



COURTESY OF THE MINT MUSEUM (CHARLOTTE, NC)  
MUSEUM BOOK CLUB GUIDE

# *Waking Raphael*

LESLIE FORBES

Fiction—*“Amidst a country rocked by scandal and corruption, inhabitants of the idyllic city of Urbino, Italy, birthplace of Raphael, are more concerned with a sudden outbreak of miracles than with politics. But what unspeakable secret lies hidden in Raphael’s enigmatic painting? Its restoration will drive a living mute to a shocking act of violence and spark an investigation into a nearly forgotten war crime and a series of events that will shatter the silence gripping this community forever. Both a mesmerizing thriller and a passionate exploration of the power of truth to effect reconciliation and restore faith, Waking Raphael spins a tantalizing web of silence and lies to recreate an Italy where the romantic and the violent, the comic and the tragic, are spellbindingly interwoven.”* Page numbers refer to the 2005, Bantam paperback edition.

1. What did you know about the artist Raphael before reading the book? Did you learn anything interesting or new about Raphael after reading the book? Anything that surprised you about Raphael?
2. Has anyone ever visited Urbino? If yes, what was that experience like? What can you tell the group about Urbino or the home of Raphael? Did you see *La Muta* when you were there?
3. What did you think of Forbes’s concept for the book? Style of writing? Tone of the book? The mix of mystery and magic with real life?
5. Were you familiar with the term *pentimento* (an alteration in a painting)? On page 92 Paulo says, when referring to the scar in the original painting, “It is largely concealed. The city council decided that the people of Urbino were not yet ready to see their lady with such an unsightly blemish.” A sore point with Charlotte, who saw it as a betrayal of Raphael’s wishes. What are your thoughts about conservation work and the decisions that go into the process?
6. Elaborating on questions #5, Charlotte says on page 89 that she “attempts in her work to suppress all evidence of her own identity” and “I am an interpreter, Charlotte thought, an archaeologist digging through the layers of other restorers’ paint to unearth the truth; or, as she sometimes saw herself, a translator. Like translation, restoration inevitably reflected its era’s fashions and prejudices and politics; each translator cast the shadow of his or her own light source.” What does Charlotte mean?
7. Discuss any recent restorations that were controversial. Did you prefer the piece pre or post restoration? Why?
8. Charlotte made several comments about her high regard for Raphael, p. 165, and on page 276–277, Count Malaspino asked Charlotte, “Tell me, do you ever worry about the morals of the artists you restore? After all, the painter of that work, Caravaggio, he was a murderer, so they say, as well as a corrupter of young men.... Or is it all too long ago to matter?” Charlotte responds, “I try not to confuse the art with the artist.” Is this easier when talking about artists that lived hundreds of years ago? Does it matter? At the end of the day, is it just business?
9. Do you believe in miracles? Discuss the resources used by the Vatican to prove or disprove miracles? Why go to such lengths?
10. Have you ever been to a pilgrimage site? If yes, where and what was the experience like?