

High Renaissance

Raphael Santi (or Sanzio) 1483-1520

Early Life and Influences

Raphael was born in Urbino. His father was a painter and probably his first teacher. After his father died he was apprenticed to the artist Perugino. Perugino's style was sweet and devout and as a result Raphael absorbed this style also creating harmonious and beautiful images. He also learnt from other artists. In 1504 he arrived in Florence at the time when Michelangelo's David was being put in place and the work of Leonardo was known far and wide. Many artists would be discouraged by these genius' but Raphael was eager to learn from them. Unlike Leonardo and Michelangelo, Raphael was even tempered and easy to work with, he completed commissions without getting involved in politics or other controversial matters.

'Madonna in the Meadow', 1505-1506, oil on wood

- Raphael is known for his paintings of the Madonna and Child.
- This composition echoes Leonardo's pyramidal compositions. The Madonna forms the centre of the triangle in the foreground and the other figures are contained within her.
- The deep colours of her clothes emphasise the triangle and force John the Baptist and Christ further into the foreground.
- John is at the left corner and Christ at the right.
- Raphael uses contrapposto and imbalance to create a sense of motion, and intertwines the figures through gesture and expression. Mary's right side is highlighted to emphasise the tilt of her body, and her right leg fully crosses her body, stretching across the width of the painting forming a diagonal.
- Great tenderness is shown by the artist in the painting of the children and the poses with the mother.
- All three figures are linked through touches and looks.
- With her eyes fixed on Christ, Mary's head is turned to the left and slightly inclined, and in her hands she holds up Christ, as he leans forward unsteadily to touch the miniature cross held by John.
- Jesus steps towards John, with his foot angled outward so that he also appears to be moving closer to the viewer. His back foot is lifting off the ground, tipping him off balance so that he leans on his mother's arm for balance. John and Jesus look at each other, and are connected by their common gesture of grasping a cross. John kneels with his right leg and arm lower than his left leg and arm, tilting him toward the viewer.
- The position of each figure creates a sense of liveliness.
- The mother herself is one of Raphael's typical Madonnas, beautiful, gentle, and caring; she tenderly caresses the children.
- He also adopts Leonardo's sfumato technique. All edges are softened and sharp edges are avoided.
- The landscape behind is natural and suggests that Raphael may have been familiar with the Venetian landscape painter Giorgione. The landscape in the background is filled with graceful curves, and this is connected to the figures through the Madonna's neckline and

shoulders, which also curve softly.

- The poppy in the mid ground refers to Christ's passion, death and resurrection.
- The royal colours of her gold-bordered blue mantle set against a red dress out from the harmonious background.
- The blue symbolizes the church and the red Christ's death
- Raphael contrasts earthy tones and deeper shades in the middle and foreground against the pale, bluish background.
- Raphael creates depth in the middle ground by showing small trees.
- Raphael has used atmospheric perspective to show the background is far away from us in the pale shades, blue tint, and smudged lines of the hills and village across the lake.
- Raphael also picked up on Leonardo's use of fine chiaroscuro to model the figures so that they appear to take up actual space within the picture
- Each figure casts a shadow on the ground, and the shadowing between Mary and Jesus creates space between them to create volume.
- The only uneasy sign in this painting is the Christ Child grasping the cross of St. John, which is likely a means of foretelling the future Passion of Christ.



The kind of peacefulness and harmony of the painting was held in high regard by Renaissance patrons, and after Raphael completed this work he would be asked to paint a fresco for an even more powerful patron – the pope – at the Vatican *stanze* in Rome.

'The School of Athens', 1509, Raphael Rooms

- After some years in Florence Raphael went to Rome where Pope Julius II found work for him.
- Raphael was known as a great space composer and the 'School of Athens' in the Vatican's Stanza della Segnatura shows this.
- The fresco is considered one of the greatest Renaissance works.
- The fresco is part of a series of rooms decorated by Raphael.
- This one in particular celebrates the importance of books and learning.
- The style of the figures in the fresco reminds us that Michelangelo was working at the same time on the Sistine Chapel and that Raphael may have had a secret viewing.
- The fresco itself includes 21 distinct figures set against an imaginary backdrop of a school. The figures are engaged in conversation, work or games. All of the figures are male and are



believed to represent all significant Greek philosophers.

- The fresco also includes images of statues within the school displayed within the school. One statue is Apollo, the Greek god of light, archery and music, holding a lyre. The other statue is Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, shown in her Roman form as Minerva.
- The building itself is shown in a cross-shape with the figures in the foreground and the interior receding behind them. The figures are scattered across steps and walkways within the school and the fresco is framed with an arch decorated with arabesque swastikas.
- The artist studied the ruins of the baths in Rome and included them in the background for this painting in keeping with the traditional belief that great philosophical discussions took place in public in ancient Greece.
- The philosophers are linked together through glances and gestures.
- In the centre and vanishing point are Plato and Aristotle framed in an archway and others are grouped in fours and fives.
- Plato may be a portrait of the elderly Leonardo with the gesture of the upward- pointing finger so often used in Leonardo's work.
- Michelangelo's features may be seen in the figure of Heraclitus who sits alone on the left of the composition.
- Raphael may be seen on the right glancing at the viewer.
- The space is mathematically composed with deep perspective in the true tradition of Masaccio and Piero. (single point linear perspective)



'Portrait of Pope Leo X with Cardinals', Raphael, oil on panel, 1518, Uffizi Gallery

Raphael was the most important portrait artist working in Rome in the early 16thc. His skills are best seen in his portraits.

Raphael not only captured the patron's look but also emphasised their intelligence and nobility.

- In this painting he portrays Pope Leo X with his two cardinals.
- The Pope holds a magnifying glass for examining an illuminated manuscript on the table. This reflects his interest in humanities and the arts.
- Pope Leo X is not idealised but is portrayed in a realistic manner. Raphael breaks away from Michelangelo's tradition of



idealising his subjects and he gives them personalities instead.

- No attempt is made to flatter the strong-willed, dominant features of the Pope.
- The composition is dominated by the diagonals. The Pope is seated at an angle, looking away from the viewer. The cardinal on his right (Luigi) looks sternly yet calmly at the Pope. The cardinal to his left (Giulio) looks worried and distracted. The Pope's head is slightly larger than those of the cardinals and this adds to his commanding presence.
- The richly coloured velvets and luxurious silks worn by Pope Leo X contrast with the simpler garments of the cardinals.
- The attention to detail is more exacting than any Florentine artist had ever achieved before. This can be seen in the silver and gold bell on the table, the illuminated manuscript, and the rich textures of the velvets of the robes. A reflection of the window can be seen on the gold knob on the back of the chair.
- The entire composition is tied together by lush harmonies of colours, including oranges, scarlets and crimsons.

Later Life

Raphael's career was short lived as he died on his 37th Birthday ☹. He is buried at the Pantheon in Rome.

Key Points

- Master of space
- Triangular composition
- Harmonious and balanced composition
- Single point linear perspective
- Idealised graceful beauty
- Interaction between figures
- Sfumato
- Serenity
- Use of tone and colour to create form and three dimensional qualities
- Contrapposto
- Chiaroscuro