

THE MONA LISA FOUNDATION

FACTSHEET

Summary of facts that lead The Mona Lisa Foundation to conclude that the 'Earlier Mona Lisa' is a genuine Leonardo

Note: Further information on all of these points is available in the new book 'Mona Lisa – Leonardo's Earlier Version'. Page numbers here refer to pages in that publication.

Historical Evidence

Three main historical accounts surround the emergence of Mona Lisa; those of Giorgio Vasari (see pp. 21-29), Antonio de Beatis (see pp. 30-36) and Gian Paolo Lomazzo (see pp.37). These are totally different from each other, and were written decades apart. Taken together, these accounts point to two distinct and different portraits, one being of the young Mona Lisa, and the second of a " ... Florentine woman ... ", or "La Gioconda".

The historical evidence also identifies the subject in the portraits as Mona Lisa Gherardini (wife of Francesco del Giocondo).

- Agostino Vespucci (see pp. 10-15), Giorgio Vasari (see pp. 21-29), and Gian Paolo Lomazzo (see pp. 37), who were chroniclers during the Renaissance, confirm that Leonardo painted her.
- Francesco del Giocondo's political connections in the Florentine government during the early 1500s may serve to explain why Leonardo accepted the commission to paint Lisa Gherardini's portrait (see pp. 42-47 & pp.60-71).
- A number of other potential candidates (such as Isabella Gualanda, Vittoria Colonna, Isabella of Aragon, Philiberta of Savoy, Isabella d'Este, Pacifica Brandano and Caterina Sforza) have been put forward in the literature as possible subject of 'Louvre Version', but certain facts rule them out (see pp. 48-59).

Furthermore, the evidence demonstrates that Leonardo da Vinci painted two versions of 'Mona Lisa'.

- Fra' Pietro da Novellara's correspondence to Isabella d'Este (see p. 8-9) confirms that two of Leonardo's apprentices were working on portraits in his studio at the turn of the 16th century.
- Gian Paolo Lomazzo (see p. 37), the Renaissance artist and historian, differentiates in 1584 between the earlier and Louvre versions of the 'Mona Lisa', referring to "... a Gioconda and a Mona Lisa."
- From the 16th century onward, many art critics and experts, such as P. G. Konody, John Eyre, L. Roger-Miles, Kenneth Clark, Guy Isnard and Frank Zöllner have documented the fact that Leonardo may very well have painted two versions of the 'Mona Lisa' (see p. 39), clearly alluding to a "two-painting theory".
- Renowned publications, such as the 'Encyclopedia Americana' (see p. 39) and the French 'Quid' (see p.41), have for years made direct reference to two separate portraits of 'Mona Lisa' painted by Leonardo.
- Leonardo produced multiple versions of the same or similar paintings, for example, 'Madonna and Child', 'Virgin of the Rocks', 'Madonna of the Yarnwinder' and 'Virgin and Child with St. Anne', among others (see p. 274).

The two versions of the Mona Lisa were executed at different times, in different locations, and for different patrons.

- Agostino Vespucci, perhaps the earliest witness, writes in October 1503 that Leonardo da Vinci is working on Lisa's portrait (see pp. 10-15).
- Giorgio Vasari dates this painting, the one commissioned by Francesco del Giocondo, to very shortly after Leonardo's return to Florence in 1500, and states that it was left unfinished after four years (see pp. 21-29).
- Raphael, while studying Leonardo's work, executed a sketch (c.1504) of a '*Mona Lisa*' composition, which mirrors that of the '*Earlier Mona Lisa*', and which is fundamentally different from the Louvre '*Mona Lisa*' (see pp. 16-19).
- Antonio de Beatis' diary suggests that Leonardo had finished the '*Mona Lisa*' by 1517, and that it was completed for Giuliano de' Medici. Leonardo worked for Giuliano in Rome from 1513-16 (see pp. 30-36).

