

# HUI216

# Italian Civilization

---

Andrea Fedi

# 24.0 Announcements

- <http://www.campo7.com/hui216/>
  - All readings (suggested and required) have been posted
  - Copies of the midterms have been posted, with the correct answers highlighted in bold
  - The review page has been updated
- Review session: Monday, May 8, 3:50-5:10
- The last office hour will be on Monday, May 8, 5:30-6:30
- Midterms are available for pickup

# 24.0 Concorso d'Eleganza

- On Sunday, May 21, 10:00-3:00, the Center for Italian Studies has organized its first Concorso d'Eleganza, A Celebration of Italian Automotive Excellence and Beauty (rain date, Jun. 4)
  - Various Italian car clubs will be represented: Ferrari, Alfa Romeo, Maserati, Lamborghini
  - Display Cars will rally at Stony Brook University campus on the lawn directly across from the Sports Complex
  - The Center for Italian Studies is also looking for volunteers to assist the car owners, guard the cars, etc. If interested, please contact Donna Severino at the Center for Italian Studies, (631) 632-7444.

# 24.0 The submission of the paper

- Recommended format for papers
  - No cover page necessary
  - In the first page, please include your name, ID number and the topic number (not just the title)
- E-mailed papers
  - "Problems" with e-mail are not a valid excuse for lateness
  - A reply will be sent to you within 24-48 hours of receipt
  - All late papers should be e-mailed
- Lateness policy
  - Papers received May 4-6 = -2 (two points deducted from the grade of the paper)
  - Papers received May 7-15 = -5 (five points deducted)
  - Papers received after an extended deadline = same dates, same rules

## 24.0 The final exam

- The final exam will be on May 15 (5:10-6:50)
  - A-K: Javits 102
  - L-Z: Javits 105
- The questions will be based on the topics introduced from Mar. 15 to May 3 (weeks 8-9 and 11-14, topics 15.2-25.x)
- Topics from week 1 may also be included in the exam (topics 1.1-1.7)
- Required readings from week 8 on will be included

# 24.1 Humanism

- A system of education and a mode of inquiry
  - Was developed in Northern Italy during the 14th century
  - Formed the basis for Renaissance culture
  - Encouraged the study and the rediscovery of classical culture
  - It is during this period of that philology and archeology were born, the first museums created
- The term derives from *studia humanitatis*
  - Traditional disciplines such as grammar, rhetoric, history, philosophy (ethics, politics) studied *juxta propria principia* (=according to their own principles), rather than with the guide of religious ideology
  - The Latin term *Humanitas*, which produced the English *Humanities*, indicates the development of human virtue(s)

## 24.2 Italy during the Renaissance

- The main Italian states during this time were
  - Piedmont, Genoa, Milan, Venice, Ferrara, Mantua, Florence, Siena, the State of the Church (the city-states of Romagna), the Kingdom of Naples
  - Political fragmentation and divisions characterized Italy during this time
- 1494: Charles VIII, king of France, invades Italy
  - The kingdom of Naples was his objective
- 1494-1559: France, Germany, Spain and the various Italian states fight constantly
  - Spain emerges victorious at the end: it controlled most of the South of Italy, parts of Tuscany, and Lombardy until the beginning of the 18th century

## 24.3 The life of Leonardo, from <http://www.mos.org/leonardo/bio.html>

- The illegitimate son of a notary, Ser Piero, and a peasant girl, Caterina, Leonardo was born on April 15, 1452, in Vinci, Italy, just outside Florence
- When he was about 15 his father apprenticed him to the workshop of Andrea del Verrochio in Florence
- Leonardo stayed in the Verrocchio workshop until 1477 when he set up shop for himself
- He entered the service of the Duke of Milan in 1482, abandoning a commission in Florence, "The Adoration of the Magi"

## 24.3 The life of Leonardo, from <http://www.mos.org/leonardo/bio.html> (2)

- He spent 17 years in Milan, leaving only after Duke Ludovico Sforza's fall from power in 1499
- The Duke kept Leonardo busy painting and sculpting and designing elaborate court festivals, but he also put Leonardo to work designing weapons, buildings and machinery
- Also during this period, Leonardo produced his first anatomical studies
- Between 1490 and 1495 he developed his habit of recording his studies in meticulously illustrated notebooks

