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Raphaello Sanzio: Life and Work of a Renaissance Genius

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the great Renaissance artist Raphaello Sanzio. Examining three main aspects of this artist – his biography, his works, and his styles and techniques – the reader will see just why this man has become one of the most beloved artists of the Italian Renaissance and perhaps of all of art history. By examining and analyzing his works, the reader discovers some meaning behind his most famous works as well as learns more about his style and the style of those during that era. They also find out why he has gone down in history as one of the most famous of the Italian master painters.

Raphaello Sanzio: Life and Work of a Renaissance Genius

Few people in the modern art world have not heard of the infamous Michelangelo Buonarroti or Leonardo DaVinci. Their works are plastered all over posters, calendars, and magazines. Along with these two art icons exists a third master – Raphael. Inevitably, Raphael seems to find his way into conversations when the other two are mentioned. Raphael (1483 – 1521) was a contemporary of both Michelangelo (1475 – 1564) and DaVinci (1452 – 1519) (Edler, 2007). Perhaps Raphael was such a great painter because he lived during the time of these great artists. He was a master copier, thriving in environments in which he could pull from others’ talents and ideas and then create his own masterpiece. Living during the time of these famous artists certainly helped Raphael become the painter that we know and love today. His works are displayed all over the world in churches, on the walls of the Vatican, and in the most prestigious of museums. From his personalized portraits to his angelic Madonnas, all of his works were purely beautiful and deserve to be admired along with the other masters of his time.

Life of Raphael

Raphael in the Early Years

Childhood and an early artistic upbringing. Raphaello Sanzio, also known as Raphael Santi, was born on April 6, 1483. Born in Urbino, Italy, he was immediately thrust into a world of art. His father, Giovanni Sanzio, was a great painter and served as such in the court of Federigo da Montefeltro (Edler, 2007). Urbino, Italy, Raphael’s hometown, was the center of the Umbria Art Movement. This movement focused on

perspective and composition. Based on this upbringing, it is no wonder why Raphael excelled in both of these areas. Growing up in this environment gave him ample opportunity to become connected with the artistic community. It also influenced his style of painting, which would become one of his most distinguishable features. Naturally, Giovanni wanted his son to become a part of the Urbino art movement (Umbrian School) and follow in his footsteps, so he encouraged young Raphael to pursue painting as a career.

Apprenticeship. Following the death of his mother in 1491 and his father in 1494 (Camesasca, 1963c), Raphael chose to move to Perugia to become apprentice to the famous Pietro Perugino. At the time Pietro Perugino was famous in the Perugian world, having painted Vatican works such as *Christ Delivering the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter* and *The Deposition* (Camesasca, 1963c). Under his supervision, Raphael learned many techniques that would later define his unique style. For eleven years, young Raphael would study much about light and shades and depth and perspective. Raphael and his master soon discovered that he had the same natural talent for painting, as did his father. He enjoyed learning different styles and techniques of painting and soon surpassed even his own master. It was at this time (around his 21st year) that he painted the *Marriage of the Virgin*. This painting is famous for its emotion, movement, and depth—qualities which would soon become the outstanding and defining elements of Raphael's work.

He had such incredible talent and such a good grasp on space at this early age, as apparent in the *Marriage of the Virgin*, that he already had developed his own style of a

spacious layout. The light and dark values would change throughout his painting career, but his ability to maintain a spacious and logical layout would remain the same. This could have been developed by his many years of watching Perguino paint in a similar fashion (Edler, 2007).

Raphael in the Later Years

Florence. In 1504, the 21 year old moved to the center of the Italian Renaissance – Florence. This was also the year that he moved away from his Umbrian School influences (Shipp, 1950). In Florence, the eager artist continued to study many of the techniques of the famous painters of the time, such as Michelangelo, DaVinci, and Bartolommeo. Examining the detailed anatomy of Michelangelo's figures and the contrast of light and shadow in Leonardo DaVinci's figures, Raphael developed a personalized combination of the two artists. He often experimented with light and dark values in his paintings, but this was not his forte. His true genius was in spatial composition, but he still experimented with new dramatic values.

