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Eloquence in Raphael Drawings

Ben Thomas and Catherine Whistler

Some aspects of our research on the eloquence of Raphael's drawings are discussed here in an essay in honour of Paul Joannides, whose depth of knowledge and visual sensitivity in relation to the art of Raphael have been an inspiration to us. The concept of eloquence opens many avenues for exploration, which will inform the presentation of an exhibition on Raphael at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and at the Albertina in Vienna in 2017 [put exact dates in footnote]. As we discuss below, the 'eloquence' of Raphael's drawings is evidenced as much by his artful handling of materials in creating them, as encompassed by what they represented to the courtly culture infused with rhetorical ideas in which he worked. In this essay we raise questions on the character and formation of Raphael's visual language; the rhetorical or persuasive nature of drawing; and the relationship of drawing to contemporary literary debates on style and invention.

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St. Paul, accompanied by St. Barnabas, healed a crippled man at Lystra in Asia Minor, a miracle that inspired the natives of that city to attempt to make a sacrifice to him as they believed him to be Mercury the god of eloquence 'because he was the chief speaker', and to Barnabas as Jupiter. Responding to this unspeakable blasphemy the two apostles 'rent their clothes'.¹ Paul's eloquence was not that of the conventional orator: 'and I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech', Paul wrote to the Corinthians, 'and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power'.²

Raphael drew the moment when words failed the apostle in a remarkable metalpoint study now in the J. Paul Getty Museum collection, 'capturing perfectly the high emotional pitch of the action' as Paul Joannides aptly put it.³ (Fig.1) Eyes closed, brow knotted and face turned away in anger, Paul, moved by the power of the spirit, tears at his toga, the *pentimenti* of the left hand suggesting violent movement. Paul's emotional response to blasphemy, his 'demonstration of the spirit', could be said to be the opposite of invention in rhetoric (*inventio*), or 'finding what to say', and rather evacuates invention with a surpassing gesture (*actio* or *hypokrisis*). This 'acting out' of what cannot be said stands as a performative critique of sophistry, yet remains etymologically close to hypocrisy. Raphael's drawing, however, understood by analogy with the art of rhetoric, is an invention. The sureness with which he handles the metalpoint does not dissemble: what he has discovered here through drawing is the image of 'mute eloquence'. Strictly speaking, it is a visual realisation of 'adynaton' or the inexpressibility trope.⁴

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¹ Acts, 14, 8-18.

² 1 Corinthians, 2, 2-4. On the question of whether Paul's level of interest in rhetoric, see J. Paul Sampley and P. Lampe, eds, *Paul and Rhetoric*, London, 2010.

³ P. Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, Oxford, 1983, p. 225, cat. no. 364.

⁴ For a convenient listing of rhetorical tropes, see B. Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, Oxford, 1998, pp. 491-498.

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In Raphael's cartoon for the tapestry of the *Sacrifice at Lystra* in the Victoria and Albert Museum, for which the Getty metalpoint drawing is a study, Barnabas's pleas - perhaps a more measured reaction to the misplaced if well-intended sacrifice - effectively persuade a young man in the crowd to intervene to prevent the axe's blow from falling on the waiting sacrificial ox. Or perhaps it was, after all, Paul's disruption of ordered speech - his rending of his garments - that proved effective. Mercury, the god with whom Paul has been mistakenly identified, presides in the form of a nude bronze statue over these events, placed in the background of the 'tragic' scene staged by Raphael. The theme of Paul's apostolic confrontation with idolatry - 'the gods are come down to us in the likeness of men' - is played out in a brilliantly orchestrated composition of surging figures framed, as Shearman has argued, by Raphael's adaptation of the antique conventions of *allocutio* and *immolatio*.⁵

Whether or not the historical Paul was schooled in rhetoric, in the context of Pope Leo X's Sistine Chapel, he stood for an ideal of unifying Christian eloquence following the disputes around conciliarism during the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-17). The Medici Pope had introduced rules to reform the lengthy and flattering sermons bristling with Ciceronian ornaments that had flourished in the Sistine Chapel under his predecessor Julius II, and which had attracted criticism from Erasmus.⁶ Raphael gave form in his designs for a set of tapestries for the Sistine Chapel to this simpler, apostolic eloquence - as has been analysed before - through Paul's commanding gestures that stylistically combine, through imitation, the *quattrocento* example of Masaccio with the antique (the rending of garments even bringing to mind the example of Giotto).

