MANNERISM

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STYLE AND CIVILIZATION

I

The Historical Reality

This book will have at least one feature in common with all those already published on Mannerism; it will appear to describe something quite different from what all the rest describe. It is as well to be frank about this from the start. Such is the confusion in our present usage of the term that one perfectly natural reaction, to be found even among art-historians, is that Mannerism does not exist.

Obviously, my editors and I believe that Mannerism does exist, with the same kind of reality (and no more) as the other style periods that are commonly acknowledged. In my view the contradictions in contemporary meanings for the word 'Mannerism' are to a great extent due to the fact that most of them are too contemporary and not sufficiently historical. In the attempt to rescue sixteenth-century art from the ill repute that much of it enjoyed in the nineteenth century, it has been endowed with virtues peculiar to our time – especially the virtues of aggression, anxiety and instability. They are so inappropriate to the works in question that some pretty odd results are bound to follow (the sixteenth-century viewpoint of works of art was admirably relaxed). My conviction is that Mannerist art is capable of standing on its own feet. It can be and ought to be appreciated or rejected on its *own* terms, and according to its own virtues, not ours. This raises no particular difficulty unless we succumb to a certain aesthetic squeamishness, for some of the relevant virtues are, unquestionably, hard to accept today.

At all events, it is a fact that many interpretations now exist for Mannerism. The conclusion is unavoidable: each author must define his term and justify the way he uses it – not as an academic ritual but so that the reader may make up his own mind about where it goes right and where it goes wrong.

DEFINING THE TERM

In the term 'Mannerism' there is a trap, concealed in the word itself. 'Mannerism' appears among purely descriptive terms,

'Gothic', 'Renaissance' and 'Baroque', and it alone is an 'ism'. This is an invitation to conceive it as a movement, like those of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: as if it had a conscious direction, a manifesto, and a self-awareness that is focused in the notion of conflict with the art of the immediate past. But these ideas are anachronistic if they are projected back into the sixteenth century; they distort one pattern of development into another, and while they have the apparent virtue of making tidy something that is in reality untidy they end in an embarrassing disagreement between what is said now and what was said and thought at the time.

The problem of defining the term Mannerism is first of all a problem of method. Part of our present trouble is due to a certain arbitrariness in its application. A great deal of sixteenth-century art had been consigned to limbo by critics from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries; they thought it perverse and decadent. Around 1920 it was realized that so sweeping a condemnation was unjust. A number of interesting things happened in this neglected period; many of them were strange and fascinating, some of them were beautiful. To these phenomena, isolated and examined, was then applied the term Mannerism which was, as we shall see, conveniently at hand; it was as if the label could be attached freely to anything without one. Since the sixteenth century embraced some remarkably diverse styles, Mannerism as a concept became, not unnaturally, strained.

But another process may be used. The label did, in fact, come down to us firmly attached to something; we have inherited, not invented, it. If we give up the right to make it mean anything we like, we have in return a meaning that is specific, arguable and historically legitimate. For the expression Mannerism is unusual among our style-labels since, like Impressionism, it may be traced back to ideas in circulation in the cultural context of the works themselves. Having found out what, historically, it should apply to, we may at that stage begin to define tendencies in style that are in harmony with it. This may provide us, finally, with a more restricted field of operation than does the more arbitrary approach, but this is of no significance. We are not bound to account for all the multitude of tendencies in the sixteenth century; and the value of any such term as ours varies in inverse proportion to the number of diverse phenomena it is made to embrace.

