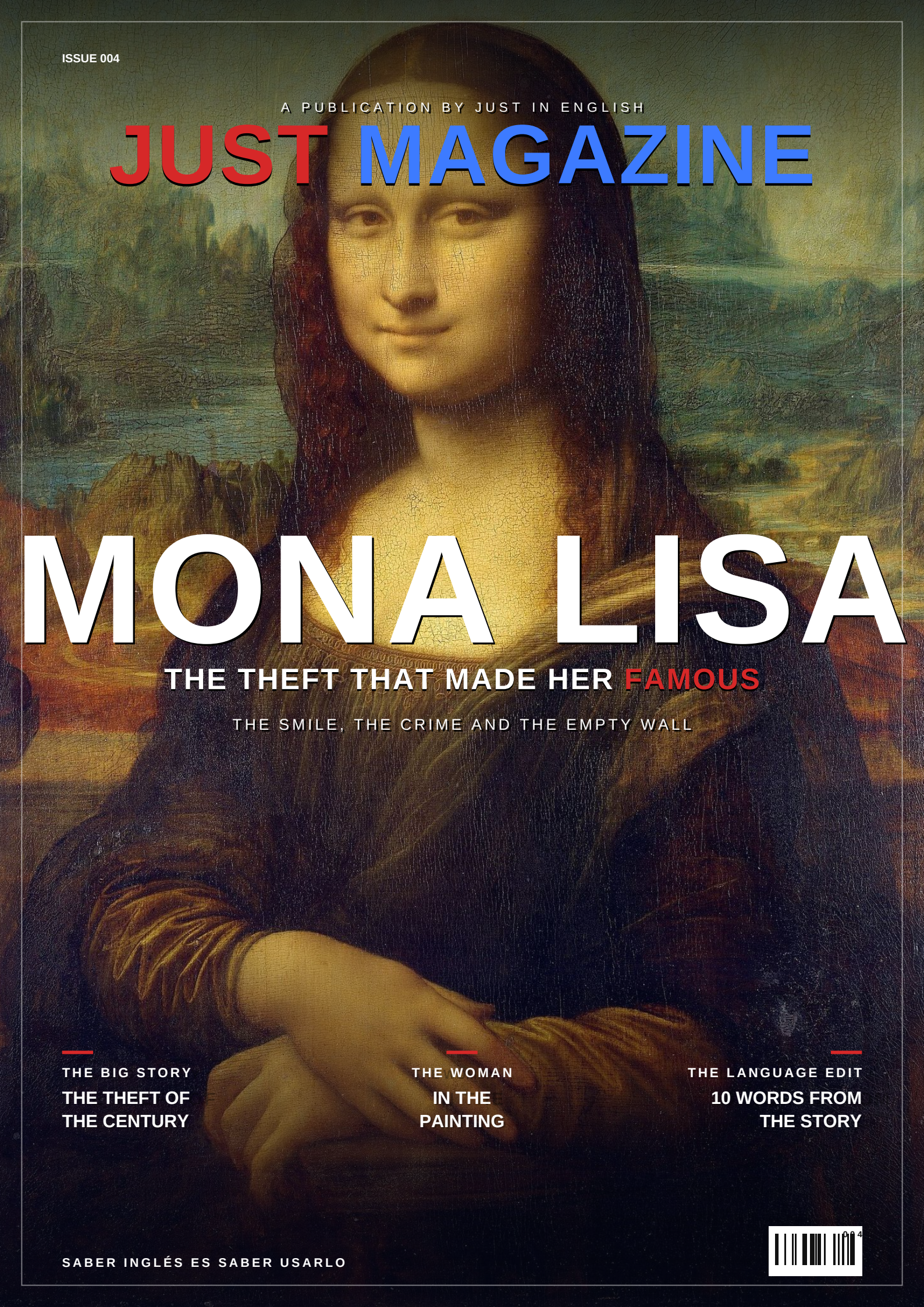
ISSUE 004

A PUBLICATION BY JUST IN ENGLISH

JUST MAGAZINE



MONA LISA

THE THEFT THAT MADE HER FAMOUS

THE SMILE, THE CRIME AND THE EMPTY WALL

THE BIG STORY
THE THEFT OF THE CENTURY

THE WOMAN
IN THE PAINTING

THE LANGUAGE EDIT
10 WORDS FROM THE STORY

The Theft of the *Century*

On a quiet Monday in 1911, a workman walked out of the Louvre with the Mona Lisa hidden under his apron. The museum did not notice for a whole day. When the world found out, everything changed — for the painting, and for art itself.