## 24.3 The life of Leonardo, from <http://www.mos.org/leonardo/bio.html> (3)

- Over the next 16 years, Leonardo worked and traveled throughout Italy for a number of employers, including Cesare Borgia
- He traveled for a year with Borgia's army as a military engineer and even met Niccolo Machiavelli
  - received a commission to paint the "Battle of Anghiari"
- Around 1503, Leonardo reportedly began work on the "Mona Lisa"
- From 1513 to 1516, he worked in Rome
- Following the death of his patron Giuliano de' Medici in 1516, he was offered the title of Premier Painter and Engineer and Architect of the King by Francis I in France
- Leonardo died on May 2, 1519 in Cloux

## 24.4 Leonardo da Vinci: the myth

- The basis for the creation of the myth of Leonardo was the lack of details on him and his life
- Even about his physical appearance, not much was known, 30 years after his death
- It was easy to fabricate or to repeat fictional anecdotes, to exaggerate traits, and create an idealized portrait
- Fictional passages in Vasari: one cannot overlook the pathos and the allegorical implications of the last scene, with one of the most powerful kings of Europe paying homage to an artist

## 24.4 Leonardo da Vinci: Vasari's vested interest, Burckhardt's Romantic ideal

- Vasari the artist had a vested interest in the construction of this ideal portrait of Leonardo as the perfect model of an equally perfect culture, a new culture that Vasari promoted in his major work, giving it a name (Renaissance) and an image, and consolidating its reputation for centuries to come
- *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, by Swiss German scholar Jacob Burckhardt (1860), revamped the myth of Leonardo, as it matched the idea of the romantic hero, still fashionable at that time

## 24.4 Giorgio Vasari, "a highly unreliable witness"

- Vasari was credited as being the first or one of the first to use and make popular the word "rinascita" [rebirth] in reference to the culture of his age
- On Vasari, his accounts and opinions, consider what famous 20th-century art historian Gombrich had to say:
  - Vasari's book -- which first appeared in 1550 and in a second, much expanded edition in 1568 -- is perhaps the most famous, and even today the most read work of the older literature of art.
  - His portrayals of his characters and his art of pragmatically linking individual episodes are still influential.
  - It has not been difficult for critical documentary scholarship to demonstrate that Vasari is a highly unreliable witness, especially for the early Renaissance, that he often invents freely, and that, even when he writes on the basis of firsthand experience, he is subject to amazing confusions.

# 24.4 Giorgio Vasari and the progress of Italian art

- On Vasari, his accounts and opinions, consider what famous 20th-century art historian Gombrich had to say:
  - And yet praise and blame of the work are too often directed at specifics, overlooking the achievement of its construction of history, in which, of course, previous generations also had a part.
  - Vasari expressly protests (in the introduction to Part Two) against being judged as a mere chronicler. He was concerned with deriving instruction from history, with showing young painters how application and talent bring success, and above all with accounting for the flourishing of art after Cimabue.
  - He expressly places Michelangelo, as the only living figure, at the end and, simultaneously, at the summit of his first edition, for to him the history of art is a story of progress from modest beginnings, through the worthy but somewhat dry masters of the "second manner" (of the Quattrocento), to the triumph of the third and perfect artistic manner, introduced by Leonardo.

## 24.4 The myth of Leonardo

- It goes without saying that Leonardo was an exceptional individual, with qualities and talents that most people can only dream of
- Yet this mythical image of Leonardo that still exists in popular culture, and that many writers and journalists seem eager to embrace without reservations, is very much the result of a cultural operation, where early documents such as Vasari's *Lives* and later cultural trends (during the age of Romanticism) conspired to produce the impression that Leonardo was not simply extraordinary (but still a product of his own time and culture), but rather that he was really unique, a giant among pygmies, a phenomenon for all times, an intellectual freak of sorts

## 24.4 The myth of Leonardo, his defects and failures

- And yet, even inside Vasari's Life, one finds references to failures and defects, defects that did not go unnoticed by Leonardo's contemporaries
- I'm referring to his inclination to protract his works and defer completion endlessly, which generated the numerous references by Vasari to the unfinished works left by Leonardo (although in some instances Vasari's comments are somehow puzzling: is the Mona Lisa unfinished? Unless the painting that we now admire in Paris is not the one described by the Vasari, a possibility mentioned by many a scholar...)