The origin of the expression Mannerism lies in an Italian word: *maniera*. This word was used during the Renaissance period in a number of grammatically different ways and carried with it a like number of meanings, but Mannerism is derived from one particular usage only: the absolute one. *Maniera* may in all cases be translated into the English word *style*. We use our word in various ways, most often with some qualification, as when we talk of Giotto's style, Byzantine style, abstract style, and so on. More rarely we use it absolutely; we say that a person, a performance or a man-made object (artefact or motor-car) *has style*, or equally has not. In the same way *maniera* was a possible, and in general desirable, attribute of works of art. For example Raphael and Castiglione wrote a most significant letter in 1519 to Pope Leo X on the architecture of Rome, in which they said that the buildings of the Goths were 'privi di ogni gratia, senza maniera alcuna' (devoid of all grace and entirely without style); in its context this remark implied that the qualities of grace and *maniera* were to be appreciated in the architecture of antiquity. Already in 1442 a sonnet listed *maniera* among the heaven-sent gifts of Pisanello; and in 1550 Vasari included it among the five qualities which, by being more highly developed in the art of the sixteenth century than that of the fifteenth, made his period superior.

The precise meaning of the word, when used absolutely as in these and several other cases, may be narrowed down by considering its still earlier history. Renaissance criticism of the visual arts was a less mature, articulate and well-armed discipline than many other literary forms of its kind, and the device of borrowing terms of reference and analytical techniques that occurs throughout the history of these disciplines was at that moment a very necessary one for writers in this field. The concept *maniera* was borrowed from the literature of manners, and had been originally a quality – a desirable quality – of human deportment. Lorenzo de'Medici, for example, required *maniera* in the deportment of ladies. In turn the word had entered Italian literature from French courtly literature of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. There *manière*, like its Italian derivative, meant approximately savoir-faire, effortless accomplishment and sophistication; it was inimical to revealed passion, evident effort and rude naïveté. It was, above all, a courtly grace. This meaning survives, not only through its transference in Italy to the visual arts but also in its modern

English equivalent, 'style'. *Maniera*, then, is a term of long standing in the literature of a way of life so stylized and cultured that it was, in effect, a work of art itself; hence the easy transference to the visual arts.

However, there were two sides to this coin, then as now. If we say that a person has style we may wish to imply that he is unnatural, affected, self-conscious or ostentatious. In the sixteenth century *maniera* was generally a desirable attribute of a work of art, but this positive aspect was accompanied by the realization of the negative one that corresponded to what we now call, derogatively, stylization. Vasari found this defect, perhaps rightly, in the self-generating abstraction of Perugino, and another writer, the Venetian Lodovico Dolce (1557), implied that there was a general recognition of a deplorable tendency towards the reduction of artistic creation to a stereotype, to *maniera*. It was understood that *maniera*, whether in people or works of art, entailed a refinement of and abstraction from nature and this might or might not be a good thing. The tendency, setting in towards the end of the sixteenth century, was increasingly to question its validity, and thus it was that the negative aspect of the quality *maniera* came, in time, to be its whole meaning. To the seventeenth-century theorist Bellori *maniera* – the vice that destroyed good painting between, approximately, Raphael and Rubens – was an ideal born in the artist's fantasy and based not upon reality but upon *pratica*: stylistic convention and technical expertise.

Changing prejudice often inverts the value of words while preserving most of their sense; virtues are turned into vices, artistic qualities become defects. A case that concerns us is the word 'artificial' which is now normally pejorative, implying something meretricious. But it was not originally so, and in the sixteenth century the word *artifizioso* was wholly complimentary, and to a great extent concomitant with *maniera*; books ought to be written, and pictures painted, with artifice. Benedetto Varchi (1548) defined the intention of artistic creation as 'an artificial imitation of nature', which is the more interesting for being a widely held view rather than an original one. We have also, equally irrationally, made a term of abuse out of the word 'rhetorical'. These things happen when the convictions of one age are no longer reconcilable with those that succeed it. It is our nature to assume that our convictions alone are right, which they are unlikely to be.

