

Introduction

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Raphael is the rare painter who was never out of fashion. The closest he has ever come is the present reserved acknowledgment of his past glory. Even when he was criticized it was within the context that he was regarded as the nearly perfect paragon, as Giovanna Perini shows in her essay in this collection. Beginning early in his short life and continuing throughout the sixteenth century he continued to inspire new generations of successors. During his lifetime his generosity and geniality endeared him to patrons and pupils alike. After his death in 1520 his followers were able to learn his style, and it served as the fertile basis for their new inventions. This was in contrast to both his great contemporaries, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, who fostered slavish imitators but few, if any, followers with the freedom to develop their own art on the foundation of what they had learned from their master.

Raphael was born in Urbino, the son of Giovanni Santi, who was characterized by Vasari as a painter "of no great merit, but of good intelligence." Sometime after his father's death in 1494, Raphael went to Perugia to assist Perugino, the most renowned painter in central Italy at the time. There is debate among scholars about whether he went as an apprentice or later as a more mature assistant in the workshop. The two authors in this volume who touch on this question, Jeryldene Wood and Sheryl Reiss, disagree. How much Raphael learned from Perugino would be evident in his style for years to come. He was enlisted by another leading painter, Bernardino Pinturicchio, who must have been impressed with his skill in draftsmanship because he had Raphael draw some of the cartoons for frescoes he was executing in the Piccolomini Library in the Siena cathedral (commissioned in 1502). Raphael's first independently commissioned work was an altar-piece of *Saint Nicholas of Tolentino* (1500), which was later disassembled; parts are to be found in Capodimonte, Naples; Pinacoteca Civica, Brescia

(see Fig. 31); and the Louvre, Paris (Plate 1). Among his early works he painted a *Crucifixion with Saints* (1503, Plate 3) and a *Coronation of the Virgin* (c. 1503–6, Plate 2), both very close in style to Perugino. During this period he received commissions from the court of Urbino, notably the precious *Saint George and the Dragon* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), probably ordered when the duke was awarded the Order of the Garter in 1504, and he executed his version of the *Marriage of the Virgin* (Plate 4), which was both close to Perugino's model and a significant departure from it.

During these years Florence was suffering political upheaval in the wake of Savonarola as well as economic depression and so it would not have attracted a young and ambitious artist. In the summer of 1503, however, with the death of Cesare Borgia who had been laying siege to the city, all this changed.¹ The city government gave commissions in the next few months to Leonardo and Michelangelo to decorate the principal hall of the Palazzo Vecchio with frescoes of Florentine battles. Both artists were working on their cartoons when Raphael arrived in town the following year, no doubt eager to learn what he could from these two masters. Raphael spent the next four years based in Florence, reworking his Peruginesque style under their influence. From Leonardo he learned the blurred contours and gentle shadow of his *sfumato*; from Michelangelo he learned to broaden his figures and attend to the underlying anatomy, which he would continue to study from antique sculpture when he reached Rome.

It was during the Florentine period (1504–8) that Raphael worked on the series of Madonna and Child paintings for which he is famous, for example, the *Small Cowper Madonna* (Plate 5) and *La Belle Jardiniere* (Plate 6). The most complex of this group is the five-figured *Canigiani Holy Family* (Plate 9); he was evidently striving for the kind of geometrical order and compositional unity that Leonardo had demonstrated in his *Madonna and Child with Saint Anne* (Paris, Louvre), on which Leonardo was working during these years. Raphael was also commissioned to paint several altarpieces and portraits, for example, the portraits of Angelo and Maddalena Doni (Plates 10 and 11). Especially in the pose of *Maddalena* one sees the influence of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (Louvre, Paris). In the *Colonna Altarpiece* (Plate 7) the lingering influence of Perugino is still evident, which then nearly vanishes by the time of the *Entombment* (1507, Plate 12), commissioned by Atalanta Baglione for an altar in Perugia. His assimilation of the lessons of Leonardo, Michelangelo, and even Fra Bartolomeo is apparent by the time of his *Madonna del Baldacchino*, at the end of his Florentine sojourn, his first large commission for a Florentine church (for Santo Spirito; unfinished, today in the Pitti Gallery, Florence).