A plausible explanation for the incompatibility between these accounts is that an earlier '*Mona Lisa*' was left in Florence c.1505 with Francesco del Giocondo, and the second (i.e., the '*Louvre Version*') was completed in Rome c.1516 at the encouragement of Giuliano de Medici. Mona Lisa would have been in her early-twenties in 1501 and in her mid-thirties in 1516 (as the subject in the '*Louvre Version*'). Leonardo deliberately intended these portraits to be different and distinct from one another, as numerous other elements in the compositions demonstrate.

Expert Opinions

Sometimes the eye of experience complements scientific data and historical conclusions, particularly in advocating the results of their respective enquiries.

With specific reference to Leonardo's '*Earlier Mona Lisa*':

- **Giorgio Vasari**, painter, architect, and compiler of one of the most enduring collection of biographies of Italian Renaissance artists, was so effusive in his wonder at this portrait, that his famous descriptive introduction of it remains a standard reference for any study of '*Mona Lisa*'.
- **Hugh Blaker**, proven art connoisseur, instantly recognised the work as a Leonardo when he rediscovered it, before World War I.
- **Paul Konody**, international art expert immediately endorsed it, comparing it favourably to the '*Louvre Version*'.
- **John Eyre**, art historian, wrote two monographs about the painting (1915 and 1926), which analysed it in detail, and compared it to the '*Louvre Version*'. For him, the work was undoubtedly by Leonardo.
- Leading Leonardo **experts in the Italy** of the 1920s were virtually unanimous in their praise of the earlier '*Mona Lisa*'; this was decades before scientific testing of any importance was recognized as being relevant in the authentication process.
- Professor **John Asmus**, an authoritative research physicist, who has specialised in art conservation for the past 40 years, and has also examined the Louvre '*Mona Lisa*', stated in 1990 that the earlier '*Mona Lisa*' displayed significant features that could only have been executed by Leonardo da Vinci.
- Professor **Alessandro Vezzosi**, one of the most influential living experts on Leonardo da Vinci, a leading specialist on the subject of Mona Lisa, and director of the Museo Ideale Leonardo da Vinci, states that of all the versions of the '*Mona Lisa*', the '*Earlier Mona Lisa*' is the most interesting and significant.
- Professor **Carlo Pedretti**, Director of the Armand Hammer Center for Leonardo Studies, stated in 2012 that the painting displays a "most beautiful face [which] is

characterized by a countenance that is strikingly younger than that of the Louvre painting.”

In the words of Professor Alessandro Vezzosi, the elements presented here represent the fruits of “ ... *labyrinthine research* ... ” undertaken by The Mona Lisa Foundation. The results of the three main areas of investigation, History, Connoisseurship and Science, supported by a wealth of background details, constitute an “*accumulation of interlocking reasons*”. These all point to the portrait as being an ‘*Earlier Mona Lisa*’ by the great master, Leonardo da Vinci.

Critical Comparisons

Comparing critical elements in the two authentic Mona Lisa paintings is in fact one of the most important and significant endeavours in attributing the painting.

Some similarities are: the pose; the veil; the profiles; the hands; the clothing; the loggia setting and the foreground landscape; and the right elbow resting on the unseen arm of the chair.

Some differences are: the supports - one is on canvas, the other on wood; the overall compositions, including that one composition has columns and the other originally did not; the obvious age difference between the subjects; the specific details of the knot patterns of the embroidery; the background landscape; the glazing technique specific to the ‘*Louvre Version*’; the geometric construction of the designs; and the proportion of the subjects in relation to the overall sizes of the paintings.

Taken together, these items (see pp. 190-219) show that:

- The artist intended from the outset that the works would be different from each other.
- Both paintings are original works by the same artist, and neither could be a copy of the other.

In 1550, and again in 1568, Vasari (see pp. 21-29) clearly identified that Leonardo left the painting “ ... *unfinished*”. The ‘*Louvre Version*’, however, is completely finished, and was so when Leonardo showed it to the Cardinal of Aragon at Cloux in 1517.

