

Bulletin of  
The Detroit Institute of Arts  
of the City of Detroit



FIG. 1—DETAIL OF PAINTING BY RAPHAEL

## AN UNKNOWN RAPHAEL

The rediscovered Raphael (figs. 1-4) which the Museum has acquired through the Ralph H. Booth Fund, is a new proof of the fact that this artist who is so popular as a painter of Madonnas is also one of the greatest portrait painters of all times. The vitality which he has been able to impart to the features of this devoted young courtier, the poetic and idealistic qualities which he has added to the common and perhaps even brutal traits of the face, the clarity and simplicity with which the forms are outlined, the plastic value given to a rather shallow profile, the unusual design of the architectural background, so carefully contrasted and balanced with the grand silhouette of the figure,—all bespeak at the first impression a great master and a great epoch.<sup>1</sup>

A portrait, whomsoever it may represent, brings us nearer to the age in which it was created than any other pictorial subject. The generalization which, for instance, the depiction of a Madonna must undergo — the combination of many different types of beauty in one, as Raphael himself expressed it—takes away from the individuality contained in a portrait, which is close to the essence of life. How characteristic of the extraordinary epoch of the Italian Renaissance, when culture and discord among the Italians reached their height, is the model of our picture: this combination of the warrior and the scholar, of the condottiere and the humanist! The sharp-featured type with pointed nose and low forehead, with an almost Greek profile but a very un-Greek long protruding chin, this combined expression of energy and devotion, appears so often in the portraits of the Italian Renaissance that if we go through the profiles on the medals of this epoch we seem to discover more than once the model of our picture.

The young gentleman wears armour

of silvery blue steel, visible on neck and forearms, and at his side a sword with red hilt. He has taken off his gray gloves and black cap while praying in front of the altar. The black cape with gold border which almost completely covers his armour, the long, carefully arranged curls falling upon his shoulders, give him the appearance of a distinguished personality, as interested in the social world as in battle campaigns. Does he wear his armour only for courtly reasons, or to protect himself in these dangerous times? The sly expression around his mouth seems to prove that he takes an active part in human intercourse, perhaps as a man of affairs, while the allegory represented in the frieze points to a peaceful rather than a warlike attitude toward life.

The concise meaning of this scene, executed in grisaille manner against a reddish brown background, must be left for further study to determine. Its general meaning seems to be that the three horses who protect the insignia of war—a helmet and club hanging from a tree—represent the wild and untamed spirit of mankind, while the group of three older men on the right side symbolize peace and justice; they seem to encourage the three youthful nude figures in the center in their effort to repulse the attack of the furious animals.

This group is one of the most beautiful parts of the picture. The manner in which these three youths are placed together, the center of their bodies forming a compact mass, while arms and legs diverge toward all directions in strongest movement without interfering with each other, shows a remarkable imagination and skill of draughtsmanship. Built upon the High Renaissance idea of *contraposto* movement, the two front figures are posed crosswise and sidewise one against the other in such a way that the advanced position of the right leg of the

<sup>1</sup>The painting measures 24 inches x 32½ inches.

first figure corresponds to the backward stance of the second figure's right leg, and the arm which the first figure holds downward balances the raised arms

The group has something of the quality of a strange flower, opening its leaves in all directions and creating a completely all-around plastic form. To



FIG. 2

of the second. A third figure is placed behind the two, taking up their *contraposto* movement and enhancing their rhythm without disturbing the clear view of their bodies.

show how interested Raphael was in this motive of representing a plastic form radiating in all directions by means of youthful nude figures, I am reproducing two drawings of slightly later date

