

ART HUMANITIES: PRIMARY SOURCE READER

Section 4: Michelangelo

Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 15

Michelangelo, Selected Poems

The passages that follow attest to Michelangelo as a personification of what we now call a “Renaissance Man.” Though he is best known for his sculpture, painting, and architecture, Michelangelo was also a prolific poet, composing over three hundred pieces during his lifetime, sometimes even jotting down lines of verse in the margins of his drawings. Though an edition of 105 of his poems was abortively prepared between 1542 and 1546, the first printed version of his written work appeared in 1623 in a volume edited by his grandnephew Michelangelo the Younger. The latter Michelangelo drew from the edition prepared earlier, as well as family manuscripts, while altering the nature of the poems by completing some, and changing the language and content of others to conform with Counter-Reformation ideas about faith and love. This was the only available version of the artist’s poetry until 1863, and, therefore, it shaped scholarly understanding of Michelangelo through the first part of the 19th century. The artist dealt with such broad themes as love and death, and, as in the selections here, the nature of artistic creativity. At the same time, the following poems provide us with a type of written self-portrait, which may be read alongside the images he created of himself in the guise of St. Bartholomew in the Last Judgment, and the figure of Nicodemus in the Florence Pietà. As the following examples suggest, Michelangelo’s insights on himself were frequently in strong contrast to Vasari’s effusively laudatory commentary on the artist’s life and works. (Introduction by Christine Sciacca)

Poem 46, ca. 1528

a

If my crude hammer shapes the hard stones into one human appearance or another, deriving its motion from the master who guides it, watches and holds it, it moves at another's pace.	3
But that divine one, which lodges and dwells in heaven, beautifies self and others by its own action; and if no hammer can be made without a hammer, by that living one every other one is made.	5
And since a blow becomes more powerful the higher it's raised up over the forge, that one's flown up to heaven above my own.	9 10 11
So now my own will fail to be completed unless the divine smithy, to help make it, gives it that aid which was unique on earth.	12

a. Sonnet, ca. 1528. The theme of losing someone who has served as the artist’s earthly inspiration (“flown up to heaven”) may refer to the death of M’s brother Buonarrotto (see no. 45), whose son Leonardo may be the person addressed in an accompanying prose passage, which continues the theme of the poem:

“Lionardo. He was alone on earth in exalting virtues with his great virtue; he had no one who would work the bellows. Now in heaven he will have many companions, since there is no one there but those who loved the virtues; so I hope that, from up there, he will complete my [hammer?] down here. At least in heaven he will have someone to work the bellows, for down here he had no companion at the forge where virtues are exalted.”

The metaphor of poem and postscript derives from Dante, *Paradiso* 2:127-32: “The motion and virtue of the holy spheres/should be inspired by the blessed movers/as is the hammer’s art by the smith,” an image dating back to Plato’s *Cratylus*.

3. *the master*: the hand of the divine sculptor, God.

5. *divine one*: heavenly hammer.

9-11. The force (person) that inspired my work has risen to heaven in death.

12. *my own* hammer, which needs forming and guidance by another, will necessarily fail.

Poem 62, ca. 1532

a

Only with fire can the smith shape iron
from his conception into fine, dear work; 2
neither, without fire, can any artist
refine and bring gold to its highest state,
nor can the unique phoenix be revived
unless first burned. And so, if I die burning,
I hope to rise again brighter among those
whom death augments and time no longer hurts.
I'm fortunate that the fire of which I speak
still finds a place within me, to renew me, 11
since already I'm almost numbered among the dead; 12
or, since by its nature it ascends to heaven, 13
to its own element, if I should be transformed
into fire, how could it not bear me up with it?

a. Sonnet, ca. 1532, probably for Tommaso de' Cavalieri. Among the earliest of the poems that M prepared for publication in 1546.

2. *conception*: the Italian term *concetto* is central to the language of artistic theory and practice, referring to the original creative *idea* whose abstract (Platonic) perfection must be realized in the artist's physical material; see no. 151.

11. *I'm almost numbered among the dead*: M used the same phrase in a letter to Benedetto Varchi in 1547 (C. MLXXXII; R. 280); cf. no. 263.

12-13. Dante speaks of the "instinct" that "bears fire upwards towards the moon," *Paradiso* 1:14-15; so too does Ficino, *Sopra lo amore*, oration 3, chap. 4.

Poem 151, ca. 1538-44

a

Not even the best of artists has any conception 1
that a single marble block does not contain 2
within its excess, and *that* is only attained 3
by the hand that obeys the intellect. 4
The pain I flee from and the joy I hope for
are similarly hidden in you, lovely lady,
lofty and divine; but, to my mortal harm,
my art gives results the reverse of what I wish. 8
Love, therefore, cannot be blamed for my pain,
nor can your beauty, your hardness, or your scorn,
nor fortune, nor my destiny, nor chance,
if you hold both death and mercy in your heart
at the same time, and my lowly wits, though burning, 13
cannot draw from it anything but death.

a. Sonnet, ca. 1538-44, among M's best known and most important for his revelations of Neoplatonic artistic theory. It was highly praised by Varchi, who made it the principal text of his first *Lezzione* on M's poetry and artistic ideas, delivered to the Florentine Academy in March 1547; M in turn thanked Varchi warmly for speaking so highly of this and other poems (C. MCXLIII; R. 343). Vasari later printed part of the poem in his *Life of M* (VM 7:274; VB p. 422). The "lady" is undoubtedly Vittoria Colonna, although neither Varchi nor Vasari mentions her by name in this connection.

1-4. These lines express M's sculptural theory of subtraction, by which the artist physically removes excess outer mass in order to reveal the preexisting form-idea already present within; the term *concetto*, "conception," is complex and of central importance in Neoplatonic and Cinquecento art theory (see Introduction and Summers, 203-33). Several poems expound on the basic theme that this conception, or mental inspiration, precedes and guides the physical labor of carving: cf. nos. 38, 62, 144, 152, 236, 241, 275. Similarly, M wrote that "one paints with the head and not with the hands" (C. MI; R. 227), and expressed the same ideas to Francisco de Hollanda.

3. *that*: that conception.

8. That is, I lack the necessary degree of skill to bring out of you the joy I desire and instead can only find unhappiness.

13. *ingegno* (here "wits") is another term with subtle ramifications in contemporary art theory, combining both "skill" and "mind"

(see Summers); cf. nos. 44, 84, 149, 159, 284.

Poem 152, ca. 1538-44

a

Just as by taking away, lady, one puts
into hard and alpine stone 2
a figure that's alive 3
and that grows larger wherever the stone decreases,
so too are any good deeds
of the soul that still trembles 6
concealed by the excess mass of its own flesh,
which forms a husk that's coarse and crude and hard.
You alone can still take them out
from within my outer shell,
for I haven't the will or strength within myself.

a. Madrigal, ca. 1538-114, for Vittoria Colonna. The sculpture metaphor is similar to no. 151, but the roles are reversed: there the sculptor chisels her; here he hopes she will cut through his physical limitations to reveal his inner goodness; cf. no 46. In a well-known letter to Benedetto Varchi, M defined the art of sculpture as "that which is made by the action of taking away [levare]" (C. MLXXXII; R. 280).

2-3. Cf. nos. 239, 241.

6. *trembles*: fears for its future salvation, the motive for performing good deeds.