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According to Vasari, Donato Bramante, a distant relative of Raphael, sent Raphael word that Pope Julius II had work for him decorating the papal apartment at the Vatican Palace. Raphael abandoned what he was working on and transferred to Rome. Frescoing the Stanza della Segnatura would occupy the painter until 1511, when Pope Julius was pleased enough with his accomplishment to assign him the adjacent room, the Stanza d'Eliodoro. Julius died before its completion, but his successor, Leo X, ordered Raphael to continue and subsequently assigned him two more rooms, the Stanza dell'Incendio and the Sala di Costantino. Very quickly Raphael became popular with the Roman patrons, and he had more work of all genres than he could do. He became the city's leading portraitist, executing the portraits of both Popes Julius (Plate 14) and Leo (Plate 15), as discussed in Joanna Woods-Marsden's essay. Altarpieces include the *Madonna di Foligno*, originally for the high altar of Santa Maria in Aracoeli (Plate 25), the famous and familiar *Sistine Madonna* (1512, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden), *Saint Cecilia* (1514, Plate 26), and the *Spasimo di Sicilia* for a church in Palermo (1516–17, today in the Prado, Madrid). Occasionally patrons were fortunate enough to procure him for frescoes, but it would seem that the patron needed to be indispensable to the pope because only the super rich Siennese merchant and the Pope's banker, Agostino Chigi, received much of Raphael's attention. For Chigi Raphael decorated two chapels, one in Santa Maria della Pace (1514) and the other in Santa Maria del Popolo (where the dome was executed in the unusual medium of mosaic), and in his villa (known today as the Villa Farnesina), *Galatea* (1513, Plate 28), and the loggia of Psyche (1518, Plate 29).

The period between his arrival in Rome in 1508 and his premature death in 1520 was phenomenally productive. In his last half-decade Raphael became the architect of Saint Peter's, the Chigi Chapel (Santa Maria del Popolo), Villa Madama, Palazzo Branconio dell'Aquila (Plate 39), as well as several other palaces. Pope Leo commissioned him to design the cartoons for a set of tapestries to hang in the Sistine Chapel depicting the Acts of the Apostles (1515–16), which were sent to Flanders to be woven (cartoons are preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Plate 24). In addition to local patrons, dukes and princes importuned him to create works for them, and Raphael was too polite ever to say no. In 1517 he promised Alfonso d'Este, duke of Ferrara, a *Triumph of Bacchus* for his *camerino*, but when its execution was repeatedly delayed, he sent cartoons of works that had been completed in an attempt to placate the duke. The *Saint Michael* (Plate 27) and the *Holy Family of Francis I* (both 1518, in the Louvre, Paris) were commissioned as gifts for the king of France, François I. Raphael's last work,

completed a few days before his death, was the *Transfiguration* (Plate 33). It was installed above the bier at his funeral. He was buried in the Pantheon.

The Rome at which Raphael arrived in 1508 was already a massive construction site, especially at the Vatican. On the order of the energetic Pope Julius, Bramante had designed the statue court to display the major antique statues owned by the papacy, including the recently discovered and centrally placed *Laocoön*. The pope's architect had torn up the woods that had lain between the Villa Belvedere and the Vatican Palace to create the new Cortile del Belvedere, which required altering the slope of the hill into a three-level terrace, building loggie to enclose its flanks, and constructing an amphitheater at the lowest level, just outside the papal apartment that Raphael was to decorate.² On the opposite side of the palace, Bramante, nicknamed *Il ruinante* because of the vigor with which he carried out preliminary demolition, was at work rebuilding Saint Peter's. Michelangelo had been persuaded to transfer his talents from the abandoned tomb for Pope Julius to painting the Sistine vault. Elsewhere in Rome Julius had new streets cut on either side of the Tiber. On the Via Giulia he began construction of the enormous new Hall of Justice, the Palazzo dei Tribunali (never finished). Along the new Via del Lungara on the opposite side, Agostino Chigi had Baldassare Peruzzi build him a splendid villa on the Tiber (now called the Villa Farnesina), which would be frescoed by Raphael but also by Peruzzi, Sebastiano del Piombo, and Il Sodoma.

