

Raphael and Michelangelo



While Leonardo was somewhat isolated from other people, in that he was a great inventor and thought of things others could not comprehend, most other artists were primarily concerned with beauty in art – in painting and sculpture. One artist who loved beauty was a man called Raffaello Sanzio, or as we call him: Raphael. This is the artist who painted *Angel*, which you copied last week. Raphael had a gift for being able to paint people with soft and gentle features, and modest expressions. He made few sketches before being ready to put paint to canvas; and the loveliest images seemed to flow from his brush.



What he loved to paint most of all were pictures of Mary and the Jesus Child. Each was a masterpiece. One of them is called *Sistine Madonna*; 'Sistine' for the chapel for which he painted it. This is the most famous picture of Mary and the Jesus Child. We don't know what Mary and the Jesus Child really looked like, but it is said that standing before one of Raphael's paintings of Mary and Child gives you a feeling that you are seeing how they really look – there is a truth in the way they are painted. Raphael was a painter who touched people's heart and feelings, not their minds.

Raphael was born in 1483, so Leonardo was old enough to be his father (who was thirty-one when Raphael was born). Raphael's real father, Giovanni, was a painter and a poet. He worked in the court of Urbino which was one of the most glamorous in Italy. Giovanni was a cultivated man and Raphael

grew up in a stimulating and artistic environment. Sadly, his father died when Raphael was only eleven years old, and his mother had died a few years earlier. This left Raphael an orphan, so he was brought up by relatives.

Raphael was handsome, charming and well-loved by all. He was gentle and kind, modest and good; and he made friends easily. While Leonardo and Michelangelo could be solitary men consumed by their work, Raphael was much more sociable. No one knows where he trained to be an artist but, by the time he was seventeen he was an independent master. It is likely that he learnt a lot from his father.

The pope, kings, princes, and rich merchants gave him commissions – in fact, they gave him more work than he could manage, and he was paid generously. He did not have any of the money worries that Leonardo had. His paintings have given millions of people pleasure; the figures in his paintings are so graceful and serene yet also strong and dignified. It was also the way in which Raphael painted his backgrounds that people admired. He skilfully depicted the shadows and reflections of light.

Raphael's first attempt at a dramatic painting containing many figures is *The Entombment* (right). Raphael did take time and care to create sketches as he planned this painting; it is very complex.



Sadly, Raphael's life was a short one; he died in 1520 at the age of thirty-seven. However, in this time, he experienced much good fortune.

Quite a different master was the painter and sculptor Michelangelo (left). He also loved beauty, but the beauty of strength. Most of the figures we see of his are not gentle and sweet like Raphael's. They are figures of might and power.

Michelangelo had a different kind of upbringing to Raphael as well. Michelangelo was determined to be an artist, but his father disapproved of this artistic ambition. His family, the Buonarroti's, claimed to have

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aristocratic blood and it was considered unfitting of such people to be what was really nothing more than just a craftsman. Despite this, Michelangelo began training with a Florentine artist when he was thirteen. He was an exceptionally talented boy and thought of himself as largely self-taught.

To look at a painting by Raphael is like taking a walk in a beautiful park. To look at Michelangelo's work is more like seeing mighty mountains reaching into the sky – his work is serious. There was little happiness in his own life, and he lived a long life, to over eighty years old.

Michelangelo found it difficult to make friends. He did not have the charisma of Leonardo and he was not gentle or charming like Raphael. He was in fact ill-tempered and flew into rages. If he did not like his work, he took a hammer to it and broke it into pieces.

During the Renaissance, in Florence, a family called the Medici made a great deal of money from trade and banking. By the time Michelangelo was born they had reached the height of their power with Lorenzo (right) as head of the family. He was known as 'Lorenzo the Magnificent' because of his wealth and love of luxury. This family ruled Florence and supported the arts by giving a lot of commissions and residencies to artists, sculptors and architects. This made Florence a very beautiful city to live in. It helped make public spaces inviting and draw people outside to enjoy each other's company in pleasing surrounds. If public spaces were beautiful and well-cared for, wealthy people were less likely to just sit at home in their beautiful estates; and poorer people could also find solace in being in these public areas. So, you can see how beautiful spaces can help people of all types to come together as a community.



Top: Lorenzo de Medici. Above: Florence

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One day, Michelangelo was working in his master's workshop and some members of the household of the Medici family came to visit. Before long, Michelangelo met a number of these people and one of them, an old sculptor called Bertoldi di Giovanni, changed Michelangelo's life.

Giovanni was employed by the Medici family to make statues and medals as well as to look after Lorenzo's art collection.



Lorenzo de Medici is seated, wearing red. He is with a variety of artists in the sculpture garden.

Many of Lorenzo's sculptures were displayed in a garden where artists went to draw and carve. Student sculptors often went there, and young Michelangelo was invited by Giovanni to join in as well. This garden was not far from the Medici palace and artists came there hoping to be spotted by Lorenzo. Michelangelo was only fifteen, but his ability was soon noticed by Lorenzo. Other sculptors became jealous and things got so heated that, in a physical fight, Michelangelo's nose was broken! This was a signature Michelangelo would

have for the rest of his life - his bones mended even if a bit askew.



Lorenzo being presented with the faun sculpture by Michelangelo.

