



A NIGHT AT THE LOUVRE: LEONARDO DA VINCI

EDUCATIONAL KIT ACCOMPANYING THE FILM





Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of a Woman*, known as *La Belle Ferronnière* (detail),
c. 1495-1499, oil on wood, coll. Musée du Louvre

To accompany the screening of the film “A Night at the Louvre: Leonardo da Vinci”, the Musée du Louvre is making an educational kit available to primary and secondary school teachers. It provides them with keys to the work of Leonardo da Vinci and activities to be carried out with their groups before and after the screening.

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LEONARDO DA VINCI

OR “THE FREEDOM TO NEVER FINISH ANYTHING”

A conversation with Vincent Delieuvin and Louis Frank, curators of the “Leonardo da Vinci” exhibition (24 October 2019 – 24 February 2020).

Interview by Valérie Coudin for *Grande Galerie magazine* (no. 49).

The “Leonardo da Vinci” exhibition is not a “classic” retrospective: it offers a strong interpretation of the artist’s genius to show a Leonardo, who, thanks to science, which offers infinite scope for study, pursues a passionate quest for a perfect painting, a never-completed image of the complexity of the world.

What are the challenges of this exhibition?

Vincent Delieuvin: To put painting back at the centre of Leonardo da Vinci’s work and thought. Most of the colossal bibliography devoted to him perpetuates the idea that painting was above all “a thing of the mind” for him, and that he dedicated most of his time to conceptual thinking and searching for ideas.

The scientific analyses conducted during the restoration of *Saint Anne*, *Saint John the Baptist* and the *Belle Ferronnière*, the study of workshop copies but also of his writings reveal that the reality is quite different. He conceived the compositions very quickly and what occupied him above all was the pictorial execution, the noblest part for him, a true recreation of nature.

He was trained in the Florentine workshop of a very great master, Andrea del Verrocchio, who is essentially a sculptor. What was Leonardo’s relationship to sculpture?

Louis Frank: The first part of the exhibition centres on Verrocchio’s great bronze, *Christ and Saint Thomas*, and Leonardo’s *Drapery Studies*, which are intimately linked to the creation of this extraordinary sculpture.

These sublime studies are much more than a simple exercise. For Leonardo, they serve as a pretext for learning about light and shadow, and for analysing chiaroscuro. This subject sets him apart from all other painters and illustrates his transition from the world of sculpture to the world of painting, or, more precisely, to what his painting will be: an art based on the construction of space by light.

In all his great compositions, from the *Virgin of the Rocks* to the *Mona Lisa*, the hallmark of the *Drapery Studies* will be evident.

What do his early works reveal?

V. D.: The first dated drawing we know of, a landscape executed in 1473, already reveals Leonardo's fascination with landscape and the movements of nature. He does not draw a static nature, but already attempts to capture the movement of leaves in trees or the movement of water in a waterfall. As for his early paintings, *The Annunciation*, *The Madonna of the Carnation* and *Ginevra de' Benci*, these are very accomplished works, characterised by a perfection of form, and an exquisite attention to detail inspired by the Flemish masters. *The Benois Madonna* of St Petersburg opens a new chapter in his art, due to the movement and expression instilled in the figures, including the radiant smile of the Virgin, the first of a long series.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Madonna and Child*, known as the *Madonna with a Fruit Bowl*, c. 1478-1480, pen and brown ink, brown wash on stylus strokes and metalpoint (lead?), coll. Musée du Louvre.

Alongside the analyses of his drawings and paintings, you carried out extensive studies on Leonardo's sources in the sixteenth century. How did these two approaches come together?

L. F.: These two approaches ended up coinciding perfectly one day when we were discussing Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*. This text offers the first systematic contemporary interpretation, by one of its actors, of the large-scale cultural movement that was the Italian Renaissance. The construction of Vasari's work and the central place that it attributes to Leonardo enable us to understand the development of his art in light of the concepts of his own time. This differs from the classical representation of his art found in all the monographs and exhibitions, which is articulated with historical eras supposed to correspond to Leonardo's periods in Florence, Milan, Rome, etc.

What new light does this shed on his work?

V. D.: We propose a new reading of Leonardo's life, in which his achievements do not correspond to his travels. For example, the first pivotal moment comes in the 1470s, when he masters a fascinating and definitive drawing style by no longer seeking, as in Pollaiuolo's beautiful draughtsmanship, to draw a continuous line to reproduce forms perfectly. From this point on, he draws discontinuous contours, superimposes ideas, and fragments and distorts anatomies. Above all, he seeks to capture movement and energy as well as the interaction between figures to tell a story. In this very new practice, which he will call *componimento inculto*, literally "intuitive composition", what matters is movement. It is also necessary to relate this great freedom in his drawing style to the advice he gives in his writings to practice, to invent, to observe seemingly incoherent forms, clouds or the stains on walls. By dint of looking back over his ideas, his own drawings also become kinds of stains within which he discovered forms that suited his story.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Study for Saint Anne: Drapery of the Virgin*, c. 1507-1510, black chalk, black chalk wash, white and black pigments applied in tempera, coll. Musée du Louvre.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Woman's Head Almost in Profile*, metalpoint heightened with white on blue prepared paper, coll. Musée du Louvre.

How did Vasari's text inform the design of the exhibition?

L. F.: We reinterpreted the two categories which, for Vasari, are the essential foundations of *modernity* and by which the Renaissance was not only the rediscovery of Antiquity, but the surpassing of Antiquity: *freedom* and the imitation of life. These two concepts form two of the four sections of the exhibition.

What is this freedom that Leonardo conquered?

L. F.: It is a freedom that is exercised in art, the graphic and pictorial freedom we have just been talking about, and it is also an extraordinary and paradoxical freedom in social life, the freedom an artist wished to allow himself to not finish, to never finish anything! Vasari insists on this aspect in the *Lives of the Artists* and, for his contemporaries who all knew him, it was a rather striking feature. We have not preserved the contract for Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari* – the vast mural he painted for the Great Council Hall of the Palazzo della Signoria in Florence – but we do have a deliberation dating from 1504, which sets out the painter's duties. The Signoria stated only one requirement: that Leonardo deliver the cartoon for the composition. It obviously feared that he would not complete the painting. Similarly, Pope Leo X did not have great confidence in Leonardo and preferred to commission more *efficient* artists. While it took Leonardo twenty years to not finish a small painted panel, Michelangelo and Raphael covered huge surfaces in the time allotted to them.

V. D.: Yes, but a small unfinished panel, the *Mona Lisa*, became a sort of monument equivalent to the Sistine Chapel! And this freedom to not finish is the opposite of the way he produced the paintings of his youth, which are perfectly finished, like Flemish paintings. Even if, on occasion, contingencies can be invoked to explain why he does not finish his works, there is no reason why he should never finish a small panel like his *Portrait of a Musician*. In Leonardo's case, the work of art itself becomes a kind of drawing, in which there must always be this freedom to perfect things. The form is always open, in the process of becoming. Just look at the *Saint Jerome* in the Vatican.