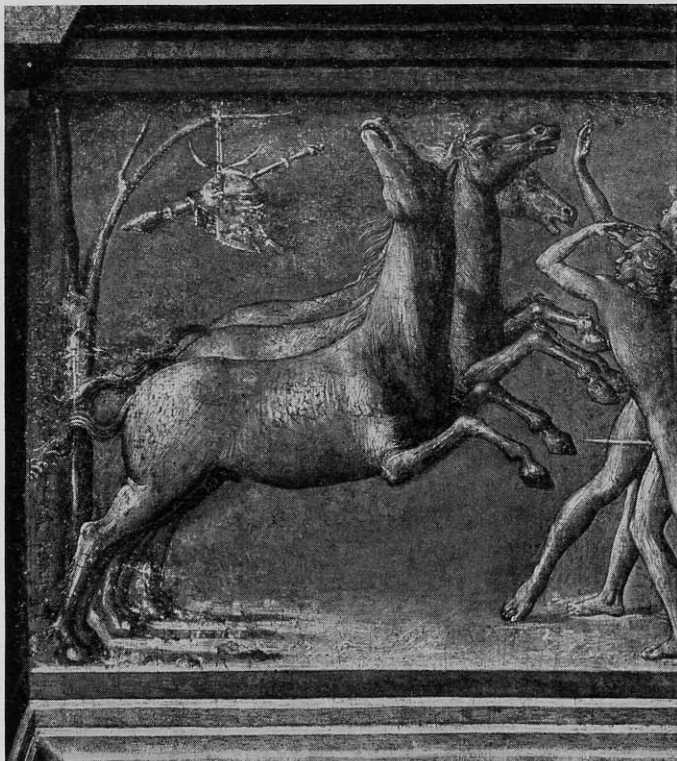


FIG. 3

(figs. 5 and 6). A third (fig. 7) expresses his ability to connect the movement of a rearing horse with that of several nude youths in a manner somewhat similar to that of our picture.

The same tendency toward the creation of space by placing the heads close together, turned at the same time in different directions, can be observed in the no less beautiful group of the three horses. The elegant form of their parallel bodies unfolds itself from the relief plane into free plastic sculpture through a twisting of the necks, which corresponds to a slight change of the height of the lifted forefeet. As in the group of figures, the artist succeeds in keeping each body, including its extremities, free from the next, in spite of the closely connected

plastic continuity of the whole composition.

Raphael (like the Florentine masters of the High Renaissance to whom he attached himself after leaving his native Umbria) is rightly famous for the great plastic effect of his compositions. Our composition also is imbued to a high degree with this characteristic of his art. Unfortunately, the reproduction cannot do justice to the original. The monumental style for which Raphael strove at the time he executed our picture can be better appreciated if it is seen from a certain distance. It carries as well as the fresco paintings which he was to execute a few years later in the Vatican. That he clearly intended the picture to be viewed from a distance may be seen

from the fact that he outlined strongly even the small figures on the relief, and more especially the portrait, whose profile and hand are silhouetted by dark umber lines. The color scheme also helps the plastic effect of the painting. While the foreground in front of the altar is dark red, the platform behind the head and the moulding below the relief are blue-green, the relief itself and the upper part with the inscription reddish brown, both these colors forming a lively background for the figure.

The painting is signed RAPHAEL VRBINAS PINXIT A D M D V I. The question has been raised whether the date should not be read 1507 instead of 1506. There is a slight damage in the paint behind the "I" which makes it impossible to determine whether the space between the numeral and the painted frame contained another "I" or a dot. As the artist placed a dot between each numeral and was in the habit of ending his signatures with one, it is likely that the reading of 1506 is correct. This date agrees with the style of that year, in which Umbrian elements are still clearly combined with Florentine. In the works of 1507, such as *The Entombment* in the Borghese Gallery, the Michelangelesque tendency has almost entirely overcome the Peruginesque. The Borghese painting, however, is the only other which has exactly the same signature as ours (RAPHAEL VRBINAS PINXIT A D M D V I I), so that it is not impossible that our picture was executed in close proximity to it in date. Otherwise, the signatures of Raphael during this period vary considerably according to where they are placed.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to Leonardo or Michelangelo, who hardly ever signed their paintings, signatures are quite common with Raphael, who had the pride of a youthful and most successful artist.