Death. Raphael died on his 37th birthday, a Good Friday, of a lingering fever. He died young, only one year after his predecessor DaVinci and forty-four years before Michelangelo. Not resting much and working more than he should, the fever soon claimed his life in the midst of his painting the *Transfiguration*. His best pupil, Giulio Romano, finished this Vatican masterpiece. Despite his early death, this painting turned out to be a wonderful work of art – one that people will continually associate with the name Raphaello Sanzio (Edler, 2007).

Raphael's Most Famous Works

Raphael's Madonnas

Famous examples. The Madonnas are possibly Raphael's most famous works. Such skill is shown in these beautiful portraits of his beloved Mary, mother of Jesus. He represented her as a human being, more loving and caring than most of the angelic and godlike representations of that time. He accomplished these humanistic characteristics by not painting her with a halo and by having her show realistic emotions. Most Madonnas of the time were paintings of posed women adorned with a glowing halo and detached emotions. Raphael's new interpretation helped people relate to her more, and therefore, his paintings became more and more popular (Edler, 2007). The majority of his paintings were of Mary and Christ. One of the most famous of these is the *Small Cowper Madonna* which dates to probably 1506 (Camesasca, 1963c). Perhaps his most famous Madonnas are the *Large Cowper Madonna*, the *Garvagh Madonna*, and the *Sistine Madonna*. Scholars say that the first Madonna that Raphael painted was *Madonna and Child*. There is no confirmed date on this piece, and some even speculate that it could be a painting by Raphael's father, Giovanni Sanzio. Some speculate that this picture is of Raphael's mother holding him as an infant (Camesasca, 1963a). The style is definitely different than Raphael's other Madonnas, but this could also be attributed to Raphael's lack of skill and experience at the time or just his young age. Either way, Raphael loved to paint Madonnas from an early age, and would continue to do so more and more skillfully until his death.

In 1506, he painted the *Madonna del Cordellino*. In this painting, the Virgin Mary is shown very natural and humanlike, which was a novel idea at the time. She is holding

St. John who is holding a bird for the infant Jesus. The presence of St. John in the Madonna paintings was not unusual. He is found quite often in the paintings, shown as an infant like Jesus. This scene could have been somewhat influenced by DaVinci's painting, *Virgin of the Rocks*. This would not be surprising considering Raphael's tendency to borrow ideas from his contemporaries. In this painting, Raphael experimented with different shades and lighting based on the way DaVinci painted. DaVinci's light and dark values make for a more dramatic effect. However, Raphael soon returned to his lighter shades as Perugino had instructed him in his earlier stages. He decided not to focus as much on dramatic lighting as he would on spatial composition and movement – a technique he later became famous for and mastered quite skillfully (Edler, 2007).

Most of his Madonnas were beautifully painted with a similar color scheme. Mary was mostly the focal point of the painting, and she always held the infant Christ or St. John. There were sometimes other people in the composition – Joseph, the Apostles, Elizabeth, etc. However, there was always an unspoken relationship between Mary and the infant Jesus. The spatial relationship between the two always drew the viewer's eye to both of the figures and the lingering space between them.

The Granducca Madonna, also one of his most famous Madonnas, has been complimented as such: "Where shall one find greater purity, more utter loneliness than in his *Graducca Madonna* or a sublimer apparition of woman than appeared to St. Sixtus?" (Berenson, 1909, p. 115) This Madonna was painted approximately in 1505 during Raphael's stay in Florence. The piece is named after the Grand Duke who insisted that it

travel with him on every journey. The simplicity of this portrait is inspiring. Only two figures grace this canvas – that of Mary and her infant Jesus. She looks down to her left and the infant Jesus causally looks just below where the painter would be sitting. The baby looks very calm and passive, and Mary looks similar. Jesus’ hand rests open-fisted on her breast. This is also one of Raphael’s darkest paintings. One element that sets this painting apart is that the background behind the Madonna figure is very, very dark. Usually there is some sense of nature or color at least. But not in this case. Her headdress bleeds into the dark background. This creates a beautiful contrast with the infant Jesus. He is very pale, especially compared to the dark background. The simplicity and yet the realism of these poses help make this Madonna one of Raphael’s most famous paintings (Camesasca, 1963c).