Which of Leonardo's paintings best expresses this imitation of life?

L. F.: In Vasari's book, the imitation of life is the portrait of Lisa del Giocondo. Lisa is physiological life, breathing, humidity, blood, heartbeats – that's what is painted. Vasari was the first to describe this painting, yet he never saw it. His text echoes an interpretation that is not directly his, but that of the people who have admired the work. No one had ever seen such a painting!

Why are the manuscripts kept at the Institut de France so important to understanding Leonardo's practice?

V. D.: The loan of these twelve manuscript notebooks, which are kept in the Institute's library and very rarely seen, is fundamental: they provide an extraordinary insight into what Leonardo called the "science of painting". A recognised artist since the 1480s, having acquired this freedom in the practice of drawing and then pictorial art, he had nonetheless only completed a few engineering studies and for the most part artistic drawings. From the end of the 1480s, he began to keep notebooks in various formats.

What subjects do these manuscripts deal with?

L. F.: Leonardo deals with the whole universe and its fundamental structures: mathematics, geometry, physics, mechanics – that is, the study of movement, equilibrium and weights –, fluid mechanics, optics and astronomy; he studies geology, geography, hydrology, zoology, botany, anatomy, town planning, architecture, etc. Everything! Why? Because, as he wishes to represent or recreate the real world, he needs to know its intimate essence: all sciences thus become instruments of painting.

It's an infinite project...

L. F.: He remains steadfastly committed to this project, which, as a result, in all its aspects, is deeply linked to incompleteness. This infinite quest, which occupies him until the end of his life, is in fact never external to painting, since it is constitutive, for Leonardo, of his desire to be a painter. And it is painting itself that is the supreme science: it annexes all the others, since it is necessary to master them in order to be able to recreate the world through painting. Painting, the supreme science, is thus a divine science. Freedom is accomplished in science, and the freedom based on science opens the way to the perfect imitation of life.

In addition to everything you have just said, what would you like the visitor to understand about Leonardo?

V. D.: I would like the exhibition to make visitors understand the true meaning of the word "genius". Leonardo is someone who followed through with his ideas, in a way that is still relevant to us today – that of committing to a path out of passion and letting it guide us, with total freedom, a freedom known and accepted by all our contemporaries.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT LEONARDO DA VINCI

Leonardo da Vinci is probably the most popular artist of all time. Already much admired during his lifetime, he has been the subject of countless studies, interpretations, and even over-interpretations, some of them fanciful. Today, he epitomises the figure of the multifaceted genius, at the same time a painter, architect, engineer, man of science and philosopher. While some of these facets are truly part of the character, others belong to a personality imagined over the centuries by art historians, artists and writers.

This document presents an overview of some of the clichés about Leonardo da Vinci liable to distort our understanding of this extraordinary artist, and offers arguments to help visitors distinguish between the true and the false.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Saint John the Baptist*,
c. 1508-1519, oil on wood, coll. Musée du Louvre.

LEONARDO DA VINCI WAS A SCIENTIFIC GENIUS

Very often, this is how Leonardo da Vinci is presented: as a white-bearded genius, a great scientist, gifted in all disciplines and credited with revolutionising the arts and sciences. Leonardo was blessed with an exceptional imagination, but this idea of a pioneering scientific genius must be qualified. While it is true that he carried out a great deal of research in the most varied fields – botany, hydraulics, mechanics, cartography, anatomy, mathematics and optics – Leonardo’s actual scientific contributions are a source of debate among science historians. For, while some of his studies are remarkable (notably those on water, the flight of birds and movement) and some of his theories are innovative (in applied mechanics, for example, where he demonstrates the impossibility of building a perpetual motion machine), it would be an exaggeration to consider Leonardo as a scientific genius in the modern sense of the term.

There are many reasons for this:

- First, he never published anything in his lifetime. His notebooks and sketchbooks, which were not discovered until the late nineteenth century, only contain drafts of scientific treatises that he probably intended to write, but which have never reached a readership;
- second, in spite of his discoveries, there is no law or scientific principle theorised by Leonardo da Vinci, as there is for Pythagoras or Archimedes;
- finally, his method, based on observation and experimentation, is certainly modern, but it remains quite intuitive and empirical. Leonardo often proceeds “by feeling his way”, starting from one of his intuitions or from the idea of a predecessor, which he tries to put to the test of experience and the senses.

LEARN MORE: THE RENAISSANCE MAN

Leonardo da Vinci perfectly embodies the figure of the Renaissance man. With the spread of humanist culture, man’s knowledge and intellectual capacities were placed at the centre of everything. At this time, the barriers between various fields of study began to disappear and the vision of the “universal” man whose intellect embraces all spheres of knowledge began to emerge. Leonardo trained in one of the largest workshops in Florence, that of Andrea del Verrocchio, a truly “polytechnic” laboratory. He did not attend a university, therefore, but acquired a solid theoretical knowledge by educating himself. He taught himself Latin and read the classics, eventually building up considerable knowledge in various disciplines. He thus became the perfect Renaissance man, gifted in the most diverse activities, both practical and theoretical.

So why is he considered a scientific genius?

The myth of Leonardo's scientific genius arose when his manuscripts were discovered and published at the end of the nineteenth century, a period in which there was great belief in scientific progress. His sketches and illustrations showed he was a man of many talents and insatiable curiosity touching on all fields of knowledge. When his drawings came to light, it seemed that he had imagined everything and discovered everything. And while it is true that Leonardo had brilliant intuitions, his designs owe much to those of his predecessors and contemporaries. Leonardo did not start from a blank slate: he was above all a man of his time.

LEONARDO DA VINCI INVENTED MACHINES USED TODAY

It is often said that Leonardo da Vinci invented a large number of machines, including the helicopter, the tank, the submarine, the parachute, the diving suit and so on. His popularity owes much to his engineering work. While it is true that Leonardo had many intuitions in designing countless mechanisms, these claims must be qualified for several reasons:

- Some of his “inventions” are not actually inventions: he adapted drawings and ideas from his predecessors. This is particularly the case for the parachute;
- there is no proof that he built the machines he designed. It is very likely that this was not the case, as many drawings are incomplete (lacking information on size, materials, etc.). For the specialists, these are therefore primarily fairly advanced ideas, but not workable diagrams;
- even if he had built them, most of his machines would not have worked. For example, the wings he imagined attaching to a man's back for the “ornithopter” would have weighed 750 kilos, so it would have been impossible to make them fly without an engine;
- Finally, Leonardo did not publish anything during his lifetime, and the notebooks containing his drawings and diagrams were not rediscovered until several centuries after his death. They therefore had no direct influence on subsequent research.