Soon after, Michelangelo spotted a spare piece of marble and he begged the owner if he could please have it. Marble was expensive, even this spare piece. From this he created the head of a faun, a figure from ancient Roman myths. Lorenzo was impressed with this carving and offered Michelangelo an allowance. Things went

well for Michelangelo for a number of months. He had an employer – a powerful patron who appreciated the arts, and he had a certain freedom to develop his skills. But not long



David by Michelangelo

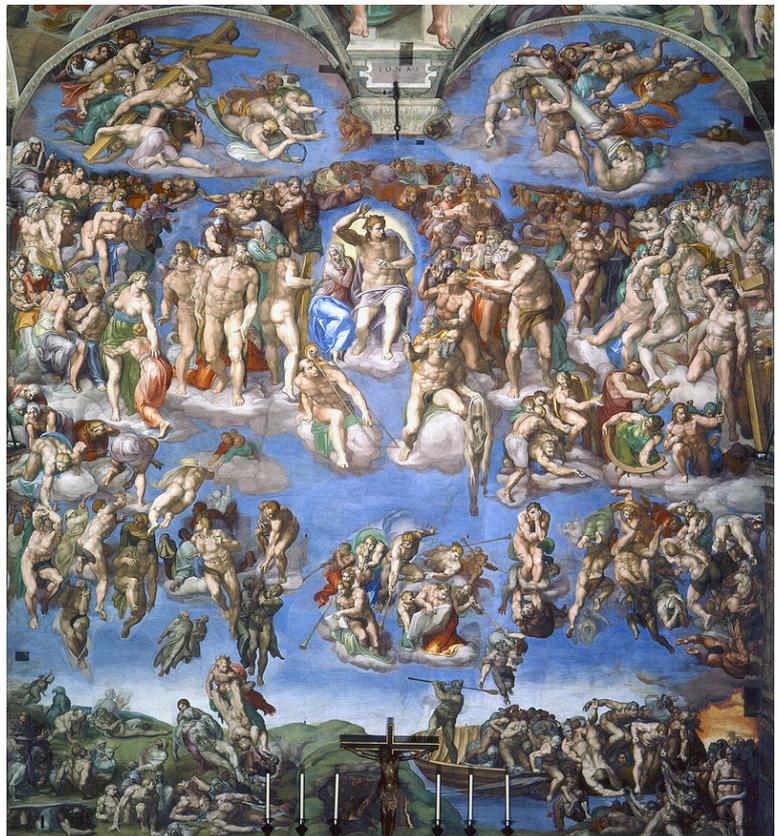
after, Lorenzo died, and his son Piero took over. Piero did not care for the arts and when he gave Michelangelo the menial task of building him a snowman, Michelangelo knew he could no longer work for the Medici family.

Michelangelo taught himself the study of anatomy. While everyone else was asleep, in the dead of night, he would sneak in and out of the morgue of the hospital at the church of Santo Spirito in Florence, Italy. He would carve and dissect corpses and commit to memory what he saw. The prior (or Father) of Santo Spirito, was aware of someone entering the morgue, but it took quite a while before he realised that it was indeed Michelangelo sneaking around. The church prior liked Michelangelo and there was an unspoken agreement that he was free to continue his anatomical studies; hence, no more sneaking around. The prior never brought up Michelangelo's trespassing into the morgue.

Later in his life, Michelangelo worked for many popes. He painted a huge fresco called the *Last Judgment* (below) on the altar of the Sistine Chapel. He also created one of the world's most famous artworks when he painted the pope's chapel ceiling in the Sistine Chapel.

Although he was a wonderful painter, Michelangelo saw himself as a sculptor, and you are probably familiar with his sculpture, *David*. Michelangelo was a devout man and could have become very wealthy, however, he had other values and often refused payment. He preferred to work for the glory of God.

In Italy at the time of the Renaissance, there were these three artists: Leonardo the seeker for truth and a great thinker; Raphael, gentle and sweet-natured; and the fiery quick-tempered



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Michelangelo. There were also hundreds of other artists: sculptors, painters and architects who also produced beautiful work. How is it possible that so many artists flourished at this time?

We know about the feudal system in the Middle ages, which was a few centuries earlier and of the noble knights who could fight but not read or write. Villeins and serfs were made to work far too hard and were too poor and ignorant to know anything about art. If any of these three talented artists were born three hundred years earlier, they could only have been monks – painting little pictures in parchment books.

But in the Renaissance so many people loved art and could afford to buy it too. So, there was a way to give work to many artists. It was the merchants, businessmen, bankers, lawyers and doctors who could support the arts – the Medici family is one example. These people were free citizens and in these free cities, there could grow a love of art, which made these great masters possible.

This also created a new class – that of free citizens. And this is the class that these artists belonged to – they came from the middle class. They weren't noblemen or priests, nor serfs or knights, but free citizens.

While the feudal system withered away in Italy, individual cities grew rich and powerful. This created its own problems. Italy was split up into dominions of the great cities. Each city had its own government and its own army (or navy in Venice's case). The cities were quite often at war with one another. When the French attacked Milan, neither Florence nor Venice took much notice. The city people, these businesspeople, were competitors, and that's how they viewed these other cities – as business competitors. That's why there was so much trouble between them. But these Italian cities were the cradle of renaissance art.



David gets clean!