Poem 164, ca. 1541-44

a

As a trustworthy model for my vocation,
at birth I was given the ideal of beauty,
which is the lamp and mirror of both my arts. 3
If any think otherwise, that opinion's wrong:
for this alone can raise the eye to that height 5
which I am preparing here to paint and sculpt.
Even though rash and foolish minds derive
beauty (which moves every sound mind
and carries it to heaven) from the senses,
unsound eyes can't move from the mortal to the divine, 10
and in fact are fixed forever in that place
from which to rise without grace is a vain thought.

a. Two *sestine* for Vittoria Colonna, ca. 1541-44, probably from the same period as no. 165, expounding the Neoplatonic theory of anagogy, through which one is led upward from earthly to divine beauty. For the quasi-astrological notion of receiving certain sensibilities at birth, cf. nos. 97, 104, 119, 173.

3. *both my arts*: painting and sculpture.

5. that height: to that lofty conception of beauty and grace that constitutes the ideal forms of Platonic thought.

10. *unsound eyes*: eyes trapped and misled by the merely physical aspect of beauty; *infermi* (sick) contrasts with *sano* (healthy, sound) in line 9.

Poem 239, 1538-46

a

How can it be, Lady, as one can see
from long experience, that the live image
sculpted in hard alpine stone lasts longer 3
than its maker, whom the years return to ashes?
The cause bows down and yields to the effect, 5
from which it's clear that nature's defeated by art; 6
and I know, for I prove it true in beautiful sculpture,

I could well say that the stone
in which I model her
resembles her in its harsh hardness; but
in any case I could not,
while she scorns and destroys me,
sculpt anything but my own tormented features.

7

So, since art preserves the memory
of beauty through the years, if she wants to last,
she will make me glad, so that I'll make her beautiful.

14

15

a. Madrigal, ca. 1540-44, to which M added a brief postscript "For sculptors"-indicating that he is writing about a tendency to self-identification with one's work that will be understood by others in his profession (see no. 236). Savonarola preached that "every painter paints himself" in his Lenten sermons of 1497, no. 26 (*Prediche sopra Ezechiel*, Venice, 1517, f. 71v). M himself later said the same, with an uncomplimentary twist, regarding a fine depiction of an ox by an otherwise mediocre artist: "Every painter paints himself well [*ritrae se medesimo bene*]" (VM 7:280; VB 427 [alternate translation]).

1-2. In no. 173, M expresses the same thought in terms of the art of painting.

1. Dante also compared his hard lady to hard stone (e.g., DR nos. 102, 103).

7. *I could well say*: in defense of my tendency to depict her unflatteringly.

14-15. Cf. no. 240.

Contract for the Pietà

1498

The link between earthly and divine beauty is made explicit in the contract for Michelangelo's *Pietà*. The subject of Mary holding the dead Christ, one of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin, had long been popular in the North, though the motif had yet to find its way into the realm of Italian Renaissance sculpture. Michelangelo was given the commission by a French cardinal who wanted a sculpture to place at his tomb in St. Peter's in Rome. The cardinal died before the life-size sculpture was completed, but the *Pietà* is still in St. Peter's today, albeit reinstalled and heavily protected behind bullet-proof glass.

AUGUST 7, 1498.

Be it known and manifest to all who shall read this present writing that the Most Reverend Cardinal di San Dionisio has agreed that Maestro Michelangelo, statuary of Florence, that the said Maestro shall at his own proper costs make a Pietà of marble; that is to say, a draped figure of the Virgin Mary with the dead Christ in her arms, the figures being life-size, for the sum of four hundred and fifty gold ducats in papal gold (*in oro papali*), to be finished within the term of one year from the beginning of the work. And the Most Reverend Cardinal promises to pay the money in the manner following: that is to say, *imprimis*, he promises to pay the sum of one hundred and fifty gold ducats in papal gold before ever the work shall be begun, and thereafter while the work is in progress he promises to pay to the aforesaid Michelangelo one hundred ducats of the same value every four months, in such wise that the whole of the said sum of four hundred and fifty gold ducats in papal gold shall be paid within a twelvemonth, provided that the work shall be finished within that period: and if it shall be finished before the stipulated term his Most Reverend Lordship shall be called upon to pay the whole sum outstanding.

And I, Iacopo Gallo,* do promise the Most Reverend Monsignore, that the said Michelangelo will complete the said work, within one year, and that it shall be more beautiful than any work in marble to be seen in Rome today, and such that no master of our own time shall be able to produce a better. And I do promise the aforesaid Michelangelo, on the other hand, that the Most Reverend Cardinal will observe the conditions of payment as herein set forth in writing. And in token of good faith I, Iacopo Gallo, have drawn up the present agreement with my own hand the year, month and day aforesaid. Furthermore, be it understood that all previous agreements between the parties drawn up by my hand, or rather, by the hand of the aforesaid Michelangelo, are by this present declared null and void, and only this present agreement shall have effect.

The said Most Reverend Cardinal gave to me, Iacopo Gallo, one hundred gold ducats of the chamber in gold (*ducati d'oro in oro di Camera*) some time ago, and on the aforesaid day as above set forth I received from him a further sum of fifty gold ducats in papal gold.

Ita est IOANNES, CARDINALIS S. DYONISII
Idem Iacobus Gallus, *manu proprio*

*Jacopo Galli, a wealthy Roman banker and collector of antiques, bought Michelangelo's Bacchus.

Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 17

Contract for Michelangelo's David

1501

It is easy to forget that until the modern era great works of art were not made for museums. In the Renaissance, artists worked on commission. The scope and subject of a project were largely pre-determined by the patron, and it was up to the artist to realize his patron's vision. The contracts for Michelangelo's monumental sculptures offer a glimpse of the priorities and concerns of these patrons.

For the entire course of the fifteenth century the citizens of Florence had hoped to adorn the exterior of their cathedral with a series of monumental marble statues representing Biblical prophets. For almost a hundred years, a tremendous block of marble known as "the Giant" lay in the cathedral stone yard, barely roughed out from the original block that had been quarried and allocated for the first prophet. At the turn of the new century, Piero Soderini, a leading figure in the new Republican government of Florence, undertook to transform the unrealized block of marble into a monument of potent civic significance. When word of this grand project reached Michelangelo in Rome, he returned to his native city, eager not only for such a lucrative commission, but also for the challenge of wresting a heroic figure from the colossal block of stone.

AUGUST 16, 1501

Spectabiles . . . viri, the Consuls of the Arte della Lana and the Lords Overseers [of the Cathedral]¹ being met Overseers, have chosen as sculptor to the said Cathedral the worthy master, Michelangelo, the son of Lodovico Buonarrotti, a citizen of Florence, to the end that he may make, finish and bring to perfection the male figure known as the Giant, nine *braccia* in height, already blocked out in marble by Maestro Agostino² *grande*, of Florence, and badly blocked; and now stored in the workshops of the Cathedral.

The work shall be completed within the period and term of two years next ensuing, beginning from the first day of September next ensuing, with a salary and payment together in joint assembly within the hall of the said of six broad florins of gold in gold for every month. And for all other works that shall be required about the said building (*edificium*) the said Overseers bind themselves to supply and provide both men and scaffolding from their office and all else that may be necessary. When the said work and the said male figure of marble shall be finished, then the Consuls and Overseers who shall at that time be in authority shall judge whether it merits a higher reward, being guided therein by the dictates of their own consciences.

