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## Introduction

In May 2024, an article in the Guardian led to worldwide news that an Italian geologist and art historian, Ann Pizzorusso, had successfully identified the mountains that form the backdrop of the Mona Lisa and the bridge that can be seen there.<sup>1</sup> Without a precise definition of the mountains of Lecco

and identified the bridge in the painting as the Azzone Visconti Bridge in Lecco, which is still in use today. This study is not only intended to confirm these claims

but also sets itself the daring goal of determining which part of the floor of which building in the Lecco area, which part of which building, which part of which floor still exists today, the model could have been sitting on, and where Leonardo da Vinci could have painted him. Once the authenticity of the site has been proven beyond doubt, and in the light of this, and of a Mona Lisa hitherto ignored by research

I will attempt, by interpreting the information left behind, to identify the person of the lady in the painting(s) and to understand the creative motivation(s) behind Leonardo's different versions of the Mona Lisa.

I will, of course, take into account and use the results of the research to date, and where as a necessary reference, in view of the extensive literature on the subject and the often non-consensual professional positions, instead of evaluating these theories in detail and contrasting them with each other, I will outline my own ideas and their logic.

## Leonardo around Lake Como and in the Adda river valley

Leonardo has been documented to have visited the Lake Como area near Lecco on several occasions, and the Adda river valley was also studied in detail to study the regulation of waterways. After leaving Florence and being employed by the Sforzas, he explored the Lombardy canals in 1490, and in 1492 he also visited the Lake Como area, e.g. Como and Bellagio.<sup>2</sup> It is very likely that the that he already knew the Brianza area well in the 1490s.<sup>3</sup> Later in 1507 he studied the Adda river, as he did in 1510. In 1511, he moved to the villa of Melzi in Vaprio d'Adda and made drawings of the landscapes of the area until 1513.

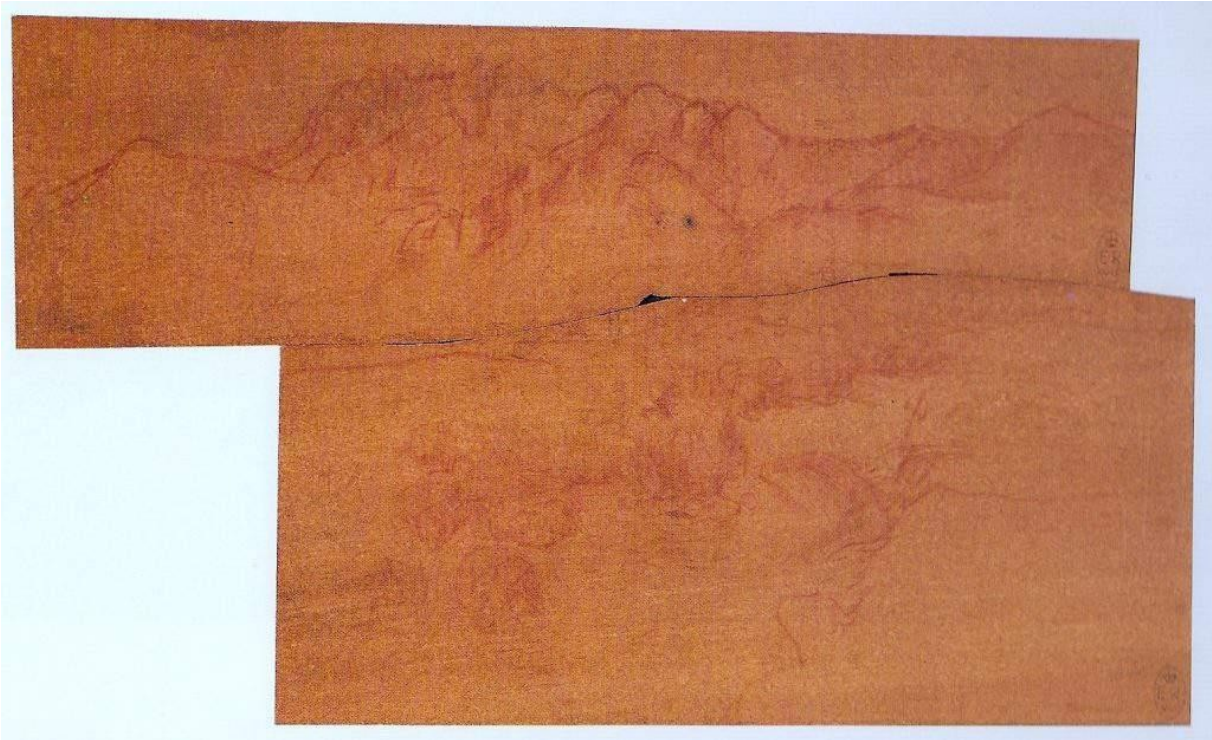
In addition, due to a lack of sources, there is a serious lack of knowledge about when, why and on whose behalf Leonardo was in the Adda and Lecco area, but it is easy to see that in his first Milanese period (1482-1499) this happened several times in addition to the occasions just mentioned. In any case, it is certain that Leonardo's drawings RL12413 and RL 12414 were made in the same building as the Mona Lisa, so Leonardo could have been there. The building we are looking for is the Rocchetta di Airuno, whose loggia offers the same view as Leonardo's drawing - picture 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Dalya Alberge: The Guardian: Mystery of where Mona Lisa was painted has been solved, geologist claims 11 May 2024. [www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/article/2024/may/11/where-mona-lisa-was-painted-mystery-solved-geologist-claims](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/article/2024/may/11/where-mona-lisa-was-painted-mystery-solved-geologist-claims)

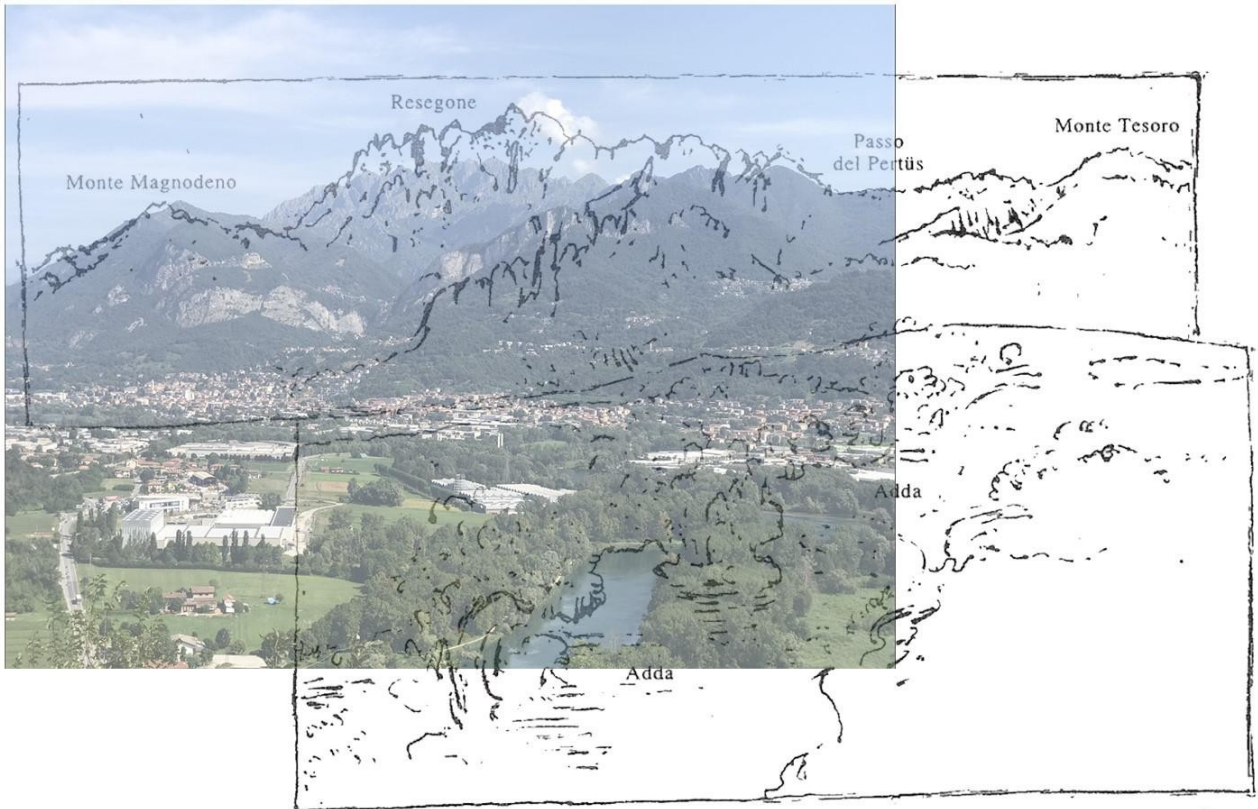
<sup>2</sup> <https://brunelleschi.imss.fi.it/itineraries/itinerary/ChronologyLeonardo.html>

