

LEONARDO DA VINCI (d. 1519)

Importance/Legacy

Life: Florence, Milan, Florence, Milan, Rome and France

[Khan Academy, Leonardo da Vinci](#)
[Britannica, Leonardo da Vinci](#)
[Britannica, Leonardo da Vinci video](#)
[Wikipedia, Leonardo da Vinci](#)
[LeonardodaVinci.net](#)

Historical Context: Italian Renaissance

Influenced by: [Andrea del Verrocchio \(d. 1488\)](#)

Contemporaries: Lorenzo de Medici (d. 1492), Sandro Botticelli (d. 1510), Raphael (d. 1520), Niccolò Machiavelli (d. 1527), Michelangelo (d. 1564)

Influenced: [Francesco Melzi \(d. 1570\)](#)

Notebooks: grotesques, deluges



Self-Portrait, 1510



Vitruvian Man, 1490



Muscles of the Face and Hand, 1510-11



Apocalyptic Deluge, c. 1519

[Royal Collection Trust, Deluges](#)

Inventions: war machines, flying machines, musical instruments, automata, architecture

[Leonardo da Vinci Inventions](#)

Science: anatomical drawings, geometric patterns, nature studies

Paintings: perspective

Khan Academy, The Last Supper 1

Khan Academy, The Last Supper 2

Khan Academy, Mona Lisa



Annunciation, 1472-76



Virgin of the Rocks, 1483-86



Lady with an Ermine, 1489-91



Mona Lisa, 1503-16



The Last Supper, 1492-98

Bibliography

Bisley, Donovan. *A Portrait of Leonardo*.

Isaacson, Walter. *Leonardo da Vinci*. 2017.

Vasari, Giorgio. *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. 1550.

Leonardo's Deluge Drawings

In *How Should We Then Live?*, first published in [], Francis Schaeffer rightly calls Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) one of the unique geniuses of history and the quintessential “Renaissance man.” According to Schaeffer, Leonardo attempted, on a humanistic basis, to use mathematics and careful scientific observation to produce art that would depict universal meanings and purpose. This attempt, according to Schaeffer, failed. Leonardo tried to paint the universal human soul, but he could never successfully pass beyond the particular people he was drawing or painting. In this, Leonardo foresaw the collapse of autonomous humanism. Prophetically, he foresaw where autonomous humanism would eventually lead. This caused him to become deeply pessimistic in the last years of his life. Leonardo, with keen insight, saw that, beginning with man the machine, with mathematics, science, and art in two, no absolute reference point may be found. Mathematics, in other words, cannot provide meaning and purpose. With his artistic sensitivity, Leonardo grasped the problem of modern man and anticipated his eventual demise.

This anticipation is clearly seen, according to Schaeffer, in Leonardo's apocalyptic deluge drawings and notes he scribbled in the last years of his life when he served under the young French king Francis I, who ruled from 1515-47. These drawings depict the end of the world as a cataclysmic storm of fire and water engulfing everything—rocks, trees, people, and animals. They show a confused mix of curling fire and flood smashing human fortresses causing universal death. Several examples of these sketches and notes are readily accessible at the website of the Royal Collection Trust: <https://www.rct.uk/collection/themes/exhibitions/leonardo-da-vinci-a-life-in-drawing-0/deluges>. These sketches never left Leonardo's studio and were never intended by him to be shown to others. Fortunately, we have many of them.



A Deluge, c. 1517-18

So why was Leonardo fascinated, even obsessed, with writing about and drawing these apocalyptic scenes?

Where Leonardo ended up teaches us that the Reformation, with insistence on the absolute infinite-personal God who reveals himself to us, is the right answer, and that Renaissance humanism, with no similar absolute reference point, is not. Leonardo, with his keen foresight as an artist, understood this. He foresaw the fragmentation of modern culture and art, such as what we see in Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2.