





WORKS

Madonna and Child with a Pomegranate (Dreyfus Madonna)

c. 1469

Oil on wood, 15.7 x 12.8 cm
Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington

This small painting was once attributed to the workshop of Verrocchio, sometimes more specifically to Lorenzo di Credi; but more recent studies have argued that this is one of the earliest extant works of Leonardo. There are many stylistic analogies with the early works of the young Tuscan painter, such as the tender relationship between the Virgin and Child, which resembles that seen in the *Madonna of the Carnation* (Alte Pinakothek, Munich), the pose of the Virgin's left hand as it offers the pomegranate, and the plump, uplifted arm of the Child; similarly, the young Virgin's hair is very like that portrayed in the Uffizi *Annunciation*. The two figures in the foreground emerge from the obscurity of a room, and are bathed in a soft light that falls from above, revealing a delicate chromaticism. The Virgin stands behind a parapet, supporting the Child as he takes a few faltering steps, his feet protected from the cold stone with her blue cloak. The figure of the Child is projected into the foreground, his gaze raised heavenwards, and through the windows there are glimpses of a landscape as yet relatively undistinguished. The critics Wilhelm Suida and Bernard Degenhart were the first to suggest that this work, like the *Madonna of the Carnation* (Alte Pinakothek, Munich) and the *Benois Madonna* (Hermitage, St. Petersburg), bears the hallmarks of Leonardo's characteristic blurring of colors and tones (*sfumato*). The delicacy of the painting, the precision of the brush-strokes, and the juxtaposition of blue, red, yellow, and green are further hallmarks of Leonardo style.



The Annunciation

c. 1472–1475

Oil on wood, 98 x 217 cm
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

This work comes from the church and convent of San Bartolomeo di Monteoliveti, near Florence. It was traditionally attributed to Domenico Ghirlandaio, until studies conducted around the time of its transfer to the Uffizi in 1867 suggested that it may be an early work by Leonardo. There are evident similarities to the works produced by those close to Verrocchio, notably the graceful gestures of the figures and the abundant folds of drapery. The lectern and the stone table, especially the lion's-paw feet and the plant decoration, closely resemble features found in the funeral monument to Giovanni and Piero de' Medici in the Old Sacristy in San Lorenzo in Florence, a monument completed by Verrocchio. The Virgin is seated outside a typical Florentine Renaissance villa, her left hand raised in a delicate gesture of acceptance of the divine message, whilst her right touches the pages of the holy book. However, the effect of the gesture is hampered by the excessive distance between her and the lectern, which makes the figure of the Virgin appear too far away to be realistic, the right arm excessively long. This apparent deformation in perspective diminishes, however, when the observer is standing in the intended viewing point, slightly to the right of the painting. The wings of the archangel, the carpet of flowers, the imaginary northern landscape in the background, with its boats, pointed towers and rocky mountains, and the softly pervading light of dawn gently illuminating the figures—all are elements that in their almost scientific detail foreshadow the successive stages in the evolution of Leonardo's style.





*The Annunciation
(details)*







Madonna of the Carnation

c. 1473

Oil on wood, 62 x 47.5 cm
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

Some critics have identified this work as the “Madonna of the Vase” mentioned by Vasari: “Leonardo has done an excellent painting of Our Lady for Pope Clement VII. Amongst other things he accomplished, there is a vase full of water with a few flowers in it, which is not only wonderfully lifelike, but echoes the dewdrops in the background in such a way as to look more realistic than the real thing!”

It marked an important step in Leonardo’s artistic development, both in terms of form and composition. Two sets of mullioned windows frame the landscape, which is articulated through successive planes, and the light falls on the figures of the Madonna and Child from the front, rendering them more monumental, though without any hint of rigidity; indeed the fluidity is maintained by gestures such as the Virgin’s right hand gently resting on the young Savior’s back. The painting is one of Leonardo’s early works, and there are some similarities with the style of Verrocchio’s workshop, but there are also some individual characteristics that resemble those found, for example, in the Uffizi *Annunciation*.

Prefiguring elements of Leonardo’s mature style, these characteristics include the rocky landscape in the background, visible through the windows, the yellow folds of drapery knotted into a spiral, which are reminiscent of his later studies on hydraulics, and the plaited hair of the Virgin, which is similar to that shown in his preparatory sketches for the figure of Leda.



