

Michelangelo

Early life and works

Michelangelo Buonarroti was born to a family that had for several generations belonged to minor nobility in Florence but had, by the time the artist was born, lost its patrimony and status. His father had only occasional government jobs, and at the time of Michelangelo's birth he was administrator of the small dependent town of Caprese. A few months later, however, the family returned to its permanent residence in Florence. It was something of a downward social step to become an artist, and Michelangelo became an apprentice relatively late, at 13, perhaps after overcoming his father's objections. He was apprenticed to the city's most prominent painter, Domenico Ghirlandaio, for a three-year term, but he left after one year, having (Condivi recounts) nothing more to learn. Several drawings, copies of figures by Ghirlandaio and older great painters of Florence, Giotto and Masaccio, survive from this stage; such copying was standard for apprentices, but few examples are known to survive. Obviously talented, he was taken under the wing of the ruler of the city, Lorenzo de' Medici, known as the Magnificent. Lorenzo surrounded himself with poets and intellectuals, and Michelangelo was included. More important, he had access to the Medici art collection, which was dominated by fragments of ancient Roman statuary. (Lorenzo was not such a patron of contemporary art as legend has made him; such modern art as he owned was to ornament his house or to make political statements.) The bronze sculptor Bertoldo di Giovanni, a Medici friend who was in charge of the collection, was the nearest he had to a teacher of sculpture, but Michelangelo did not follow his medium or in any major way his approach. Still, one of the two marble works that survive from the artist's first years is a variation on the composition of an ancient Roman sarcophagus, and Bertoldo had produced a similar one in bronze. This composition is the *Battle of the Centaurs* (c. 1492). The action and power of the figures foretell the artist's later interests much more than does the *Madonna of the Stairs* (c. 1491), a delicate low relief that reflects recent fashions among such Florentine sculptors as Desiderio da Settignano.

Florence was at this time regarded as the leading centre of art, producing the best painters and sculptors in Europe, and the competition among artists was stimulating. The city was, however, less able than earlier to offer large commissions, and leading Florentine-born artists, such as Leonardo da Vinci and Leonardo's teacher, Andrea del Verrocchio, had moved away for better opportunities in other cities. The Medici were overthrown in 1494, and even before the end of the political turmoil Michelangelo had left.

In Bologna he was hired to succeed a recently deceased sculptor and carve the last small figures required to complete a grand project, the tomb and shrine of St. Dominic (1494–95). The three marble figures are original and expressive. Departing from his predecessor's fanciful agility, he imposed seriousness on his images by a compactness of form that owed much to Classical antiquity and to the Florentine tradition from Giotto onward. This emphasis on seriousness is also reflected in his choice of marble as his medium, while the accompanying simplification of masses is in contrast to the then more usual tendency to let representations match as completely as possible the texture and detail of human bodies. To be sure, although these are constant qualities in Michelangelo's art, they often are temporarily abandoned or modified because of other factors, such as the specific functions of works or the stimulating creations of other artists. This is the case with Michelangelo's first surviving large statue, the *Bacchus*, produced in Rome (1496–97) following a brief return to Florence. (A wooden crucifix, recently discovered, attributed by some scholars to Michelangelo and now housed in the Casa Buonarroti in Florence, has also been proposed as the antecedent of the *Bacchus* in design by those who credit it as the artist's work.) The *Bacchus* relies on ancient Roman nude figures as a point of departure, but it is much more mobile and more complex in outline. The conscious instability evokes the god of wine and Dionysian revels with extraordinary virtuosity. Made for a garden, it is also unique among Michelangelo's works in calling for observation from all sides rather than primarily from the front.