Portraits of Raphael

Portraits. Raphael also loved to paint portraits, and he did so mostly for the Pope. He painted a self-portrait in 1504-1505 (dated based on the Florentine characteristics) and one in 1506, but these were more for personal interest (Camesasca, 1963c). Some of the other portraits that he painted were of Elisabetta Gonzaga, Emilia Pia di Montefeltro, Angelo Doni, Maddalena Doni, La Gravida, Bin Do Altoviti, and Baldassore Castiglione, just to name a few (Camesasca, 1963c). His portraits were not always very objective. In fact, he was known to “paraphrase” what he saw by painting what the subject presented to him. He would paint the feeling that they impressed upon him, so most of the portraits are somewhat inaccurate (Fischel, 1948). However, his portraits always pleased his audience. He did quite a few portraits, and most of them are in museums today. This all

makes sense considering his reputation for a vivid imagination. According to Berenson (1963c), “He was endowed with a visual imagination which has never even been rivaled for range, sweep, and sanity” (p. 123). He must have had a great imagination in order to paint such masterpieces like the *School of Athens*. He could easily include emotion and movement into the paintings because he could imagine the figures showing emotion and moving around the canvas. In his portraits, he “strove to sketch their agitated gestures in the new style of Florentine art, with the accented dorsal furrow, the pronounced muscles, the taut rhythm of their curves, the portato of their stride, and that glance over their shoulder at the trifling things of this world...” (Fischel, 1948, p. 119). Of course, his portraits were not totally inaccurate. They were somewhat stylized, but he still was required to represent his subjects accurately.

Painters of that time had a reputation of flattering the subject by making their subjects look handsomer or skinnier or fatter or whatever the case would have been. There is no evidence to say that Raphael did not do these things to his subjects. These are the only records we have that tell us anything as to the description of the subjects. Plus, if these were terribly inaccurate, the subject would have demanded a new one and the old one would not have gone down into history as it has.

In 1513, Pope Julius II died, leaving Pope Leo X of the Medici line to succeed as Pope. Under his leadership, Raphael drew a Vatican tapestry cartoon depicting the Acts of the Apostles. He was familiar with painting scenes from the Bible as this was one of his passions. He mostly painted scenes from the Old Testament, but he ventured in to painting New Testament scenes for Papal commissions. He also was commissioned to

decorate Cardinal Bibiena's bathroom with portraits of Venus and to paint portraits of the Pope's friends, such as *Count Baldassore Castiglione*. He painted many portraits for the Pope, but this one has become one of his most studied pieces. Once again, as typical of Raphael, the pose in this picture greatly resembles DaVinci's *Mona Lisa* pose, which had been painted 10 years before. However, this picture is certainly Raphael's and will continue to be one of his most famous paintings. In fact, Rembrandt sketched this in 1634, and it supposedly influenced Titian and Rembrandt in their future paintings (such as Titian's *Portrait of a Gentleman* or Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait*) (Berenson, 1957).

In many cases, his subjects were royalty themselves or at least friends of royalty. For example, in the *Portrait of a Cardinal*, the subject is most likely Cardinal Alidosi. There has been some speculation as to the certainty of the subject, but most scholars agree that this is a portrait of this specific Cardinal. This portrait must have to have been accurate in order to please the Cardinal or the Pope, or whomever it was painted for in the first place. Another example of a Raphael portrait is of the *Portrait of Fedra Inghirami*. This portrait was most likely paid for directly by Pope Leo X. These two portraits would have to be as accurate as possible since they represent such famous and important people at the time. Raphael still added his own interpretation of the person into the picture, but neither subject nor the Pope seemed to mind so much. Raphael was well loved and trusted by everybody.

