

When art speaks: an analysis of two artist and two works of art

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When Art Speaks: An Analysis of Two Artist and Two Works of Art Wanda M. Argersinger Southern New Hampshire University When Art Speaks The Italian Renaissance produced many artists and even more works of art, but there were three artists considered to be the Trinity of Great Masters, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Raffaello Santi, or simply Raphael. While these artists often worked in different mediums, Michelangelo preferred stone and Raphael preferred oil paint. Michelangelo and Raphael were able to portray emotions in their work.

In two of these works, The Pieta and La Madonna di San Sisto, these artists were able to bring to works of art the raw emotions felt by their subjects. Though their works are quite different, what they portrayed was often quite similar. One of Raphael's works called Raphael's Angels (San Sisto, 1513-1514), speaks to me in many ways. I was familiar with these two cherubs in the Sistine Madonna as they are often copied and hung in offices and homes. But it was only recently that I discovered that these two smiling cherubs belong to a larger work of art.

These two well-known cherubs are part of a larger oil painting done on canvas titled La Madonna di San Sisto or Sistine Madonna. It was a commissioned piece and the last of Raphael's Madonnas. When the cherubs are seen alone they are often called Raphael's Angels, The Sistine Cherubs, and Raphael's Two Putti. Most of the works of art during the Renaissance had strong religious connections and were done for the church with the intent that it would reside in the church. When we think of this period in art we most often think of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel.

While Raphael's Sistine Madonna is in oil, it was done on a flax covered wall in the Benedictine monastery church and was not permanent. The full painting, The Sistine Madonna, shows Mary holding the baby Jesus, sans halo, with two Saints. The cherubs sit at the very bottom of the picture, almost out of place. Their cherubic faces and expressions, in my opinion, belie the magnificence and holiness of the rest of the art work. They look puzzled and somewhat bored, a bit mischievous and not at all reverent.

The colors are similar to others used during this period but do not contain all the colors used by Michelangelo in his painting of The Sistine Chapel. They are not bright or harsh, but rather muted. There is sparing use of red and blue, but show more use of brown and gold. The curtains and clothes are dark. The images have little shadowing, showing only under the feet of Mary and one of the saints. The lines of the painting show an opened curtain and clouds on which Mary and the saints stand.

The cherubs appear to be leaning on a solid surface that is, in fact, the very bottom of the painting, which is the only straight line of the piece. The clothes appear to be flowing, captured by the use of curved lines and shadowing in the folds. The light source appears to be the clouds which are the brightest of the piece. Personally, it is the cherubs that speak to me, and not the entire work of art. I like the playfulness they show in their eyes. I like the idea that not all religious work is completely serious and that some fun exists in religion.

Intellectually, I wonder what the purpose Raphael had in including them in a Church commissioned work. This work is much like other works of the time - religious in nature, done in oil, and displayed in a house of worship. No doubt <https://assignbuster.com/when-art-speaks-an-analysis-of-two-artist-and-two-works-of-art/>

that Rafael was influenced by other artists and the trend in art of the time, and yet from this one work of art, it appears that the artist himself shows his own unique style simply by including the cherubs and their quizzical looks. During this same time period, the famous Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel.

Though he may be remembered as a painter, he considered himself a sculptor and completed many statues during his lifetime. One in particular, his Pieta, (Rome, 1498) speaks to me in many ways. The Pieta is a marble statue of Mary holding Christ after he was removed from the cross. He lies straddled across her lap with her looking down on him with a solemn face and closed eyes. When looking at the piece it would be difficult not to see the pain of a woman who has lost someone dear to them.

Certainly you can see the grief of Mary for the loss of Jesus, but you can also see the grief of many women who have lost someone they love. I am reminded of all women who grieve for the loss of a child. Done in marble, the statue appears to glisten in places and yet seems darker and in others. The lines capture the image of the human form and the folds of the clothes Mary wears. The hard stone she sits upon is barely seen and does not distract from the movement of the other aspects of the piece. Her face appears shaded under the scarf on her head, while light reflects off the body of Christ.

The statue shows marvelous detail of Christ's body including the holes in his hands where he was nailed to the cross. Upon close observance of the statue one can see that Mary does not touch Jesus skin to skin but has a garment under her right hand, while her left hand is away from the body with her

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palm up. During his life Michelangelo worked for the church under Pope Julius II and for the Medici family that ruled Rome. The majority of his work was religious in nature, as seen in The Pieta and another famous sculpture he did of David.

He designed the tombs for the Medici family and also the Medici Chapel. Michelangelo's work, along with Raphael's works, follow the works of the time, most being not only religious in nature, but based on the Christian religion and following stories from the Bible. Both painting and sculpting were popular forms of art and capturing the body through use of religious figures played a major part in the subject matters. Whether done in marble, clay, or oil, the pieces of art capture the emotions of life, the human form in almost absolute detail, and the thoughts of society at the time.

With Italy being the center of Catholicism and home to the main church, it is no wonder that the majority of the art works during this period are religious in nature. Add to that the fact that many of the pieces were commissioned by one or more arms of the church religion was certainly the major influence on many of the artists. Topalski, Art In Creation, Raphael's Angels, Retrieved from <http://www.topalski.com/2012/artworks-in-progress-fine-art-in-creation/raphael%E2%80%99s-angels/> Garden of Praise, Pieta, Retrieved from <http://www.gardenofpraise.com/art50.htm>