

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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THE INFLUENCE OF RAPHAEL AND HIS CIRCLE ON WESTERN ART IS REVEALED IN DRAWINGS FROM WINDSOR CASTLE AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, MAY 14 – JULY 23, 2000

Washington, D.C. – Selected from the magnificent British Royal Collection, more than sixty drawings by Italian artist Raphael (1483-1520) and his circle reveal the master's exemplary skills and influence. Raphael and His Circle: Drawings from Windsor Castle will be on view in the National Gallery of Art's East Building from May 14 through July 23, 2000. The exhibition travels to the Art Gallery of Ontario, August 6 through October 15, 2000, and The J. Paul Getty Museum, October 31, 2000, through January 7, 2001.

The exhibition offers an overview of Raphael's short career in twenty-one exquisite drawings, which exemplify the principles of composition, types of figure drawing, and systems of workshop collaboration he developed that set standards for much of the next four centuries. Works by earlier artists who influenced Raphael's style, and by his assistants, who spread interpretations of his work throughout Italy, amplify the magnitude of the master's achievements.

"This focused and enlightening exhibition provides fresh insights into the origins of the genius of Raphael, one of Western art's greatest figures," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are deeply grateful to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for her gracious generosity in lending this marvelous selection of works."

Raphael (Raffaello Santi or Sanzio) was born in Urbino, a city known for its culture, seventy miles east of Florence. He began his career in the studio of his father, the painter Giovanni Santi. Although he lived only to the age of thirty-seven, Raphael is recognized as one of the three preeminent painters of the High Renaissance, along with Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

The exhibition traces the course of Raphael's career, starting with small studies for the heads of two apostles in the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin, executed around 1503, now in the Vatican. It includes drawings by his father and other artists who helped shape Raphael's early style—among them his principal teacher, Pietro Perugino, Umbria's leading painter, and occasional collaborators such as Girolamo Genga, Lo Spagna, and Luca Signorelli.

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After a few years in Florence where he developed his skills, Raphael settled in Rome by his mid-twenties and began creating work for Pope Julius II. A series of drawings in the exhibition prepared for frescoes to decorate the papal library, the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican, suggests the care and skill with which the young artist approached this challenging project. The success of these frescoes, glorifying the ideal of learning, established Raphael as the premier painter in Rome.

Also on view are other outstanding drawings from the last dozen years of Raphael's life, including several compositions of Madonnas and the Holy Family, by which he became universally known and praised, sketches for tapestries to hang below the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, and one of his last undisputed sheets, a nude study for the Psyche Loggia. It was during this period of remarkable creativity that Raphael demonstrated his organizational skills, refining the preparatory process for major commissions, developing techniques to marshal teams of assistants working on several simultaneous projects, and evolving ways to employ talented assistants in workshop collaborations.

Raphael and His Circle examines the evolution of the styles of such workshop assistants as Gianfrancesco Penni, Giulio Romano, Perino del Vaga, and Polodoro da Caravaggio. It explores how they developed the master's idiom in highly individual ways after Raphael's death in 1520, and they disseminated differing interpretations of his style throughout Italy over the next three decades.

The exhibition was organized by The Royal Library, Windsor Castle, in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington. The coordinating curator at the National Gallery is Andrew Robison, Andrew W. Mellon Senior Curator of Prints and Drawings. Raphael and His Circle is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated, 224-page catalogue written by Martin Clayton, Assistant Curator in the Print Room of the Royal Library at Windsor Castle. Published by the Royal Collection, it is available for \$35 softcover and \$60 hardcover in the Gallery Shops and through the Gallery Web site at www.nga.gov. To order by phone, call (301) 322-5900 or (800) 697-9350.

The National Gallery of Art and Sculpture Garden, located on the National Mall between Third and Ninth Streets at Constitution Avenue, N.W., are open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. Admission is free. For general information, call (202) 737-4215; call the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176; or visit the National Gallery of Art's Web site at www.nga.gov. To receive the Gallery's free bimonthly Calendar of Events, call (202) 842-6662.

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Washington, D.C.