As applied to people the notion of 'style' had always had, in France, derivative adjectives; in the first half of the sixteenth century there was current in Italy the flattering term *manieroso*: stylish, in the sense of polished. It was not long before works of art were similarly described. An alternative in the seventeenth century is *manierato*: more negatively intended, like our 'stylized'. The objective sense of the word is exemplified in a note made by Jonathan Richardson (1722), the heir to the whole Renaissance and academic tradition of criticism, on an antique bust of a girl in the Uffizi: 'very young, and a natural pretty air: this is not common in the Antique, which is generally *Manierato*'. Simultaneously there appeared in France the abusive name for a type of artist, more concerned with technical facility than anything else: *maniériste*. When in turn this title was transferred once more into Italian by the great historian Luigi Lanzi (1792) he adhered more precisely to the ideas implied by the root of the word since he specifically meant that group of artists previously stigmatized by Bellori with the vice of *maniera*; and this is important for it was Lanzi who invented, in the same context, the substantive we now use: *manierismo*.

The title thus given to a period is derived from a quality which is singled out, soon after the period in question, as most characteristic of it, and from a quality that is appreciated before and during that period. So, when we turn to look for tendencies in the art of the sixteenth century that may justifiably be called Mannerist, it is logical to demand that these should be, so to speak, drenched in *maniera* and, conversely, should not be marked by qualities inimical to it, such as strain, brutality, violence and overt passion. We require, in fact, poise, refinement and sophistication, and works of art that are polished, rarefied and idealized away from the natural: hot-house plants, cultured most carefully [1]. Mannerism should, by tradition, speak a silver-tongued language of articulate, if unnatural, beauty, not one of incoherence, menace and despair; it is, in a phrase, the stylish style.

There may have been an element of chance in the early selection of one quality in this kind of art to typify the whole, and we should greatly impoverish our understanding of Mannerism if we did not take account of other ideas intimately associated, in the same cultural context, with *maniera* and ideally harmonious with it. Modern aesthetic attitudes, at least those of sufficient maturity for us to be aware of them, are

1. *Madonna del Collo Lungo.* Parmigianino

quite as effective an obstacle to the appreciation of Mannerist works of art as were those of Ruskin's era, and a frame of mind tolerant to them is not easily acquired. One reads, as we have seen, with surprise that artifice is a quality to be nurtured; yet there is clearly no reason why it should not be. Almost more important is the notion of difficulty, that is to say of difficulty overcome, which achieved during the Renaissance and Mannerism a significance which now seems hypnotic and irrelevant. Lorenzo de'Medici, in a Commentary upon his own sonnets, argued that this verse-form is the equal of any other because of its *difficultà* – because *virtù*, according to the philosophers, consists in (the conquest of) difficulty; to the philosophers he might have added Vitruvius who defined Invention as 'the solving of difficult problems and the treatment of new problems achieved by a lively intelligence'. Painters and sculptors each argued the superiority of their art over the other because it was more difficult. One of the qualities of Brunelleschi's trial relief for the bronze doors of the Florence Baptistery that his friend and biographer Manetti admired most was *difficultà*. It was, according to Raphael and Castiglione, to be found in antique architecture. Vasari praised Bramante for increasing it, together with beauty, to the great advantage of the modern style in architecture. This idea was important because it led to the appreciation (which we do not share) of facility as a very positive virtue; and it led also to those kinds of complexity and invention that are the result of deliberately raising more difficulties, so that dexterity may be displayed in overcoming them.

Today we take a somewhat priggish attitude towards virtuosity, but in the sixteenth century there were fewer inhibitions. Vasari defined perfection in the art of painting as richness of invention, absolute familiarity with anatomy, and the reduction of difficulty to facility; and Dolce went so far as to say that 'facility is the basis of the excellence of any art'. Already in the fifteenth century Landino praised Masaccio's 'great facility of execution', an attitude unlikely to be prominent in any modern monograph on this artist.

