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MONA LISA: MORE THAN A MYSTERIOUS SMILE

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Behind bulletproof glass in a gallery of the Louvre Museum in Paris, hangs one of the greatest masterpieces in the field of art, THE MONA LISA painted by Leonardo da Vinci somewhere between 1503 and 1509. It has been a part of the museum's collection since 1804

How did it become so famous?

Today whenever in a room, there is a talk about art, artists, paintings or anything related then, name Mona Lisa always pops out from somewhere. It is the most famous piece of artifacts of the modern era.

But for centuries, the Mona Lisa hung quietly in the Louvre, generally unnoticed, but on August 21, 1911, it was stolen right off the museum's wall in a heist that shocked the art world.

Author Seymour Reit says, "Someone walked into the Salon Carré, lifted it off the wall and went out with it! The painting was stolen Monday morning, but the interesting thing about it was that it wasn't 'til Tuesday at noon that they first realized it was gone."

After more than two years, in late 1913, a Florentine art dealer named Alfredo Geri received a letter from a man who

claimed to have the painting. Geri immediately contacted the police, who soon arrested Vincenzo Peruggia, an Italian carpenter who had been working at the Louvre at the time of the theft. Peruggia admitted that he had simply lifted the masterpiece from the four hooks upon which it hung, stuck it under his workman's tunic, and just walked out the door of the Louvre.

Once the Mona Lisa was returned to the Louvre, the French turned out in droves to see her, and soon, so did people from all over the globe. The small, simple painting of a maybe-smiling woman had become an overnight sensation, and was the most famous work of art in the world.

Who is the woman in the painting?

There have been various speculations from being referred as some prostitute to personification of the Bramante's Tempietto in Rome regarding the identity of the women in this painting.

Mona Lisa the Prostitute

It was argued by many that the subject in Mona Lisa was a prostitute because she doesn't have eyelashes or eyebrows, according to some history books,

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in Italy around the 16th century, the only women who were hairless on face with no eyebrow, no eyelashes and no moustache, were prostitutes and the way the hair on her head is worn in the painting, was the style of prostitute or an unmarried woman.

But a French engineer Pascal Cotte used Infrared Reflectography technique and found definitive proof that when Leonardo da Vinci painted the original portrait he included Mona Lisa's lashes and brows which was probably accidentally removed during cleaning or restoration work. Moreover, the 3D scans reveal that the woman was originally painted with her hair tied back in a bun, even though today it appears loose on her shoulders.

This process also assisted in revealing under drawings which shows that the fingers of the Mona Lisa's left hand were originally painted in a slightly different position than in the final portrait. And also provided information about the materials used and techniques employed.

Mona Lisa the Gay Lover

Silvano Vinceti, head of a research group called the National Committee for Cultural Heritage said: "The Mona Lisa is androgynous – half man and half woman. The painting was based on two models. The first was Lisa Gherardini and the second was Salai, Leonardo's apprentice." Gian Giacomo Caprotti, the male apprentice of Da Vinci

was fondly called Salai or Little Devil and is rumored to be the gay lover of the legendary artist. Vinceti says , "You see it particularly in Mona Lisa's nose, her forehead and her smile," he added, noting that these features are similar to other Da Vinci paintings which used Salai as a model, namely St John the Baptist, St Anne, and The Incarnate Angel. This theory is vastly opposed by several art professors such as Martin Kemp, professor emeritus of the history of art at Trinity College, Oxford, questioned the credibility of Vinceti's findings and said, "This is a mish-mash of known things, semi-known things and complete fantasy."

Mona Lisa or Lisa Gheradini

Amongst all the theories in regard with the true identity of the woman who was commissioned to sit for the portrait, the one which has most facts asserted to its side and accepted by majority of historians, artists, professors, etc. Is that she was Lisa Gherardini, wife of Francesco del Giocondo also known as Lisa del Giocondo.

The model, Lisa del Giocondo, was a member of the Gherardini family of Florence and Tuscany, and the wife of wealthy Florentine silk merchant Francesco del Giocondo. The painting is thought to have been commissioned for their new home, and to celebrate the birth of their second son, Andrea.

"Mona" was a common Italian contraction of "Madonna," meaning "my lady," the

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equivalent of the English "Madam," so the title means "Madam Lisa" this means the lady in the painting was from a high society and was a noblewoman.