Julius had been a prominent patron of art and architecture and had amassed an important collection of antiquities while he was still a cardinal. In the 1490s Julius collected the famous *Apollo Belvedere*, which he placed in his new statue court and where it can still be seen today. Julius undertook to transform the capital of Christendom into a city that would recall and rival the grandeur of imperial Rome. The court he created at the Vatican, like that of his hated predecessor Alexander VI Borgia, would wed Christianity to classical culture. In Bramante, Michelangelo, and Raphael he found artists capable of expanding their styles under his patronage, and the influence of antique culture all around them, to fulfill his vision, and his vision inspired his artists to surpass themselves. The papal court was filled with humanists whose ardor in their study of antique texts created an ebullience that was contagious. Julius, like most popes by the time they are elected, was an old man, and he had no intention of leaving projects uninitiated. He must certainly have known that most of them could not be completed in his lifetime, but that did not deter him. Work was undertaken on a scale that would not be thinkable in cramped medieval Florence or at most centers on the Italian peninsula. The vast open areas of the city

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encouraged thinking on a grand scale, dotted as it was with ruins of the ancient capital that had once accommodated more than a million residents and was now populated with fewer than thirty thousand inhabitants.

It is not surprising, therefore, to see that Raphael's style changes in the new environment, with the new patronage, and with the new medium of fresco. His principal work for the next several years would be in a medium in which he had had limited experience before Rome, and the demands of fresco contributed to the changes that his style underwent. The damp plaster of fresco is unforgiving: mistakes are tedious to correct because, to do it properly, the dried plaster has to be chiseled out. The painter needs to determine with accuracy how much he can paint in a day before the plaster dries. He needs to work with broad strokes in thin layers; there is little opportunity to build up the surface, concealing or partially concealing as one can do with oil paint. The Raphael who came from Florence was well suited to this kind of large-scale project because he was very systematic in the way he prepared his composition; he was not impetuous, but he was able to improvise as needed.

The experience of working intensively on the Stanze frescoes encouraged him to broaden his style, to conceive on a large scale and in terms of the total composition. Leonardo's exploration of light and shade as the means of focusing and organizing a composition had interested Raphael in Florence, and he had emulated it in his oil paintings there. Now in the Stanza della Segnatura (Plates 17–20), facing an entire wall, he must have referred to Leonardo's cartoon for the *Battle of Anghiari* (now lost). That mural, which was to have been still larger than Raphael's – fifty-five feet in length – must have required Leonardo to think through the pattern of light and shade across the whole expanse. We have Raphael's full-scale cartoon for the figures in the *School of Athens* (Plate 18) where we see that he has done exactly that. It is a very different effect, and a far more dramatic one, than the usual quattrocento fresco in which each figure is lit separately and evenly and important figures are each granted the same degree of illumination. Raphael is not afraid to conceal parts of figures in shadow: the lower bodies of Plato and Aristotle are shaded by the adjacent figures, and Euclid, leaning over his slate, has only the top of his head in bright light. The painter makes explicit his indebtedness to Michelangelo, it would seem, by including his portrait as a postcartoon addition to the foreground in the figure of Heraclitus. The seated pose and the colossal scale have suggested to many critics that Raphael intended to imitate the Prophets of the Sistine vault on which Michelangelo was then at work, thereby acknowledging his debt not only to Michelangelo's earlier, Florentine works but also his present work in

Rome. This kind of generosity was characteristic of Raphael, according to contemporary report.