Castiglione, in the *Cortegiano* (published 1528, but written earlier), invented a word for the courtly grace revealed in the effortless resolution of all difficulties – *sprezzatura*, which is that kind of well-bred negligence born of complete self-possession that Van Dyck and Gainsborough not accidentally divined in the English gentleman – and this term was used

with enthusiasm by Dolce for works of art. As with 'facility', the opposite vice is the *visible* application of too much effort or any sense of strain in the performance.

The love of complexity rather than economy was another characteristic of the period. Lorenzo de'Medici, in the same Commentary, expressed his dislike of obscurity and hardness of style but valued copiousness and abundance. And finally we have to accept the validity of the caprice, the bizarre fantasy, or, as we sometimes call it, the conceit. This was so well understood in the sixteenth century that Vasari could praise as capricious, for example, the spectators crowded on columns in Raphael's *Heliodorus*, and as 'a most bizarre invention' an octagonal plan of Brunelleschi's – cases from earlier periods where these devices have different, and functional, purposes. Correspondingly, it was common for Mannerist artists to adapt artistic forms or compositional devices, originally invented with expressive functions, and to use them in a non-functional way, capriciously.

2

The Arrival of Mannerism in the Visual Arts

While it is not intended, in this little book, to give a historical survey of Mannerism, it is important to focus attention upon the early growth of the style because this, more than anything, helps us to understand its true nature. If we watch the sequence of events we find, for example, that Mannerism did not grow up (as is so often claimed) in any sense as a reaction against, or in opposition to, the High Renaissance but as a logical extension of some of the latter's own tendencies and achievements.

THE HIGH RENAISSANCE

This period, which we normally stretch from the maturity of Leonardo about 1480 to the death of Raphael in 1520, is not to be conceived as one of repose in implied contrast to a succeeding one of restlessness; on the contrary, it was itself deeply marked by the strains of growth and change. The climax of this period, the first decade of the Cinquecento, was dominated by events in Florence and Venice, and these had an astonishing diversity. Leonardo, for example, created almost simultaneously his *Leda*, *Mona Lisa*, the *Battle of Anghiari* and the *Angel of the Annunciation*. In the *Leda*, he established a new canon of the female nude, which was a renewed classicism emulating but not imitating the formal qualities of the antique and far exceeding it in sensuousness. In the *Mona Lisa* he established a new and more ambitious concept of portraiture: to describe not only the exterior qualities of the subject but also the inner qualities of mind. In the *Battle of Anghiari*, never completed, he raised history-painting to an undreamed-of level of energy and violence. In the lost *Angel of the Annunciation*, he experimented with a new relationship between work of art and spectator, for the latter found himself in the physical and emotional position of the Virgin Mary, as recipient of the Angel's message: in other words, as part of the painting's subject.

In Venice a corresponding exploration of new territories was made by Giorgione. Partially influenced by Leonardo, he

animated the portrait in a similar way, and added a dramatic dimension also to landscape; his *Tempesta* is not so much a timeless, static record of nature's appearance, but nature in a mood – that is, in a specific meteorological condition. In his frescoes on the Fondaco de'Tedeschi he liberated the human figure from the inhibitions of posture and viewpoint that still remained at the close of the fifteenth century, and gave it – if we may trust early descriptions – a striking vitality of colour and realism of texture.

There is, however, another aspect of these developments. Giorgione's *Tempesta* was, at least in part, the answer to a challenge handed down from antiquity; for Pliny records that Apelles painted the unpaintable, a thunderstorm. A similar artistic self-consciousness is revealed by Leonardo's invention, so often followed in the High Renaissance and prefigured only in the work of Masaccio, of the pyramidal figure-group; this implies the subjection of natural movement to an abstract aesthetic formula – it is an intentional expression of the perfection of the work of art itself, and of its autonomy in relation to an illustrative or spiritual function. In the fifteenth century there are already indications of the notion that a work of art is partly a demonstration of its creator's *virtù*, but there is no clearer illustration of the renewed emphasis on this idea in the High Renaissance than the first one-man exhibition since antiquity. In 1501 the Florentine public was invited to admire Leonardo's *Saint Anne* cartoon, which had most probably been made with no commission in mind but solely with the intention of producing, in the most exact sense, a 'marvellous' work of art.

