Leonardo da Vinci

### Personal life

Within Leonardo's lifetime, his extraordinary powers of invention, his "outstanding physical beauty", "infinite grace", "great strength and generosity", "regal spirit and tremendous breadth of mind", as described by Vasari, as well as all other aspects of his life, attracted the curiosity of others. One such aspect was his respect for life, evidenced by his vegetarianism and his habit, according to Vasari, of purchasing caged birds and releasing them.

Leonardo had many friends who are now renowned either in their fields or for their historical significance. They included the mathematician [Luca Pacioli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luca_Pacioli" \o "Luca Pacioli), with whom he collaborated on the book [Divina proportione](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divina_proportione" \o "Divina proportione) in the 1490s. Leonardo appears to have had no close relationships with women except for his friendship with [Cecilia Gallerani](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecilia_Gallerani" \o "Cecilia Gallerani) and the two Este sisters, [Beatrice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beatrice_d'Este" \o "Beatrice d'Este)and Isabella.[]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo_da_Vinci" \l "cite_note-88) While on a journey that took him through [Mantua](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantua" \o "Mantua), he drew a portrait of Isabella that appears to have been used to create a painted portrait, now lost.

Beyond friendship, Leonardo kept his private life secret. His sexuality has been the subject of satire, analysis, and speculation. This trend began in the mid-16th century and was revived in the 19th and 20th centuries, most notably by [Sigmund Freud](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund_Freud" \o "Sigmund Freud). Leonardo's most intimate relationships were perhaps with his pupils Salai and Melzi. Melzi, writing to inform Leonardo's brothers of his death, described Leonardo's feelings for his pupils as both loving and passionate. It has been claimed since the 16th century that these relationships were of a sexual or erotic nature. Court records of 1476, when he was aged twenty-four, show that Leonardo and three other young men were charged with [sodomy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sodomy" \o "Sodomy) in an incident involving a well-known male prostitute. The charges were dismissed for lack of evidence, and there is speculation that since one of the accused, Lionardo de Tornabuoni, was related to [Lorenzo de' Medici](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorenzo_de'_Medici" \o "Lorenzo de' Medici), the family exerted its influence to secure the dismissal. Since that date much has been written about his presumed homosexuality and its role in his art, particularly in the androgyny and eroticism manifested in John the Baptist and Bacchus and more explicitly in a number of erotic drawings.

### Assistants and pupils

Gian Giacomo Caprotti da Oreno, nicknamed [Salai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sala%C3%AC" \o "Salaì) or Il Salaino, entered Leonardo's household in 1490. After only a year, Leonardo made a list of his misdemeanours, calling him "a thief, a liar, stubborn, and a glutton", after he had made off with money and valuables on at least five occasions and spent a fortune on clothes.Nevertheless, Leonardo treated him with great indulgence, and he remained in Leonardo's household for the next thirty years. Salai executed a number of paintings under the name of Andrea Salai, but although Vasari claims that Leonardo "taught him a great deal about painting", his work is generally considered to be of less artistic merit than others among Leonardo's pupils, such as [Marco d'Oggiono](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marco_d'Oggiono" \o "Marco d'Oggiono) and [Boltraffio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boltraffio" \o "Boltraffio). In 1515, he painted a nude version of the [Mona Lisa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona_Lisa" \o "Mona Lisa), known as [Monna Vanna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gian_Giacomo_Caprotti_da_Oreno" \l "Life" \o "Gian Giacomo Caprotti da Oreno). Salai owned the Mona Lisa at the time of his death in 1524, and in his will it was assessed at 505 lire, an exceptionally high valuation for a small panel portrait.

In 1506, Leonardo took on another pupil, Count [Francesco Melzi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francesco_Melzi" \o "Francesco Melzi), the son of a [Lombard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lombardy" \o "Lombardy) aristocrat, who is considered to have been his favourite student. He travelled to France with Leonardo and remained with him until Leonardo's death. Melzi inherited the artistic and scientific works, manuscripts, and collections of Leonardo and administered the estate.

Painting

Despite the recent awareness and admiration of Leonardo as a scientist and inventor, for the better part of four hundred years his fame rested on his achievements as a painter. A handful of works that are either authenticated or attributed to him have been regarded as among the great masterpieces. These paintings are famous for a variety of qualities that have been much imitated by students and discussed at great length by connoisseurs and critics. By the 1490s Leonardo had already been described as a Divine painter.