The *Bacchus* led at once to the commission (1498) for the *Pietà*, now in St. Peter's Basilica. The name refers not (as is often presumed) to this specific work but to a common traditional type of devotional image, this work being today the most famous example. Extracted from narrative scenes of the lamentation after Christ's death, the concentrated group of two is designed to evoke the observer's repentant prayers for sins that required Christ's sacrificial death. The patron was a French cardinal, and the type was earlier more common in northern Europe than in Italy. The complex problem for the designer was to extract two figures from one marble block, an unusual undertaking in all periods. Michelangelo treated the group as one dense and compact mass as before so that it has an imposing impact, yet he underlined the many contrasts present—of male and female, vertical and horizontal, clothed and naked, dead and alive—to clarify the two components.



The artist's prominence, established by this work, was reinforced at once by the commission (1501) of the *David* for the cathedral of Florence. For this huge statue, an exceptionally large commission in that city, Michelangelo reused a block left unfinished about 40

Michelangelo: *Pietà*
Pietà, marble sculpture by
Michelangelo, 1499; in St. Peter's
Basilica, Vatican City.
© Bill Perry/Fotolia

years before. The modeling is especially close to the formulas of classical antiquity, with a simplified geometry suitable to the huge scale yet with a mild assertion of organic life in its asymmetry. It has continued to serve as the prime statement of the Renaissance ideal of perfect humanity. Although the sculpture was originally intended for the buttress of the cathedral, the magnificence of the finished work convinced Michelangelo's contemporaries to install it in a more prominent place, to be determined by a commission formed of artists and prominent citizens. They decided that the *David* would be installed in front of the entrance of the Palazzo dei Priori (now called Palazzo Vecchio) as a symbol of the Florentine Republic. It was later replaced by a copy, and the original was moved to the Galleria dell'Accademia.



Michelangelo: *David*
David, marble sculpture by
Michelangelo, 1501–04; in the Galleria
dell'Accademia, Florence.
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On the side Michelangelo produced in the same years (1501–04) several Madonnas for private houses, the staple of artists' work at the time. These include one small statue, two circular reliefs that are similar to paintings in suggesting varied levels of spatial depth, and the artist's only easel painting. While the statue (*Madonna and Child*) is blocky and immobile, the painting (*Holy Family*) and one of the reliefs (*Madonna and Child with the Infant St. John*) are full of motion; they show arms and legs of figures interweaving in actions that imply movement through time. The forms

carry symbolic references to Christ's future death, common in images of the Christ Child at the time; they also betray the artist's fascination with the work of Leonardo. Michelangelo regularly denied that anyone influenced him, and his statements have usually been accepted without demur. But Leonardo's return to Florence in 1500 after nearly 20 years was exciting to younger artists there, and later scholars generally agreed that Michelangelo was among those affected. Leonardo's works were probably the most powerful and lasting outside influence to modify Michelangelo's work, and he was able to blend Leonardo's ability to show momentary processes with his own to suggest weight and strength, without losing any of the latter quality. The resulting images, of massive bodies in forceful action, are those special creations that constitute the larger part of his most admired major works.

The *Holy Family*, probably commissioned for the birth of the first child of Agnolo and Maddalena Doni, was a particularly innovative painting that would later be influential in the

development of early Florentine Mannerism. Its spiraling composition and cold, brilliant colour scheme underline the sculptural intensity of the figures and create a dynamic and expressive effect. The iconographic interpretation has caused countless scholarly debates, which to the present day have not been entirely resolved.



viewers observing Michelangelo's *The Holy Family*

Viewers observing *The Holy Family*,
tempera on wood, by Michelangelo,
1506/08; in the Uffizi Gallery,
Florence. The round painting (tondo)
is also known as the Doni Tondo,
because it was commissioned by the
Doni family.