<sup>3</sup> Fondazione Lombardia per l'Ambiente : LEONARDO E I PAESAGGI DI LOMBARDIA - Vie d'acqua e vie di - 69.page



1. image from

This coincidence is already discussed in a 2019 study<sup>4</sup>, but its significance is not explained there. For ease of interpretation, I present below a juxtaposition of the graphic identifying the mountains and the Adda river in Leonardo's drawing and the landscape itself. The correspondence is undeniable. The mountains at different distances from the viewpoint are positioned in relation to each other, just like the meandering river Adda below. Both the angle and the height coincide with the view from the loggia of the Rocchetta di Airuno (only the height of the Resegone is slightly inaccurate).



2. image from

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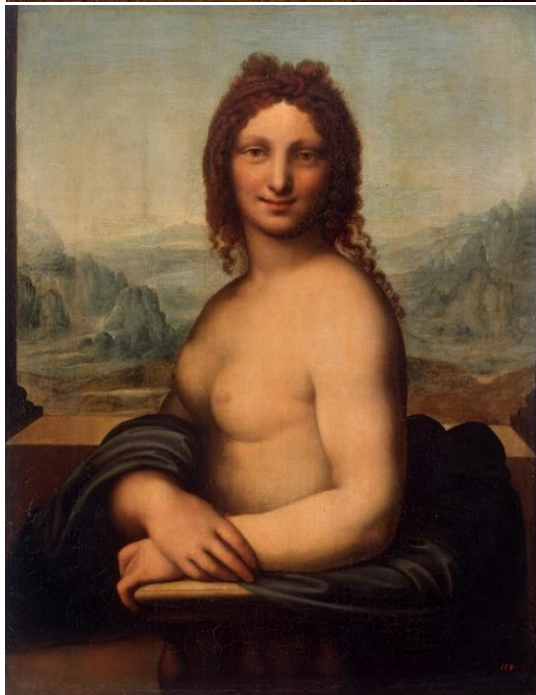
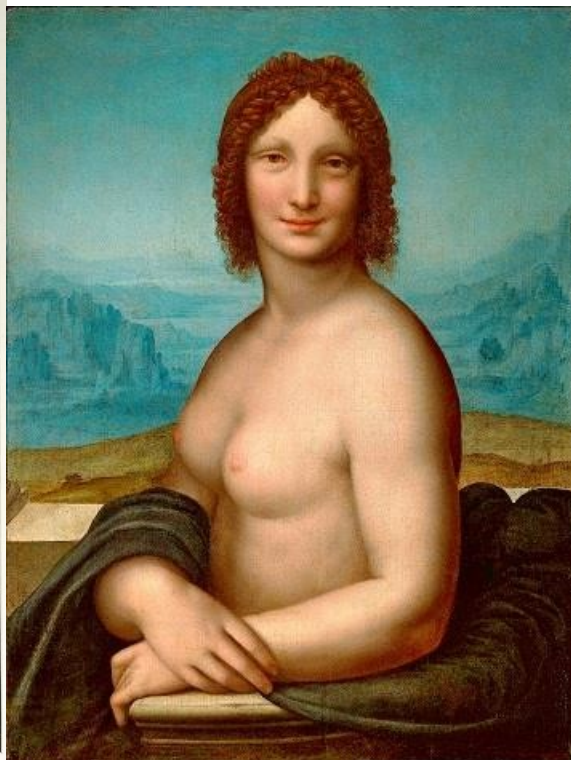
<sup>4</sup> ANGELO RECALCATI: 'And This May Be Seen' Leonardo da Vinci and the Alps -169.p.





3. image from

## The naked Mona Lisa



So before we talk more about the building itself, the Rocchetta di Airuno, it is worth noting that Leonardo visited it and the stunning panorama from there was, I assume, the backdrop for his "Nude Mona Lisa", which, if true, will also prove that the



other versions of the Mona Lisa were also made in the former fortress<sup>5</sup>. The Nude Mona Lisa, or "Mona Vanna", a charcoal drawing in the Condé Museum, was most recently in the media spotlight in 2017, when an investigation by the Louvre revealed that it was probably the work of Leonardo, in whole or in part. This proves what art historians have long assumed: the Mona Lisa was painted by Leonardo in various ways, several times, or at least he was involved in the in their painting. I will write more about this later.

However, in addition to the charcoal drawing of Mona Vanna in the Condé museum, there are also paintings of a nude Mona Lisa with a background, which are similar to each other. The foregoing suggests, therefore, that either one of these works is indeed Leonardo's, or at least one of his from the workshop. If not, there must have been one from which the copies were made. This is significant because the lack of clothes between the Mona Lisa and the Nude Mona Lisa the most obvious difference is in the background landscape. While the background of the Mona Lisa is complex, "pieced together" from several detailed elements in an almost fairy-tale-like manner, the the background of a naked Mona Lisa looks real. But the really special discovery is that it is has a strong resemblance with the landscape seen from the loggia of Rocchetta dil Airuno. The similarity is even it is more convincing to reconstruct the approximate position of the model on the spot.

4. image from



4. image from

The composition is revealing at first glance. To the left, below the shoulder, is the steep slope of a rocky mountain, while to the right of the neck is the slope of a more gentle mountain. Also of note is the presence of a body of water at the neck of the left slope - Lake Garlate.

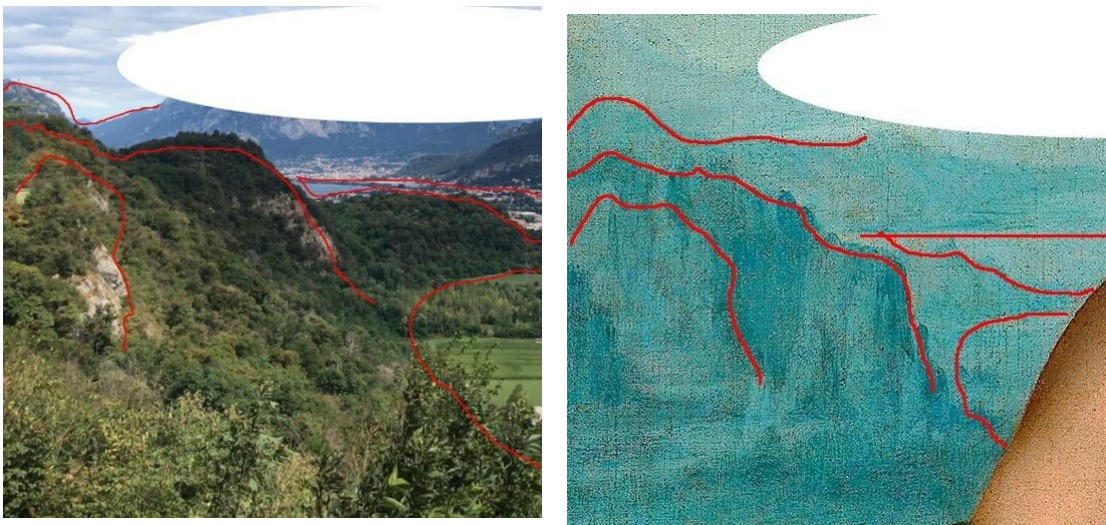
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<sup>5</sup> Walter Isaacson: Leonardo Da Vinci, Helikon, 2018 - p596



