

## Master Apprentice Relationship

Megan Rowe

### Introduction:

In a master-apprentice relationship, potential artists studied under other distinguished artists of their time. During the Renaissance, apprentices received shelter and other essentials for life in return for their labors. Examples of these labors include grinding color pigments, shaping wooden panels, or stretching canvas. As time passed, apprentices gradually were allowed more advanced tasks. These tasks included sketches or filling in color according to the master's needs. These various assignments assisted the apprentices in learning artistic skills from their masters, which later lead to them being able to take on apprentices of their own<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, it has been seen that artists adapt their style around their master's. Similarities in the rendering of paintings, artistic content and other aspects have been seen throughout the Renaissance. These relationships can be seen in art work as early as the mid 1200s. During the early Renaissance, Giotto's style was influenced by his master Cimabue. Later, Leonardo de Vinci and Verrocchio's styles showed similarities in various works that were rendered by both artists. In the High Renaissance, Raphael Santi's style displayed similarities that he adapted from Giovanni Santi and Pietro Perugino, both of whom were his masters.

---

<sup>1</sup> August L. Freundlich. "On the University as the Best Environment for Training Artists." *Leonardo* 8.2 (1975): 121.

## Cimabue and Giotto:

In the beginning of the Renaissance, Cimabue was one of the most known artists. After Cimabue made a name for himself in Renaissance art, he acquired disciples that followed him and his works. One of his greatest disciples and apprentices was Giotto. Cimabue was one of the first artists to bring painting back to the area. Giotto, being his

follower, was inspired by this transformation and worked to perfect the skill of painting.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1: Giotto, *The Ognissanti Madonna*. 1310. Tempura on wood. 325 cm x 204 cm. Florence, Italy.

Cimabue greatly impacted Giotto's process as an artist. Much of Giotto's paintings showed similar content to that of Cimabue. By comparing Cimabue and Giotto's works, one can depict many similarities in their style. Both Cimabue and Giotto worked on pieces that involved the Madonna and Christ child. Cimabue painted the *Madonna and Child* (figure 1) in 1280 and later Giotto rendered the *Ognissanti Madonna*

(figure 2). Apart from the related pictorial content, these two compositions share other similarities. Among these are use of space, forms and facial expressions. Another example being when Cimabue and Giotto both created a space where Mary is depicted on a throne surrounded by angels. This tight space is shared between both compositions. The way that the forms are positioned also share similarities. In Cimabue's rendering of Mary and Child, both are shown larger than the other figures with Jesus seated on her lap (figure 1).

---

<sup>2</sup> Giorigo Vasari. "Cimabue". *The Lives of the Artists*. Trans. Juila Connaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2008): 26, 27.



Figure 2: Cimabue.  
*Madonna and Child*. 1280-  
1285. Uffizi Gallery.

This is also seen in the way that Giotto rendered his Mary and Child. In the separate paintings, there are angels and other important figures all facing Mary and baby Jesus. Also, Cimabue and Giotto both depict the facial expressions of the figures very somber and soft. These elements show the influence that Cimabue had on his apprentice, Giotto's, way of rendering. Cimabue's style and processes when rendering impacted the way that Giotto's style was formed. Through this relationship, both artists share stylistic qualities.

### Verrocchio and da Vinci:



Figure3: Andrea del Verrocchio &  
Leonardo Da Vinci, *The Baptism of  
Christ*, 1472-1475, Oil on wood, Uffizi  
Gallery, Florence

Two hundred years after Cimabue and Giotto, similarities between a master's style is evident in the apprentice's work. Leonardo da Vinci is one of the artists that is widely known for his art during the Renaissance. He worked under Verrocchio, who was also well known during the Renaissance. After his time was completed as an apprentice, da Vinci stayed on as an assistant to Verrocchio. The earliest painting that da Vinci aided Verrocchio in was the rendering of the painting *Baptism of Christ* (figure

3).<sup>3</sup> It is believed da Vinci painted the landscape and Christ himself because the realism is



Figure 4: Andrea del Verrocchio, Tobias and the Angel, 1470–1480, Egg tempera on nonlar National Gallery



distinct compared to the palm tree and the other three figures in the painting.