LEARN MORE: THE EXAMPLE OF THE HELICOPTER

Leonardo da Vinci designed a “flying screw”, consisting of an iron cable around which a canvas unfolds in the shape of a propeller. He imagined that this “screw” could rise into the air if it were rotated quickly. Except that in his day, engines didn't exist and no force could rotate a device that large (with a roughly ten-metre span) fast enough to make it take off. This drawing is therefore more an illustration of a theoretical scientific principle than an actual invention, even though the propeller and the helicopter would later be based on the same principle. We can say that Leonardo had an intuition of what the helicopter could be, but he did not really invent it.

So, where does this reputation as a great engineer come from?

Beyond his great scientific and technological creativity, his popularity is largely due to the technical and aesthetic quality of his drawings, which are exceptionally precise, efficient and beautiful! Specialists even argue that Leonardo da Vinci's major contribution to the history of technology is the invention of the engineer's drawing, more than real working machines. Indeed, he represents the machines he imagined with the same precision and care with which he depicted human anatomy or geographical maps. His drawings are so well executed that the machines look real!

LEARN MORE:

THE *MONA LISA*, A WORK NEVER DELIVERED...

Commissioned by a wealthy Florentine silk merchant, Francesco del Giocondo, who wanted Leonardo to paint his wife's portrait, the work was never delivered. Leonardo began the painting around 1503, but, for various reasons (his many travels, his multiple research pursuits), he didn't finish it and, in 1516, brought it with him to France when invited by François I. He kept it in his studio until his death in 1519, constantly modifying and improving it while testing out his technical inventions on the portrait (on light and chiaroscuro, on modelling, facial expressions and the expression of thought, on elements as imperceptible as air and atmosphere).

AS AN ARTIST, LEONARDO WAS GUIDED ONLY BY HIS INSPIRATION

In the collective imagination, Leonardo embodies all the stereotypes concerning the figure of the artist: solitary, extravagant, even eccentric, always lost in his ideas and guided only by his inspiration. Here again, this somewhat caricatural vision needs to be qualified.

The idea of creative idleness, which supposedly consists in not appearing to work, being absorbed by ideas and research and then suddenly giving birth to a work of art, does not correspond to reality!

Like all artists of his time, Leonardo had to work hard to satisfy his clients by producing the works they commissioned. Throughout his life, he worked for rich merchants, lords and religious orders, and was employed in the service of various princes and rulers, seeking the ideal situation with as few obligations as possible so that he would have time to devote himself to his research. From Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan, to the Republic of Florence, Caesar Borgia and his final years with François I, Leonardo was above all a man of the court. And like any courtier, he was tasked by his masters with various duties: he painted and proposed sculptures, architecture projects, machines and weapons of war, in keeping with what was requested of him. He designed theatre sets, created automatons and costumes for princely celebrations, composed and performed songs and melodies to entertain the court. His research, drawings and some of his paintings were carried out alongside his main occupations.

So why then do we have this image of the artist always absorbed by his ideas?

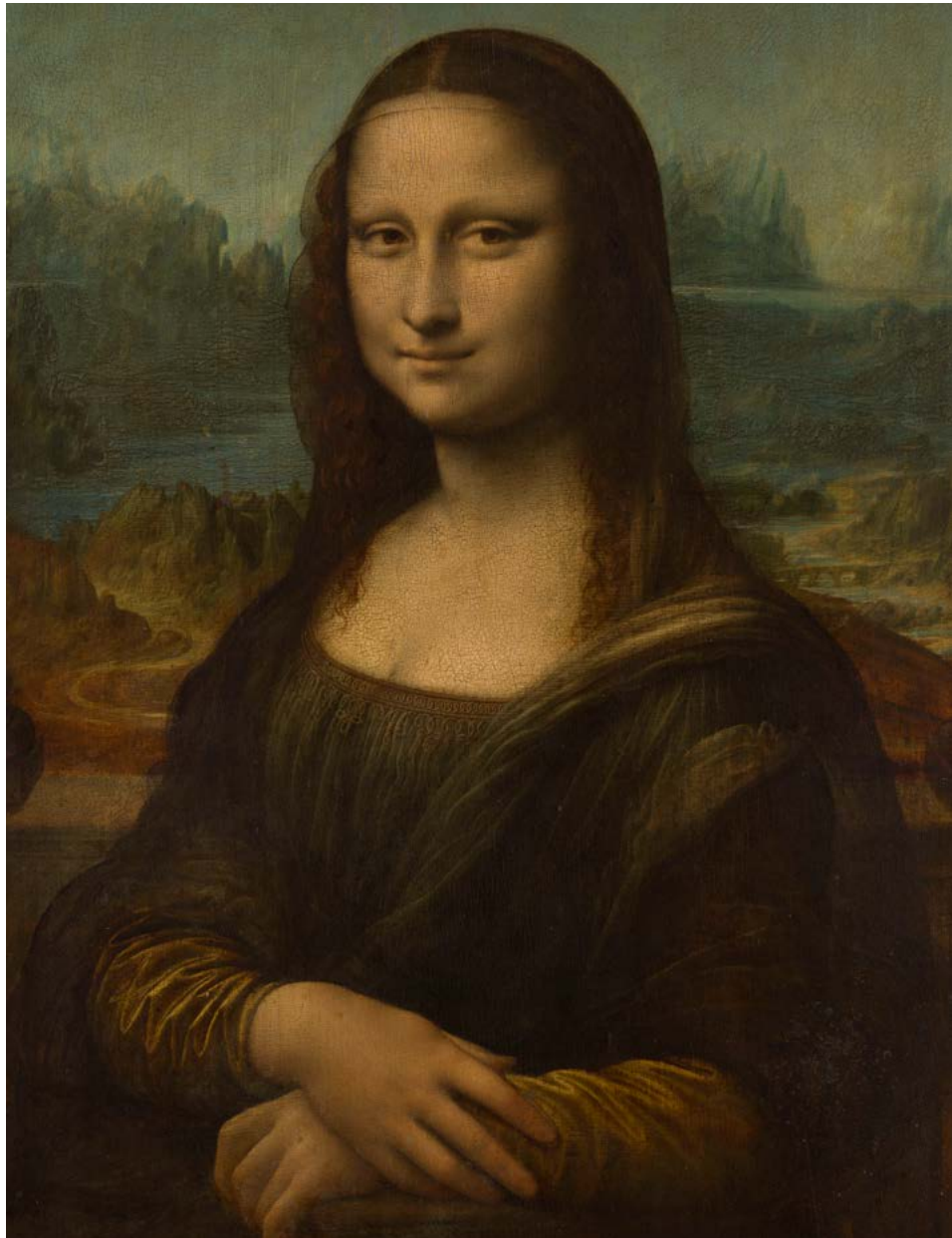
Two reasons have contributed to the propagation of this image.