5. image from

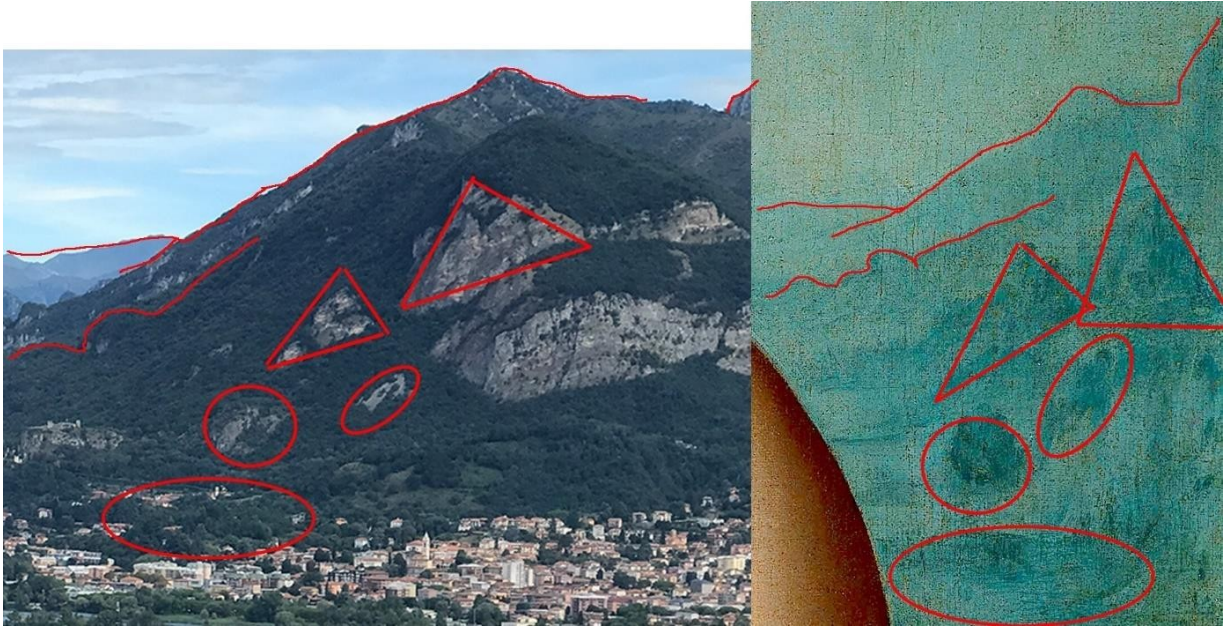
If we look at the shapes in more detail, the identity becomes clear.- Picture 6. The only difference is that Leonardo did not depict the distant Mount Grignetta in the area marked with a white ellipsis in picture 6, because the block that rises next to the head would presumably have disturbed the composition.



6. image from

In the case of the landscape on the right side of the shoulder, all the characteristic elements correspond to the real landscape and are almost exactly depicted.





7. image from

At the bottom of the steep foot of the mountain, there is a flat oval-shaped - now inhabited - basin, the location of which can be clearly seen on Google Earth (45°48'43 "N 9°25'42 "E) - image 8.

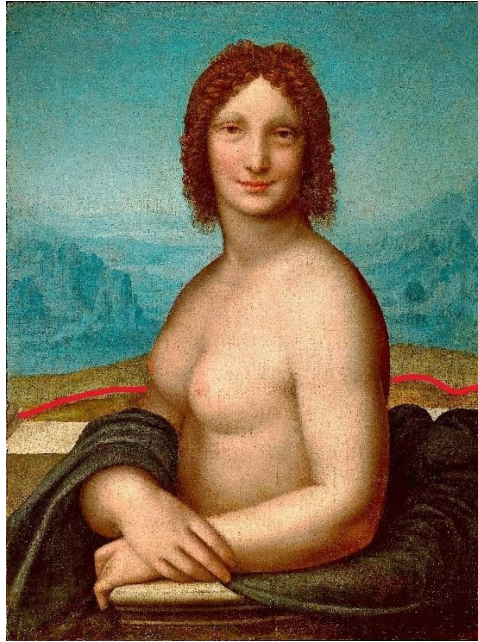
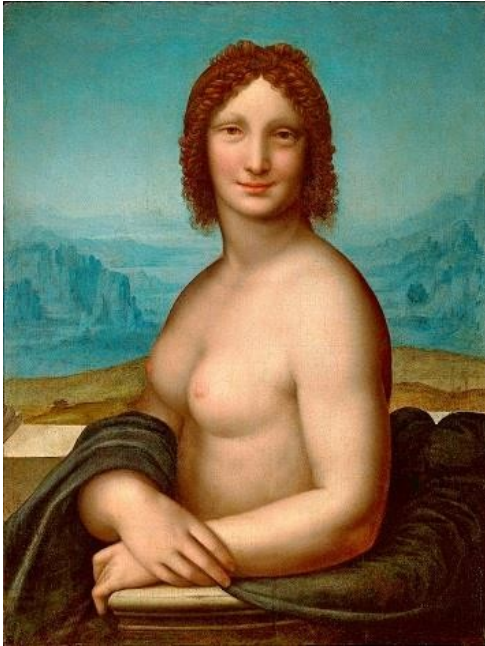


8. image from

Both the rock formations and the silhouette of the distant mountain - which is fainter because it is further away - match. There are only minor differences between the reality and the painting, except one: to the right of the summit, a new rise begins further away in reality - although again its shape, angle of repose and break are exactly the same. This slight modification may have been made by Leonardo to avoid breaking his composition, in which the mountains on either side of the Mona Lisa are seen in a V-shape.

Further argument that the Rocchetta di Airuno is indeed the scene is provided by the sharp outline and contrasting yellowish curve against the bluish background between the railing and the distant bluish landscape - Fig. 9. From the loggia, looking north-west, towards the female figure, there was once a castle wall- Image 10, the traces of which are still clearly visible today. - Image 11.





9. image from



10. picture11

. picture

It is not difficult to imagine, from this view, the then certainly more elegant walls that curved around the terraced elevation. This also answers the question of why in the painting we get the impression that beyond the wall there is a depth separating the landscape from the distance - as this is also the case in reality.



12. image from

The Nude Mona Lisa in charcoal, which recent research suggests is definitely a work by Leonardo in whole or in part, makes it likely that the painting is either a genuine Leonardo work or a copy made in his workshop by one of his pupils. The other versions of the Mona Lisa, in which both the lady, the pose and the background of the loggia are identical, must have been so get ready.

The loggia

This loggia, located in Rocchetta di Airuno, consists of a longer north-western part and a shorter north-eastern part perpendicular to it. On entering the loggia, the panorama almost gives you the impression of being in the the archway in front of which Leonardo could have painted his mysterious subject. This is the penultimate arch in the north-western part of the church, seen from the entrance. - Picture 13. In the case of the arch to the left of this one, the terrain obstructs the view. The arch to the right is not only 20 cm narrower - about 180 cm instead of 205 cm - but the buttress also narrows the view. It cannot be a coincidence that the loggia widens out opposite the arch, and a stone table has found a place there.