> *For two years, the most wanted face in the world was hiding in a trunk in Paris.*



Today the crowds never stop. Before 1911, almost nobody came to see her.

A QUIET MASTERPIECE

Leonardo da Vinci painted a Florentine merchant's wife, and kept the portrait with him for the rest of his life. For four hundred years it was respected by artists and kings — one masterpiece among many in the Louvre. The public walked past. In 1516 Leonardo carried her to France, and the French king bought her: from royal palaces, she finally arrived at the museum.

THE MONDAY THEFT

Vincenzo Peruggia, a glazier who had helped to build her protective case, hid inside the museum on Sunday night. On Monday, with the museum closed, he lifted her off her four iron hooks, took away the frame, and walked out into Paris. The next morning, a painter came to sketch the gallery — and found only four iron pegs on an empty wall.

FAMOUS AT LAST

Newspapers on every continent told the story. Crowds queued to stare at the empty wall. Police questioned a young artist named Pablo Picasso. Two years later, the painting appeared in Florence — and returned to Paris as a superstar. Peruggia was arrested in a Florence hotel in December 1913. His punishment for the crime of the century? Only about seven months in prison.

Her Five *Hundred Years*

One small painting, five centuries of adventure. Follow her life, date by date — from a workshop in Florence to the most guarded wall on Earth.



The Louvre by night — her home for more than two hundred years.

1503 Leonardo begins the portrait in Florence. The sitter is Lisa, the wife of a rich silk merchant.

1519 Leonardo dies in France, with the painting still beside him. It stays with the French king.

1800 Napoleon, in love with the portrait, hangs her in his own bedroom in Paris.

1911 Stolen from the Louvre on a quiet Monday. For two years, nobody knows where she is.

1913 Found in a hotel trunk in Florence. The thief, Peruggia, is arrested.

1914 She returns to Paris to enormous crowds — now the most famous painting in the world.

1963 Her first trip to America: more than a million people queue in Washington and New York.

TODAY Behind protective glass at the Louvre, she receives millions of visitors every year.

The Woman *in the Painting*

Five centuries later, we still ask the same two questions: who was she, and why does her smile change when we look at it? The answers are hidden in a name — and in a painting technique made of smoke.

