

# Is the Mona Lisa a Self-Portrait?

25 January 2010, by Lisa Zyga



Italian scientists hope to dig up the remains of Leonardo da Vinci in order to determine if his most famous painting, the Mona Lisa, is a disguised self-portrait.

(PhysOrg.com) -- Italian scientists hope to dig up the remains of Leonardo da Vinci in order to determine if his most famous painting, the Mona Lisa, is a disguised self-portrait.

“If we manage to find his skull, we could rebuild Leonardo’s face and compare it with the [Mona Lisa](#),” said [anthropologist](#) Giorgio Gruppioni, who is part of a team from Italy’s National Committee for Cultural Heritage, a leading association of scientists and art [historians](#), which is undertaking the investigation.

Da Vinci, who died in 1519 at age 67, was originally buried in the Chateau Amboise in France's Loire Valley, which was destroyed after the French Revolution in 1789. It is believed that his remains were reburied in the castle’s smaller chapel of Saint-Hubert in 1874. An inscription above the tomb says they are “presumed” to be those of da Vinci.

Traditionally, the individual in the painting is thought to have been Lisa del Giocondo, the wife of wealthy Florentine silk merchant. However, speculation surrounds the true identity of the individual, with several other women (including da Vinci’s mother) being candidates.

More recently, artist Lillian Schwartz has used computer programs to identify similarities between the features of the Mona Lisa and those of one of da Vinci’s true self-portraits. Some scholars suggest that da Vinci’s presumed homosexuality and love of riddles inspired him to paint himself as a woman.

If granted permission, the Italian researchers plan to verify that the remains in Saint-Hubert are da Vinci’s by using carbon dating and comparing DNA samples from the bones and teeth with those of several male descendents buried in Bologna, Italy.

Bone tests could also reveal how da Vinci died, which is currently unknown. Diseases such as tuberculosis and syphilis, as well as lead poisoning, would appear in the bones. The researchers noted that syphilis was seen as a form of plague at the time, killing about 20 million people in the first quarter of the 16th century.

The Italian researchers are currently seeking permission from French cultural officials and the owners of the chateau, who have agreed in principle. Despite criticism from some scholars who believe that the remains should be left alone, the scientists hope to receive formal permission this summer.

**More information:** via: [Times Online](#)

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APA citation: Is the Mona Lisa a Self-Portrait? (2010, January 25) retrieved 23 September 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-01-mona-lisa-self-portrait.html>

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