It can be demonstrated that Raphael knew of and identified with St. Paul's ambivalence concerning eloquent speech and the sacred. In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul described an ecstatic vision, possibly the moment of his conversion, where 'he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter'.⁷ Raphael, demonstrating a theological sophistication not matched by the quality of the poetry, refers to this passage in the opening quatrain to a sonnet written on a sheet of studies for the *Disputa*, in the Ashmolean Museum (Fig.2, Fig.3):

Just as Paul could not speak of the hidden God,
Once descended from heaven,
So my heart with a loving veil,
Covered all my thoughts.

Como non podde dir d'arcana Dei
Paul como discesso fu dal cello,
cusì el mio cor d'uno amoroso velo

⁵ ↓ Shearman, *Raphael's Cartoons in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen and Tapestries for the Sistine Chapel*, Oxford, 1972, p. 93.

⁶ Shearman, *Raphael's Cartoons*, p. 16.

⁷ 2 Corinthians, 12, 4.

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a ricoperto tutti i pensier mei.⁸

By extension we could say that in Raphael's drawings, therefore, form veils thought revealing as it conceals. The idea of style as clothing for invention is discussed in texts by authors close to Raphael debating the literary theory of imitation: the exchange of letters between Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Pietro Bembo in 1512-13. These cite the earlier critique of eclectic imitation by Paolo Cortesi in a dispute with Angelo Poliziano where injudicious eclecticism in a text is compared to a pawnshop where 'one often finds hanging there the overcoats, cloaks, raincoats and travelling coats of many men'.⁹ Similarly, Pico states that the orator should not 'pluck features out here and there and stitch together his speech from dissimilar styles like a patchwork quilt out of different pieces of cloth'.¹⁰ The 'loving veil' that clothes the forceful eloquence of the spirit should be appropriate to its innate character, or in rhetorical terms the style should follow the invention: 'they used to dress the soul with different habits just as we dress the body with clothes'.¹¹

But how is appropriate style judged? What is it that guides the selection and imitation of the best aspects of the best writers so that the result is not patchwork and random? According to Pico stylistic judgements are guided by an innate idea of good style, and reflect the individual character of each writer. To this Platonic notion of psychology, Bembo offered a more Aristotelian response – as if recalling the complementary gestures of the two great philosophers designed by Raphael at the focal point of his *School of Athens* - 'but it's your business if you see in your soul an idea and form of writing planted there and handed down by nature. I can speak to you only of my own soul. I saw no form of style in it, no pattern of discourse before I developed myself in mind and thought by reading the books of the ancients over the course of many years, by long labour, practice and exercise'.¹² Although Pico and Bembo disagreed amicably about the best procedure to follow in imitating ancient authors, and on the relative importance of Cicero as a model to follow, both agreed on the fundamental importance of Christian sincerity: as Pico put it, referring once more to St. Paul, 'I would value most of all the sort of imitation that the Apostle Paul talks about. For although I have no doubt that correct speech and brilliant discourse are a gift of god, since the gift of elegant speech is numbered among goods, nonetheless, if there is no underlying solidity of honourable activity, and activity concerned with our ultimate happiness, will Cicero's words be anything but "empty sounds without meaning, musical trifles"?'¹³

⁸ Ashmolean Museum, Inv. WA1846.187, K. Parker, *Catalogue of the collection of drawings in the Ashmolean Museum, II, Italian Schools*, Oxford, 1956, cat. no. 546, verso (Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, cat. no. 221v); J. Shearman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources*, New Haven and London, 2003, vol. 1, p. 134. For a discussion of this poem, see also Shearman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources*, p. 90 and more recently C. Kleinbub, 'Raphael's "Transfiguration" as Visio-Devotional Programme', *Art Bulletin*, 90, 3, 2008, p. 369.

