

[The Dead Guy Interview]

Leonardo da Vinci
(1452-1519)

WITH
MICHAEL A. STUSSER



BELATED OBITUARY:

Look up “Renaissance man” in the dictionary, and you’ll find a picture of Leonardo da Vinci. The guy could do anything. He was an amazing architect, geologist, and engineer. He played a wicked viola, could sculpt with the best of ‘em, developed scientific theories that were light-years ahead of his time, and anticipated some of the greatest inventions of the modern era. And did we mention he could paint? The Italian master behind “Last Supper” and “Mona Lisa,” da Vinci developed an entirely new artistic style using transitions between colors, light, and shadow to introduce atmospheric perspective (kinda like 3-D, but without the glasses). Da Vinci died of old age in 1519, while living in France.

mental_floss: Leo, you were quite the Renaissance man!

Leonardo da Vinci: Yes. Veramente. I lived during the height of the Renaissance.

MF: No, what I mean is ... well, you wore many hats, ya know? Painter, sculptor, scientist, engineer. How’d you get into all that stuff?

LDV: My folks-a, they put me in a—how you say?—program for apprentice.

MF: “You’re fired!”

LDV: No. Not-a fired. When I was 15, I became apprentice to Andrea del Verrocchio. He had workshop famous for painting and sculpting, and I learned to do this and a-that.

MF: But you jumped around a lot. You’d start a sculpture and not finish it. You devised unbelievable architectural drawings, but none of them got built. You’d make incredible scientific observations, then not finish your

experiments. Did you have Attention Deficit Disorder?

LDV: I have grown tired of this interview, I can-a tell you that much.

MF: Well, we’d know a lot more about what you *did* finish if you hadn’t used that weird mirror script in your notebooks. *{Da Vinci wrote in a reverse script that could only be read when held up to a mirror.}*

LDV: I’m-a left-handed. It came naturally.

MF: Is there anything you *couldn’t* do?

LDV: Fly. I made some rough drawings of a helicopter [*the “helical airscrew,” circa 1487*], but I never got it off-a the ground.

MF: Well don’t beat yourself up about it. After all, you did paint the “Last Supper.”

LDV: All 27 feet of it!

MF: So, I gotta ask. *The Da Vinci Code*: true or false?

LDV: Not-a this again! Mama mia!

MF: So there’s no ...

LDV: No. No secret society, no forged Shroud of Turin, no line of French kings fathered by Jesus! Just-a really long painting of-a the Last Supper. Which reminds-a me, my fettuccini is getting cold. You have one minute.

MF: OK, tell me about the “Mona Lisa.”

LDV: I like to call it by its Italian name, “La Gioconda.” It comes from the name of her husband. I took a liking to her, capisce?

MF: I’ll say. You carried the painting with you everywhere you traveled.

LDV: She has-a the nice smile. I just wish I got a nickel every time some *idiota* put her on a coffee mug or mouse pad.

MF: People think of you as a painter, but you were an amazing inventor. You even came up with swim fins.

LDV: And so-a much more. I originated the science of hydraulics. I also invented the underwater diving suit, cranes, and contact lenses. It’s all in-a my notebooks.

MF: Speaking of which, did you know Bill Gates bought one of your sketch pads [*a notebook of scientific observations called The Leicester Codex*] for, like, \$30 million?

LDV: Good. I will need his help for-a my newest creation: a phone that-a takes pictures and fits in pocket.

MF: Uh, we need to talk ... 🙌

