

In the Lab



[Margaret Livingstone, Ph.D.](#), is the Takeda Professor of Neurobiology at Harvard Medical School. Her [lab](#) studies visual processes and, as a side interest, relates them to art and artists.

Q What motivates you at the lab day in and day out?

A Curiosity. I love figuring out puzzles.

Q You use your research on the visual system to better understand both what people perceive when they look at a piece of art and how artists use their skills to create different visuals. How did you get interested in this area of research?

A I realized that artists also try to figure out how we see, and they often discover important principles about how the brain works. The way

they manage to demonstrate these principles is usually more engaging than any demonstration I could come up with.

Q Do you have a favorite piece of art? If so, why is it your favorite?

A Mona Lisa. I like it because Leonardo figured out how to make something (her smile) differentially visible to central vs peripheral vision, so her smile changes as you move your eyes around the painting, and it therefore changes.

Q If you hadn't become a neurobiology professor, what other career would you have pursued?

A Physician. I went to med school but never finished.

Q After a long day in the lab, what is your "guilty" pleasure?

A I enjoy biking home.

Q What encouraging words would you give to young people considering a career in neuroscience?

A You don't have to be a genius, just work hard. Learn maths.

Dr. Livingstone is the author of [Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing](#). Watch her [video](#), where she discusses what art can tell us about the brain.