

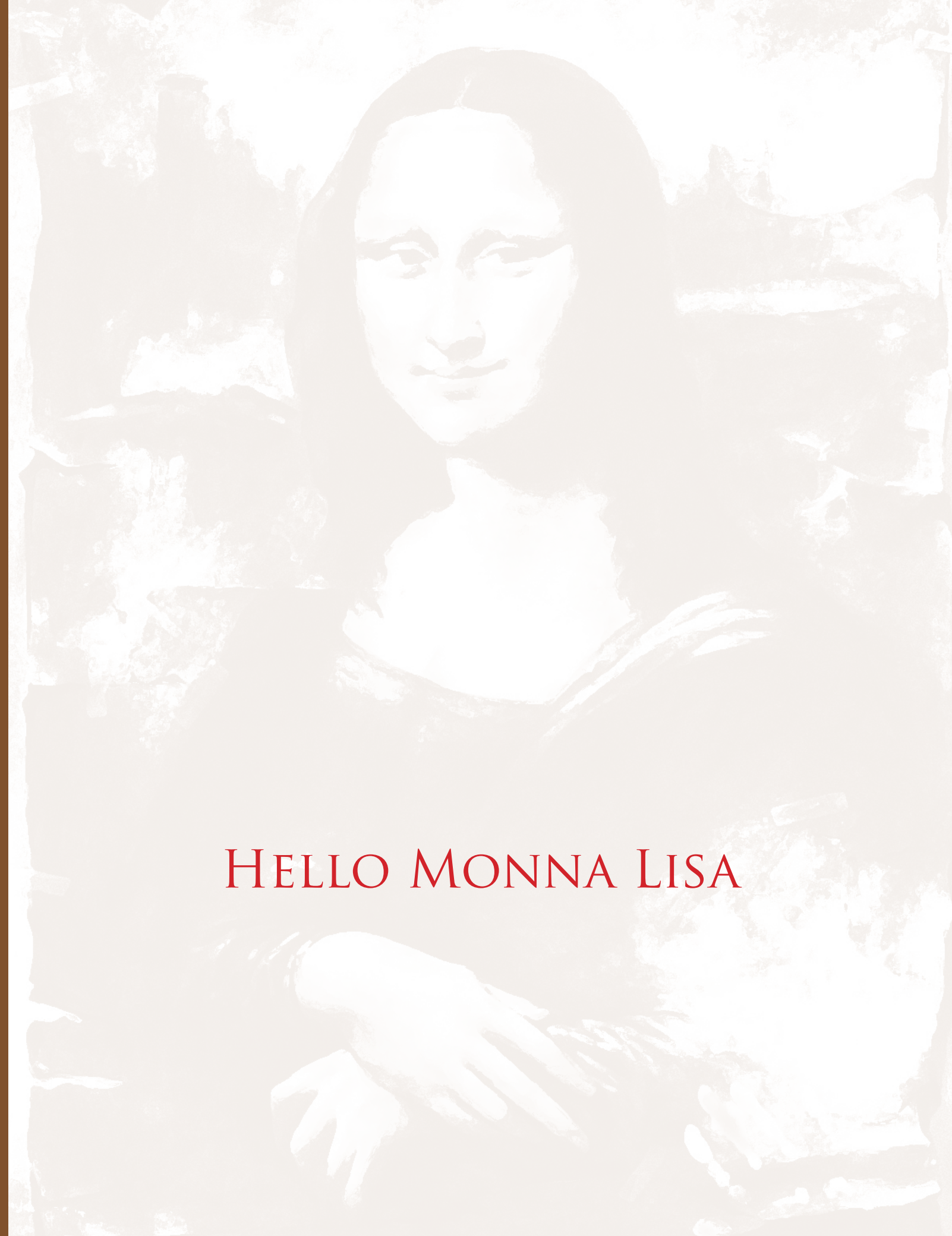


HELLO MONNA LISA

THE QUEST
of a
WOMAN'S SOUL

“If Shakespearean classics such as *Hamlet* or *Othello* can be re-invented and modernised successfully, so can Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa!”

HELLO MONNA LISA



MESSAGE

Italian Consulate



Gianluca Rubagotti

As the Consul General of Italy in Kolkata, when I was approached by Rekha Mody for a project on Leonardo da Vinci and his most famous painting, 'La Gioconda' or 'Mona Lisa', I was of course very curious to know more, because he is known in all the corners of the world, his life itself being the epitome of the Renaissance Man.

What pleased me was the attempt to merge the past and the present, and to reach out to a new generation of younger public, to raise their interest and to try to create new connections.

The project is multifaceted: first, the printing of a short essay by Chiara Rostagno, an Italian expert in restoration who had the honour and responsibility to overlook the latest fundamental round of works on the Last Supper, which has been mesmerising, for the past over 500 years, all the viewers from the wall of the Church Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. She will take us through a journey of discovery of the figure of Leonardo da Vinci, his works, and the Monna Lisa.

Secondly, the connection between the original message coming from the past and new inspirations imbued in the present, with 12 contemporary re-interpretations of the Renaissance masterpiece by artists from different parts of the world, Italy, India, USA, Pakistan, and Nepal.

Thirdly, a focus on the wardrobe of Mona Lisa, with a reproduction of the different pieces of garments she would wear as a lady of XVI century Florence, by Bengali dress-maker Rohan Pariyar, who could deepen his knowledge of the history of apparels through his studies in Milan.

This is what we have prepared for you, in the hope that it can offer new keys to enter the world of one of the greatest Men of all times, as well as new perspectives to enjoy the unrivalled magnetism of the Mona Lisa and her smile.

November 2023

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GRATITUDE

Founder Trustee
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The Mona Lisa has always fascinated me. I have visited the Louvre in Paris several times to see it. When the world was celebrating 500 years of Mona Lisa in 2006, we, at Habiart, embarked upon the project 'Hello Mona Lisa'. This endeavour was undertaken as an effort to reach out and understand the creativity of the genius- Leonardo Da Vinci.

I am indebted to the Italian Consul General Gianluca Rubagotti for taking an interest in our initiative. It was through his efforts that I was introduced to the renowned curator, Chiara Rostagno, whose enlightening contribution graces this publication. The Consul General also connected us with the dynamic dress designer, Rohan Pariyar, whose insights have allowed us to delve into the intricacies of Mona Lisa's attire.

I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to the twelve distinguished artists who have reinterpreted the Mona Lisa in their own style. I also acknowledge Sangita Thapa of Sidharth Art Galley of Nepal for connecting me to the artists in Nepal.

Life is routine, imagination is buzzing!

Cheers
November 2023

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ABOUT

Italian Curator

Chiara Rostagno

Chiara Rostagno is an architect, university lecturer and author. She has been involved in history and restoration for 30 years. She was director of the National Museum of Leonardo Da Vinci's Last Supper and has worked at the Italian Ministry of Culture for over 10 years.

Since 2019, she has been present in India for cultural and university projects related to art and restoration. She will soon publish a theoretical text about art and nature, in which she investigates the deep reasons for caring for the artistic and natural heritage.

Chiara Rostagno PhD

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A memory as an introduction

I remember as if it were now the afternoon (I must have been five years old, I think) when my mother took me to the library for the first time in my life. I remember the smell of the books, the creaking of the old wooden floor and the high shelves along the walls, full of books. I had gotten my first library card! Now, I said to myself, I could know everything and, above all, seek answers to my many “whys”?

The librarian asked me what I loved. I remember having no doubts. I said: “art and inventions”!

She said ‘bravo’! and gave me my first book: *The Story of Little Leonardo da Vinci*. This Artist entered my heart and stayed there to remind me every day not to be afraid of my ideas, to believe in beauty, to try to turn dreams into reality. Then, with time and much study, I also took care of ‘him’ in his ‘Last Supper’ as Director of the Cenacolo Vinciano Museum in Milan.

But it was easy! Because he (Leonardo) was always “beside” me.

This book is aimed at girls and boys aged between 10 and 12 who are curious about Leonardo and want to discover some of the secrets of one of his most important paintings, the Mona Lisa. The words of today will be interwoven with the words of the past and this will show us that this painting is a masterpiece and a kind of “timeless” mystery. You will see sentences in quotation marks. These are writings that experts have dedicated to Leonardo and his works over time. Some are very important, some are brilliant and some are really creative. When you read them, you will sometimes find sentences that seem to come from very distant times, and that’s right: they are the voices of history and will give you the opportunity to enrich your vision and your ideas with truly different points of view.

For the curious, there are also some footnotes. They are like the clues of a treasure hunt. Those of you who want to, can follow them and find real treasures and - who knows? - write your own personal history of Leonardo and his Mona Lisa.

But that’s enough! Let’s get started... Because as Leonardo said: “Time stays long enough for anyone who will use it”!

Leonardo da Vinci’s life, gives us courage

It was happen since his age, regardless of latitudes, times and cultures. Leonardo certainly had a virtue, which all people who have “known” him over “five centuries” recognize. This genius explored many fields of knowledge, driven by his inexhaustible curiosity. Not only that, he was able to express himself in a universal language: the drawing.

Drawing was his way of expressing his vision and interpretation of the world, of natural, physical and human phenomena. His research led him to make the ‘motions of the soul’ tangible and to discover the secrets and perfections of nature, coming to understand the mysteries of life itself.

Not only that. Leonardo’s life teaches us never to give up. This story, together with that of the Mona Lisa, will give us courage and - at the same time - the chance to discover the link we can find in him between the arts (knowledge) and life. At that time, he was an uncommon person.

As Goethe reminded us: “Art stood, at that period, upon a point, where any great genius might step forward with success, and shine in all the splendour of its powers. It had, for more than two centuries, emerged from the meager pedantry of the Byzantine school, and, by the imitation of nature, and the expression of pious, and moral feelings, at once commenced a new life. Artists wrought in a superior manner, though themselves unconscious of their merit: and they succeeded in what genius inspired, or where their feelings directed and their taste guided them; but none of them was able to account to himself for the excellence which he produced, or the defects that belonged to him, though he might be sensible of their existence. Truth and Nature were the objects of all; but there was wanting that unity and harmony, which is the very life and soul of the art. You may meet with the most exquisite talents, and yet not find any performance, of those days, perfectly conceived, and thoroughly digested. Much of what you see is adventitious, and foreign to the subject; nor do you as yet remark any established principles, by which those works were regulated”¹.

Certainly in the human history, Leonardo was a great gift for all Humanity! An extraordinary gift for us today and for the generations that will come after us, in the future.

Giorgio Vasari, who narrated the lives of the greatest painters, sculptors and architects of Italian Renaissance remembers him exactly like that.

“The greatest gifts are often seen, in the course of nature, rained by celestial influences on human creatures; and sometimes, in supernatural fashion, beauty, grace, and talent are united beyond measure in one single person, in a manner

¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Observations on Leonardo Da Vinci’s Celebrated Picture of the Last Supper*, London, W. Bulmer and W. Nicol for J. Booth, 1891; p. 4.

that to whatever such an one turns his attention, “nis every action is so divine, that, surpassing all other men, it makes itself clearly known as a thing bestowed by God (as it is), and not acquired by human art. This was seen by all mankind in Leonardo da Vinci, in whom, besides a beauty of body never sufficiently extolled, there was an infinite grace in all his actions; and so great was his genius, and such its growth, that to whatever difficulties he turned his mind, he solved them with ease. In him was great bodily strength, joined to dexterity, with a spirit and courage ever royal and magnanimous; and the fame of his name so increased, that not only in his lifetime was he held in esteem, but his reputation became even greater among posterity after his death”².

