

Name

Professor

Subject

Date

### The Parnassus by Raphael

Painting is the expression of emotions and ideas by creating two-dimensional visual languages. The main elements of the visual language are lines, colours, shapes, tones, and textures and the elements are used to develop sensations of space, volume, light, and movement on a flat surface. When combined, the elements produce an expressive pattern presenting natural or supernatural phenomena, create a visual relationship, or interpret a narrative. A painter's choice to use a particular tempera, watercolour, fresco, or oil or the choice of a specific form such as panel, miniature, scroll or panorama is determined by the sensuous quality as well as the possibilities and limitations of the available options. When the choices are combined with the artist's techniques, a unique visual image is developed.

The history of painting dates back to the Neanderthal man although no traces of any form of art have been found. However, sufficient evidence suggests that Homo sapiens were the genius behind the modern image-making. Cave paintings believed to be more than 32,000 years old have been discovered in several regions including France, Namibia, Egypt, Australia, and China with most of them engraved using red ochre. Most of the ancient paintings portrayed significant themes in the daily lives of the early people. For instance, the reindeer and the bison portrayed ice age hunting, while cave images of animals such as rhinoceros, buffalo, and

mammoth may have been painted to catch the souls of the hunters and subsequently hunt them with ease. The female with swelling curves painted on the ceilings and the walls of the caves emphasized the fertility of the tribe. Although not much has been gathered on the cave paintings, researchers have gathered sufficient after-civilization paintings from Egypt and Mesopotamia, Greece, and from the early Christian.

Among the most accomplished painters is Raphael, an Italian painter who lived between 1484 and 1520. He is well recognized for the composition of figures in the Vatican. His work became an important aspect in modern art due to the clarity in the design and the ease of composition (Kleinbub 109). Raphael painted four frescos including the Room of the Signature, the Room of the Borgo Fire, the Room of Heliodorus, and the Room of Constantine. The four rooms have the richest Renaissance painting series in terms of stylistic development and doctrinal content and were part of the Vatican Palace that Pope Julius II selected as his residence between 1503 and 1513. However, three of the rooms were Pope's Nicholas V residence between 1447 and 1455 while the fourth fresco was used by Pope Nicholas III in the thirteenth century.

Pope Julius II commissioned Raphael to oversee the fresco projects starting with the "Room of the signature" as he was not satisfied with the previously designed frescos (Jones and Penny 49). After arriving in Rome in 1508, Raphael ordered the destruction of the previous frescoes thereby signalling the beginning of the most harmonious series of Renaissance paintings ever painted. The Room of Signature was previously used as a library and an office by Julius II. It was referred to as the Room of Signature as most of the papal documents were signed and sealed in the room. The humanist theme of the painting in the room was worldly and spiritual wisdom that incorporated Christian teaching as well as the Greek philosophy. The paintings

portrayed truth, beauty and goodness. The room of Heliodorus was originally used to hold audiences and its main pictorial themes were a glorification of the Christian church as based on the Old Testament. The paintings showed the miracles bestowed by God on the church, papal nobility, and the sacredness of the church. The paintings avoided Julius II political and military agenda despite his ambitions to liberate the Italians from the French. In the Room of Borgo Fire, the themes portrayed in the Room of Heliodorus are repeated. However, Julius II is replaced with Pope Leo X. Lastly, the Room of Constantine is painted with four episodes that portray the victory of Christianity against paganism.

#### The Parnassus (Stanza della Segnatura)

The Parnassus is one of the frescos whose interior walls were painted by Raphael. The paintings on the walls were created between 1510 and 1511. The setting of the paintings was mount Parnassus. Raphael selected the mountain as the Romans believed that its slopes were Delphi's residence. In the paintings, Apollo is portrayed as the main subject. He is painted playing an instrument of the Renaissance period under a laurel tree and surrounded by renowned poets and Muses. The poets presented in the paintings are from the pre-classical past and they include Homer, Sappho, Anacreon, Virgil, Alcaeus, Horace. Several of poets from Raphael's modernity time including Dante, Boccaccio, Ariosto, and Petrarch are also depicted in the painting. In terms of gender, there are ten females including Sappho, a Greek poetess, and nine muses, and eighteen males including seventeen poets and the god Apollo (Paoletti and Radke 409).

The Parnassus is one of the greatest paintings Raphael created in the Vatican. It is considered a benchmark to his work and an illustration of the revival of the learning that

occurred during Raphael's days. Raphael's painting brings to light the ancient Greek and Roman literature that had been forgotten. The Muses in the painting portray liberal Arts, creative process, and inspires the necessity of being a good poet. The association of Apollo with the Muses and the light represents the enlightenment during the Renaissance period. History points out that the Signature Room was used as a meeting room by the Tribunal of the Curia. However, it was pointed as the most appropriate library for Pope Julius II who commissioned it to honour the followers of the church. The fresco thus harmonizes the spirits of the ancient times and Christian poets. Unlike other portraits created in this period, the unveiling of the Parnassus and its critical reception was not affected by the reservations of its content. Thus, it is ascertainable that its completion expanded Raphael's opportunities and artistic responsibilities.