The Stanza della Segnatura

Meaning and interpretation. At the age of 24, Raphael was invited by Pope Julius II to paint two stanzas (Italian for *rooms*) of the Vatican (Edler, 2007). The first room

was the *Stanza d'Eliodoro* (*the Room of Heliodorus*) and was intended as a private audience chamber for the Pope. The other room was the *Stanza della Segnatura* (*the Room of the Signature*). This room was intended primarily as the Papal library. The Pope had originally commissioned Perugino to paint this project, but he instead replaced him with his unknown pupil, Raphaello. The painting on the latter stanza, the *Stanza della Segnatura*, spanned all four walls of the Vatican library. The four separate walls represent four different ideas, used to show the balance of the Pope. One wall was named *Disputa*, representing Theology. Another wall was named *Parnassus*, representing Poetry. The Pope wanted to be known as both a spiritual and a worldly leader, so these two walls appropriately face each other. The third wall was named *Jurisprudence*, representing Law. The final wall, and the most famous of the walls, is the *School of Athens*, representing Philosophy. On this particular wall, the painting is divided into two sides based on the famous philosophers Plato and Aristotle. The side with Plato represents the Existentialists who were primarily concerned with the mysteries that transcend the world. Plato is appropriately holding his book *Timaeus* as he points upwards, showing the source of his philosophy. The other side with Aristotle represents the Humanists who were primarily concerned with nature and mankind. Aristotle is shown holding his book *Nichomachean Ethics* as he points towards the earth, the source of his philosophy. These two main figures are found in the middle of the painting, and all other activity stems from their presence. Some important figures in this painting include Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Diogenes, and Euclid. Raphael subtly included a self-portrait, placing himself inconspicuously between the two astronomers Zoroaster and Ptolemy.

This labeled himself as a humanist, which comes as no surprise considering his Umbrian upbringing (Kleiner & Mamiya, 2005).

This piece carried much importance to Raphael and his career. He was relatively unknown at this point. This job not only produced one of Raphael's most famous paintings, but it also gave him Papal recognition that would later help his painting career flourish (Shipp, 1950). This is the first and only stanza that Raphael did himself. All the other stanzas attributed to Raphael were sketched by him but were painted by his pupils. This one, however, was purely the work of Raphael, and it has become famous for being so creative. The interaction and the depth/perspective of the figures have come to define the work of Raphael.

This important stanza took Raphael from early 1509 to late 1511 to finish. The finished stanza was approximately 19 feet by 27 feet. It covered the entire wall of the Papal Library. This important piece of art is still admired and studied to this day because of its details and its symbolism. Raphael used some symbolism in his work, but unlike DaVinci, he preferred to be candid with his art instead of mysterious. The ornamentation he used around the stanza also is worth noting. It was not an original idea, but the pattern and the rhythm of the tiling made the border very sophisticated and luxurious. His attention to detail makes this painting look very realistic. And, the movement of the people – the gestures of their hands, the looks on their faces, their body language – makes this picture almost come alive. Imagine this picture up close and 19 feet high. Surely the effect is much greater (Kleiner & Mamiya, 2005). Pope Julius, upon seeing this

masterpiece, declared that all other work in that place be destroyed so that Raphael would alone be praised for decorating his library (Columbia University, 2008).

Illustrations and Frescoes

Illustrations. Raphael was also known as a great illustrator of the Bible. He used his talents in spatial composition and movement to illustrate his beloved religious beliefs: “Raphael also saw in tactile values and movement not the principal pursuit of the artist, but a mere aid to illustration” (Berenson, 1957, p. 95). He loved to illustrate the Bible – the Old and New Testament. One writer commented that he had “given an Hellenic garb to the Hebraic universe” (Shipp, 1950, p. 109). His beautiful paintings illustrated the Bible for Gentiles and non-believers. They gave the world something beautiful to admire and somehow associate with the human good. Instead of the typical and traditional figures representing Jesus, Mary, and the Apostles, Raphael used more human-like forms and emotions to present Catholicism as a more accessible religion. He enjoyed taking passages from the Bible and illustrating them and making them more understandable and emotional. He had a great talent of creating drama and emotion out of passages that normally would seem somewhat unemotional or stagnant. Instead, much movement and emotion are seen in these illustrated scenes (Berenson, 1909).