Leonardo as a child

Leonardo was born in Vinci, a small town not far from Florence, on April 15, 1452. This place, with the extraordinary landscape of the Valdarno, was a great source of inspiration and growth for him during his childhood. Nature, drawing and curiosity were his life companions.

“At such a time it was, that Leonardo came into the world, and as he found it easy, with the abilities bestowed upon him, to imitate nature, his penetrating mind soon began to be aware, that behind the outside of objects, which he succeeded so well in copying, there still lay concealed many a secret, the knowledge of which it would be worth his utmost efforts to attain. He, therefore, set about enquiring into the laws of organic formation, the ground of proportion, the rules of perspective, the composition and colouring of his objects, the effect of shade in a given space; in short, he strove to compass all the requisites of art : but what, above all, he had at heart, was the variety of the human countenance, in which not only the permanent character of the mind, but also temporary emotion is presented to the eye.”³.

From a very early age, he shows an extraordinary talent: he is “truly wonderful” in every field of knowledge and in the arts. And these gifts will give him a way to overcome the disadvantages of his status as an outlaw child.

“Truly marvellous and celestial was Leonardo, the son of Ser Piero da Vinci; and in learning and in the rudiments of letters he would have made great proficience, if he had not been so variable and unstable, for he set himself to learn many things, and then, after having begun them, abandoned them. Thus, in arithmetic, during the few months that he studied it, he made so much progress, that, by continually suggesting doubts and difficulties to the master who was teaching him, he would very often bewilder him. He gave some little attention to music, and quickly resolved to learn to play the lyre, as one who had by nature a spirit most lofty and full of refinement: wherefore he sang divinely to that instrument, improvising upon it.

² Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives Of The Most Eminent Painters Sculptors And Architects*, Vol.4: p. 89

³ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Observations on Leonardo Da Vinci's Celebrated Picture of the Last Supper*, cit.; p. 4-5.

Nevertheless, although he occupied himself with such a variety of things, he never ceased drawing and working in relief, pursuits which suited his fancy more than any other. Ser Piero, having observed this, and having considered the loftiness of his intellect, one day took some of his drawings and carried them to Andrea del Verrocchio, who was much his friend, and he sought him straitly to tell him whether Leonardo, by devoting himself to drawing, would make any proficience”.

This had been going on in Italy since the Middle Ages. If a young boy showed talent in an art or craft, the family would invest money to send him “to the workshop” of a master:(La Bottega del Maestro. Becoming a pupil of a master was an extraordinary opportunity to grow and learn.

Craftsmen and artists were trained in this way: they followed a master with whom they spent up to 6 years. This was the time the master needed to train the apprentice. They worked side by side, with increasingly complex tasks. It was a slow process, at the end of which the student became a “master”.

The relationship between pupil and master was almost alchemical. The master taught, allowing his own art to “descend” on the disciple.

So it was between Andrea Verrocchio and Leonardo, who from the very beginning - from a very young age - proved to be an unusual pupil. He was good, curious and worked tirelessly.

“Andrea was astonished to see the extraordinary beginnings of Leonardo, and urged Ser Piero that he should make him study it; wherefore he arranged with Leonardo that he should enter the workshop of Andrea, which Leonardo did with the greatest willingness in the world. And he practised not one branch of art only, but all those in which drawing played a part; and having an intellect so divine and marvellous that he was also an excellent geometrician, he not only worked in sculpture, making in his youth, in clay, some heads of women that are smiling, of which plaster casts are still taken, and likewise some heads of boys which appeared to have issued from the hand of a master; but in architecture, also, he made many drawings both of ground-plans and of other designs of buildings; and he was the first, although but a youth, who suggested the plan of reducing the river Arno to a navigable canal from Pisa to Florence”⁴.

How many interests! How many skills he had and how much energy he put into his work from childhood: “nature was pleased so to favour him, that, wherever he turned his thought, brain, and mind, he displayed such divine power in his works, that, in giving them their perfection, no one was ever his peer in readiness, vivacity, excellence, beauty, and grace”⁵.

But Leonardo also seemed to be driven by a certain “frenzy”. But it was not a lack of will on his part, it was his way of striving for perfection. Vasari remembers this

⁴ Ivi; p. 90.

⁵ Ivi; p. 92.

perfectly: “It is clear that Leonardo, through his comprehension of art, began many things and never finished one of them, since it seemed to him that the hand was not able to attain to the perfection of art in carrying out the things which he imagined; for the reason that he conceived in idea difficulties so subtle and so marvellous, that they could never be expressed by the hands, be they ever so excellent. And so many were his caprices, that, philosophizing of natural things, he set himself to seek out the properties of herbs, going on even to observe the motions of the heavens, the path of the moon, and the courses of the sun”⁶.

All creatures were a magnificent inspiration to him: the flora, the fauna, the stars, the planets, the seas, the air. And in a short time he was able to surpass his master, and in such an impressive way. So much so that he himself decided to abandon his Art. Leonardo, who should have learned from his master, was able to surpass him in such a very short time. “He was placed, then, as has been said, in his boyhood, at the instance of Ser Piero, to learn art with Andrea del Verrocchio, who was making a panel-picture of S. John baptizing Christ, when Leonardo painted an angel who was holding some garments; and although he was but a lad, Leonardo executed it in such a manner that his angel was much better than the figures of Andrea!; which was the reason that Andrea would never again touch colour, in disdain that a child should know more than he”⁷.

Leonardo understood this perfectly, and although he was very young, he remembered it later, as an adult, as an artist and deeply as a master. His famous sentence “Sad is the pupil who does not surpass the master” helps us to understand how what happened between him and Verrocchio had a way of deeply marking him, including in the particular way he transmitted art to his pupils.

But something happened, and in order to escape some accusations relating to his personal behaviour, he moved to Milan around the age of 30.

He arrived in Milan as a military engineer, an architect and, last but not least, a painter. Above all, however, he was a talented master and, as he had ideally learnt alongside Verrocchio and Pollaiuolo, he facilitates comparison both between masters and between pupils. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the school of the “Leonardeschi” was so strong, which turns out to be linked in some way to the “Accademia Leonardi Vinci”, which Vasari tells us was born in Milan. It certainly stemmed from this experience in his childhood and remained forever. Many local artists started to paint in the way - “alla maniera” of Leonardo. Many amazing artists, known as “Leonardeschi”, declared to reproduce his painting or way to compose the pictorial space and to face reality.

In any case, he spent his early years in Milan in the role he had promised Duke Ludovico il Moro. He designed astonishing military machines, water canals, architecture and the magnificent and triumphant equestrian statue that the

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem.

Duke wanted to dedicate to the memory of his father. As was often the case with Leonardo’s dreams and projects, such a grandiose work was never realised.

There is something magical about the ideas that Leonardo was unable to realise, such as this magnificent horse. Many people after him tried to realise it, but it was so magnificent and precious that centuries later it still seems impossible.

After a few years in Milan, he began to paint again for the Duke. Just a few works that had the power to change the history of art forever.

The Last Supper

In order to have a deep comprehension of Leonardo, we must have a profound understanding of a painting that he did in Milan between 1494 and 1498. This is not a simple painting. It is a kind of dynamic composition. This mural changed the history of art forever: it was “ simply “ a decoration for the refectory of the convent, but it became the most beautiful and magnificent painting that was ever seen!

As Vasari refers, Leonardo “also painted in Milan, for the Friars of S. Dominic, at S. Maria delle Grazie, a Last Supper, a most beautiful and marvellous thing; and to the heads of the Apostles he gave such majesty and beauty, that he left the head of Christ unfinished, not believing that he was able to give it that divine air which is essential to the image of Christ. This work, remaining thus all but finished, has ever been held by the Milanese in the greatest veneration, and also by strangers as well; for Leonardo imagined and succeeded in expressing that anxiety which had seized the Apostles in wishing to know who should betray their Master. For which reason in all their faces are seen love, fear, and wrath, or rather, sorrow, at not being able to understand the meaning of Christ; which thing excites no less marvel than the sight, in contrast to it, of obstinacy, hatred, and treachery in Judas; not to mention that every least part of the work displays an incredible diligence, seeing that even in the tablecloth the texture of the stuff is counterfeited in such a manner that linen itself could not seem more real”⁸.

For Leonardo, time was necessary to approach the beauty of nature and the depth of human thought. For this reason, he used a technique unsuitable for wall painting. A tempera grassa applied to a double imprimatura of chalk. He treated the wall as a large wooden panel. His strokes are precise and slow, and his shaded colours seem to vibrate with their own light. None of this would have been possible with a fresco. Fresco is a technique that requires speed and work during the day (before the plaster has dried). Fresco does not allow for ‘second thoughts’. Few corrections can be made: few because they cannot escape the expert eye. And Leonardo wanted to achieve perfection and the depth of the human soul.

⁸ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives Of The Most Eminent Painters Sculptors And Architects*, Vol.4; p. 96.

Above all, he took the time to research by painting with an experimental technique, and he did not care if the work was fragile afterwards! He concentrated on the field of his artistic experience.

“It is said that the Prior of that place kept pressing Leonardo, in a most importunate manner, to finish the work; for it seemed strange to him to see Leonardo sometimes stand half a day at a time, lost in contemplation, and he would have liked him to go on like the labourers hoeing in his garden, without ever stopping his brush. And not content with this, he complained of it to the Duke, and that so warmly, that he was constrained to send for Leonardo and delicately urged him to work, contriving nevertheless to show him that he was doing all this because of the importunity, of the Prior. Leonardo, knowing that the intellect of that Prince was acute and discerning, was pleased to discourse at large with the Duke on the subject, a thing which he had never done with the Prior: and he reasoned much with him about art, and made him understand that men of lofty genius sometimes accomplish the most when they work the least, seeking out inventions with the mind, and forming those perfect ideas which the hands afterwards express and reproduce from the images already conceived in the brain. And he added that two heads were still wanting for him to paint; that of Christ, which he did not wish to seek on earth; and he could not think that it was possible to conceive in the imagination that beauty and heavenly grace which should be the mark of God incarnate. Next, there was wanting that of Judas, which was also troubling him, not thinking himself capable of imagining features that should represent the countenance of him who, after so many benefits received, had a mind so cruel as to resolve to betray his Lord, the Creator of the world. However, he would seek out a model for the latter; but if in the end he could not find a better, he should not want that of the importunate and tactless Prior. This thing moved the Duke wondrously to laughter, and he said that Leonardo had a thousand reasons on his side. And so the poor Prior, in confusion, confined himself to urging on the work in the garden, and left Leonardo in peace, who finished only the head of Judas, which seems the very embodiment of treachery and inhumanity; but that of Christ, as has been said, remained unfinished. The nobility of this picture, both because of its design, and from its having been wrought with an incomparable diligence, awoke a desire in the King of France to transport it into his kingdom; wherefore he tried by all possible means to discover whether there were architects who, with cross-stays of wood and iron, might have been able to make it so secure that it might be transported safely; without considering any expense that might have been involved thereby, so much did he desire it. But the fact of its being painted on the wall robbed his Majesty of his desire; and the picture remained with the Milanese”.