Lisa and Francesco had five children: Piero, Camilla, Andrea, Giocondo, and Marietta, four of them between 1496 and 1507. National Research Council of Canada did 3D scan of painting using infrared technology. From the scans, it was revealed that the lady in the painting is wearing a Guarnello, which is a kind of veil that a pregnant woman used to wear at that time moreover it seems that she has a slight tummy with arms crossed around it, which suggests that she might have been pregnant.

A recently discovered marginal note by Agostino Vespucci, one-time assistant to the diplomat and writer Niccolò Machiavelli, records that Leonardo was working on a painting of "Lisa del Giocondo" in 1503.

There are many other theories and speculations regarding the inspiration behind painting like it was Da Vinci's self-portrait as a woman or his mother's portrait, etc. But they do not have a single relevant proof and seem a bit farfetched.

Is this the original Mona Lisa?

A recent study based on painting indicated that the estimated age of the Mona Lisa's face was 32.3 ± 5.6 years but the real

age of the Mona Lisa should probably be 23 or 24 years when the artwork was produced—assuming the woman portrayed really is Lisa del Giocondo because it was also at this age that she was pregnant.

In 1913 an English connoisseur Hugh Blaker acquired a painting from a manor house in Somerset, where it was thought to have been hanging for over a century. This painting came to be known as Isleworth Mona Lisa.

The Isle worth Mona Lisa is an early sixteenth-century oil on canvas painting depicting the same subject Lisa del Giocondo but at a younger age.

Physicist John F. Asmus, who had previously examined the Mona Lisa in the Louvre and investigated other works by Leonardo, published a computer image processing study in 1988 concluding that the brush strokes of the face in the painting were performed by the same artist responsible for the brush strokes of the face of the Mona Lisa in the Louvre.

A review of the painting in the Deseret News describes its tonality as being darker, and describes the colouring as being in "accordance with almost all the works attributed to Leonardo—that of a golden glow—while the finish is of a most minute character".

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Italian curator Lorenzo Cecconi, who also examined the painting in the 1920s, said that "the fusion of the tints of the flesh, especially in the eyes; the line which designs the nose, the mouth, and the oval of the face were remarkable, and indicated that "this may be a second work of the Great Leonardo".

In the same period, Renaissance scholar Arduino Colasanti thought "the upper part with the eyes and nose of the face" were definitely by Leonardo, and noted collector Ludovico Spiridon stated that "the face has been painted by Leonardo; no doubt of this at all". In the 1960s, Pulitzer claimed that "densitometry tests on the planes of face and hands show a gradual change of tone values from dark to light which only [Leonardo] da Vinci, with his amazing eyesight, was capable of".

Raphael who was inspired by Da Vinci also made a pen-and-ink sketch probably around 1505 after seeing the painting in progress, showed the sitter flanked by two columns. Similar columns are visible in the Isle worth picture and women in this painting also seem to be young.

Moreover, Leonardo is also known for often painting two versions of his works, and also leaving them unfinished, for his students to complete the missing portions. For example, two versions of Virgin of the

Rocks along with two versions of St. John the Baptist and of Leda and the Swan, and two versions each of drawings of Isabella d'Este, the Adoration of the Magi, and St. Anne. There are believes that he even painted the second version of THE LAST SUPPER, the one found in an abbey in Tongerlo, Belgium.

But there are historians who believe that Da Vinci painted only one Mona Lisa and also that the lady in the painting is Lisa del Giocondo and the reason that she seems more aged than she actually was at the time of painting is that she during 1503, Leonardo had no income source, which may in part explain his interest in a private portrait. But later that year, he most likely had to delay his work on Mona Lisa when he received payment for starting The Battle of Anghiari, which was a more valuable commission and was contracted to be complete by February 1505.

In 1506, Leonardo left the portrait [Mona Lisa] unfinished and did not deliver it to his client because he was not paid for the work. He travelled with the painting throughout his life, and may have completed and modified it according to the age of the subject in his mind many years later in France, around 1516.

Other Mysteries

There are many other mysteries related with Mona Lisa like The right eye have the letters "LV" written while the left

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eye's letters are not clearly recognizable but could be Letter "B" or "CE". A number 72 can be seen in the background in the arch. Or the hidden animals in the background of the painting and of course the mysterious smile.

Researchers of Dutch developed software for "emotion recognition" and ran it for Mona Lisa Painting in 2005. Finally, it was found that Mona Lisa painting is less than 1% neutral, 2% angry, 6% fearful, 9% disgusted and 83% happy. Thus creating a perfect ambiguity between happy and sad.