SOLVING
MONA LISA
PRESS RELEASE

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Author discovers that true identity of "Mona Lisa" is a character described in "The Divine Comedy."

Author Ron Piccirillo finally reveals "Mona Lisa's" actual identity in his new book, "*Solving Mona Lisa*," and explains that though she is primarily one character from "*The Divine Comedy*," her smile belongs to a second character in the poem, which Dante Alighieri wrote 200 years before.

These recent discoveries follow Piccirillo's previous findings from 2011 of hidden animal heads in "Mona Lisa" and other Renaissance art—which Leonardo secretly wrote about in his notebooks. The hidden animal heads are finally explained in "Solving Mona Lisa." They are also tied to "The Divine Comedy." (Blog: http://ronpiccirillo.com/)

Mona Lisa's Identity:

In recent years, experts, lacking evidence, believed that "Mona Lisa" portrays one of several women, with many suspecting she is Lisa Gherardini (Lisa del Giocondo). Experts also believed that Leonardo never mentioned the painting in his writings. (The "Mona Lisa" name was given to the painting years after Leonardo's death.) Piccirillo's discoveries dispute what experts have believed. "Solving Mona Lisa" shows that Leonardo mentioned a woman named Envy in his notebooks, which he has found to reference a character from "The Divine Comedy." Leonardo wrote:

> "**Envy** must be represented with **a contemptuous motion of the hand towards heaven,** because if she could she would use her strength against God; **make her with her face covered by a mask of fair seeming;** … Many thunderbolts should proceed from her to signify her evil speaking. Let her be … **haggard** because she is in **perpetual torment**. … **Give her a leopard's skin, because this creature kills the lion out of envy and by deceit.** … make her ride upon death, because Envy, never dying, **never tires of ruling. Make her bridle,** …."

Piccirillo connected the Envy passage and "Mona Lisa" to "The Divine Comedy," explaining that the painting is described in detail in the poem, and that the poet Dante, who is also the story's main character, encounters the Mona Lisa character. She is a female soul sitting in Purgatory, guilty of envy (one of the seven deadly sins), and overlooks Hell. Dante begins describing the woman in the following lines, which Leonardo later painted:

> "… 'This circle scourges / The sin of envy, and on that account / Are drawn from love the lashes of the scourge. // **The bridle** of another sound shall be … // But **fix thine eyes athwart the air right steadfast,** / And people **thou wilt see before us sitting,** / And **each one close against the cliff is seated.**' // Then wider than at first mine eyes I opened; / I looked before me, and saw **shades with mantles** // … **Not from**

the color of the stone diverse. … // **Covered with sackcloth** vile they seemed to me, … // And **all of them were by the bank sustained.** // … **Among the rest I saw a shade that waited** / **In aspect,** and should anyone ask how, / **Its chin it lifted upward** …" (*The Divine Comedy*, Longfellow, emphasis added)

Piccirillo dissects the full description in "Solving Mona Lisa," line by line, including an explanation for the balcony scene in the painting—Dante references how the envious woman sat at a balcony before her death, overlooking the town she prayed devastation upon during a war attack.

Mona Lisa's Smile:

"Solving Mona Lisa" explains that although the woman in "Mona Lisa" represents the souls guilty of the sin of envy, her smile comes from Beatrice, one of the main characters in "The Divine Comedy." Beatrice's smile is significant to the story—Dante points out her smile many times, her expression continuing to increase for Dante to see. Initially, Dante can't perceive her smile because he is mortal. As "Solving Mona Lisa" points out, Beatrice is first introduced with an "expressionless face;" she "tells Dante that her smile would be so powerful to his mortal senses that he would be killed by seeing it …" (*Solving Mona Lisa*). Dante wrote:

> "… And [Beatrice] smiled not; but 'If I were to smile,' / She unto me began, 'thou wouldst become / Like Semele, when she was turned to ashes.'" (*The Divine Comedy*, Longfellow)

Piccirillo goes on to explain in his book that Dante's "growing purification … allows him to eventually receive the brilliance of Beatrice's brightening smile. Her true smile can only be seen by purified souls. Throughout the poem, [Dante] makes it a point to progressively describe her increasing smile. When Dante's divine vision first improves, Beatrice offers him 'somewhat' of a smile. Later, she smiles at him 'a little.' Her smile increases proportionally with Dante's divine vision." (*Solving Mona Lisa*)

"Leonardo painted 'Mona Lisa' as a combination of the envious souls and Beatrice," Piccirillo explains. "Leonardo and Dante both wrote about the idea that [each] person has an envious side and a virtuous side. 'The Comedy's framework explains it all." Piccirillo points to a line Leonardo wrote: "… and sooner will there be a body without a shadow than Virtue without Envy;" and to a scene in "The Divine Comedy" in which Dante looks at Beatrice, but suddenly sees her as two characters: "… mine eyes / Saw Beatrice turned round … , / That is one person only in two natures" (*The Divine Comedy*, Longfellow).

