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Mona Lisa's was happy

AP

Thursday 15th December, 2005 Posted: 16:09 CIT (21:09 GMT)

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands (AP) – The mysterious half-smile that has intrigued viewers of the Mona Lisa for centuries isn't really that difficult to interpret, Dutch researchers said Thursday.

She was smiling because she was happy – 83 percent happy, to be exact, according to scientists from the University of Amsterdam.

In what they viewed as a fun demonstration of technology rather than a serious experiment, the researchers scanned a reproduction of the painting and subjected it to cutting-edge "emotion recognition" software, developed in collaboration with the University of Illinois.

The result showed that the subject of Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting was 83 percent happy, 9 percent disgusted, 6 percent fearful and 2 percent angry. She was less than one percent neutral, and not at all surprised.

Leonardo began work on the painting in 1503, and it now hangs in the Louvre in Paris.

The work, also known as "La Gioconda," is usually believed to have portrayed the wife of Francesco del Giocondo. The title is a play on her husband's name, and also means "the jolly lady" in Italian.

Professor Harro Stokman said the researchers knew the results would be unscientific – the software isn't designed to register subtle emotions. So it couldn't detect the hint of sexual suggestion or disdain many have read into Mona Lisa's eyes.

In addition, the technology is designed for use with modern digital films and images, and subjects first need to be scanned in a neutral emotionless state to accurately detect their current emotion.

But Stokman said with a reading of 83 percent, it's clear happiness was the woman's main emotion. Lead researcher Nicu Sebe took the challenge as seriously as he could, obtaining a base image by using a composition of faces from 10 women of Mediterranean ancestry.

"Basically, it's like casting a spider web over the face to break it down into tiny segments," Stokman said. "Then you look for minute differences in the flare of the nostril or depth of the wrinkles around the eyes."

Stokman said the software was useless in trying to resolve controversial theories about the painting. One is that it was actually a self-portrait of Leonardo himself as a woman.

"But who knows, in 30, 40, 50 years, maybe they'll be able to tell what was on her mind," Stokman said.



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