If we leave Michelangelo and Raphael on one side, for the moment, the artists coming to maturity in the second decade of the sixteenth century explored still further the animating, sensuous and realistic tendencies in the first decade (which, in retrospect, we see as tendencies towards baroque art) rather than those that would make the work of art the answer to an aesthetic problem. We cannot, naturally, make such a statement absolutely, but only as an impression of the placing of emphasis. In Florence the later works of Fra Bartolomeo (d. 1517) became increasingly energetic and substantial in the formal sense; more important, in the long run, were the paintings of Andrea del Sarto (such as the *Marriage of St Catherine* in Dresden, 1513, or the *Madonna of the Harpies* in the Uffizi, 1517), which were above all vibrant, expressive and communicative.

Sarto's highly individualistic pupils, Rosso and Pontormo, took this style as a new point of departure, sought first to imitate and if possible to surpass it and then moved, about 1520, to a point of sharpness, tenseness and even brutality that was again a new invention but always motivated by and keyed to the expression of the subject; not accidentally, the major works of this phase had subjects from the Passion – Pontormo's frescoes in the Certosa di Galluzzo (1522–4) and Rosso's *Deposition* at Volterra (1521).

Titian, in Venice, working within a style that was always more natural than theirs, was at one moment emphatically sensuous (as in the *Sacred and Profane Love* in the Borghese Gallery, Rome) and at another no less emphatically dynamic (as in the *Assunta* in the Frari, Venice). In relation to him, Lotto and Pordenone played a role not unlike that of Rosso and Pontormo in relation to Andrea del Sarto; their work appears sometimes strange, often awkward or violent, but always expressive and communicative in intention. Correggio, in Parma, came closest of all to a style that deserves the title proto-Baroque; it exploits a natural, sensuous grace, highly charged sentiment, and compositional or emotional devices that relate the spectator more directly to the action in the work of art than ever before. Most of these artists greatly admired the realistic and unidealized expressiveness of engravings from the North, by Schongauer, Dürer and Lucas van Leyden. Collectively they illustrate one of the logical sequels to the ferment of ideas around 1510, and one path out of the High Renaissance.

MICHELANGELO AND RAPHAEL

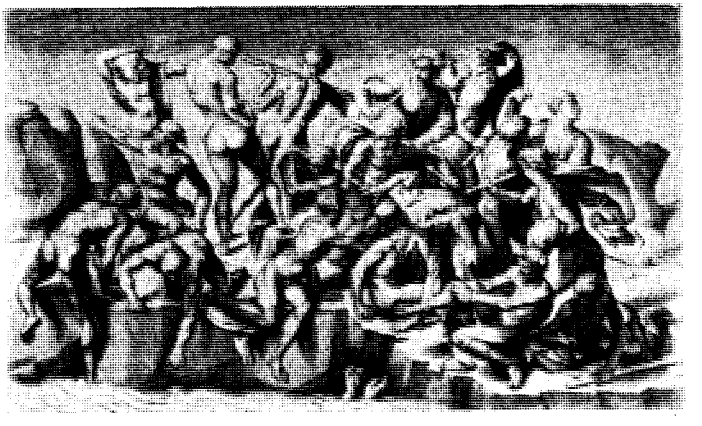
With Michelangelo and Raphael the situation is more complex; there is, at first, ambivalence in their choice of direction, and then increasingly a placing of emphasis on qualities rather different from those summarized above. We are concerned, also, with their part in establishing Rome as an artistic centre of primary importance.

