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LEONARDO DA VINCI

Vinci, Leonardo Da (1452-1519) was one of the greatest artists of the Italian Renaissance and the greatest experimental scientist of his age. He displayed genius in almost all the arts and sciences. Da Vinci was a painter, sculptor, architect, musician, and art critic. In the field of science he was an inventor, a civil and military engineer, a botanist, an astronomer, a geologist, and the leading anatomist of his time. Da Vinci was also a pioneer in flying. His notebooks contain sketches of flying machines based on the method of flight used by birds. One machine had a board on which the flier lay and operated oars, or wings, and his feet. These impractical machines show that Da Vinci had a knowledge of aviation far beyond his own time.

He was born the son of the village notary in the little village of Vinci near Florence. The boy showed his genius while a student by solving difficult mathematical and engineering problems that puzzled his teachers. His talent for painting was his most noticeable gift in his early years and he was apprenticed to the painter and sculptor, Andrea del Verrocchio. Da Vinci soon was a better artist than his teacher, and in 1472 he was taken into the painters’ guild in Florence.

In the early 1480’s Da Vinci entered the service of the Duke of Milan, for whom he painted the famous “Last Supper.” This picture is now faded, but it is still considered one of the greatest paintings in the world. Da Vinci designed court pageants, worked out fortifications, and planned an immense statue for the duke. Soon afterward the French occupied Milan and the duke was forced to flee. Da Vinci returned to Florence, where he painted perhaps his most famous picture, the portrait of Mona Lisa del Giocondo, a prominent Florentine woman. The mysterious smile of this lady has been the subject of endless discussion. In 1911 this painting was stolen from the Louvre in Paris, and the theft caused a world sensation. Two years later it was recovered.

In 15006 Da Vinci went once more to Milan, where he served the French king as painter, engineer, and artistic adviser. Six years later he joined a group of architects and painters who were reconstructing Saint Peter’s Church in Rome and adorning the palaces of the Vatican. Da Vinci spent the last years of his life in France. Francis I admired him and persuaded him to visit his country. Until his death, Da Vinci lived in a princely fashion in a chateau, or castle, near Amboise.

Da Vinci was an excellent draftsman and colorist, but it was his scientific genius that made him a great painter. He had a wonderful understanding of psychology and anatomy, and with these two sciences he could reveal the deep, hidden sides of his subject’s character.

His works include “The Virgin of the Rocks,” and “The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne,” in the Louvre. Few other pictures of his have survived. Da Vinci left also a number of notebooks filled with amazing sketches of pictures and inventions, and he was the author of an important book on painting.
Claude Monet (1840-1926) was one of the leaders of the Impressionist group of French painters. This group painted in a style which art critics of their day considered ugly and revolutionary, but which was accepted throughout the world before the end of the 1800's. The Impressionists took their name from Monet’s painting, “Impression, Rising Sun.”

Monet’s paintings were based on his theory that no object has a definite fixed color, but is colored by the way the light strikes it at a particular moment. Monet also had certain new ways of painting bright colors. He did not paint an object violet by mixing blue and red together on his palette. Instead, he placed little touches of red and blue side by side on the canvas.

Monet was born in Paris but spent his early life in Le Havre, where his father was a grocer. Monet liked to draw, and spent much of his time sketching caricatures of people. After a short period in the army, he went to Paris to study under Charles Gleyre. Monet disliked the classical school of painting which was then popular, and joined several artists whose ideas agreed with his own. This group became the Impressionists.

During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, Monet lived in England. On his return to France he began to exhibit the paintings which later won him fame.

His works include “Fontainebleau Forest”; “Water Lilies”; “The Sun in a fog”; “Waterloo Bridge”; and “Rouen Cathedral.”
Rembrandt (1606-1669) was the greatest of all Dutch painters. His full name was Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn, but he is known best by his first name. Rembrandt’s work showed great range of imagination, for he was equally great in painting religious scenes, portraits, scenes of everyday life, and landscapes.

Rembrandt’s religious paintings were painted not for the Church, but for his patrons’ or his own private pleasure, and were stamped with his own individual personality. His early religious works are filled with dramatic and often violent feeling but his later works are marked by calm and peacefulness. Rembrandt’s portraits also show a similar development from a dramatic capture of a momentary pose to a deep and calm understanding of the subject’s character. His many self-portraits show the changes in both the painter and his technique.

The change is also noticeable in his three most famous group portraits. His “Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp,” which was painted in 1632, is rather elegant and showy. “The Company of Captain Cocq on the March,” which was painted in 1642 and is sometimes called “The Night Watch,” is very sharp and dramatic. His last great work, “The Syndics of the Drape’ Guild,” is calm and monumental.

Rembrandt was a great etcher and draftsman as well as a painter. Most of his landscapes and his scenes of everyday life were done in etchings and drawings. His painted landscapes were mostly of an imaginary, mountainous type. In his etchings, Rembrandt changed the white of the paper into an all-enveloping light, and the black of his lines and areas into forms which give the spirit instead of the appearance of man and nature.

Rembrandt’s most famous artistic method was the use of chiaroscuro. It was a masterly blending of light and dark and of the visible and the invisible. His colors had a deep glow, and the chiaroscuro, which seemed to make forms come out of the dark background, gave his paintings depth and intensity.

Rembrandt was born in Leiden, the son of a miller. He attended the University of Leiden, but later turned his attention to art. After studying under Pieter Lastman in Amsterdam, he returned to his home town and set himself up as a painter. He soon attracted attention and went back to Amsterdam, where he continued to live.

In 1634 he married the wealthy Saskia van Uijlenburgh, and became a fashionable portrait painter of the wealthy classes. He became very rich and built up a magnificent art collection. But tragedy struck with the early deaths of three of his four children, and, in 1642, with the death of his wife.

Rembrandt lost his popularity and his money began to run out. In 1656 he became bankrupt, and he was poor the rest of his life. Only the help of his housekeeper and second wife, Hendrickje Stoffels, and of his son Titus saved him from starvation. They set up an art dealers’ shop in 1660 and gave the elderly painter employment. But both died soon after, and Rembrandt was left alone to die in poverty.

His works include “Supper at Emmaus”; “The Prodigal Son”; “Old Woman Cutting Her Nails”; Simeon in the Temple”; “Christ as the Gardener”; and “Young Girl at an Open Half Door.”