I find these dialogues that Vasari gives us so beautiful. They give us a glimpse of a ‘human’ Leonardo, certainly brilliant, but also profoundly natural. This teaches us a lot. It reminds us that behind every person, behind every author, there are stories, there are moments of everyday life, and this, I think, makes the works of Art even more extraordinary and precious.

Let us also reflect on the Last Supper itself. As I said, it began as a ‘simple’ decoration for a refectory and became a masterpiece of humanity. And so it was with all the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci and, of course, with the Mona Lisa. It teaches us how even the simplest thing, if done with verve, vigour, wisdom and care, can become extraordinary. For him, a painting was a way of speaking. Leonardo was able to speak the universal language of images. He could express the beauty of nature and human thought. And this language was and is universal, transcending time. It is not afraid of differences, it transcends the boundaries of cultures, it is indifferent to common languages: because it is able to speak to each one of us and to the sense of natural beauty that we have within us. That is why people have always felt confident with these paintings and with Leonardo himself.

What a strange destiny for this work. It was created in an everyday place that spontaneously became an exceptional museum. A simple room where every artist wanted and still wants to be present to face one of the greatest masterpieces of humanity. Many thought they could take it away! Over the centuries, many attempts have been made. Surely the terrible Duke Ludovico called the Moro would have laughed if he had seen the clumsy attempts that were made! Because it was impossible.... Of course, frescoes can be detached and captured using really effective techniques. The method used by Leonardo was so fragile that it was impossible to remove the painting from the wall. And so The Last Supper remains here, where everyone wants to be.

But let’s go back to two of Leonardo’s most beloved and special gifts, which we must remember when we look at the Mona Lisa: slowness and stubbornness. These were two such special qualities of the great artist!

“The slowness with which Leonardo worked was proverbial. After the most thorough preliminary studies he painted The Holy Supper for three years in the cloister of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. One of his contemporaries, Matteo Bandelli, the writer of novels, who was then a young monk in the cloister, relates that Leonardo often ascended the scaffold very early in the morning and did not leave the brush out of his hand until twilight, never thinking of eating or drinking. Then days passed without putting his hand on it, sometimes he remained for hours before the painting and derived satisfaction from studying it by himself. At other times he came directly to the cloister from the palace of the Milanese Castle where he formed the model of the equestrian statue for Francesco Sforza, in order to add a few strokes with the brush to one of the figures and then stopped immediately. According to Vasari he worked for years on the portrait of Monna Lisa, the wife of the Florentine de Gioconda, without being able to bring it to completion”⁹.

The Last Supper and the Mona Lisa are the two works of art to which Leonardo devoted a significant part of his life. They have become true myths, partly because we can read in them so much of Leonardo’s genius and ‘torments’.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*, cit.; pp. 8-9.

I love the way Guglielmo Scala has chosen to express (through his visionary paper, which I recommend to you!) Leonardo's idea of the relationship between art and time. The Last Supper, like all his masterpieces, took a long time. So much so that the opera became interminable.

It happened to the greatest artists! It happened to Michelangelo Buonarroti himself, who did not finish his most powerful and important works. The 'unfinished' (l'incompiuto, to use an Italian word) are a great mystery. For us, who can look at them with the distance and comfort of time, they are perhaps the most touching works of our beloved artists. But for them they must have been almost torture. Not because they could not finish them, but because they were looking for something special and perfect.

Art takes time, as beauty takes time. And sometimes it takes almost an entire life: because "No true work of beauty was ever accomplished in haste. Think how many ages it took the Arno [The Florentine River] to hollow out this lovely valley! In truth, impatience is the mother of stupidity, and those people who wish things to be done too rapidly do not desire perfection. It is impossible for me to produce great works in a hurry, as the good prior in Milan discovered when I was painting the Cenacolo"¹⁰.

Remember. You must be never impatient, if you want to be an Artist!

The Monna Lisa. A timeless "rebus"

The history of this painting is such a rich source of inspiration!

As Giorgio Vasari reminds¹¹, "Leonardo undertook to execute, for Francesco del Giocondo, the portrait of Monna Lisa, his wife; and after toiling over it for four years, he left it unfinished [...]. In this head, whoever wished to see how closely art could imitate nature, was able to comprehend it with ease; for in it were counterfeited all the minutenesses that with subtlety are able to be painted, seeing that the eyes had that lustre and watery sheen which are always seen in life, and around them were all those rosy and pearly tints, as well as the lashes, which cannot be represented without the greatest subtlety"¹².

Thus was born one of the most enigmatic and inspiring paintings the world has ever seen. This is not just a painting. As it was said in one of the most fantastic writings that Leonardo and the Mona Lisa could inspire: she "Is the Quest of the woman soul"¹³. I like to follow these fantastic and free expressions with you. For

¹⁰ Guglielmo Scala, *Monna Lisa. Or The Quest of the Woman Soul*, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1911; p. 43.

¹¹ Giorgio Vasari sad, that at his time "the work is now in the collection of King Francis of France, at Fontainebleau".

¹² Giorgio Vasari, cit.; pp. 99-100.

¹³ Even though it is a fantasy, his book is very interesting and funny. The reader has the feeling of being present at the time of Leonardo's painting of Lisa. As was written by the Author in his *Proemio*: "The matter of some of these pages will consist of records of events and of conversations, written by me at

me, this is one of Leonardo's great virtues. The ability to bring us closer to art, creation and freedom for over five centuries.

The painting began as usual. Leonardo signed a contract with a patron. "Messer Francesco asked to Leonardo to paint his beautiful wife: Madonna Gioconda. The contract was not ordinary as well and the payment related to the perfection of the result".

The drawing is perfect and astonishes us, not only because of Leonardo's ability to capture the lady's beauty, but also because of his understanding of her human soul. Perhaps it is the mystery of the "moto dell'animo" expressed by this woman's face that has impressed people for almost five centuries. Lisa looks at us. She is right in front of us: for the first time in the History of Art.

"If we examine how the female portrait developed over the course of the fifteenth century — from the pure profile, to the three-quarter view, to the nearly frontal face of the Mona Lisa —it seems almost as if the portrait were making a slow turn toward the viewer over the course of a century. In that respect, Leonardo's innovation cannot be undervalued: the Mona Lisa is the first time in the history of portraiture that a woman is the subject of an *en face* portrait"¹⁴.

She is *en face* and she seems to smile. And her smile, the famous Mona Lisa smile, is a timeless mystery that has inspired artists for centuries. Every detail is astonishing. The painting tells us not only what is happening to this woman at this moment, but also who she really is, expressing at the same time the eternal beauty and mystery of the woman. You will discover growing up!

Sigmund Freud could certainly help us understand this! "Leonardo painted this picture four years, perhaps from 1503 until 1507, during his second sojourn in Florence when he was about the age of fifty years. According to Vasari he applied the choicest artifices in order to divert the lady during the sittings and to hold that smile firmly on her features. Of all the gracefulness that his brush reproduced on the canvas at that time the picture preserves but very little in its present state. During its production it was considered the highest that art could accomplish; it is certain, however, that it did not satisfy Leonardo himself, that he pronounced it as unfinished and did not deliver it to the one who ordered it, but took it with him to France where his benefactor Francis I, acquired it for the Louvre"¹⁵.

Let us leave the physiognomic riddle of Monna Lisa unsolved, and let us note the unequivocal fact that her smile fascinated the artist no less than all the people all round the world for these 400 years. This captivating smile had thereafter returned

or near the time when they occurred, other pages will contain copies of letters which passed between me and Madonna Lisa Gioconda — God rest her soul! — and the remainder will be made up by my recollections, which after twelve years and more are still fresh in my mind. In what I shall write my sole endeavor will be to tell the truth as far as is in my power". Guglielmo Scala, *Monna Lisa. Or The Quest of the Woman Soul*, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1911.

¹⁴ Andreas Beyer, *Portraits: a History*, New York, H.N. Abrams, 2003; p. 137.

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*, 1916.

in all of his pictures and in those of his pupils. As Leonardo's Monna Lisa was a portrait we cannot assume that he has added to her face a trait of his own so difficult to express which she herself did not possess. It seems, we cannot help but believe, that he found this smile in his model and became so charmed by it that from now on he endowed it on all the free creations of his phantasy"¹⁶.

The genesis of this painting is something we really don't know as well as Leonardo's aim. Oh... "Lisa you don't know who she is and not even ask. You ask instead who she is not"¹⁷!

"The eyebrows, through his having shown he manner in which the hairs spring from the flesh, here more close and here more scanty, and curve according to the pores of the skin, could not be more natural. The nose, with its beautiful nostrils, rosy and tender, appeared to be alive. The mouth, with its opening, and with its ends united by the red of the lips to the flesh-tints of the face, seemed, in truth, to be not colours but flesh. In the pit of the throat, if one gazed upon it intently, could be seen the beating of the pulse. And, indeed, it may be said that it was painted in such a manner as to make every valiant craftsman, be he who he may, tremble and lose heart. He made use, also, of this device: Monna Lisa being very beautiful, he always employed, while he was painting her portrait, persons to play or sing, and jesters, who might make her remain merry, in order to take away that melancholy which painters are often wont to give to the portraits that they paint. And in this work of Leonardo's there was a smile so pleasing, that it was a thing more divine than human to behold; and it was held to be something marvellous, since the reality was not more alive"¹⁸.

The details of the face, the mysteries of natural beauty, the surprise of a state of soul: Leonardo paints Monna Lisa but, through her, gets to the essence of beauty, of emotions and of life.

Perhaps the secret of Mona Lisa is her humanity. But Leonardo does not need to forget the perfection of forms to reach the truth of feelings. For him, for Leonardo, they can coincide.

They can. Because his quest will be endless and the work of the Mona Lisa will be destined to remain unfinished, like all works of art that pursue the perfection of nature and, let me say, of the natural beauty.

This earned Leonardo the reputation of "divine creator". It took about twelve years to perfect it. But, in his mind, it remained uncompleted.

"By reason, then, of the excellence of the works of this most divine craftsman, his fame had so increased that all persons who took delight in art — nay, the whole city of Florence — desired that he should leave them some memorial, and it was

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*, 1916.

¹⁷ Arène Houssaye, *Le Dianes et les Vénus*, 1875.

¹⁸ Giorgio Vasari, cit.; p. 101.

being proposed everywhere that he should be commissioned to execute some great and notable work, whereby the commonwealth might be honoured and adorned by the great genius, grace and judgment that were seen in the works of Leonardo"¹⁹.

Certainly Leonardo's last stay in Florence was special and intense. Experts say he indulged in the freedom of his thoughts and expressed them in art with a strength and courage he may not have had before. It is his works that are now in the Louvre, including the Lisa.

They are timeless works that speak to each of us.

"The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern philosophy has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea"²⁰.