The broadening and new weightiness of Raphael's figures may well have been inspired by the Roman antiquities all around him as well. Another kind of influence of antiquity is more indirect and yet more fundamental, however. The humanists of Julius's court were reading ancient literature as never before. Especially important were the writings on rhetoric of Cicero and Quintilian in which modes of speech are divided into categories according to purpose or function. If the orator wishes to persuade he uses one kind of argument, gesture, tone; if his purpose is to praise he uses another. In the preceding century artists on the whole – with important exceptions³ – developed one all-purpose style and did not vary it. Raphael increasingly recognized that different subject matter required different treatment: a devotional altarpiece should not be painted the same way as an episode from history. Eventually, just before his death, he discovered that even contrasting episodes in the same painting may call for different treatment (*Transfiguration*, Plate 33).⁴ To accommodate these various requirements Raphael developed in the course of his Roman career modes of coloring and modes of composition, based no doubt on the categories of rhetoric. This new kind of thinking dawned slowly: in the Stanza d'Eliodoro he recognized that these historical subjects required more dramatic treatment than the contemplative scenes in the Segnatura and that he needed to heighten the contrast of his chiaroscuro. The shadows are noticeably blacker than the soft brownish tones used for shading in the preceding Stanza.⁵ At the same time, he was commissioned to make an altarpiece for a major Roman church, the *Madonna di Foligno*, representing a vision of the Madonna and Child (Plate 25). For such a devotional piece, Leonardo's sfumato suited the gentle, meditative mood. On the vault of the Eliodoro, however, were to be depicted four epiphanies in which God made appearances to man – for example, *Moses and the Burning Bush* and *Jacob's Dream*. Their transcendental character needed to be apparent, so Raphael employed the color style that Michelangelo had reinvented, *cangiantismo*, in which color shifts from one hue to another in a modeling sequence. The antinaturalistic quality of this coloring is well suited to supernatural events. Thus in these four works, painted in a period of a few years, Raphael had used four different modes of coloring, matching the mode to the conditions. In the Segnatura his color mode can be called *unione* because it strives to create a flowing unity among the figures, connecting them in a melodious harmony. On the Eliodoro walls he introduced the chiaroscuro mode, which becomes

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most unmistakable in the *Liberation of Peter* (Plate 22). For the *Madonna di Foligno* the mode might be called *unione* again, but he has softened the contours and the shadows still more than in the *Segnatura*, approaching Leonardesque *sfumato*. On the Eliodoro vault he used *cangiantismo*, borrowed from Michelangelo's ceiling perhaps quite intentionally, again paying homage. Raphael would continue to refine and develop his use of modes for the remainder of his short career. More than any of his contemporaries he applied this kind of thinking in terms of categories of use, but his followers, often more interested in the aesthetic possibilities than in matching mode to function, would spread the idea far and wide. It is one of the most important of Raphael's contributions. We are familiar with Nicolas Poussin's adaptation, more than a century later, discussed in his famous letter to Chantelou in which he carries the idea a step further intellectually and connects the modes of painting with the Greek modes of music.⁶ Poussin, of course, was a great admirer and imitator of Raphael, and I have no doubt that he derived the idea of modes from his High Renaissance mentor.

In the last half-decade of his life Raphael expanded his modal thinking to composition. Since the second quarter of the quattrocento, linear perspective had been the means by which Renaissance artists – painters and relief sculptors alike – ordered the space of their images. They had learned to manipulate the system for effect and were by no means slavishly tied to it, but it remained *the* Renaissance system.⁷ Raphael demonstrated it in his early Stanze frescoes. Only in the *Parnassus* and *Repulse of Attila* was there no architecture to establish the orthogonals that measure the space and guide the eye. But his immersion in Roman antiquity showed him that there were other interesting ways to organize the space of a picture. Vasari described an excursion Raphael made with his assistant Giovanni da Udine to explore the “grottoes,” what we now know were the vaults and walls of Emperor Nero's infamous Domus Aurea. Nero's Golden House was so sumptuous that it was an embarrassment to later emperors, so Trajan had it filled with rubble and built his baths on top as a gift to the residents of Rome.⁸ The experience of exploring these buried rooms opened up to Raphael the world of ancient Roman wall decoration. The following year Raphael assigned Giovanni da Udine to execute Cardinal Bibbiena's loggia, in which the entire wall was covered with *grotteschi*, invented in the manner of the Domus Aurea decorations (Plate 30). No perspective system organizes the wall. There are no frames. Instead the wall is treated as a surface over which these fantastic ornaments are spread. *Grotteschi* had been the fashion in Rome since the Domus Aurea was first explored around 1480, but they had been restricted