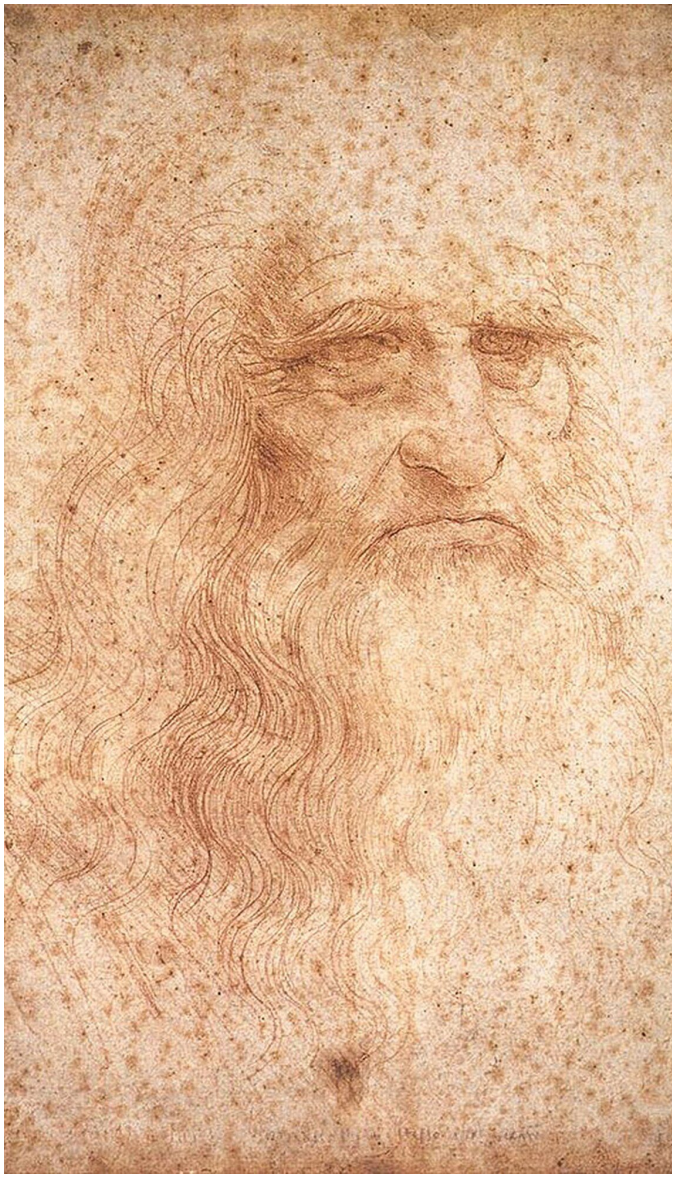
77 × 53 cm	1503	2 years
smaller than a poster on a classroom wall	the year Leonardo began painting her	hidden in a thief's Paris apartment

WHO WAS SHE?

Her name was Lisa Gherardini, the wife of Francesco del Giocondo, a Florentine silk merchant. In Italian, the painting is called La Gioconda — which means ‘the cheerful one’, and plays with her married name. Leonardo never delivered the portrait: he carried it with him for years, adding layer after layer.

THE PAINTER'S SECRET

Leonardo painted her with sfumato — soft layers with no hard lines, so the edges melt like smoke. That is the trick of the smile: look at her eyes, and she is smiling. Look directly at her mouth, and the smile is gone. Your eyes see two different women — and the brain cannot decide.

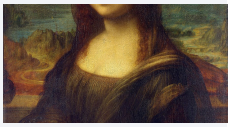


Leonardo da Vinci, presumed self-portrait in red chalk.

The Language Edit

Real words from a real story. Here are some key words from this issue, with simple meanings and examples.

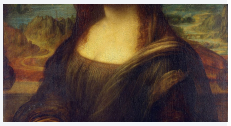
painting *(noun)*
a picture made with paint
The painting is five hundred years old.



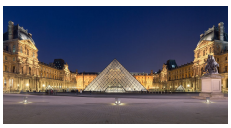
portrait *(noun)*
a painting or photo of a person
Leonardo painted a portrait of a merchant's wife.



smile *(noun / verb)*
the expression when you are happy
Her smile changes when you look at it.



museum *(noun)*
a building where art and history are kept
The museum closed on Mondays.



steal *(verb (stole, stolen))*
to take something that is not yours
Peruggia stole the painting in 1911.



thief *(noun)*
a person who steals things
The thief hid the painting in a trunk.



frame *(noun)*
the border around a picture
He removed the painting from its frame.



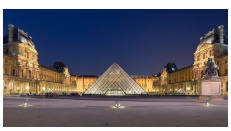
famous *(adjective)*
known by many people
The theft made her famous.



crowd *(noun)*
a large group of people
A crowd waited outside the museum.



protect *(verb)*
to keep something safe
Today, glass protects the painting.

