

A Study on Raphael: One of the Three Masters of the Renaissance

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Abstract: In the 14th century, the Renaissance first emerged in various city-states in Italy, and then expanded to Western European countries, reaching its peak in the 16th century. The influence of the Renaissance has been reflected in art, architecture, philosophy, literature, music, science and technology, politics, religion, and intellectual inquiry. Renaissance scholars took a humanist approach to their research and looked for realism and human emotion in art. As one of the three masters of the Renaissance, Raphael represents the pinnacle that Renaissance artists can achieve in the career of ideal beauty. Raphael was an unmistakable, unfettered, eloquent poet, painter, and extremely agile and superhuman. Raphael visualized the artistic ideals of Renaissance Neoplatonism as if they were easy to visualize. He embraced the artistic ideal of Neoplatonism, and with his refined painting skills, he brought the humanism of the Renaissance to the extreme. Although there are not many works left by Raphael, the talent displayed in his works has a far-reaching influence on future generations. This article will analyze Raphael's influence on the artistic creation style of the Renaissance and the artistic creation of later artists from the perspective of humanism and classicism by appreciating Raphael's six works.

Keywords: Renaissance, Raphael, Classicism, Madonna

1. Introduction

With the development of the European factory handicraft industry and commodity economy, an ideological and cultural movement initiated by the bourgeoisie emerged in Europe. As one of the three major ideological emancipation movements in Europe, the Renaissance reached its peak in the 16th century. In the 14th century, it gradually expanded to all parts of the world in the late Italian period. The Renaissance took humanism as the core, and it was a revolution of science and art in Europe, which fully affirmed the dignity and value of human beings. The rise of the Renaissance movement had a great impact on the political, scientific, economic, theological and other world views at that time. In this "Age of Giants", the "Three Masters of the Renaissance" appeared in the art world. They were Da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael. Among them, Raphael, as the youngest of the three, has deep attainments in artistic creation. Raphael was born in Urbino, Italy in 1483. Raphael was deeply influenced by his parents and family environment in his childhood and developed good habits, but he was not influenced by the worldly and barbaric ways of poor families. When Raphael was growing up, his father discovered his talent for drawing and began to teach him to draw. In 1498, when Raphael entered the painter Perugino, he was learning to paint [1]. When Raphael learned

Perugino's painting style, he imitated every detail so realistically that the portraits he painted were similar to those of his teacher. The handwriting is exactly the same, and it is difficult to distinguish between true and false. At the age of 25, he had already established his artistic style. Most of his works are related to religious themes, and the source of inspiration and the selection of themes are all from the Bible and ancient Greek myths. After 1504, Raphael learned what Leonardo da Vinci called the "smoke" technique in Florence and developed his own new style. The subtle and serene beauty conveyed by Raphael's work represents the aesthetic ideals of the Italian Renaissance. Raphael influenced the plastic arts of Western Europe in the history of world art, provided a perfect standard for the figurative plastic arts of later generations, and was regarded as an insurmountable idol by later painters [2]. Raphael was not only a great artist, but also a pioneer and explorer. The image of the Virgin, as well as his numerous fresco works, reflects his pursuit of truth and happiness. Raphael's painting style is delicate, gentle, round and pure. He is famous for creating a large number of Madonna images. The image of the Madonna under his brush is different from the public. It is not a bitter image, nor is it the same as the bohemian Madonna image of the Venetian school, but is more gentle and pure. Although his works have religious overtones, he can still see the talents and wisdom of human beings through the cloak of religion. Raphael wanted to convey to the audience a sense of self-love, meekness, and purity through his work. The perfect art form created by Raphael had a huge impact on the history of European painting. In a certain sense, in Raphael's era, in fact, the autocratic rule of the Catholic Church has been significantly loosened. Although the influence has not been completely eliminated, the in-depth spread and extensive influence of the humanistic spirit has made Raphael influential. It is also a beneficiary of the influence of humanistic thought. Raphael's works mainly focus on the portrayal of the image of the Virgin. Raphael's painting features not only made the Catholic Church a little bit of popularity, but also gradually got rid of the old image. At the same time, this also made the Renaissance movement no longer limited to literature, sculpture, etc., but helped the spirit of humanism penetrate the field of religion. Raphael's short 37-year life journey changed the focus of painting in the Renaissance. He made the painters at that time realize that portrait painting cannot be rigid and serious, but can even be more soft and natural. This article understands Raphael's influence on later painting styles and artistic creation by appreciating Raphael's artistic works.

