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business profile

The Gulani-da Vinci Connection

As has often been the case with visionaries throughout history, the incredible diversity of Leonardo da Vinci was not truly appreciated until centuries after his time on this earth.

While he is perhaps best remembered for his famous painting *Mona Lisa*, the 15th century Renaissance artist was a scientist, an architect, an inventor, a mathematician, a teacher, a writer and an engineer.

Sigmund Freud once said, "Leonardo da Vinci was like a man who awoke too early in the darkness, while the others were all still asleep."

Jacksonville eye surgeon Arun Gulani is a modern-day Renaissance man who, much like the late da Vinci, is ahead of his time. Cutting a swath through the darkness and shining the light of perfect vision into the eyes of the world is the aim of the unusual ophthalmologist.

The vision of Gulani as da Vinci aiming his paint brush/laser beam at a huge blue eye is depicted in a painting by artist Susanne Schuenke that was unveiled at the grand opening of the new Gulani Vision Institute on January 23rd of this year.

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The painting, titled *Shaping the Future...The Art of Vision Surgery*, is a multi-layered work that weaves in the wide scope of Gulani's accomplishments as an internationally recognized award-winning Lasik surgeon, originator of several advanced procedures, inventor of intricate surgical instruments, author, innovator and educator.

It was when Schuenke and Gulani met at the Angelwood Art Show in November that the inspiration for the Gulani-daVinci painting began. The art show benefited Angelwood, a non-profit organization that provides long-term residential care for developmentally disabled children in Jacksonville. Schuenke was one of several artists supporting the organization.



Frank League of Ponte Vedra Beach recalls watching "the sparks fly" between Gulani and Schuenke the night they met at the Angelwood Art Show. "It was almost like they recognized each other," muses the long-time art patron of Schuenke's and recent admirer of Gulani. One of the approximately one hundred guests at the January grand opening of Gulani Vision Institute, League looked at Schuenke's painting and smiled. "This is what happens when two geniuses collaborate," he says.

"I had read in a local magazine about 'the da Vinci of eye surgery,' but it wasn't until I met Dr. Gulani that I even considered the connection," says Schuenke. She admits to "googling Gulani" somewhat suspiciously after meeting him.



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"On first impression, he was charming—well-dressed and well-spoken—but that still didn't tell me anything about his skill as an eye surgeon," she comments. "I was, frankly, curious. Then I was stunned."

Stunned. It's not a word to be used lightly, but in Gulani's case, it is a word that often fits the occasion. OR Nurse Deb Beede, who works with him weekly at Surgical Care Affiliates on Emerson Expressway, noting that Gulani regularly brings patients in from all over the world, says, "one of his big things is that he absolutely wants the whole family involved. He meets with them before and after the surgery and he's never in a hurry."

Attending the Gulani Vision Institute grand opening, Beede says she was "blown away" by Schuenke's depiction of Gulani as da Vinci. "It's a great painting and it almost captures everything I admire about him," she said. One thing the painting does not show, Beede notes, was the fact that Gulani designs his own elegant suits. "I've nicknamed him Dr. G.Q.," she smiles.

So, is Gulani a 21st Century da Vinci? As guests were greeted graciously by Dr. Arun Gulani and his wife, Suparna Gulani, M.D. (a family doctor who shares office space at the new Gate Parkway location), there was, an overwhelming sense of destiny permeating the atmosphere.

"I could feel it in the air – something big was going on," says Doug Wilder, a Jacksonville business coach who attended the grand opening in his capacity as an ambassador for the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce. "Dr. Gulani is a striking person," comments Wilder. "His institute was impressive and I'm already familiar with Susanne's beautiful art. I've been to a lot of ribbon cuttings for the chamber, and this was one of the most interesting."

Wilder particularly admires Schuenke's painting style. "She certainly has a gift for imbedding messages and meanings into her paintings," he observes.

"Gulani's an artist at what he does," acknowledges optometrist Wayne Wood, who is also one of Jacksonville's most widely respected historians. Wood, who often refers patients to Gulani, attended the grand opening.

Jacksonville optometrist Jay Gallaty is both a colleague and patient of Gulani's. "He's a pioneer," explains Gallaty. "Maybe one in one-hundred thousand ophthalmologists do what he does. That's why I chose him as my eye surgeon." Speaking of Gulani's innovative advanced lasik procedure called "Comeoplastique" Lasik procedure, Gallaty calls it a "perfectly logical approach. The ability to modify the living glass of the cornea is quite remarkable."

In one corner of Schuenke's painting, there is an overflowing pile of books and manuscripts representing the many articles and papers authored by the ophthalmologist during the past two decades.

"I found it most interesting," observes Schuenke, "that Arun Gulani is so carefully documenting his innovations and teachings in writing. Da Vinci did that, too, several centuries ago." In 1994, Schuenke points out, Bill Gates purchased Da Vinci's collection of scientific writings called the "Codex Leicester."

"What will history do with Gulani's writings?" ponders Schuenke. "Who knows."

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