

*Raphael: The Drawings* highlights the artist's ambitious and experimental approach to drawing across his brief yet brilliant career. The exhibition unites over 100 works by Raphael spanning the artist's entire career. With a focus on the immediacy and expressiveness of Raphael's drawing, the exhibition transforms our understanding of this great artist and highlights new research on a core group of drawings which have been investigated by the Ashmolean's Conservation Team.

Drawing drove Raphael's creativity. Whether sketching or moving with conviction, Raphael's hand generated lines that gave shape to his pursuit of eloquent forms. By following his dynamic processes we can witness his ideas emerging. Raphael used drawing as a means of observation, as a mode of experimentation, and as a way of reflecting on human emotions and actions. This is evident in two recurring themes in the exhibition: the interactions of mother and child and the dramatic potential of the muscular male body. Raphael forged his artistic identity through drawing, developing an increasingly sophisticated graphic language that aimed to communicate, persuade and move.

The first gallery highlights Raphael's restless inventiveness as he injected fresh energy into existing conventions. His innovative spirit was newly spurred in Florence from 1504 as he responded to classical and modern art - notably that of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. The second gallery sees Raphael in Rome from 1508, confronting the challenge of orchestrating grand narratives and of transforming abstract or literary themes into compelling human dramas. Raphael's powerful sense of the expressive and empathetic qualities of drawing is the focus of the third gallery, as he worked with unceasing energy until his premature death in 1520.

### Studies of standing figures, c.1502–3

Metalpoint on blue prepared paper, Presented by a Body of Subscribers in 1846, Ashmolean Museum WA1846.154



The silvery blue of the prepared ground gives an airy, atmospheric setting for the figures. They wear everyday dress of loose-sleeved shirts and tight hose and hold batons for support. There is a range of initial marks and animated arms and legs overlaid by vigorous hatching.

### Studies of heads and hands, and sketches after Leonardo, c.1505–7

Metalpoint with white heightening, partially oxidised, on white prepared paper, Presented by a Body of Subscribers in 1846, Ashmolean Museum WA1846.176



This sheet is closely packed with studies that reveal Raphael's concerns and interests at the time and his fascination with art being produced in Florence. The diversity of studies shows Raphael's ambition to assimilate and re-interpret Leonardo's visual language and graphic methods.

**A battle of nude warriors with captives, c.1506–7** Pen and brown ink over black chalk Presented by a Body of Subscribers in 1846, Ashmolean Museum WA1846.179



Raphael's drawings of fighting nudes have crowded compositions reminiscent of antique sculptural reliefs. Raphael sketched the essentials of this complex group in black chalk before consolidating the outlines in pen and ink, improvising as he worked.

**Sheet of studies of the Virgin and Child, c.1507** red chalk, pen and brown ink, Vienna, Albertina 209



Raphael's fast-moving hand created variations on the group of the Madonna and Child. He began with red chalk, making swift sketches. He then took up pen and ink and continued to improvise and explore different solutions.

**Study for St Paul in the Disputa, c.1508–10** Charcoal with white heightening, Presented by a Body of Subscribers in 1864, Ashmolean Museum WA1846.189



Charcoal was used for this study of St Paul to achieve powerful effects of light and shade. Raphael initially drew softly, revising his thoughts on the position of the head and the silhouette of the study on the blank sheet. Below, Raphael drew some loosely sketched cherubs in a playful mode.

**Studies for a group in the School of Athens, c.1508–10** Metalpoint with white heightening on grey prepared paper, Vienna, Albertina 4883



Raphael began with the seated figure of a man, working with the metalpoint from within a loose net of lightly drawn lines towards greater definition of form. He sought the greatest possible expression of energy in the forceful right leg whose foot flexes as it pushes upwards, its momentum pivoting around the bulging knee.

**Head of a Muse, c.1510–11** Black chalk over pouncing and blind stylus, New York, Private Collection



The subtle use of black chalk creates an image of grace and beauty. This study comes at a late stage of the design process. The dots of black chalk are signs of transfer from the outlines of a full size image. Raphael allowed the dots to remain visible, contrasting with the elaborate detail in the head.

**Study for the Massacre of the Innocents, c.1509–10** Red chalk, Vienna, Albertina 188



This is one of a series of preparatory drawings for an engraving. It shows Raphael working on compositions, working out how to create a persuasive narrative. The Massacre of the Innocents gave Raphael the opportunity to combine the two themes of the protective mother with her vulnerable child, and the heroic or aggressive male.

**Sheet with inventive ideas and studies of a seated male nude, c.1511–14**

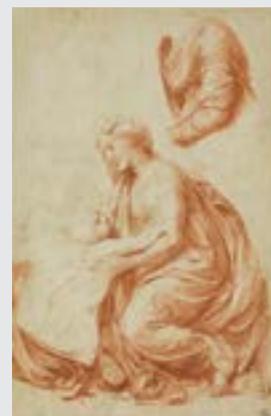
Pen and brown ink, some marks in black chalk(?), and some stylus marks(?), Presented by a Body of Subscribers in 1846, Ashmolean Museum WA1846.200



This explosion of pen and ink sketches communicates a sense of rapid and brilliant improvisations. The main focus of creativity is the densely worked area where at least four different figures are reiterated, enlarged and transformed with intensity.

**Studies for the Madonna of Francis I, c.1518**

Red chalk over blind stylus, Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe 535E



In this mother and child study, Raphael's principal concern was to establish the involved drapery patterns of the cloak and robe. He laid down initial thoughts with a blind stylus. Over this, he created a masterpiece in drapery design through refined handling of red chalk. The child is lightly outlined apart from a quick exploration of facial features.

## Developing techniques

- Why have mother and child compositions inspired artists over the years? Compare and contrast Raphael's drawings with other artists' work on this theme. Consider decorated religious icons, other Renaissance artists and contemporary artists such as Jenny Saville.
- Raphael studied draped fabric. Knot a strip of fabric and use a light source to create interesting twists and folds for drawing across the human form or in a still life.
- Raphael created sheets of small drawn studies as a sort of visual note taking. Choose a subject, for example self-portraiture. Make quick studies to capture visual information. How does this process help you develop your work and ideas?
- Use different coloured papers or create a coloured ink wash background. Use different coloured chalk e.g. red and white on a grey or blue background. Try pen and ink or charcoal. Which materials work well for your subject matter and style of work?
- Raphael drew figures in motion. Photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830 – 1904) took the earliest photographs of figures and animals in motion isolating each stage of the movement. Find film of people moving then pause frame by frame to analyse the stages of movement. Create quick studies to capture the essence of the movement.
- Consider detail within Raphael's drawings. Some areas are more detailed than others. Why do some parts of a composition need more emphasis than others? Consider the subject matter, story, foreground and background.

## Working with drawings: key questions

- What is the main subject of the picture? Why do you think it was chosen?
- What is your eye drawn to and why?
- Why might the drawing have been created and who for?
- What materials were used? Why do you think they were chosen?
- How have materials been used to create different effects? Think about use of tone, shadow and highlight.



Seven nude warriors fighting for a standard, c.1506-7. Pen and ink over black chalk, the outlines pricked for transfer. Presented by a body of Subscribers in 1846, Ashmolean Museum.

## Further resources

Ashmolean Western Art Collection

<http://www.ashmolean.org/ash/objects/?mu=770>

Ashmolean Western Art Print Collection

<http://www.ashmolean.org/ash/objects/?mu=236>

This is a charging exhibition but FREE for pre-booked UK school groups and for under 12s.

To book a group visit please contact the Education Department:

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