⁹ Joann Dellaneva, ed., *Ciceronian Controversies*, Cambridge, Mass, 2007, p. 15.

¹⁰ Dellaneva, *Ciceronian Controversies*, p. 109.

¹¹ Dellaneva, *Ciceronian Controversies*, p. 39. For similar passages on clothing inventions see p. 111 and p. 117.

¹² Dellaneva, *Ciceronian Controversies*, p. 51.

¹³ Dellaneva, *Ciceronian Controversies*, p. 123.

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Raphael's process of invention, as revealed by his drawings, is usually associated with the eclectic imitation guided by an innate idea of good style advocated by Pico, who cited in support of it Cicero's story of how the painter Zeuxis in order to paint an image of perfect female beauty selected the best features of 'five Crotonian maidens who were celebrated for their beauty'.¹⁴ This association of Raphael with idealism became particularly strong following the publication of the second edition of Vasari's biography of Raphael in 1568, where a well-known analysis is supplied of the artist's stylistic development by imitating a range of artists from Perugino through Leonardo to Michelangelo, but it was established in the literature on art after the publication of a letter purportedly by Raphael himself in 1559 apparently supporting an idealist position. Whether it was written by Raphael or, as Shearman has argued, by Baldesar Castiglione the apparent addressee, the letter referring to the fresco of *Galatea* (c. 1514) in Agostino Chigi's villa demonstrates that Raphael's works were interpreted using the terms of these contemporary literary debates.¹⁵

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Castiglione, apparently, had praised the *Galatea* and, in reply, Raphael argued that in order to paint a beautiful woman he needed to see several 'with the proviso that your honour be with me to choose the best'. However, as he is deprived both of beautiful women and of good judges of beauty, Raphael made use of a 'certain idea which comes to mind'.¹⁶ The tone of the letter is self-deprecatory since Raphael implies that, in the absence of Castiglione's superior judgement of beauty, he had to rely on his own inferior resources. The elegant compliment paid to Raphael in *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, where his name is implicitly linked with Apelles's understanding of female beauty, is here returned by putting the non-artist Castiglione in the place of Zeuxis. However, Raphael's nonchalant allusion to his 'certa Idea', suggests that he believed that a poet's ability to correctly appraise the visual arts is due to the fact that both painter and poet employ a similar judgement in their respective forms of imitation.

However, if we return to the Getty study of St. Paul rending his garments, the drawing is perhaps more eloquent of Bembo's 'long labour, practice and exercise' than of Pico's innate idea. Long-rehearsed linear patterns can be traced in the construction of the folds that encase the bent right leg in long looping oval lines, and which provide a zig-zagging surge of bands of cloth up the column of drapery supporting and framing the culminating ripping gesture. This particular method of constructing drapery patterns from within oval loops around the fulcrum of a bent knee goes back to Raphael's origins as a draughtsman: see, for example, the sketchy figure of an angel in the compositional study in Lille (Fig.4) for the early *Coronation of St. Nicholas of Tolentino* (c.1500) which, at least from

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¹⁴ Dellaneva, *Ciceronian Controversies*, p. 23.

¹⁵ The letter was first published by Lodovico Dolce in *Lettere di diversi eccellentiss. huomini*, Venice, 1559. J. Shearman, 'Castiglione's Portrait of Raphael', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorisches Institutes in Florenz*, 38, 1994, 69-97.

¹⁶ V. Golzio, *Raffaello nei documenti*, Vatican City, 1936, p. 31: '...mi bisogneria veder più belle, con questa condizione: che V.S. si trovasse meco a far scelta del meglio... Io mi servo di certa Idea, che mi viene nella mente. Se questa ha in sè alcuna eccellenza d'arte, io non so; ben m'affatico di haverla'.