– Leonardo's vision of art: in his view, artistic creation was no longer just a manual activity, as was the case until the end of the Middle Ages, but above all an intellectual one. Although this conception is consistent with Renaissance thinking, Leonardo theorised it, and one of his most famous phrases has gone down in history: "Painting is a thing of the mind." The artist's mind must therefore be occupied by ideas. And to make room for ideas, he needs to be free of all constraints. Ideally, therefore, the artist should, in Leonardo's view, work as little as possible. But in practice, he has to provide for himself! That is why he sought the protection of a prince all his life, so that he would have time to nourish his imagination and give shape to his ideas.

– Leonardo often left his works unfinished: he dabbled in everything but never finished anything! This image was forged in his own time, disseminated by Vasari, the art historian who wrote the first biography of the artist in 1550, thirty years after his death. Indeed, in his long career, Leonardo produced only about twenty paintings (at least that is the number we know of). And many of them are not finished. It has to be said that he set an extremely high standard: painting was a science for him, and every work he produced had to be perfect. This would prompt him to undertake extremely detailed research (in anatomy, botany, geology, etc.) for each new creation. His quest for perfection in pictorial execution could last for several years as a result.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE *MONA LISA*

Based on the most frequent comments from visitors – sometimes accurate, sometimes fanciful – this document provides arguments to deconstruct some of the misconceptions about this painting.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of Lisa Gherardini, wife of Francesco del Giocondo*, known as the *Mona Lisa*, *La Gioconda* or *La Joconde*, c. 1503-1519, oil on wood, coll. Musée du Louvre

“THE *MONA LISA* EXHIBITED IN THE LOUVRE IS NOT THE REAL *MONA LISA*!”

Although some visitors may doubt it, the painting on display in the Musée du Louvre is indeed the “real” *Mona Lisa*, by Leonardo da Vinci.

Why does this doubt persist? The iconic status of the *Mona Lisa* and the infatuation it arouses prevents many visitors from seeing it as a work of art among others: it’s incredible, it can’t be the real *Mona Lisa*!

Moreover, the habit of seeing it represented in all kinds of mediums (from poster to postcard, cup to sock, or pencil to tie), of being familiar with it as a reproduced and therefore infinitely reproducible image, can sow doubt about the very existence of a “real” *Mona Lisa* before one sees it in reality.

Once the visitor is inside in the museum, standing in front of the original work, the *Mona Lisa* can disappear behind its own myth.

Indeed, as soon as the portrait was made it became very famous, and the artists who travelled to admire it were so fascinated by it that they made copies, interpretations or variations. At least one hundred and fifty copies were made by pupils of the great master or by other artists, such as Raphael, and they were already in circulation in Leonardo’s time.

LEARN MORE: THE *MONA LISA* IN THE COLLECTIONS

We can precisely trace the painting’s journey and how it entered the museum’s collections. In 1516, Leonardo da Vinci responded to François I’s invitation to come to France, where he took up residence at the Château du Clos Lucé in Amboise. The *Mona Lisa* travelled with him, since in 1517 it is mentioned in the account of the Cardinal of Aragon’s visit to Leonardo. Subsequently, the work was acquired by François I, who hung it in the Château de Fontainebleau. In the following century, Louis XIV brought it to Paris, where it moved successively from the Louvre Palace to the Tuileries Palace. It was then hung in the Palace of Versailles. During the Revolution, it entered the collections of the Musée Central des Arts de la République, the future Musée du Louvre. It is curious to note that it was not exhibited when the Museum was inaugurated in 1793. It would not go on display until 1797, when it was added to the collection of small Italian paintings.

THE *MONA LISA* DURING THE WAR

Between 1938 and 1945, the *Mona Lisa* was smuggled out of the Louvre several times. Thanks to the audacity of the director of the National Museums at the time, Jacques Jaujard, it travelled through France from hiding place to hiding place, concealed in a box: it was held at the Château de Chambord twice, in Louvigny, at the Abbey of Loc-Dieu, in Montauban and in Montal. It returned to the museum in June 1945.

“THE *MONA LISA* IS A MAN!”

There are countless hypotheses about the identity of the *Mona Lisa*: Leonardo's mother, Isabelle d'Este, a self-portrait of Leonardo or of one of his pupils.

The physical appearance of the *Mona Lisa* surprises and sometimes disturbs some visitors, who judge her physical features to be rather masculine. It is true that her beauty no longer corresponds entirely to our contemporary canons! Leonardo preferred to paint the model in her natural state. But she is indeed a woman, and we know her name. The most probable hypothesis, which is almost unanimously accepted by specialists, comes from two concordant sources, a commentary written in 1503 by Agostino Vespucci and Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, published in 1550. According to these two texts, the model for the *Mona Lisa* was Lisa del Giocondo, the wife of a wealthy silk merchant who had asked Leonardo da Vinci to paint her portrait. It was her name, del Giocondo, feminised as Gioconda and then Gallicised as *Joconde*, that gave the painting its name. It also was known as *Monna Lisa*, “Monna” being the abbreviation of the Italian word “Madonna” which means “My Lady”. The portrait may have been commissioned by her husband, Francesco del Giocondo, to celebrate the birth of their third child and the purchase of a new house in the centre of Florence.

“THE *MONA LISA* FOLLOWS US WITH HER EYES.”

In the Musée du Louvre, when in front of the painting, many visitors walk back and forth to check if the *Mona Lisa*'s eyes follow them as they move. Indeed, this is the impression given by the painting, even if it is not the only one to produce this effect.

Leonardo da Vinci chose to represent the model at life size, in three-quarter profile, the torso slightly twisted, the head turned to the left while the gaze is directed to the opposite side. This dynamic posture contributes to the visitor's impression of being followed by the gaze.

This impression is reinforced by the realism that Leonardo succeeded in imparting to his work. He wanted his *Mona Lisa* to look as real and as alive as possible. To achieve this, he elevated his *sfumato* technique (a pictorial technique that blurs contours) to perfection, particularly around the eyes and lips. It is a very meticulous painting technique, which consists of superimposing glazes, i.e. very thin layers of diluted, almost transparent paint.

The result? No brushstrokes or drawn lines are visible, the shapes are soft, subtle, almost enveloped by a light smokiness, and the modelling of the face is extremely real. This gives the impression of a vibrant and mobile gaze.

LEARN MORE: THE BIRTH OF A MYTH

The *Mona Lisa* is probably the most famous painting in the world today. This fame dates back to when it was first created: the *Mona Lisa* was already copied by several artists during Leonardo's lifetime. Nonetheless, Giorgio Vasari can be credited with forging the painting's legend: in 1550 (that is to say more than 30 years after Leonardo's death), he published *Lives of the Artists*, in which he describes the *Mona Lisa* as a "work more divine than human to behold, considered to be wondrous because so true to life".

