

*Miraculous Draught of Fishes* by Sanzio Raphael (16th century Italian artist) - Some artists are so famous that they are known by their first name only. Raphael is one of them, which is amazing since he died at the age of 37. Although he lived half the number of years as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, he was at their level of artistry. His father was an artist for the court of Duke of Urbino (an Italian kingdom) so he had a head start.

At this time in history (the 16th century), artists experimented with many kinds of materials. This painting is large: 12 feet by 13 feet! In 1515 Raphael drew the cartoon, which is what they called the sketch, on paper. He made tempura (an egg-yolk based paint) and painted on paper which he must have folded. He mounted the paper onto canvas. Tempura lasts a very long time.

It has been a long night, and dawn is breaking over the lake. How do we know it is dawn? Red light is reflected in the reflection beneath Jesus. Based on the play of shadows and light we know the sun is not in the background. The sun is where the viewer sits, off the painting.

Two boats carry muscular men whose reflection is in the water. In the first boat are the fishermen in blue and green. The arm of the green reaches toward the viewer. The blue worships Jesus. Which disciple do you think he is? In the second boat are men retrieving the net while a third continues to row. A flock of birds fly from the background to the fishermen in foreground. The birds hover near the fisherman, hoping for a tasty morsel.

The cities in the background are Italian, not Galilean. They gradually fade in color to mainly blues and lose detail the farther they are away from the viewer. This gives the painting depth.

*Young Woman with a Unicorn* by Sanzio Raphael (16th century Italian artist) - Raphael lived in Rome, Italy in the 16th century — a time when painting had become more realistic. He died young — at the age of 37. How did he manage to paint so many pictures? In those days, great artists had workshops. The artist would draw the cartoon (sketch) by hand but people in his workshop would do simple tasks: make the paint, prepare the materials, and even point unimportant bits.

If you ever go to an art museum, the most important rule is “do not touch the painting!” There are guards who watch to make sure that you obey. People weren’t so fussy as they are now. For hundreds of years, this painting was called Saint Catherine of Alexandria, a Catholic saint. The woman was wearing a shawl to cover her shoulders and her hand was on a wheel. She lived during a time in which the Roman empire persecuted Christians and the emperor had ordered her to be crushed by a wheel.

You may be wondering what happened to the robe and wheel. In the 1700s, not only had someone sneaky touched the painting, they added their own “improvements.” When modern restorers transferred the painting to canvas to preserve it, they noticed extra layer of added paint. Imagine their shock when they removed the robe and wheel and found a unicorn! But, wait, there’s another surprise for the careful observer. Later on, they took x-rays of the painting and underneath the unicorn Raphael had painted a dog. You can still see the dog’s ears near the unicorn’s head, only they are now red and are part of the young woman’s sleeve.

One more tidbit, most paintings of this time have a large or small section of landscape to make it look more real.

*Saint George and the Dragon* by Sanzio Raphael (16th century Italian artist) - Saint George is the patron saint of England, not Italy. Clues clearly tie this painting to England's George. He is a saint for he wears a halo. George is wearing a blue garter (leg band) with the letters HONI (Honi soit qui mal y pense), which means "Shame on him who thinks ill of it." The Order of the Garter, one of England's highest award, was established in the name of Saint George. Why would an Italian artist paint him slaying an evil dragon?

In 1504 Henry VII of England awarded the Duke of Urbino the Order of the Garter. The king paid honor to a minor Italian ruler to show his appreciation of the Renaissance Italy's art and culture. With its sour relations with Spain and France, having some Italian friends seemed like a good idea. The Duke hired a young artist — only twenty-three years old — from Urbino to paint two small scenes of St. George, the princess, and the dragon. Each painting is less than one foot by one foot. He sent one of the paintings (we are not sure which) to England. We chose this painting because, if you ever go to Washington, DC, you can see it hanging at the National Gallery of Art. Right here in the United States!

By the time Raphael began work on his two tiny commissions, he had already moved to Florence. Florence, Italy! The flowering of all sorts of art of this time — sculpture, architecture, and painting. Today, one could spent an entire month in Florence and still not see all that there is to see. Who do we know that is from Florence? In one cathedral (there are many) lies buried Galileo Galilei, Michelangelo, and many other people you will study some day.

*Guidobaldo da Montefeltro* by Sanzio Raphael (16th century Italian artist) - Who is this serious young man in rich, black clothing? Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, the Duke of Urbino. Italy was not really a country in the 16th century and it did not become a country for another 300 years. The Italian boot was a patchwork of small city states that was continuously ripping apart seams because each duke wanted a larger kingdom. The Republic of Florence was its western border and the Adriatic Sea was its eastern border.

Because of the need for a strong defense, many leaders of these little kingdoms were mercenary captain — strong military fighters. Such leaders followed the money. At one point, Guidobaldo fought alongside King Charles VIII of France and, a few years later, he fought against King Charles. Perhaps, he also saw the need to defend his elegant home. His court was known to be the most fashionable court of the time and there's even a fictionalized account written by an eyewitness. Sadly, Guidobaldo did not get to enjoy his reign for long. He died from a disease we could easily cure today. His body was deficient of Vitamin B3 and all he needed was a healthy diet!

Why would the Duke of Urbino call on one of the three greatest Italian artists to paint his portrait and several more of his family? The artist Raphael was born and raised in Urbino and his father had worked for Guidobaldo's father. Growing up in court gave him an important edge over other artists: he had learned proper manners and good social skills which will get you ahead in life today. After his father died, he trained under another master of