1. [The Operai, or committee in charge of a building.]

2. Agostino di Duccio.

The Installation of Michelangelo's David

1503

Leonardo da Vinci, the painter Botticelli, the local goldsmiths, and even the pipe players of the Florentine Republic were all part of a spirited debate surrounding the placement of Michelangelo's *David*. These minutes come from a meeting convened by the Florentine democratic regime, which was anxious to conciliate public opinion in all fields, including those of art and architecture.

Originally, the statue of David was to be placed high atop a buttress of the Florence Cathedral, but after this meeting, a new and more prominent site was selected near the front door of the Palazzo Vecchio, the town hall of Florence. This change of context – from religious to civic – added new meaning to the statue, transforming the image of a Biblical boy hero and king into an emblem of the Florentine Republic.

Over the course of four days, the statue, thirteen and a half feet tall, was moved on tree-trunk rollers from Michelangelo's workshop, through the narrow streets of Florence, and up to the town hall. The *David* was unveiled on 8 September 1504. There is no record that anyone asked the artist's opinion as to its placement, though his approval may be inferred.

The reunion experts called by the Opera¹ to decide the future location of Michelangelo's David is one of the many consultations, typical of the Florentine democratic regime, which was anxious to conciliate public opinion in all fields, those of art and architecture in particular. One will notice, however, that while most members of the committee voted for the Loggia de' Lanzi, the statue was installed in a much more honorific place: in front of the Old Palace in the place of Donatello's Judith, a solution that only the Herald of the Signoria had dared to propose, but which must, as Tolnay suggests, have had Michelangelo's support.

The description of the installation of the David is taken out of Luca Landucci's journal, one of the most interesting documents on Florentine life at the time; it is very rich in information about art, although written by a simple dealer in spices and drugs (1450-1519). The act of vandalism mentioned by Landucci may have been prompted by political considerations because Donatello's Judith, which was to be dethroned, was particularly dear to the radical republicans of the old school.

On the minutes of the reunion of experts and on all the other documents concerning the installation of the David, see Tolnay, *The Youth of Michelangelo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 96-98 and 151-153.

DELIBERATION ON THE LOCATION OF MICHELANGELO'S DAVID² **January 25, 1503**

Considering that the statue of David is almost finished, and wishing to install it and find for it a convenient and suitable location, and a suitable time for the installation; (the place having to be sound and consolidated in agreement both with the instructions of Michelangelo, the artist who made the aforesaid giant, and of the consuls of the *Arte della lana*;³ and wishing to have some advice as to the above mentioned matter etc., the consuls decided to call together, to decide on this, the masters, men and architects whose names are written down in Italian, and to write down their opinion word for word:

Andrea della Robbia
Giovanni Cornuola
Vante, *miniature painter*
the Herald of the Palace
Giovanni, fifer-player
Francesco d'Andrea Granacci
Biagio, *painter*
Piero di Cosimo, *painter*
Guasparre, *goldsmith*

Lorenzo della Golpaia
Salvestro, *jeweller*
Michelangelo [Viviani], *goldsmith*
Cosimo Rosselli
Chimenti del Tasso
Sandro di Botticelli, *painter*
Giovanni, called Giuliano and
Antonio da Sto. Gallo
Andrea da Monte a Santo Sovino,

Ludovico, *goldsmith and
bronze-caster*
Riccio, *goldsmith*
Gallieno, *embroiderer*
Davit, *painter*
Simone del Pollainolo
Philipppo di Philipppo, *painter*

painter (in the margin: is in
Genova)
Lionardo da Vinci
Pietro Perugino in the via Pinti,
painter
Lorenzo di Credi, *painter*
Bernardo della Ciecha, *woodcarver*⁴

All those mentioned above came to the office of the Opera del Duomo, and as they were asked and summoned by two members of the Opera, to give and lay down their opinion etc. and to indicate the place where the statue should be installed. And from the beginning we shall take down word for word just what they said as it came out of their mouth in Italian.

Messer Francesco The Herald of the Palace: I have turned over in my mind those suggestions which my judgment could afford me. You have two places where the statue may be set up: the first, where the Judith stands; the second, in the middle of the courtyard where the David is.⁵ The first might be selected because the Judith is an omen of evil, and no fit object where it stands, as we have the cross and lily for our emblems; besides, it is not proper that the woman should kill the male; and, above all, this statue was erected under an evil star, as you have gone continually from bad to worse since then. Even Pisa has been lost. The David of the courtyard is an imperfect statue because the leg thrust backwards is poor; and so I should advise you to put the Giant in one of these places, but I give preference myself to that of the Judith.⁶

Francesco Monciatto, carpenter:⁷ I answer and say: I believe everything made is made for a certain purpose; and I believe so because it [the statue] was made to be placed above the pilasters or buttresses around the church:⁸ why one should not want to put it there, I do not know; and it seems to me that it would have stood there as a fine ornament for the church and for the consuls, and the place has been changed. My advice is that since you changed the first project, it would be very well either in the Palace or around the church. Since I have not quite made up my mind, I shall yield to what others say, because by lack of time I have not given enough thought to what place would be most suitable.

Cosimo Rosselli: Both Messer Francesco [the herald] and Francesco [the carpenter] were right that it would be fine around the Palace. I also thought of placing it on the steps of the church to the right, with a pedestal on the corner of those steps, with a high base and ornament, and that's where it should go in my opinion.

Sandro Botticello: Cosimo has said exactly where I feel [it should go] to be seen by the passers-by with a Judith on the other corner; the *loggia dei Signori* is also possible, but on the corner of the church is better. I believe it would stand there best and it would be the best place⁹

Giuliano da Sangallo: I was much inclined to chose the corner of the church, like Cosimo, which is seen by the passers-by; but since it is exposed to the public, in view of the imperfection of the marble which is soft and spoiled by having remained in the open,¹⁰ I do not think it would last. For that reason I decided that it would be well placed in the central bay of the *loggia dei Signori*, either in the middle of the vault so that one could walk around it, or further inside near the wall in the middle, with a black niche behind it like a little chapel. Because if it is put in the open it will soon be destroyed, and it has to be covered.

The Second Herald (nephew of Messer Francesco, the first speaker): I can see what they all mean, and everyone is right in a different way. And looking for a place, because of frost and cold I concluded that it must be sheltered, and that its place is in the foresaid loggia and in the bay near the Palace; there it would be sheltered and honored by the proximity of the Palace; but if it were placed in the central bay, it would interfere with the ceremonies performed there by the Signoria and other magistrates, and before Your Honors decide where it belongs, you should check with Signori, because some of them are very clever.

Andrea called Il Riccio, goldsmith (*This was added after everyone had spoken*): I agree with what Messer Francesco the herald said, that there it would be well sheltered, and it would be better appreciated and its conservation would be better taken care of, and it would be better if it were sheltered; passers-by would go and see it, and a thing like this would not have to go and meet the passers-by; it is for us and the passers-by to go and see it and not for the statue to come and see us.

Lorenzo della Golpaia: I agree with the Herald, Riccio, and Giuliano da S. Gallo.

Biagio, painter: I think that this is wisely spoken, and I am of the opinion that it would stand best where Giuliano has said, if set far back so as not to hamper the ceremonies of state which take place in the Loggia. Or, if not there, then on the stairs.