Centuries later, in 1911, the fame of the *Mona Lisa* was further amplified by an event that caused a scandal: its theft, by an Italian who wanted to return the work to his country. The disappearance of the painting was reported all over the world and a photo of the *Mona Lisa* was reproduced in many newspapers, thus widely disseminating its image. When it was retrieved two years later, the painting acquired a true status as an art icon. Ever since, the *Mona Lisa* has continued to fascinate, but for modern artists it has also become the symbol of a certain classicism to be challenged and surpassed, which explains the many subversions to which it has been subjected. Among the most famous are Marcel Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q* in 1919 or Salvador Dali's *Self-Portrait as Mona Lisa* in 1954. Contemporary artists have also proposed interpretations of the famous face, namely Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Banksy, to name a few.

"THE LOUVRE WON'T LOAN THE *MONA LISA*!"

Apart from its theft in 1911, the *Mona Lisa* has left the Louvre only twice, and each time its journey caused a sensation: in 1963 to go on display in Washington and New York, and in 1974 to feature in an exhibition in Tokyo and then Moscow.

Why doesn't the Louvre lend the *Mona Lisa* to museums so that other publics outside its own visitors can enjoy it? There is a simple answer to this frequently asked question: today, because of the poor condition of its support (a poplar panel barely 12 millimetres thick, now warped and cracked), the painting can no longer be loaned, nor can it leave its isothermal case, except once a year in order to study its "health".

Climatic shocks and transport vibrations could have terrible consequences. But we find its effigy everywhere: in the cinema, in novels and comic strips, advertising posters and so on. The image of the *Mona Lisa* has become part of our daily lives. It is reproduced on thousands of objects and gadgets. A collection of 11,000 objects reproducing the *Mona Lisa* was recently donated to the Musée du Louvre by a researcher in hydrology, Jean Margat, who has spent years researching, collecting and cataloguing as many gadgets (but also works of art, stamps, postcards, posters and books) as possible bearing the image of the *Mona Lisa*.



ACTIVITIES TO CARRY OUT

WITH MY GROUP

LOUVRE

LIKE A PAGE FROM LEONARDO'S NOTEBOOK

Observation activity

Objectives:

The aim of this activity is to have the pupils create a notebook of surprises and curiosities to experiment with the starting point of Leonardo da Vinci's thought process, namely observation and note-taking.

Places: to be carried out at school.

Public: all levels (ages 6 and up).

Materials: drawing pages or notebooks, pencils, pens, erasers.

1

BEFORE THE SCREENING: UNDERSTANDING OBSERVATION

1. Observe the pages of Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks: they are covered with writing, small sketches, observations, ideas, etc. Leonardo didn't work on a single subject at the same time, he put his ideas and observations down on paper as they came to him.
2. With the whole group, consult the Louvre's Italian Renaissance visitor itinerary featuring Leonardo, Raphael and Titian (<https://www.louvre.fr/en/routes/leonardo-raphael-titian>) and pick out five works.
3. Take a notebook and dedicate a page to each work you have chosen. Observe each work and record your observations by taking drawn and/or written notes. Answer this question: what surprises me and draws my attention (characters, landscapes, drapery or accessories, architecture, etc.)?

2

DURING THE SCREENING: CONTINUE THE OBSERVATION

The work can continue, during the screening, on these three paintings: what surprises me, what draws my attention?

- Leonardo da Vinci, *Saint Anne, the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus Playing with a Lamb*, known as *Saint Anne* (c. 1503-1519).
- Marco d'Oggiono (after Leonardo da Vinci), *The Last Supper* (c. 1506-1509).
- Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist and an Angel*, known as *The Virgin of the Rocks* (c. 1483-1486).

Then develop these three themes:

- nature and landscape;
- the body and the human figure;
- architecture and space.



Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist and an Angel*, known as *The Virgin of the Rocks*, c. 1483-1486, panel transposed to canvas, coll. Musée du Louvre.

AFTER THE SCREENING: DO A REVIEW OF THE EXERCISE USING THE NOTEBOOKS

For each work/theme, the pupils answer these questions: what drew my attention?

What details/parts of the work did I choose to draw? What words did I write?

Pupils can also continue to use their notebooks in other activities / exercises to do with Leonardo da Vinci.

For pupils who need more guidance, they can use this chart for note-taking practice, completing it for each chosen work.

	DRAWINGS/SKETCHES	WORD (IMPRESSIONS, DESCRIPTION, ETC.)
CHARACTERS		
LANDSCAPES OR ARCHITECTURE		
DETAILS OF DRAPERIES OR ACCESSORIES (JEWELLERY, HATS, CLOTHES, ETC.)		
OTHER		

JOURNEY INTO A PAINTING

Sensorial activity

Objectives: the aim of this activity is to accompany pupils in a sensorial discovery of one of Leonardo da Vinci's masterpieces: *Saint Anne, the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus Playing with a Lamb*, known as *Saint Anne* (c. 1503-1519).

The idea is to gradually have the children "enter" the painting, starting from tangible elements and moving towards a more general understanding of the work. The sentences in italics provide some content for the teacher's use.

Places: to be done at school.

Public: cycles 1 to 3 (ages 4 to 11).

Materials: details of the work, tactile elements (see "before the screening"), photocopies of the painting, pencils, rulers.

1

BEFORE THE SCREENING: GENERATING A DIALOGUE OF THE SENSES

- Show pupils five details of the work, without showing them the entire painting:
 - a detail of the rock in the foreground;
 - a detail of the tree in the background;
 - a detail of the veil on Saint Anne's forehead;
 - a detail of Mary's blue mantle;
 - a detail of the lamb's body.
- Gather the following items (corresponding to the selected details):
 - a fairly thick fabric reminiscent of Mary's mantle;
 - a piece of lace or tulle to evoke the very light veil worn by Saint Anne;
 - some sheep's wool;
 - a tree leaf;
 - a pebble.
- Place the items in bags and have the children touch them without seeing them. Ask them to try to associate each item with a detail of the work. In this way, the first approach to the painting involves two senses: sight and touch.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Saint Anne, the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus Playing with a Lamb*, known as *Saint Anne*, 1503-1519, oil on wood, coll. Musée du Louvre.

- Identify the painting through the details observed in class and explore the work through the following observational questions.

1. Identifying the characters and actions

- How many characters are there in this painting? How many women, men and animals?
- What is the child doing with the lamb? Is he playing? Is he hurting it? Look at the child's eyes. Who is he looking at?
- He is looking at the woman who is leaning towards him. Who could she be in relation to him? How is she dressed? What is she doing? Is she trying to help the child to get on the lamb? Or to stop him?
- This woman is sitting on another woman's lap. Who is this other woman looking at? Who do you think this woman might be in relation to the other characters?