Before the completion of the frescoes, Raphael was already one of the most proficient painters across Europe. The Parnassus was thus considered as one of his genius work in the school of Athens and an ideal example of the High Renaissance art. Modern painters, as well as critics, hold the highest regards to Parnassus although it has endured less success compared to the work by Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. From Raimondi period, there have been no artworks engraved often as that of Raphael. There is a tremendous gathering of copper plates in Rome delineating his paintings from etchers amid the eighteenth and nineteenth hundreds of years. Electrotypes of the copper plates are still worked and books of the etchings and painting of his work are yet distributed. The Malcolm, Oxford, British Museum, Louver, Dresden and different accumulations of Raphael's works have been distributed and numerous outlined monographs still exist.

The composition of the Parnassus

The Parnassus measures six hundred and seventy centimetres wide and it portrays the theme of poetry. It is located opposite to the school of poetry. In the painting, Apollo is portrayed sitting on mount Parnassus with his head raised upright to acknowledge his gift. He is surrounded by proficient poets such as Dante and Boccaccio (Joannides 27). In the painting, several instruments are included including lira da braccio which was an instrument in the Renaissance period. Raphael customized the instrument in the paintings by adding extra strings that totalled to nine. By increasing the number of strings, Raphael's goal was to symbolize harmony. The poses of the characters depicted in the figure were adopted from the statues. For instance, Apollo is presented sitting under a tree, an adaptation from the Grimani arts.

Apollo's unbroken linkage to the Muses in the Parnassus is a reworking of the ancient Roman sarcophagi and it is only known from Raphael's drawings. The combination of the characters was designed such that it reduced the intrusive window thereby making the audience understand the relationship between the outside windows and the main field. Raphael covered the edges of the window with a mountain, lyre, and Sappho's arms. The Apollo is thus portrayed as a member of the poets behind the frame as well as the window. The equivocation of the portrait extends to the relationship between the foreground and the Muses on the mountain. The poet at the right of the painting seems to be closer to the spectator than Apollo but both the poet and Apollo have a similar relationship to the frame. This implies that a comparable position exists in space and it minimizes the depth of the composition.

On the left is Socrates who is probably arguing with a group consisting of Chrysippus, Aeschines Xenophon, and Alcibiades. The Venetian scientist Zeno faces Epicurus, and he is crowned with leaves probably from the grape tree, and presumably, he is defending hedonism principles. He is attentively followed by some of his pupils and Pythagoras is teaching the

Diatessaron. In the front is Xenocrates and in the foreground is Heraclitus who is mourning with his head resting on the arms. Researchers believe that Raphael added most of the contents of the painting after completing the painting of the room as most of the contents are absent in the original painting. Raphael depicted Michelangelo, one of his greatest rivals in the image of an Ephesus, a philosopher in the Renaissance period. The child beside Epicurus is likely to be Federico Gonzaga and the passer-by wearing a white garment and da Vinci smile, is probably Francesco Maria Della Rovere the nephew of Julius II who later became Duke of Urbino.

Raphael's Parnassus painting used permanent lime proof pigments dissolved in water. The paint was laid on lime plaster. His utilization of the colours was close to perfection just like any artist. The Parnassus painting is not revered for the utilization of colour but rather the overall poetic beauty. The Parnassus is characterized by visual counterpoint and compositional harmony. The figures in groups are bound together using continuous lines while the single characters are represented in different corresponding poses. Despite not portraying the originality as depicted in the school of Athens, the Parnassus illustrates Raphael's illustrative ability. The inclusion of classical elements holds greater appeal for individuals excited by archaeological discoveries. Furthermore, the painting portrays his ability to interpret contemporary taste to artistic skills.

The main brush stroke used by Raphael was Secco and Intonaco. The Secco involves retouching the fresco after hardening or using a dried lime plaster to paint a mural while intonaco involves adding the final plaster coat while the fresco is wet. It did not take numerous strokes of the brush before Pope Julius II understood that he had an uncommonly skilled virtuoso at work in the individual of the youthful craftsman from Urbino. Ultimately, the Pope expelled whatever remains of the group of specialists and turned the whole occupation over to Raphael and his colleagues. Actually, a great part of the work simply wrapped up by the other, more experienced

craftsmen were demolished keeping in mind the end goal to give the youthful Raphael a free hand to fresco the whole condo.

Raphael developed his paintings during the great years of the High Renaissance between 1450 and 1527. Pope Julius II belittled numerous artists and through his support, Raphael managed to move to Vatican where he pioneered noticeable artistry. Among the most well-known paintings by Raphael are the four Vatican frescos. The Parnassus was third to be completed and it was in accord to the High Renaissance period. The painting portrayed Apollo and several Muses and its main theme were truth, goodness and beauty. The unveiling of the Parnassus was a significant step in Raphael's painting career.

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