# Mona lisa, ginevra da benci research paper samples

Art & Culture, Artists

## Leonardo da Vinci: Mona Lisa

Da Vinci's ' Mona Lisa' better known as Mona Lisa has captivated the hearts and minds of millions for several hundreds of years since its conception. It is truly a great work of art in that it is basically simple yet its true life approach makes it one of the most desirable paintings ever to grace a collection of great masters.

The comparison painting is the one of Ginevra da Benci which was painted by Leonardo in 1479/80, almost twenty five years before the Mona Lisa. Although it is a relatively early work by Leonardo, some of the stylistic features which were to come to fruition in Mona Lisa are already evident here, the serious facial expression and the background being amongst them. It is a powerful painting and one full of angst and sorrow especially in the faceless eyes which almost speak to you in their anguish.

Principally, Mona Lisa contains a visual expression of a woman in the height of her prime. Her staring gaze is undeterred by what is going on around her; she almost seems to be completely fixated with what is in the foreground demonstrating that life has a particular meaning to her. The facial expression is also dominated by largish eyes and an almost faint hinted edge of a smile although that is debatable.

The composition of the work is simple in that it makes use of pastel oils which form an intrinsic part of the material on offer. This also means that the subject has a certain brilliance about her which is instantly recognizable in this sense as well as a directness which is rather magisterial.

The identity of the woman in the painting has long been the subject of intense debate and this also means that the speculation on it will continue

for a long time to come. Many have said that ' Mona Lisa' was Leonardo's lover or close friend but the fact that he was rumoured to be homosexual seems to put paid to that argument. Others have speculated that she was some sort of helper or benefactress and this could be closer to the truth although nothing has ever been proven in this regard.

The portrait has been variously described as the best known painting in the world. It is thought to be a portrait of the wife of Francesco del Giocondo who was Lisa Gherardini. It is believed to have been painted between 1503 and 1506 and was acquired by the French Republic – it is permanently on display at the famous Louvre Museum in Paris. The painting has a unique expression of rarefied beauty but is also demonstrative in the fact that the eyes show a piercing kind of directness as well as sensuality. There has been speculation that the woman was in love with Leonardo Da Vinci although he was reputedly homosexual.

The black almost funeral like dress of the Mona Lisa has also inspired considerable debate. The artists placed the figure in a pyramid design whilse the light plays around in rather unique circumstances with a particular spotlight on her face and hands. She is portrayed quite similarly to the usual Madonnas who were portrayed at the time and at times, one almost mistakes her as being so. There is also an impression of a distance between the subject and those who observe her. She is also placed in an imaginary landscape which was another strikingly original feature for the time. There is also a sense of mysticism in the expression of the subject since she is seemingly welcoming the observer to some sort of silent communication. Other artists were also greatly influenced by this work especially Raphael in

his portrayal of Baldassare Castiglione which is also found at the Louvre. Most of all the painting truly demonstrates the beauty and intrinsic wonderment of Leonardo's capabilities when he was at the height of his powers as an artist. One cannot deny that this is truly one of the great paintings of the age and its value is surely unquestionable.

Visually the painting is not only striking but it is also extremely beautiful in every respect from the expression of ' Mona Lisa' onto the wonderment of the background and the subject's attire.

The composition of the materials which include oils and pastels add to the soft almost erotic touch of the painting. It is surely extremely sensual, especially the colour of the skin which comes across as extremely beautiful and light shaded, edifying a portrait of intrinsic wonderment and astonishing clarity on all counts. Yet one must also account for the personal relationship that Leonardo must have had with the sitter who seems to speak with us from beyond the grave, this portrait is surely her calling card for posterity in more ways than one.

Leonardo da Vinci was a man of many talents and also perhaps of many vices. Yet his capacity to thrill with this great painting has never been underestimated. It is surely one of the great paintings of the age and with its combination of beautiful colours and real life postures it speaks to our hearts with a directness that cannot be underestimated. It is definitely one of the greatest paintings of all time and deserves every accolade awarded to it.

The Mona Lisa remains a controversial work in some aspects but it is also an incredibly vivid portrayal of womanhood in a strikingly original way.

# Ginevra de' Benci

Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of Ginevra da Benci is slightly different although the expression is of a similar stance with seriousness and clarity amongst its main features. The painting was probably made by Leonardo in 1474 apparently to commemorate her marriage but there is no historical proof of the matter since she was apparently not the daughter of Amerigo de Benci, she was actually his wife. Critics have pointed out that the suggestiveness of the picture and the portrayal of a Juniper tree in the background behind the face add fuel to the theory that she was the wife of De Benci. The painting is currently at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D C and is the only painting by Leonorado da Vinci which is currently outside Europe. It was originally in the possession of the Dukes of Liechenstein but it was sold in 1967 for the then princely sum of USD 5 million.

There are hidden messages in the painting just as they are found in the Mona Lisa. First of all the juniper tree can be seen to be a pun on the subject's name since juniper and Ginevra are closely related, in fact the Italian word for juniper is ginepro. Still the expression of sorrow on Ginevra's face seems to imply that she was mourning some particular family member. The juniper comparison has been rejected by contemporary historians since the tree was actually a symbol of sorrow and loss in the Middle Ages so Ginevra can hardly have been celebrating her wedding with such an austere face. In fact the juniper tree was usually used to accompany the painting of widows. Here the similarities with Mona Lisa appear once again especially in the mystique behind the painting and the suggestive background.

There has also been much debate on the inscription at the back of the

painting which is written in Latin and which means ' Honour means Virtue'. There is also a juniper tree circled by a palm and a laurel which further emphasise Ginevra's name. A study of Ginevra's temperament in the portrait is useful here since she is very beautiful but also austere with a smile being completely absent from the face. She is almost identical to the Mona Lisa with her indifference to those who observe her. The painting once contained hands and a body but these were unfortunately lost when the painting was damaged.

## Conclusion

Italy was obviously seen as the most important centre in terms of the rise of the Renaissance. Amongst other factors was the rise of Italian city states such as Venice and Florence which were in them a hotbed of ideas and confrontations.

The artist who probably embodies the spirit of the Renaissance is Giotto. His methodical and almost spiritual canvases demonstrate the esteem in which he was held especially with regards to his religious works. He developed an innovative brushwork and his use of colours was also extremely bright and spiritual. Other artists who developed the elements of spiritualism and portraiture include Luca Della Robbia who was very well regarded as a portrait painter as well as Paolo Uccello who developed landscape and portraiture to a hitherto unheard of level. The same goes for Lorenzo Ghiberti who was described by the art historian Vasari as a highly diligent person, extremely devoted to his art. These two paintings by Leonardo Da Vinci hold together the same logical progression that was found in their predecessor's

work and everything is imbued with striking clarity throughout.

Although both portraits are different, they have many similarities. First and foremost is the expression of seriousness and reserved grief which is clear and almost cuts through us like a knife. Secondly there is the background with nature providing the mixed messages. Thirdly both subjects are women in their prime and who are in all probability widows. Leonardo skilfully leaves the viewer without much clues on the provenance of these paintings making us ask questions about their past which will probably never be solved. The gap of around 25 years between both paintings also suggests that Leonardo had improved considerably in his technique with the Mona Lisa nearing perfection.

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