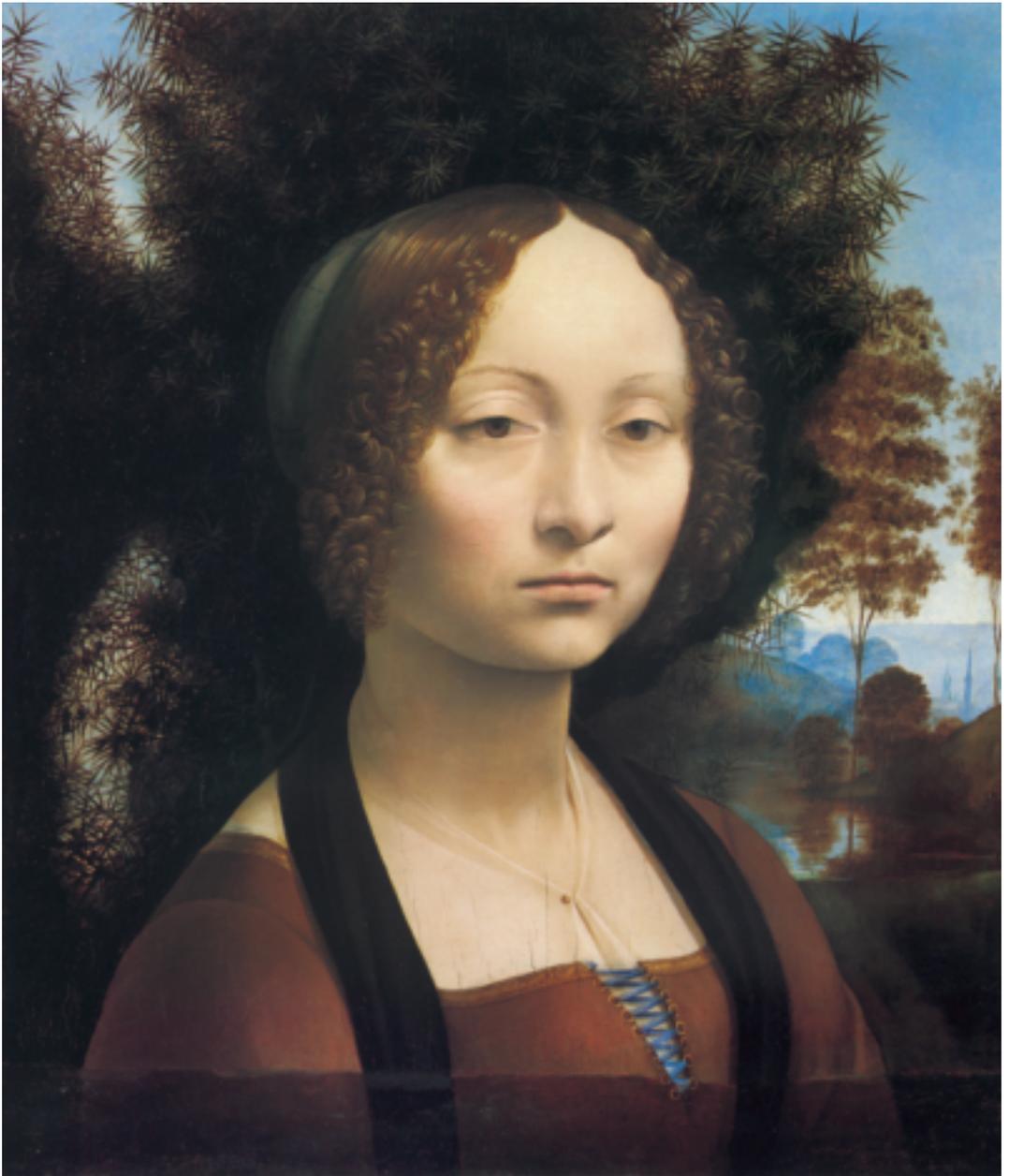
Ginevra de' Benci

c. 1474

Oil and tempera on wood, 38.8 x 36.7 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington

The front of this panel shows the portrait of a young woman identified as Ginevra de' Benci, daughter of the Florentine banker Amerigo di Giovanni Benci; in 1474, at the age of seventeen, she was married to Luigi di Bernardo di Lapo Nicolini. The painting is rich in allusions: the fronds of juniper behind Ginevra's shoulders help to identify her (*ginevra* means juniper in Italian), as does the painting on the reverse, which depicts a sprig of juniper surrounded by a garland consisting of a branch of bay tree and a branch of palm, with the inscription "Virtutem forma decorat" (Beauty Adorns Virtue).

The portrait shows a young woman with strong, stern features, against a landscape full of abundant vegetation and water. There are clear references to Flemish art, such as the decorative touches to the hairstyle, the particular attention to detail, and the delicate luminosity of the skin, which suggest that Leonardo may have been influenced by Jan van Eyck, incorporating various elements of the Flemish artist's style in his own work. It seems likely that a third of the painting was cut off at the bottom, and that it would originally have shown her hands, though perhaps only sketched in. Sketch No. 12558 at Windsor Castle may have been a study for those hands. They are very similar to those of the portrait bust known as the *Lady with Flowers* (c. 1475, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence), which was sculpted by Verrocchio; careful critical observation has given much credence to the hypothesis that this sculpture was executed by Verrocchio with the help of Leonardo.



The Baptism of Christ

1475–1478

Oil and tempera on wood, 177 x 150 cm
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

According to Vasari, “Whilst Andrea del Verrocchio was working on a painting of St. John the Baptist baptizing Christ, Leonardo painted one of the angels, who was portrayed wearing clothes. Although he was still young, Leonardo’s angel surpassed that of Andrea to such an extent that Andrea never touched paints again—he was ashamed that a boy understood their use better than he did.”

Vasari’s well-known anecdote of the pupil outshining his master suggests a relatively early date for the painting. However, X-ray examinations have shown that in the case of the angel in profile, Christ’s hair, and certain parts of the landscape in the background on the left, the tempera underpainting was covered with an oil glaze, which suggests Leonardo’s involvement. The quality of Leonardo’s contribution shows a technical maturity that would suggest a date later than that of the portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci in the Uffizi. More recent studies have confirmed the hand of Leonardo at work in other areas of the painting, namely in the river, whose waters flow over the feet of Christ and St. John the Baptist, and in areas of Christ’s face and body. The rendering of the muscles and an evident anatomical accuracy are particularly clear in the figure of the Baptist. These characteristics of Leonardo’s style prefigure the St. Jerome in the Pinacoteca Vaticana and all of his other mature works.





*The Baptism of Christ
(details)*



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