

Recitation C

The Mona Lisa Continues to Fascinate People

Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* is probably the most famous painting in the world. It is believed to have been painted between 1503 and 1506 in Florence, Italy, although Leonardo may have continued working on it as late as 1517. Every year, millions of people visit the Louvre Museum in Paris to see the *Mona Lisa* with their own eyes. Over the years, a number of reasons have contributed to the continuing fascination and study of this magnificent work.

The painting is a half-body portrait of a young woman with a distant landscape in the background. The woman is sitting upright and sideways in a chair, with her face and body slightly turned towards the viewer. This three-quarter view quickly became the standard for all portraits, one that is still used today.

The delicately painted veil, the finely created long black hair and the carefully crafted folded fabric show Leonardo's great patience and attention to detail. The use of fine shading in the curves of the woman's hair and clothing is repeated in the shapes of the valleys and rivers in the background. This synthesis of model and landscape set the norm for all future portraits.

Leonardo was fascinated by the way light falls on curved surfaces. He created her veil, hair and skin with ultra-thin layers of transparent color. Her face appears to glow, giving the painting an almost magical quality. But probably the most magical, and mysterious, quality of all is her smile. Leonardo created this smile through perspective and by using unique shadow work. The *Mona Lisa's* famous smile represents the idea of happiness. The smile changes, depending on where the viewer looks. It actually appears more impressive when looking at portrait's eyes than when looking at the mouth itself.

(293 words)