The small pen and ink drawing of a young woman on a balcony with columns, by Raphael (pp. 21-29), dating from c. 1504 and executed while he was in Florence and observing Leonardo at work, is an important piece of evidence in itself. Most scholars concur that this drawing, and some of his subsequent paintings, were derived from a portrait of ‘*Mona Lisa*’ being undertaken by Leonardo. It was undoubtedly the ‘*Earlier Mona Lisa*’, with its unique set of flanking columns that influenced Raphael.

Because of the unique compositional elements that appear nowhere else, this ‘*Mona Lisa*’ portrait must have been in progress when Raphael saw it in 1504. What other painting by Leonardo having these characteristics could have been seen by Raphael at that time?

Both versions of the Mona Lisa have generated their copies (see pp. 198-203). The ‘*Louvre Version*’ has been the basis for countless copies over hundreds of years. By contrast, any copy that employs flanking columns of classical design would likely have found its origin in the ‘*Earlier Mona Lisa*’: for example, the Oslo ‘*Mona Lisa*’ is a direct copy of the ‘*Earlier Mona Lisa*’.

The detail in the rendering and design of the embroidery looping suggests a brilliant

mind. The looping design in the '*Louvre Version*' shows a 'secret' extra loop not rendered in any of the copies. Even more amazing is the uniqueness of every single loop in the '*Earlier Mona Lisa*' demonstrated by a slight difference in the cloverleaf looping; leaving no two the same! This does not exist in any of the copies; even the '*Louvre Version*' has similar repeating cloverleaf knotting.

In addition, the existence of the columns (see pp. 209-211) and the application of appropriate shadowing strongly suggest the signature work by Leonardo. One observes the clear Leonardesque creation and fine architecture of the lower section of the columns in the '*Earlier Mona Lisa*' contrasted with the rather poor renderings of the bases of columns partly visible in the '*Louvre Version*'. The latter would likely not have been painted by Leonardo. The '*Louvre Version*' has not been cut down and therefore originally never did have columns.

Finally, the innovative '*Regression Project*' (see pp. 218-219), undertaken by one of the world's leading forensic artists, concludes that both '*Mona Lisa*' portraits are of the same woman, with an age difference of approximately 11 years.

Scientific Evidence

The authentication of a painting cannot be based on Science alone, but the results of certain scientific tests can disprove an attribution. Over the last 35 years, every recognized test and examination has been performed on the earlier Mona Lisa.

- **Mathematics** (see pp. 226-234): A testament to Leonardo's interest in geometry, the '*Earlier Mona Lisa*' aligns perfectly with the 'Golden Ratio'. In addition, the innovative 'Hidden Technique' investigation reveals that both portraits were painted by the same artist. Furthermore, the '*Earlier Mona Lisa*' precisely fits the Goldblatt thesis.
- **Tests** (see pp. 235-263): Ultraviolet Light, Infrared Luminescence, Infrared, False Colour Infrared, Infrared Reflectography, X-Radiography, Carbon Dating, and Lead-White Measurement by Gamma Spectroscopy examinations all confirm, especially when considered together, that the painting was most likely executed at the beginning of the 16th Century.
- **Comparison** (see pp. 235-263): Scientific comparisons of both the Earlier and Louvre Mona Lisas clearly point to them both being works of the same artist. However, there are significant differences which signify that neither one is a copy of the other.
- **Canvas** (see pp. 235-237): When the historical circumstances of Leonardo are considered, and noting his keen interest in, and experience with, the use of canvas, it is arguably most logical that Leonardo would have used a canvas support for his '*Earlier Mona Lisa*'. The hand-woven linen canvas was relined at a later date, for the purpose of strengthening it for longevity, and for maintaining the masterful integrity of the work. X-rays have confirmed that there has never been any damage to either the painting or the canvas support. Leonardo not only described his techniques for painting on canvas, but clearly used this medium himself. The hand-woven linen canvas, or Rheims cloth, on which the portrait was painted, has the same characteristics as those upon which Leonardo painted his famous drapery studies in the 1470s.
- **Pigments** (see pp. 241-245): All the pigments that were found on the '*Earlier Mona Lisa*' were available and in use at the beginning of the 16th Century. Leonardo's palette, and the manner and sequence in which he mixed and applied his pigments, follows closely the meticulous instructions he wrote in his Treatise '*On Painting*'. This has been recognized in the course of all the intense