Da Vinci and Verrocchio both did a rendering of the scene, *Tobias and the Angel* (figure 4). In Verrocchio's piece, there is a flatness to his work whereas da Vinci's shows more depth with the rendering of the shadows. This flatness is evident when looking at the palm tree, dove, and rays in particular. If you look at da Vinci's, *Virgin and Child with St. Anne* (figure 5), his rendering

of landscape has a very serene and soft-like

brushwork that is similar in comparison to the

background of *The Baptism of Christ*.

When bringing forth elements

such as the palm tree, rocks, dove, and rays, there

is a distinction between the two styles portrayed;

Leonardo's subtle realism versus Verrocchio's

crisp as well as clear rendering of

naturalism/realism. Another example is the

scenery in *Annunciation*(figure 6) by da Vinci. His

<sup>3</sup> Encyclopedia of World Biography. "Leonardo da Vinci". [encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Leonardo_da_Vinci.aspx). Nov 28, 2015. [http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Leonardo\\_da\\_Vinci.aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Leonardo_da_Vinci.aspx)



Figure 6: Leonardo Da Vinci, *Annunciation*, c. 1472-1475, oil and tempera on panel, 98 x 217 cm Uffizi Gallery Florence Italy

Figure 5: Leonardo Da Vinci, *Virgin and Child with St. Anne*, c. 1503, Oil on wood Louvre Paris

rendering of the trees is realistic as he depicts each and every leaf in his brushwork, similar to the trees in the corner of *Baptism* (figure 3). Both are distinctly different than the palm tree on the far left. Another similarity between the stylistic choices in each painting is the atmospheric perspective, which portrays the wispy yet still dominant backdrop to emphasize the depth of the background (figures 5, 6)

It is quite obvious that Christ and St. John were painted by two different people, from the musculature of their bodies, to the expressions on their faces. Thus, it is likely that St. John was painted by Leonardo. It is no secret that Leonardo was a man fascinated with the anatomy of the human body. He would dissect bodies and make observations and sketches in his many journals.<sup>4</sup> St. John's body has a more 'flexed' look, where every muscle and tendon is emphasized scrupulously compared to Christ's body (figure 3) Since Leonardo was working under Verrocchio at this time, he might

<sup>4</sup> Encyclopedia of World Biography. "Leonardo da Vinci". [encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Leonardo_da_Vinci.aspx). Nov 28, 2015. [http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Leonardo\\_da\\_Vinci.aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Leonardo_da_Vinci.aspx)

have been in the early stages of his anatomical studies which perhaps made him less experienced at portraying correct proportions through paint naturally/realistically. The relationship between Verrocchio and da Vinci's style shows how the master impacted the apprentice into the middle of the Renaissance.

### **Giovanni, Perugino and Raphael:**

During the high Renaissance, some of the most iconic art was produced. Raphael became a well known artist and composed most of his work during this time as well. Raphael's style was influenced from his two teachers. The first being his father, Giovanni Santi and the other, his master, Perugino. By working under these two artists, Raphael's style reflected aspects of both masters. In Raphael's work this influence is visible through the imitation of different painting techniques. Giovanni Santi was the first to expose Raphael to art and bestowed to him his initial training. This played a huge role in the formation of Raphael's artistic style. One can clearly see that Raphael adjusted his style to accommodate his collaborators, Giovanni Santi and Perugino. Even in his lifetime, Raphael gave thanks saying he "learned from his father who was a painter and from Perugino."<sup>5</sup> All of Raphael's initial training came from his two masters. The way that Giovanni and Perugino taught Raphael was through their own personal style and rendering techniques. It was because of this that Raphael's style was seen to imitate his master's.

In his youth, Raphael's work showed many color combinations that reflected his father's style. Raphael's father had him grinding color pigments as one of the first tasks in his early apprenticeship. By learning the mixture of colors and applying them to canvas under his

---

<sup>5</sup> Kim E. Butler(2009): 18.

father, Raphael had little opportunity for experimentation of these techniques in his own way. Although Raphael took many stylistic traits while working under his father, the two still