The figures in this painting are Mary (in blue), sitting on her mother's lap (Saint Anne) and leaning towards her son (Jesus).

2. Observing the landscape

- Examine what you see around the characters. Where are they? Outside or inside? How would you describe this landscape? What do we see?
- Look at the characters' feet. What could we imagine right in front of them, between us and them?
- At what time of day could this scene be taking place?
- What season could it be? If we imagined being inside the picture, would we be cold or warm?

3. Observing the colours

- What colours do you see in this painting?
- Where are the brightest colours in the painting? Do you know how painters made their colours?

In Leonardo's time, very often painters made their colours themselves, by mixing pigments (coloured powder) with a binder (oil for Leonardo, but it could also be egg). For the blue of Mary's mantle, Leonardo used powder made from lapis lazuli, an extremely rare and precious stone. For the red of her coat, he used kermes lacquer, obtained from insects called kermes beetles.

- Why, in your opinion, did the painter use a lighter colour to paint the mountains in the distance?

Leonardo da Vinci realised that the further away the landscape is, the more it appears to us in pale, bluish colours. He was one of the first to write about this subject; this effect is called atmospheric perspective or aerial perspective.

4. Observing emotions and putting oneself in the place of the characters

- Look at the faces. Are the characters smiling? Do they look happy?
- For each character, try to imagine what they might be saying to each other. For example, what is the child thinking about? If he had a little speech bubble over his head, what could be written in it?

- Back at school, distribute photocopies of the painting, pencils and rulers to pupils and give them the following instructions.

1. Understanding the composition

- Observe the landscape again. What are the two dominant colours?
- These two colours divide the landscape into two parts. Trace the line that corresponds to this division. Which part of the landscape does each colour correspond to?
- On the photocopy of the painting, draw a line from Saint Anne's eyes to the lamb's eyes. What do you notice?

The eyes of the figures are almost on the same axis, showing the importance of the gazes, which connect the figures to each other.

- Observe and compare Mary's right arm and Jesus' right arm. Again, what do you see? *Their arms are making exactly the same gesture, they are in the same position, forming a continuity.*

- Draw a circle around the position of Saint Anne's right shoulder and then Mary's right shoulder. What do you notice?

The shoulders of the two women are superimposed. Mary's arm is placed as if it could be Saint Anne's arm.

- Now draw a line from Saint Anne's right shoulder to the child's right hand. Again, what do you notice?

The shoulders, arms and hands of the figures form a continuity, which unites the figures in one movement. The gazes, positions and gestures of the figures overlap and are superimposed on each other, giving the impression that these three bodies could be one.

- Draw a line from the top of Saint Anne's head to her left foot. Now observe the figures' bodies. They are positioned in such a way that they could form one or more geometric shapes. Try to trace this shape or shapes.

Mary's body could fit into a triangle, as could the group of Jesus and the Lamb. The entire group of figures can also fit into a triangle, or into a diamond if the lamb is removed. The body of Saint Anne is an axis of symmetry for these geometric shapes.

Leonardo da Vinci carried out numerous studies for this work, changing the position of the figures several times, seeking to create a work that is both dynamic and balanced.

2. Creating a "living painting"

Now that the children have thought about the composition of the work, organise a "living painting": ask four children to recreate the painting by mimicking the poses of the characters and possibly by placing the various tactile elements (pebble, sheep's wool, fabrics) back into the composition.

- In which directions are your bodies turned in relation to each other? Which side are they facing?

When we are facing the painting, Saint Anne's legs are pointing to the left while her upper body is turned to the right. Mary's whole body is oriented to the right, and Jesus is oriented to the right, but his head is turned to the left. The lamb is looking left. The movements of the bodies are alternated, to create movement and dynamism.

FACE TO FACE

Analysis and argumentation activity

Objectives: based on the analysis of the pupils' photo portraits and works displayed in the exhibition, this activity aims both to make the pupils aware of how portraits are staged and to help them work on speaking in front of the class, formulating an argument and expressing an opinion.

Places: to be done in class.

Public: cycle 4 and high school (ages 11 and up).

1

BEFORE THE SCREENING: WHAT IS A PORTRAIT?

- Ask the pupils how they would define what a portrait is. What is the first image that comes to mind when they hear the word “portrait”?
- Ask them to bring a portrait of themselves to class: a selfie or a picture taken by someone else.
- In pairs, the pupils compare their photos: what do they have in common? What are the differences?
- Then, as a group, the pupils try to identify criteria they can use to compare the photos:
 - the angle of the face (profile, three quarters, facing);
 - the angle of view (high-angle, low-angle, eye level);
 - the framing (head, bust, whole body);
 - the direction of the gaze;
 - the facial expression (smile, wink, open or closed mouth, etc.);
 - the environment (inside, outside, alone, with other people in the background, etc.);
 - clothes, hair, make-up, jewellery, etc.
- What major trends stand out? What type of portrait was most frequently chosen? Draw a typical portrait of a pupil in this class (e.g. front view, seen slightly from above, looking sideways, without smiling, outside, etc.). Make pupils understand that, even without thinking about it, they don't just take a photo any old way, but they are influenced by fashions.

Carefully examine the *Portrait of a Woman*, known as *La Belle Ferronnière*, by Leonardo da Vinci (c. 1495-1499). Ask the pupils to reflect on the construction of this portrait, in the same way that they analysed their own portraits in class:

- What is the angle of the face (profile, three quarters, facing)?
- the angle of view (high-angle, low-angle, eye level)?
- the framing (head, bust, whole body)?
- the direction of the gaze?
- facial expression ?
- the environment (interior, exterior, landscape, plain background) ?
- Finally, how would you describe the clothes, hairstyle and accessories?

- Have pupils question the effect produced by these different choices: why did the painter choose to stage his model in this way? What effect was he seeking to produce?
- On this portrait, the gaze is very particular. What impression does it give?
- What personality and temperament are conveyed by this portrait?
- If you were an exhibition curator, would you hang this portrait in your “Leonardo da Vinci” exhibition? Why?



Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of a Woman*, known as *La Belle Ferronnière*, c. 1495-1499, oil on wood, coll. Musée du Louvre

1. Creating a portrait

Now that the pupils have familiarised themselves with how to analyse the staging of a portrait, have them work in pairs to create a photo portrait in class, with the following instruction: if you were exhibiting a portrait of yourself in a museum like the Louvre, how would you stage your portrait?

To make this portrait, they will have to choose: a setting, one or more accessories (jewel, book, ball, cap, etc.), a posture, a facial expression, an angle of view and a framing. Ask them to explain their choices: what did you want to express about yourself with this portrait?

