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Mona Lisa 83% happy, 'scan' shows

Dec. 16, 2005. 01:00 AM

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands —The mysterious half smile that has intrigued viewers of the Mona Lisa for centuries isn't really that difficult to interpret, Dutch researchers said yesterday.

She was smiling because she was happy — 83 per cent happy, 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 Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece and subjected it to cutting-edge "emotion recognition" software, developed in collaboration with the University of Illinois.

The result showed the painting's famous subject was 83 per cent happy, 9 per cent disgusted, 6 per cent fearful, 2 per cent angry, less than 1 per cent neutral, and not at all surprised.

San Jose State University biometrics researcher Jim Wayman said: "It's hocus pocus, not serious science. But it's good for a laugh, and it doesn't hurt anybody."

Leonardo's painting, begun in 1503, now hangs in the Louvre.

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