An Universe behind a smile

"Two ideas were especially fixed in him [Leonardo], as reflexes of things that had touched his brain in childhood beyond the measure of other impressions — the smiling of women and the motion of great waters"²¹. In Leonardo's paintings, the "motions of the soul" and of nature are deeply united and participate together in beauty. Natural beauty is the real mystery that Leonardo attempts to reveal.

You can see how strong the value of childhood experiences can be! Because Lisa's smile is the result of an entire life of the master. "From childhood we see this image defining itself on the fabric of his dreams; and but for express historical testimony, we might fancy that this was but his ideal lady, embodied and beheld at last. What was the relationship of a living Florentine to this creature of his thought? By what strange affinities had she and the dream grown thus apart, yet so closely together? Present from the first, incorporeal in Leonardo's thought, dimly traced in the designs of Verrocchio, she is found present at last in Il Giocondo's house. That there is much of mere portraiture in the picture is attested by the legend that by artificial means, the presence of mimes and flute players, that subtle expression was protracted on the face. Again, was it in four years and by renewed labour never really completed, or in four months and as by stroke of magic, that the image was projected?"

The Mona Lisa, "represents the culmination of Leonardo's portraiture" and his own research. How much we have to study to get the result we want. And this tenacity, this commitment of Leonardo's is a great help to all of us. It helps us not to give up,

¹⁹ Giorgio Vasari, cit.; p. 101.

²⁰ Walter Pater, *Renaissance*, cit.; p. 104.

²¹ Walter Pater, "Mona Lisa", in *Famous painting as seen and described by famous writers*, New York, P.F. Collier & Son, 1911; p. 357.

to put all our energy into getting the result we want. It takes a lot of strength to get what you want, in general and especially in art.

As Pietro Marani suggests, this painting could be related to a series of portrait studies. The Monna Lisa is one of the few Leonardo's Artworks "whose attribution has never been challenged, although the identity of the sitter has been much debated, as has its dating. Monna Lisa del Giocondo, Costanza d'Avalos, Isabella d'Este, and a favorite of Giuliano de' Medici—either Pacifica Brandano or a Signora Gualanda—have all been proposed. Each of these possibilities brings with it a different date for the portrait, and these are often in conflict with Vasari's traditionally accepted assertion that it was begun in Florence in the first years of the sixteenth century"²². But we want to follow the "traditional choice": she's "Lisa Gherardini del Giocondo", and "Monna" is a contraction of "Madonna," or madam"²³. So, welcome Lisa Gherardini! Wife of Francesco del Giocondo, well known as the Monna Lisa or the Gioconda ...

But for us, she could be just Lisa, Monna Lisa (in the old Italian language) or even Lady Lisa, but she could also be "Gioconda"!

Yes, we started to call her "Gioconda" because of a comment written by the painter Salai (a Leonardo pupil) between the lines notes that the painting "was called La Gioconda ("dicto la Joconda") [...] The link of "La Gioconda" ("the merry one") to the Florentine lady surnamed del Giocondo is a logical one"²⁴.

The Gioconda remained in France after Leonardo's death. Through documents, it passed from the artist's hands to those of the King of France, who bought the painting from da Vinci in 1518.

"In France, the painting remained in the private collections of the King of France until the opening of the Louvre. Therefore, when Parisians flooded into the *Palais du Louvre* upon its opening in 1793, they were able to attach mystique qualities to the portrait of a woman with little known history in France. The *Mona Lisa's* half smile was seen as a window behind which she hid plenty of secrets"²⁵.

But it was clear from the beginning! And it was clear to everyone from the day the painting left the king's rooms and went into a museum. "La Gioconda" is, in the truest sense, "Leonardo's masterpiece, the revealing instance of his mode of thought and work. In suggestiveness, only the Melancholia of Durer is comparable to it; and no crude symbolism disturbs the effect of its subdued and graceful mystery. We all know the face and hands of the figure, set in its marble chair, in that circle of fantastic rocks, as in some faint light under sea. Perhaps of all ancient pictures time has chilled it least. As often happens with works in which invention

²² Pietro C. Marani, *Leonardo da Vinci: the complete paintings*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 2003.

²³ Pietro C. Marani, *Leonardo da Vinci: the complete paintings*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 2003; pp. 183-184.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Melad Abou Al-Ghanam and Denielle Jackson

seems to reach its limit, there is an element in it given to, not invented by, the master. In that inestimable folio of drawings, once in the possession of Vasari, were certain designs by Verrocchio, faces of such impressive beauty that Leonardo in his boyhood copied them many times. It is hard not to connect with these designs of the elder, by-past master, as with its germinal principle, the unfathomable smile, always with a touch of something sinister in it, which plays over all Leonardo's work. Besides, the picture is a portrait. From childhood we see this image defining itself on the fabric of his dreams, and but for express historical testimony, we might fancy that this was but his ideal lady, embodied and beheld at last. What was the relationship of a living Florentine to this creature of his thought? By what strange affinities had the dream and the person grown up thus apart, and yet so closely together? Present from the first incorporeally in Leonardo's brain, dimly traced in the designs of Verrocchio, over Leonardo's sundry experiments on the armed figure of the great duke, which had occupied the two so much during the days of their good fortune at Milan"²⁶.

And this is a real achievement that we can try to take from this painting: brain is always free!

Lisa as a muse

The circulation of many lithographs has added to the fascination of this painting. "Lisa" has become a true icon: a superb muse for artists of all times. As Ciardi said, we can found "equally perfect paintings [...]. All this often originated in a direct autopsy – carried out in many cases with a not infrequently ideologically biased eye, but just as often on a basis of observations regarding copies, derivation, prints, daguerreotype, and verbal descriptions"²⁷.

Since the sixteenth century, in a very short time, this work has become famous and the greatest artists have tried to deal with this theme: Piero della Francesca, Veneziano, Raphael, Titian, Veronese. This little piece of painted wood was a powerful inspiration.

History has made us understand that there are two ways to talk to Mona Lisa: inspiration and interaction. Inspiration is an almost supernatural act that drives the artist to create. Interaction is something else. For Mona Lisa, we see it prevail, as it has become a pop icon, since that infamous 1911! Interacting with an image means provoking or undergoing a process of transformation. It means having the courage to change, to use a painting like the letters of a new alphabet to say new words. And that's what happened with the famous *mustaches* ... and all that followed.

Yes! Mona Lisa was also able to support the art revolution. The L.H.O.O.Q, for

²⁶ Walter Pater, *Renaissance*, ; pp. 100-101.

²⁷ Roberto Paolo Ciardi, "The Myth within the Myth: Leonardo's Mona Lisa, Phantoms and Fantasies", Pietro C. Marani and Maria Teresa Fiorio, *Leonardo da Vinci. The Design of the Word*, Skira, Milano, 2015; p. 491.

example, is a cheap colour photographic reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa to which Duchamp has added a moustache and beard. The L.H.O.O.Q Mona Lisa is an early example of Duchamp's approach to renovating the language of art. From here it has become the protagonist of extraordinary Artworks. We could talk about each of them for a long time. Because each is an undisputed masterpiece. But as perfect and innovative and exciting and wonderful as they were, none of them could create anything like it.

The Mona Lisa has slowly 'invaded' our lives. Now we find it everywhere: in social, commercial and humanitarian messages. But even though she (Lisa) is everywhere, every day more than 30,000 people come to visit her in the room where she is exhibited (under many watchful eyes) at the Louvre Museum.

A surprise ending

Attention, attention please!

"There wasn't an explosion of "Giocondomania" until the second half of the nineteenth century, and even then it took the theft of the painting - on August 21, 1911, by Vincenzo Peruggia, an Italian housepainter who was working in the museum - to give a final push to the work's now well-established fame. The *Excelsior*, one of France's most important newspapers, announced the theft on its front page of August 23, 1911, publishing an image of the painting alongside the faces of the Louvre's then director, Théophile Homolle (who was forced to resign in disgrace), and the chief of police. *Le Petit Parisien*, which sold 1.4 million copies a day, came out with an enormous photo on the front page and a banner headline: "The Mona Lisa Has Disappeared from the Musée du Louvre". The September 23 issue of *Illustration* also presented readers with a reproduction of the Mona Lisa. The occasion of the theft thus became an extraordinary opportunity for the popular dissemination of the painting's image, the biography of the Artist, and the story behind the subject's enigmatic smile. When the Louvre, which had been closed in the wake of the theft, reopened on August 30, Parisians turned out en masse to contemplate the empty wall"²⁸.

The media effect was very impressive... and she (our Lisa) became something of a pop star! And that was indeed extraordinary in the beginning of a new era of art in the 20th century.

It is something very strange that happens even today. I firmly believe that it is because of the fear of the lost. When it happens (the lost of an Artwork or a Monument) it causes fear and pain. Seeing an empty wall at Louvre *en masse* was a spontaneous and incredible reaction. How was this possible? What an agony. Yes, it is completely true. Sometimes we understand the meaning of what we've

²⁸ Francesca Bonazzoli, *Mona Lisa to Marge: how the world's greatest artworks entered popular culture*, p. 58.

always had at the very moment it leaves us. We must take care of art, monuments, landscape and nature. We must look after our communities and their memories, for we must leave to those who come after us a world as beautiful as the one we have received.

Indeed, we could learn that from Leonardo: and we might try to leave the world even more beautiful! Hey... that's going to affect you and your children (in a very, very distant future)!

But let's go back to 1911. Let's go back to the fear that made the Mona Lisa so dear and "close" to everyone. It was a moment of general *delirium* and Pablo Picasso (!) himself was arrested on suspicion of theft.

But in the end, the truth was revealed. On 12 December 1913, a new story begins: "The "Gioconda" was found in Florence, after the arrest of its thief, Vincenzo Peruggia. We'll never know what was in Vincenzo's mind in the early hours of the day he decided to steal the Mona Lisa. He said it was done to bring it back to Italy...

And so it was that Mona Lisa became a pop icon at the age of 400, thanks to the madness of a foolish man.

But that's not what interests us. What is really important is the popularity of Lisa, which has reached all people (even those who have never loved art and Leonardo). This is what it means to be popular in the real sense!

The whole world breathed a collective sigh of relief... But, for sure, the "mysterious disappearance" of the "Mona Lisa" was "the most colossal theft of the modern age", which made the painting famous all over the world.

Everyone can see, even in the eyes of the people who stand in front of the painting every day, that no one will ever be able to erase that smile and the value that the mystery of a simple human expression can have for people. Because there is nothing more beautiful or universal than a simple smile, capable of opening up our imagination and our hopes.

As Leonardo taught us from a very early age: a woman's smile and a flooded river have the same natural beauty and the same mystery!