In the first decade of the sixteenth century Michelangelo's work is bewildering in the variety of artistic ideals it expresses. The *Saint Matthew*, for example (begun 1506 and left incomplete), is tense with an unrestrained physical and emotional energy; the boldness of its torsion, the vitality of its movement and the passion expressed in its head have no precedents, except in antiquity. While it is true that these are artistic

conquests, and may be admired as such, they also express a specific dramatic and quasi-narrative situation, in this case the 'inspiration' of an Evangelist; and the emotional experience thus conveyed places the *Saint Matthew* in an intermediary stage between the inanimate, icon-like Saints of the greater part of the fifteenth century and those of Bernini. Michelangelo here makes the same animating change in this category of images as Leonardo does in the portrait, and Giorgione in landscape.

But when we turn to Michelangelo's *Doni tondo*, in the Uffizi (*c.*1506), and his cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina* [20] (1504–5), the emphasis seems really to be different. The torsions and movements in the first express nothing except the artist's virtuosity; the ambition lies less in expression than in the conquest of difficulty. The cartoon, made in rivalry with Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*, demonstrated far more comprehensively that Michelangelo's art enjoyed absolute sovereignty over the human figure; its message, to the sixteenth century, was that there were now no limitations in the complexity of postures and the variety of aspects in which the body might be re-created and seen. On the other hand it told them much less about the appearance of a battle than Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*; it was a professional manifesto, and not an illustration. This is the germ of an idea that later became so fully conscious that it could be expressed in writing. Vasari, conducting the young prince Francesco de'Medici round his decorations in the Palazzo Vecchio, remarked: 'I have made

20. *The Battle of Cascina*. After Michelangelo



this composition . . . with these foreshortenings of the figures seen from below, partly to show the capacity of art . . .' (*parte per mostrar l'arte*).

The ambivalence of intention in these works by Michelangelo is probably not more extreme than in the contemporary works of Leonardo; the immediate importance of that aspect of Michelangelo's style that emphasizes aesthetic autonomy lies in the form it takes: it expresses in particular the conquest of difficulty (which is not, as we have seen, in itself a new idea). Like Leonardo, however, Michelangelo – in the *Doni tondo* and the *Battle Cartoon* – is also working out a new standard, classical in inspiration, of grace and idealized beauty of form.

In the Sistine Ceiling (1508–12) these varied tendencies are pursued further; in this case the scale and complexity of the project is so great that there exists within it every nuance between the polarities of intention in the earlier work. Parts, such as *Jonah*, the early Creation scenes and the crepuscular figures in the lunettes, continue the line of expressiveness that encompasses *Saint Matthew*. In the *Brazen Serpent* these qualities are in equilibrium with a demonstration of artistic capacity even richer than that of the *Battle Cartoon*. But there are also parts, most conspicuously some of the *Ignudi* [21], in which the qualities of grace, elegance and poise are so intense that the beauty of the work of art becomes more nearly its subject than ever before. At this point, perhaps, we should judge that the quality *maniera* begins to characterize a style.

How easy and just was the transference of the word *maniera*, a term for an ideal of behaviour, to a work of art we can see if we look beyond the clearly appropriate idealization and polish of form to the deportment of such a youth. We recognize already an air of refined detachment, and – to descend to a detail – a formula for twisting the wrist and holding the fingers in an apparently easy and elegant tension, that will be endlessly repeated in Mannerist works to the end of the period [13, 45]. Was this how Castiglione's young courtiers relaxed, or did it take the imagination of a supreme master of the human body to invent a stylish deportment that is only too easily imitated in life?