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the waist down, has much in common with the later, more accomplished study of St. Paul. Raphael carried his exploration of this drapery construction over onto the verso of the sheet, and variations of the same problem recur on other later sheets such as the British Museum's sheet with a study in profile of a young woman's head alongside drapery, or more brilliantly in the Ashmolean's stunning black chalk study for the drapery of a scholar in the *Disputa* (Fig. 5).¹⁷

Although it is inevitably hampered by the hazards of survival, the study of such recurring motifs across Raphael's drawn oeuvre – his rhythmic reiteration and creative variation upon practised formulae – reveals a different type of eloquence in the drawings to that understood through analogy with rhetoric. Viewed from this perspective, the drawings speak with great immediacy of the creative discovery of viable formal solutions *through* the practice of making, and from *within* the material constraints of technique and the acquired habits of a trained hand. This is what, in relation to Giambattista Tiepolo, Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall called the 'medium-reinforced function of invention', which produces drawings in which 'the lines have a grammar and gait derived not so much from the edges of things as from an athletic hand enjoying exercise on a sheet'.¹⁸ Of course, Raphael was not Tiepolo, and his drawings have a very different character as we would expect of the product of a late fifteenth-century artistic training. However, the early Lille sheet is revealing, in a way that makes these observations on Tiepolo relevant, for its juxtaposition of different types of preparatory drawing within the same compositional study: as Joannides notes 'the upper figures were probably first studied on separate sheets and then transferred to their places here. Raphael shows God the Father and the Virgin as studio models, but St. Augustine has here been given his final (?) characterization'.¹⁹ While these upper figures do reveal the careful checking of figural inventions against the pose of the *garzone* in the studio, the drawing of the lower figures of the angel, St. Nicholas and Satan demonstrate their construction by a hand improvising within established conventions and without reference to a model (see, for example, the abbreviated geometrical construction used to establish the foreshortening of St. Nicholas's head).

Attending to this aspect of Raphael's drawings, therefore, tends to cast doubt on the association of his art with 'the Idea', or what social anthropologist Tim Ingold has called the 'hylomorphic model' of creativity where the art work is the result of the transposition of a conceptual image, or formal template, into a material object. To demonstrate the shortcomings of hylomorphism, Ingold carried out with his students an experiment in traditional basket weaving on a beach near Aberdeen. Vertical lengths of willow were stuck into the sand, tied at the top to form a circle, and then horizontal pieces of willow were woven between the verticals to form the basket. Although each student was attempting to produce the same basket, each worked at a slightly different speed and rhythm,

¹⁷ Respectively, Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, cat. no. 55 recto, British Museum, London, Inv.1947, 010.11.19, and Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, cat. no. 218v, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Parker, *Italian Schools*, p. 545, Inv. 1846.186.

¹⁸ S. Alpers and M. Baxandall, *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence*, New Haven and London, 1994, p. 55 and p. 62.

¹⁹ Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, p. 38.

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experienced the resistance of the wood differently according to their strength, or tied the verticals together at a different height related to their own size. Another unforeseen variant was that 'a persistent, strengthening wind was bending all the verticals of the frame in one direction, with an inclination that increased with height'. The result of this 'confluence of forces and materials' was that each basket differed 'uniquely reflecting the mood and temperament, as well as the physical stature of its maker'.²⁰ This sense of ideas or designs coming into being through the process of working with materials, as much as through abstract thought-processes that precede such making, is given a more philosophical explanation in Jean-Luc Nancy's analysis of 'the pleasure in drawing': 'the *design* of art is its *idea* as idea – form, scheme, and rhythm – of that which is not achieved in any Idea, ideal, ideology, or ideation', or more simply 'it is the impetus of a form that seeks itself and only finds itself in search of itself'.²¹

This seeking quality of drawn line, its impetus towards the precise calibration of formal tension, is most evident in the Getty drawing of St. Paul in the upper half of the figure. (Fig.1) Here *pentimenti* around the Saint's left shoulder and elbow and also his right elbow, suggest that this remained a crucially unresolved area of the design when the artist began this drawing (assuming the existence of other studies prior to this one). A tendency to bisect the figure in adapting or developing a design can be seen clearly in an earlier, although technically similar, metalpoint drawing in the British Museum (Fig.6), which became the model for an engraving of *Venus and Cupid* by Marcantonio Raimondi, and which shows Raphael dramatically altering his design for the figure of Venus by pasting a new set of legs over the original figure, effectively cutting it in half.²² The subject of the engraving – the image of perfect female beauty – brings to mind the problematic 'idea of beauty' associated with Raphael discussed above. However, this drawing of the female nude reveals him tackling an artistic difficulty through a process of quite literally combining alternative sections of the pose. The drawing also shows Raphael transforming a contrapposto device which he had appropriated from Leonardo da Vinci (for example, his pen and ink study after Leonardo's *Leda and the Swan* in the Royal Collection), and which also refers to the example of the antique.²³ Here the drawing carries with it the history of the form, as a type of visual memory, while it is subjected to creative analysis through splitting and recombination of its elements.

