Raphael's Gioconda

Donato Pezzutto

London, Ontario, Canada

Abstract: The *Mona Lisa*, or *La Gioconda*, of Leonardo, seems to be the inspiration for two paintings attributed to Raphael. The two paintings, *Isabella of Aragon* and *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens,* share similarities to each other. These strong similarities make the works practically interchangeable; they are referred to as Raphael's *Giocondae*. Connections between Raphael's *Giocondae* and Leonardo's *Gioconda* are considered.

Résumé: Il apparaît que *La Joconde* de Léonard a servi d'inspiration dans la création de deux tableaux attribués à Raphaël, les portraits *d'Isabelle d'Aragon* et de *Doña Isabel de Requesens*. Ces portraits, appelés les *Giocondes* de Raphael, se ressemblent si fortement que les portraits sont considérés interchangeables. Les connexions entre les *Giocondes* de Raphaël et *La Joconde* de Léonard sont étudiées.

Introduction:

The *Mona Lisa*, or *La Gioconda*, of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), seems to be the inspiration for two paintings attributed to Raphael, Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino (1483-1520), or to his school. The *Isabella of Aragon* (Doria Pamphilj Gallery, Rome, fig. 1.) and the *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens* (Louvre Museum, Paris, fig. 2.) share similarities to each other and have connections to the *Mona Lisa*. (Louvre, fig. 3.) This hypothesis is based on a renewed perspective on the Mona Lisa landscape, as developed in previous articles by this author. Those articles claim that Leonardo arranged the landscape in the *Mona Lisa* to hold two disjoined halves of one image which can be reassembled by juxtaposing two copies. That reassembled image, or reconstituted landscape, corresponds to Leonardo's topographic map, the *Val di Chiana*. Analysis of these findings has determined that the work is an elaborate and sophisticated puzzle solved by staring at the painting with eyes converged, to appreciate the three-dimensional image as a stereoscopic illusion. Leonardo perpetrated this prank as a pun on *La Gioconda* as the playful or jocular lady.[1&2] This will be further elaborated.

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[1] Donato Pezzutto, 2011, "Leonardo's *Val di Chiana* map in the *Mona Lisa*", 149-59.
[2] Donato Pezzutto, 2012, "Leonardo's Landscapes as Maps", 1-31.

FIGURE 1. Raphael Sanzio and Giulio Romano, *Isabella of Aragon*, 1515. Oil on wood, 125.7 x 99 cm. Rome: Doria Pamphilj Gallery. (Photo: Arti Doria Pamphilj)

The *Isabella of Aragon* (125.7 x 99 cm.), was painted c.1515, by Raphael and Giulio Romano (c. 1499 -1546). The subject, Isabella of Aragon, (1470-1524), was born a princess of Naples and became Duchess of Milan when she married her cousin,

FIGURE 2. Raphael Sanzio and Giulio Romano, *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens*, 1518. Oil on wood, 120 x 95 cm. Paris: Louvre. (Photo: Art Resources, NY.)

FIGURE 3. Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa / La Gioconda*, from 1503. Oil on poplar panel, 79.4 x 53.4 cm. Paris: Louvre, (Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.)

the Duke of Milan, Gian Galeazzo II. Leonardo orchestrated the festivities of this, as well as other House of Sforza, weddings.[3]

The *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens*, (120 x 95 cm.), was painted c.1518, by Raphael and Giulio Romano. The Louvre monograph by Michael Fritz reveals that it

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[3] Angelica Dülberg, 1990, *Privatporträts. Geschichte und Ikonologie einer Gattung im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, 141-2.

is a portrait of the vice-empress of Naples, Isabel de Requesens (1500-1577). It was not, as previously believed, a portrait of Jeanne d'Aragon. The painting, commissioned by Vatican legate to France, Cardinal Bibbiena, was intended as a diplomatic gift from Pope Leo X, for Francis I, King of France. It was executed by one of Raphael's pupils, Giulio Romano, on the basis of a design by Raphael. The oil-on-panel painting was restored in 1540 by Primaticcio in Fontainebleau. After restoration it was transferred from wood to canvas.[4] The *Mona Lisa* was also part of the same collection of paintings kept by Francis I at Fontainebleau.[5]

Resemblance

The *Isabella of Aragon* and the *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens* resemble each other to a remarkable degree. Both subjects hold identical poses. Like Mona Lisa, both subjects are looking directly at the viewer, but are turned slightly. Both wear similar red hats and dresses. The dresses, both of the same cut, with similar slashed sleeves and a bow at the waist, are draped with identical folds. A particularly striking similarity is the identical position of the hands, with individual fingers corresponding in exactly the same posture.