Bernardo di Marcho: I agree with Giuliano da S. Gallo; I think he is right, and I subscribe to the arguments Giuliano has brought up.

Leonardo di Ser Pietra da Vinci: I agree it should be in the Loggia, where Giuliano has said, on the parapet where they hang the tapestries on the side of the wall; with appropriate ornament and in a way that does not interfere with the ceremonies of state.

Salvestro: We have considered and discussed all the places where such a work can be displayed, and I

believe that he who has made it should give it the best location. As for myself I think it would be best next to the palace. Nevertheless, as I said, the man who made it would know better than anyone else the place fit for the appearance and the conception of the statue.

Philippo di Filippo: You have all spoken very well and I believe the artist has considered the location better and at greater length, and let us hear his opinion, and I approve of all that has been said, for it has been said wisely.

Gallieno, embroiderer: As I see it, and in view of the quality of the statue, I believe it would be well where the lion sits on the square,¹¹ with a base as ornament. This place is suitable for such a statue and the lion could be put at the side of the gate of the palace on the corner of the parapet.

Davit, painter: It seems to me Gallieno has pointed out as worthy a place as any, and this is the suitable and convenient location, and put the lion where he said, or in another place, wherever it would be decided best.

Antonio, carpenter of S. Gallo: If the marble were not fragile, the place of the lion would be fine. But I don't think it would last there very long. Therefore, since the marble is fragile, I would install it in the Loggia, and if it is not quite on the street, the passers-by will put up with going to see it there.

Michelangelo, goldsmith: These wise men have well spoken, and best of all Giuliano da S. Gallo; it seems to me that the location in the loggia is fine, and if this is not approved, then the middle of the Council Hall.

Giovanni, fifer-player: Since I see your opinion, I would agree with Giuliano if it could be seen complete, but it can not be seen complete; one must think of the purpose of the work, the climate, the opening [of the loggia], of the wall, and of the roof; it would be necessary to walk around it, and on the other hand some wretch might hurt it with a bar. I think it would be well in the courtyard of the palace, as Messer Francesco the herald proposed, and this would be very agreeable to the creator, since such a place is worthy of such a sculpture.

Giovanni Cornuola: I was inclined to put it where the lion is, but I had not thought that marble was fragile and would be necessarily damaged by water and cold; therefore I think it would be well in the loggia as Giuliano da S. Gallo has said.

Guasparre di Simone: I had thought of putting it on the Piazza di S. Giovanni, but I think the loggia is a more suitable location, since it is fragile.

Piero di Cosimo, painter: I agree with Giuliano da S. Gallo, and even more that the man who made it should give his agreement, because he knows best how it should be located.

NOTES

1. The *Opera del Duomo* was the name given to the board of directors of the Cathedral works, as well as to the workshops and other establishments attached to these constructions.

2. Published by Gaye, *Carteggio inedito d'artisti del sec. XIV, XV, XVI* (Florence, 1839-40), 11, 4.54-463.

3. *L'Arte della lana* was one of Florence's great corporations, and the consuls were its elected leaders.

4. Some of the characters on this list are difficult to identify, others are well known. The following seem to ask for some explanations:

- Giovanni Cornuola or delle Corniuole, engraver on hard stones, c. 1470-1516; we know a head of Savonarola carved by him in carnelian.
- Vante the miniaturist is Attavante, 1482-1517, who worked for Lorenzo de Medici and was a friend of Leonardo.
- Giovanni the fifer-player is B. Cellini's father: see the latter's *Vita*, 1, 5.
- Francesco Granacci, 1477-1543, is the well-known painter, a friend of Michelangelo's youth.
- Davit the painter must be Ghirlandaio.
- Simone del Pollaiuolo: this is the real name of the architect Cronaca.
- Filippo di Filippo is Filippino Lippi.
- Lorenzo della Golpaia built a famous astronomic clock described by Politian.
- Michelangelo the goldsmith is, according to Gaye, Michelangelo Viviani, father of Bandinelli.
- There were two Chimenti del Tasso, the uncle, 1430-1516, and the nephew, d. 1525. Both were wood sculptors and makers of intarsia.
- Bernardo della Cecca, called Bernardo di Marcho below, is Bernardo di Marco Renzi, pupil of the cabinet maker and wood sculptor Fr. d'Angelo, called la Cecca.
- It is hard to understand why Andrea Sansovino is called a painter.

5. Donatello's bronze *David*, formerly owned by the Medici, was set up by the Republic in the courtyard of the Old Palace.

6. This is the opinion which prevailed. Donatello's *Judith* was stationed in front of the Old Palace, and was considered a symbol of Florentine freedom and of the Republic (this is what the Herald protests against when he says "as we have the cross and the lily for emblems").

7. Francesco Monciatto was, together with Cronaca, the architect of the Council Hall, 1495-1497.

8. The buttresses of the Cathedral's tribune were supposed to be crowned by statues; the marble allotted to Michelangelo,

which two or three sculptors successively had started and worked on, was originally planned for that place.

9. There follows the word *dalorini*, the meaning of which is dubious; perhaps for *dall'orini*.

10. The unfinished block had remained for forty years in the storehouse of the *Opera del Duomo*.

11. This figure, now lost, was in approximately the same spot in front of the Palace that is occupied today by a replica of Donatello's *Marzocco*.

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Giorgio Vasari, "Life of Michelangelo Buonarroti"

Vasari reserved the highest praise for Michelangelo, whose work he felt represented the culmination of all the artistic advances made by previous artists. The author introduces the artist by enumerating the redeeming features of his painting, architecture, and sculpture, all of which comprise the formal elements of artistic creation in general. If that were not enough, he states that there was not an artistic or professional pursuit at which Michelangelo did not excel. It is arguably Vasari, then, through his panegyric on Michelangelo, who formulated the idea of the artist as genius. As in his biography of Raphael, Vasari provides the reader with a long list of Michelangelo's works, highlighting what he saw as their superior qualities, and describing the circumstances behind their creation. The author's lengthy treatment of the Vatican *Pietà* and the *David* are two such passages. Vasari knew Michelangelo personally, and he frequently takes the opportunity to mention this direct connection in his text. As one of the few artists Vasari discussed who was alive when the first edition of the *Lives* was published in 1550, Michelangelo was somewhat unsatisfied with the author's account of his life. In 1553 he commissioned his follower Ascanio Condivi to write his biography, for which the artist directly provided the content. Vasari incorporated some portions of Condivi's text into his second edition of the *Lives*, without, however, acknowledging his source. (Introduction by Christine Sciacca)

EXCERPT FROM LIVES OF THE ARTISTS, 2ND. ED., 1568

While the most noble and industrious spirits were striving, by the light of the famous Giotto and of his followers, to give to the world a proof of the ability that the benign influence of the stars and the proportionate admixture of humours had given to their intellects, and while, desirous to imitate with the excellence of their art the grandeur of Nature in order to approach as near as possible to that supreme knowledge that many call understanding, they were universally toiling, although in vain, the most benign Ruler of Heaven in His clemency turned His eyes to the earth, and, having perceived the infinite vanity of all those labours, the ardent studies without any fruit, and the presumptuous self-sufficiency of men, which is even further removed from truth than is darkness from light, and desiring to deliver us from such great errors, became minded to send down to earth a spirit with universal ability in every art and every profession, who might be able, working by himself alone, to show what manner of thing is the perfection of the art of design in executing the lines, contours, shadows, and high lights, so as to give relief to works of painting, and what it is to work with correct judgment in sculpture, and how in architecture it is possible to render habitations secure and commodious, healthy and cheerful, well-proportioned, and rich with varied ornaments. He was pleased, in addition, to endow him with the true moral philosophy and with the ornament of sweet poesy, to the end that the world might choose him and admire him as its highest exemplar in the life, works, saintliness of character, and every action of human creatures, and that he might be acclaimed by us as a being rather divine than human. And since He saw that in the practice of these rare exercises and arts-namely, in painting, in sculpture, and in architecture-the Tuscan intellects have always been exalted and raised high above all others, from their being diligent in the labours and studies of every faculty beyond no matter what other people of Italy, He chose to give him Florence, as worthy beyond all other cities, for his country, in order to bring all the talents to their highest perfection in her, as was her due, in the person of one of her citizens.

