



Raphael

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ISBN: 978-1-78160-972-9

“Here lies Raphael, who while he lived made Nature afraid of being bested by him and, when he died, of dying with him.”

— Pietro Bembo
(Epitaph carved on Raphael’s tomb in the
Pantheon)

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Biography

1483 Raffaello Santi or Sanzio, known as Raphael, is born in Urbino, probably on the 6th of April. He is the son of Giovanni Santi, a painter and official poet at the court of the great patron of the arts Federico da Montefeltro.

1491 Death of Raphael's mother. He is deeply affected by the event.

1494 His father also dies. He is taken in by his uncle, a priest.

1495 The young artist arrives in Perugia and supposedly becomes one of the disciples of Pietro Vannucci, known as Perugino.

1501 The artist finishes the first work known to be his, the altar of the church of San Nicola da Tolentino, at Castello, in Umbria.

1504-1508 He spends several years in Florence, which is later known as his Florentine period. He discovers the works of Leonardo and Michelangelo, which influence him strongly. Raphael paints many pictures of the Virgin Mary, in particular *The Madonna of the Goldfinch* (1506), *The Madonna of the Pinks* (1506-1507) and *The Madonna and Child with Infant St John the Baptist*, often called *La Belle Jardinière* (1507-1508).

1508 He leaves for Rome where he settles permanently. Pope Julius II asks him to decorate the *Stanze della Segnatura* at the Vatican. They contain two major works: the *School of Athens* and *Disputation over the Most Holy Sacrament*.

1512 Raphael takes up architecture. He plans, designs, and supervises the construction of a chapel for Agostino Chigi.

1514 He finishes the decoration of another room in the Vatican, the *Stanza dell'Eliodoro*. The artist's popularity is now such that he receives many commissions. Most are finished by his assistants, so much work does he have. His workload increases even more when he is asked to finish St Peter's Basilica, following the death of his mentor and friend, the architect Bramante.

1515 Raphael paints the *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione*, probably with the help of his assistants.

Raphael

1516 Cardinal Giuliano de' Medici commissions the altarpiece of the *Transfiguration*. He will work on it until his death and it will then be finished by one of his pupils.

1517 Raphael is appointed superintendent of antiquities in Rome by Pope Leo X. He immediately begins an inventory of the ancient monuments in the city.

Still working for the Pope, he completes a series of ten cartoons for tapestries for the Sistine Chapel. These are later woven by Pieter van Aelst in Brussels.

1518-1519 He paints one of his masterpieces, the *Portrait of Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de' Medici and Luigi de' Rossi*. It is perhaps his only late work done entirely without the help of his assistants.

The Fornarina is also painted during this period, inspired by the baker's daughter with whom Raphael is supposed to have been hopelessly in love.

1520 Raphael dies of a fever on the 6th of April, his thirty-seventh birthday. As he is by then wealthy and admired, his funeral is held in the Vatican and his body buried in Rome at the Pantheon.



Birth of Raphael and his First Works

On the 6th of April 1483, Raphael, who would carry to such heights of glory the name of Santi, was born in Urbino, Italy. His father, Giovanni Santi, gave him the name of an archangel, as though guessing the celestial splendour to which his son would rise. Giovanni was a modest and thrifty member of the middle class, ready to accept any commission, provided it was well remunerated.



Angel Holding a Phylactery
(fragment of the
Baronci Altarpiece)

1500-1501

Oil on wood, 58 x 36 cm

Musée du Louvre, Paris





To judge him only by his ordinary occupations, one would be tempted to take him for an artisan rather than an artist, so diverse and varied were his activities. But this worker, so humble in appearance, had travelled extensively. He had studied the works of the most famous masters; he possessed the secrets of the trade and stopped at nothing in order to remain abreast of new methods. He had observed and read widely, and the names of the humanists were familiar to him.

The Crucified Christ with the Virgin Mary, Saints and Angels (The Mond Crucifixion)

c. 1502-1503

Oil on poplar wood,
283.3 x 167.3 cm

The National Gallery, London





Given Giovanni Santi's tastes, we may assume that, in addition to a very careful artistic education, his son received a good and solid literary one as well. Raphael lost his mother at the age of eight, and his father four years later. In spite of Giovanni Santi's premature death, knowledgeable judges see several similarities of style between the works of the father and those of his son. It is quite probable that Raphael received some lessons from his father. How was the interval separating the death of Giovanni Santi and Raphael's departure for Perugia filled?

The Madonna and Child with a Book

c. 1502-1503

Oil on wood, 55.2 x 40 cm
Norton Simon Museum of Art,
Pasadena, California





It is probable that in his native city the boy received lessons from his compatriot Timoteo Viti. This capable painter, whose value should, nonetheless, not be exaggerated, had returned to Urbino in 1495 after solid studies done in Bologna in the workshop of Francia. A tender friendship immediately united the two artists. In his period of grandeur, Raphael did not forget the companion of his youth; he called him to him in Rome, and asked for his help in the execution of the *Sibyls* and the *Prophets* in the church of the Pace.

Head of a Boy with a Cap

c. 1502-1503

Black chalk, 21.2 x 18.6 cm

Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille





His Departure for Perugia and his Collaboration with Perugino

If Raphael's new home, Perugia, was less developed culturally in 1495 than Urbino, it offered some compensation from the point of view of the beauty of the countryside, its variety and the vastness of the reactions it evoked. Here again the young artist was to breathe the brisk, vivifying air of the mountains, and be in contact with a countryside full of poetry.



The Crowning of the Virgin (Oddi Altarpiece)

1502-1504

Oil and tempera on wood
transferred onto canvas,
272 x 165 cm

Musei Vaticani, Vatican City





Pietro Vannucci, “Perugino”, his new master, concentrated only on painting, nothing else, whereas most of his contemporaries excelled at once in painting, goldsmith work, architecture or sculpture. But he had travelled greatly, he had seen close-up the most remarkable men of that great time. His conversation was therefore perfect for sparking the interest of his young listener. He could speak to him of the very energetic and unscrupulous Pope, Sixtus IV, whose unflagging activity had transformed Rome;



Saint Michael and the Demon,
known as The Small Saint Michael

c. 1503-1505

Oil on wood, 30 x 26 cm

Musée du Louvre, Paris





of Innocent VIII, a no less enthusiastic builder; of Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, whose magnanimous personal warmth, mixed with frightening flashes of temper, already foretold the style of his papacy as Pope Julius II. In Florence, Perugino had had the opportunity to see Lorenzo the Magnificent, perhaps also Charles VIII. Savonarola struck him as a true prophet, whose teachings he followed enthusiastically. Then the master spoke of matters of art. He described Verrocchio's studio, a training ground for great artists, where he had worked beside Leonardo da Vinci and Lorenzo di Credi.

Portrait of Elisabetta Gonzaga

1504

Oil on wood, 52.9 x 37.4 cm
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence





He told of experiments among his comrades to refine the laws of perspective and to initiate themselves into the deepest secrets of colour. They were wonderful and profitable years for they had marked the beginning of a new era in the history of painting. The great competition for the decoration of the Sistine Chapel must have been a frequent theme in their conversation. It is easy to imagine his pupils hanging on his every word as he described such marvels.

The Marriage of the Virgin

1504

Oil on wood, 170 x 118 cm
Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