The settings are also strikingly similar. Both subjects are positioned in the same location in rooms that have the same architectural features and decorated in a similar manner. The carved heads of two felines can be seen at the right edge of both paintings. The draperies and the mouldings are interchangeable. Both feature a passageway opening onto a loggia with similar balcony, columns and lintel. In the

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[4] Michael P. Fritz, 1997, *Giulio Romano et Raphaël: la vice-reine de Naples*.
[5] Giorgio Vasari, 2008, *The Lives of the Artists*, 294.

background, both have grid-work that seems part of a conservatory, through which is seen the tree-line and sky. Both include a person on the balcony, seen from behind, looking out at the background. Here we find a key difference between the two works; in the *Isabella of Aragon*, the figure appears male, while in the *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens*, the figure appears female.

Beyond similarities of appearance, both paintings share similarities of circumstance. Both are attributed to Raphael or to his school. The works were conceived by Raphael, and executed in collaboration by Raphael and Giulio Romano, a prominent student of his. From Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, we learn of Giulio Romano that;

> he also worked on most of the scenes done in fresco for Agostino Chigi's loggia, and in oil he worked on a very beautiful painting of Saint Elizabeth which Raphael did and sent to King Francis of France along with another picture of Saint Margaret, almost entirely painted by Giulio following a drawing by Raphael, who sent the same king the portrait of the viceroy of Naples' wife, in which he did only the head from life while Giulio finished the rest. These works, which pleased the king greatly, are still in France at Fontainebleau in the king's chapel.[6]

The reference to the "portrait of the viceroy of Naples' wife", could apply equally to the *Isabella of Aragon* or to the *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens*.

Like the *Mona Lisa*, the other two paintings suffer confusion as to the identities of the sitters. The fair-haired and youthful-looking subject in the *Isabella of Aragon*,

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[6]Vasari, *Lives*, 359-60.

portrayed elsewhere as dark-haired, was painted when the actual Isabella of Aragon, Duchess of Milan, (1470-1524) would have been over forty-five years of age. She, incidentally, has been proposed as one of the many possible candidates for the identity of Mona Lisa.[7&8]As previously mentioned, the sitter of the other painting, currently entitled *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens*, was misidentified; the work was formerly entitled *Portrait of Jeanne d'Aragon*. To add further confusion to the situation, the painting, referred to here as *Isabella of Aragon*, is labelled as *Giovanna D'Aragona* and as *Isabel de Requesens* in the Doria Pamphilj Gallery. The gallery also dates it from 1515 and refers to it as a copy of the Louvre's 1518 *Portrait of Isabel de Requesens* (personal observation). Thus we have the incongruity of a copy existing three years before the original. It is not the purpose of this article to establish the identity of any one of these sitters. Accepting Lisa Gherardini, as the sitter for the *Mona Lisa*, remains a contentious issue. However, in his thorough review of the evidence that Lisa Gherardini is or is not the subject of the painting, Jack Greenstein questions whether or not the identity of the sitter matters.[9] The term *gioconda* can be translated from Italian as ''playful or jocular.'' Thus we can rephrase Greenstein's conclusion as follows: whether *La Gioconda* is or is not Mona Lisa, she remains a *gioconda*. Therefore the exercise of identifying the sitter leads back to the conclusion that the painting is a *gioconda* – a jocular prank or puzzle.