to borders or ornamental bands. Raphael's use of them in the Bibbiena's loggia and the connected *stufetta* (bathroom) constitutes a rethinking of how to decorate a wall.

The following project of Raphael and his bottega was to decorate the loggia of Leo X (Plate 31), and in it he further expanded the variation on perspective. Giovanni da Udine perfected his reinvention of ancient Roman stucco, such as he had seen in the Domus Aurea, so that relieflike elements could be incorporated into the wall, which actually protrude toward the viewer. These are combined with *groteschi*, whereas the other parts of the decorative scheme representing biblical narratives are designed with perspectival recession.

A couple of years earlier Raphael had begun exploring another alternative to perspective, again suggested by antique example, this time relief sculpture and therefore called the relieflike style. I summarize Michelangelo's and Raphael's development of it and its culmination in Raphael's design for the *Battle of the Milvian Bridge* (Plate 32) in my essay in this volume.

Modes of composition and color gave Raphael the means to vary his style according to the commission. His successors and contemporaries quickly followed up on the implications. One finds exciting combinations of the modes of composition, for example, Francesco Salviati's midcentury decorations of the Palazzo Ricci-Sacchetti⁹ or inventions of hybrid color modes, such as *unione-cangiantismo*.¹⁰ The use of *groteschi* and the relieflike style were carried by Perino del Vaga to Genoa, where he worked in the Palace of Andrea Doria, and by Rosso Fiorentino to François I's palace at Fontainebleau, to cite only two examples.

Raphael did not have a large workshop in the pre-Rome years, although he appears to have had some assistants from time to time. In Rome, as his commissions and importance grew, so did his workshop. As Bette Talvacchia shows in her essay in this volume, his workshop, and the very conception of a workshop, evolved with Raphael's career. Fresco demands a workshop: there are multiple tasks that can be carried out by pupils at all stages of experience – some menial, some requiring skill. In the early stages Raphael designed and executed everything himself, and he obviously loved the process of creating a composition. Each figure and each stage was studied in drawings of all kinds: compositional sketches; studies of light and shade, figure studies made from the model and then combined into detailed studies of groups and finally into a cartoon. Fischel counted forty-five drawings surviving for the fresco of the *Disputa* alone in the Stanza della Segnatura and estimated that four or five times that many were made.¹¹ The new century would no longer tolerate Perugino's system of recycling cartoons that