2. “Battle” (debate)

Divide pupils into small groups and have them imagine that they work for a museum that has asked them to find a superb portrait for their collection. To do this, they will have to choose one of the portraits in the “Leonardo da Vinci” exhibition, analyse it by applying the methodology used for *La Belle Ferronnière*, and prepare their arguments in writing to convince the museum curators that the portrait they have chosen is worthy of joining the collection.

Based on the portraits chosen by the pupils, organise an oratory joust: two groups confront each other, each defending the painting they have chosen. The rest of the class forms the jury: the museum curators who will have to choose which painting will be added to their collection. Each group is given a turn to present their arguments as to why their painting is worthy of inclusion in the collection. At the end of the time limit (4 minutes per group), the jury decides which group has won. The roles are then reversed: two other groups compete, and those who have competed become the jury.

A possible variation could be to have two opposing opinions on the same painting (and not a confrontation between two paintings): one of the groups must come up with arguments in favour of the painting, the other against it.

PLAYING ON PERSPECTIVE

Comprehension activity

Objectives: the aim of this activity is to introduce pupils to the different types of perspective used by Leonardo da Vinci and his followers.

Places: to be carried out in class before or after the screening.

Public: cycles 3 and 4 and high school (ages 8 and up).

Materials: Printout of the image of *The Last Supper* by Marco d'Oggiono, <https://musee-rennaissance.fr/objet/la-cene>, pencils, rulers or computer, digital tablets. This activity can also be carried out using a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*.

Marco d'Oggiono, *The Last Supper*, 1506-1509, Musée de la Renaissance, Écouen, copy after the mural painting by Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1494-1499, Santa Maria delle Grazie Church, Milan.



This painting is a copy of a famous work by Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper*. The original work is a mural painted between 1494 and 1499 to decorate the refectory of the convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. It depicts the Last Supper, Christ's last meal before his crucifixion.

Marco d'Oggiono's painting is a direct replica of Leonardo's mural, and although he simplified the architectural perspective and the lighting, it gives us an idea of the extraordinary construction of the space created by Leonardo. This is especially evident in the foreground, with the long table along which Christ's apostles are divided into four groups, while he is positioned at the centre of the composition as its pivot.

1. What is central perspective?

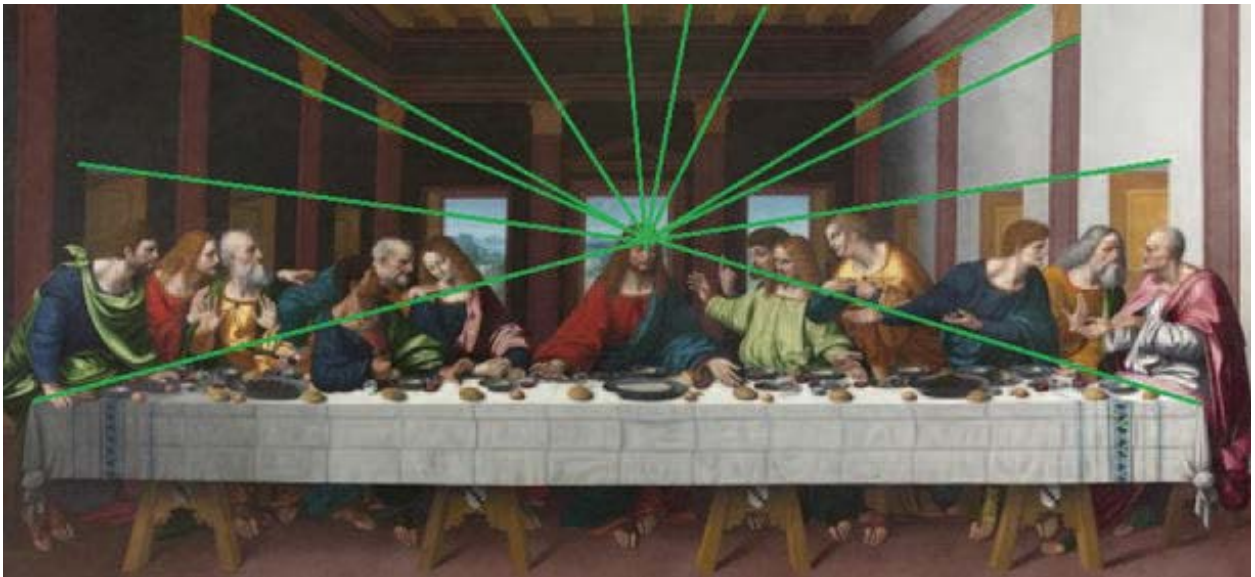
Distribute photocopies of the work to the pupils.

- **Observe the architecture. How is it constructed? What is this technique called?**

In this work, Marco d'Oggiono (like Leonardo da Vinci in the mural painting of *The Last Supper*) used perspective to focus on a central vanishing point (also called linear or conical perspective). This technique, theorised in Florence around 1420 by a painter-mathematician, Alberti, made it possible to create the illusion of depth on a flat surface by following strict geometric rules. The main rule establishes that parallels in reality (unless they are parallel in the painting) are represented by lines that converge on a single point, called the vanishing point.