The *Isabella of Aragon* and the *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens* are so similar they are practically interchangeable. (See appendix.) For the purpose of this

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[7] Robert Payne, 1979, *Leonardo*, 137-49.
[8] Maike Vogt-Lüerssen, 2003, *Wer ist Mona Lisa? Auf der Suche nach ihrer Identität*,16.
[9] Jack M. Greenstein, 2004, ''Leonardo, Mona Lisa and La Gioconda. Reviewing the Evidence'', 32.

article, the identities of the sitters for these works, as with the identity of the sitter for the *Mona Lisa*, can be set aside. For these reasons and with the aforementioned similarities, the *Isabella of Aragon* and the *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens* can be considered collectively as a single body of work and referred to as "Raphael's *Giocondae*". The *Mona Lisa* has been demonstrated to be Leonardo's *gioconda*, or playful illusion. Raphael's *Giocondae* will be demonstrated as being his *gioconda*, or playful allusion to Leonardo and the *Mona Lisa*.

Raphael

It is well known that Raphael was an admirer of Leonardo, and studied his work. Raphael had come to Florence to study art. He led a nomadic life, working in various centres in Northern Italy, but spent a good deal of time in Florence, perhaps from about 1504.[10] There is a letter of recommendation of Raphael, dated October 1504, from the mother of the next Duke of Urbino to the Gonfaloniere of Florence:

> The bearer of this will be found to be Raphael, painter of Urbino, who, being greatly gifted in his profession has determined to spend some time in Florence to study. And because his father was most worthy and I was very attached to him, and the son is a sensible and well-mannered young man, on both accounts, I bear him great love...[11]

Connections between Raphael and Leonardo were established before Raphael's Florentine period. Raphael had started his apprenticeship in Urbino in the school of

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[10] Cecil Gould, *The Sixteenth Century Italian Schools*, 207-8.
[11] Roger Jones and Nicholas Penny, *Raphael*, 5.

Perugino.[12] Perugino was a contemporary of Leonardo and both had studied together in Florence in the school of Verrocchio.[13] Before his formal studies, Raphael would have frequented the court of Urbino with his father Giovanni Santi, who was court painter to the Duke, Federico III da Montefeltro.[14] Thus Raphael had the opportunity to become familiar with Leonardo's reputation, if not his works. Leonardo had travelled extensively through the region, including Urbino, during his employ with Cesare Borgia from 1502, which coincides with the creation of the *Val di Chiana* map.[15] It is likely that Leonardo and Raphael would have met during that time.

Any relationship that existed between the two artists would have become well developed during their time together in Florence, from 1504 to 1508. Raphael would have been twenty-one and eager to assimilate the teachings available in Florence, especially from Michelangelo and the recently returned, and more approachable, Leonardo. Raphael had proved to be particularly skilled at adopting the style of others to his own.[16] The *Mona Lisa* painting was available and already a sensation at that time. It was the inspiration for Raphael's *Drawing for a Portrait of a Young Woman*, (1506, fig. 4.).[17]

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[12] Vasari, *Lives,* 306-307.
[13] Vasari, *Lives*, 258.
[14] Vasari, *Lives*, 309.
[15] Roger D. Masters, 1998, *Fortune Is a River: Leonardo da Vinci and Niccolò Machiavelli's Magnificent Dream to Change the Course of Florentine History*, 88.
[16] Heinrich Wölfflin, 1968, *Classic Art; An Introduction to the Renaissance*, 73.
[17] Frank Zöllner, 1993, "Leonardo's Portrait of Mona Lisa del Giocondo", 120.

FIGURE 4. Raphael Sanzio, *Head and shoulders of a woman, in three-quarters profile facing left, with folded arms*, c. 1505-07. Pen and brown ink, traces of black chalk on paper, 22.2 x 15.9 cm. Paris: Louvre (Photo: Art Resouces, NY.)

