



# Leseprobe

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## **Masters of Art: Leonardo**

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Leonardo di Ser Piero da Vinci was born on 15 April 1452, possibly in the hamlet of Anchiano, near Vinci, a village in the region of Florence. He was the illegitimate first-born son of Ser Piero da Vinci (1426–1504), a notary, and Caterina di Meo Lippi (c. 1427–1494/5?), a servant. Soon after he was born, Leonardo's mother married Antonio di Piero Buti del Vacca (called "Accattabriga"; c. 1425/30– c. 1490) a furnace worker. It seems that the infant Leonardo lived with his mother and step-father at a farm near Vinci before moving to his father's house. Ser Piero resided mainly in Florence, his place of work, later with a young wife (Leonardo's step-mother). Leonardo would eventually have many half-siblings (all younger) on both sides of his family. He was close to grandfather, Antonio (1393–1469) and paternal uncle, Francesco (1436–1507)—the latter would leave his nephew a legacy—and would spend much of his childhood in their homes.

Being illegitimate, Leonardo was unable to follow his father's profession. This may have contributed to his father's decision to give the child an education limited to literacy and numeracy. He was not taught languages (beyond the rudiments) and his natural left-handedness was never corrected. His country upbringing and lack of book-learning inculcated in the curious child a propensity to observe, experiment and remember. Unshackled by conventional wisdom, he was free of assumption and therefore lacked self-satisfied rigidity. Leonardo later commented, "All our knowledge has its foundation in our sensations. All science will be vain and full of errors which is not born of experience."

When Leonardo moved to Florence around 1466, he arrived as a youth without great education but nevertheless cultured. Ser Piero would have told his son about his distinguished clients. It was unlikely that this was the first time Leonardo had experienced the heady environment of Florence, a thriving centre of trade and culture under the rulership of Lorenzo de' Medici. It was the site of Brunelleschi's famed cathedral dome, one of the architectural marvels of Europe and a subject of wonder and pride for Florentines. At around 14 years' old, Leonardo was at the normal age for apprenticeship. Ser Piero knew artist Verrocchio in a professional capacity and arranged to have his son train under him. Ser Piero would have paid the fees required. For the first years of apprenticeship, masters were paid by their pupils' families; only when apprentices became experienced enough to perform to a high level were they themselves paid.

Andrea del Verrocchio (c. 1435–1488) trained—and collaborated with—many highly regarded Florentine artists of the periods we now call the Early and High Renaissance: Sandro Botticelli, Pietro Perugino, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Filippino Lippi, Luca Signorelli. He had been trained as a metalsmith and became a sculptor of great distinction. As a painter, Verrocchio was adequate and could provide pupils with a capable grounding in tempera painting. We shall discuss Leonardo's progress in painting later.

Leonardo absorbed the treatises of Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) and scrutinised the Baptistery doors of Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455), as well as the new art of his time. Before learning

