

**By Don Tse**

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It was all over the media – beer media and regular media. Over 100 different people forwarded the news to me. The “best beer in the world”, also the “rarest beer in the world,” was going to be for sale in North America.

Big deal.

Don't get me wrong. I love Westvleteren 12. Each time I've had it, I've enjoyed it. And prior to the recent shipments, it was hard to get on this side of the pond (though surprisingly easy to get all over Europe). But I've had many beers that, in my opinion, taste as good or better. Meanwhile, there are many beers that I haven't had; Westvleteren is not that rare.

I'm not trying to convince you not to enjoy it; I enjoy it myself. But it annoys me when people rush out to buy it, plug it down and proudly proclaim they've drank the best/rarest beer in the world. They often have no appreciation for what it is they've just enjoyed; having it is just a badge of honor.

This type of hysteria is equally prevalent in the world of art. Indeed,

the number of people I know, both beer people and non-beer people, who posted photos of Westvleteren 12 on Facebook, Twitter or other boastful social media is exceeded only by the number of people I know who have posted photos of themselves in front of the Mona Lisa.

The Mona Lisa is, of course, the undisputed masterpiece of Italian Renaissance painter, Leonardo da Vinci. It is widely recognized (pun intended) as the most famous work of art in the world. Painted in the early 16th century, the painting is believed to be of the wife of a wealthy Italian merchant who commissioned da Vinci to paint it. Strangely, da Vinci never considered the painting to be completed and it was never delivered to its buyer. Upon da Vinci's death, the work was left to da Vinci's pupil who sold it. It then it exchanged hands among royalty and is now owned by the government of France.

The Mona Lisa draws enormous crowds to the Louvre museum in Paris every day and, as a result, is permanently housed behind bullet-proof glass while a rail the keeps admirers at a distance (there have

been several attempts at vandalism and the painting was successfully stolen at least once). The room in which the Mona Lisa lives is always the most crowded in the enormous Louvre. Thousands wait their turn to have their picture taken in front of it. Meanwhile, other unbelievably-good (finished!) Renaissance portraits, including several also by da Vinci, hang nearby, ignored by all but the most passionate art fans.

Is the Mona Lisa good? That is a matter of personal taste, but you'd be hard pressed to find anyone who does not recognize the skill exhibited in this work, from composition to technique. But is the Mona Lisa really that much better than anything else in the world? Is it even really that much better than anything else painted by da Vinci?

I have the same feelings toward Westvleteren 12. It's great. But is it worth all the hype? When it comes to anything aesthetic, whether it be beer, art, music or food, pursue what you like, not what others tell you to like.

Much has been written about Mona Lisa's smile. Perhaps she's smirking at us for our foolish pursuits. ♦♦♦