Frescoes. Raphael also did a series of frescoes (water-based paintings on wet plaster) (*Merriam-Webster*, 2008) on certain stories in the Bible – Old and New Testament. He loved illustration, and he found great joy in illustrating scenes from his beloved Book. He did many frescoes on David, Joshua, Moses, Solomon, Joseph, Jacob, and some from the life of Christ. He focused on the Resurrection a few times and created

several frescoes of that special Event. His frescoes on David are very graphic and show the appropriate emotion from that particular scene. For example, some of the David frescoes include, the *Anointing of David*, *David and Goliath*, *Triumph of David*, and *David sees Bathsheba*. In *David and Goliath*, the spatial composition is very interesting. Although the foreground is filled with action, the viewer can easily identify David defeated his enemy. The way that the soldiers are facing and moving leaves a subtle horseshoe shape of empty space around David and Goliath. This draws the eye immediately to that part of the fresco. In this way, Raphael effectively used spatial composition to lead the viewer's eye to the main action, despite the chaotic foreground. The emotion felt in those frescoes is overwhelming. There is much action going on, especially in the foreground. This style is typical for Raphael. The background is scenic, having a few trees or buildings scattered over the backdrop. The foreground holds the majority of the people and the action and the emotion (Camesasca, 1963a).

Raphael's depiction of Joshua and the *Fall of Jericho* is also an interesting piece. His whole series on Joshua is complicated because he is required to show much chaotic action and yet have the storyline be very clear. There is much action in this piece because of the soldiers and the falling walls. The soldiers are mid march when they see and hear the walls of Jericho crumble. They are shocked and eager, which is shown by their body language. Many of them are leaning forward in anticipation. Some are leaning back in fear and terror. The leg and arm muscles are strained from being in such a stressed position. This adds much more movement to the characters. The buildings are falling over and the soldiers are preparing for war, and yet the viewer can still easily identify

Joshua. He has a distinguishing presence about him and he is set apart physically by the way the movement centers him in a horseshoe of emptiness. This is, once again, because of Raphael's clever use of spatial composition.

Raphael also did a few frescoes on Mythology. These frescoes are more ornate and gaudy than the ones from the Old Testament. They all represent stories from Mythology that somehow play a part in his modern day happenings. The people of the time were very interested in Mythology as it applied to them at the moment. These frescoes are interesting because they are so different from the Biblical frescoes. They have different color schemes and even different styles. There is more of a luxurious and godlike quality to them. Raphael kept the Biblical scenes more natural and the Mythology scenes more supernatural (Camesasca, 1963b).

Most of these frescoes would have been ordered by the Pope or by royalty to hang in their great halls or in their libraries. For example, *Venus and Jove* and *Mercury* are just a few frescoes done with ornate decorations and a different style than that of the Bible illustrations. This could be because they were made in different years and Raphael was still in transition between styles. Another reason these frescoes look different from the Biblical frescoes is due to the fact that Raphael did little painting on them. He was commissioned to do these pieces. Then he brought his pupils allowing them to finish the paintings. Raphael did the initial sketches and some of the painting. But once he started to become more and more famous, the less and less time he had to actually work on a painting. This is evident in his paintings, especially toward the end of his life. His facial expressions are less smooth and the body movements are less animated. Of course, the

basic painting idea still belonged originally to Raphael, but the actual values of the painting were not his. They belonged to his pupils who by this time had developed their own style of painting. The layout and spatial composition was still purely Raphael. That is why the viewer can still easily recognize his work (Camesasca, 1963b).

