

Da vinci's the last supper - image analysis



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Last Supper Leonardo Da Vinci's the Last Supper constitutes one of the most seminal works of the Renaissance era. The painting's stylistic qualities and overall tone are revolutionary in nature, giving the painting a timeless quality that has endeared it to art critics and patrons throughout the centuries. With the monumental nature of the work, attempting to articulate its message in words borders on artistic sacrilege, however with the proper angle and appreciation one can approach the work with the proper critical lens. The overarching visual message contained in the painting depicts the moment when Jesus informed the apostles that one of them would betray him. When one examines the work it is fairly simple to understand how the apostles' reactions to Jesus depict their astonishment at his words. Da Vinci depicts them as astonished, crystallized in a performative, nearly ironic state of shock. Symbolically the image groups the apostles in groups of three, with each different group reacting to Jesus' announcement in subtle yet pronounced ways. The groupings of three hold obvious religious significance as the number is echoed throughout the Bible in a number of incarnations. Perhaps the most relevant such incarnation in the context of this work is that which refers to Jesus' resurrection after three days, as a direct result of his betrayal that led to his eventual crucifixion at the hands of the Romans. In one grouping, Bartholomew, James, son of Alphaeus and Andrew are depicted together as simple surprised. In another grouping, Judas Iscariot, Peter, and John are depicted together. In terms of Biblical significance this last grouping is the most relevant in terms of relation to Christ, as well as narrative significance within the painting. Peter and John represent two of the closest and Biblically significant disciples; also, as is well understood, Judas Iscariot is the one that would eventually betray Jesus. In the painting

Judas Iscariot is depicted as the shocked and withdrawn. Scholars have noted that this is Leonardo's attempt to depict the surprise Judas has experienced at Jesus' revealing his machinations (Steinberg 2001). Similarly, it's been argued that the bag Judas is clutching in his hand represents the money that he received from the individuals for turning Jesus over to them. Matthew, Jude Thaddeus and Simon the Zealot are depicted in another grouping. In this grouping the individuals are facing Simon, perhaps attempting to discern if he has any answers to the information that Jesus has just revealed.

Structurally the painting is constructed with three-point perspective and extends into the horizon through the view Da Vinci creates through the windows. The variety of colors adds to the painting through coating the disciples and the environment in different emotional tones. All of the disciples are depicted on one side of the table. Considering this aspect of the painting, some might find it slightly humorous that such a renowned work would have to make use of staging in such a manner to depict the actions of the work. In terms of progressive criticisms of the work, one might argue that with the disciples situated in such a stage-like manner, coupled with the performative expressions on their faces, Da Vinci has slyly incorporated a level of ironic distance between himself and actions being depicted.

References Steinberg, Leo. *Leonardo's Incessant 'Last Supper'*". New York: Zone Books, 2001.