A Beautiful Mind

Leonardo Da Vinci spent his life inventing, designing, dissecting, drawing and painting. Born over 500 years ago, he is hailed as a genius beyond comparison. Victoria Vaughan looks at some of his work, replicas of which are on display at the Singapore Science Centre.

Flying high
Da Vinci understood that to achieve lift, an object must be pushed down. Although his attempts at flying were unsuccessful, he is recognised for inventing an early version of the helicopter.

Beneath the smile
See the Mona Lisa as she was originally painted, with modern photographic techniques that peel away the layers of damage and restoration, revealing the lady (or some say, the man) beneath. The exhibition details 25 hidden secrets of the mysterious painting, including the fact that the subject did not have eyebrows and eyelashes, once upon a time.

Floating through air
He sketched a design for a parachute, which was found to work—partially—nine years ago by a journalist trying out a replica model. BBC reporter Adrian Nicholas made the jump from a hot air balloon 3,000m above ground, but had to cut himself free when he reached 600m and use a second parachute to avoid being crushed by the weight of the device.

Exploring depths
He conceived of a diving suit which would allow a person, weighted with rock, to walk along the river floor. He also developed a hoop-shaped life buoy, exactly like those used today.

Defence
His tank bears little resemblance to today's modern vehicles, but the angle of the sides of the tank—considered the best way to deflect bullets—is still replicated in military helmets. Da Vinci also designed an early version of the machine gun.

Da Vinci had a philosophy, he did not think of art or science but that it was all knowledge. He used science in his art—drawing dissected bodies—and his art in his science. This makes him unique.

—Dr Chew Tuan Chiong, Chief Executive of the Singapore Science Centre.