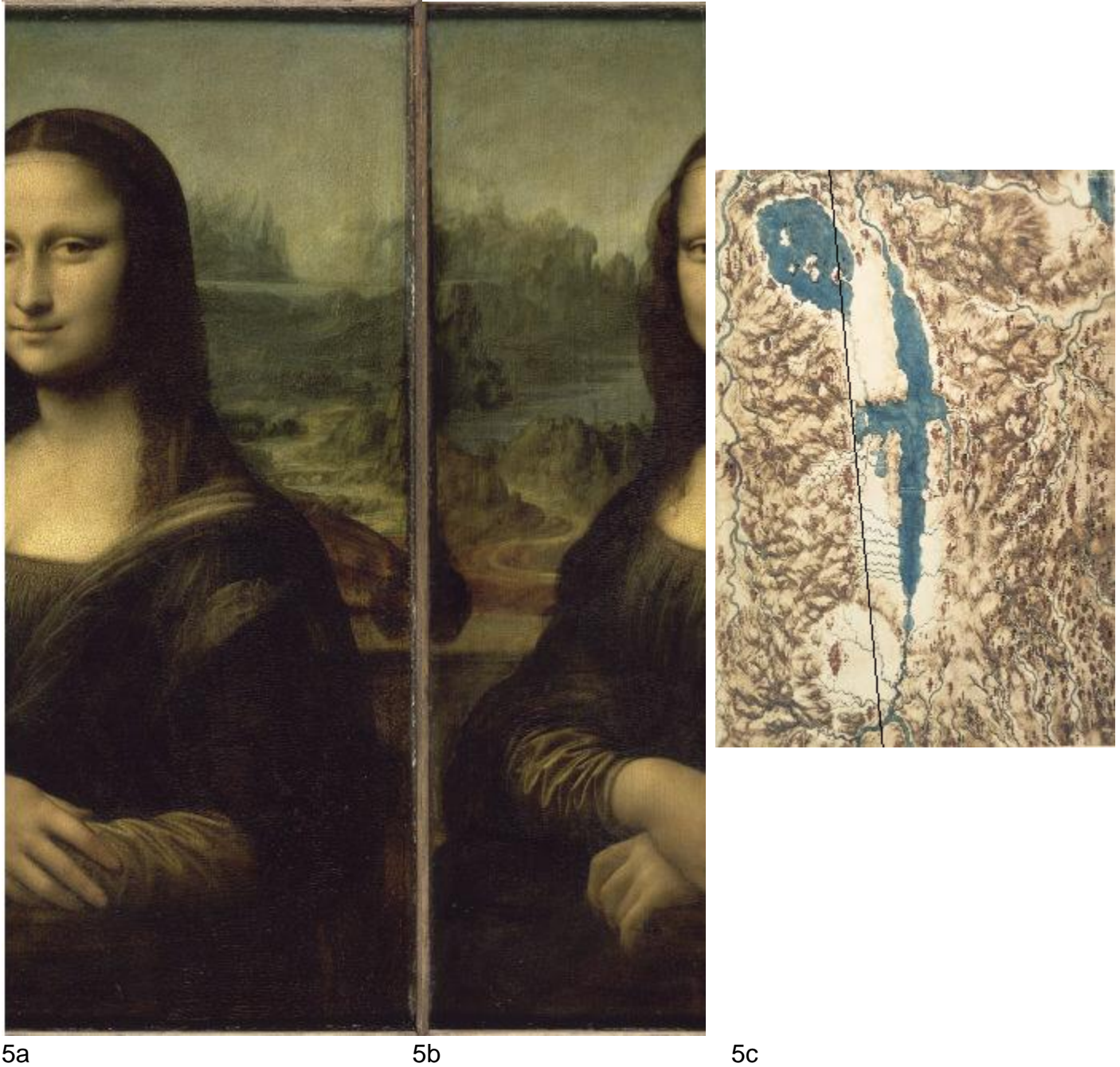5a   5b   5c

FIGURE 5. 5a and 5b show the reconstituted landscape of the *Mona Lisa*. Compare the features along the seam of the juxtaposed halves with those along the line on the *Val di Chiana* map, 5c.This demonstrates the painting as a puzzle and reveals the solution.

Leonardo da Vinci: *Val di Chiana*, (RL12278) 1502-3, 33.8 x 48.8 cm, pen and ink, watercolour, bodycolour and chalk on paper, The Royal Collection, Windsor. (Photo Credit: Art Resource, NY)

Stereoscopy

A previous article by this author suggests the following; the *Mona Lisa* contains as background, a landscape image divided in two parts (fig. 5). The two parts can be reconciled into one image by aligning the two lateral edges; the reconstituted image depicts an actual place, namely the Val di Chiana (fig. 5c) as mapped by Leonardo, and that image consists of a sequence of vistas assembled in the form of a topographicmap. The article also offers a possible motivation for Leonardo producing the *Mona Lisa* as he did—his attempt at stereoscopy and its depiction as a visual pun. [18]