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The middle years

After the success of the *David* in 1504, Michelangelo's work consisted almost entirely of vast projects. He was attracted to these ambitious tasks while at the same time rejecting the use of assistants, so that most of these projects were impractical and remained unfinished. In 1504 he agreed to paint a huge fresco for the Sala del Gran Consiglio of the Florence city hall to form a pair with another just begun by Leonardo da Vinci. Both murals recorded military victories by the city (Michelangelo's was the *Battle of Cascina*), but each also gave testimony to the special skills of the city's much vaunted artists. Leonardo's design shows galloping horses, Michelangelo's active nudes—soldiers

stop swimming and climb out of a river to answer an alarm. Both works survive only in copies and partial preparatory sketches. In 1505 the artist began work on a planned set of 12 marble Apostles for the Florence cathedral, of which only one, the *St. Matthew*, was even begun. Its writhing ecstatic motion shows the full blend of Leonardo's fluid organic movement with Michelangelo's own monumental power. This is also the first of Michelangelo's unfinished works that have fascinated later observers. His figures seem to suggest that they are fighting to emerge from the stone. This would imply that their incomplete state was intentional, yet he undoubtedly did want to complete all of the statues. He did, however, write a sonnet about how hard it is for the sculptor to bring the perfect figure out of the block in which it is potentially present. Thus, even if the works remained unfinished due only to lack of time and other external reasons, their condition, nonetheless, reflects the artist's intense feeling of the stresses inherent in the creative process.

Pope Julius II's call to Michelangelo to come to Rome spelled an end to both of these Florentine projects. The pope sought a tomb for which Michelangelo was to carve 40 large statues. Recent tombs had been increasingly grand, including those of two popes by the Florentine sculptor Antonio Pollaiuolo, those of the doges of Venice, and the one then in work for Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I. Pope Julius had an ambitious imagination, parallel to

Michelangelo's, but because of other projects, such as the new building of St. Peter's and his military campaigns, he evidently became disturbed soon by the cost. Michelangelo believed that Bramante, the equally prestigious architect at St. Peter's, had influenced the pope to cut off his funds. He left Rome, but the pope brought pressure on the city authorities of Florence to send him back. He was put to work on a colossal bronze statue of the pope in his newly conquered city of Bologna (which the citizens pulled down soon after when they drove the papal army out) and then on the less expensive project of painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (1508–12).

The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

The Sistine Chapel had great symbolic meaning for the papacy as the chief consecrated space in the Vatican, used for great ceremonies such as electing and inaugurating new popes. It already contained distinguished wall paintings, and Michelangelo was asked to add works for the relatively unimportant ceiling. The Twelve Apostles was planned as the theme—ceilings normally showed only individual figures, not dramatic scenes. Traces of this project are seen in the 12 large figures that Michelangelo produced: seven prophets and five sibyls, or female prophets found in Classical myths. The inclusion of female figures was very unusual though not totally unprecedented. Michelangelo placed these figures around the edges of the ceiling and filled the central spine of the long curved surface with nine scenes from Genesis: three of them depicting the Creation of the World, three the stories of Adam and Eve, and three the stories of Noah. These are naturally followed, below the prophets and sibyls, by small figures of the 40 generations of Christ's ancestors, starting with Abraham. The vast project was completed in less than four years; there was an interruption perhaps of a year in 1510–11 when no payment was made.



Michelangelo: *Delphic Sibyl*
Delphic Sibyl, detail of a fresco by
Michelangelo, 1508–12; in the Sistine
Chapel, Vatican City.
Scala/Art Resource, New York

Michelangelo began by painting the Noah scenes over the entrance door and moved toward the altar in the direction opposite to that of the sequence of the stories. The first figures and scenes naturally show the artist reusing devices from his earlier works, such as the *Pietà*, since he was starting on such an ambitious work in an unfamiliar medium. These first figures are relatively stable, and the scenes are on a relatively small scale. As he proceeded, he quickly grew in confidence. Indeed, investigations of the technical processes used show that he worked more and more

rapidly, reducing and finally eliminating such preparatory helps as complete drawings and