This type of dissective approach could be related to Alberti's suggestion concerning drawing in Book 3 of *De Pictura* that 'it will help to divide the modules into parallels in order that in the public work everything may be ordered in its proper place as though drawn from private notebooks' (the extent to which Raphael's drawings reveal him to be a reader of Alberti is an intriguing

²⁰ T. Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, London and New York, 2013, pp. 22–24.

²¹ J.-L. Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, trans. Philip Armstrong, New York, 2013, p. 51 and p. 55.

²² Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, p. 286. Joannides notes the possibility that it may be related to the *School of Athens* and record an initial idea of pairing sculptures of Apollo and Venus in the framing architecture of the scene.

²³ Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, p. 98 (Royal Collection 12759).

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question).²⁴ This principle of modular division and combination is evident in even the most rapid of Raphael's sketches, where hooked strokes of the pen that designate essential semantic units – the body's members reduced to underlying geometrical forms indicating arms, legs, torso, head – are rapidly conjugated to explore a complex variety of potential forms. The supreme example of this procedure from among Raphael's drawings is the sheet of studies for a *Resurrection* in the Ashmolean (306v) covered in, to quote Alpers and Baxandall, 'manual thinking aloud'.²⁵ (Fig. 7) Although this precious insight into the artist's creative process was presumably only preserved because of the nude studies from the model on the reverse of the sheet, Joannides was correct to see in this rare survival an instance where Raphael's 'fecundity of invention... matches the triumphant energy of the draughtsmanship'.²⁶ One of a group of studies for an unexecuted altarpiece for the Chigi Chapel at S.Maria della Pace, Rome, this was followed by a series of studies from the model that put flesh on the bones of these 'pensieri'. However, the detailed studies should not be taken too literally as simple transcriptions of models before the artist's eyes: for example, as the confusing proliferation of limbs in the black chalk study of three guards in the Duke of Devonshire collection, Chatsworth shows, the additive and recombinatory process of design continues in these drawings which, in spite of their content, are far from being static 'academy' studies of the nude.²⁷

Even when sketchy and quick, as in the Ashmolean sheet of brilliant sketches for the *Resurrection*, Raphael's draughtsmanship conveys a mastery that suggests another of Alberti's insights: that 'the hand will proceed most rapidly which is well guided by a certain rule of the mind'. Intellectual understanding of form precedes execution in a successful drawing, although this understanding is also arrived at through long practice in drawing. At this level – how mind and hand together discover eloquent form – it is perhaps most instructive to consider Raphael drawings out of chronological sequence, and separately from project-based teleological sequences that impose a retrospective coherence on the evolution of designs. As we have seen, the structure of folds creating the coherence rent asunder in Paul's gesture of abhorrence – what has been described here as a visual 'inexpressibility trope' – was one constructed by Raphael over and over again until it became second nature: thought *revealed* through a loving veil.

Of course, the process of designing through combining modules recommended by Alberti, is analogous to the process of literary composition through combining quotations or ornaments recorded in notes, or even of improvising speeches by drawing on memorised topics, that have as their basis the rules of classical rhetoric. The culture in which Raphael worked was saturated by rhetorical ideas to the extent that understanding the pressing issue of courtly behaviour – 'la forma di cortegiania' as Castiglione put it – was predicated on imitation of

²⁴ L. B. Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. J. R. Spencer, New Haven and London, 1966, p. 135, note 18: 'Quove id certius teneamus modulos in paralellos dividere iuvabit ut in public opera cuncta veluti ex privatis comentariis ducta suis sedibus collocentur'

²⁵ S. Alpers and M. Baxandall, *Tiepolo*, New Haven and London, 1994, p. 60.