Some people may think it even sacrilegious that he wrote his name on the border of the garments of some of his Madonnas. It certainly does not speak for too great a modesty that the twenty-one-year-old youth painted his name over the portal of the temple in the center of the composition of the *Sposalizio* in Milan. In our picture also the large signature is conspicuous. Obviously the artist was proud of his work. In the place where the painting originally was exhibited, however, it may not have been, as we shall see, quite as clearly visible as now.

As our painting represents a donor in prayer, it is obvious that an altarpiece must have been connected with it. It also can not be doubted that this altarpiece was placed above our picture and that our painting was exhibited in a rather low position. If the lines of the architectural background are continued, it will be seen that the focus was several inches above the upper edge of the picture. We get the correct perspective of the steps behind the portrait if we look down upon the painting at a slight angle. This seems to prove that the painting was placed as a kind of altarfrontal below the altar, upon which it is likely that there was another painting by Raphael. As the upper edge of our painting was presumably underneath the projecting moulding of the altar top, the shadow cast from this moulding would possibly have made the signature of the artist less conspicuous.

In view of the fact that Raphael is very much inclined to build up his compositions symmetrically, it has been asked whether our painting might not have been the right part of a large altar with a central panel and a corresponding part at the left which would have portrayed a female donor. Against this two

<sup>1</sup>The *Sposalizio* is signed: RAPHAEL VRBINAS MDIII. The *St. George* from the Hermitage in the Mellon Collection (executed 1504 or 5) is signed on the harness of the horse RAPHAELLO. V. The *Cowper Madonna* in the same collection is signed on the border of the mantle of the Madonna: MDVIII. R. V. The *Madonna Ansidei* in the National Gallery, London, and the *Madonna in Green* in the Vienna Museum have only the date, the first MDV, the second MDV. I.



FIG. 4—PORTRAIT OF A DONOR BY RAPHAEL  
RALPH H. BOOTH FUND



FIG. 5  
OXFORD

facts militate. First, no such altar is mentioned in the documents, and we are rather well informed by contemporary descriptions about the large altarpieces which Raphael executed at this time; secondly, the perspective of the architecture in our painting speaks clearly against any such supposition. If our painting had formed the right part of an altar, the focus for the architectural perspective would be a considerable distance to the left of our composition. In other words, the lines of the mouldings leading inward would have been drawn from the right foreground to the left background, whereas they actually convey toward the center. Our painting was therefore composed as a work complete in itself. The further fact that the base which carries the inscription is exactly centered between the two retreating mouldings on either side also supports this.

This base may suggest the lower part of the altarpiece which stood above our

painting. As it is not very wide (within the frame  $21\frac{3}{4}$  inches) it is natural to suppose that the picture above was a Madonna painting of not too large a compass. Now we know that Raphael painted in the year 1506 (1505 according to others) the *Madonna in Green*, and that this is one of the two pictures which, according to Vasari, he painted for Taddeo Taddei, the wealthy Florentine art patron in whose house Raphael stayed while he was in Florence. Vasari does not mention what these two paintings in the possession of Taddeo were. But when Baldinucci,<sup>1</sup> a century later (about 1660) visited the palace of the heirs of Taddeo Taddei, he found that there remained only one painting, representing the Madonna, and, as he relates, shortly thereafter this was sold to the Archduke Ferdinand Carl of Austria. From his description this painting can be identified with the *Madonna in Green*, which, toward the end of the eighteenth century found its way from the Hapsburg castle Ambras into the Belvedere in Vienna.<sup>2</sup> Had the other painting also



FIG. 6  
BRITISH MUSEUM

<sup>1</sup>Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie de Professori*, Firenze, 1681.