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had been made for previous commissions.¹² As his fame grew and the pressure on Raphael increased, he gathered about him more artists. Many were more collaborators than apprentices or assistants. By the middle of the second decade he had the largest workshop that had ever been assembled: Vasari reported that an entourage of fifty accompanied Raphael when he arrived daily at the Vatican. As he became busier he developed a system whereby he inserted the more experienced assistants into the preparatory stages, perhaps at first transferring and combining studies. His role in the actual execution diminished. Finding the right balance between allowing freedom to his assistants and providing the necessary oversight and intervention took some time. In the Stanza dell'Incendio scholars agree that he turned over too much to the workshop; the *Oath of Leo* is hardly ever discussed or reproduced, for example.¹³ With remarkable speed he worked out a system for sharing the work, however, which constituted a major revision of workshop practice. Raphael's pupil, Giulio Romano, reported to Vasari that the master would retouch the work of his assistants until they appeared entirely his.¹⁴ And patrons appear to have been satisfied. Reflected here is a shift in the conception of the role of artist from executant to inventor. Contracts continued to repeat the language calling for the work to be done entirely by the hand of the master, but it was expected less and less that this would actually be the case. Vasari's midcentury commission to decorate the large audience room in the Palazzo della Cancelleria is a case in point. It is known as the Sala de Cento Giorni because the patron required the painter to complete it in one hundred days.¹⁵ Speed increasingly became a valued virtue in the cinquecento, and as the century wore on, clever invention was frequently more highly valued than refined execution.¹⁶ Some of Raphael's followers seem hardly to have had time to take up the brush. Giulio Romano spent his time making the sketches and overseeing the operation. He was constantly under pressure from his patron, Federico Gonzaga, duke of Mantua, so that brilliant conceits like his Sala dei Giganti (Palazzo Te) was executed by the crude hand of an assistant, Rinaldo Mantovani. Raphael's innovations in workshop organization and management made possible the revolution in working practice that took place during the cinquecento.

We may imagine that euphoria fueled the achievements of the High Renaissance, but we would be mistaken to imagine this as a Garden of Eden. Envy and rivalries motivated both patrons and artists.¹⁷ Underlying everything, of course, was the desire to surpass antiquity, but competition between equals, or would-be equals, was everywhere evident. The pope provided the example for the cardinals, the papal court, and the wealthy citizens

to spend lavishly on artistic patronage. As Linda Pellecchia shows in her chapter, there resulted a boom in palace building and decoration. The opening of new streets gave access to new building sites, which were snapped up by ambitious prelates or businessmen. Coteries developed among the artists, and a rivalry between Michelangelo and Raphael was exacerbated by their respective partisans and exploited by patrons. The very size of Raphael's workshop would have created a clique of his enthusiastic allies. Michelangelo, on the other hand, it will be recalled, fired his assistants in the Sistine Chapel and sent them packing back to Florence, thereby incidentally denuding himself of supporters.¹⁸ Michelangelo was by nature querulous, as his letters make clear.¹⁹ He complained about Bramante, who was a distant relative of Raphael and fellow Urbinate, because he promoted his kinsman. Michelangelo blamed Bramante for Julius's decision to abandon his tomb, and for proposing him to paint the Sistine vault. He considered himself a sculptor and believed that Bramante wanted to embarrass him in the confrontation between his frescoes and those of Raphael, which were being executed at the same time in the papal apartment. When the pope ordered Bramante to build a scaffolding for Michelangelo in the Sistine, Michelangelo had it torn down, pointing out that the holes from which it was suspended could not be closed and would mar the appearance of the frescoes. As Costanza Barbieri shows in her chapter, the Venetian Sebastiano became the focus of the rivalry between the two factions and – once Michelangelo had taken up residence in Florence – his surrogate in Rome. It was principally on the issue of coloring, for which Raphael had been judged the superior and Michelangelo deficient, that Sebastiano, the pupil of Giorgione, was put forward as the champion of the Michelangelo clique. Raphael himself seems to have been aloof from these discussions and of a generous nature, but he could not have been oblivious to the antagonism and the gossip going on around him. An incident reported by Benvenuto Cellini indicates that the fervor of Raphael's supporters did not diminish after the master's death. Rosso Fiorentino received a commission to fresco a chapel in Santa Maria della Pace, where Raphael had worked. When Rosso disparaged Raphael, his followers "were quite resolved to murder him," according to Cellini, who was, admittedly, prone to exaggerate.²⁰

The critical literature continued to compare Raphael and Michelangelo through much of the sixteenth century, and critics aligned themselves with one or the other. After the unveiling of the *Last Judgment* in 1541, the artists flocked to Michelangelo's standard. The chapel was always full of artists copying his fresco. Even Michelangelo himself deplored this adulation. He is reported to have remarked on passing through the chapel on business