²⁶ Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, p. 90.

²⁷ Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, 311; Chatsworth 20.

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Cicero's attempt to describe the perfect orator. Raphael, himself an accomplished courtier, certainly adapted his art for a courtly audience and it is possible to draw parallels between his drawings with aspects of literary practice in a way which the art itself seems to invite.

For example, Raphael's use of quotation can appear knowing and complex: a notable instance being the use of the head of Laocoön from the antique sculpture grouping for the figure of Homer in the *Parnassus* fresco in the Stanza della Segnatura. A pen and ink drawing at Windsor (Fig.8) of the heads of three poets in Parnassus contains a study based on the Laocoön that is, as Joannides put it, 'a brilliant reinterpretation of a cry of pain as a moment of poetic inspiration'.²⁸ However, it is not clear that this is a copy made directly from the Laocoön. In fact the angle of the head, and the treatment of the beard as playful 'fusili'-like curls, suggests that it is a creative adaptation based on memory rather than direct observation. Nor is there anything in this carefully drawn and remarkably precise study to confirm the identification of this head, at this stage in the design process, with Homer. Because this is a familiar sheet with a clear relationship to the *Parnassus* fresco, questions such as how Raphael went about making the drawing, how he conceived of the *mise en page* (full face seen from below/three-quarter profile/profile?), in what sequence the heads were drawn, were they intended as studies for pre-allocated poets thus 'expressing' their character (agony/concern/composure?), or are they just generically characterful heads (Dante being the obvious exception here), tend to be obscured by a teleological interpretive bias to see in the drawing the resulting finished work.

Another example might be to see in Raphael's interest in expressive contrasts a visual translation of the rhetorical trope of antithesis, so that the majestic auxiliary cartoon in the Ashmolean for Saints Peter and John in the *Transfiguration* altarpiece (Fig.9) could be interpreted as structured around the opposites of youth and age, of closed and open hand gestures, that together elevate the design to the highest tragic style.²⁹ Yet even here the *pentimenti* around Peter's thumbs display Raphael's restless inventiveness unconstrained by any programmatic attempt to translate rhetorical tropes to a visual language. On a sheet of paper with a drawing of a foreshortened man leaning on a parapet for the fresco of the *Disputa* in the Vatican, Raphael worked on the draft of a sonnet, listing alternative end rhymes for his lines.³⁰ The juxtaposition of foreshortening and rhyme is suggestive, if probably casual, as both involve a concern with providing accents within a rhythmic structure – as well as aiming to give pleasure to the listener or beholder while drawing them in to a complex composition. Our goal in attending to these properties of Raphael's drawings is not to attempt a close mapping of formal motifs to rhetorical tropes, but rather to explore broader structural equivalencies between the arts opened up by a shared concern with eloquence.³¹

²⁸ Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, p. 192, 241v.

²⁹ Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, p. 437, Parker, *Italian Schools*, p. 568.

³⁰ Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, cat. no. 225r, Montpellier, Musée Fabre 3184.

³¹ An example of this type of approach is D. Summers, 'Contrapposto: Style and Meaning', *Art Bulletin*, 59, 1977, pp. 336-361.

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The extent to which Raphael was aware of or even concerned by the difference between the two types of eloquence in drawing outlined here is difficult to assess. We shall conclude here by considering the artist's design for *The Judgement of Paris*, which because it was intended for an engraving – a relatively autonomous work of art – might be said to come closest to expressing his artistic intentions free from patronal influence and would have been understood by contemporaries as evidence of his *innate disegno*. *The Judgement of Paris* print by Marcantonio Raimondi (Fig.10) after a design by Raphael could be said to inhabit the same matrix of themes concerning love, the judgement of beauty and the theory of imitation explored in the writings of Raphael's literary friends, such as Bembo and Castiglione.³² Within this context it is permissible to interpret Paris's role in judging the beauty of the goddesses as analogous to the judgement practised by the artist Zeuxis when he selected five Crotonese beauties in order to make his image of Helen. The complementary sequence of views of female nudity in the print, therefore, might figure the conceptual process of synthesis involved in the eclectic method of imitation, the different view of each goddess adding up to a single idea of beauty (similar interpretations have also been made of the beautiful red chalk drawing in Windsor of the Three Graces as the 'unfolding of a single form').³³