<sup>2</sup>Until 1663 the painting was in the Residence castle at Innsbruck; it is mentioned in 1719 in the inventory of Castle Ambras. Archduke Ferdinand Carl, the son-in-law of the Grand Duke Cosimo II, visited Florence in 1661-62 and died at the end of 1662 (Gronau, *Raffaël*, 1922, p. 226).

been a Madonna, as has been suggested, it would have been easy for Vasari to speak of two Madonnas, for he mentions at the same time the *Madonna del Cardellino* which Raphael executed for Lorenzo Nasi. It seems more likely that it was not a Madonna. It is hardly probable that the artist presented his host with two Madonnas inasmuch as he was able to paint other subjects. If we remember that Raphael writes to his uncle in Urbino in 1508 that he owes Taddeo Taddei the deepest gratitude and further that he had stayed as his guest in Florence many months, it seems entirely likely that he painted his portrait. Perhaps the lost painting mentioned by Vasari is identical with our picture. The picture's pedigree, somewhat similar to that of the *Madonna in Green*, would further support this hypothesis, although the provenance for the time being cannot be disclosed. We can imagine that when the family of the Taddei had to sell their heirlooms, they disposed of our painting before they let the Madonna go.

Vasari says that the two paintings belonging to Taddeo Taddei combined well the Umbrian and Florentine manner of Raphael. This is true both of the *Madonna in Green* and our painting. We find the motif of a donor, in profile and half length, praying before the Madonna, more than once among Raphael's predecessors in Umbria. Pintoricchio is a case in point in his altarpiece in the cathedral of Sanseverino and in the panel in the Ambrosiana in Milan. Raphael did not use it again in his Umbrian or Florentine period, but in his Roman period he returns to the representation of portraits in profile more than once. Although these examples belong to a later period and are executed in a different medium (in fresco) they may well be compared with our portrait, not only in the way the figures are contrasted with an architectural background, but also in the design of the profile itself. In the heads of



FIG. 7  
ACADEMY, VENICE

the Swiss guards (fig. 8) in *The Mass of Bolsena* in the Vatican, for instance, we find in the first a similar expression of the mouth with the protruding lower lip, in the second a similar design of the sharply outlined eye and a like treatment of the hair. We are also reminded of Raphael's Umbrian period by the different hats and caps of the figures at the right of the relief. The same variety of shapes is found among the figures of the *Sposalizio*, or in other early works under Perugino's influence.

If our portrait represents Taddeo Taddei, the painting is testimony to an interesting friendship. Taddeo was a patron of letters and friend of Pietro Bembo, the great humanist and poet of whom Raphael painted a lost portrait probably in the same year that he executed our picture,<sup>1</sup> and whose circle also included Balthasare Castiglione. At the time of Raphael's stay with him, Taddeo lived in a house in the Via San Gallo (No. 15) which now has a tablet saying: *Raphael fu ospite di Taddeo di Francesco Taddei in questa casa*. Later Taddeo had a palace built in the Via de Ginori by Baccio d'Agnolo, another of Raphael's

<sup>1</sup>This portrait is mentioned by the Anonimo Morelliano (A. Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, IX, 2, p. 11.)





FIG. 8—DETAIL OF THE MASS OF BOLSENA, VATICAN

friends in Florence. Taddeo was also one of the first patrons of Michelangelo. A year or two before Raphael came to Florence Michelangelo executed for him the beautiful marble tondo of the Madonna, which is in the Royal Academy in London. How much Raphael admired this work in Taddeo's possession is shown by the fact that he made a sketch after the relief, and used its composition for his so-called Bridgewater Madonna. It is of interest to quote the passage in the letter which Raphael wrote to his uncle Simone Ciara informing him that Taddeo contemplated a journey to Urbino: "In the event of Taddeo Taddei, about whom I have often spoken to you, coming to Urbino, pray ask my uncle the priest and my aunt Santa to render him all possible honour without stint. I will ask of you also to do all that you can to oblige him, for I owe him the deepest gratitude."

