

## **Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)**

Italian Artist, Engineer, Scientist and writer

By Chris Murray

Leonardo da Vinci was one of the founders of the High Renaissance style in painting, well known artist and writer on art, natural science and engineering. He produced small number of complicated art works and a large amount of writing accompanied by illustrations.

Giorgio Vasari, the Florentine artist and writer said, “Leonardo accomplished far more in his words than in deeds.” He was a very great philosopher. A small portion of his manuscript notes was received by his student Francesco Melzi.

His writings in manuscript were very difficult to read: reversed writing, lack of punctuation, idiosyncratic orthography compound. Unrelated ideas and drawings were compounded. A scholarly industry has evolved to make sense of his works. His works were disseminated only after his death.

The codex Vaticanus Urbinas Latinus (1270) was a manuscript which was a basis of Leonardo's ideas. It was compiled by Melzi in the sixteenth century. It was about the art of painting. Leonardo's views on painting were widely circulated through Melzi's anthology. His ideas were reproduced in various languages: Italian, French Spanish and English.

He has demonstrated his intellectual power and inquiry into nature in his writing on art. His artistic ideas are based on scientific investigations and visual observation. He elevated painting to the status of liberal arts. His artistic works were the product of his extensive investigation of the nature and the law of nature.

His works reflect the blend of nature and human feelings and emotions; unity of man and nature. Mona Lisa is an example of such a blend. His empirical method of observation and recording makes him distinct from earlier works on painting. Scientific and artistic qualities are mutually supportive. He adds his empirical observation on aerial and color perspective, qualities of light, color, chiaroscuro and their role in creating relieve (relief).

He believed that the motions of body reveal the motions of mind. His 'Treatise on Art' is an account of the relationship between physical movement and emotion, between gesture and expression and their role in creating affective narrative. It is the fundamental text for the teachings of the French Academy in the seventeenth century.

He advises artists that motion/emotion is best captured in a spontaneous and unfinished sketch rather than in perfected drawing. Wisdom is the daughter of experience. He promotes the eye to the level of the highest sense. Eye is the window of the soul. It is geometrical instrument capable of sensing the inherent design of nature.

His praise of the sight and his belief that painting is a science are related to his conception of the nobility of the painter. He claimed that painting is an investigative tool for the pursuit of scientific knowledge.

He presents an image of a painter at his work in a supportive, creative and beautiful atmosphere.

Through his research and writing, he transformed the practice of art theory into an investigative tool of unprecedented power.