incisions on the plaster surface. The same growing boldness appears in the free, complex movements of the figures and in their complex expressiveness. While remaining always imposing and monumental, they are more and more imbued with suggestions of stress and grief. This may be perceived in a figure such as the prophet Ezekiel halfway along. This figure combines colossal strength and weight with movement and facial expression that suggest determination to reach a goal that is uncertain of success. Such an image of the inadequacy of even great power is a presentation of heroic and tragic humanity and is central to what Michelangelo means to posterity. Nearby the scene of the creation of Eve shows her with God and Adam, compressed within too small a space for their grandeur. This tension has been interpreted as a token of a movement away from the Renaissance concern with harmony, pointing the way for a younger generation of artists, such as Jacopo da Pontormo, often labeled Mannerists. Michelangelo's work on the ceiling was interrupted, perhaps just after these figures were completed. When he painted the second half, he seemed to repeat the same evolution from quiet stability to intricacy and stress. Thus, he worked his way from the quietly monumental and harmonious scene of the creation of Adam to the acute, twisted pressures of the prophet Jonah. Yet, in this second phase he shows greater inward expressiveness, giving a more meditative restraint to the earlier pure physical mass. The complex and unusual iconography of the Sistine ceiling has been explained by some scholars as a Neoplatonic interpretation of the Bible, representing the essential phases of the spiritual development of humankind seen through a very dramatic relationship between humans and God. See *also* Sidebar: The Restoration of the Sistine Chapel.



Michelangelo: *The Creation of Adam*

The Creation of Adam, detail of the Sistine Chapel ceiling fresco by Michelangelo, 1508–12; in Vatican City.

Scala/Art Resource, New York

Other projects

As soon as the ceiling was finished, Michelangelo reverted to his preferred task, the tomb of Pope Julius. In about 1513–15 he carved the *Moses*, which may be regarded as the realization in sculpture of the approach to great figures used for the prophets on the Sistine ceiling. The control of cubic density in stone evokes great reserves of strength; there is richer surface detail and modeling than before, with bulging projections sharply cut. The surface textures also have more variety than the earlier sculptures, the artist by now having found how to enrich detail without sacrificing

massiveness. Of about the same date are two sculptures of bound prisoners or slaves, also part of the tomb project but never used for it, since in a subsequent revised design they were

of the wrong scale. Michelangelo kept them until old age, when he gave them to a family that had helped him during an illness; they are now in the Louvre. Here again he realized, in stone, types painted in many variants on the ceiling, such as the pairs of nudes that hold wreaths above the prophets' thrones. The complexity of their stances, expressive of strong feeling, was unprecedented in monumental marble sculpture of the Renaissance. The only earlier works of this nature were from the Hellenistic period of Classical antiquity, well known to Michelangelo through the discovery of the Laocoön group in 1506. The old man and his two adolescent sons forming that group certainly stimulated the three statues by Michelangelo as well as the related figures on the ceiling. Yet the first of the ceiling figures in 1508 were not so affected; Michelangelo utilized the Hellenistic twists and complications only when he was ready for them, and he had been moving in this direction even before the Laocoön was found, as is evident in the case of the *St. Matthew* of 1505.



Michelangelo: *Moses*

Moses, marble sculpture by Michelangelo for the tomb of Pope Julius II, c. 1513–15; in the basilica of San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome.
Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York



Michelangelo: *The Dying Slave*

The Dying Slave, marble sculpture by Michelangelo, 1513–15; in the Louvre, Paris.

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Julius II's death in 1513 cut off most of the funds for his tomb. Pope Leo X, his successor, a son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, had known Michelangelo since their boyhoods. He chiefly employed Michelangelo in Florence on projects linked to the glory of the Medici family rather than of the papacy. The city was under the rule of Leo's cousin Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, who was to be Pope Clement VII from 1523 to 1534, and Michelangelo worked with him closely in both reigns. The cardinal took an active interest in Michelangelo's works. He made detailed suggestions, but he also gave the artist much room for decision. Michelangelo was moving into architectural design with a small remodeling project at the Medici mansion and a large one at their parish church, San Lorenzo. The larger project never materialized, but Michelangelo and the cardinal did better with a more modest related effort, the new chapel attached to the same church for tombs of the Medici family.