It must, however, be said that we have no certain proof for the supposition that our portrait represents this Florentine patrician so long as we lack another existing likeness which can be compared with the profile in our picture. There are alternative possibilities. Although Raphael had his studio in Florence from

the end of 1504 to the beginning of 1508, in 1506 and 1507 he stayed for some time in Perugia and in Urbino, and may have painted portraits of courtiers in both cities. There exist drawings for friezes of nude youths, in fighting or in other attitudes,<sup>1</sup> somewhat similar in style to the relief in our painting. These seem to point to Perugia as their place of execution, since one represents an attack on the fortress of this city. They may be connected with the altarpiece of the "Entombment" which Raphael executed for Atalanta Baglioni, in memory of her son Griffone Baglioni who tyrannised over Perugia for a short time before his murder. This same altarpiece, as we have noted, bears a signature identical to the one on our painting.

Whoever may be represented, the portrait is one of the outstanding achievements of Raphael during his Florentine period. He was only twenty-three years old when he painted it, yet the artist who died so young was already at the height of his art. It was the period when he painted some of his most beautiful Madonnas—the *Madonna del Granducca*, the *Madonna del Cardellino*, and the *Belle Jardinière*—and most noble portraits such as those of the Doni and the

<sup>1</sup>Oscar Fischel, *Raphaels Zeichnungen*, II and IV.

Donna Gravida. Our painting is a remarkable addition to the small number of easel paintings created by the master and takes a notable place beside the eight other originals by him owned in this country.

The painting is placed for the time

being upon the altar in the Gothic chapel which was given by Ralph H. Booth, former president of the Arts Commission, from whose fund the painting has been acquired.

W. R. Valentiner

## CALENDAR OF LECTURES AND EXHIBITIONS

### EXHIBITIONS

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| October 15—November 6   | American Folk Art and Colonial Furniture.  |
| October 15—November 15  | Architectural Etchings and Facsimiles of Water-colors and Drawings by Dürer in the Albertina Museum. |
| November 12—December 15 | Michigan Artists' Annual Show.   |

### SPECIAL LECTURES

- Tuesday, November 19—8:30 p. m. "Art for All," by Gordon Washburn, Director Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo.

### GALLERY TALKS

(Tuesdays at 2:30 p. m. and Thursdays at 8 p. m.)

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|--------------------|---|
| November 5 and 7   | "The Roman Empire: From Caesar to Constantine." |
| November 12 and 14 | "Churches of the Earliest Christians."          |
| November 19 and 21 | "Master Artists of Florence and Siena."         |
| November 26 and 29 | "The Splendor of Venetian Painting."            |

### WORLD ADVENTURE SERIES

(Illustrated lectures on Sundays)

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| November 3—3:30 p. m.  | "Mt. Athos and the Crusader Castles of the Mediterranean," by Byron D. MacDonald. |
| November 10—3:30 p. m. | "The World's Stake in Ethiopia," by Col. Charles Wellington Furlong.              |
| 8:30 p. m.             | "My London to Australia Air Race," by Col. Roscoe Turner.                         |
| November 17—3:30 p. m. | "Exploring Madagascar for Science," by Dr. Charles F. Swingle.                    |
| 8:30 p. m.             | "Up-to-the-Minute News from Soviet Russia," by Julien Bryan.                      |
| November 24—3:30 p. m. | "Adventures with the Stars," by Dr. Clyde Fisher.                                 |

### GARDEN CENTER

(Illustrated lectures Thursdays at 2 p. m.)

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|-------------|--|
| November 7  | "Table and Flower Arrangements," by Mrs. Wm. Beresford Palmer. |
| November 21 | "Chrysanthemums," by V. R. DePetris.                           |

## YOUNG ARTISTS' MARKET

(Illustrated lectures the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month at 11 a. m.)

November 11 and 25 "Modern Taste and Its Sources," by Edgar P. Richardson.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

(Illustrated Pageant of History talks by Marion Leland Heath Thursdays at 3:45 p. m.)

November 7 "A Day in Egypt 4000 Years Ago"

November 14 "Temple Builders of Mesopotamia."

November 21 "Sea Kings of Crete."

(Chronicles of America photoplays Tuesdays at 4 p. m.)

November 5 "Peter Stuyvesant."

November 12 "Gateway to the West."

November 19 "Wolfe and Montcalm."

November 26 "Eve of the Revolution."