Mona Lisa Landscape:

"Solving Mona Lisa" reveals how every single detail in "Mona Lisa" is described in "The Divine Comedy." Absolutely no detail in the art is random, as the following section from Piccirillo's book begins to explain:

> … Dante describes the path [he and Virgil] take through the mountains: "We mounted upward through the **rifted rock,** / Which undulated to this side and that, / Even as a wave receding and advancing" (Pur. 10.7-9). To the left of Mona Lisa looked to be wavy-textured mountains that are split—or ***rifted***. … just before the backward winding S-shaped [**zigzagging**] path near [Mona Lisa's] shoulder. Dante and Virgil then take [that] **zigzagging** path: "'Here it behoves us use a little art,' / Began my Leader, 'to adapt ourselves / Now here, now there, to the receding side'" (*Purgatory* 10.10-12).
>
> With the mountains at their backs, they make their way toward the first terrace of Purgatory, "from out that needle's eye; / But when we [safe] and in the open were, / There where the mountain backward piles itself, … [where the poets] stopped upon a plain / More desolate than roads across the deserts" (*Pur.* 10.16-18, 20-21). Dante "perceive[s] **the embankment round about,** / Which all **right** of ascent had interdicted …" (10.29-30). On the *right* of the painting, between the figure's shoulder and the bridge, is a sloping side of a curved-faced plateau—a round embankment. At one level higher than the rest of the terrain, but still one level below the seated figure, that plateau had to be the first terrace!
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> But I also noticed another peculiar fracture in the mountains along the right edge of the art, on the opposite side of the ***rifted rock*** I had linked the text to. Just across the water from the round embankment

in the art, on the side of the mountains, may have been where the poets passed through instead when they "mounted … through a **rifted rock** // … [and proceeded] forth from out that **needle's eye** …" (*Pur.* 10.7, 16). The fracture looked to be shaped like the opening of a needle—***out that needle's eye.*** I wasn't sure which opening referred to the text. Perhaps Leonardo meant for both to be, humorously placing them on opposite sides of the art as a playful reference to the previous sentence: "'Here it behoves us use a little art,' / Began my Leader, 'to adapt ourselves / **Now here, now there,** to the receding side'" (*Pur.* 10.10-12). Regardless, everything Leonardo placed in that painting tied back to *The Comedy*. (*Solving Mona Lisa*, p. 238)

Hidden Animal Heads and Second Bridge:

"Solving Mona Lisa" explains the ape head and roaring lion head Piccirillo previously discovered. Both are described perfectly in "The Divine Comedy." Dante describes the lion just as Leonardo later painted it: "… A **lion's aspect** which appeared to me. // … **With head uplifted,** and with ravenous hunger, / So that **it seemed the air was afraid of him**" (*Inferno* 1). Piccirillo points to a line mentioning the ape he found in the landscape, which Leonardo portrayed through use of wordplay: "how I a skillful **ape of nature** was" (*Inferno* 29).

Piccirillo introduces a second bridge in the painting that was never noticed before. A section of a bridge can be seen peaking out from the right edge of the painting, near the slanting landscape. "The Divine Comedy" mentions "the **half arch of a bridge**. …" Leonardo painted a bridge that shows exactly **half an arch.**

Other Discoveries:

Among Piccirillo's discoveries, "Solving Mona Lisa" introduces many hidden optical illusions for the first time, mostly showing animal heads hiding throughout thousands of Renaissance works of art in a technique Leonardo was known to invent.
https://ronpiccirillo.com/press-kit [ANIMAL HEAD EXAMPLES]

Additionally, Leonardo's optical illusion technique is the key to viewing "Mona Lisa's" smile. From the special angle Leonardo discusses in his writings, "Mona Lisa's" smile becomes more expressive—a direct representation to Beatrice's increasing smile in "The Divine Comedy."
http://ronpiccirillo.com/mona-lisas-smile-explained [Blog showing secret smile]

"These discoveries will completely change our understanding of some of the most famous works of art in history," Piccirillo states. "The revelation that there is even more imagery than is apparent on the surface should not be a surprise, but comes as a shock that it hasn't been noticed earlier. Most, if not all of it, can be explained through 'The Divine Comedy.'"

About Ron Piccirillo:

A graphic designer and oil painter, Piccirillo lives in Rochester, NY and has worked as a graphic designer for nearly the last 20 years. He has dedicated the last eight years of his life researching and writing this memoir. He enjoys studying the techniques of the masters associated with the periods in art about which he is most interested, including Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Cezanne, Van Gogh and Monet. For more information on him and his findings, visit www.ronpiccirillo.com.

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