2. Raphael's Artworks

2.1. Sistine Madonna

Sistine Madonna is a work that portrays a savior, and it depicts the Virgin as a beautiful, kind, and maternal woman. Different from the image of the Madonna depicted by Raphael in the early days, in the painting *Sistine Madonna* the image of the Madonna is no longer the pursuit of beauty, happiness and integrity, but is fuller of spirit and temperament. From the content point of view, the Virgin Mary is determined to sacrifice her own children to save this suffering world, which reflects the softness and strength of women. In the painting, the Virgin Mary has a loving smile and holds Jesus in her arms. She is fit and powerful, showing the happiness and greatness of maternal love. In terms of structure, this work uses a triangular composition, which is solemn and balanced. This artwork also gives the audience a solemn and quiet look [3]. From the perspective of painting skills, Raphael skillfully used the shortened perspective method to give the audience a sense of depth in space, leaving a distance between the characters. Raphael's short and powerful painting style is also vividly reflected in this work. The lines in the painting are simple, clean and magnificent, with a kind of flamboyant power. The lines on the Virgin's clothes are like being blown by the holy wind fluttering [4]. Both the Holy Infant and the Little Angel use the method of partial sketching, which makes the works look more vivid and real. In the use and matching of colors, Raphael used a variety of color fusions, whether it is the blouse of the Virgin Mary or the robes of Sistine II, which are treated with

different colors, making the characters vivid and providing the audience with a stunning visual experience.

2.2. The Marriage of the Virgin

The Marriage of the Virgin, which depicts the marriage of Maria and Joseph, was completed by Raphael in 1504 in the Franciscan church of San Francesco. From the point of view of the characterization of the painting, the painting shows a dramatic scene. Whether it is a boy or a girl, Raphael uses a lot of lines to outline. Whether it is the physical appearance of the characters or the changes in the folds of the clothes, it gives the audience a sense of softness. From the perspective of Raphael's painting innovation, Raphael fully absorbed Perugi's weak artistic essence and made innovations on the basis again. The balance of the picture and the depiction of the background can fully reflect Raphael's innovation in composition and character image. The picture adopts a symmetrical layout, and a large number of horizontal lines, vertical lines, and semi-circular curves are used so that the whole picture has a harmonious beauty [5]. In addition to embodying Perugi's weak and elegant style, *The Marriage of the Virgin* also began to reveal its own unique soft style. In terms of composition style and environment, the solemn and elegant face of the Virgin Mary is extremely rare in previous works of art. From the perspective of composition skills, the two protagonists and the rest of the characters are arranged on both sides to form a symmetrical composition. In the composition of the background characters, there are individual characters and groups of characters. The two groups of characters make the picture extend to both sides in depth, reflecting the solemnity of the wedding. The church behind *The Marriage of the Virgin* mostly uses a grand and solemn polygonal composition, which makes the painting full of profound classical culture and fully reflects the characteristics of the Renaissance period. In addition, the church uses the radioactive composition steps to make the combination of many characters in an orderly and realistic manner, bringing the audience into the ranks of the sages.

2.3. The School of Athens

Judging from the theme of the work, *The School of Athens* heralds the revival of the human rational spirit and reflects the praise of the artist's active pursuit of human wisdom and truth. From the top of the layout of the picture, there are many characters but not chaotic, and the whole picture is very concentrated. Raphael unifies the diversity of characters in the theme of pursuing truth. Representatives of different philosophical schools are discussing here, and Raphael endows the whole picture with a relaxed democratic atmosphere. From the perspective of the composition, the central point of view of the whole picture is advancing in depth like the Arc de Triomphe. With the help of the changes in light and shadow, it creates a grand and far-reaching feeling for the audience. The backgrounds on both sides are symmetrical with each other, and the figures in the painting seem to be walking out of the corridor [2]. The use of perspective makes the picture look more profound. The buildings beside the characters blend with the curves that outline the picture, making the whole picture feel soft and firm to the audience. In terms of Raphael's use of colors, the marble uses creamy yellow, which blends with the red, yellow, hundred, purple, and other colors in the characters' clothes, which also reflects Raphael's skilled skills. From the perspective of painting innovation, Raphael's *The School of Athens* absorbs the advantages of Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* in its composition, and all the characters in the picture are facing the central picture. Raphael used his own superb skills in depicting characters to endow the characters in the picture with different character characteristics and spiritual outlooks, making the whole picture reflect a harmonious sense of rhythm.