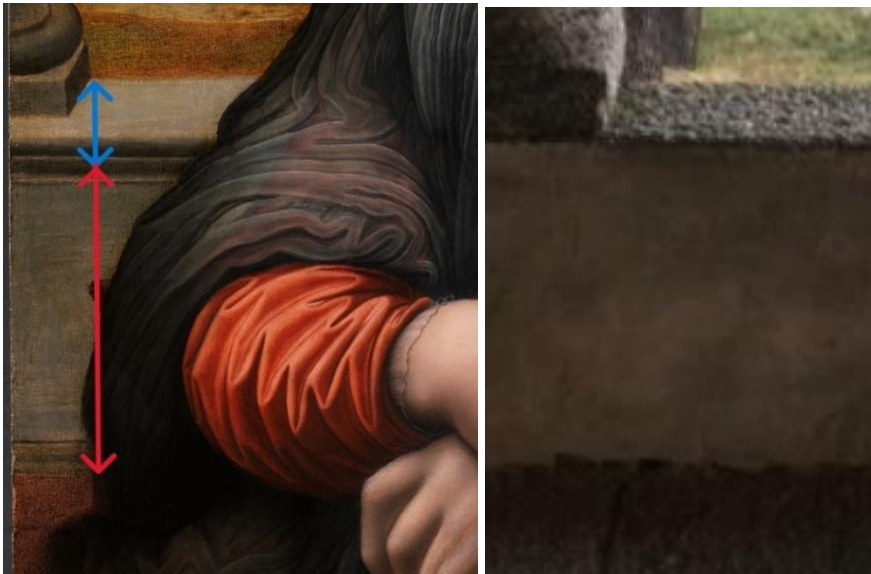




13. image from

The parapet

Almost all paintings show the top of the parapet, but the Prado Mona Lisa is the one with the most exposed ground. Comparing this with field measurements ( approx. 34 cm thick, approx. 57 cm high ) and photographs, it is clear that the proportions of the parapet in Rochetta are very similar to the proportions of the parapet in the painting.





14. image from

Unfortunately, the date of the construction of the loggia is not known, but the Missaglia Convento della Misericordia, only about 10 km from Rochetta, is known to have been built at the end of the 15th century, and the stylistic similarity is clear.



15. image from

### Columns

The columns in Rochetta are the same Tuscan-style columns used during the Renaissance that you see in the paintings. There are, however, some small differences an explanation must be given. Most strikingly, the columns in the paintings are much closer together than in reality (except for the Nude Mona Lisa). However, this fact does not disprove that the Mona Lisa paintings were done in Rochetta, because if the distance between the columns is Leonardo (or his pupils) would have wanted to represent reality, they would be equally spaced in the different paintings. But this is far from being the case.





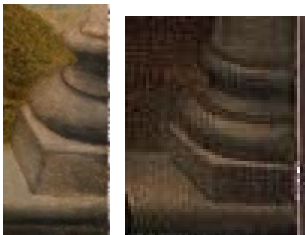
16. image from

In reality, the columns are about 205 cm apart, and if you follow the composition of the painting and sit the model in the middle, and show her exactly from the front, the best part of the panorama is simply not visible.



17. image from

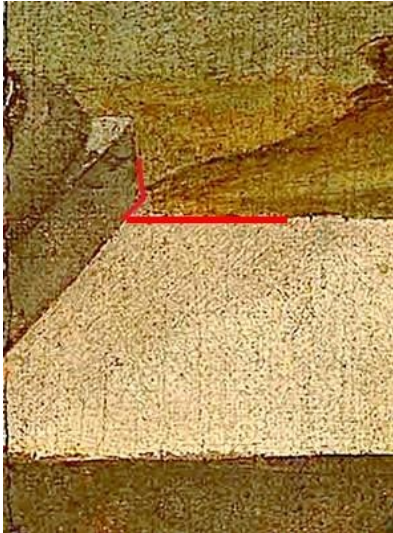
For Leonardo, the symmetry of the columns framing the picture vertically and the parapet framing it horizontally was obviously more important than spoiling the composition for the sake of realism. Leonardo paid little attention to the bases of the columns, painting them at most slightly less robust than the real thing. Although their style is the same in all the paintings, their proportions and elaboration vary - Fig. 18 - and it is telling that they are barely visible in the Louvre Mona Lisa, considered the most sophisticated. More on the reason for this later,



18. picture.

The Nude Mona Lisa stands out in two ways, however, and that is that it follows reality in terms of the columns. On the one hand, only one column "fits" in the picture, as it actually does on the other hand, the base of that one is also hanging strangely from the top of the parapet, as we can see on the spot today.





19. image from

It should also be mentioned that above the pedestals of the Rocchetta columns, the decorative elements that are still present on the columns in the painting are now missing. According to Davide Maria Vertemara, these were often made of terracotta in the 15th and 16th centuries and, although they could not have been durable, their marks can still be seen on each column today.<sup>6</sup> - Fig. 20. I have not been able to find out when these repairs were made, but in any case, the date of the first one, the early 1940s, is not known.

on the postcard, there appear to have been deeper gouges in the columns, which appear to have been made  
may have been repaired in the 1940s. - picture 21

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<sup>6</sup> Davide Maria Vertemara: MONNA LISA LANDSCAPE FROM ROCCHETTA OF AIRUNO



20. picture21

. picture

## Perspectives

Looking at the versions of the Mona Lisa, it is striking that they often differ in perspective. The model is sometimes closer to the parapet, sometimes further away from it, which is depicted from a lower or higher angle. It is reasonable to assume that Leonardo, in his characteristic manner

experimenting, looking for the perfect angle and distance for his painting. It's worth mentioning Raffaello's drawing of Leonardo's painting, which differs from the other Mona Lisas in that it shows the woman from the lowest perspective, but also in that she is not sitting in an armchair - instead she is resting her arms on a long, straight panel. In principle, of course, it is possible that Raffaello drew the picture from memory, after the fact, and was merely mistaken about the differences, but this explanation seems plausible. After all, the drawing is very rich in detail, and even from the accurate and subtle depiction of the hands alone, it is hard to believe that Raffaello would have been so poor an observer that he would have forgotten that Mona Lisa was sitting on a chair, while accurately recalling the details. Rightly so

We can therefore assume that Leonardo also had a painting in which Mona Lisa was not sitting on a chair and was seen from a lower perspective. Knowing the loggia, it is not difficult to find a place where Mona Lisa could have been painted from such a perspective, leaning on a table top.

Reconstructed on the spot, this assumption seems correct.



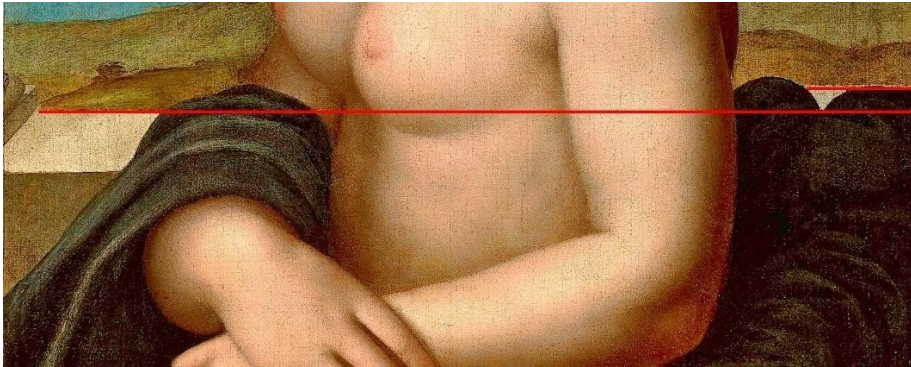


22. image from



23. image from

It is also worth examining separately how Leonardo experimented with correcting and perceiving perspective while maintaining a symmetrical composition. This was necessary because, although he depicted the loggia from the centre, from the eye, it is known from the location that the he had to sit slightly to the left of her because of the panorama. In the Nude Mona Lisa the lines of the parapet do not coincide, while in the Louvre version the top of the parapet to the right of the model is slightly narrower and rises at an angle of about 8 degrees.