Chiara Rostagno

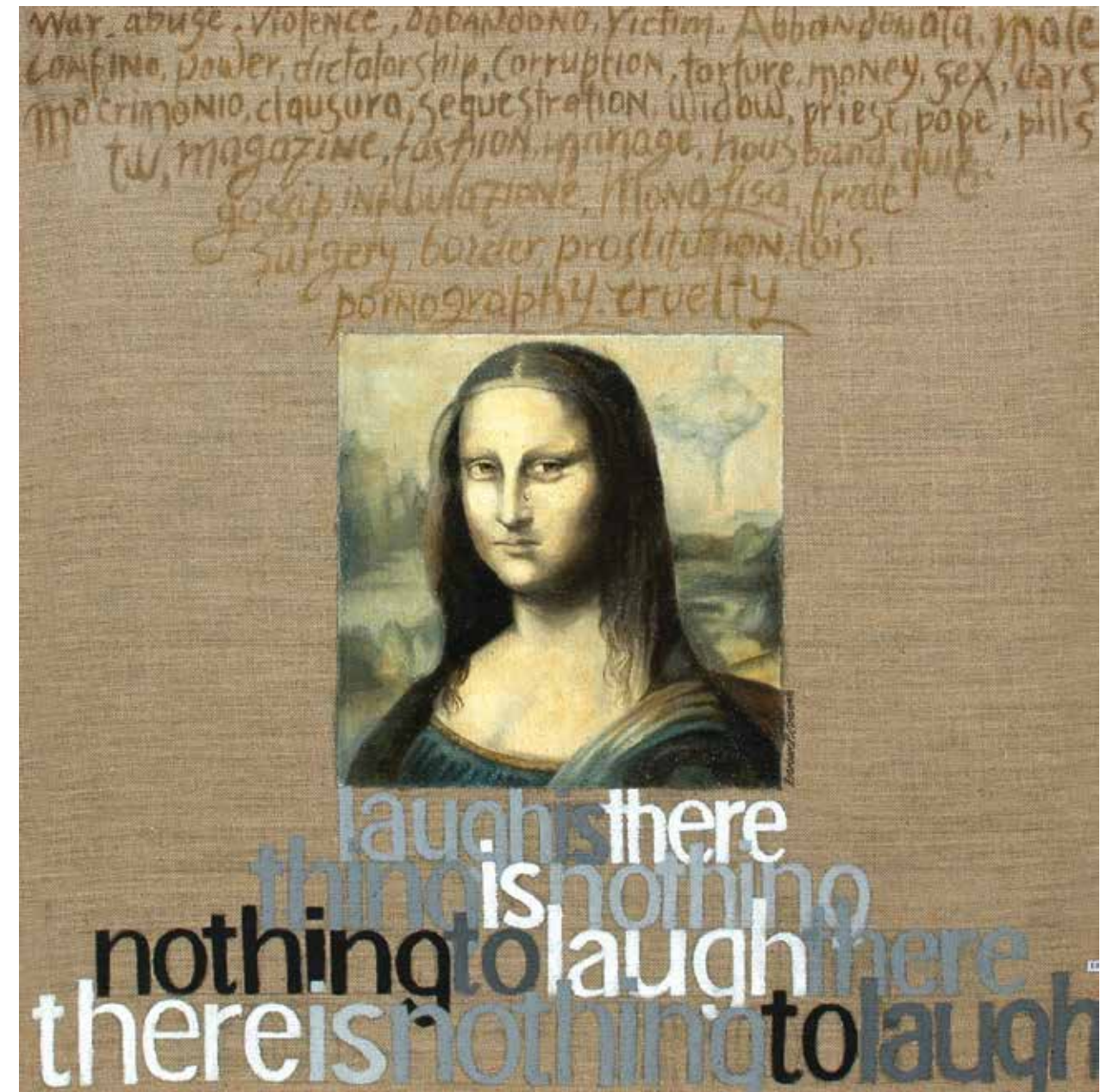
MONNA LISA

P A I N T I N G S

Barbara Pietrasanta

Barbara Pietrasanta was born in Milan and studied at the Brera Art School and then at Literature Faculty of Statal in Milan. In 1984 she moved to New York where she began work on her personal project, stimulated by visiting and living in this multi-racial city with all the contradictions of its social fabric. Following that she set up the Anyway Advertising Agency in Milan and is its Creative Director today. She has exhibited in New York, San Francisco, Zagreb, Milan, Rome, Turin, and many other Italian cities. Barbara has realized several artistic installations for the National Exposition as Pitti in Florence. She has painted frescos in the USA using an original technique as well as murals in many Milanese buildings and was invited by Christie's to do a charity contemporary art installation 'Red Windows', with other famous international artists. Barbara recently completed a cycle of frescos of the Via Crucis for the Sacra Famiglia Church in Cinisello Balsamo, Milan. In 1997 she won the Jury prize at "Filippo Sassetti Premium".

In 1999 the Milan Provincial Council purchased two of her paintings. One of her works is on permanent exhibition in the MIMAC in the Picture-Gallery of Tricase and in the town Hall of Modica. Since 2005 she is a member of Scientific Committee of 'Melegnano Castle' the future Museum of the Province of Milan. She teaches Art Direction at the Istituto Europeo of Design of Milan, cooperates with Politecnico University of Milan and she teaches "Advertising Design" at Zhong Guan Vocational Training School of Shanghai, China.

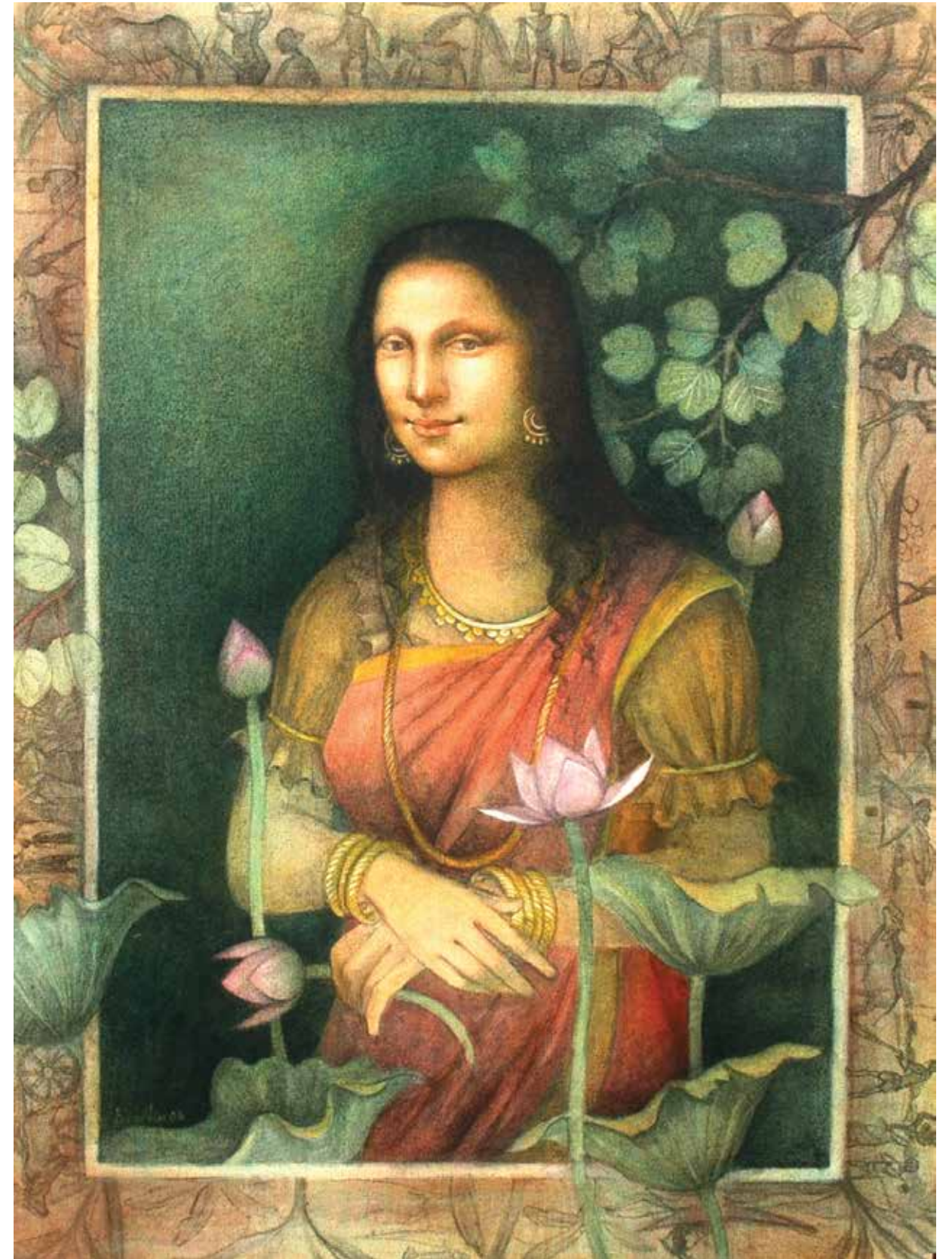


40 x 40 inches

Bratin Khan

Bratin Khan completed his BFA in painting from Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan 1993. An outstanding student: he won the Merit Scholarship from Vishwa Bharti for 1991,1992,1993. He has had more than 18 solo shows and 4 duet shows. Participated in Sotheby's auction for Khushi -2015/20

His paintings are in several collections in India and in the USA, UK, Mauritius, Dubai, Indonesia, and Germany. Important collections: Indian Parliament, Taj group of Hotels, Adani group, Birla Group, Hero Motors, Simplex group, Mr R.S Agarwal, Mr & Ms Landquist (former American Ambassador) Ambuja group.