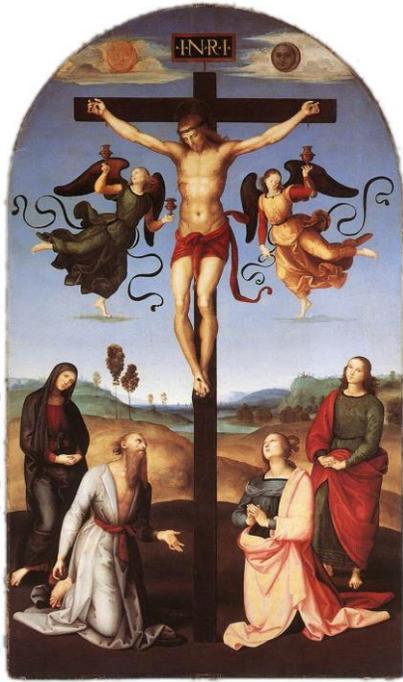
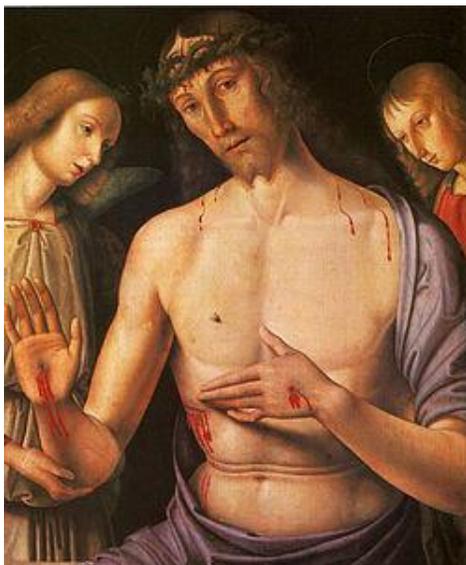


Figure 7:Raphael, *Gavari Crucifixion*, 1503. oil on poplar. 111.5 in × 65.9 in. National Gallery London

differed in style. Giovanni used more white flesh tones in his compositions compared to Raphael's. These traits are evident in Raphael's early style in his rendition of *Gavari Crucifixion* (figure 7) of 1503. When comparing to Giovanni's *Christ supported by two angels* (figure 8), one can easily see the similarities of his work and Raphael's. In both paintings, Christ is visible in a sickly manner. Details that support this are the pigment of his skin color, the forms of the body and the facial expressions. Both Raphael and Giovanni put Christ as the main focus in the center to show the importance of the figure. Throughout time, Raphael's style changed from mimicking his fathers, to creating his own technique. You can see this difference in a comparison



of how both artists use their light sources to portray depth in a painting. Giovanni had the light source seem as if it was casting light from all directions in his rendering of *Christ supported by two angles*.(figure 8) A more evident light source is used in Raphael's *Gavari Crucifixion* giving more contrast of lights and

Figure 8: Giovanni Santi, *Christ supported by two angels*. 1490. oil on canvas. 66.5 x 54.5 cm

darks (figure 7). This adaptation to the changing style shows that Raphael grew and learned as an individual.<sup>6</sup> Even though Raphael's artistic approach progressed to be more of his own, his stylistic traits still mimicked those of his fathers. Imitation is proof of the influence that Giovanni had on Raphael's style.

Not only was Raphael's style influenced by his father's style, it adapted from the master that he primarily studied under. After Giovanni taught his son all of the skills that he knew, he felt there was nothing else that Raphael could learn from him. To further Raphael's education in the arts, Giovanni brought him to Perugino asking if he would take Raphael as his apprentice. The reason Giovanni chose to offer Raphael to Perugino is because Perugino was believed to be one of the greatest painters of that time. In the beginning, Perugino did not want to accept Raphael as his apprentice. It was not until after Giovanni befriended Perugino that he realized Raphael's potential. After observing Raphael's skill and technique, Perugino saw Raphael's style of drawing and his beautiful manner of forms. This showed him potential for Raphael's artistic career. By studying under Perugino, Raphael learned to emulate his style almost exactly. There were details in the portraits in which they collaborated that to the untrained eye, were not easily distinguished.<sup>7</sup> When Perugino trusted Raphael to aid in the rendering of some of his paintings, it showed that he trusted his style to match that of his own. The master and apprentice relationship between these two artists is an example of how the style of the master influences that of their apprentice.

---

<sup>6</sup> Kim E. Butler (2009): 18.

<sup>7</sup> Giorgio Vasari. (2008): 306, 307.