## 24.4 The myth of Leonardo, his failures

- I am referring also to his failed experiments with new techniques, especially in the areas of oil painting and frescoes, which led to the early deterioration of famous works such as the Battle of Anghiari
- The Last Supper painted in Milan, for a long time considered the most beautiful fresco ever realized, became considerably darker just a few years after Leonardo finished it, and even today, after a recent painstaking restoration, many details cannot be seen clearly from a normal distance: they can only be appreciated at a very close range

## 24.4 The myth of Leonardo, recap

- The first element that facilitated the construction of the myth of Leonardo, other than his obvious talents, was, as I mentioned before, the very lack of precise information, details and anecdotes, at least compared to other artists such as Michelangelo
- When Vasari wrote the chapter on Leonardo, many things about him were still surrounded by secrecy or obscurity
- Even about his face and body, his physical appearance, not much was remembered, 30 years after his death

## 24.4 The myth of Leonardo, his portrait

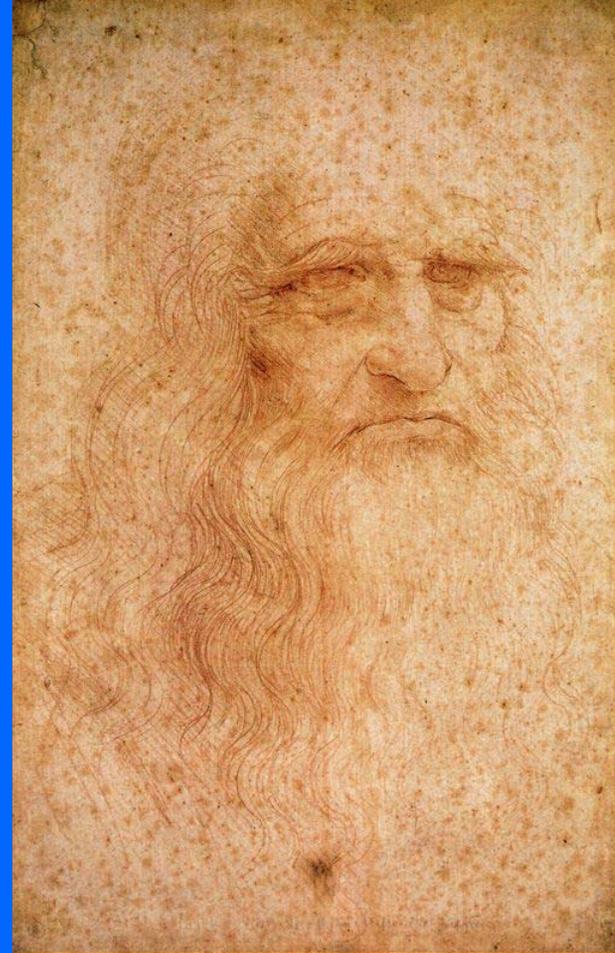
- There weren't any portraits where Leonardo could be identified without any doubts, nor were there any self-portraits that were known (scholars still argue whether or not the famous image of an old man drawn in red ink in a manuscript found in Turin, Italy, is Leonardo or not)
- Without accurate information available, it was easier in the case of this artist to fabricate or to repeat fictional anecdotes, to exaggerate the traits of an idealized portrait
- Therefore Leonardo becomes in the early biographies one of the most handsome men of his times, and not just the greatest mind