24. image from

#### Background of the Mona Lisa in the Louvre and Prado

First of all, it is worth clarifying that the two paintings referred to in the title were painted at the same time, since the corrections on the Louvre Mona Lisa were made at the same time on the Prado Mona Lisa,<sup>7</sup> meaning that it is highly likely that while Leonardo was working on - and correcting - his own, his student who was copying him was also correcting the Prado Mona Lisa. Nor would we expect any significant formal differences in the background depictions, so for the sake of simplicity, we will not discuss this aspect of the work in the following I distinguish between the two paintings.

Once the background of the Nude Mona Lisa has been identified with absolute certainty, as the view from the loggia of the Rocchetta di Airuno, the question arises whether the Louvre and the Prado Are the backgrounds of the Mona Lisa just a figment of Leonardo's imagination or a product of nature? I suppose the correct answer is both. Leonardo admired nature

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<sup>7</sup> Museo Nacional del Prado YT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJxXdUZf0HA> - 6m30s, 9m43s

but used them in the way that best suited his own creative power.<sup>8</sup>  
will be of importance later, when deciphering the meaning of the painting.

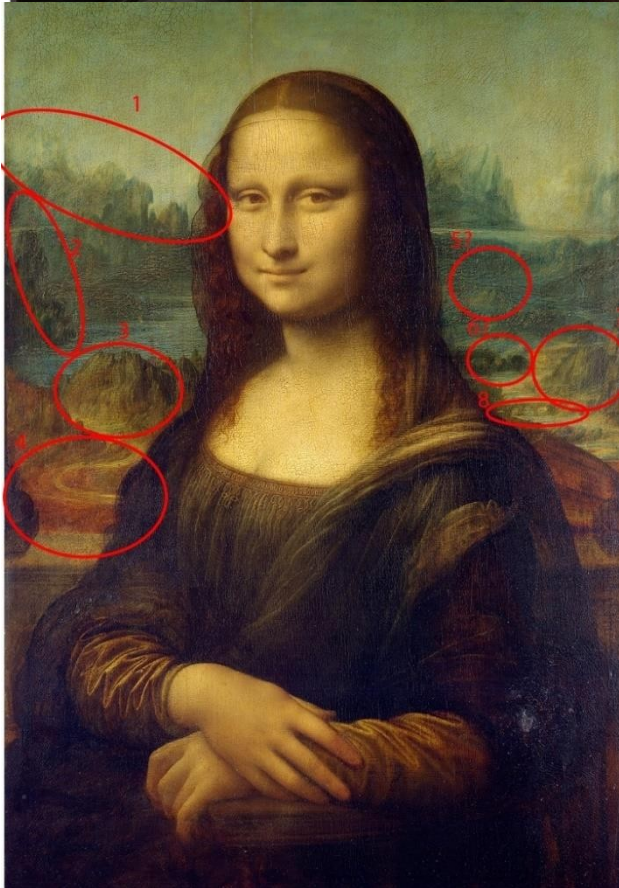
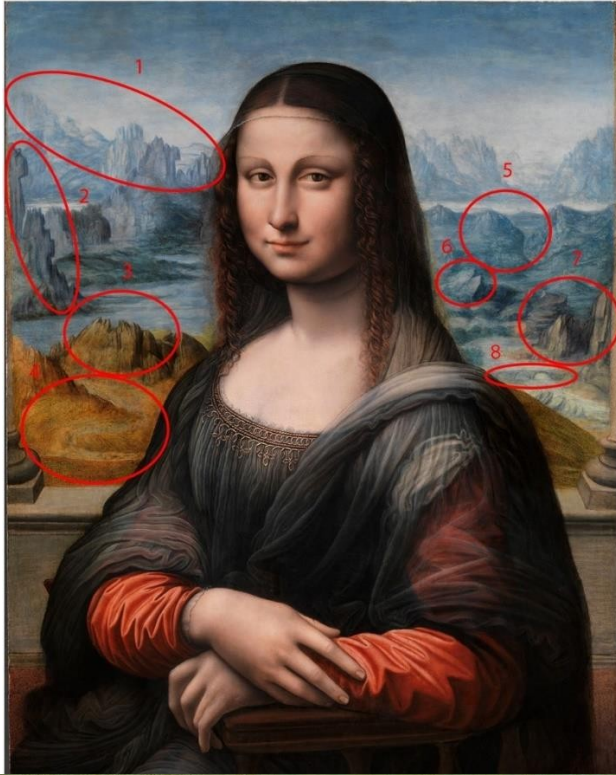
So Leonardo did not want to capture the magnificent rock formations he saw around Lecco exactly as they were, but as his own artistic creation, a kind of making a "selection", slightly modifying them occasionally, and then arranging them in a single composition. Leonardo was clearly bold in his use of artistic freedom, retaining only the particular, individual character of the forms. The rock formations, already fabulous in themselves, were transformed by the means of art into a unified fairy-tale world, and placed it as a worthy background for the suggestive smile. Without going into an exhaustive art historical analysis, its message can be briefly summarised as that timeless beauty can only be created by nature with the help of creative man. Perhaps this was Leonardo's artistic credo, and why he worked on this work so much, why so many versions were created, why he explored angles and distances to such an extent.

If all this is true, then the characteristic rock formations borrowed from nature must be recognisable in the painting. What are they? Rocks and mountains that have enough character, spectacular enough to stand out in a landscape already rich in natural scenery, and thus capture Leonardo's attention and imagination when he was in the Lake Como area spent his time. I have been able to identify eight of these formations with a high probability, but I am sure that those who know the area well will find some more. - Picture 25 (Formations 5 and 6 on the Louvre Mona Lisa are not clearly visible)

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Isaacson: Leonardo Da Vinci, Helikon, 2018 - p.321





25. image from

1. Mount Resegone in the Lecco area (GPS 45.846300872546806, 9.39284372103953)

The mountains towering over Lecco, about 10 km from Rochetta, are impossible to miss, and were certainly so in Leonardo's day. Slightly 'squashed' horizontally, but almost flawlessly, the characteristic shapes are drawn one after the other. The only difference is that the peak marked with a blue arrow is for some reason higher in the painting than in reality.



2. Grignetta (rock formations on the hills above Lecco)

It is questionable how high Leonardo reached during his travels in the area, but for this similar stone formations were probably seen in many places.





3. Mountains behind Santuario di S. Martino (GPS 45.843468389588914, 9.344388949915821)

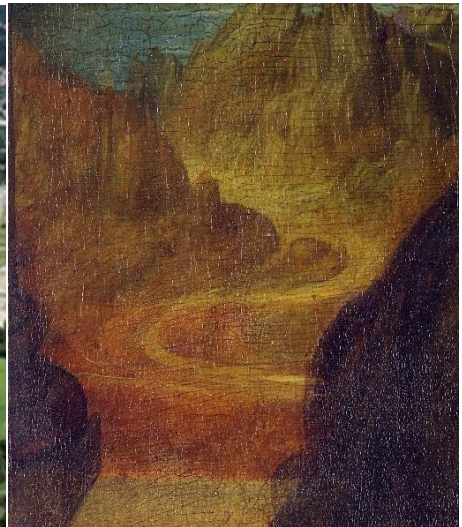
At 8 km from Rochetta, a church dating from the Early Middle Ages is set against a dramatic backdrop of mountains. We don't know for sure if Leonardo visited the site, but the mountains certainly did not escape his attention as he walked around the area.