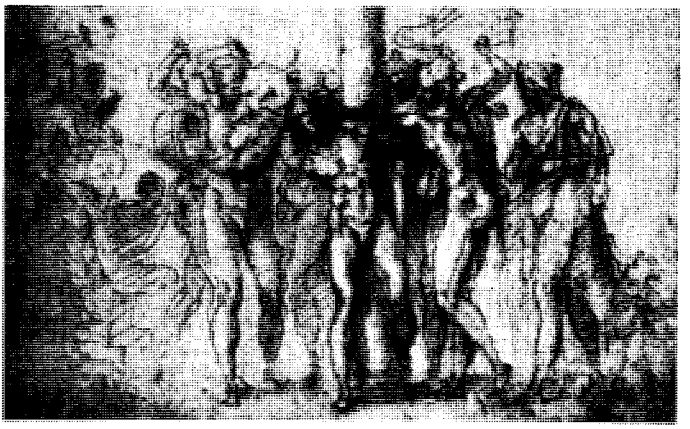
But if these precociously Mannerist features may be found elsewhere in the ceiling, notably in some Prophets and Sibyls, the whole work is not characterized by them. This only begins to be true a few years later. Michelangelo's contributions to painting for the next decade and more were made only at

21. *Ignudo*, from the Sistine Ceiling. Michelangelo

second hand, and chiefly through the medium of drawings he provided for his protégé Sebastiano. One of these was for a fresco of the *Flagellation* to be painted by Sebastiano in San Pietro in Montorio, Rome; Michelangelo's preparatory drawings [22] were made in 1516. Here the new spirit of refinement and grace informs the whole design, giving it an unreal, ballet-like beauty and reserve. It is hard to imagine a conception of this subject less expressive of its essential brutality, and hard not to believe that this purification of the content results from a preoccupation with style, as in *Bembismo*.

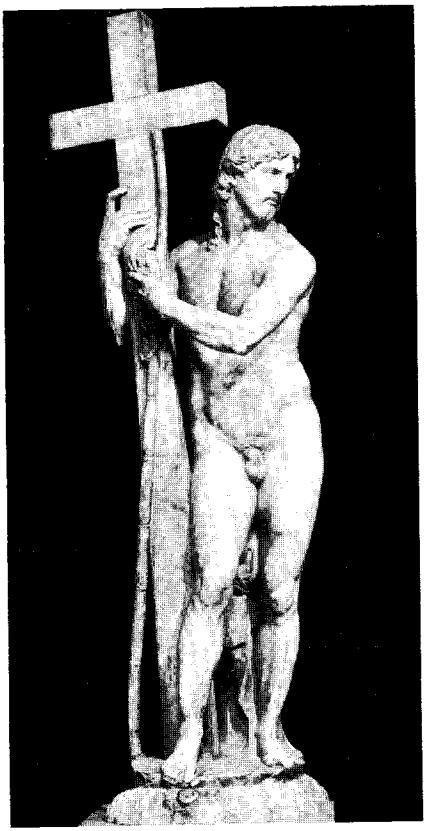
The same thing happens in Michelangelo's sculpture, though not in all of it. At about the same time as the Sistine

22. *The Flagellation* (detail). Michelangelo



Ceiling he was working on sculptures for the tomb of Julius II – the *Moses*, and the two *Slaves* now in the Louvre. These vary between dynamism and listless grace, but each inflection of style is expressive of the content of the figures – in fact makes and describes it with absolute clarity. A few years later the same is probably true of the four unfinished *Slaves* for the same project now in Florence; had they been finished it seems that their style would still have been the servant of an emotion and a subject. But contemporary with these is a work in which the servant seems to usurp the position of its normal master, in which style seems to become subject and subject in the old sense to be driven out; this is the *Risen Christ* [23] in S. Maria sopra Minerva (1519–20).

But we must beware of underestimating the complexity of the situation. In the case of Michelangelo, and of Raphael, we should not interpret such idealization as a complete negation of expression, but rather as the translation of expression to another plane. That the beauty of Michelangelo's *Christ* has a spiritual meaning and effect there can be no doubt, for such is its icon-like stimulus that the forward foot must be protected by a metal shoe from the kiss and touch of the devout. The ambivalence of the beauty of this work is derived from its double intention; it seems reasonable to believe that Michelangelo should have wished us to admire the capacity of his art, but we know from his poetry of the period that beauty of form was for him a manifestation of Divine Grace that moved him



23. *The Risen Christ*. Michelangelo

most when he found it in the human body. This idea was metaphysically based, and related to current Christianized Neoplatonism. It was also, however, another aspect of the notion of the artist as another god, his work another nature; for Michelangelo believed that the Divine was most clearly revealed in what was most perfectly created, and this is probably the principal reason why his art was devoted to the human form so exclusively, save for the abstract forms of architecture.