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Since the print aspires to the connotative complexity of a literary text, further levels of allusion can be discovered. The particular motif of the undressing Minerva – so pivotal in knitting together each half of the composition – could be interpreted as carrying with it more subtle references to Pliny's exemplary anecdotes about ancient artistic competitions. The dramatic gesture with which she removes her clothing – shedding the 'amoroso velo' - recalls the tale of the fictive curtain painted by Parrhasius, which deceived Zeuxis into taking it for a real object hiding a work of art. The combination of hidden face with drapery recalls Pliny's account of Timanthes's painting of the *Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, where the artist 'not having any way in which to show the grief of the father... threw a drape over his head and let his most bitter grief be imagined, even though it was not seen', as Alberti put it when recommending this example of invention in his *On Painting*.³⁴ Both Parrhasius and Timanthes were praised in antiquity for their ability to represent the unrepresentable, or as Castiglione put it in his dedicatory epistle to *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, referring explicitly to the works of Raphael, to make apparent 'quello che non è'. There is a complex play of notions of veiling and revealing being enacted in Minerva's gesture, with which she apparently presents to Paris the unadorned 'naked' truth (as Castiglione claimed to be doing in his dialogue), while simultaneously alluding to the artist's powers of deception, exemplified in stories about hiding.

As a key compositional element which does not derive from the antique relief in Palazzo Medici in Rome upon which Raphael based his composition, Minerva signifies the dialectic exchange between work and source, serving as a means by

³² Ben Thomas, "'The art consists of hiding the art': Castiglione and Raphael', eds. Antonella Braida and Giuliana Pieri, *Image and Word: Reflections of Art and Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Oxford, 2003, pp. 134–150.

³³ Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, pp. 118, 408.

³⁴ Pliny, *Natural History* XXXV, 65 and 73; Alberti, *On Painting*, p. 78.

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which the imitation's superiority can be gauged. Where Raphael departs significantly from the imitation of his source it is to introduce into the design forms which had proved among the most resilient and adaptable in his personal vocabulary. For example, the undressing goddess, and the nearby reclining River god, can also be found as ideas for astonished guards in a *Resurrection*. (Fig. 7, Fig. 11) A black chalk drawing in the Ashmolean Museum, the reverse of the sheet of rapid pen and ink sketches discussed above, shows a nude man sitting awkwardly on a rock, the torsion of his back and raised arm prefiguring in reverse the gesture of Minerva. Ultimately, the descent of the motif of the undressing Minerva (and also of the River god) can be traced back to a red chalk drawing in the Ashmolean Museum of a group of fighting nude men, which Raphael also included in the *School of Athens* in the fictive relief below the statue of Apollo.³⁵ (Fig.12) This in turn can be seen as evidence of Raphael's response to the epoch-defining cartoon of the *Battle of Cascina* (c. 1504) by Michelangelo, which the younger artist had studied in Florence before moving to Rome. The figure seen from the back is particularly close to two of Michelangelo's bathers, notably the one known as *The Climber* from Raimondi's print after it.

Minerva's gesture, therefore, reveals the trace of Raphael's working method – the process of reversal, bifurcation, and adaptation by which his particular *maniera* was formed; and it does so against the background of respectful imitation of the antique as if to juxtapose the two types of eloquence discovered in Raphael's drawings. It is as if Raphael inserts himself into the myth of the shepherd judge by means of this signature figure, thereby confronting antiquity with the genealogy of his individual style. Minerva's gesture is a double one, however, since it announces Raphael's status as an author, through inter-textual allusion and an emulative critique of the anonymous Roman artist's treatment of *istoria*, while simultaneously revealing the irreducibly visual process of formal development on which this claim rests. The grace of the gesture consists in allowing a glimpse of difficulty behind the veil of facility. This act of unveiling in a mythic context can be compared with St. Paul's spiritually inspired tearing of his garments: both gestures revealing the force of Raphael's drawing, and its intrinsic eloquence.

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³⁵ Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael*, cat. no. 233 (Ashmolean 552).