4. South of Capiate, the once possibly marshy part (GPS 45.7729673949836, 9.425959737527927)

This landscape appears to be the closest to Rochetta, and thus represents the river and its smaller branches meandering towards Capiate, less than 1km away, along the Adda River. A the meandering, perhaps slightly marshy landscape on the plain takes on an autumnal, yellowish colour - photo 26.







26. image from

That the river flowed in a less regular course five hundred years ago than it does today is confirmed by a drawing by Leonardo. In the upper left corner you can see the Rocchetta, and below it the meandering bed of the Adda, which in the painting, marked here with a red arrow, seems to be slightly spread out.



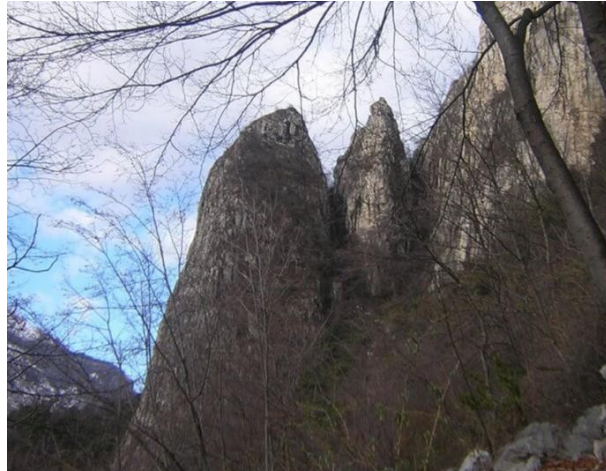
27. image from

5. From Monte Regismondo to Monte Coltignone (GPS 45.88024312095478, 9.388434294482805)





6. Duplaszikla - Pizzetto (GPS 45.86937253693898, 9.383110813474904)



These two huge boulders towering over Lecco already appear in Leonardo's painting Annunciation, painted in the 1470s.



28. image from

Tre corni (GPS 45.678333118546355, 9.461594823605314)

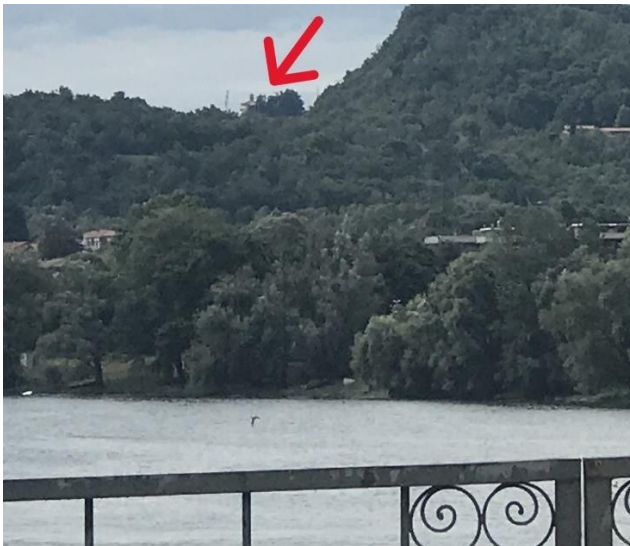
The Rocchetta di Airuno is a natural landmark located about 8 km from the Rocchetta di Airuno, in a bend of the Adda river.



Roman Bridge (GPS 45.802482091993646, 9.413453585353997)



The former Roman bridge, about 4 km from Rocchetta di Airuno, which was visible from the loggia. This new bridge, built alongside the former bridge, can be seen from the fortress (Rocchetta di Airuno is indicated by a red arrow) - photo 29.



29. image from

In the Guardian article, Ann Pizzorusso wrongly identified the bridge with the Azzone Visconti Bridge, built in the 14th century. In his study, Davide Maria Vertemara discusses the bridge in exhaustive detail and concludes that the Azzone Visconti Bridge at the time looked different from the painting, opposite the Roman bridge, which, although no longer in use, is shown on the maps of the time



it was still standing, at least for the most part.<sup>9</sup> A photograph from 1945 even shows the pillars.<sup>10</sup> - Photo 30.



30. image from

### **The chronology of the different versions**

Of the voluminous amount of Mona Lisa portraits, we will focus below on the five that are presumably closely linked to Leonardo and help us to understand the creative process. We will try to reconstruct how and why the differences between the versions might have developed.

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<sup>9</sup> Davide Maria Vertemara: MONNA LISA LANDSCAPE FROM ROCCHETTA OF AIRUNO

<sup>10</sup> Aldeghi G., Riva L.: Il ponte romano sull'Adda a Olginate.



## 1. Naked Mona Lisa

We might suspect the identity of a wealthy client's mistress behind the lady's identity, as nude or semi-nude portraits of a specific woman were usually commissioned in such cases. Since Leonardo's charcoal drawing of the lady, we know that she must have been painted. It must either be this painting or a copy by one of his pupils - many attribute it to Salai - because, unlike the other known Nude Mona Lisa, this background accurately depicts the real-life view of Rochetta. Also reflecting reality is the fact that we only see a detail of one column, as the in reality, the columns are much further apart than in the other paintings. Another very realistic detail of the column "hanging" from the parapet ledge. This ledge not much thought has been given to its elaborateness, which may indeed have reflected its former appearance. The perspective that Leonardo has painted the woman slightly sideways, with the lines of the cornice, is an attempt to

- Picture 24. The lady, however, seems to be painted in a slightly idealised way, as in the charcoal drawing. Overall, then, Leonardo, in keeping with this type of commission, has perhaps embellished the lady a little, but without much concern for the surroundings, has painted them in a rather realistic, even slightly simplified, way.

It is not known whether he was commissioned by Lodovico Sforza at the same time or a little later to produce another painting of the lady in a dress. Nor is it possible that Leonardo himself suggested that he be commissioned to do another painting, which Lodovico was happy to accept.

It is possible that Leonardo, who was always experimenting, was so inspired by the panorama of Rocchetta, the extraordinary rock formations and the beauty of the female body that he conceived an idea celebrating the artist's capturing of natural and human beauty. He wanted to create a masterpiece that would surpass even the beauty created by reality. The conditions were right: a young, beautiful woman as a model, a loggia with stunning views, and the unique rock formations that are ubiquitous around Lecco.

## 2. Raffaello's drawing

Raffaello visited Leonardo's workshop in Florence around 1504 and saw what was probably an early version of the Mona Lisa, which was still in the Rochetta and was kept by Leonardo. What is known about this work from the drawing is that the columns, as in all his later works, frame the picture from two sides, but the perspective is different - the model is much further away from the parapet. It is also likely that an early version of the painting is that the model here is leaning on a table top rather than the arm of a chair - Leonardo later abandoned these attempts and returned to depicting the chair and a smaller distance from the parapet. The slightly sideways head was later retained, but the lady's hairstyle is different, and she does not yet have the textile draped over her shoulders as in later paintings. Together, these suggest an early experiment. The background of the painting was probably not finished and Raffaello only marked it with a few lines - as he did later in his own similar painting.