There was born a son, then, in the Casentino, in the year 1474, under a fateful and happy star, from an excellent and noble mother, to Lodovico di Leonardo Buonarroti Simoni, a descendant, so it is said, of the most noble and most ancient family of the Counts of Canossa. To that Lodovico, I say, who was in that year Podestà of the township of Chiusi and Caprese, near the Sasso della Vernia, where S. Francis received the Stigmata, in the Diocese of Arezzo, a son was born on the 6th of March, a Sunday, about the eighth hour of the night, to which son he gave the name Michelangelo', because, inspired by some influence from above, and giving it no more thought, he wished to suggest that he was something celestial and divine beyond the use of mortals, as was afterwards seen from the figures of his horoscope, he having had Mercury and Venus in the second house of Jupiter, with happy augury, which showed that from the art of his brain and of his hand there would be seen to issue forth works marvellous and stupendous. Having finished his office as Podestà, Lodovico returned to Florence and settled in the village of Settignano, at a distance of three miles from the city, where he had a farm that had belonged to his forefathers; which place abounds with stone and is all full of quarries of grey-stone, which is constantly being worked by stone-cutters and sculptors, who for the most part are born in the place. Michelangelo was put out to nurse by Lodovico in that village with the wife of a stone-cutter: wherefore the same Michelangelo, discoursing once with Vasari, said to him jestingly, "Giorgio, if I have anything of the good in my brain, it has come from my being born in the pure air of your country of Arezzo, ever as I also sucked in with my nurse's milk the chisels and hammer with which I make my figures." In time Lodovico's family increased, and, being in poor circumstances, with slender revenues, he set about apprenticing his sons to the Guilds of Silk and

Wool. Michelangelo, who by that time was well grown, was placed to be schooled in grammar with Maestro Francesco da Urbino; but, since his genius drew him to delight in design, all the time that he could snatch he would spend in drawing in secret, being scolded for this by his father and his other elders, and at times beaten, they perchance considering that to give attention to that art, which was not known by them, was a mean thing and not worthy of their ancient house.

At this time Michelangelo had formed a friendship with Francesco Granacci, who, likewise a lad, had placed himself with Domenico Ghirlandajo in order to learn the art of painting; wherefore Granacci, loving Michelangelo, and perceiving that he was much inclined to design, supplied him daily with drawings by Ghirlandajo, who at that time was reputed to be one of the best masters that there were not only in Florence, but throughout all Italy. Whereupon, the desire to work at art growing greater every day in Michelangelo, Lodovico, perceiving that he could not divert the boy from giving his attention to design, and that there was no help for it, and wishing to derive some advantage from it and to enable him to learn that art, resolved on the advice of friends to apprentice him with Domenico Ghirlandajo. Michelangelo, when he was placed with Domenico Ghirlandajo, was fourteen years of age. Now he who wrote his life after the year 1550, when I wrote these Lives the first time, has said that some persons, through not having associated with him, have related things that never happened, and have left out many that are worthy to be recorded, and has touched on this circumstance in particular, taxing Domenico with jealousy and saying that he never offered any assistance to Michelangelo; which is clearly false, as may be seen from an entry by the hand of Lodovico, the father of Michelangelo, written in one of Domenico's books, which book is now in the possession of his heirs. That entry runs thus: "1488, I record, this first day of April, that I, Lodovico di Leonardo di Buonarrota, placed Michelangelo my son with Domenico and David di Tommaso di Currado for the three years next to come, on these terms and conditions, that the said Michelangelo shall remain with the above-named persons for the said period of time, in order to learn to paint and to exercise that vocation; that the said persons shall have command over him; and that the same Domenico and David shall be bound to give him in those three years twenty-four florins of full weight, the first year six florins, the second year eight florins, and the third ten florins; in all, the sum of ninety-six lire." And next, below this, is another record, or rather, entry, also written in the hand of Lodovico: "The aforesaid Michelangelo has received of that sum, this sixteenth day of April, two gold florins in gold. I, Lodovico di Leonardo, his father, have received twelve lire and twelve sold, as cash due to him." These entries I have copied from the book itself, in order to prove that all that was written at that time, as well as all that is about to be written, is the truth; nor do I know that anyone has been more associated with him than I have been, or has been a more faithful friend and servant to him, as can be proved even to one who knows not the facts, neither do I believe that there is anyone who can show a greater number of letters written by his own hand, or any written with greater affection than he has expressed to me. I have made this digression for the sake of truth, and it must suffice for all the rest of his Life. Let us now return to our story.

When the ability as well as the person of Michelangelo had grown in such a manner, that Domenico, seeing him execute some works beyond the scope of a boy, was astonished, since it seemed to him that he not only surpassed the other disciples, of whom he had a great number, but very often equalled the things done by himself as master, it happened that one of the young men who were learning under Domenico copied with the pen some draped figures of women from works by Ghirlandajo; whereupon Michelangelo took that drawing and with a thicker pen outlined one of those women with new lineaments, in the manner that it should have been in order to be perfect. And it is a marvellous thing to see the difference between the two manners, and the judgment and excellence of a mere lad who was so spirited and bold, that he had the courage to correct the work of his master. That sheet is now in my possession, treasured as a relic; and I received it from Granacci to put in my book of drawings together with others by the same hand, which I received from Michelangelo. In the year 1550, when Giorgio was in Rome, he showed it to Michelangelo, who recognized it and was pleased to see it again, saying modestly that he knew more of the art when he was a boy than he did at that time, when he was an old man.

This affair did not happen without some censure attaching to Cardinal San Giorgio, in that he did not recognize the value of the work, which consisted in its perfection; for modern works, if only they be excellent, are as good as the ancient. What greater vanity is there than that of those who concern themselves more with the name than the fact? But of that kind of men, who pay more attention to the appearance than to the reality, there are some to be found at any time.

