

The Emma B. Andrews Diary Project: Tracking the Mysterious Acquisition and Disappearance of the 'Donna Laura Minghetti Leonardo'

Overview

In creating this first interactive digital chronology of the history of 'Portrait of a Girl,' a work once fêted as the work of Leonardo Da Vinci, we follow a tale of smuggling and intrigue as the piece moves from the hands of famed Italian art collectors, to Roman dignitaries, American connoisseurs and 'Robber Barons'. Our research has shed light on the fate of this work which had disappeared into apparent obscurity for almost a century.



This project derives from work completed by interns on the Emma B. Andrews Diary Project, which has been digitizing and researching the late 19th/early 20th century diaries of the mistress of millionaire art collector turned archaeological excavator Theodore Davis. Volume 5, 1898-1899, details the painting's stealthy acquisition and journey to R.I.

On the Trail of the 'Leonardo': 19th Century Italy to present day Washington, D.C.



Morelli
1816 - 1891

Giovanni Morelli
Milan, Italy - Late 1800s: Italian art connoisseur suspected to have called painting "Leonardo" as a trick.



Minghetti
1829 - 1915

Donna Laura Minghetti
Rome, Italy - 1891: powerful Italian socialite, she held 'Leonardo' in her famous 'Roman Salon' after inheriting the work from Morelli.



Davis
1838 - 1915

Theodore Davis
Rome to Newport, R.I., USA - 1898: wealthy American collector who acquired 'Leo' from Donna Laura, and smuggled it through Europe and to the US.



Buttles
1861 - 1956

Mary Buttles
Florence, Italy - 1915: niece of Andrews, she inherited 'Leo' from Davis, and left the painting to her great grandnephew in her will.

John Whaling Allen
Great grandnephew of Buttles, smuggled 'Leo' out of Italy, had the painting professionally x-rayed, which determined it was a product of one of Leonardo's students.

Current Owners
Allen's son and daughter-in-law hold the painting in their Washington D.C. home.

Bernard Berenson
Morelli's chief pupil, introduced 'Leo' as a Leonardo into artistic literature in 1896, reversed this opinion when attribution was questioned.



Berenson
1865 - 1959

Lady Layard
Friend of Donna Laura, her 1899 friendly letter reveals Donna Laura knew it was a fake.



Layard
1843 - 1912

Emma B. Andrews
Mistress and constant companion of Davis, detailed their journeys in 19 volumes of diaries. There are no known photographs of her.

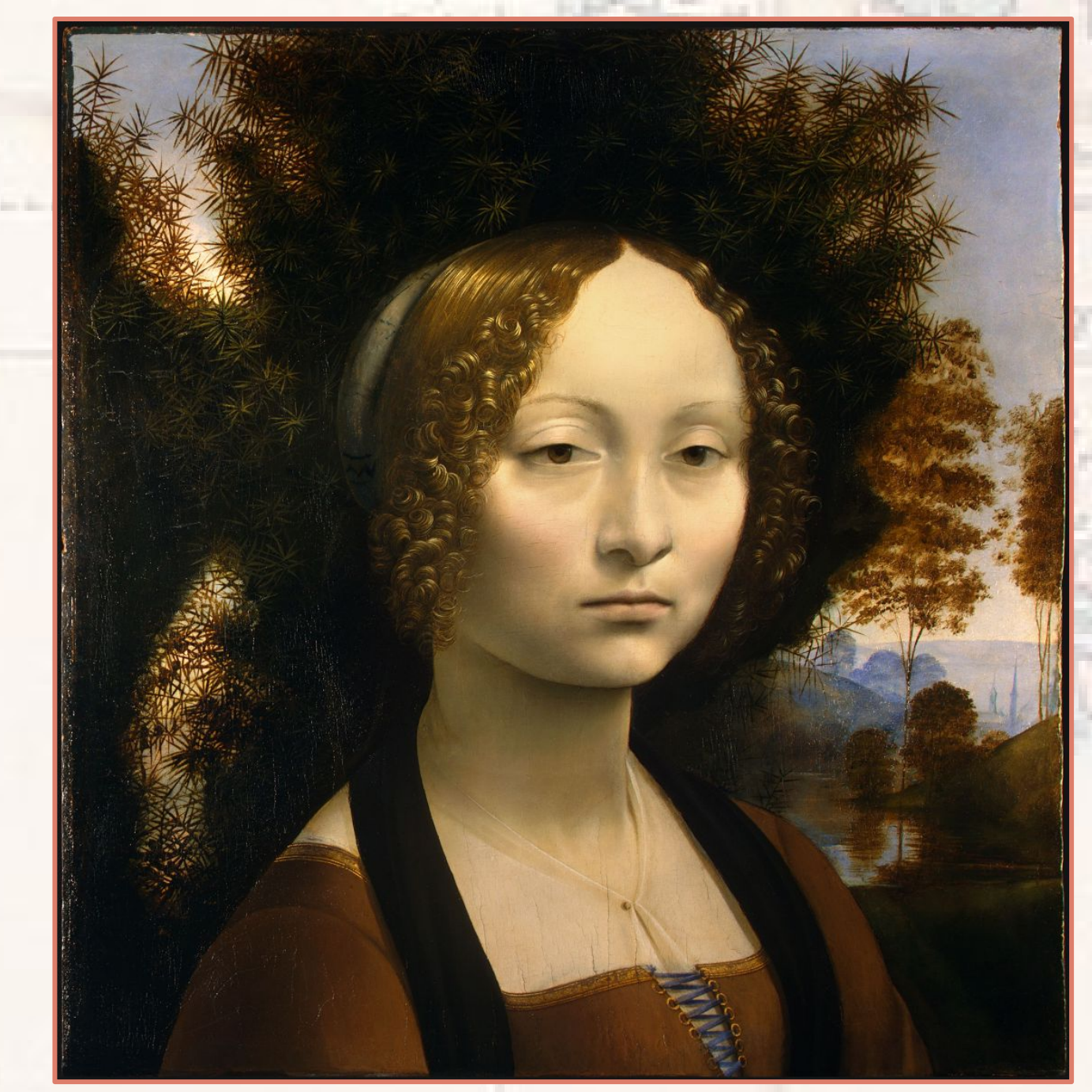


Andrews
1837 - 1922

The 'Leonardo' or A Leonardo? A Closer View



'Portrait of a Girl': The 'Donna Laura Minghetti Leonardo'



'Portrait of Ginevra de Benci': a 1474 portrait by Leonardo Da Vinci, which is thought to be of the same woman depicted in 'Portrait of a Girl'

The Process

This narrative has been developed using the open source online platform StoryMap JS, and seeks to visually guide the user through an exploration of the history and significance of this artwork. We have uncovered the sometimes difficult interpersonal relationships that influenced the movement of this work, and its journey from the 'School of Leonardo' to the cozy hallway of a private home in the United States.