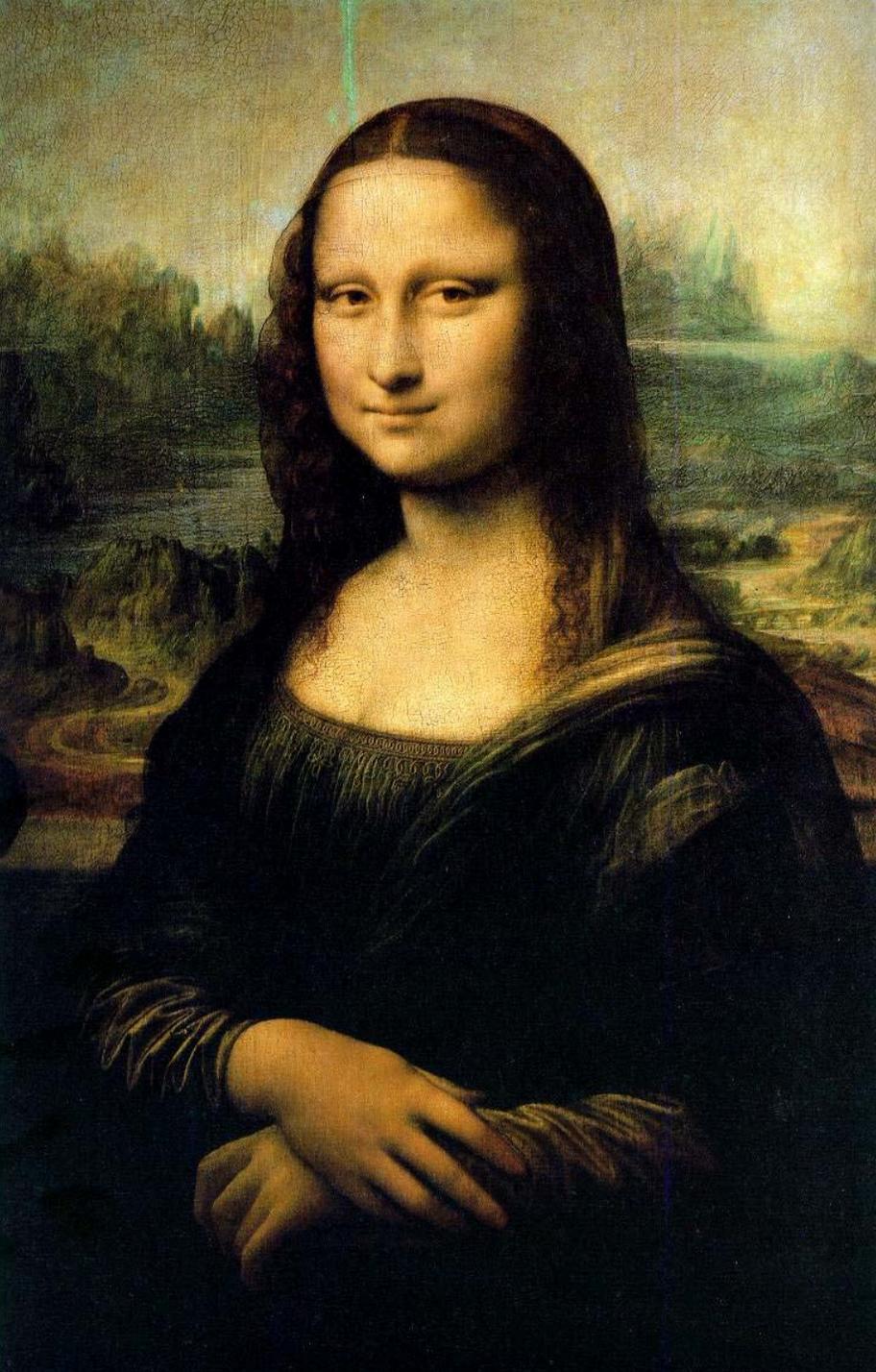
## 24.4 The myth of Leonardo, his portrait

- But this connection between mind and body, the correspondence between the grace of the physical characteristics (and of the movements) and the power of the intellectual talents was first and foremost a classical idea, which can also be seen in many literary characters of the Middle Ages, for example Dante's Cato (the ancient Roman placed by Dante at the beginning of Purgatory, as the Guardian and the gatekeeper)
- And talking about fiction in Vasari, one cannot overlook the pathos and the allegorical implications of the last scene, in which the artist dies in the arms of a powerful king, Francis I, having professed his greatest sin, a sin against Art itself: "he had offended God and man by not working at his art as he ought"