Now this event brought so much reputation to Michelangelo, that he was straightway summoned to Rome and engaged by Cardinal San Giorgio, with whom he stayed nearly a year, although, as one little conversant with our arts, he did not commission Michelangelo to do anything. At that time a barber of the Cardinal, who had been a painter, and could paint with great diligence in distemper-colours, but knew nothing of design, formed a friendship with Michelangelo, who made for him a cartoon of S. Francis receiving the Stigmata. That cartoon was painted very carefully in colours by the barber on a little panel; and the picture is now to be seen in S. Pietro a Montorio in the first chapel on the left hand as one enters the church. The talent of Michelangelo was then clearly

recognized by a Roman gentleman named Messer Jacopo Galli, an ingenious person, who caused him to make a Cupid of marble as large as life, and then a figure of a Bacchus ten palms high, who has a cup in the right hand, and in the left hand the skin of a tiger, with a bunch of grapes at which a little satyr is trying to nibble. In that figure it may be seen that he sought to achieve a certain fusion in the members that is marvellous, and in particular that he gave it both the youthful slenderness of the male and the fullness and roundness of the female—a thing so admirable, that he proved himself excellent in statuary beyond any other modern that had worked up to that time. On which account, during his stay in Rome, he made so much proficiency in the studies of art, that it was a thing incredible to see his exalted thoughts and the difficulties of the manner exercised by him with such supreme facility; to the amazement not only of those who were not accustomed to see such things, but also of those familiar with good work, for the reason that all the works executed up to that time appeared as nothing in comparison with his. These things awakened in Cardinal di San Dionigi, called Cardinal de Rohan, a Frenchman, a desire to leave in a city so famous some worthy memorial of himself by the hand of so rare a craftsman; and he caused him to make a Pieta of marble in the round, which, when finished, was placed in the Chapel of the Vergine Maria della Febbre in S. Pietro, where the Temple of Mars used to be. To this work let no sculptor, however rare a craftsman, ever think to be able to approach in design or in grace, or ever to be able with all the pains in the world to attain to such delicacy and smoothness or to perforate the marble with such art as Michelangelo did therein, for in it may be seen all the power and worth of art. Among the lovely things to be seen in the work, to say nothing of the divinely beautiful draperies, is the body of Christ; nor let anyone think to see greater beauty of members or more mastery of art in any body, or a nude with more detail in the muscles, veins, and nerves over the framework of the bones, nor yet a corpse more similar than this to a real corpse. Here is perfect sweetness in the expression of the head, harmony in the joints and attachments of the arms, legs, and trunk, and the pulses and veins so wrought, that in truth Wonder herself must marvel that the hand of a craftsman should have been able to execute so divinely and so perfectly, in so short a time, a work so admirable; and it is certainly a miracle that a stone without any shape at the beginning should ever have been reduced to such perfection as Nature is scarcely able to create in the flesh. Such were Michelangelo's love and zeal together in this work, that he left his name—a thing that he never did again in any other work—written across a girdle that encircles the bosom of Our Lady. And the reason was that one day Michelangelo, entering the place where it was set up, found there a great number of strangers from Lombardy, who were praising it highly, and one of them asked one of the others, who had done it, and he answered, "Our Gobbo from Milan." Michelangelo stood silent, but thought it something strange that his labours should be attributed to another; and one night he shut himself in there, and, having brought a little light and his chisels, carved his name upon it. And truly the work is such, that an exalted spirit has said, as to a real and living figure —

*Bellezza ed Onestate
E Doglia a Pietà in vivo marmo morte,
Deh, come voi pur fate,
Non piangete sí forte,
Che anzi tempo risvegliasi da morte;
E pur mal grado suo
Nostro Signore, a tuo
Sposo, Figliuolo, a Padre,
Unica Sposa sua, Figliuola, a Madre.*

From this work he acquired very great fame, and although certain persons, rather fools than otherwise, say that he has made Our Lady too young, are these so ignorant as not to know that unspotted virgins maintain and preserve their freshness of countenance a long time without any mark, and that persons afflicted as Christ was do the contrary? That circumstance, therefore, won an even greater increase of glory and fame for his genius than all his previous works.

Letters were written to him from Florence by some of his friends, saying that he should return, because it was not unlikely that he might obtain the spoiled block of marble lying in the Office of Works, which Piero Soderini, who at that time had been made Gonfalonier of the city for life, had very often talked of having executed by Leonardo da Vinci, and was then arranging to give to Maestro Andrea Contucci of Monte Sansovino, an excellent sculptor, who was seeking to obtain it. Now, however difficult it might be to carve a complete figure out of it without adding pieces (for which work of finishing it without adding pieces none of the others, save Buonarroti alone, had courage enough), Michelangelo had felt a desire for it for many years back; and, having come to Florence, he sought to obtain it. This block of marble was nine braccia high, and from it, unluckily, one Maestro Simone da Fiesole had begun a giant, and he had managed to work so ill, that he had hacked a hole between the legs, and it was altogether misshapen and reduced to ruin, insomuch that the Wardens of Works of S. Maria del Fiore, who had the charge of the undertaking, had placed it on one side without troubling to have it finished; and

so it had remained for many years past, and was likely to remain. Michelangelo measured it all anew, considering whether he might be able to carve a reasonable figure from that block by accommodating himself as to the attitude to the marble as it had been left all misshapen by Maestro Simone; and he resolved to ask for it from Soderini and the Wardens, by whom it was granted to him as a thing of no value, they thinking that whatever he might make of it would be better than the state in which it was at that time, seeing that neither in pieces nor in that condition could it be of any use to their building. Whereupon Michelangelo made a model of wax, fashioning in it, as a device for the Palace, a young David with a sling in his hand, to the end that, even as he had defended his people and governed them with justice, so those governing that city might defend her valiantly and govern her justly. And he began it in the Office of Works of S. Maria del Fiore, in which he made an enclosure of planks and masonry, thus surrounding the marble; and, working at it continuously without anyone seeing it, he carried it to perfect completion. The marble had already been spoilt and distorted by Maestro Simone, and in some places it was not enough to satisfy the wishes of Michelangelo for what he would have liked to do with it; and he therefore suffered certain of the first marks of Maestro Simone's chisel to remain on the extremity of the marble, some of which are still to be seen. And truly it was a miracle on the part of Michelangelo to restore to life a thing that was dead.

This statue, when finished, was of such a kind that many disputes took place as to how to transport it to the Piazza della Signoria. Whereupon Giuliano da San Gallo and his brother Antonio made a very strong framework of wood and suspended the figure from it with ropes, to the end that it might not hit against the wood and break to pieces, but might rather keep rocking gently; and they drew it with windlasses over flat beams laid upon the ground, and then set it in place. On the rope which held the figure suspended he made a slip-knot which was very easy to undo but tightened as the weight increased, which is a most beautiful and ingenious thing; and I have in my book a drawing of it by his own hand-an admirable, secure, and strong contrivance for suspending weights.

It happened at this time that Piero Soderini, having seen it in place, was well pleased with it, but said to Michelangelo, at a moment when he was retouching it in certain parts, that it seemed to him that the nose of the figure was too thick. Michelangelo noticed that the Gonfalonier was beneath the Giant, and that his point of view prevented him from seeing it properly; but in order to satisfy him he climbed upon the staging, which was against the shoulders, and quickly took up a chisel in his left hand, with a little of the marble-dust that lay upon the planks of the staging, and then, beginning to strike lightly with the chisel, let fall the dust little by little, nor changed the nose a whit from what it was before. Then, looking down at the Gonfalonier, who stood watching him, he said, "Look at it now." "I like it better," said the Gonfalonier, "you have given it life." And so Michelangelo came down, laughing to himself at having satisfied that lord, for he had compassion on those who, in order to appear full of knowledge, talk about things of which they know nothing.