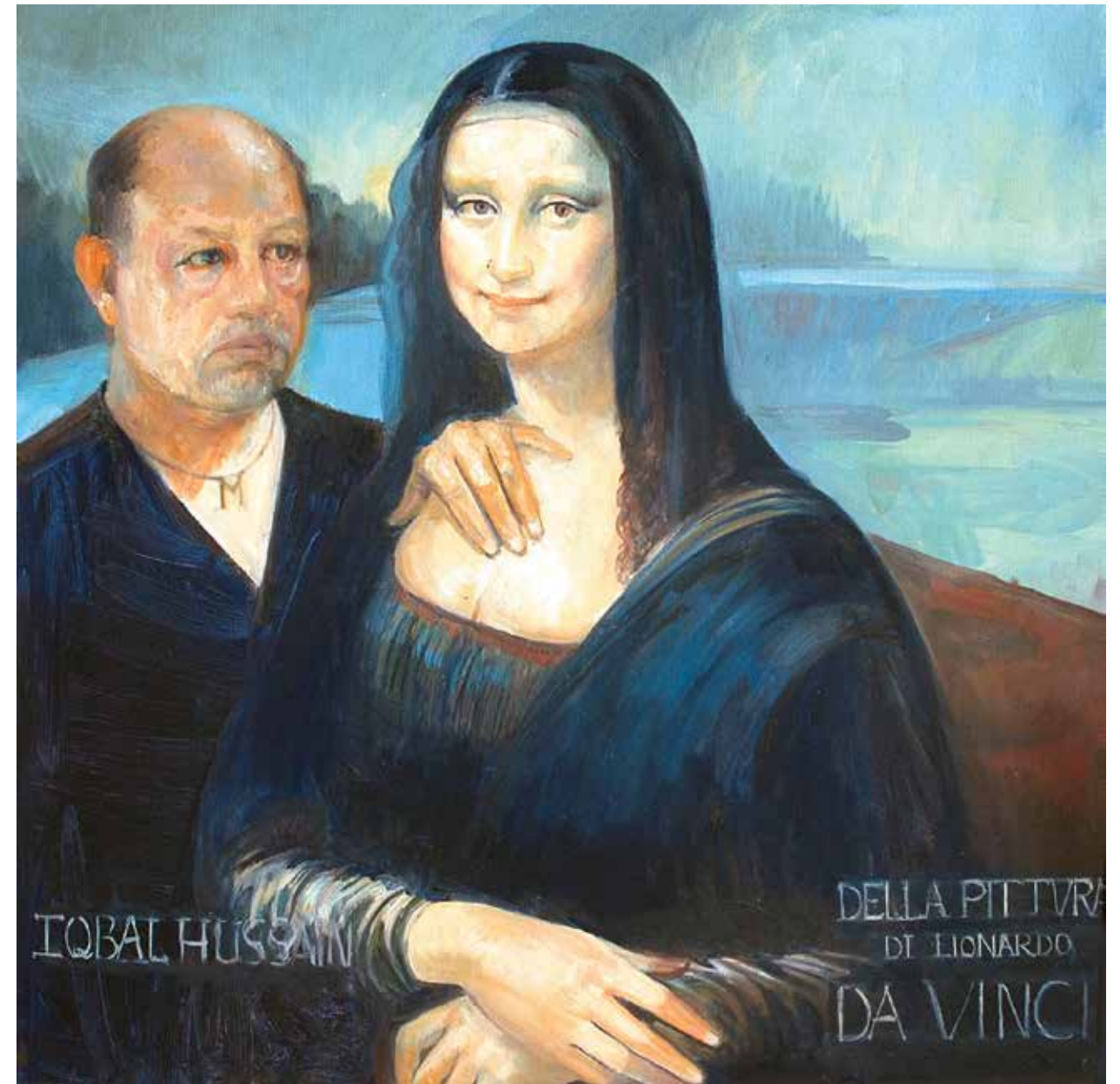
47 x 35 inches

Iqbal Hussain

Born in Heera Mandi and the son of a courtesan, Iqbal Hussain is one of the most controversial artists whose reputation as a maverick remains intact. He lives and works in Lahore Pakistan.

He immortalizes his subjects in paintings that belong to Lahore's Old Walled City of courtesans, dancers' musicians, and the Ravi River landscapes. He uses mirrors within his paintings with great sophistication, juxtaposing images of himself and sometimes the subject.

His paintings have been requested by the Jordanian Princess Wijdan Ali for the Jordanian Gallery of Fine Arts and World Bank. His paintings were the only ones from Pakistan selected for UNESCO Headquarter Prize in 1995 in Paris.



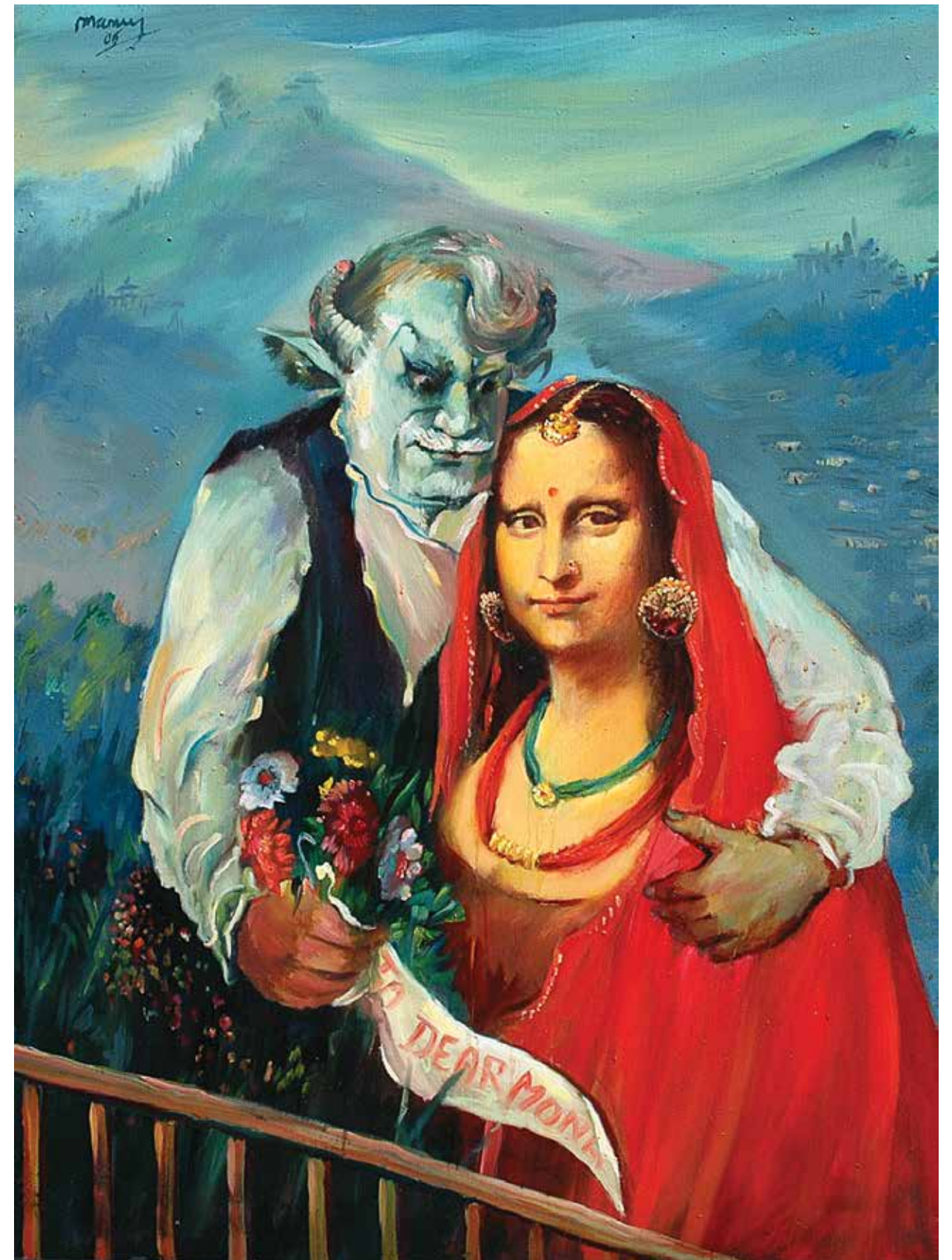
35 x 35 inches

Manoj Babu Mishra

Manoj Babu Mishra's devotion to painting and life-long search for the unknown has acquired for him a unique place in Nepal. He has published many novels, short stories, and art books. His books, *World History of Plastic Arts* (1983) and *Atelier Hermitage* (2004) deserve a special mention.

He has represented Nepal in International Art Symposium in Finland (1995), Japan (1985), Germany (1994) and in SAARC Nations several times. He held his first solo in Dhaka in 1967, since then he has exhibited in many solo and group exhibitions.

He was commissioned by His Majesty to do portraits of the Royals. His art is in collection in Japan, Germany, Burma, Italy, Finland, and Pakistan to name a few.



48 x 36 inches

Sanatan Dinda

Born in 1971, in Kolkata, Sanatan Dinda graduated (B. V. A.) from Govt. College of Arts & Crafts, Kolkata in 1993 and stood 1st Class First (Western Style). Sculpture being his forte; he has been able to incorporate figures standing in relief from his beautifully executed canvases. He infuses his characters too with a three-dimensional quality, which transcends the medium of an otherwise flat canvas, the deep cracks symbolizing the harsh realities of life.

Among the many awards and accolades he has received are the West Bengal State Academy Certificate of Merit in 1989; Govt. College of Arts & Crafts Annual Exhibition award for Painting & Graphics in 1990 and the Creative Painting Award by the Birla Academy in 2000. He lives and works in Kolkata.

His works are found in the permanent collection of the Duchess of Kent – Buckingham Palace, UK, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Belgium Consulate, RPG Enterprises Ltd. (Mumbai & Kolkata), Reliance Group (Mumbai), Ballarpur Industries Limited as well as in numerous private collections in SACO – Springdale, USA, Germany, Australia, Holland, and Paris.



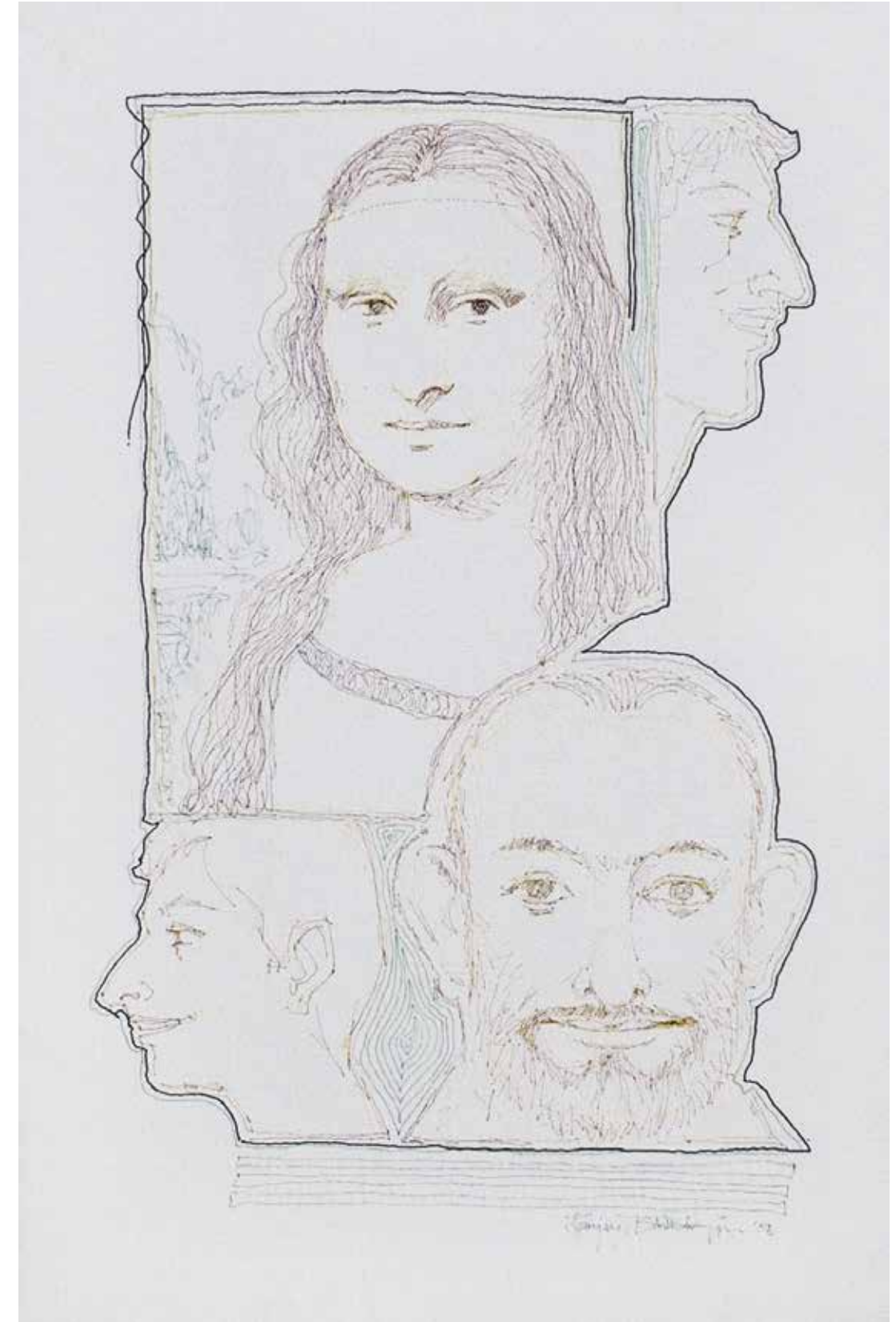
68 x 56 inches

Sanjay Bhattacharya

Sanjay Bhattacharya received a First-Class Diploma from Govt college of Art Kolkata in 1982. He has emerged as a major painter of India. His delicate water colour paintings in British wash techniques are simply enchanting.