2.4. Disputation of the Holy Sacraments

From 1508 to 1520, Raphael entered the Roman creative period. In his *Disputation of the Holy Sacraments*, the layout of the picture is very different from that of *The School of Athens*. The structure of *The School of Athens* adopts a real architectural configuration, and the activities of characters can be carried out in a wide space, while in *Disputation of the Holy Sacraments* the architectural beauty is reflected through the well-ordered figures, whose symmetrical arrangement is precise and full of symbolic meaning. Raphael employs the perspective of two opposite arcs and the far-near method to deepen the impact of the enormous expanse in the *Disputation of the Holy Sacraments* [6]. A large composition is arranged in a semicircle. Raphael spent a lot of time studying Michelangelo's and Da Vinci's methods of human expression and composition before progressively developing his own. With a unique perspective, the character Jesus is the center, and the sanctity and teachings of Christianity are displayed with beautiful brushes. Although most of the frescoes created by Raphael served the Holy See, Raphael skillfully reflected his humanistic thoughts through his works, and he hoped to combine the Greek spirit and the Christian spirit in the frescoes through his own efforts.

2.5. The Alba Madonna

The painting *The Alba Madonna* is mainly based on traditional religious themes, depicting the family relationship between the Virgin and Child and John the Baptist bathed in the twilight. In the dusk and twilight, the mellow and fresh sunlight of summer falls on the distant view of the farmhouse and rolling hills, which paints the picture with a melancholy and poetic atmosphere. The piece is displayed in a beautiful spherical frame that was common during Raphael's time. While playing with the infant on her lap instead of carefully clutching Jesus, the Virgin Mary sat on the ground with a pure blush, just like a virgin. The three individuals are positioned differently, but they are all gazing towards the cross, which allows the child's agility to be naturally framed in the traditional triangular balance composition [7]. The poses of the characters in the whole painting are very natural, but they form an unnaturally well-balanced composition. The soothing and graceful moving curves perfectly outline the curved images, successfully retaining all the spirituality of an icon. In the handling of details, such as idealized landscapes and natural details, some of which Raphael learned from Leonardo da Vinci's paintings. The composition has a very natural balance and harmony. The whole painting presents a pyramid structure. Everyone in the pyramid structure adds a sense of dynamism to the overall effect of the picture, and at the same time freezes itself in a circular frame [8]. In creating this work, Raphael judged Maria's clothing form and face by studying nude figures.

2.6. Madonna of the Meadow

Madonna of the Meadow is a work created by Raphael in 1507. In the picture, the Virgin is sitting sideways, and she looks at the two children who are playing. The bright complexion of the child in the picture clearly emerges in front of the Virgin's dark blue coat and green grassland. The Holy Infant Jesus is playing with the cross carefully handed over by John the Baptist, which makes the Virgin's expression loving and quiet. In the whole painting, the Virgin and Child form a triangular composition, and the two lovely children form another triangle. The Madonna's crimson tunic and round neckline characterize Raphael's work. The two children occupy the lower part of the picture, slightly to the left, while Madonna's left foot is turned to the right of the picture, making up for the spatial imbalance caused by the former. The pyramid structure in this work shows that Raphael was deeply influenced by Leonardo da Vinci. The lines of the picture are soft, the distant view is beautiful, the close-up view is full of flowers, and there are a few light white clouds in the sky, reflecting the soft shimmer [9]. Love and scenery are rich in poetry, full of happiness and beautiful sentiment in the world. In the foreground, the Virgin Mary has a plump and graceful figure, a simple image, approachable, and her