When it was built up, and all was finished, he uncovered it, and it cannot be denied that this work has carried off the palm from all other statues, modern or ancient, Greek or Latin; and it may be said that neither the Marforio at Rome, nor the Tiber and the Nile of the Belvedere, nor the Tiber of Monte Cavallo, are equal to it in any respect, with such just proportion, beauty and excellence did Michelangelo finish it. For in it may be seen most beautiful contours of legs, with attachments of limbs and slender outlines of flanks that are divine; nor has there ever been seen a pose so easy, or any grace to equal that in this work, or feet, hands and head so well in accord, one member with another, in harmony, design, and excellence of artistry. And, of a truth, whoever has seen this work need not trouble to see any other work executed in sculpture, either in our own or in other times, by no matter what craftsman. Michelangelo received from Piero Soderini in payment for it four hundred crowns; and it was set in place in the year 1504. In consequence of the fame that he thereby won as a sculptor, he made for the above-named Gonfalonier a most beautiful David of bronze, which Soderini sent to France; and at this time, also, he began, but did not finish, two medallions of marble-one for Taddeo Taddei, which is now in his house, and another that he began for Bartolommeo Pitti, which was presented by Fra Miniato Pitti of Monte Oliveto, a man with a rare knowledge in cosmography and many other sciences, and particularly in painting, to Luigi Guicciardini, who was much his friend. These works were held to be admirable in their excellence; and at this same time, also, he blocked out a statue of S. Matthew in marble in the Office of Works of S. Maria del Fiore, which statue, rough as it is, reveals its full perfection and teaches sculptors in what manner figures can be carved out of marble without their coming out misshapen, so that it may be possible to go on ever improving them by removing more of the marble with judgment, and also to draw back and change some part, according as the necessity may arise. He also made a medallion in bronze of a Madonna, which he cast in bronze at the request of certain Flemish merchants of the Moscheroni family, persons of high nobility in their own country, who paid him a hundred crowns for it, and intended to send it to Flanders.

Michelangelo used to work almost every day, as a pastime, at that block with the four figures of which we have already spoken; which block he broke into pieces at this time for these reasons, either because it was hard and full of emery, and the chisel often struck sparks from it, or it may have been that the judgment of the man was so great that he was never content with anything that he did. A proof that this is true is that there are few finished

statues to be seen out of all that he executed in the prime of his manhood, and that those completely finished were executed by him in his youth, such as the Bacchus, the Pietà in S. Maria della Febbre, the Giant of Florence, and the Christ of the Minerva, which it would not be possible to increase or diminish by as little as a grain of millet without spoiling them; and the others, with the exception of the Dukes Giuliano and Lorenzo, Night, Dawn, and Moses, with the other two, the whole number of these statues not amounting in all to eleven, the others, I say, were all left unfinished, and, moreover, they are many, Michelangelo having been wont to say that if he had had to satisfy himself in what he did, he would have sent out few, nay, not one. For he had gone so far with his art and judgment, that, when he had laid bare a figure and had perceived in it the slightest degree of error, he would set it aside and run to lay his hand on another block of marble, trusting that the same would not happen to the new block; and he often said that this was the reason that he gave for having executed so few statues and pictures. This Pietà, when it was broken, he presented to Francesco Bandini. Now at this time Tiberio Calcagni, a Florentine sculptor, had become much the friend of Michelangelo by means of Francesco Bandini and Messer Donato Giannotti; and being one day in Michelangelo's house, where there was the Pietà, all broken, after a long conversation he asked him for what reason he had broken it up and destroyed labours so marvellous, and he answered that the reason was the importunity of his servant Urbino, who kept urging him every day to finish it, besides which, among other things, a piece of one of the elbows of the Madonna had been broken off, and even before that he had taken an aversion to it, and had had many misfortunes with it by reason of a flaw that was in the marble, so that he lost his patience and began to break it up; and he would have broken it altogether into pieces if his servant Antonio had not besought him that he should present it to him as it was. Whereupon Tiberio, having heard this, spoke to Bandini, who desired to have something by the hand of Michelangelo, and Bandini contrived that Tiberio should promise to Antonio two hundred crowns of gold, and prayed Michelangelo to consent that Tiberio should finish it for Bandini with the assistance of models by his hand, urging that thus his labour would not be thrown away. Michelangelo was satisfied, and then made them a present of it. The work was carried away immediately, and then put together again and reconstructed with I know not what new pieces by Tiberio; but it was left unfinished by reason of the death of Bandini, Michelangelo, and Tiberio. At the present day it is in the possession of Pier Antonio Bandini, the son of Francesco, at his villa on Monte Cavallo. But to return to Michelangelo; it became necessary to find some work in marble on which he might be able to pass some time every day with the chisel, and another piece of marble was put before him, from which another Pietà had been already blocked out, different from the first and much smaller.

Michelangelo was much inclined to the labours of art, seeing that everything, however difficult, succeeded with him, he having had from nature a genius very apt and ardent in these most noble arts of design. Moreover, in order to be entirely perfect, innumerable times he made anatomical studies, dissecting men's bodies in order to see the principles of their construction and the concatenation of the bones, muscles, veins, and nerves, the various movements and all the postures of the human body; and not of men only, but also of animals, and particularly of horses, which last he much delighted to keep. Of all these he desired to learn the principles and laws in so far as touched his art, and this knowledge he so demonstrated in the works that fell to him to handle, that those who attend to no other study than this do not know more. He so executed his works, whether with the brush or with the chisel, that they are almost inimitable, and he gave to his labours, as has been said, such art and grace, and a loveliness of such a kind, that (be it said without offence to any) he surpassed and vanquished the ancients; having been able to wrest things out of the greatest difficulties with such facility, that they do not appear wrought with effort, although whoever draws his works after him finds enough in imitating them.

The genius of Michelangelo was recognized in his lifetime, and not, as happens to many, after death, for it has been seen that Julius II, Leo X, Clement VII, Paul III, Julius III, Paul IV, and Pius IV, all supreme Pontiffs, always wished to have him near them, and also, as is known, Suleiman, Emperor of the Turks, Francis of Valois, King of France, the Emperor Charles V, the Signoria of Venice, and finally, as has been related, Duke Cosimo de' Medici; all offering him honourable salaries, for no other reason but to avail themselves of his great genius. This does not happen save to men of great worth, such as he was; and it is evident and well known that all these three arts were so perfected in him, that it is not found that among persons ancient or modern, in all the many years that the sun has been whirling round, God has granted this to any other but Michelangelo. (He had imagination of such a kind, and so perfect, and the things conceived by him in idea were such, that often, through not being able to express with the hands conceptions so terrible and grand, he abandoned his works-nay, destroyed-many of them; and I know that a little before he died he burned a great number of designs, sketches, and cartoons made with his own hand, to the end that no one might see the labours endured by him and his methods of trying his genius, and that he might not appear less than perfect. Of such I have some by his hand, found in Florence, and placed in my book of drawings; from which, although the greatness of that brain is seen in them, it is evident that when he wished to bring forth Minerva from the head of Jove, he had to use Vulcan's hammer. Thus he used to make his figures in the proportion of nine, ten, and even twelve heads, seeking nought else but that in putting them all together there should be a certain harmony of grace in the whole, which nature does not present; saying that it was necessary to have the compasses in the eyes and not in the hand, because the hands work and the

eye judges; which method he used also in architecture.