The Medici Chapel

The immediate occasion for the chapel was the deaths of the two young family heirs (named Giuliano and Lorenzo after their forebears) in 1516 and 1519. Michelangelo gave his chief attention up to 1527 to the marble interior of this chapel, to

both the very original wall design and the carved figures on the tombs; the latter are an extension in organic form of the dynamic shapes of the wall details. The result is the fullest existing presentation of Michelangelo's intentions. Windows, cornices, and the like have strange proportions and thicknesses, suggesting an irrational, willful revision of traditional Classical forms in buildings.

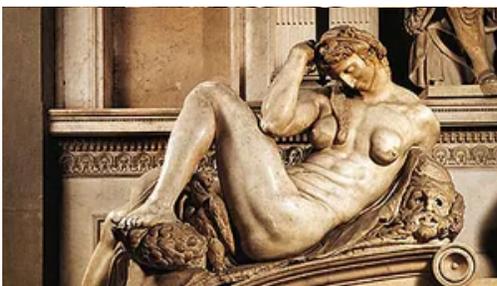


Michelangelo: tomb of Giuliano de' Medici

Marble tomb of Giuliano de' Medici by Michelangelo, 1520–34; in the Medici Chapel, San Lorenzo, Florence.

Wojciech Stróżyk/Alamy

Abutting these active surfaces, the two tombs on opposite walls of the room are also very original, starting with their curved tops. A male and a female figure sit on each of these curved bases; these are personifications of, on one tomb, Day and Night, according to the artist's own statement, and, on the other, Dawn and Dusk, according to early reports. Such types had never appeared on tombs before, and they refer, again according to Michelangelo, to the inevitable movement of time, which is circular and leads to death.



Night by Michelangelo

Night, marble sculpture from the tomb of Giuliano de' Medici by Michelangelo, 1520–34; in the Medici Chapel, San Lorenzo, Florence.

Scala/Art Resource, New York

The figures are among the artist's most famous and accomplished creations. The immensely massive *Day* and *Dusk* are relatively tranquil in their mountainous grandeur, though *Day* perhaps implies inner fire. Both female figures have the tall, slim proportions and small feet considered beautiful at the time, but otherwise they form a contrast: *Dawn*, a virginal figure, strains upward along her curve as if trying to emerge into life; *Night* is asleep, but in a posture suggesting stressful dreams.



Dawn by Michelangelo

Dawn, marble sculpture from the tomb of Lorenzo de' Medici by Michelangelo, 1520–34; in the Medici

These four figures are naturally noticed more immediately than the effigies of the two Medici buried there, placed higher and farther back in wall niches. These effigies, more usual in execution, also form a contrast; they are traditionally described as active and thoughtful, respectively. Rendered as standard types of young soldiers, they were at once perceived not as portraits but as idealized superior beings, both because of their high rank and because they are souls beyond the grave. Both turn to the same side of the room. It has naturally been thought that they focus on the

Chapel, San Lorenzo, Florence.
Scala/Art Resource, New York

Madonna, which Michelangelo carved and which is at the centre of this side wall, between two saints. The heads of the two effigies, however, are turned in differing degrees, and their common focus is at a corner of the chapel, at the entrance door from the church. On this third wall with the *Madonna* the architectural treatment was never executed.



Dusk by Michelangelo

Dusk, marble sculpture from the tomb of Lorenzo de' Medici by Michelangelo, 1520–34; in the Medici Chapel, San Lorenzo, Florence.
Scala/Art Resource, New York