face is full of quietness and love, giving people a comfortable feeling. The Virgin Mary in Raphael's heart is not a lofty one, but a person who is full of love for the world, like flesh and blood women. Due to the close contact between Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci, this painting can reflect the expression of the quiet and subtle psychology of the *Mona Lisa*. There are also Raphael's personal characteristics in color matching. The technique of "color vibration" is widely used in his works, which is a color-matching technique that can subtly produce a sense of harmony. The Virgin dressed in red is contrasted with low-light brown-green tones to make the picture more vivid. The grass lining the Virgin's red clothes tends to be green, while the grass lining the blue clothes is more yellowish. This is Raphael's way of vibrating the color difference between red, green, blue and yellow to make the picture more flexible [10]. These shading effects are consistent with light and shadow in the real world. Not only do they add realism to the picture, but they also create a sense of harmony in colors of multiple intensities. The scene behind the Virgin is made up by Raphael himself, and it can also be seen that Raphael's attainments in composition design. The gray-toned towns appear ethereal and sacred, yet distant, giving people a hazy feeling, poetic and picturesque, which adds depth to the picture [11]. At the same time, here Raphael also used the "fading method" to carefully design the edge of the picture to depict the facial expressions of the Virgin and the Holy Child, which will make the audience feel full of life and elusive beauty.

3. Influence

3.1. Showing a Humanistic Atmosphere

As an important representative of the humanist painting genre, Raphael's works all show this strong humanistic atmosphere. This also represented the theme of the era during the Renaissance movement at that time. Raphael helped Western Europeans to understand the value of their existence continuously and deeply, to realize the dark rule of the Catholic Church, and to realize that this real society is not in permanent darkness. During the Renaissance, due to the long-term dark rule of the Catholic Church, people were looking forward to a bright future.

3.2. Depicting a World with Classical Charm

Raphael himself constantly depicts a future world full of classical charm through his own paintings. Raphael closely combined the scientific discoveries of the Renaissance with artistic innovations. In the work *Canon Debate*, Raphael cleverly borrowed the architectural layout of the semi-circular vault, combined with the knowledge of contemporary cosmology, with an armillary sphere structure and carefully composed. The painting *School of Athens* shows the painter's skilful perspective knowledge and ingenious spatial layout, so that the work can get rid of the limitation of the semi-circular vault and extend the space infinitely into the distance [4]. Raphael contributed to the creation of the classicism school. From the 16th century to the middle of the 20th century, the vast majority of artists, critics, art theorists, and art historians regarded Raphael as the epitome of high Renaissance art. In 17th-century France, Raphael's art was regarded as a model of classical style. Because Raphael's works are very realistic and realistic, many people disagree with the deep meaning of the paintings. However, Raphael had long since abandoned the aspirations of many 15th-century artists, no longer faithfully portraying nature, but deliberately using an imagined type of standard beauty, that is, ideal beauty [7]. Raphael organically combined his natural image with the idea of ideal beauty in his mind, condensed the many pursuits of ideal beauty in the Renaissance, and finally established the standard of ideal beauty.

4. Conclusions

Although Raphael's artistic accomplishments are inferior to those of Leonardo Da Vinci in terms of intelligence and originality, Michelangelo in terms of style and style, and the Venetian school in terms of color and sensitivity, he is nevertheless completely capable of producing works of art. He was able to produce the most dazzling artistic accomplishments of the Renaissance by utilizing his all-encompassing artistic ability. Raphael was a very early student of the painting techniques and styles used by the masters before him. He later combined these essences in his own works and concentrated on achieving the ideal beauty of the world, which was a characteristic of Renaissance art. Raphael alters the beauty of gentle and complete harmony by taking inspiration from the painting techniques of the preceding generation of art masters. His works from the Madonna series are exceptional masterpieces in the annals of art. Raphael uses a secular perspective to show classic religious themes as ideal beauty in actual life, to celebrate the linear brilliance of common people, to be joyful and full of enjoyment, and to develop his humanistic ideas. Raphael's work, which following generations referred to as "classicism," not only influenced the Baroque style but also the classical school in 17th-century France. From an artistic perspective, Raphael is not simply a painter of the Renaissance; he also widened the possibilities for future generations of artists.

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