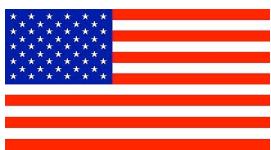


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# USC GUEST PROFESSOR DISCOVERS 'MYSTERY' BEHIND MONA LISA'S SMILE

*THE GREATEST PUZZLE IN ART, "The Mystery Behind Mona Lisa's Mouth", is finally solved. It is simply a mouth depicted at rest, with shading added subtly at both ends that advance a multitude of directional and emotional signals to the viewer.*



Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa* (detail)

**HONOLULU, HAWAII (API) -- LOOKING THROUGH THE NEVER-ENDING POPULAR LITERATURE AND REPORTS surrounding Mona Lisa's enigmatic smile over the centuries, one finds most of the pertinent commentaries casting about two crucial questions: First, *Is Mona smiling?*; and, secondly, *What emotion/s should one attribute to her mouth?* These two questions alone (plus one never-ending feature: her ever-attentive 'moving eyes') fuel the global market, fever, and ever-renewable energy that inspires legions of writers to grab their pens, or visitors to cram themselves like Star Trek 'Borg' into the most famous holodeck in the modern western world.**

**ACCORDING TO USC GUEST PROFESSOR LG WILLIAMS,** the all-illusory, hidden-secret-formula that unlocks the long-standing mystery behind Mona's mouth (*THE HOLY GRAIL OF ART PROBLEMS*) is the equation most oft repeated by Leonardo himself, time and time again: acute observation and unhampered human imagination.

As Williams describes in his forthcoming book, *Gorgeous Nonsense: The Missing History of Artistic Genius*, published by PCP Press, no, Mona Lisa is not smiling. Nor is she grimacing or frowning... so much for the longstanding, mysterious question #1. No, in fact, Mona Lisa is doing *all* of the above, and more. Only this type of hybrid, recombinative construction can account for her mouth's legendary expressive and emotional range -- that settles longstanding, mysterious question #2.

See here, Leonardo viewed both sfumato and anatomy (as well as every other visual element in his huge, fluffy, dandy-pink bag-of-artistic-tricks) as independent, expressive devices, which should never-ever be limited or hampered by such remedial objectives as, say, verisimilitude. Rather, with Leonardo, each visual element reported only to artistic genius. Be that as it may, the magic formula for the anatomical structure informing *The Greatest Puzzle in Art* aka *The Mystery Behind Mona Lisa's Mouth*, is simply a mouth depicted at rest (flat), with

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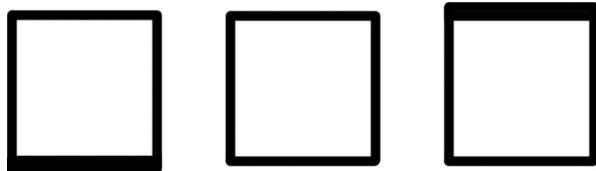
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shading (*sfumato*) added subtly at both ends, with the intent of advancing a multitude of directional and emotional signals to the viewer.

**TO FULLY APPRECIATE THIS VISUAL INVENTION**, start by looking at the right corner of Mona’s mouth. Notice that the dominant area of *sfumato* -- not the ‘*mouth*’, but the ‘*bold shading*’ -- curves and *ascends above* mouth-line. This important tonal feature independently activates and accentuates the area above the mouth. This, in turn, gives rise to an ‘*illusion*’ that informs the entire right region of the mouth. This illusion asserts that *all* within this area of the mouth must *ascend*, too -- when, in fact, *all* do not. Hence, the ‘*illusion*’. If you look carefully at the ‘*physical*’ mouth you will notice that it does *not* follow the ‘*shadow*’ of the mouth.

The second part of the invention can be found at the other end or left corner of Mona Lisa’s mouth. Here, Leonardo again followed the same recipe for illusionism and tomfoolery. Except, in this case, he subtly placed *sfumato below* mouth-line, which, as you can guess by now, activates another ‘*illusion*’. This illusion, on the other hand, makes the *entire* left side of her mouth apparently *descend* -- when, in fact, *all* does not descend. Likewise, as in the previous illusion, her mouth does not follow the shadow down.