Since 1988 he has had over 18 solo shows in India and in UK. He has participated in many groups shows. His solo exhibition Rajeev Gandhi Landscape of a man 1994 is still remembered as an important landmark in art exhibitions.

His works in collection of World Bank, R.P.G Group, I.T.C, J.K Group, Parliament House, Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust, India Today Group, Hilton to name a few.



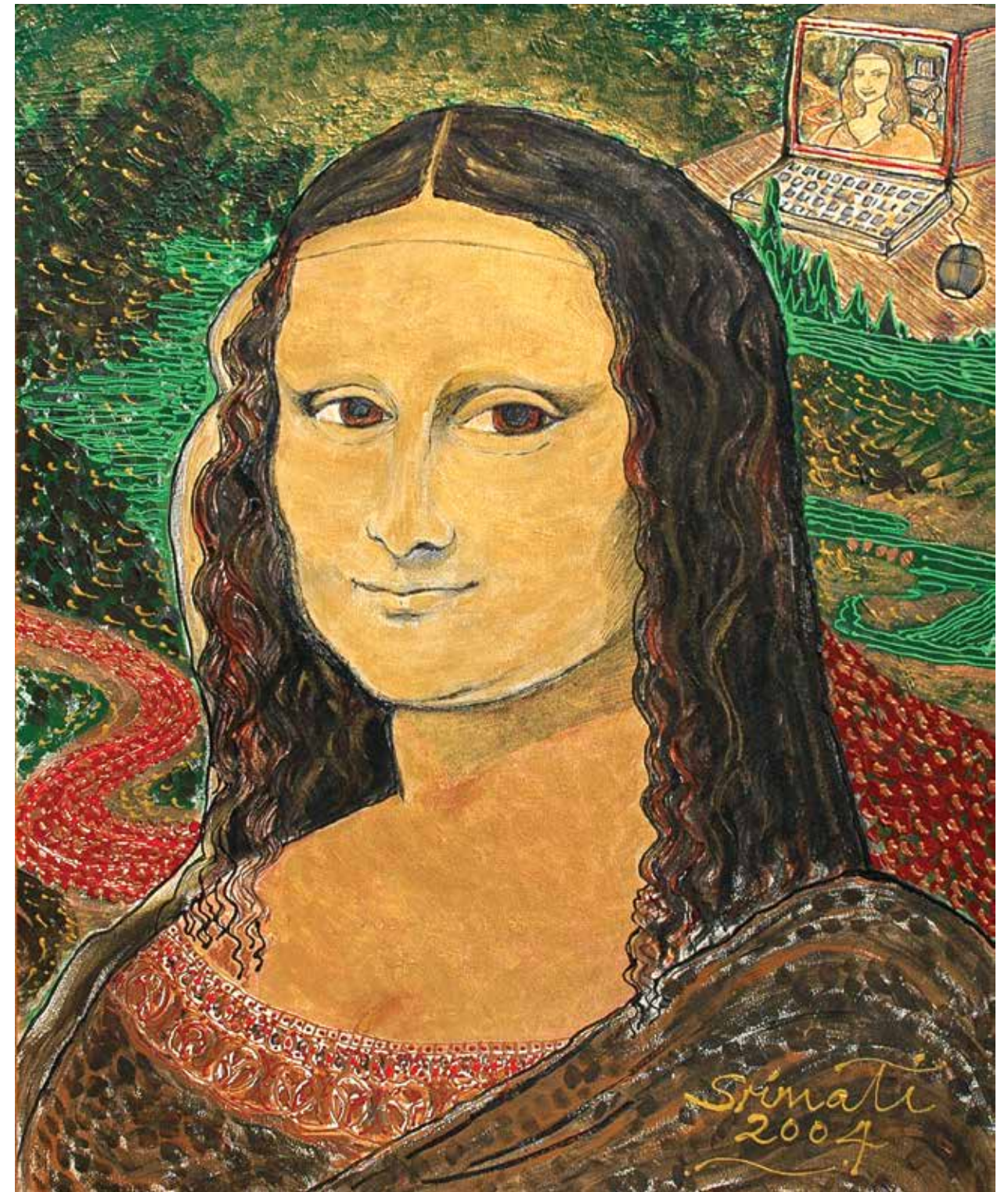
35 x 24 inches

Shrimati Lal

Shrimati Lal was born in Kolkata. Her father was Professor P Lal of Writer's workshop. She stood first class first in English Literature in Presidency college and studied Fine Art at Western Mary Land College, USA. She was an acclaimed writer, poet, and painter. She was Souza's muse and friend.

She exhibited in Nehru Centre London, New York, Helsinki, Delhi and Kolkata. She has exhibited her art widely to much critical acclaim.

To quote a famous art critic "With a dazzling brilliant freshness breathing the spirit of Matisse, Russian iconography and the passionate intensity of her Guru Souza, Shrimati's art has a flavour uniquely its own."



35 x 30 inches

Srijan Raj Bhandari

Srijan Raj Bhandari is a self-taught artist. He is very popular in Nepal and is counted among the senior artists of Nepal.

He has held many solo shows 1989 (Nepal -India Cultural Centre, Kathmandu), 1992 (Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu), 1997 (Kathmandu Art Gallery, Kathmandu), 2000 (GTZ, Lalitpur), 2001 (Matsumoto, Nagano, Japan). He has won many awards Consolation Prizes (Org. Yuwa Bouddha Samuh, 1984; Org. HMG/Nepal, 1985; Inter College Art Competition, 1987; Org. Vishwo Hindu Sangh, 1989). (Org. NAFA 1985); First Prize (Org. NAFA, 1989); Third Prizes (Org. Ministry of Education and Culture HMG/Nepal & UNICEF, 1990; NAFA).

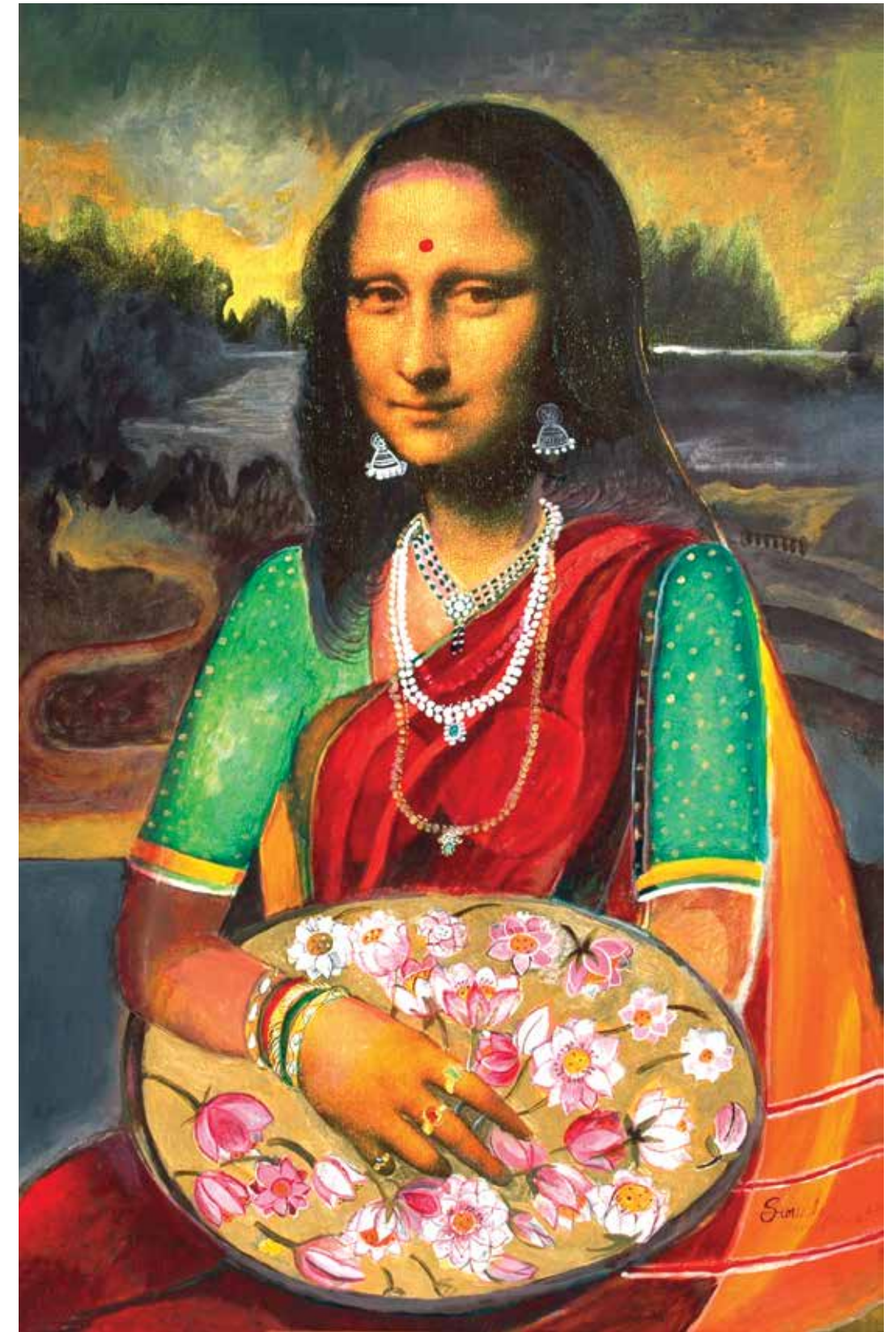


47.5 x 35.5 inches

Suruchi Chand

Suruchi Chand is well recognized in India for her Draupdi series, which she painted in 1985. Indian motifs have been center staged in her creations like Hanuman and characters from the Mahabharat. She has often drawn her inspiration from contemporary India and experimented by recreating works in miniature technique. She works and lives in Mumbai.

She created the hanging sculptures in 1990 at the CMC Ltd Mumbai office. Her works are in collection of major institutions in India and abroad. She also served on the art selection committee of NGMA. She is invited to deliver talks in several universities abroad.



36 x 24 inches

Tarak Garai

Tarak Garai is well known as a sculptor and painter. He creates forms not only on canvas but also in clay, stone, wood, and metal. He has fashioned most of his works on definite figural subjects. Mother and child is one recurring theme in his work. He lives and runs his own art school in Kolkata. He is well known for experimentation, often drawing energy from tribal art. His technical innovations are pursued by artists and critics with interest.