His dissatisfaction with the limits of linear perspective as described by Leon Battista Alberti,[19] which is essentially monocular, lead Leonardo to the study of binocular vision. "Leonardo correctly observed that because the eyes normally receive different views of a 3-D scene, it is impossible, even in principle, to convey a full sense of 3-D on a 2-D canvas…He puzzled over how we can see a single world of solid objects given the different eye views (now known as Leonardo's paradox)".[20] Nicholas Wade and others explain that "Leonardo . . . struggled with the differences between the perception of a scene and a painting of it, which he reduced to the differences between binocular and monocular vision. He could not produce on canvas what, in the terminology of Ames, was an equivalent configuration. This was provided 300 years after Leonardo by Wheatstone's stereoscope".[21] Kim Veltman writes, "[a]fter 1500, his major paintings can be seen as attempts to address one fundamental challenge: how to

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[18] Pezzutto, 2011, "Leonardo's Val di Chiana map in the Mona Lisa", 156-57.
[19] DR Edward Wright, 1984, ''Alberti's De Pictura: Its Literary Structure and Purpose", 52–71.
[20] Vilayanur S Ramachandran and Diane Rogers-Ramachandran, 2009, ''Seeing in Stereo: Illusions of Depth'', 12.
[21] Nicholas J.Wade, Hiroshi Ono and Linda Lillakas, 2001, "Leonardo da Vinci's Struggles with Representations of Reality", 231.

create effects of three-dimensional relief under carefully controlled conditions. Speaking anachronistically, he was trying to create auto-stereoscopic effects in paintings."[22]

Leonardo was grappling with the problem of depicting a three-dimensional effect on a two-dimensional media. The *Mona Lisa* is a painterly display of the very example discussed by Leonardo in his *Notebooks* under "Differences of perception by one eye and by both eyes", where the "object in relief t" is the column.

Let the object in relief t be seen by both eyes; if you will look at the object with the right eye m, keeping the left eye n shut, the object will appear, or fill up the space, at a; and if you shut the right eye and open the left, the object (will occupy the) space b; and if you open both eyes, the object will no longer appear at a or b, but at e, r, f. Why will not a picture seen by both eyes produce the effect of relief, as [real] relief does when seen by both eyes; and why should a picture seen with one eye give the same effect of relief as real relief would under the same conditions of light and shade?[23] (fig. 6)
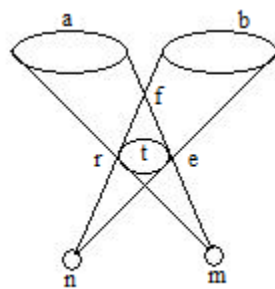

FIGURE 6. Adapted from Leonardo's *Notebooks.*

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[22] Kim H Veltman, 2009, "Leonardo da Vinci and Perspective", 1.
[23] Leonardo da Vinci, 1970, *The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci*, 29.

A solution to this problem is the creation of a stereoscopic image.[24] As already stated, this is the solution that Leonardo was reaching for in creating the *Mona Lisa*.

Leonardo use of perspective and stereoscopy to create an illusion with the *Mona Lisa* would be in keeping with his jocular nature and his fondness for puzzles and puns,[25] rebuses[26] and transformations.[27] His taste for trickery is also illustrated by Vasari. An anecdote offered to us in *Lives of the Artists* shows the extent to which Leonardo would go just to play a practical joke. A buckler, or round shield, was left by Ser Piero da Vinci, to be painted; Leonardo turned it into a monster from which issued venom and smoke, and presented it in such a way as to startle his father.[28] And again, to restate Greenstein's position as to whether *La Gioconda* is, or is not, Mona Lisa, the painting remains a *gioconda*. In Italian, *gioconda,* is the feminine form of "playful one". Thus the painting itself is a prank or puzzle—a visual pun.

Re-evaluate

The aforementioned requires us to re-evaluate the *Mona Lisa* in a new light—one that Raphael had an opportunity to appreciate. Besides studying and copying paintings of the Florentine artists, Raphael must have discussed issues such as technique and perspective with Leonardo. It would seem unlikely that the two artists would not have

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[24]Nicholas J.Wade, Hiroshi Ono and Linda Lillakas, 2001, "Leonardo da Vinci's Struggles with Representations of Reality", 231.

