



Leonardo da Vinci

1452-1519

Everyone has heard about the famous artist, Leonardo da Vinci, the creator of great paintings. In fact, Leonardo was also a scientist and an inventor. He was interested in various branches of intellectual and practical activity; analysing anatomy, mechanics, mathematics, technology, botany, geology, hydrology and so on.

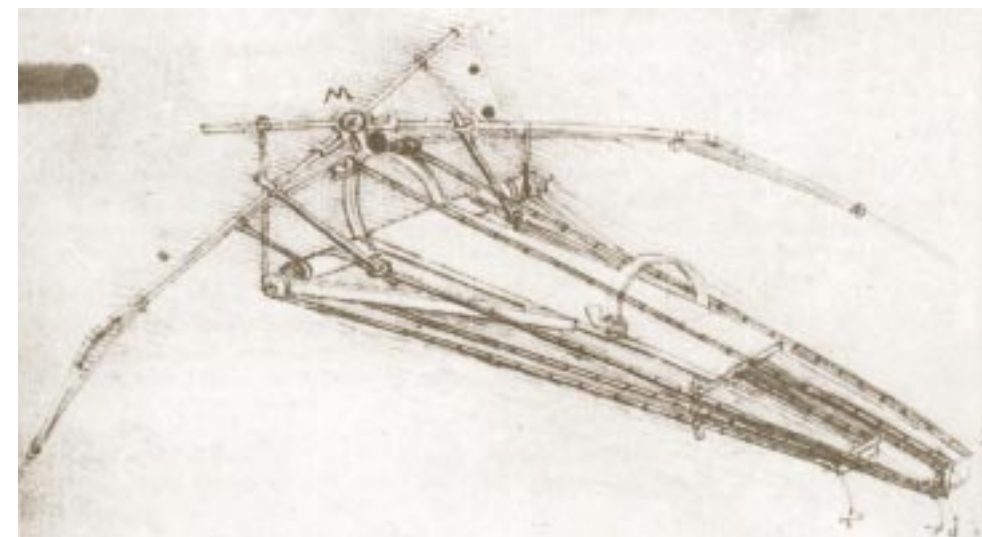
Leonardo da Vinci was born on 15th April, 1452, the illegitimate son of Piero da Vinci, a landowner and a successful notary, and a poor peasant woman named Caterina. Soon after his son's birth the father married the daughter of a noble family. Leonardo grew up in the countryside where he was born, near the little town of Vinci in Tuscany. It was there, as a child, that **he used to collect insects, 'serpents', butterflies, grasshoppers and other small animals** and put them together to form 'a great ugly creature'.

From an early age Leonardo was good at drawing and music. Seeing this, his father sent him to Andrea del Verrocchio in Florence, who taught him drawing, sculpture and elementary mechanics. Young Leonardo was handsome and graceful with a fine figure; he was also physically strong. He charmed everyone around him and drew people to him. He was never married and his 'private actions' are subject to debate, even now.

It is known that in 1482 Leonardo left Florence to serve the Duke of Milan. While in Milan he mainly developed military technology. At the same time, he studied mechanics and the physics of light. He taught himself Latin, because at that time few scientific writings of the ancients were accessible in other languages. He also continued to draw. It was his most creative period, during which he painted his famous 'The Last Supper', in 1497.



*From Leonardo's
'The Last Supper'*



He designed flying machines

From Milan Leonardo went to Venice and then eventually to Florence where he served as a chief inspector of military fortifications. But his favorite activity was drawing and at that time he painted 'The Mona Lisa', in 1503.

In spite of his artistic activity he never stopped studying and investigating nature. While doing that he used to make notes in his famous notebooks. They were later discovered and it was found that he used mirror writing, apparently because he was left handed.

Some of his notes and sketches have been preserved in libraries and museums. From these we know about his scientific work. **He studied the anatomy of humans and birds to try to solve the problem of whether man could fly.** He studied the movement of water and created plans for diverting rivers and building canals. He invented mechanical systems, such as complex cranes, pulley systems, an underwater breathing apparatus, lathes and clocks. He was mostly interested in problems of vision and the diffusion of light. He thought that light was distributed in the same way as waves 'from dropping stones into water'. By studying the properties of the moving body he came close to the discovery of Newton's law, stating that 'the body continues to move as long as the impression of the force'.

It is said that he never published his scientific works because he could never put his manuscripts in order and despite his great scientific achievements he is remembered principally as a great artist. He died on the 2nd of May, in 1519, leaving to his friends and pupils all his drawings and manuscripts.



*Leonardo's
three-dimensional
design*