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The Mona Lisa Smile: Not Quite

Techtree News Staff

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Dec 16, 2005



It's now official; the legendary "Mona Lisa's smile" may seem enigmatic because she is, in fact, a blend of many different emotions.

The Renaissance masterpiece was analyzed by a computer, to reveal that Mona Lisa is 83 percent happy, 9 percent disgusted, 6 percent fearful and 2 percent angry.

Leonardo Da Vinci's work-of-art was scrutinized by an "emotion-recognition software" or algorithm, developed by Dr Nicu Sebe - University of Amsterdam, in conjunction with the University of Illinois, Chicago. The software is said to "tease apart the different emotions behind a facial expression".

Dr Sebe's "emotion-recognition software" assesses human mood by examining key features such as curvature of lips and crinkles around eyes; then makes a score with respect to 6 "universal" emotions - happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise and disgust. According to the principles of psychology, these emotions are behind all facial expressions.

Sebe said that the Mona Lisa smile was similarly broken down into its constituent parts using the software. Sebe said that no one really shows just one single facial expression, and this is true of Mona Lisa as well.

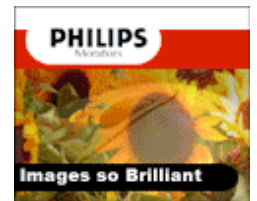
The study revealed that although the overwhelming emotion was one of happiness, the second most important was that of disgust. Sebe however said that no one really knows for sure why Mona Lisa looks so enigmatic, since they do not know the context of why she is smiling.

The Mona Lisa was painted by Leonardo Da Vinci in 1506; and never in the history of art has one painting been so ardently admired... The Mona Lisa is also known as "La Gioconda," since the model is believed to have been the wife of Francesco del Giocondo, a wealthy silk merchant living in Florence. Many have been fascinated by the faint smile at the corner of Mona Lisa's mouth.

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Earlier on, Prof Margaret Livingstone of Harvard University, had published research saying that the elusive quality of Mona Lisa's smile can be explained by the fact that her smile is almost entirely in low spatial frequencies, and hence is best seen by a human being's peripheral vision.

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