

## PRESS RELEASE

20 April 2017, for immediate release:

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### ASHMOLEAN TO PRESENT ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME RAPHAEL EXHIBITION

RAPHAEL: THE DRAWINGS

1 June–3 September 2017

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120 works by Raphael from international collections will go on show at the Ashmolean this summer in the once-in-a-lifetime exhibition, **RAPHAEL: THE DRAWINGS**.

Fifty works come from the Ashmolean's own collection, the largest and most important group of Raphael drawings in the world. They arrived in 1845 following a public appeal to acquire them after the dispersal of the collection of the portrait painter Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830), who had amassed an unrivalled collection of Old Master drawings. A further twenty-five works are on loan from the Albertina Museum, Vienna, which will show the exhibition in autumn 2017. The remaining drawings come from international collections and include *The Head of a Muse* (private collection) which broke the records when auctioned at Christies in 2009.

**Dr Xa Sturgis, Director of the Ashmolean Museum, says:** 'Not since 1983, when an exhibition of drawings from British collections was on view at the British Museum, has such an extraordinary gathering of Raphael drawings been shown to the public. The generosity of lenders and supporters has enabled us to give people a 'once in a generation' opportunity - that of experiencing the visual and emotive power of Raphael's hand, and of understanding Raphael's genius.'

The 120 drawings on display are taken from across Raphael's brief but brilliant career, taking visitors from his early career in Umbria through his radically creative years in Florence to the period when he was at the height of his powers in Rome, working on major projects such as the Vatican frescoes. The exhibition aims to transform our understanding of Raphael through a focus on the immediacy and expressiveness of his drawing. It will show how Raphael, throughout his career, engaged in an intensive search through drawing for possibilities of expression that would enable him to fulfil his far-reaching ambitions. Raphael often investigated and refined his ideas through the process and materials of drawing in ways that were more subtle or more adventurous than they would appear in his paintings, as in his nuanced portrayal of a youthful saint (c. 1505–7) that evokes not only a sculptural form, but an enigmatic, brooding character. Similarly, the breathtakingly accomplished red chalk folds that encircle and cling to the Madonna in the *Studies for the Madonna of Francis I* (c. 1518) were expressive details that would not translate to the final painting, but the act of making such elaborate drawings enabled Raphael to reflect deeply on the subject and its significance.



The challenges and opportunities presented by important commissions in Florence and above all in Rome saw Raphael forging through drawing a compelling and persuasive mode of visual communication, orchestrating ambitious narratives with inventive force. He was highly aware of the expressive potential of each drawing medium, including charcoal, earthy chinks, ink and metalpoint. Raphael's drawings reveal processes of thinking, experimenting, recalling from memory, and revising, with gestures both rapid and considered, which attest to an embodied intelligence shaped by the nature of the medium.

At the height of his career and fame in Rome, when he not only became papal architect but also overseer of archaeological excavations, Raphael still used drawing as a mode of reflection and exploration, as well as making drawings of great refinement that were highly prized. That he was willing to offer finished designs as gifts to prestigious figures such as Duke Alfonso d'Este signalled a reciprocal recognition of their value as autonomous works of art. He chose to present the powerful sheet with *Three Standing Men* (c. 1515) to Albrecht Dürer. The German artist annotated the drawing, recording that Raphael sent it to him 'to show him his hand', a phrase that echoes Dürer's concept of the 'free hand', the locus of talent, skill and creativity.

A further highlight is the sublime *Study of the heads and hands of two Apostles* of c.1519–20 relating to the *Transfiguration* altarpiece, arguably the most impressive drawing the artist ever made. This elaborate black chalk study exemplifies the 'mute eloquence' that Renaissance artists aspired to achieve in competition with poets and orators. The combination of moving facial expressions and articulate hand gestures conveys an immediate effect of 'visible speech'. Through drawing, Raphael discovered an avenue of imaginative access to the feelings of his sacred protagonists who respond to disturbing events and are touched by divine light.



**Dr Catherine Whistler, Keeper of Western Art, Ashmolean Museum, and exhibition curator, says:** 'RAPHAEL: THE DRAWINGS aims to shift the ground in our appreciation of Raphael by looking at his drawings as worlds in themselves, where we see the artist's hand and mind in tune as thoughts take shape before our eyes through the process and materials of drawing. The idea of eloquence runs through the exhibition, not only in the shaping of Raphael's powerful visual language but also in the tactile and gestural qualities of the drawings and in their expressive power - aspects that also make the drawings 'speak' in arresting ways to viewers today.'