Style and Influences

Styles

Spatial composition. Raphael's style can be distinguished from the other Renaissance painters through some educated examination. He was, of course, a skilled painter. Few at the time matched his skill. However, he was not the most skilled or the most creative painter of the Renaissance. According to Berenson (1909a), Michelangelo was "more grander and more powerful" (p. 121). Leonardo DaVinci was "more profound and more refined" (p. 121). Giorgione better portrayed "the sweet world's taste" (p. 121). And Titian and Veronese were "more full of pride and splendor" (p. 121). Although he did not compare to these great painters in skill or grandeur, Raphael did excel in style:

For the more essential matters of figure-painting, Raphael is not for a moment to be ranked on a level with the great Florentines; nor does he, like the Venetians, indelibly dye the world with resplendent colour...for movement and form were to his temperament, if not to his mind, as repugnant as ever they were to his patriarchal precursor, Duccio. (Berenson, 1909a, p. 112)

Raphael's true gift was space. He had a natural talent for spatial composition, and this is why his work is still studied today. He is widely respected more for his layout and composition than for his actual painting skills. So why do we love and appreciate the

work of Raphael as much as we do? His work reflected his views on humanity. As Berenson (1909a) notes, “Raphael has enshrined all the noble tenderness and human sublimity of Christianity, all the glamour and edifying beauty of the antique world in forms so radiant that we ever return to them to renew our inspiration” (p. 118).

More than any of his contemporaries, Raphael could be distinguished as a master of movement and spatial composition, as well as “purity of form” (Zeri, 2000, p. 17). His paintings are easily recognizable as spacious and clean. According to Berenson, Raphael “was the greatest master of Composition – whether considered as arrangement or as space – that Europe down to the end of the nineteenth Century had ever produced” (Zeri, 2000, p. 123). He of course was a talented painter, but his distinguishing quality was the way in which he laid out his canvas. No body or figure was ever placed arbitrarily. Every figure had a place to bring about an implied focal point and an established order. Also, movement was a big part of his style. The way he laid out his canvas allowed for great areas of movement that still led the viewer’s eye toward the intended focal point.

Using *The Transfiguration* as an example, Raphael used spatial composition to produce an effect of movement and energy. As Christ ascends, all of the apostles and onlookers are performing different types of movement. Their bodies are going all different directions, and their hands are gesturing every which way. Also, their facial expressions cause great movement. The way the onlookers’ eyes are gazing and how their mouths are formed cause a great scene of movement. However, because of the space around placid ascending Christ, the viewer’s eye focuses on him. To accomplish this spatial technique, Raphael puts clutter at the bottom of the painting, which causes the top

to have the appearance of more space. This space creates a visual target that draws the eyes towards that movement of Christ ascending. The two figures ascending near Him (supposedly Moses and Elijah) create a type of symmetry, which balances the painting. To produce the “clutter,” the bottom half of the painting is filled with movement and action as the Apostles and friends of Christ react to their Lord leaving the earth. In addition, the lower right half illustrates a passage from Matthew 17:14-18 where a young boy possessed by a demon is brought to the Apostles at the time of Christ’s ascension (Camesasca, 1963c). This adds even more chaos to the scene, which, in turn, actually helps make the contrast between the peaceful Christ and the chaotic earth. The emotion on their faces creates movement and turmoil as well as excitement and action, creating a true sense of action.

Another example of Raphael’s use of spatial composition is the *Holy Family Under the Oak*. In this painting, Mary and Joseph sit with infants Jesus and St. John. St. John holds a banner that reads *Ecce. Agnus. Dei. (Behold, the Lamb of God)*. The cradle in front of the two boys is inscribed with the words *Raphael Pinx.* The distant rustic backdrop adds a subtle emphasis on Mary, who is also at the center of this painting. The plain background with muted tones helps Mary’s figure stand out more and gives more emphasis to the center of the painting. The two young boys are surrounded by dirt and earth. This makes their olive skin tones stand out more against the background, adding greater emphasis to them. The way all of the figures hands are moving also creates an interesting movement to the painting. Joseph, pensively resting off to the top right side,

creates a balance with the two infants on the bottom left. The balance and the use of space make this painting beautiful and logical (Camesasca 1963c).