Figure 9: Raphael. *Alba Madonna*. 1510. oil on panel transferred to canvas. Framed: 55 x 53 1/2 x 5 1/2



Raphael created an artistic process for himself by using aspects of both Perugino's and Giovanni's stylistic techniques. Although many style characteristics are similar, the two artists show some differences as well. Perugino's technique was to apply many layers to show depth within a piece. On the other hand, Raphael's composition seemed more flat with

strongly outlined figures and visibly harder brush strokes. Although these aspects differed,

Raphael closely imitated Perugino's subject matter, style and technique. It is seen in

Raphael's work that he repeatedly used white flesh tones

present in Giovanni's style. You can see the difference

when comparing Raphael's *Alba Madonna* (figure 9)

from 1510 versus Perugino's rendition of *Madonna*

*and Child* (figure 10) from 1500.<sup>8</sup> The similarities of

style between these two artists appear in the

proportions of the Christ child's body in comparison to

Mary. These paintings both represent the Christ child

in a way that portrays characteristics of an infant.

There are also similarities seen in the facial expression

on Mary's face. In both artists' rendering of Mary, they

portray her with a soft expressionless face. These

---

<sup>8</sup> Kim E. Butler (2009): 20.

Figure 10: Perugino, *Madonna and Child*, 1500, tempura on panel, 31 3/4 x 25 1/2 in.

examples show how Perugino's style influenced Raphael's works. This growth led to differences in use of color compared to Giovanni and Perugino.<sup>9</sup>

According to Vasari, the Madonna painting was the turning point to the period of Perugino imitation.<sup>10</sup> The two artists show similarities in both stylistic rendering and choice content. This similarity shows the influence that Perugino had on Raphael's development of style.

Not only was Raphael's painting style an imitation, Raphael's signature style seemed to imitate his master's, Perugino. Both artists' used suggested inscriptions into their works. These inscriptions helped portray different ideas or concepts to the viewer, with or without them being aware of the fact. Perugino's inscriptions were meant to tease the viewer into thinking that there was writing along the border. Most of the time, these inscriptions were patterns or line work that emulated words instead of using actual text. On the other hand, Raphael used his inscriptions as a decorative factor. Raphael used actual text that was disguised in a way that made them seem like a pattern or other decorative technique. The other difference between the two artists was the Perugino did not use comprehensible text and Raphael disguised his text in a way where it lost the characteristics that comprehensible text exhibits.<sup>11</sup> Along with Perugino's signature, his style is also present in Raphael's drawings. Raphael also demonstrated in many occasions that he copied Perugino's style through shared compositions.<sup>12</sup> The imitation of Perugino's signature style through Raphael's work is proof that he used aspects of his master's work in his own.

---

<sup>9</sup> Kim E. Butler (2009): 18.

<sup>10</sup> Kim E. Butler (2009): 20.

<sup>11</sup> Rona Goffen. "Raphael's Designer Label: From the Virgin Mary to La Fornarina." *Artibus et Historiae* 24.48 (2003): .

<sup>12</sup> Kim E. Butler 18.

**Conclusion:**

From Giotto to da Vinci to Raphael, many well known artists adapted their styles from their masters. This relationship is shown through the use of similar techniques along with rendering, stylistic choices and contextual choices. If it were not for the master's teachings, many of the famous Renaissance artists would not be as well known as they are in society today. Through imitation and adapting specific aspects of style, the influence is clear in these artists' work. These techniques show the importance of teaching to an artist early in their artistic careers.

## Work Cited

- Butler, Kim E. "Giovanni Santi, Raphael, and Quattrocento Sculpture." *Artibus et Historiae* 30.59 (2009): 15-39.
- Encyclopedia of World Biography. "Leonardo da Vinci". [encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com). Nov 28, 2015. [http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Leonardo\\_da\\_Vinci.aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Leonardo_da_Vinci.aspx)
- Freundlich, August L. "On the University as the Best Environment for Training Artists." *Leonardo* 8.2 (1975): 121-24.
- Goffen, Rona. "Raphael's Designer Label: From the Virgin Mary to La Fornarina." *Artibus et Historiae* 24.48 (2003): 123-42.
- Vasari, Giorigo. *The Lives of the Artists*. Trans. Juila Connaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.