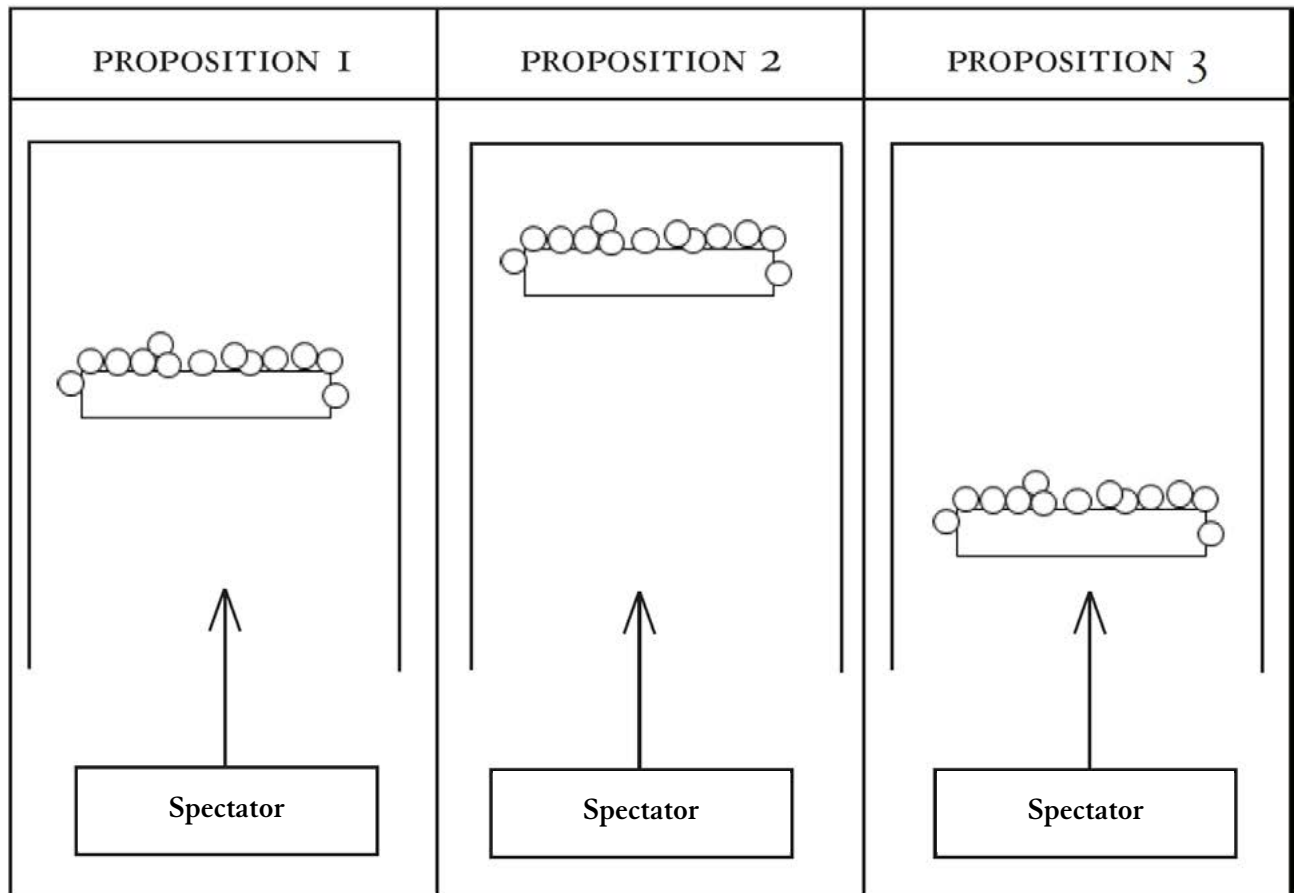
- **Draw the vanishing lines (walls, ceiling, etc.). What do you notice? Where is the vanishing point? Why do you think that is?**

All the lines converge on a point on Christ's forehead. This brings him to the fore, placing him in the centre of the composition, and thus the spectator's gaze is drawn towards him as shown below.



2. How is the space constructed?

- On the plans reproduced below, carefully observe the three proposals for positioning the table and the figures in the painting.
- Try to position the architectural elements in the space, by drawing circles for the columns and rectangles for the openings (doors and windows):



• **What do you notice? Which of these three proposals corresponds to the painter's work?**

The third proposal corresponds to the work of Marco d'Oggiono. The table and the figures are to the foreground of the composition, and a large empty space, punctuated by architectural elements, extends between them and the openings on the back wall. Our gaze is as if drawn towards the back of the work, towards the depth of the room, and at the same time the figures seem to emerge towards us. This exercise enables us to understand the extent to which Leonardo (and his followers, such as Marco d'Oggiono) mastered the technique of linear perspective. After painting this work, Leonardo no longer worked on linear perspective, turning his attention instead to what can't be captured by this technique. Geometric architecture disappeared from his backgrounds, replaced by landscapes in which the illusion of depth is suggested by other visual means.

3. Experimenting with the atmospheric perspective

Materials: pastels, printouts of black and white images of the works on medium- or coarse-grained drawing paper.

- **Examine these two paintings by Leonardo:**



Leonardo da Vinci, *Saint Anne, the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus Playing with a Lamb*, known as *Saint Anne*, 1503-1519, oil on wood, coll. Musée du Louvre.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of Lisa Gherardini (1479-1528), wife of Francesco del Giocondo*, known as *Mona Lisa*, *La Gioconda* or *La Joconde*, c. 1503-1519, oil on wood, coll. Musée du Louvre.

-
- **How is depth suggested in these two paintings? By what means? Can you draw the vanishing lines?**

It is difficult, if not impossible, to draw vanishing lines in these two paintings. And yet we have the impression that the space behind the figures extends far into the horizon. Here, Leonardo strives to render the illusion of depth through the use of colour and light alone. The further away the objects are (mountains primarily), the bluer they are and the more blurred their contours become. This technique, called “atmospheric perspective” or “aerial perspective”, was first theorised by Leonardo da Vinci.

Distribute black and white A4 photocopies of one of these two paintings to the pupils (reducing the contrasts to the maximum to make the images as pale as possible).

- **Use colours to create the effect of depth**

Have the pupils reproduce Leonardo’s technique of atmospheric perspective simply by using coloured pencils to create the illusion of depth: distribute bright, energised colours in the foreground and then, as subtly as possible, make the colours lighter and more bluish towards the horizon.

This exercise will give pupils a better understanding of the role of colour in rendering the illusion of depth.

LEONARDO DA VINCI IN A FEW DATES

- **15 April 1452:** Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci is born in Vinci, near Florence in Tuscany, into a family of notaries.
- **1462:** Leonardo enters an abaco, a school for the children of craftsmen and traders.
- **Circa 1464-1465:** he begins an apprenticeship in the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio, a Florentine goldsmith, painter and sculptor, where he receives multidisciplinary training in drawing, painting and sculpture, but also in metallurgy, mechanics and carpentry. He also learns how to solve problems through experimentation.
- **Circa 1480:** he receives a commission for his first major work (unfinished), *The Adoration of the Magi*.
- **1482:** Leonardo enters the service of Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan. At the Sforza court, he is a portrait painter, theatre decorator and musician.
- **1483-1486:** Leonardo begins *The Virgin of the Rocks* in Milan.
- **Circa 1494-1499:** he paints *The Last Supper*, a mural that decorates the refectory of the Basilica of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan.
- **1501:** Leonardo begins work on Saint Anne.
- **1502:** Leonardo spends a year in the service of Caesar Borgia, son of Pope Alexander VI.
- **1503:** he returns to Florence, where he agrees to paint the portrait of a Florentine lady, the wife of Francesco del Giocondo, a painting that is most certainly the *Mona Lisa*. He is commissioned to paint a mural for the palace of the Signoria of Florence: *The Battle of Anghiari*. Only the preparatory drawings have been preserved, the unfinished fresco having been covered over later.
- **1508:** Leonardo returns to live in Milan.
- **1513:** Leonardo leaves for Rome, in the service of Giuliano di Lorenzo de' Medici, brother of Pope Leo X. He never finds his place in Rome, with Michelangelo and Raphael taking centre stage.
- **1516:** he accepts François I's invitation and leaves for France. He takes up residence at the Château du Clos Lucé in Amboise. In the service of the King of France, he is an engineer, philosopher and set designer, and pursues his own work on his paintings, from which he has never been separated: the *Mona Lisa*, *Saint Anne* and *Saint John the Baptist*.
- **2 May 1519:** Leonardo dies in Amboise at the age of 67.

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