



Leonardo da Vinci: A Biography

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Leonardo da Vinci was an Italian polymath whose areas of interest included invention, painting, sculpting, architecture, science, music, mathematics, engineering, literature, anatomy, geology, astronomy, botany, writing, history, and cartography. He has been variously called the father of paleontology, ichnology, and architecture, and is widely considered one of the greatest painters of all time. Sometimes credited with the inventions of the parachute, helicopter and tank, his genius epitomized the Renaissance humanist ideal.

Many historians and scholars regard Leonardo as the prime exemplar of the "Universal Genius" or "Renaissance Man", an individual of "unquenchable curiosity" and "feverishly inventive imagination". According to art historian Helen Gardner, the scope and depth of his interests were without precedent in recorded history, and "his mind and personality seem to us superhuman, while the man himself mysterious and remote". Marco Rosci, however, notes that while there is much speculation regarding his life and personality, his view of the world was logical rather than mysterious, and that the empirical methods he employed were unorthodox for his time.

Born out of wedlock to a notary, Piero da Vinci, and a peasant woman, Caterina, in Vinci in the region of Florence, Leonardo was educated in the studio of the renowned Florentine painter Andrea del Verrocchio. Much of his earlier working life was spent in the service of Ludovico il Moro in Milan. He later worked in Rome, Bologna and Venice, and he spent his last years in France at the home awarded to him by Francis I.

Leonardo was, and is, renowned primarily as a painter. Among his works, the Mona Lisa is the most famous and most parodied portrait and The Last Supper the most reproduced religious painting of all time, with their fame approached only by Michelangelo's The Creation of Adam. Leonardo's drawing of the Vitruvian Man is also regarded as a cultural icon, being reproduced on items as varied as the euro coin, textbooks, and T-shirts. Perhaps fifteen of his paintings have survived. Nevertheless, these few works, together with his notebooks, which contain drawings, scientific diagrams, and his thoughts on the nature of painting, compose a contribution to later generations of artists rivalled only by that of his contemporary, Michelangelo.

Leonardo is revered for his technological ingenuity. He conceptualised flying machines, a type of armoured fighting vehicle, concentrated solar power, an adding machine, and the double hull, also outlining a rudimentary theory of plate tectonics. Relatively few of his designs were constructed or were even feasible during his lifetime, as the modern scientific approaches to metallurgy and engineering were only in their infancy during the Renaissance, but some of his smaller inventions, such as an automated bobbin winder and a machine for testing the tensile strength of wire, entered the world of manufacturing unheralded. A number of Leonardo's most practical inventions are nowadays displayed as working models at the Museum of Vinci. He made substantial discoveries in anatomy, civil engineering, optics, and hydrodynamics, but he did not publish his findings and they had no direct influence on later science.

Today, Leonardo is widely recognized as one of the most diversely talented individuals ever to have lived.

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