## 3. Mona Lisa of Isleworth

This painting is a transition between the previous and the Louvre Mona Lisa. There is much controversy about its authenticity, but there is one detail in the painting that proves to me that it is original: the rounded edge of the cornice, traces of which can still be seen on the site. The Nude Mona Lisa omits this detail, while the Louvre Mona Lisa has 'added' a non-existent stucco decoration. The Isleworth Mona Lisa is therefore a kind of transition in this respect too. On the lower left, the landscape is identical to the later Verzo landscape, but the mountain behind it is different from it and from reality. Leonardo has therefore already begun here



to use the arbitrary shaping of the existing landscape elements, but perhaps he was still dissatisfied with them, because the part above it is hardly his work. (Perhaps the picture came into the possession of someone who painted over the blank part later, perhaps unfinished.) Another difference is that the lady's face appears thinner here, which makes it resemble Raphaello's drawing. Her hair is now hanging over her shoulders, and there is also the slung textile on her shoulders, which will be discussed later.

#### 4.5. Louvre Mona Lisa and Prado Mona Lisa

Leonardo's last version was certainly the Mona Lisa in the Louvre. It is unanimously considered by the profession to be the most beautiful version. The most recent studies show that the Prado version was made at exactly the same time, and that one of Leonardo's pupils copied the Master while he was working on it. So we see what Leonardo arrived at at the end of the perfecting process. distance is not realistic, but he has placed them just close enough to be just visible. The woman's face is slightly fuller than before. He placed great emphasis on the landscape, and he himself created his own landscape from the natural scenery around Lecco. to your taste. To create a lateral perspective for the viewer, he slightly modified the right side of the parapet, but more subtly than he did for the Nude Mona Lisa.

We can see, then, that Leonardo experimented with almost everything in his characteristic way. With the columns, the with the cornices, the distances, the angles, the face, the clothes, the background. An accurate knowledge of the loggia helps us to understand these, and we can summarise the degree of correspondence with reality as follows examined and arranged in chronological order:

Columns: Real distance - Imaginary distance - Distance between the two

Parapet: Real, but simplified - Real - Real, but decorated with stucco Parapet

perspective: Existing, but simplified - None - Existing

Landscape: real - Real but slightly modified (unfinished) - Real elements but completely new

layout Face: idealised beauty - More real - Idealised beauty but more mysterious

Clothing: Not over the shoulder - Over the shoulder

Hair: Contemporary hairstyle - Behind the shoulder - Hair with logo on the shoulder

Several conclusions can be drawn from these changes: 1. The lady's real features may have been the closest to those of the face in the Mona Lisa at Isleworth; 2. Leonardo gradually matured the concept of arranging the natural landscape freely, using real elements but with his own creativity and imagination. 3. He eventually chose the golden mean in both perspective and columns. 4. The flesh and blood beauty of the model was gradually transformed by the artist into an "eternal beauty", a kind of man-made Goddess.

How conscious Leonardo must have been of the latter is revealed in a BBC documentary. In the last version, the Louvre Mona Lisa, which Leonardo must have considered finished, both the hair and the dress slung over the shoulders suggest that Leonardo ultimately intended to portray her as a kind of goddess.<sup>11</sup> The same was true of the Isleworth Mona Lisa, so the concept of the but he couldn't find the face of the model "divine" enough, so he

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<sup>11</sup> BBC: Secrets of the Mona Lisa - 50m24s <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kknh1y6dV7A>

changed it slightly later. Also in the same documentary, it is said that an examination of the pigments revealed that the colour of Mona Lisa's dress was once called Leonardo, after the colour of the lion's fur. This may have been a deliberate but "hidden" reference to Leonardo's self.<sup>12</sup> Such hidden pictorial references can also be found in several portraits of Leonardo. In the portrait of Cecilia Gallerani, the antique name of the ermine is followed by Galé, while in the portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, the Italian name Ginepro may be hidden behind the terraced tree.<sup>13</sup> In the case of the Mona Lisa, the name of the model was obviously not the point, and probably not even intended to be revealed, because the aim was to capture a general beauty and not a specific person. That is why we do not see the jewellery on her, which is typical of portraits and helps to identify her.<sup>14</sup> Leonardo must have felt the painting to be his own. For him, it was the visual embodiment of his aforementioned creed, and therefore could have hidden his name in it. But there is more to support this idea. On the Prado Mona Lisa, the new dress is a different colour - a shade of red - for which the reason has not yet been discovered. Since we know that this work was made under the supervision of Leonardo by one of his pupils, it is possible that the new dress was made in a different colour on the Master's instructions, since the colour Leonato was used to indicate the Master himself.

Whether these assumptions are true or not, the message of the painting is clear: Leonardo's artistic genius has made the beauty of nature and man even more beautiful, and has painted it in capturing it makes it eternal. He not only rivals, but conquers nature and the gods. No wonder Leonardo made so many versions of the painting, and held on to them so tightly throughout his later life.

### **Who was the woman in the Mona Lisa?**

As more and more researchers are assuming, Lisa del Giocondo certainly did not. The painting must have been painted during one of Leonardo's periods in Milan because of the location of the Rocchetta di Airuno. The second period can be excluded, since Raphaello saw a version around 1504, before Leonardo's second period in Milan. This leaves the period between 1482 and 1499. The same period is supported by the fact that the Prado Mona Lisa - which was made at the same time as the Louvre Mona Lisa - found a foundation technique in the painting that was characteristic of Leonardo's first period in Milan.<sup>15</sup> From this period, only the 1490s can be considered, given the refined, mature technique of the painting. What we can be certain of is that it is of a lady of distinction and is probably related to Lombardy, or even specifically to the regions around Lecco.

It was quite rare during the Renaissance to see a portrait of a specific and distinguished woman the subject should be shown topless. In such cases, the painting was usually commissioned by an influential person, often depicting a lover, and was later placed in a private room away from prying eyes. This perhaps implied a certain trust between the commissioner and the artist. If this is the case, then, although of course the mistress or perhaps the wife of many of the prominent heads of families around Lecco could also be considered, but given that Leonardo was a very famous artist and the and the number of versions of the Mona Lisa he created after the Nude Mona Lisa, the simplest explanation seems the most likely. That is, then and there, one of the most influential and important people, one of the most important clients, Lodovico Sforza may be your favourite lover in the picture. Lucrezia Crivelli is the best candidate for this on an elimination basis. Although many have suspected her of being behind the female figure in the painting "La Belle Ferronière", the Louvre Museum

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<sup>12</sup> BBC: Secrets of the Mona Lisa - 53m01s <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kknh1y6dV7A>

<sup>13</sup> Walter Isaacson: Leonardo Da Vinci, Helikon, 2018 - p. 324.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Sasoon: the Mona Lisa story, Saxum, 2007 - p.108.



<sup>15</sup> Museo Nacional del Prado YT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJxXdUZF0HA> - 8m05s

In 2015, he said that it was not really known who was in the painting.<sup>16</sup> There is more agreement about the other famous lover of Lodovico Sforza, Cecilia Galerani, who is depicted in the painting "Lady with an Ermine", so her identity can be ruled out.

There is not much source material on Lucrezia Crivelli, but it is known that after Cecilia, especially between 1494 and 1498, she was Lodovico Sforza's first, favourite and devoted mistress, and had two children by him. The Crivelli family in Lombardy received, as is well known, considerable property donations from Lodovico Sforza.<sup>17</sup> Although there are no sources on the landed property of the Rocchetta di Airuno at that time, and so it is not known for sure, but it cannot be excluded that Lucrezia received the fortress in the area under the control of Lodovico Sforza as such a donation.