Another example of Raphael's exquisite use of spatial composition is the *Madonna of the Canopy*. This is one of many Madonnas he painted during this time in his life. This Madonna, however, is distinct due to all the movement in the picture and the abundance of empty background space. The characters represented in the picture are St. Peter, Augustine, Bernard, and James. The emotion on the faces of the men around the throne creates enough movement to keep the eye moving. And, the movement of the Cherubs above and below the throne makes this scene even less static. The viewer's eye continually moves around the painting because of the way all the figures are placed. Even the positioning of their hands serves to keep the eye moving around the picture, finally resting on the Madonna figure. According to legend, this painting was probably not finished by Raphael himself. Supposedly Niccolo Cassana finished it in 1700 for Prince Ferdinando de' Medici. However, Raphael certainly did the initial sketches and even most of the paintings for this wonderful piece of art (Camesasca, 1963d).

Spatial composition can also be clearly seen in his early work, *Marriage of the Virgin*. The foreground is busy with activity as Joseph prepares to wed Mary. The young women on the left are the virgins attending Mary, and the young men on the right are the unsuccessful suitors. One of them, out of frustration, is breaking his staff over his knee. Joseph, the male in the center, is offering Mary a wedding ring. The movement of the female figures is slight as is the movement of the male figures. However, their facial expressions cause most of the movement. The way the figures are placed in the scene also

creates an interesting effect. There is basic symmetry, but not enough to cause boredom to the viewers. It is just enough off-centered to create more visual stimulation. The background is of a temple that, according to Raphael, is “centrally-planned” (Berenson, 1963c, p. 119). It is a contemporary version of Bramante’s *Tempietto*, and once again Raphael borrowed a few ideas from those who painted before him. The earth-toned background also helps set the figures apart from the backdrop. It places emphasis on the temple in the background and on the main event of the draping (Berenson, 1909).

Influences

Humanism. In his paintings, Raphael tried to associate beautiful things with human good. This mindset hinges from his Umbrian School upbringing. (Freedberg, 1961, p. 128). His paintings were so pure and so beautiful that it placed him among the Humanist painters. He portrayed human good and purity with his paintings, and this made his followers love him and his works even more (Berenson 1909). He applied to his art what he had learned in Florence. He had received a greater appreciation of naturalism and humanism, and this influenced much of his work. His upbringing had influenced him to lean more towards Humanism, but his visit to Florence certainly affirmed this position (Shipp, 1950).

Umbrian School. Raphael was also a part of the Urbino movement. The Urbino art movement, also known as the Umbrian School, was “a school of provincial art, reflecting belatedly movements of the cities, being more naïve in subject and approach, more religious minded, less hectic in its portrayal of life. Moreover, it loves landscapes and open spaces, re-creates continually the beautiful river valley and distant blue

mountains” (Berenson, 1957, p. 94). This mindset can be seen in many of Raphael’s works. He loved landscapes and often included trees and meadows in his portraits and his Madonnas. He preferred to paint his portraits with an outdoor backdrop than with an indoor backdrop. He often times included animals in his paintings to give it a more human feel. Some of his paintings are hectic and chaotic simply because of the nature of the painting, but Raphael preferred serene and peace-loving scenes. These characteristics stem from Raphael’s Urbino upbringing and Humanistic worldview (Shipp, 1950).

Contemporary influences. Raphael was a creative artist, but he was known more for his ability to borrow others’ ideas than for his own creativity. He had a tendency to absorb ideas from his contemporaries and make them his own by performing them better than the originator had (Camesasca, 1963c). His trip to Florence greatly encouraged his tendency to do this because he was around so many of the best artists in Europe at the time (Berenson, 1909). He was mostly influenced by his famous contemporaries, Leonardo DaVinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti (Kleiner & Mamiya, 2005). While in Florence, he also studied the works of Timoteo Viti, Pintoricchio, Fra Bartolomeo, and Sebastian del Piombo. (Berenson, 1909).

