

LEONARDO DA VINCI

Italian painter, was the greatest portrayer of his time. No artist before him had captured in such a convincing way the vivacity of the traits and the individual spirit. Leonardo da Vinci summarized the renaissance ideal of the polymath – artist, joke teller, musician, scientist, mathematician and engineer – a man of many talents, with an unsatisfying curiosity and hunger for knowledge.

He was born in Anchiano, a village near the city of Vinci, on April 15th, 1452. Son of a notary and a countrywoman, Catarina. Leonardo grew up in the countryside, where he developed a great love for nature. As a boy he was asked to draw a coat of arms for a friend of his father's. It's said that he made an extraordinary bestiary, based on real observation of lizards, crickets, snakes, butterflies, grasshoppers and bats. According to registries, it was on this occasion that he revealed his fascination for the moving, twisted and alive forms. It is also registered that he liked horses and knew them deeply. They are shown with so much highlights on his works of maturity that it seems to be very probable.

Some time before 1469, Leonardo went to live in Florence with his father and, in 1472, was accepted as a member of the Guild of Saint Lucas, the painters guild. His master was Andrea Verrocchio, and the registers show that he was still employed at Verrocchio's workshop, in the dell'Agnolo village, in 1476.

There are no consistent evidences of when Leonardo went to Milan, but the first registered order there is of 1483. The reason he went to that city is not clear, but he might have felt attracted by the stimulating atmosphere of Sforza court, with many physicians, scientists, military engineers and mathematicians.

On April 24th, 1500 he went back to Florence and found a different city from the one he had left twenty years earlier, going through a revitalization of religious interest and with republican ideas on the politics. Leonardo got almost immediately the public satisfaction, after showing his card of the Virgin and St. Anne planned to be an altarpiece. At this time, Michelangelo had his reputation already assured in Florence. These two giants never liked each other and Leonardo didn't hide the fact of considering sculpture inferior to painting, but Michelangelo's fame was a conflict factor.

In 1503, he got into his three years of greatest production as a painter. His most famous painting, Mona Lisa, with her mysterious smile, might have been painted at that time. A big part of Leonardo's works in Florence, made between 1503 and 1507, got lost, including Leda. He thought the mechanics of the painting was boring and preferred to concentrate his imagining abilities on the drawing and planning of his compositions.

As a result of his florescent association with Machiavelli, Leonardo received an order to paint a fresco at the Room del Gran Consiglio di Palazzo Vecchio. He started working on the card to the fresco – the battle of Anghiari – in October of 1503, but it seems that the progress was slow. Leonardo finished his card in the end of 1504 and started painting using an unusual technique. The ink dried unevenly and the painting didn't work out. The fresco was unfinished but, later, a special framework was made for the finished part and there are people who consider the best thing to see when visiting Florence. Later, it was repainted by Vasari.

During 1507, Leonardo worked for the King of France, although his immediate patron was Charles d'Ambroise, lord of Chaumont and governor of Milan. In many ways, d'Ambroise reinstalled the glories of the court of Sforza. Leonardo was in his element, working as a painter, engineer and artistic counselor in general. D'Ambroise died in 1511, but Leonardo stayed in Milan until September 24th, 1513. Later he went to Rome, taken, as many others, by Giovanni de Medici who had become recently Pope Leo X.

The last painting made by Leonardo that survived is, almost for sure, Saint John and must have been made in 1514-1515. On March of 1516, Leonardo accepted the invitation of Francisco I to live in France and got a rural property near Cloux. On October 10th, 1517, he received the visit of the Cardinal Luis de Aragão, whose secretary wrote a report about the meeting. He mentions three paintings, two we can identify as the Virgin and the boy with St. Anne and Saint John the baptist, the third is a portrait of a Florentine lady. He also states that Leonard was from a kind of paralysis on the right hand. Leonardo was left-handed, but this observation may have, actually referred to his "work" hand, meaning the left one. Observing the manuscripts, it is obvious that this paralysis didn't stop Leonardo from using his fingers because his writing was clear and steady as usual. Some drawings, however, showed a lack of steadiness and precision which suggest that the problem may have affected the movement of the arm.

On May 2nd, 1519, Leonardo died in Cloux. He left his drawings and manuscripts for his loyal friend Francesco Melzi, and while he alive, he kept the works with a lot of affection, but committed the insensibility of not including on his will any clause that guaranteed the continuity of this care. The son, Orazio, who didn't have any interest for arts or science, allowed this priceless collection to deteriorate, got lost, was stolen or vandalized in a way that can only be described as criminal.

Some works:

The Last Supper (1498)— Mona Lisa or La Gioconda (1503–1505/1507)— The Virgin and Child with St. Anne and St. John the Baptist (c. 1499–1500)