examinations through which the painting has been subjected. Many of these pigments were known to have been in use even decades earlier. It is conspicuous how Leonardo's palette for this painting remains true to his own directions and theories. Evidence has also been provided that the ground pigments used for Leonardo's '*Earlier Mona Lisa*' were also employed by him in some of his other famous works.

- **Underdrawings** (see p. 263) signify that this is an original work, and not copied from another.
- The '*Louvre Version*' has characteristics of his **glazing technique** which was developed after 1508, entailing that this could not have been the '*Mona Lisa*' described by Vasari.
- Leonardo da Vinci was primarily **left-handed**. Intense magnification indicates brushstrokes of a left-handed artist (see p. 240).
- Professor John Asmus, of the University of California, stated in 1990 that he firmly believes that Leonardo painted significant portions of the '*Earlier Mona Lisa*' (see pp. 254-257).

FACTS THAT POINT TO THE '*EARLIER MONA LISA*' BEING AN ORIGINAL

- **Unique Composition:**
Apart from the long-admired sitting position of the subject, the architecture of the painting is completely novel. To the best of our knowledge, no other painting, executed prior to this one, has the same composition.
- **Flanking Columns:**
The use of these columns in the structure of this painting is fundamental to the composition. As an element in portraiture, Leonardo had never utilized this idea. The traces of columns and bases that can be seen today in the '*Louvre Version*' were a later addition, and never part of its original composition.
- **Sitting Angle:**
The sitting position of the subject is angled differently than the '*Louvre Version*'. The subject is leaning forward more slightly, and the body is angled further from the viewer. This sitting position is also emphasized in the neck muscles.
- **Younger:**
The figure in the '*Earlier Mona Lisa*' is clearly younger, and, some say, more beautiful, than the '*Louvre Version*'. This face has never been represented like this in any other painting.
- **'Support' Material:**
The portrait was painted on canvas. If it was a copy of, say, the '*Louvre Version*', it would have been painted on wood.
- **'Support' Size:**
The size of the '*Earlier Mona Lisa*' painting is significantly larger than its Louvre counterpart. A copyist would have made them virtually the same size.
- **Background:**
A pioneering use of simple Tuscan landscape was employed, without the later embellishments of 'Alpine' mountains, or numerous water details.

- **Landscape:**
Recent tests have shown that some elements, particularly in the landscape area, such as the cluster of trees (upper left), and the dark-outlined vegetation (or rocks), over and behind her left shoulder, were not part of the original composition. These were apparently added later by a different artist or artists. The original composition is not seen anywhere else.
- **Embroidery:**
Details of the embroidery on the blouse are different from those in the *'Louvre Version'*, and from any copy of either.
- **Extra Detail:**
Due to the larger 'canvas' size, there is more detail at the bottom of the picture than can be seen in others: a prime example being the chair. Therefore other Mona Lisa paintings, without that extra detail, would not have pre-dated the *'Earlier Mona Lisa'*.
- **Underpainting:**
There are re-worked portions, and parts of underpaintings, that a copyist would not have made.
- **Not a Copy:**
A copy would likely have been painted by one artist, and at the same time. The *'Earlier Mona Lisa'* shows elements that were likely added to Leonardo's work, by another artist or artists; as well as evidence that this occurred over an extended period of time. Therefore the painting cannot be a copy of any other work.