



Thoughts on Life and Art

Leonardo Da Vinci (1452 - 1519)

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At the age of 55 Leonard da Vinci set out to organize his ideas from a review of the thousands of pages of notebooks he had produced over an intensely productive lifetime. He begins with “Begun at Florence in the house of Piero di Braccio Martelli, on the 22nd day of March, 1508; and this is to be a collection without order, taken from many papers which I have copied here, hoping to arrange them later, each in its place, according to the various subjects treated.” The result is *Thoughts on Life and Art*, a collection of thoughts made in simple statements, some as short as one sentence, many a single paragraph, seldom more. Many take on the character of an epigram, an axiom, perhaps a revelation. Others show a keen mind quickly paring a subject down to its essence. Each idea seems described as it occurred to

Leonardo in the instant of its conception. There 333 entries in all, organized into three groups: 129 Thoughts on Life, 93 Thoughts on Art, and 111 Thoughts on Science. The book was assembled by editor Lewis Einstein and contains a Table of References that lists the nineteen source documents with a listing by page and thought for each section showing the source document. It was initially published by the Merrymount Press in Boston in 1906 in a run of 303 copies. It is a remarkable digest of the workings of one of the greatest minds ever to grace the planet.

Leonardo da Vinci (April 15, 1452 – May 2, 1519) was an Italian Renaissance polymath that many scholars regard as the finest example of the “Universal Genius” or “Renaissance Man”. He was possessed of an insatiable curiosity and inventive imagination that he deployed in a wide range of fields including painting, sculpture, science, mathematics, engineering, architecture, anatomy, geology, astronomy, art, cartography and more. He has been called the father of architecture and the inventor of the parachute, helicopter, and armored tank. Born out of wedlock to a notary and a peasant woman in the Florence region, he was educated in the studio of Florentine painter Andrea del Verrochio. His professional life was wide ranging, taking him to Milan, Bologna, and Venice, and Rome, including a residency at the Vatican and ending in a chateau in France lent to him by his close friend King Francis I of France. Giorgio Vasari, in the *Lives of the Artists*, introduced his chapter on Leonardo da Vinci with the following words:

“In the normal course of events many men and women are born with remarkable talents; but occasionally, in a way that transcends nature, a single person is marvellously endowed by Heaven with beauty, grace and talent in such abundance that he leaves other men far behind, all his actions seem inspired and indeed everything he does clearly comes from God rather than from human skill. Everyone acknowledged that this was true of Leonardo da Vinci, an artist of outstanding physical beauty, who displayed infinite grace in everything that he did and who cultivated his genius so brilliantly that all problems he studied he solved with ease.”