## 24.4 There is no evidence that this famous drawing is indeed a self-portrait of Leonardo

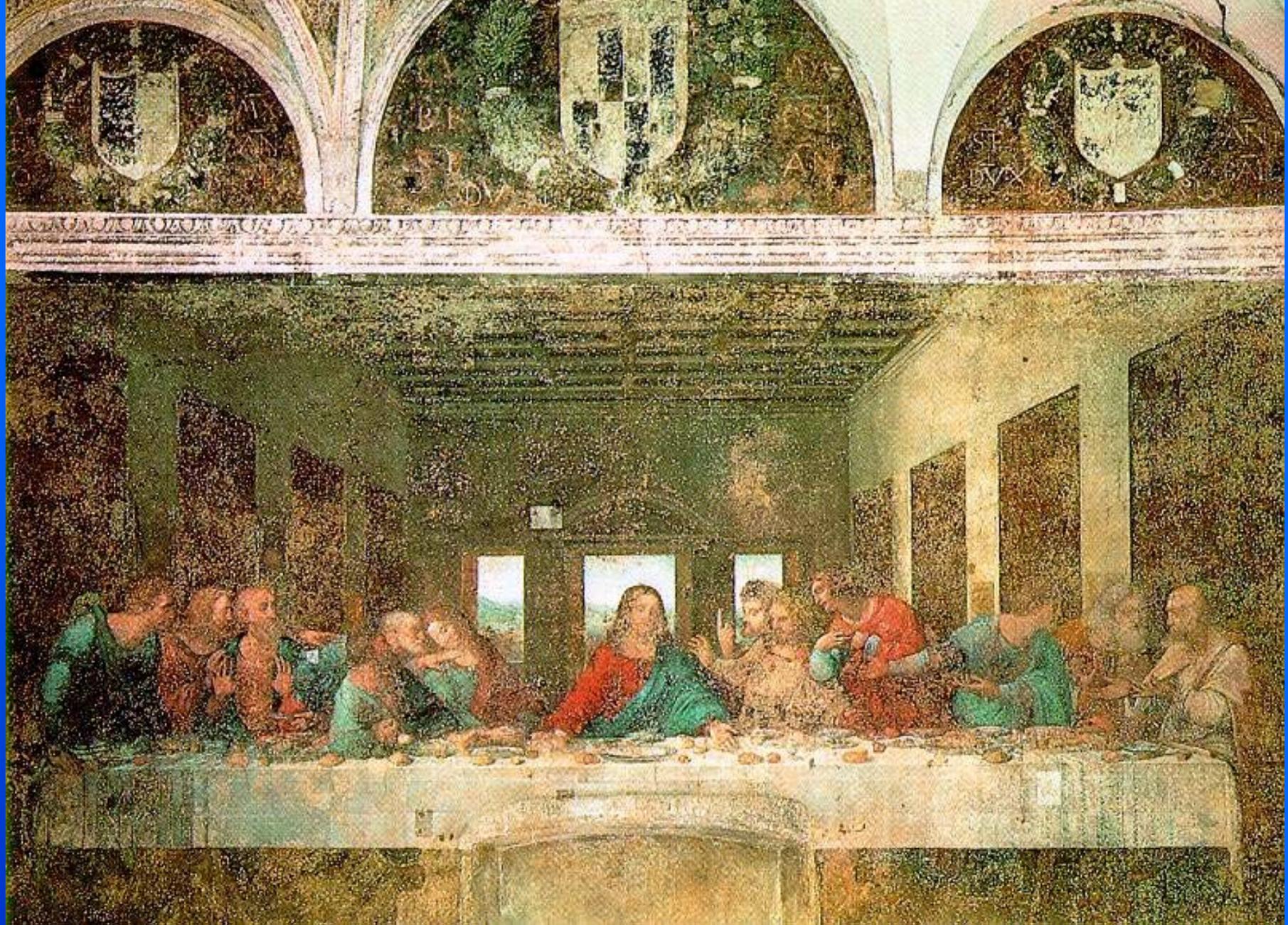
- Leonardo's tank could not have moved by an inch, considering the weight of cannons at that time, and the lack of any system of propulsion. The space inside is clearly insufficient for the number of men or animals required to move it forward. On the other hand it was probably supposed to be just something to show to his prospective employers, not the blueprint of a real machine