When Antonio de Beatis visits Leonard in 1517 and asks him who is in the painting, which was most likely the Mona Lisa, he is told that Giuliano de' Medici lover. It has since turned out that this is highly unlikely<sup>18</sup>, so the old master must have been lying. Perhaps he didn't want others to know who was sitting for him because, for him, the painting was not a portrait of a woman but his artistic creed, with which he seemed to have a special affinity. So when the unexpected question was put by Beatis, or by the cardinal present with him, Leonardo did as most people do in such cases: he instinctively told a lie with a kernel of truth. He replaced the mistress of the Prince of Sforza with the mistress of another noble, a Prince of Medici. Why did Giuliano de' Medici come to mind? Perhaps because the news of the prince's death was still fresh in 1517 - he died in 1516 - and because a dead man cannot expose a lie.

These are, of course, only assumptions, which are logical but do not prove anything. There is, however, one source that has so far been ignored by Mona Lisa research. On the back of folio 456 of Leonardo's Codex Atlanticus there is an epigram from the late 1490s attributed to Tebaldeo, a famous poet of the time.<sup>19</sup> This poem praises Leonardo da Vinci's painting of Lucrezia Crivelli. Earlier, the portrait of Lucrezia had been accompanied by the title "la Belle Ferronnière" painting, which is probably why no one noticed that the epigram's content was a perfect match for the Mona Lisa, and only the Mona Lisa. I have managed to find an English translation of the work, written in Latin, while I wrote the Hungarian translation, mainly with a view to making it more readable.

How well the master's art answers to nature. Da Vinci might have shown the / soul here, as he has rendered the rest. He did not, so that his picture might be the / greater likeness; for the soul of the original is possessed by Il Moro, her lover. / This lady's name is Lucrezia, to whom the gods gave all things with lavish hand. / Beauty of form was given her: Leonardo painted her, Il Moro loved her - one the / greatest of painters, the other of princes. / By this likeness the painter injured Nature and the goddesses on high. Nature / lamented that the hand of man could attain so much, the goddesses that immortality / should be bestowed on so fair a form, which ought to have perished / For Il Moro's sake Leonardo did the injury, and Il Moro will protect him. Men / and gods alike fear to injure Il Moro.

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<sup>16</sup> Musée de Louvre: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myOhv7v0mws> - 37m38s

<sup>17</sup> Felice Calvi: Castello Visconteo-Sforzesco, 1894 - p. 74.

<sup>18</sup> Guardian: The myth of the Mona Lisa, 2002

<sup>19</sup> Chrysa Damianaki: Il ritratto della Belle Ferronnière di Leonardo da Vinci e l'epigramma di Antonio Tebaldeo, 2019 Università del Salento -59.p.



The master answers to nature  
His soul speaks while the work  
is being made But he does not  
paint his reflection It is the  
Moor's alone

Lucretia, that is the name of  
the lady Whom the gods  
measured with a large hand  
Leonardo, the one who  
painted her,  
And whom the Moor loved very much  
One of them is the greatest  
painter, the other is the first

Both nature and the goddesses  
were wondering what art could  
do  
How can a human hand do that?  
Complained nature vehemently  
Immortality would be granted to these  
forms, said the goddesses - not nature!

It was for the sake of the Moor  
that this harm was done by  
Leonardo's work  
But the Moor protects him, because  
Man, God together fear the Moor

<Ut> bene respondet natur<a>e ars docta, dedisset

Vincius, ut tribuit cetera, sic animam.

Noluit, ut similis magis haec foret; altera sic est.

Possidet illius Maurus amans animam.

Huius quam cernis nomen Lucretia, Divi

omnia cui larga contribuere manu.

Rara huic forma data est. Pinxit Leonardus, amavit

Maurus; Pictorum primus Hic (ille ducum).

Naturam et superas hac laesit imagine Divas

piktor. Tantum hominis posse manum haec doluit.

Illae longa dari tam magnae tempora formae,

quae spacio fuerat deperitura brevi.

Van laesit Mauri causa. Defendet et ipsum

Maurus, Maurum homines laedere diique timent.

The most emphatic element of the epigram is the idea which was also Leonardo's well-known fundamental principle and creed, and which we can also learn from his already mentioned treatises. The true artist creates human and natural beauty that surpasses the capacity of nature and the goddesses, and

thereby granting them immortality. The most striking similarity between the Mona Lisa and the epigram is precisely that natural and human beauty are well separated but equally weighted. The same can be observed in the painting. Unlike Leonardo's other portraits, here not only are the natural landscape and man equally pronounced and elaborate, but even the area they occupy in the picture is about the same - just as the poem is about the same extent of the envious, offended nature and the goddesses.

"By this likeness the painter injured **Nature and the goddesses** on high. **Nature** / lamented that the hand of man could attain so much, the **goddesses** that immortality / should be bestowed on so fair a form, which ought to have perished."

We do not know if Leonardo spoke to the poet about this, but if not, he understood the painter. This is also in line with our earlier finding that the lady's hair and dress are not a ordinary portraits, but the presence of higher, divine spheres in the painting, as well as the arrangement of the strange formations of nature, which is divorced from reality. Next to the model, nature is not found in any other portrait of a woman by Leonardo, so Tebaldeo's lines cannot even refer to another Leonardo painting, but only to the Mona Lisa. It could be argued that the word nature does not refer to the background, but only to the



refers to female beauty, as in other lyrical works. In these, however, another representative of the higher spheres is never present, as here the term goddess. A putting the painting and the poem side by side, there is no doubt that nature envies the landscape and the goddesses envy the woman - hence the term goddesses rather than god or gods.

Unless we consider the highly unlikely case that there was a portrait of Lucrezia Crivelli by Leonardo, lost without any record, and with the same subject, it is likely that the Mona Lisa is in fact Mona Lucrezia! She is the one who was the most adored mistress of Leonardo's main client at the time the work was created. She is therefore the easiest person to imagine that the woman-loving Duke of Milan commissioned Leonardo to paint her topless. The lines of Tebaldeo's epigram mentioning Lucrezia only fit this one portrait of Leonardo. And finally, perhaps it is no coincidence that the elderly Leonardo prince's mistress, when asked about the identity of the lady in the painting.

When looking for the date of the Mona Lisa, it is sometimes thought that Leonardo worked on the Mona Lisa for many years or decades. It is therefore theoretically possible that the Louvre Mona Lisa was completed in France rather than in Rochetta. However, this is contradicted by the epigram, which could only have been written on the finished painting in the late 1490s. It is also contradicted by the fact that the Prado Mona Lisa was painted in parallel by one of his pupils, which is hardly conceivable for many years. Leonardo's experimentation with existing elements of the loggia, the its perspective, which adapts to the panorama, makes it reasonable that the versions of the Mona Lisa in the Rocchetta di They were made in the loggia of Airuno between 1494 and 1499.

Art historians are also divided on the question of determining the date of the painting by style, which in itself shows how precarious an undertaking this is. to date it. Since I am admittedly not an expert, I can only rely on the fact that Leonardo's portraits were painted in the 1490s, and that Leonardo's career reached its zenith in 1495/20 - exactly the same year that he began painting his other masterpiece, The Last Supper. It is equally conceivable, therefore, that he was able to paint the Mona Lisa.

## Summary

The versions of the Mona Lisa were painted in the Rocchetta di Airuno, based on the clear characteristics of the loggia where the paintings are set and the panorama from there. This is the basis, and Raphaelo 1504, Drawing of Leonardo's painting, all during the painter's first period in Milan, 1482 and 1499, or more precisely by style, in the 1490s. From this period, it is most likely, by rule of thumb, that Lodovico Sforza's first mistress, Lucrezia Crivelli, was the lady in the pictures, and that they were therefore taken between 1494 and 1499. This is confirmed by Tebaldeo's epigram. In addition, I have attempted to reconstruct Leonardo's creative motivation and the painter's creative process through an analysis of the major versions of the Mona Lisa associated with Leonardo.

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<sup>20</sup> Walter Isaacson: Leonardo Da Vinci, Helikon, 2018 - p. 383.