[25] Larry J Feinberg, 2004,"Visual Puns and Variable Perception: Leonardo's Madonna of the Yarnwinder", 38-41.

[26] Augusto Marinoni, 1954, *I Rebus di Leonardo da Vinci, Raccolti e interpreti*, 186.

[27] Fritjof Capra, 2007, *The Science of Leonardo; Inside the Mind of the Great Genius of the Renaissance*, 267-70.

[28] Vasari, *Lives,* 287–9.

shared thoughts on the very problems of which Leonardo had written in his notebooks, intended for his treatise on painting and featured in the *Mona Lisa*.

Raphael would have become familiar with these problems from Leonardo. He may well have observed Leonardo experimenting with stereoscopic arrangements. Raphael's *Giocondae* seem to illustrate this. In both paintings, the figure standing in the loggia is seen from the back, while looking out over a balcony at the columns and background beyond. The background includes a series of repeated geometric grids. This grid arrangement, with its potential for stereoscopic illusion, recalls Leonardo's consideration of binocular versus monocular vision in painting. That is the very problem that he was illustrating in his *Mona Lisa*. The setting of a loggia, with balcony and columns overlooking a landscape, is the same setting portrayed in Raphael's *Giocondae*. (fig. 7.) In the *Isabella of Aragon*, the figure is a man who could be Leonardo. He is standing where the painter of the *Mona Lisa* would be standing. In the *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens*, the figure is replaced by a woman who could be Mona Lisa. She, though turned, is positioned where the sitter for the *Mona Lisa* would be positioned.

FIGURE 7. Loggia detail from *Isabella of Aragon* (left) and *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens* (right).

There is a precedent for Raphael including a portrayal of Leonardo in his works; his *School of Athens* (1509) is said to include a Plato depicted as Leonardo. (fig. 8.)This Plato, dressed in rose-coloured robes and pointing upwards with his right index finger, is reminiscent of Leonardo.[29&30] This is indicative of the high esteem Raphael held for Leonardo as a teacher.

FIGURE 8. Detail showing Leonardo as Plato (in rose) in: Raphael Sanzio, *School of Athens*, 1509–1510. Fresco, 500 × 770 cm. Vatican City: Stanza della Segnatura, Apostolic Palace. (Photo: Art Resources, NY.)

A reference to Leonardo is included in the periphery on the right of Raphael's *Giocondae*. The rather leonine-looking carved cats may be taken as emblematic of Leonardo. This visual pun is another example of a favoured device of Leonardo; he

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[29] Serge Bramly, 1991, *Leonardo: Discovering the Life of Leonardo da Vinci*, 6.
[30] William E Wallace, 2010, "Leonardo as Plato", 8-11.

used the image of a lion as a self reference in his painting, *St Jerome*, and in his rebuses.[31&32]

Conclusion

The *Isabella of Aragon* and the *Portrait of Doña Isabel of Requesens* form Raphael's *Giocondae*. The works represent Raphael's playful homage to the *Mona Lisa* and to Leonardo, whom he regarded as a great teacher. This exploration, of Raphael's *Giocondae* and Leonardo's *Gioconda*, provides insight into the playful creative process shared by two great figures of the Renaissance.

Appendix: The similarities between Raphael's *Giocondae*; the *Isabella of Aragon* and the *Portrait of Doña Isabel of Requesens*, raises the issue of copying. One may have been copied from the other. A more likely scenario is that both were copied from an original cartoon. At the time of this writing, the best information available gives dimensions of; 125.7 x 99 cm. for the *Isabella of Aragon*, and 120 x 95 cm. for the *Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens*. Various sources give disparate values. That puts the accuracy of the quoted dimensions in doubt. Requests to the Doria Pamphilj Gallery and the Louvre Museum, to confirm the dimensions, have yet to be answered. Simple but accurate measurements of the two could be taken and compared. That would answer whether the image overlap of the two paintings matched, or not. A one-to-one

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[31] Feinberg, "Visual Puns and Variable Perception: Leonardo's Madonna of the Yarnwinder", 41.
[32] Marinoni, *I Rebus di Leonardo da Vinci*, 186.

match would support the idea that, not only were both paintings executed from the same draft but that each could have been traced from a single cartoon.

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