The Laurentian Library and fortifications

During the same years, Michelangelo designed another annex to that church, the Laurentian Library, required to receive the books bequeathed by Pope Leo; it was traditional in Florence and elsewhere that libraries were housed in convents. The design for this one was constrained by the existing buildings, and it was built on top of older structures. A small available area on the second floor was used as an entrance lobby and contains a staircase leading up to the larger library

room on a new third floor. The stairhall, known as the *ricetto*, contains Michelangelo's most famous and original wall designs. The bold and free rearrangement of traditional building components goes still further, for instance, to place columns recessed behind a wall plane rather than in front of it as is usual. This has led to the work's being cited frequently as the first and a chief instance of Mannerism as an architectural style, when it is defined as a work that intentionally contradicts the Classical and the harmonious, favouring expressiveness and originality, or as one that emphasizes the factors of style for their own sake. By contrast the long library room is far more restrained, with traditional rows of desks neatly related to the rhythm of the windows and small decorative detail in the floor and ceiling. It recalls that Michelangelo was not invariably heavy and bold but modified his approach in relation to the particular case, here to a gentler, quiet effect. For that very reason the library room has often been less noticed in the study of his work. At the opposite end of the long room, across from the stairway, another door led to a space intended to hold the library's rarest treasures. It was to be a triangular room, a climax of the long corridor-like approach, but this part was never executed on the artist's plan.

The sack of Rome in 1527 saw Pope Clement ignominiously in flight, and Florence revolted against the Medici, restoring the traditional republic. It was soon besieged and defeated, and Medici rule permanently reinstalled, in 1530. During the siege Michelangelo was the designer

of fortifications. He showed understanding of modern defensive structures built quickly of simple materials in complex profiles that offered minimum vulnerability to attackers and maximum resistance to cannon and other artillery. This new weapon, which had come into use in the middle of the 14th century, had given greater power to the offense in war. Thus, instead of the tall castles that had served well for defensive purposes in the Middle Ages, lower and thicker masses were more practical. The projecting points, which also assisted counterattack, were often of irregular sizes in adaptation to specific hilly sites. Michelangelo's drawings with rapid lively execution reflecting this flexible new pattern have been much admired, often in terms of pure form.

Other projects and writing

When the Medici returned in 1530, Michelangelo returned to work on their family tombs. His political commitment probably was more to his city as such than to any specific governmental form. Two separate projects of statues of this date are the *Apollo* or *David* (its identity is problematic), used as a gift to a newly powerful political figure, and the *Victory*, a figure trampling on a defeated enemy, an old man. It was probably meant for the never-forgotten tomb of Pope Julius, because the motif had been present in the plans for that tomb. Victor and loser both have intensely complicated poses; the loser seems packed in a block, the victor—like the *Apollo*—forms a lithe spiral. The *Victory* group became a favourite model for younger sculptors of the Mannerist group, who applied the formula to many allegorical subjects.

In 1534 Michelangelo left Florence for the last time, though he always hoped to return to finish the projects he had left incomplete. He passed the rest of his life in Rome, working on projects in some cases equally grand but in most cases of quite new kinds. From this time on, a large number of his letters to his family in Florence were preserved; many of them concentrated on plans for his nephew's marriage, essential to preserve the family name. Michelangelo's father had died in 1531 and his favourite brother at about the same time; he himself showed increasing anxiety about his age and death. It was just at this time that the nearly 60-year-old artist wrote letters expressing strong feelings of attachment to young men, chiefly to the talented aristocrat Tommaso Cavalieri, later active in Roman civic affairs. These have naturally been interpreted as indications that Michelangelo was gay, but his sexual orientation cannot be confirmed as no similar indications had emerged when the artist was younger. The correlation of these letters with other events could suggest that he was seeking a surrogate son, choosing for the purpose a younger man who was admirable in every way and would welcome the role.