Among the qualities that make Leonardo's work unique are his innovative techniques for laying on the paint; his detailed knowledge of anatomy, light, botany and geology; his interest in [physiognomy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physiognomy" \o "Physiognomy) and the way humans register emotion in expression and gesture; his innovative use of the human form in figurative composition; and his use of subtle gradation of tone. All these qualities come together in his most famous painted works, the Mona Lisa, the Last Supper, and the Virgin of the Rocks.

### Early works

### Leonardo first gained notoriety for his work on the [Baptism of Christ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Baptism_of_Christ_(Verrocchio)" \o "The Baptism of Christ (Verrocchio)), painted in conjunction with Verrocchio. Two other paintings appear to date from his time at Verrocchio's workshop, both of which are [Annunciations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annunciation" \o "Annunciation). One is small, 59 centimetres long and 14 centimetres high. It is a predella to go at the base of a larger composition, a painting by [Lorenzo di Credi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorenzo_di_Credi" \o "Lorenzo di Credi) from which it has become separated. The other is a much larger work, 217 centimetres (85 in) long.[]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo_da_Vinci" \l "cite_note-99) In both Annunciations, Leonardo used a formal arrangement, like two well-known pictures by [Fra Angelico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fra_Angelico" \o "Fra Angelico) of the same subject, of the [Virgin Mary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgin_Mary" \o "Virgin Mary) sitting or kneeling to the right of the picture, approached from the left by an angel in profile, with a rich flowing garment, raised wings and bearing a lily. Although previously attributed to [Ghirlandaio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghirlandaio" \o "Ghirlandaio), the larger work is now generally attributed to Leonardo.

In the smaller painting, Mary averts her eyes and folds her hands in a gesture that symbolised submission to God's will. Mary is not submissive, however, in the larger piece. The girl, interrupted in her reading by this unexpected messenger, puts a finger in her bible to mark the place and raises her hand in a formal gesture of greeting or surprise. This calm young woman appears to accept her role as the [Mother of God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_of_God" \o "Mother of God), not with resignation but with confidence. In this painting, the young Leonardo presents the humanist face of the Virgin Mary, recognising humanity's role in God's incarnation.

### Paintings of the 1480s

In the 1480s, Leonardo received two very important commissions and commenced another work that was of ground-breaking importance in terms of composition. Two of the three were never finished, and the third took so long that it was subject to lengthy negotiations over completion and payment.

One of these paintings was [Saint Jerome in the Wilderness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Jerome_in_the_Wilderness_(Leonardo)" \o "Saint Jerome in the Wilderness (Leonardo)), which Bortolon associates with a difficult period of Leonardo's life, as evidenced in his diary: "I thought I was learning to live; I was only learning to die." Although the painting is barely begun, the composition can be seen and is very unusual. [Jerome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Jerome" \o "St Jerome), as a [penitent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penitent" \o "Penitent), occupies the middle of the picture, set on a slight diagonal and viewed somewhat from above. His kneeling form takes on a trapezoid shape, with one arm stretched to the outer edge of the painting and his gaze looking in the opposite direction. J. Wasserman points out the link between this painting and Leonardo's anatomical studies. Across the foreground sprawls his symbol, a great lion whose body and tail make a double spiral across the base of the picture space. The other remarkable feature is the sketchy landscape of craggy rocks against which the figure is silhouetted.

The daring display of figure composition, the landscape elements and personal drama also appear in the great unfinished masterpiece, the [Adoration of the Magi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoration_of_the_Magi_(Leonardo)" \o "Adoration of the Magi (Leonardo)), a commission from the Monks of San Donato a Scopeto. It is a complex composition, of about 250x250 centimetres. Leonardo did numerous drawings and preparatory studies, including a detailed one in linear perspective of the ruined [classical architecture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_architecture" \o "Classical architecture) that forms part of the background. In 1482 Leonardo went to Milan at the behest of [Lorenzo de' Medici](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorenzo_Medici" \o "Lorenzo Medici) in order to win favour with [Ludovico il Moro](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludovico_il_Moro" \o "Ludovico il Moro), and the painting was abandoned.

