

Raphael Sanzio

Raffaello Sanzio was the youngest of the three giants of the High Renaissance. He was born in Urbino in 1483 and received his first instruction in the techniques of painting from his father, Giovanni Santi, a minor artist. Urbino, where Raphael spent his youth, was also the seat of the warfaring but art-loving condottiere Federico 11 da Montefeltro. At Federico's court, Raphael was introduced to the works of such artists as Paolo Uccello, Luca Signorelli, Melozzo da Forlì and Francesco di Giorgio, as well as the Flemish artists Hieronymus Bosch and Joos van Gent. As the stylistic characteristics which he had acquired from his teacher, namely a clear organization of the composition and the avoidance of excessive detail, also provided useful means through which to express the new spirit of the High Renaissance. In some works it is not easy to distinguish between the hand of Perugino and that of the young Raphael. The idealizing beauty of Peruginesque women, with their calmly contemplative expressions and strikingly small mouths, lingers on for some time in the faces of Raphael's Madonnas (such as that in the Solly Collection and the Madonna del Duca die Terranuova in Berlin). Slowly and tentatively, however, Raphael began to modify the style he had learned, gradually assimilating the new techniques of Leonardo and Michaelangelo.

Raphael can elsewhere be seen to introduce elements which reveal his interest in the achievements of the new age. The domed building in the semicircular upper half of the picture may be derived from Bramante's contemporary ideal of architecture, as expressed in his round tempio at S. Pietro in Montorio in Rome. The scene is one of tranquility. Mary graciously receives the ring from Joseph, who is depicted barefoot in accordance with the custom of oath-taking ceremonies at that time. "In 1504 Raphael went to Florence, bearing a letter of recommendation from the Duchess of Montefeltro to the gonfalonier Soderini. The intensive debates surrounding the new directions being taken in art at that time must have made a forceful impression on the young 21-year-old. It was a period in which Leonardo, just returned from Milan, was astounding the public with his Mona Lisa; Fra Bartolommeo was exhibiting his Last Judgement; and Michelangelo, who had come back to Florence from his first trip to Rome three years previously, had completed his David and was now working on the cartoon of the Bathing Soldiers, part of a series of historical and battle scenes planned for the Palazzo della Signoria. Leonardo also produced a design for another fresco in the same series, The Battle of Anghiari. As Benvenuto Cellini later recalled: "One of these cartoons was in the Medici palace, and the other in the Pope's hall: and while they remained intact they served as a school for all the world." Raphael responded to the artistic challenge posed by these cartoons in drawings in which he took up the theme of battle, such as his Battle of the Lapiths and the Centaurs sketch of around 1504.

In autumn 1508, shortly after summoning Michelangelo to Rome, Julius II also sent for Raphael. If Vasari is to be believed, the Pope acted upon the recommendation of Bramante, the architect of St. Peter's, who was also originally from the Urbino area. A suite of papal rooms was to be decorated on the basis of a theologically-determined concetto. Some of the preliminary work had already been executed (perhaps not altogether to the Pope's

satisfaction) by the artists Sodoma and Peruzzi, He commenced work at the beginning of 1509, and from the very start broke away from the passionate love of detail so characteristic of Florentine painting, and thus away from the style of Ghirlandaio, Botticelli and Piero della Francesca. He developed instead an expansive style of composition which presented itself as a homogeneous and easily intelligible whole. Raphael produced a number of other important works during his time in Rome. These included Madonna paintings such as the Madonna della Sedia (1513–14), and a series of famous portraits, including that of Julius II (1511–12), the Donna Velata, Baldassare Castiglione, and Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de' Medici and Luigi de' Rossi. He also provided the decorations for the upper zones of the lateral walls of the Sistine Chapel, which thus directly adjoined the works by his great rival Michelangelo. Instead of frescoes, however, Raphael's contribution took the form of a tapestry cycle depicting scenes from the lives of the Apostles. Raphael's cartoons for the cycle, which are today housed in London, were produced between 1515 and 1518. The tapestries were woven in Arras under Pieter van Aelst, and seven were hung in 1519.

One of the most frequently discussed and best-loved paintings of the Renaissance is Raphael's so-called Sistine Madonna. For many people it remains the supreme example of western painting, and its popularity is virtually as great as that of the Mona Lisa. All who have written about this picture have acknowledged the strange and baffling expressions worn by Mary and the child Jesus.

Michelangelo Buonarroti

Italian sculptor, painter, architect and poet. He was one of the founders of the High Renaissance and, in his later years, one of the principal exponents of Mannerism. Born at Caprese, the son of the local magistrate, his family returned to Florence soon after his birth. Michelangelo's desire to become an artist was initially opposed by his father, as to be a practising artist was then considered beneath the station of a member of the gentry. He was, however, eventually apprenticed in 1488 for a three-year term to Domenico Ghirlandaio.

He would have had access to the Medici collection of antiques, as well as a certain amount of tuition from the resident master, Bertoldo di Giovanni. His work here included two marble reliefs, a Madonna of the Steps (Casa Buonarroti, Florence), carved in rilievo schiacciato and showing the influence of Donatello (Bertoldo's master) and a Battle of the Centaurs (Casa Buonarroti, Florence), based on Bertoldo's bronze Battle of the Horsemen, which itself appears to be based on an antique prototype. Either at this time, or when he was in the Ghirlandaio workshop, Michelangelo also studied from and drew copies of the frescos of Giotto and Masaccio.

Argomento: Scultura rinascimentale

Epoca: Secolo XVI

Descrizione: Marmo, h.cm 420. L'opera, eseguita nel 1501–1504, prima commissione civica per il giovane Michelangelo, era destinata ad essere posta davanti a Palazzo della Signoria e diventare il simbolo della repubblica fiorentina.

Description: Marble, height cm 420. The work, carved between 1501 and 1504,

was destined to be placed immediately in front of the Palazzo Signoria.

Ubicazione: Firenze, Galleria dell'Accademia

Basilica di San Pietro

Christianity's "greatest temple", stood over the tomb of St. Peter, the founder of the Church of Rome, and was opened in the year 326. During the Renaissance, however, it was torn down to build a magnificent new basilica, with the work entrusted first to Bramante, and subsequently to Raphael, B. Peruzzi, Antonio da Sangallo and, lastly, Michelangelo, who designed the dome as the dominating element of the church. The piazza of the basilica is characterized by the ellipsis of Bernini's portico, while the façade, with the balcony of the Pope's blessing in the center, has a portico with five entrances, including the Holy Door (opened only Holy Years). Among the numerous masterpieces, worthy of mention are the canopy over the high altar, a theatrical creation by Bernini, the gilt bronze Chair of St. Peter, also by Bernini, the monument to Clement XIII by Canova, and Michelangelo's Famous Pietà, the splendid marble sculpture as glossy as alabaster.