

Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*

In the 1480s, Leonardo da Vinci sought the patronage of Ludovico Sforza, ruler of Milan. Three of his most famous paintings were completed during his tenure in Milan. In the 1480s he began to experiment with wall paintings and completed his second famous painting, *The Last Supper* (1495-1497) for the refectory of Sta. Maria delle Grazie.

Within this masterpiece there is an idea of "the harmony of the parts." *The Last Supper* is Leonardo's visual interpretation of the evening before Christ was betrayed by one of his disciples. He gathered them together to eat, and told them he knew what was coming and to wash their feet (a gesture symbolizing that all were equal under the eyes of the Lord). *The Last Supper* depicts the first few seconds after Christ said 'I tell you, one of you will betray me', and that it would happen before sunrise. All twelve of the disciples have reacted to the news with different degrees of horror, anger and shock. *The Last Supper*, had certainly been painted before, but Leonardo's version was different. It was the first that seemed to depict real people *acting like* real people. They are all displaying very human, identifiable emotions.

There are four groups with three disciples in each. Starting at the left, the first group is Bartholomew, James Minor and Andrew. All are aghast, Andrew to the point of holding his hands up in a "stop!" gesture. The next group of three men are: Judas, St. Peter and John the Evangelist. Judas is the only disciple fully in shadow and he is pulling away but grabbing a piece of bread. St. Peter is visibly angry; he has a knife in hand. He is noted for anger and his betrayal of Christ, he cut off Christ's ear. John seems about to

swoon and is somewhat feminine looking. John the Evangelist is known for being very youthful, gentle and mild. Christ is in the middle, which is the calm in the midst of the storm. Thomas, James Major and Philip are next. Thomas is clearly disturbed, James Major surprised and Philip seems to be looking for clarification or an answer. The last group of figures are: Matthew, Thaddeus and Simon. It appears that, when a situation turns ugly, Simon is the "go to" guy for explanations.

This painting is the one of the greatest, if not the greatest example of a one-point perspective ever created. Every single element of the painting creates the vanishing point, which depicts Christ as the absolute center of the whole painting. This creates a harmony throughout the whole painting. The disciples are all moving, but Christ is static, just as Christ is the only figure who has total frontality. These both help the viewer to focus in on him. The painting is almost as if Christ is a rock in a body of water and the disciple's figures are the ripples in the water. The pose of Christ is triangular, which can stand for stability and there are three points in a triangle which can represent the trinity. There are three openings behind Christ. The middle opening has a crescent above it, which gives the appearance of a halo. If you follow the crescent, it makes a circle, which Christ is the center of.

Christ is placed in the middle of the three openings, which opens up to the world. He is the link between human and god. The light is coming in from the left side, shining on the right. The door is enlarged to enhance the effect, as well as the room is very long to make orthogonals. In order to enhance the narrative, Leonardo didn't make enough space on one side of table for everyone to sit. He also styles the figures to show personalities.

Two examples of this are: John is rounded to go along with his mild and youthful personality while Peter is sharp and angular to show his angry personality.

There are four panels on either side of the room which can be related to the four temperaments, four points of the cross, four points on a compass, four seasons, four times of the day, four evangelists and also four elements of the world. This is called number symbolism. There are twelve disciples, and twelve months in a year. Another example that can be found in the painting is the four groups of three disciples. $3+4=7$. There are seven liberal arts, lucky 7's, there are seven deadly sins, seven vices and seven virtues. It could be people just reading too far into the painting, but it may have been painted there on purpose.