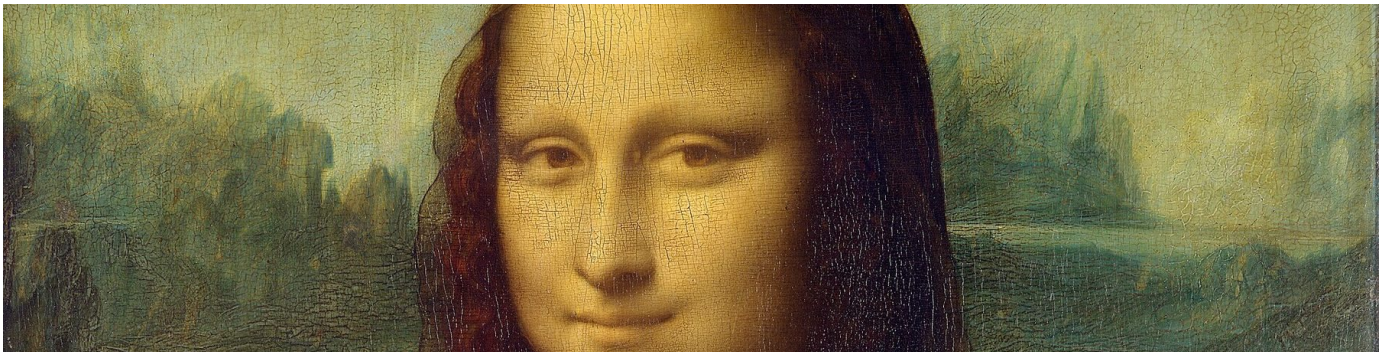


LANGUAGE IN CONTEXT

in front of • under his apron • at last • all over the world — patterns from this issue's story.

Five Things *You Didn't Know*

Five centuries, one theft and a thousand myths. Here are five things about her that most visitors to the Louvre never hear.



The most famous face on Earth — painted on poplar wood, 77 by 53 centimetres.

1 The police had his fingerprint

On the abandoned frame, detectives found the thief's thumbprint. But their files were organised by the right hand — and the print was from the left. For two years, the answer was sitting in a drawer.

2 She has no eyebrows

Look closely: no eyebrows, no eyelashes. In her time, a high, smooth forehead was fashion in Florence — and five centuries of cleaning may have taken the finest lines away.

3 She receives fan mail

People write letters to her, and leave flowers at the museum. She may be the only painting in the world with her own post, five hundred years after she was painted.

4 The glass is there for a reason

She has survived acid thrown at her, a stone, red paint in Tokyo, and a cream cake in 2022. Each attack added protection: today she lives behind special safety glass, in her own climate.

5 She has a twin in Madrid

In the Prado Museum hangs another Mona Lisa, painted at the same time in Leonardo's own workshop, probably by one of his students working beside the master. Two sisters, two countries.

THINK ABOUT IT

If the theft had never happened, would she still be the most famous painting in the world?

Your Perspective

Now it's your turn. Read, think, speak and write about the world's most famous smile.

READ & THINK

1. Who was Lisa Gherardini, and who painted her?
2. How did Peruggia carry the painting out of the Louvre?
3. Why did people queue to look at an empty wall?
4. What happened in Florence in December 1913?
5. Which fact surprised you most?

SPEAK

Discuss with a partner:
• Would you queue for an hour to see a painting for thirty seconds?
• Can stealing ever be an act of love for your country?
• Describe the most famous object in your city.

SPEAKING CHALLENGE (60–90 seconds): you are the Louvre guide — tell the theft story. Point – Reason – Example – Point.

WRITE

Write a short paragraph (100–120 words):
Imagine your first moment in front of the Mona Lisa. Describe the room, the crowd — and her eyes on you. Start with: "The room was full of people, but she was looking at me…"

Word bank: painting • portrait • smile • museum • steal • thief • frame • famous • crowd • protect



Her room at the Louvre today — the queue never ends.

REFLECT

Peruggia said he stole her for love of Italy. Where is the line between love and a crime?
Is a work of art worth more when everybody is looking at it — or when nobody is?

EDITORIAL SOURCES

Musée du Louvre — the Mona Lisa and the Salle de la Joconde: louvre.fr • Encyclopaedia Britannica — "Mona Lisa": britannica.com
Gallerie degli Uffizi — the recovery of 1913: uffizi.it • HISTORY — "The Heist That Made the Mona Lisa Famous": history.com
Photographs and artwork: Wikimedia Commons (the painting, C2RMF restoration; the Louvre at night; the Salle des États; Leonardo, presumed self-portrait).

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