

System User Manual: Da Vinci: The Portraitist

The **System User Manual** for the "Da Vinci: The Portraitist" website is a guide designed to help users navigate the 9-page static exhibit effectively. It focuses on the website's structure, how to access information about each of the eight featured works, and tips for viewing the high-resolution images of the portraits.

Primary Goal

The manual's main goal is to ensure the user can seamlessly move between the **Home Page (Exhibit Guide)** and the **eight individual Portrait Pages**, maximizing their learning experience by locating the structured historical and analytical content for each artwork.

Key Manual Sections

1. Introduction to the Exhibit

- **System Description:** Describes the website as a non-commercial, static digital exhibition focusing on Leonardo da Vinci's major portraits and anatomical studies.
- **Exhibit Structure:** Explains that the site consists of **9 pages**: 1 Home page and 8 dedicated Portrait/Study pages

2. Navigation Guide

- **The Home Page (Exhibit Guide):** Explains that the main function of the home page is as a comprehensive **Table of Contents**.
 - **Hero Section:** Identifies the main heading and introductory text.
 - **Portrait Gallery Links:** Explains that all 8 major works are listed and linked at the bottom of the home page, with the **image thumbnail** acting as the primary navigation tool.

THE EYES OF GENIUS



A Digital Study of Leonardo da Vinci's Master Portraits and Anatomical Studies.

[Begin the Exhibit](#)



The Mona Lisa (La Gioconda)

Sfumato and the Enigmatic Smile

[click image to see](#)



Lady with an Ermine

Symbolism and Composition

[click image to see](#)



La Belle Ferronnière

Attribution and Ornamentation

[click image to see](#)



Ginevra de' Benci

The Landscape and Early Florentine Style

[click image to see](#)



Self-Portrait in Red Chalk

Leonardo's Late-Life Image

[click image to see](#)



The Vitruvian Man

Proportions, Geometry, and Anatomy

[click image to see](#)



La Scapigliata

The Unfinished Sketch and Mastery of Hair

[click image to see](#)



Head of an Angel Study

Light, Shadow, and Idealized Form

[click image to see](#)

- **The Universal Navigation Bar:** Points out the simplified menu at the top of every page, allowing one-click access back to the **Home page** and directly to other major sections (e.g., *Self-Portrait*, *About & Sources*).

Self-Portrait in Red Chalk

Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1512–1515

3. Using the Portrait Pages

- **Image Viewing:** Instructs the user on the best way to view the artwork (e.g., using a desktop browser to view the large central image or using a mobile device's zoom feature).
- **Content Breakdown:** Explains the consistent three-part structure of every portrait page:
 - **History & Provenance:** Where the work came from and who commissioned it.
 - **Technique:** Analysis of the focused concept (e.g., **Sfumato**, **Chiaroscuro**, **Composition**).
 - **Subject & Interpretation:** Discussion of the sitter (if known) and the work's meaning.

HOME MONA LISA LADY WITH AN ERMINES LA BELLE FERRONNIÈRE GINEVRA DE' BENCI SELF-PORTRAIT VITRUVIAN MAN LA SCAPIGLIATA HEAD

Lady with an Ermine

Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1489–1490

Currently housed at the Czartoryski Museum, Kraków.

History & Provenance

This striking portrait depicts *"Cecilia Gallerani"*, a young woman at the court of Milan and the mistress of Ludovico Sforza, the Duke of Milan, who was Leonardo's patron at the time. Painted during Leonardo's first Milanese period, this work showcases his evolution from the static poses of Florentine portraiture. It is one of only four surviving portraits of women painted by Leonardo.

The painting was likely commissioned to celebrate Cecilia's new relationship and the birth of her son. The direct, almost intimate connection between the sitter and the viewer, combined with the dynamic movement of the animal, makes this an unparalleled work of the early Renaissance.

Symbolism and Composition

The *"ermine"* held by Cecilia is highly symbolic. In ancient texts, the ermine was revered for its purity, as it would supposedly rather die than soil its white coat. The animal also directly references Ludovico Sforza, as he was a member of the prestigious Order of the Ermite. Thus, the ermine functions as a clever and sophisticated visual pun, clearly identifying the sitter's powerful lover without stating it explicitly.

Compositionally, the work is masterful. Leonardo uses a *"contrapposto"* (counterpose) effect: Cecilia's body turns to the left while her head turns sharply to the right, mirroring the tension in the ermine's posture. This creates a sense of momentary pause and elegant restlessness, bringing a profound *"psychological dimension"* to the portrait.

Technique: Light and Contours

Unlike the misty background of the *"Mona Lisa"*, the background here was originally a dark blue-grey (though later repainted black). This dark void makes Cecilia and the ermine emerge dramatically, emphasizing the effect of the light. The light source strikes her from the upper right, exquisitely sculpting her face, hands, and the animal's powerful form, highlighting the delicate folds of her dress and the translucent quality of her skin. The precision of the *"anatomical study"* in the ermine demonstrates Leonardo's dedication to scientific observation, even within portraiture.

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4. Conventions and Terminology

- **Bolded Text:** Explains that key art historical terms (**Sfumato, contrapposto, red chalk**) are bolded throughout the analysis sections for emphasis and easy identification.
- **Attribution:** Explains the use of the subtitle line to provide clear attribution and dates (e.g., *Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1503–1506*).



Currently housed at the Louvre Museum, Paris.

History & Provenance

This portrait, painted during Leonardo's second Milanese period, features a prominent sitter, likely one of the women at the court of Ludovico Sforza. The traditional name, **"La Belle Ferronnière,"** arose from a misidentification in the 17th century, mistakenly linking the portrait to a fictional mistress of King Francis I of France who was the wife of an ironmonger (*ferronnier*). Art historians believe the sitter may be Lucrezia Crivelli, another mistress of Sforza.

The portrait's attribution to Leonardo himself has sometimes been debated, but its sophisticated composition, handling of light, and the sitter's penetrating gaze generally confirm its status as an authentic masterpiece from the master or his workshop, created under his direct supervision.

Ornamentation and Formal Composition

The sitter is defined by her elaborate attire and, most notably, the **"ferronnière"**—the fine jewel worn across her forehead. This ornamentation contrasts sharply with the plain, dark background, drawing immediate attention to her features and wealth. The portrait