Raphael's Early Life

Backgrounder

Raphael (Raffaello Santi or Sanzio) was born in Urbino in 1483, the son of the painter Giovanni Santi (ca. 1435/40-1494). Through his adventurous patronage Federigo da Montefeltro (1422-1482) had created at Urbino, in the Marches seventy miles east of Florence, a cultural centre of a richness out of proportion to its importance as a city, and Santi would have encountered there the works of artists as varied as Piero della Francesca, Francesco di Giorgio and Justus of Ghent. Exposure does not necessarily lead to receptivity, but the clear echoes of both northern and Umbrian art in Santi's painting (the colouring of the former, the compositional modes of the latter, and the figure types of both) reveal an artistic personality open to new experiences, but always discriminating and adapting rather than thoughtlessly coping. Santi also seems to have been socially adept, cultivating contacts with influential patrons while not being tied to them in a formally exclusive relationship. Both traits were to be inherited by his son.

It seems certain that Raphael started his artistic career in his father's studio, but in the absence of primary documents all reconstructions of his early years are speculative. Vasari claimed that Santi eventually realised that his son could make no further progress under him and so placed the boy with Pietro Perugino (ca. 1450-1523), the leading painter in Umbria. This is probably, if excusably, inaccurate. Perugino was indeed the single most important influence on the young Raphael; he may have known Giovanni Santi personally and would certainly have known some of his work, a connection that would have eased Raphael's passage into Perugino's studio, for family traditions were as strong in fifteenth-century painting as in any other craft. But it is around 1502-03, when Raphael was approaching his twentieth year, that his paintings look most like those of Perugino. Perugino's influence before this date is strong, but not complete, and from the evidence of this earliest identifiable paintings and drawings it seems that Raphael did not have a conventional training in the sense of spending a long period of time with a single master.

It is likely that Raphael was still with his father at the time of Santi's death, when Raphael was aged eleven, and that he continued for a time to work in the studio maintained by Santi's collaborator Evangelista di Pian di Meleto (ca. 1458-1549).

A decisive event may have been the return to Urbino around 1495 of Timoteo Viti (1469-1523). Then in his mid twenties, Viti was a well travelled artist who probably had wide contacts and whose eclecticism was on a par with that of Giovanni Santi, and he may have been the agent for Raphael's first move away from Urbino into the circle of Perugino.

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While it may seem fanciful to suppose that Raphael was, at his age, in a position to choose between masters in such a way, a theme of his whole career is ambition in the best sense, a ready grasping of new challenges. Viti's character would certainly have appealed more to the young Raphael than would that of the limited, if able, Evangelista, but again this must remain speculation: Raphael's early drawings owe little or nothing to the example of Viti.

Attempts to identify Raphael's hand in such paintings as the predella of Perugino's altarpiece of 1497 in Santa Maria Nuova, Fano, are probably futile, and none of the few drawings associated with that project is (to this author) convincing as Raphael's. In 1500 Raphael was described as *magister* in the contract that he co-signed with his father's former collaborator Evangelista for the altarpiece of *The Coronation of St. Nicholas of Tolentino* for Città di Castello, and Raphael's preparatory drawings for that project demonstrate (by their existence) that he was then the senior partner in his relationship with the much older Evangelista and (by their style) that he had had the extensive contact with the immediate circle of Perugino in the later 1490's. Similarly, Raphael may have been the dominant designer in a collaboration with the older Bernardino Pintoricchio (ca. 1452-1513) on some of the frescos of the Piccolomini Library in Siena Cathedral around 1502-03, for, although the contract was with Pintoricchio alone, several surviving drawings for the scheme are by Raphael.

It therefore seems that, while still in his teens, Raphael was acting independently, collaborating on equal or senior terms with fully mature artists. Perugino was, however, always his dominant stylistic influence. Rather than maintaining a single, stable workshop, Perugino was intermittently active in a number of towns and probably recruited some assistants on an ad hoc basis. Many artists therefore had the opportunity to work directly under the master for short periods, and indeed much painting in Umbria, the Marches and western Tuscany at the end of the fifteenth century can be characterized without excessive simplification as Peruginisque.

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Excerpt from the exhibition catalogue for Raphael and his Circle: Drawings from Windsor Castle by Martin Clayton, Assistant Curator in the Print Room of the Royal Library at Windsor Castle.