Michelangelo's poetry is also preserved in quantity from this time. He apparently began writing short poems in a way common among nonprofessionals in the period, as an elegant kind of

letter, but developed in a more original and expressive way. Among some 300 preserved poems, not including fragments of a line or two, there are about 75 finished sonnets and about 95 finished madrigals, poems of about the same length as sonnets but of a looser formal structure. In English-speaking countries people tend to speak of “Michelangelo’s sonnets,” as though all of his poems were written in that form, partly because the sonnets were widely circulated in English translations from the Victorian period and partly because the madrigal is unfamiliar in English poetry. (It is not the type of song well known in Elizabethan music, but a poem with irregular rhyme scheme, line length, and number of lines.) Yet the fact that Michelangelo left a large number of sonnets but only very few madrigals unfinished suggests that he preferred the latter form. Those written up to about 1545 have themes based on the tradition of Petrarch’s love poems and a philosophy based on the Neoplatonism that Michelangelo had absorbed as a boy at Lorenzo the Magnificent’s court. They give expression to the theme that love helps human beings in their difficult effort to ascend to the divine.

In 1534 Michelangelo returned after a quarter century to fresco painting, executing for the new pope, Paul III, the huge *Last Judgment* for the end wall of the Sistine Chapel. This theme had been a favoured one for large end walls of churches in Italy in the Middle Ages and up to about 1500, but thereafter it had gone out of fashion. It is often suggested that this renewal of a devout tradition came from the same impulses that were then leading to the Counter-Reformation under the aegis of Paul III. The work is in a painting style noticeably different from that of 25 years earlier. The colour scheme is simpler than that of the ceiling: flesh tones against a stark blue sky. The figures have less energy and their forms are less articulate, the torsos tending to be single fleshy masses without waistlines. At the top centre, Christ as judge—surrounded by a crowd of Apostles, Saints, Patriarchs, and Martyrs—lifts an arm to save those on his right and drops the other arm to damn those on his left, suggesting in the idiom of the period a scale to weigh humans in the balance. The saved souls rise slowly through the heavy air, as the damned ones sink. At the bottom of the wall skeletons rise from tombs, a motif taken directly from medieval precedents. To the right Charon ferries souls across the River Styx, a pagan motif which Dante had made acceptable to Christians in his *Divine Comedy* and which had been introduced into painting about 1500 by the Umbrian artist Luca Signorelli. Michelangelo admired this artist for his skill in expressing dramatic feeling through anatomical exactitude. The *Last Judgment*, conceived as a single, unified, grandiose scene without architectural elements to divide and define its space, is permeated by a sense of dynamic intensity derived from the emotional gestures and expressions of the judged.

Legacy and influence

For posterity Michelangelo always remained one of the small group of the most exalted artists,



Michelangelo: *Last Judgment*
Last Judgment, fresco by Michelangelo, 1536–41; on the west wall of the Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City.
Scala/Art Resource, New York



Michelangelo: *Profile with Oriental Headdress*
Profile with Oriental Headdress, sanguine drawing by Michelangelo, c. 1522; in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, England.
Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Eng.

who were felt to express, like William Shakespeare or Ludwig van Beethoven, the tragic experience of humanity with the greatest depth and universal scope.

In contrast to the great fame of the artist's works, their visual influence on later art is relatively limited. This cannot be explained by hesitation to imitate an art simply because it appeared so great, for artists such as Raphael were considered equally great but were used as sources to a much greater degree. It may be instead that the particular type of expression associated with Michelangelo, of an almost cosmic grandeur, was inhibiting. The limited influence of his work includes a few cases of almost total dependence, the most talented artist who worked in this way being Daniele da Volterra. Otherwise, Michelangelo was treated as a model for specific limited aspects of his work. In the 17th century, he was regarded as supreme in anatomical drawing but less praised for broader elements of his art. While the Mannerists utilized the spatial compression seen in a few of his works, and later the serpentine poses of his sculpture of *Victory*, the 19th-century master Auguste Rodin exploited the effect of unfinished marble blocks. Certain 17th-century masters of the Baroque perhaps show the fullest

reference to him, but in ways that have been transformed to exclude any literal similarity.

Besides Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the painter Peter Paul Rubens may best show the usability of Michelangelo's creations for a later great artist.

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Citation Information

Article Title: Michelangelo

Website Name: Encyclopaedia Britannica

Publisher: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.

Date Published: 02 March 2022

URL: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Michelangelo>

Access Date: July 04, 2022