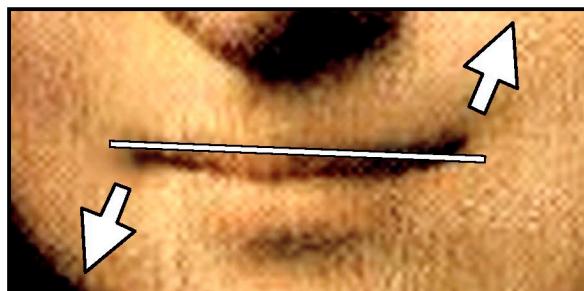
The following illustration articulates Leonardo’s hidden formula:



**The illusive formula behind Mona Lisa’s mouth is an illusion in 3 parts.**

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The remaining third of Leonardo’s hidden formula includes the central portion of Mona’s mouth. It alone remains perceptually undisturbed by discernable interventions from *sfumato*. As a result, it appears stationary, flat, and at-rest. This middle feature is essential not only because it introduces a neutral element, but it also serves to calmly transition and smoothly redirect the mouth’s peripheral momentums. It is the formula’s bedrock, the piece of the puzzle that supports, connects and holds the opposing forces in check.



**Placing a line parallel with Mona’s mouth reveals Leonardo’s optical trickery.**

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**NOW EXPOSED AND FULLY REVEALED!** Leonardo’s illusive, secret visual strategy and invention, which generations after generations have sought to understand, can finally be brought to light. Mona’s mouth rests fundamentally and simply upon three pivotal, interconnected, visual sub-components or spaces that perceptually convey to the viewer three distinct stratagems { down – flat – up }. The implications for emotion are significant. In addition, only with this important, landmark discovery can one fully appreciate the puzzle’s magnificence and radiance, founded upon a remarkable synthesis of observable facts, reason, and good-old-fashioned hijinks. Finally understood and clearly appreciated, it will rank as one of the greatest visual equations in the history of art:

## USC GUEST PROFESSOR DISCOVERS ‘MYSTERY’ BEHIND MONA LISA’S SMILE

*continued from page 2*

marvelously rich in its poignant, concentrated elegance and ever-ready symmetry; as wonderful to behold as it is powerfully captivating. And, this discovery will never diminish its timeless luster.

The mysterious phenomena underlying Mona’s mouth, so patently powerful it literally spans world and age -- the hallmark mechanism from the first virtual time machine of the modern era -- can now be seen for what it really is: the confusion one naturally feels when presented ‘simultaneously’ with three or more contradictory stimuli within a given moment. In other words, the instant, intermediate and long-lasting perceptual confusion over Mona’s mysterious mouth, *Is she smiling?, What is she feeling?*, is the result of a multi-layered, supra-structural, compound device composed for the expressed purpose of advancing a dizzying array of possible arrangements from 3 independent variables { down – flat – up }.

**FOR EXAMPLE, A SIMPLE ASSESSMENT OF MONA’S MOUTH** can lead a receptive and perceptive viewer to assume her mouth conveys one of three conventional emotions { d, f, u }; or (d) down = sad, (f) flat = at rest, or (u) up = happy. Now, once an attentive viewer has consciously or unconsciously grasped these rudimentary details, Leonardo’s trap springs open. Whereupon, milliseconds later, the viewers assumptions of Mona’s mouth can quickly amount to { d, f, u, df, du, ud, fd, fu, uf, dfu, duf, fdu, fud, udf, ufd }. In other words, without warning and at lightning insta-glance speed, comes 6 permutations, 9 combinations, or 12 new emotional possibilities; raising the viewer’s total perceptual choices to 15. Then, in the next blink-of-an-eye that number can grow significantly, and so on. With each passing fraction of a second that the mind can process, determine and re-determine the significance of Mona Lisa’s mouth, the set of emotional possibilities can increase rapidly.

A more nuanced understanding and complex awareness arrives with time; perhaps through repeated contacts with, or ruminations upon the emotional state/s expressed by Mona Lisa’s mouth.

At this stage, one has entered the acute or power level. This is where we see the emotional possibilities within Leonardo’s invention quickly spike. Indeed, Williams is sympathetic to the notion that one of the hardest aspects about viewing Mona Lisa after so long is deciding, with so many psychological combinations available, just where does one begin? No wonder millions of people from every generation and all walks of life for hundreds of years are left standing spellbound!

What happens at this advanced stage is that hunches form hunches, combinations multiply combinations. At each moment you get some new flash of insight or complexity of emotion, which cause you to see the mouth anew. This recurring process creates the stuff of life and legend. You end up with, sooner or later, a large number of emotions embedding within, canceling out, and multiplying with any number of other set of emotions. At that point the viewer is left with an enigma. And, enigma is *the* very definition of the Mona Lisa and *the* substance that continues to put a ‘smile’ on her face.

**SO THERE YOU HAVE IT,** these small, unassuming details in Mona’s mouth are the elements that initiate the inexhaustible sequence of expressions, the source of our historic troubles and turbulence. This invention mixed as it is with movement and pictorial beauty, brings Mona Lisa’s mouth alive and loaded to the brim with inter/expressive and emotional signals all derived from coordinates and combinations of { down – flat – up }. Literally, this stunning conceptual contraption is a mouth that has never been seen or imagined before – and it is even more impressive when one understands its complicated machinery.

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