The third important work of this period is the [Virgin of the Rocks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgin_of_the_Rocks" \o "Virgin of the Rocks), commissioned in Milan for the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception. The painting, to be done with the assistance of the [de Predis brothers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Ambrogio_de_Predis" \o "Giovanni Ambrogio de Predis), was to fill a large complex [altarpiece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altarpiece" \o "Altarpiece). Leonardo chose to paint an apocryphal moment of the infancy of Christ when the infant [John the Baptist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_the_Baptist" \o "John the Baptist), in protection of an angel, met the Holy Family on the road to Egypt. The painting demonstrates an eerie beauty as the graceful figures kneel in adoration around the infant Christ in a wild landscape of tumbling rock and whirling water. While the painting is quite large, about 200x120 centimetres, it is not nearly as complex as the painting ordered by the monks of St Donato, having only four figures rather than about fifty and a rocky landscape rather than architectural details. The painting was eventually finished; in fact, two versions of the painting were finished: one remained at the chapel of the Confraternity, while Leonardo took the other to France. The Brothers did not get their painting, however, nor the de Predis their payment, until the next century.

### Paintings of the 16th century

Among the works created by Leonardo in the 16th century is the small portrait known as the [Mona Lisa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona_Lisa" \o "Mona Lisa) or la Gioconda, the laughing one. In the present era, it is arguably the most famous painting in the world. Its fame rests, in particular, on the elusive smile on the woman's face, its mysterious quality perhaps due to the subtly shadowed corners of the mouth and eyes such that the exact nature of the smile cannot be determined. The shadowy quality for which the work is renowned came to be called "[sfumato](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sfumato" \o "Sfumato)", or Leonardo's smoke. Vasari, who is generally thought to have known the painting only by repute, said that "the smile was so pleasing that it seemed divine rather than human; and those who saw it were amazed to find that it was as alive as the original".

Other characteristics of the painting are the unadorned dress, in which the eyes and hands have no competition from other details; the dramatic landscape background, in which the world seems to be in a state of flux; the subdued colouring; and the extremely smooth nature of the painterly technique, employing [oils](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oil_paint" \o "Oil paint) laid on much like [tempera](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tempera" \o "Tempera), and blended on the surface so that the brushstrokes are indistinguishable. Vasari expressed the opinion that the manner of painting would make even "the most confident master … despair and lose heart." The perfect state of preservation and the fact that there is no sign of repair or overpainting is rare in a panel painting of this date.

In the painting [Virgin and Child with St. Anne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Virgin_and_Child_with_St._Anne_(Leonardo)" \o "The Virgin and Child with St. Anne (Leonardo)), the composition again picks up the theme of figures in a landscape, which Wasserman describes as "breathtakingly beautiful" and harkens back to the St Jerome picture with the figure set at an oblique angle. What makes this painting unusual is that there are two obliquely set figures superimposed. Mary is seated on the knee of her mother, St Anne. She leans forward to restrain the Christ Child as he plays roughly with a lamb, the sign of his own impending sacrifice. This painting, which was copied many times, influenced Michelangelo, Raphael, and [Andrea del Sarto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea_del_Sarto" \o "Andrea del Sarto), and through them [Pontormo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontormo" \o "Pontormo) and [Correggio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Correggio" \o "Correggio). The trends in composition were adopted in particular by the Venetian painters [Tintoretto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tintoretto" \o "Tintoretto) and [Veronese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo_Veronese" \o "Paolo Veronese).

***Some of the work and status***

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| [Mona Lisa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona_Lisa" \o ") | 76.8 × 53.0 cm, | Universally accepted |
| [The Virgin and Child with St. Anne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Virgin_and_Child_with_St._Anne_(Leonardo_da_Vinci)" \o ") | 168 × 112 cm | Universally accepted |
| [St. John the Baptist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._John_the_Baptist_(Leonardo)" \o ") | 69 × 57 cm | Generally accepted |
| [Lucan Portrait of Leonardo da Vinci](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucan_portrait_of_Leonardo_da_Vinci" \o ") | 40 cm × 60 cm | Disputed attribution |
| [The Annunciation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annunciation_(Leonardo)" \o ") | 98 × 217 cm | Generally accepted |

**List of Manuscripts**

[Codex Atlanticus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Atlanticus" \o "Codex Atlanticus)

Codex Windsor

[Codex Arundel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Arundel" \o "Codex Arundel)

[Codex Trivulzianus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Trivulzianus" \o "Codex Trivulzianus)

Codex Forster

Paris Manuscripts

[Codex Madrid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Madrid_(Leonardo)" \o "Codex Madrid (Leonardo))

Codex Ashburnham

[Codex on the Flight of Birds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_on_the_Flight_of_Birds" \o "Codex on the Flight of Birds)

[Codex Leicester](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Leicester" \o "Codex Leicester)

[Codex Urbinas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Urbinas" \o "Codex Urbinas)

**Citation**

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