## 24.4 This portrait of a woman may or may not be the same that Vasari refers to

- "Leonardo undertook to paint for Francesco del Giocondo a portrait of Mona Lisa his wife, but having spent four years upon it, left it unfinished. This work now belongs to King Francis of France, and whoever wishes to see how art can imitate nature may learn from this head. Mona Lisa being most beautiful, he used, while he was painting her, to have men to sing and play to her and buffoons to amuse her...; and in this of Leonardo's there is a peaceful smile more divine than human" (Vasari).
- You can read Sigmund Freud's notes on the Gioconda here: <http://www.people.virginia.edu/~djr4r/freud.html>



## 24.4 The last supper

## 24.5 Giorgio Vasari (1511-74): *Lives of the Artists...*, Leonardo

- He also painted in Milan for the friars of San Domenico, at Santa Maria delle Grazie, a Last Supper, a thing most beautiful and marvelous...
- The work, finished after this sort, has always been held by the Milanese in the greatest veneration, and by strangers also, because Leonardo imagined, and has succeeded in expressing, the desire that has entered the minds of the apostles to know who is betraying their Master.

## 24.5 Vasari's portrayal of the artist as an intellectual genius, not just a souped-up artisan

- So in the face of each one may be seen love, fear, indignation, or grief at not being able to understand the meaning of Christ; and this excites no less astonishment than the obstinate hatred and treachery to be seen in Judas.
- Besides this, every lesser part of the work shows an incredible diligence; even in the tablecloth the weaver's work is imitated in a way that could not be better in the thing itself.

## 24.5 The Renaissance artist as a thinker and a great man, the equal of Dukes and Kings

- The prior of the place was very importunate in urging Leonardo to finish the work, it seeming strange to him to see Leonardo standing half a day lost in thought; and he would have liked him never to have put down his pencil, as if it were a work like digging the garden.
- And this not being enough, he complained to the duke... Leonardo, knowing the prince to be acute and intelligent, was ready to discuss the matter with him... He reasoned about art, and showed him that men of genius may be working when they seem to be doing the least, working out inventions in their minds, and forming those perfect ideas which afterwards they express with their hands.

## 24.5 Leonardo aims for perfection, aims too high

- ... he proposed to the duke that he should make a bronze equestrian statue of marvelous size to perpetuate the memory of the Duke [Francesco Sforza]. He began it, but made the model of such a size that it could never be completed. There are some who say that Leonardo began it so large because he did not mean to finish it, as with many of his other things. But in truth his mind, being so surpassingly great, was often brought to a stand because it was too adventuresome, and the cause of his leaving so many things imperfect was his search for excellence after excellence, and perfection after perfection.

## 24.5 Leonardo's death in Vasari (1568 version, normalized to fit into the culture of the Counter-Reform)

- having become old, he lay ill for many months, and seeing himself near death, he set himself to study the holy Christian religion, and though he could not stand, desired to leave his bed with the help of his friends and servants to receive the Holy Sacrament.
- Then the king... came in, and he, raising himself respectfully to sit up in bed, spoke of his sickness, and how he had offended God and man by not working at his art as he ought.
- Then there came a paroxysm... and the king raised him and lifted his head to help him and lessen the pain, whereupon his spirit, knowing it could have no greater honor, passed away in the king's arms...



## 24.6 The Virgin and St. Ann, 1510

## 24.7 Leonardo's inventions, from the halls of the museum in Vinci

- <http://www.leonet.it/comuni/vincimus/inptfram.html>
  - Flying machine
  - Helicopter
  - Steam cannon
  - Tank
  - Hygrometer
- <http://www.leonet.it/comuni/vincimus/inp1fram.html>
  - Spring driven car
  - Bicycle
  - Diver breathing apparatus
  - Parachute

## 24.7 Excerpts from an interview with Paolo Galluzzi, curator of the exhibition "Innovative Engineers of Renaissance" (2001)

- One of the most important developments in the art of the 15th century was the introduction of linear perspective: a system of representing three-dimensional space based on the principles of Euclidean geometry
- This major artistic achievement was born of scientific and mathematical research
- So you see, there was really only one impulse: the desire to gain control over space by ordering it mathematically
  - This impulse could express itself in different ways--through a painting that gives you the illusion of depth, or through a dam built on a river. But we should understand that the development of art and the development of technology are really two modes of a single great advance.