Tarak is acknowledged as a sculptor of considerable talent and a first-rate craftsman also. His works are in many renowned collections, to name a few those of Shiv Nadar, B.K Modi, Neeru Poddar and in many prestigious art institutions.

He has won many awards; a student of Shanti Niketan, Tarak has been sculpting for the last forty years.



36 x 24 inches

Thomas Easley

Thomas Easley is a figurative American painter known for his visually rich palette knife paintings that capture the spirit of motion and energy. Born in 1949 in California, Easley did not acquire a formal education in art. Instead, he studied the works of the artists he admired and taught himself how to paint. He has lived and worked in Europe, Asia, and the United States in a career spanning four decades.

Over the years, Easley has had more than a hundred solo exhibitions. His art has been exhibited at the Albert and Victoria Museum in London, Portrait Inc. in New York, and Vassar College. His collectors include the late Diana, Princess of Wales, Arrigo Cipriani of Harry's Bar and Cipriani Hotels, and Thomas Hoving, former Metropolitan Museum of Art director.

Easley is the author of *The Figure In Motion*, a best-selling visual guide for artists to paint the female form. He works from his studio in New York's Hudson Valley.



29 x 29 inches

Yusuf

A renowned artist, Yusuf has held many solo shows across the country as well as participated in numerous group exhibitions. Through a linear language of which he has acquired mastery, Yusuf reveals his essential preoccupation, lines in space. He lives and works in Bhopal, M.P.

His works are found in the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi; MP Kala Parishad, Bhopal; Orissa Lalit Kala Akademi, Bhubaneswar; Nag Foundation, Pune; and with many private collectors in India and abroad. Founder Director, Bihar Museum, Patna. Jury member at several national exhibitions. He set up Graphics workshop at Bharat Bhavan Bhopal.

He is recipient of several awards: Parchemin d' Honneur France, 2006, Qiongdao International Print Biennial China 2000, International Asian European Biennial, Turkey 1980, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi 1987.



27 x 22 inches



Rekha Mody, Gianluca Rubagotti with Rohan Pariyar

Rohan Pariyar

Dress Designer

'Having presented his designs at Bangalore Fashion Week and North East India fashion week, Rohan Pariyar studied pattern making with emphasis on corsets at Istituto Di Moda Burgo, Milan. During his 2 year stay in Italy Rohan was also a part of designer's teams showcasing at Milan Fashion week.

He has now set up his atelier in Kolkata and is bringing the trend of corsets in East India. National artist Swastika Mukherjee, actors Subhashree Ganguly, Parno Mitra, and Mimi Chakraborty are among the million-plus followers who have donned his creations.'

Mona Lisa's Wardrobe

Seated with her right hand resting above her left, the Mona Lisa symbolizes Renaissance art's portrayal of a virtuous woman and a devoted wife. Widely theorized as the wife of an affluent silk merchant, she is dressed in 16th-century Florentine fashion.

She is not wearing any jewellery, and her hair is elegantly simple, gathered atop her head, allowing the curls that frame her face to flow freely. The first of the many items of clothing is stockings, which were made from bias-cut fabrics of wool, velvet, silk, or linen. She could possibly be wearing hand-knitted silk stockings given her status in the society. Just below her knee, she secures a pair of garters, traditionally fastened on the outside of the knee to avoid constraining her movement.

Next, she wears a chemise or camicia, a linen undergarment worn along the skin. It is long and voluminous, with sleeves extending wide beyond her wrists.

The next item would be a gamurra or camurra, worn over the chemise. It was a popular dress style of the 15th and early 16th centuries. Its bodice is stiffened like a corset with bones, typically crafted from whalebone or metal. This helped to embrace the shape of her body, accentuating her curves. It could be laced up either at the front or back using metal rings or meticulously hand worked eyelets.

Florentine fashion favoured a wide, slightly off-the-shoulder neckline, as in the case of the Mona Lisa, with a hint of her bust. Her skirt is richly gathered at the waist.

The gamurra, while considered informal attire, was worn at homes, though the fabrics used could still be very expensive.

Sleeves were separate from the bodice. They were tied in place at the shoulders, with puffs of the chemise intended to be seen. While sleeves could be elaborate, embroidered, and bejewelled, the Mona Lisa's sleeves remain soft and simple. Her sleeves contrast her garment as we see golden sleeves paired with the black gammura. The slightly extended length of the sleeves is considered a subtle display of wealth.

Unlike in a formal setting where a lady might wear one or two additional garments over the gamurra and accessorize with fine jewellery, the Mona Lisa wears a guarnello, an informal over gown.

A guarnello was typically associated with children, pregnancy, or perhaps breast feeding. They were usually made of linen, but Mona Lisa's is made of silk with gold silk embroidery that controls the gathers at the neckline. Although the guarnello would be worn loose during pregnancy, it is widely believed that the Mona Lisa's is tied at the waist with a sash.

A gold-wired coif was placed at the back of her head to cover the hair, providing a means to fasten fine linen, or as in this case, a silk veil, in place. Thus, this ensemble completes the informal day-at-home outfit of a Florentine lady who sat down to be painted by the greatest painter of all times.

Rohan Pariyar

Habiart Global Initiatives

Established in 1989 Habiart promotes contemporary art through art events and exhibitions. Few events are mentioned here.

White Nights:

1992: Etchings from Russia, sponsored by I.T.C. and Bank of America with participation of Russian artists; supported by Lalit Kala Academy and the Russian Embassy.

Art Against Terror: Sphote

2001-2003: The project involved one hundred and fifty Indian artists and designers, along with nine artists from Nepal. Fourteen peace panels (each consisting of nine canvases measuring one square foot) were designed as an expression of peace. On 13th December 2002, the exhibition of peace panels opened in the Parliament Annex, New Delhi. Among those present were the Honorable Vice President Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, Shri L.K. Advani, Shri Manmohan Singh, Shri Karan Singh, Smt. Najma Heptulla, Shri Manohar Joshi along with hundred parliamentarians. A signature peace panel was painted on the spot by eminent artists Anjolie Ela Menon, Jatin Das, Dhiraj Chowdhury, Suresh Chowdhury, Fokhrul Islam (Bangladesh) and others.

World Economic Forum:

2006: "Sphote - A Creative Protest Against Terror" was exhibited at the prestigious World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting at Davos, Switzerland.

India Splendor Art Camp at UCLA, Los Angeles

2007: Participating Artists: Bose Krishnamachari, Shamshad Hussain, Harshvardhan, C. Jagdish

26-27 February 2009 International Conference:

'South Asian Art Present Scenario and Future Vision'

Art, as always, reflects this dialectic in a unique manner, but has not often been looked at as the canvas that reveals the concerns and values of the South Asian nations. Habiart Foundation, in association with the India Council for Cultural Relations initiated an important dialogue through a seminar to understand how

these modern interpretations converge or conflict with their traditional content or style, and how each persona within the region has evolved to face the challenge of changing equations. The conference was inaugurated by Dr Karan Singh, keynote speaker was Dr. Lokesh Chandra, with experts from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal and India.

Russian & Indian Artists:

2010: at the Exhibition Hall, Russian Center of Science & Culture an exhibition featuring four artists was organized. From Russia, Zhanna Iakovleva, Tatiana Antoshina, from India, Seema Kohli, Suhas Roy, Sanatan Dinda

Indo Pak Cultural Ties:

Following the study visit to Lahore and Islamabad by Sangita Gupta and Rekha Mody in 2005 Eminent Pakistani artist Iqbal Hussain was invited by Habiart Foundation to India.

2006: The cultural bonds between the two countries were further strengthened when renowned artists Ghulam Rasul and his daughter Maryam Rasul showcased their paintings at the Habiart Gallery India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

The Documentary: Waiting for Ananda

2012: The film directed by eminent artist Seema Kohli, documents ordination of nuns from six countries, India, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia at Maha Prajapati Nunnery, Vietnam Temple, Vaishali Bihar, Bharat.

A Café Exposition: Reliving Van Gogh

2015: Three artists. Seema Kohli (India), Begum Tayebba Lipi and Mahbubur Rahman (Bangla Desh) along with the curator Rekha Mody visited three museums Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam, The Kröller-Müller Museum Otterlo, Het Noordbrabants Museum Hertogenbosch. Motivated by their trip, artists created artworks inspired by Van Gogh's The Potato Eaters and Almond Blossom.

2018: An exhibition was mounted Reliving Van Gogh: A Café Exposition at Gandhi King Plaza India International Centre.

Hello Monalisa

Mona Lisa (La Gioconda), 1503-1506

The Concept

Leonardo da Vinci the scientist, mathematician inventor and artist - the creator of Mona Lisa is regarded as an icon of 21 century. Five hundred years later since the famous artwork was completed, Habiart Foundation launched an initiative to discover the mystery of Mona Lisa and make an effort to understand it in the present-day context and in contemporary art language. Twelve artists from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Italy, and U.S.A. interpreted the famous Mona Lisa in their individualistic styles. An art exhibition was mounted of all the works in 2006.

The Enigma

Mona Lisa - a woman, dressed in the Florentine fashion of her day and seated in a visionary, mountainous landscape. Leonardo Da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa on a piece of pine wood in the year 1506. Never in the history of art has one painting been admired to such an extent. The Mona Lisa's enigmatic expression, which seems both alluring and aloof, has given the portrait universal fame. Why is the Mona Lisa Smiling. She really seems to look at us and seems to have a mind of her own. Like a living being, she seems to change before our eyes and looks a little different every time we come back to her. This is Leonardo's famous invention which the Italians call sfumato - the blurred outline and mellowed colours that allow one form to merge with another and always leave something to our imagination. Normally Leonardo recorded in his notebooks the histories of model sittings; but nowhere is there found any records of the Mona Lisa model sitting. Why is that? Who posed for him? Did Leonardo paint himself? This theory is supported by analysing the facial features of Leonardo's face and that of the famous painting.

Present Connections

Leonardo - the Renaissance Man is presented as a model of Rationalism. The European Union has an extensive program called the Leonardo Da Vinci Project to train and place new high-tech workers. A Canadian management-training program uses the inventor's famed improvisational prowess as a model. A New Age site celebrates Leonardo's vegetarianism.

A yoga related site hails Leonardo as one of its Masters of Light. Leonardo's anatomical drawings make him one of the first great Medical Illustrators. The Medical Illustration unit of an Australian medical school celebrates Leonardo's anatomical drawings.

In 2005 Mona Lisa found a new setting in the Louver Museum in Paris. The celebrated book 'Da Vinci Code' by Dan Brown has broken all records and has become a best seller. The world is again captivated by the magic of Leonardo Da Vinci.

Our project is an innovative way of paying tribute to his genius.

“ Taking Mona Lisa to be symbolic of womanhood, I wanted to highlight the contemporary issues challenging women. ”

Barbara Pietrasanta
Italian Artist



“Hello Mona Lisa is a way to pay tribute to the genius of Leonardo Da Vinci. Never in the history of art has one painting been admired to such an extent.”

Rekha Mody

Logo