

High Renaissance

Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, known as Raphael 1483-1520



Self-portrait, 1498, Ashmolean Museum Oxford

Raphael's drawings

The three great creators of High Renaissance were Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, who was the youngest.

Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, known as Raphael, was born in 1483. His father Giovanni Santi was a painter, courtier and writer in the court of the Duke of Urbino.

Raphael showed talent at an early age and from 1500 to 1504 was a pupil with the master Pietro Perugino (1445-1523).

Perugino was to have an overwhelming influence on the young Raphael and played an important role in the formation of the High Renaissance. Raphael had a ferocious appetite for learning through drawing which is apparent in his early sheets.

He began in the medieval tradition of artist-craftsman. Raphael had an innate ability to absorb the innovations of other artists, but he did not mimic their style. His work showed the influence of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci.

In his book *Preparation for Painting*, Lynton Lamb described Raphael's drawings as semi-sculptural. "With Raphael emerges the idea of the "academic" drawing that has persisted in life classes to the present day - the study of the isolated figure, modelled up to, and bounded by, a precise contour.

“Raphael’s wonderful drawings are not of life but of life-rooms, of the nude rather than the naked.”

When using pen and ink, silver point or chalk he made little notes at the side of the paper. The shading, in red or black chalk, sometimes heightened with white, follows the roundness of the limbs with delicate strokes that perfectly express their shapes.

Raphael created full size cartoon compositions for frescoes. The cartoons were marked with holes pricked around the main contours of the drawing and temporarily applied to dry plaster. This is called pouncing. Powdered charcoal was dusted through the holes and the resulting dots would be joined up to complete the design. He also used a method of squaring to transfer drawings to panels.

In 1508 Raphael was commissioned by Pope Julius II to decorate the private Papal rooms of the Sistine Chapel. At the same time Michelangelo was working on the ceiling of the chapel. There was considerable professional rivalry between the two artists.

Giorgio Vasari’s *Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Architects, Painters and Sculptors*, 1550, contested that Raphael ‘excelled’ Michelangelo in drawing and composition.

Where to find examples of Raphael’s drawings.

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, has the world’s greatest collections of Raphael’s drawings. Dr Catherine Whistler, Keeper of Western Art, created a short video to support the Raphael exhibition in 2017. There is also a short video of the techniques used. I recommend both!

Heni Neuendorf wrote of the exhibition in 2017: “Forget his paintings, Raphael’s drawings reveal his true genius.”

National Gallery, London. Search for Raphael drawings to see preparatory drawings for paintings. The gallery had planned this year to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Raphael’s death in Rome. This has been postponed to 19th March to 10th July 2022. The exhibition will look at his celebrated painting and drawings as well as his work in architecture.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The V&A has tapestry cartoons designed in 1515-16 intended to be used for tapestries to hang below the 15th century frescoes on the wall of the Sistine Chapel. The original cartoons for seven of them are in the V&A loaned from the Royal College. The completed tapestries were delivered to the Vatican Palace between 26th December 1519 and December 1521.

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge has studies of arms and hands, one holding a book in red chalk.

Albertina Museum, Vienna. Highlights of the collection of drawings include:

The Madonna with the pomegranate 1504

Young man carrying an old man on his back - a study for the Borgobrand

Four studies for the Virgin in the Meadow 1514

Uffizi, Florence. The department of prints and drawings, listed under Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, has examples of drawings with excellent descriptions of the artwork (click on the arrows).

Pitti Museum, Florence (accessed via the Uffizi website)

Villa Farnesina, Rome

Wikipedia!