Similar ideas circulated in the literary world around Raphael. For example in the fourth book of Castiglione's *Cortegiano* Pietro Bembo, talking of 'beauty, which is a sacred thing', says that its source is in God, and external beauty is a symbol of

24. *Testa Divina* (detail). Michelangelo

goodness. Vasari, in 1550, gives the same justification for figures in altarpieces that are 'a little more graceful, beautiful and adorned than the ordinary'; in his case it is possible to doubt the sincerity of the argument, but not in Michelangelo's.

In the case of the Minerva *Christ* the expression of artistic accomplishment leads, perhaps for these reasons, to a heroic and neo-Hellenistic ideal of grace. A different aspect of the same pursuit appears in a group of drawings known as *teste divine* [24] of which the earliest probably come in the early 1520s. The idealism is equally emphatic in the shaping of the features themselves, but the most striking thing here is the elaborate fantasy in the *coiffure* and head-dresses; they are at once compact demonstrations of refinement and imagination.

As we must say so often, the type is to some extent prefigured in rare cases around 1500, but it is here classicized and formalized into a motif which was to be much imitated by the next generation.

Raphael's contribution was no less important than Michelangelo's. Maturing a few critical years later it was natural that his inventive role in the formation of the new style should have been less, but his seminal role was at least as great – partly because of his conspicuousness on the pinnacle upon which he was raised by an admiring Rome, partly because his work was intellectually and physically more accessible, and partly because he, unlike Michelangelo, had an important group of pupils and followers.

In the eleven Roman years before his early death in 1520 Raphael did, of course, produce many works that are so dynamic, expressive and realistic that they are irrelevant to our subject; but interspersed among them, and increasing in importance, are others that are incipiently Mannerist. Characteristic is the suave and coolly elegant Magdalene on the right of the *Santa Cecilia* [25] of about 1515; tall of stature, impeccably composed in emotion and movement, she compels admiration, which is her function. Her face is a portrait of Raphael's mistress, but even she was seen through a refining screen of preconceptions. Her clothing is brittle, formed upon the study of Hellenistic sculpture rather than real life, and metallic and a little unreal in colour; the whole transformation freezes humanity out of her, but in compensation saturates her in beauty to a very high degree. Since it is beauty that is willed and artificial it is, and must be, beauty of a particular kind; like any exaggerated ideal, it is a departure from the universal and hence vulnerable in the face of another convention.

A work in which these qualities characterize the whole is the *Saint Michael* [26] of 1517–18. Because of the perfect harmony of all its qualities and parts it is easy to overlook its essential complexity – easiest to grasp, perhaps, if we imagine the figures cast, as they so appropriately could be, into a bronze fountain-figure. There are two rotating systems of forms around the two heads, which are respectively of symbolic refinement and vulgarity. These elaborate patterns of movement and form in space are exactly counterpoised: too exactly, in fact, for there to be an effect of energy, and there results instead a suspension of movement (in the sense of getting somewhere, or performing some action), harmonious with the suspension

25. *Santa Cecilia* (detail). Raphael

26. *Saint Michael.* Raphael

of emotion. The torsions of the figures are extreme, yet accomplished without strain; they may be read as postures because they are so sensitively balanced. It is, again, an intensively *artificial* picture, whether examined in these general terms or in detail, where the beautiful head of Saint Michael or the elaborate ties of his leggings are vignettes of proto-Mannerist delicacy and fantasy. Parts of the *Transfiguration* (1517–20) are abstracted in a similar way above and beyond reality.