Leonardo da Vinci was born on April 15, 1452, in the Tuscan hill town of Vinci, in Florence. “da Vinci” literally means from Vinci. He was the “illegitimate son” of Messer Piero Fruosino di Antonio da Vinci, and Caterina, a peasant, who historians believed to be a slave from the Middle East (Leonardo). There is not much recorded about Leonardo’s early life, so there is little known about it. As a child he lived with his father, grandparents and uncle, in the small town of Vinci. When Leonardo was about 6, his father had married a young girl named Albiera. She was only 16 when his father married her, and she shortly after, died young (Editors). Leonardo later on recalled that when he was a child he could sense omens in things and had a fear the unknown of the world which drove his curiosity of life and his want to learn more (Leonardo).

Leonardo’s first step in his career as an artist arose when a local peasant asked him paint a picture on a plaque. Leonardo ended up creating a painting of snakes with fire coming out of their mouths. The painting was so detailed and “terrifying” that that his father sold it to an art dealer, who sold it to the Duke of Milan (Leonardo). This sparked the flame that pushed Leonardo to pursue his art career. This also gave him a name and began his journey to greatness.

By 1466, when Leonardo was only fourteen, he became an apprentice to one of the best known artists of this time period, Andrea di Cione, known as Verrocchio (Editors). Verrocchio's workshop was the heart of education and intellect in Florence. Leonardo was taught a large range of skills and learned “drafting, chemistry, metallurgy, metal working, plaster casting, leather working, mechanics and carpentry as well as the artistic skills of drawing, painting, sculpting and modeling” (Editors). Leonardo worked with his master, Verrocchio, on his painting, “Baptism of Christ”. It is said that Leonardo’s work on the painting was “so far superior to his master's that Verrocchio put down his brush and never painted again.” (Editors). This is probably an exaggeration but it does show how much skill Leonardo had at such a young age. Leonardo even inspired two pieces of work created by Verrocchio, including, “the bronze statue of David in the Bargello and the Archangel Michael in Tobias and the Angel.” (Leonardo). Verrocchio also teacher insisted that Leonardo learned anatomy. As an artist, he grew a big interest in anatomy and it helped him create the realistic paintings that made. Anatomy was studies of muscles, tendons and other “visible” features. Also, his drawing of the “Vitruvian man” is one of the most iconic drawings ever. The “Vitruvian man” shows a nude male in “two superimposed positions” (Cambell). The man has his arms and legs apart and is drawn in a circle and square. Historians say “was almost a science fiction topic in 1487” (Cambell). The measurements and proportions are very true to real life.

Leonardo had countless innovations under his belt. He was not just some painter he was a highly intelligent engineer. He designed things that were so a head of his time that they could only be designs because of the lack of technology. Some of these designs were as complex as the first helicopter or a giant crossbows to something as little as the first parachute design. He also invented something so simple yet so important, called the scissors. This had a huge impact in the development of mankind with such a common thing today.

By 1472, when Leonardo was only 20 years old, he qualified as “a master in the Guild of St Luke, the guild of artists and doctors of medicine” (Leonardo). Even after passing the role as apprentice and being titled a master of his craft, his attachment to Verrocchio was very strong and he continued to work with him. His father even got him his own workshop, but Leonardo was still often seen in his once Master’s studio. One of Leonardo’s main source of income was painting portraits for people.

Even though Leonardo was a master of many different skills and crafts, being a master painter, was his biggest accomplishment and title. He displayed example of “Italian Renaissance concepts, techniques, and typical subject material of the 15th and 16th century” (Cambell). This style, like most other Renaissance painters, was concentrated on religious themes.

Many say that Leonardo’s paintings give the viewers a unique feeling. This may have been because of his “scientific approach” with his paintings. For example, he was one of the first, and only artists of this time, who could really show the concept of the “vanishing point” (Cambell). Vanishing point involves creating a sense of depth by drawing lines that “intersect” in the painting’s background. One of his best examples of this is in his painting, “The Last Supper”. “The Last Supper” shows Jesus and his disciples sitting in a way the “appears symmetrical and realistic, a perfect representation of three-dimensional space, whereby the walls seem to be converging inwards.” (Cambell). Another example of Leonardo working with perspective, is in what is perhaps the most famous painting in the world, the ‘Mona Lisa’. “Viewers feel that the woman in the painting is watching them, regardless of their position in relation to the frame. Furthermore, her mysterious smile seems to suggest a thought. Gazing at Mona Lisa is an eerie experience that can only be felt when looking at the original as some of the effect is lost in reproductions.” Some people would say that her soft looks and gives her an unsettling effect on viewers, and some think hey to her beautiful big eyes gives and “intimate viewing experience” (Editor).

The “Mona Lisa” and “The Last Supper” are only two examples of the many pieces of art Leonardo created which use the techniques of perspective, and color composition, realistic proportion to captivate the viewers. His techniques and skill will forever inspire and captivate artists all around the world. Leonardo da Vinci changed the world with not only his brilliant art but with is innovating inventions and engineered designs which were much far ahead of his time.

Who only knows what kind of impact he would be on the world if he was born in the 20th century. He designed a helicopter, a tank, solar power, a calculator, and “outlined a beginning theory of plate tectonics” (Editor). As a scientist, he advanced the understanding of anatomy and engineering. “Leonardo da Vinci has often been described as the archetype of the "Renaissance man", a man whose great curiosity was as great as his powers of invention” (Leonardo). He is widely considered to be one of the greatest painters of all time and perhaps the most diversely talented person ever to have lived, as he once said, “It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things.”

Works Cited

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