One classic example of Raphael’s “borrowing” technique is the *Stanza della Segnatura*. The four walls of this stanza were decorated with ornaments around the edges. This was not a new idea, but the way Raphael used the old designs made a new and creatively interesting design in itself. The patterns were rhythmic and luxurious, blending well with the rich upholstery of the room (Freedberg, 1967).

Another example of Raphael borrowing styles is his portrait of *Baldassore Castiglione*. The position in which he poses is very similar to the DaVinci's *Mona Lisa* (Kleiner & Mamiya, 2005). His *Sposalizio* had the same grouping in the foreground and the middle as Perufinos version in the Sistine Chapel. The painting also had a closed horizon with a domed temple (Berenson, 1909). Also, in the *Transfiguration*, Raphael most likely borrowed ideas about Christ and the seven Apostles from Sebastiano's fresco called the *Transfiguration*, which was painted at S. Pietro in Montorio. Most would say this was a great improvement, even though he did borrow the ideas from the original artist (Gould, 1957). Again, though his ideas were not always original, he managed to make them better once he used the idea.

Conclusion

Raphael was a painter that most people tend to pass over. When the great Italian Masters are spoken about, his name is mentioned causally as a tail end of the line of artists such as Michelangelo and DaVinci. True, their works are much more famous than his, but more of Raphael's works hold their own in the world of art recognition. *The School of Athens* is perhaps just as famous as *The Last Supper* or the *Mona Lisa*.

Raphael's style was much different than his predecessors. He had a smooth style, and he loved to focus more on the spatial composition than on the actual painting. His paintings show great movement and emotion, and the viewer finds it hard to focus on just one figure in his paintings. He found an interesting balance between his Umbrian upbringing and his Florentine influence. He remained a Humanist until the end, and his paintings show this.

Towards the end of his life, his services were so in demand by the Pope and other royalty that he had little time to focus on quality. This has led some to conclude that his paintings in the later years were of lesser quality than those in his younger years. This overwork may also have led to his untimely death. Raphael was dedicated to his work, up until the very end. He loved drawing and painting, and he was able to show his devotion and his religion through his artwork.

Much can be determined about Raphael through his artwork. After seeing only a few of his paintings, one can assume that he had some religious connection. The majority of his paintings dealt with scenes from the Bible or portraits of Christian martyrs. He also painted many Papal portraits and portraits of friends of the Pope. This would also point towards a strong religious connection. And, if the viewer assumed these things, they would be correct. Raphael was a very religious man, and this showed through quite strongly in his work. Many of his paintings were Madonnas, which also point toward a Roman Catholic background. Most people at that time were Roman Catholic and somewhat religious. Raphael's religious influence may have also stemmed from his family upbringing or even from his time in Florence. Even a casual observer would be able to sense Raphael's devotion to the Madonna figure. He portrayed her much differently than the other people of his era. He, of course, respected her holiness and deity, but he represented her in such a way that she became more human. He gave her human qualities and loving features, which changed the way people of that era viewed Mary from then on. This was also one of the reasons Raphael is one of the most beloved of that era. He added a sensitivity and pure beauty to his figures.

More than just religious themes, Raphael's love and passion for his religion and his God that showed through in his artwork. The passion behind these paintings is incredible. The time spent making each wrinkle, each piece of fabric, each action really makes the entire painting as a whole look perfect. The movement he created by placing the figures in certain positions makes the picture almost look real. His creative imagination helped create the layout and the movement of these paintings.

Today he is considered one of the great Italian masters, grouped in with Michelangelo and DaVinci – and for good reason. All three of them had incredible talent. All of them created works that have lasted centuries and are considered to be some of the best artwork in the world. They have all stood the test of time, and they all lived at the same time. It is interesting to see how much each one of them influenced the other. Without one of the three, the other two might not have reached such artistic excellence. I know this is the case with Raphael. He studied other masters very intently in order to come up with his own style of painting. Some think that it was copying others' styles instead of developing his own, but others will agree that this is how anyone learns. People learn by watching other people. Raphael certainly learned much by auditing his contemporaries and being eager enough to learn all that he could. His efforts paid off, and today Raphael is known as one of the greatest painters of all time.

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