## ENDS

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### ■ PRESS IMAGES:

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▪ **CAPTIONS:**

*Head of a Muse*, c. 1510–11

Black chalk over pouncing and blind stylus, 30.5 x 22.2 cm  
© Private collection

*Studies of heads and hands, and sketches after Leonardo* (detail shown above), c. 1505–7

Metalpoint, white heightening, partially oxidised, on white prepared paper, 21 x 27.4 cm  
© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

*Studies for the Madonna of Francis I* (detail shown above), c. 1518

Red chalk over blind stylus, 33.6 x 21.4 cm  
© Gallerie degli Uffizi, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe

*Three Standing Men*, c. 1514–16

Red chalk over some blind stylus, and leadpoint for a separate sketch, the sheet cut at the right by an early collector, 40.3 x 28.1 cm  
© Albertina Museum, Vienna

*The heads and hands of two apostles*, c. 1519–20

Black chalk with over pounced underdrawing with some white heightening, 49.9 x 36.4 cm  
© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

*Portrait of a youth (self-portrait?)*, c. 1500–1

Black chalk on white heightening (now largely lost), 38 x 26.1 cm  
© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

▪ **NOTES TO EDITORS**

**Exhibition:** RAPHAEL: THE DRAWINGS

**Dates:** 1 June–3 September 2017

**Press View:** Tuesday 30 May 2017, 11am–2pm

**Venue:** The John Sainsbury Exhibition Galleries

**Tickets:** £12/£10 concessions

**Publication:** The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue of the exhibition with essays by Achim Gnann, Ben Thomas, and Catherine Whistler. £25 available at the Museum or online at [www.ashmolean.org/shop](http://www.ashmolean.org/shop)

**Supporters:** The exhibition research project is supported by The Leverhulme Trust. The exhibition is supported by: The William Delafield Charitable Trust; The Friends of the Ashmolean; The Stockman Family Foundation; The Tavolozza Foundation; Stephen Ongpin; Dr Martin Halusa. The exhibition catalogue is supported by The Wolfgang Ratjen Foundation.

**Credits:** The exhibition has been curated by Dr Catherine Whistler; Dr Ben Thomas; with the assistance of Angelamaria Aceto.

▪ **RAPHAEL (1483–1520)**

Born in Urbino at Easter 1483 to the painter, courtier and writer, Giovanni Santi, Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino (known as Raphael) was in his father's workshop from boyhood. His experience of the artistically rich environment of the court of Urbino was a formative one; by the end of 1500 he was already a *magister* or independent 'master'. A ferocious appetite for learning through drawing is apparent in Raphael's early sheets. In a study of 1500–1, probably a self-portrait, he used black chalk skilfully to model the head, conveying a sense of sculptural form and catching the fall of light on unlined skin. The seductive treatment of the face overpowers any uncertainties in the construction, and the scale and finish of this elaborate work speak of ambition and pride in artistic achievement.

Although Raphael in the early 1500s tested and adapted in drawing the visual language of leading artists in Umbria such as Luca Signorelli, Pintoricchio or Pietro Perugino, it was in Florence that, faced with the achievements of Leonardo and Michelangelo he experimented with new modes of drawing. Themes of the complex relationships of mother and child, and of the figure of the heroic male nude in aggressive action, sparked his imagination as he improvised, observed or composed in drawings that are charged with graphic energy. Florence offered an extraordinary artistic repertoire, crucial to shaping Raphael's imaginative approach, and the fusion of naturalism and grandeur found in his drawings was stimulated by his study of classical and contemporary sculpture. Raphael's style of drawing is, however, unique and clearly different from that of his contemporaries.

In 1508 Raphael moved to Rome at the request of Pope Julius II and he soon began work in the Stanza della Segnatura, the Pope's private library. Over the following decade, with Michelangelo and Sebastiano del Piombo as his principal rivals, Raphael received patronage from private citizens and further papal commissions including the designs for tapestries for the Sistine Chapel. At the height of his success and fame, in 1514, he was appointed architect of St Peter's, following the death of Bramante. Even in the final part of his career, when he was overburdened with work in Rome, Raphael was making drawings of extraordinary complexity such as those related to the *Transfiguration* commissioned by Giulio de' Medici (the future Pope Clement VII) for Narbonne Cathedral.

Raphael died on 6 April 1520 after suffering for ten days with a high fever. His death was reported in a letter to the great patron of the arts, Isabella d'Este: 'Here no one is talking of anything else other than the death of this good man [...] who has finished his first life; but his second life, that is Fame, which is not subject to Time or Death, will be eternal [...].'