered as the greatest piece of artwork of all time, Da Vinci was known more for his ability to draw than to paint. Currently there are only a handful of paintings of Da Vinci's, mostly because of his largely experimental style of art, and his habit of procrastination. Among his most famous sketches is the Vitruvian Man, which anybody who has ever studied anatomy, human biology, or art knows very well.

But most prominently Da Vinci has been known throughout the centuries as a scientist and inventor. Amongst his ideas were a rudimentary helicopter and a tank. Some of his more notable paintings include the *Mona Lisa*, of course, as well as *The Last Supper*. He used a variety of different surfaces to paint on, attributing to a lot of his failures (and a lot of his successes) as a painter. Many of his paintings are biblical in nature, but as his talent and notoriety grew, he was commissioned more regularly for portraits.

The *Mona Lisa* disappeared from the Louvre in France in 1911. Pablo Picasso was on the original list of suspects questioned and jailed for the theft, but he was later exonerated. For two years, the masterpiece was thought to be forever lost. However in 1913, Italian patriot Vincenzo Perugia was arrested for the crime of stealing the famous painting, and the original artwork returned to its home at the Louvre in Paris. Perugia was an employee of the Louvre at the time, and he believed the painting belonged to Italy. For two years he kept the famous piece of art housed in his apartment, but was discovered when he tried selling to a gallery in Florence, Italy.

Over the centuries, the famous painting has withstood attempts at vandalism as well. The first occurrence of vandalism was in 1956 when somebody threw acid at the bottom half, severely damaging the timeless masterpiece. That same year, another vandal threw a rock at the work, removing a chip of paint from near her elbow. It was later painted over. Afterwards, the piece was put under bulletproof glass as a means of protection has kept the painting from further attempts at vandalism and destruction.

This painting has long been caricaturized in cartoons, has been replicated all over the world, and has been studied by scholars and art enthusiasts alike. The painting is the most widely recognized work of art in the entire world. The oil on cottonwood panel commission of Francesco del Giocondo's used such precise detail to give an unbelievably lifelike appearance to the painting's subject. This piece of Renaissance artwork completely changed the techniques and style of painting, and is revered around the world as the greatest masterpiece of all time.

ARTIST: WARHOL, ANDY (1925 - 1987)

PRINT: *MARILYN MONROE* 20th Century American

TREMAINE COLLECTION Date: 1962

CONNECTICUT Size: 6'11" x 4'7"

Medium: Synthetic polymer paint
silk-screened onto canvas

ARTIST - Andy Warhol was born in Pennsylvania and attended art school at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh. He was once quoted as saying that he wanted to be a machine. Before becoming a painter, Warhol was a successful fashion illustrator of shoes. He wanted to produce art that would appeal to everybody. His 'products' ranged from paintings of soup cans, soft-drink bottles, cheesecake, and Brillo to Marilyn Monroe and Jacqueline Kennedy. He is the most popular of a group of artists called "Pop Artists."

The artists of the 1960's painted in styles that were calculated to be cool and detached. By neither commenting on nor transforming the object, Pop artists were not criticizing commercialism and advertising, but simply reporting them.

PRINT - *Marilyn Monroe* is a good example of the type of art done by Andy Warhol and other Pop artists. The artist takes a subject that is a common everyday object and then merely repeats it over and over. The paintings look like advertising signs, labels on cans, or comic book pages blown up. In some cases the paintings looked like the original, or real thing. In *Marilyn Monroe*, a portrait of a famous and well-known celebrity is printed over and over, half of it in very bright colors, almost like a large bright design. This portrait of Marilyn Monroe tells the story of a woman transformed into a commercial property. She has been carefully manufactured, packaged and sold like a can of soup. Some people were disturbed by this new art, saying that the subjects chosen to paint were too ordinary. A Pop painter might have replied: "We paint objects which are everywhere and are around us constantly; objects which govern our lives." Pop painting was presented as a "new realism," an accurate measure of reflection of contemporary life in America.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Give the main idea of each picture.
2. Each picture tells something about the time during which the artist lived. What can you tell about the time during which each artist lived?
3. Why do you think the artist made the *Marilyn Monroe* picture?
4. Can you find texture in each picture? Where?

RELATED ACTIVITIES

1. Fold a piece of paper 3 times to get an 8 box grid. Draw a simple design in one block. Repeat the design in the other blocks.
2. Take photos of each child before the lesson, copy pictures 6 to 8 times in black and white. Ask the children to color themselves indifferently on each picture and arrange together in a rectangle.
3. Fold a piece of paper 3 times to get an 8 box grid. Draw yourself in each box and color each one differently. Or draw the head and shoulders of another celebrity and make a picture similar to Andy Warhol's.

4. Take photos of each child before the lesson, copy each one in black and white. Ask the children to color in their own picture using bright colors. Put all the pictures together to make a class display.
5. Draw/paint a portrait of your friend. Will you just do head and shoulders or full body? What impression would you like to give? Maybe you could include something about their personality or the things they like to do.