## 24.7 Excerpts from an interview with Paolo Galluzzi

<http://brunelleschi.imss.fi.it/ingrin/index.html>

- The situation of the technical worker before the 15th century can be defined as marginal.
  - Engineers were generally anonymous. Beautiful buildings were made during the Middle Ages, but you don't even know the names of the builders, which is a clear sign that their social role was considered marginal.
- Another way to gauge the status of technicians is through the classification of disciplines in the Middle Ages.
  - The basic school curriculum covered seven liberal arts.
  - Four of these, called the *quadrivium*, were considered to be higher, and three, called the *trivium*, were lower.
  - The intellectual disciplines of the quadrivium -- arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music -- were held to be superior.
  - The disciplines of the *trivium* -- grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric -- were inferior.

## 24.7 Excerpts from an interview with Paolo Galluzzi

- Still at a lower level were mechanical arts.
- This was both an intellectual and a social distinction.
  - Being trained only in mechanical arts meant you were someone who worked with your hands, someone who was fit only to be directed by someone else who was better educated.
  - We still have a trace of that distinction in our language, in the words "trivial" and "mechanical."

## 24.8 Final remarks on Leonardo and Vasari

- The most important point in Vasari's biography of Leonardo is the attempt to raise the status of the artist in culture and society, by convincing the reader, through anecdotes and other examples, that the artist is not simply a glorified artisan, someone who knows how to use his hands and his eyes
- Vasari does that very eloquently in the story about the painting of the fresco of the Last Supper in Milan
  - The head of the convent complains about the fact that Leonardo often interrupts his work, puts his brush down to think about his work
  - Leonardo refuses to argue with such an ignorant man (and as an improbable joke, Vasari will have Leonardo use the poor man's head for the face of Judas), but he is then more than willing to explain to the Duke of Milan that an artist works even when his hands are not moving, as the mind is really the primary tool of his art

## 24.8 Final remarks on Leonardo and Vasari

- Throughout the Middle Ages and the late Middle Ages even great artists such as Giotto were considered little more than artisans, and this is evident in the way their names and their salaries are listed in administrative documents, together with carpenters and all kinds of workers
- It is only during the Renaissance that the artist is regarded as a talented individual, and, by definition, a member of the middle-upper class (provided that he is successful)
- Famous artists in this age start spending more time promoting themselves, their art, and enhancing their reputation in order to ask for more money for their works
- Benvenuto Cellini during the late 1500's writes a famous autobiography which shows how he was right from his early childhood an extraordinary individual in any area and activity that he got involved in, from music to the crafting of jewels, from sculpture to duels

## 24.8 Final remarks on Leonardo and Vasari

- Leonardo himself, if you read his notebooks, participated in this revolution by emphasizing that you cannot simply observe nature to paint a realistic painting
- The method that he suggests and that he often practiced involves a careful (quasi-scientific) study of nature, because a painting cannot be simply a mirror of reality, rather it will always be an interpretation, as good as the mind (the intelligence) of the interpreter is
- A good example of Leonardo's reasoning would be his suggestion not to exaggerate with all the details of a painting, since in real life the eye of the viewer will not be able to see clearly the details of a house or an animal on top of a mountain, in the background of the main scene

## 24.8 Final remarks on Leonardo and Vasari

- In another passage, which might very well be an indirect criticism of Michelangelo's style, Leonardo has harsh words for all those artists who exaggerate the muscles of the body of the naked figures in a painting, pointing out that not all the muscles and tendons of the body will be visible and in a state of tension at the same time, suggesting that one has to study anatomy and biology, to understand how the body works and to be able to identify the muscles and tendons that will be used for any given movement, so that the figures in the painting will be anatomically correct and realistic