No one should think it strange that Michelangelo delighted in solitude, he having been one who was enamoured of his art, which claims a man, with all his thoughts, for herself alone; moreover, it is necessary that he who wishes to attend to her studies should shun society, and, while attending to the considerations of art, he is never alone or without thoughts. And those who attributed it to caprice and eccentricity are wrong, because he who wishes to work well must withdraw himself from all cares and vexations, since art demands contemplation, solitude, and ease of life, and will not suffer the mind to wander. For all this, he prized the friendship of many great persons and of learned and ingenious men, at convenient times; and these he maintained. Thus the great Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici loved him greatly, and, having heard that a Turkish horse that he possessed pleased Michelangelo because of its beauty, it was sent as a present to him by the liberality of that lord, with ten mules laden with fodder, and a serving-man to attend to it; and Michelangelo accepted it willingly. The illustrious Cardinal Pole was much his friend, Michelangelo being enamoured of his goodness and his talents; also Cardinal Farnese, and Santa Croce, which latter afterwards became Pope Marcellus, Cardinal Ridolfi, Cardinal Maffeo, Monsignor Bembo, Carpi, and many other Cardinals, Bishops, and Prelates, whom it is not necessary to name. Others were Monsignor Claudio Tolomei, the Magnificent Messer Ottaviano de' Medici, his gossip, whose son he held at baptism, and Messer Bindo Altoviti, to whom he presented that cartoon of the Chapel in which Noah, drunk with wine, is derided by one of his sons, and his nakedness is covered by the two others; M. Lorenzo Ridolfi, M. Annibale Caro, and M. Giovan Francesco Lottini of Volterra. But infinitely more than any of the others he loved M. Tommaso de' Cavalieri, a Roman gentleman, for whom, being a young man and much inclined to these arts, he made, to the end that he might learn to draw, many most superb drawings of divinely beautiful heads, designed in black and red chalk; and then he drew for him a Ganymede rapt to Heaven by Jove's Eagle, a Tityus with the Vulture devouring his heart, the Chariot of the Sun falling with Phaëthon into the Po, and a Bacchanal of children, which are all in themselves most rare things, and drawings the like of which have never been seen. Michelangelo made a life-size portrait of Messer Tommaso in a cartoon, and neither before nor afterwards did he take the portrait of anyone, because he abhorred executing a resemblance to the living subject, unless it were of extraordinary beauty. These drawings, on account of the great delight that M. Tommaso took in them, were the reason that he afterwards obtained a good number, miraculous things, which Michelangelo once drew for Fra Sebastiano Viniziano, who carried them into execution; and in truth he rightly treasures them as reliques, and he has courteously given craftsmen access to them. Of a truth Michelangelo always placed his affections with persons noble, deserving, and worthy of them, for he had true judgment and taste in all things.

M. Tommaso afterwards caused Michelangelo to make many designs for friends, such as that of the picture for Cardinal di Cesis, wherein is Our Lady receiving the Annunciation from the Angel, a novel thing, which was afterwards executed in colours by Marcello Mantovano and placed in the marble chapel which that Cardinal caused to be built in the Church of the Pace at Rome. So, also, with another Annunciation coloured likewise by the hand of Marcello in a picture in the Church of S. Giovanni Laterano, the design of which belongs to Duke Cosimo de' Medici, having been presented after Michelangelo's death by his nephew Leonardo Buonarroti to his Excellency, who cherishes it as a jewel, together with a Christ praying in the Garden and many other designs, sketches, and cartoons by the hand of Michelangelo, and likewise the statue of Victory with a captive beneath, five braccia in height, and four captives in the rough which serve to teach us how to carve figures from the marble by a method secure from any chance of spoiling the stone; which method is as follows. You take a figure in wax or some other solid material, and lay it horizontally in a vessel of water, which water being by its nature flat and level at the surface, as you raise the said figure little by little from the level, so it comes about that the more salient parts are revealed, while the lower parts-those, namely, on the under side of the figure-remain hidden, until in the end it all comes into view. In the same manner must figures be carved out of marble with the chisel, first laying bare the more salient parts, and then little by little the lower parts; and this method may be seen to have been followed by Michelangelo in the abovementioned captives, which his Excellency wishes to be used as exemplars for his Academicians.

Michelangelo loved his fellow-craftsmen; and held intercourse with them, as with Jacopo Sansovino, Rosso, Pontorno, Daniello da Volterra, and Giorgio Vasari of Arezzo, to which last he showed innumerable kindnesses; and he was the reason that Giorgio gave his attention to architecture, intending to make use of him some day, and he readily conferred and discussed matters of art with him. Those who say that he was not willing to teach are wrong, because he was always willing with his intimates and with anyone who asked him for counsel; and I have been present on many such occasions, but of these, out of consideration, I say nothing, not wishing to reveal the deficiencies of others. It may be urged that he had bad fortune with those who lived with him in his house, which was because he hit upon natures little able to imitate him. Thus, Pietro Urbano of Pistoia, his pupil, was a man of parts, but would never exert himself. Antonio Mini was willing, but had no aptitude of brain; and when the wax is hard it does not readily take an impression. Ascanio dalla Ripa Transone took great pains, but of this no fruits were ever seen either in designs or in finished works, and he toiled several years over a picture for which Michelangelo had given him a cartoon. In the end, all the good expectation in which he was held vanished

in smoke; and I remember that Michelangelo would be seized with compassion for his toil, and would assist him with his own hand, but this profited him little. If he had found a nature after his heart, as he told me several times, in spite of his age he would often have made anatomical studies, and would have written upon them, for the benefit of his fellow-craftsmen; for he was disappointed by several. But he did not trust himself, through not being able to express himself in writing as he would have liked, because he was not practised in diction, although in the prose of his letters he explained his conceptions very well in a few words. He much delighted in readings of the poets in the vulgar tongue, and particularly of Dante, whom he much admired, imitating him in his conceptions and inventions; and so with Petrarca, having delighted to make madrigals and sonnets of great weight, upon which commentaries have been written. M. Benedetto Varchi gave a lecture in the Florentine Academy upon that sonnet which begins

*Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto
Ch'un marmo solo in se non circonscriva.*

Michelangelo sent a vast number by his own hand-receiving answers in rhyme and in prose to the most illustrious Marchioness of Pescara, of whose virtues he was enamoured, and she likewise of his; and she went many times to Rome from Viterbo to visit him, and Michelangelo designed for her a Dead Christ in the lap of Our Lady, with two little Angels, all most admirable, and a Christ fixed on the cross, who, with the head uplifted, is recommending His Spirit to the Father, a divine work; and also a Christ with the Woman of Samaria at the well. He much delighted in the sacred Scriptures, like the excellent Christian that he was; and he held in great veneration the works written by Fra Girolamo Savonarola, because he had heard the voice of that friar in the pulpit. He greatly loved human beauty for the sake of imitation in art, being able to select from the beautiful the most beautiful, for without this imitation no perfect work can be done; but not with lascivious and disgraceful thoughts, as he proved by his way of life, which was very frugal. Thus, when he was young, all intent on his work, he contented himself with a little bread and wine, and this he continued when old until the time when he was painting the judgment in the Chapel, taking his refreshment in the evening when he had finished the day's work, but always very frugally. And although he was rich, he lived like a poor man, nor did any friend ever eat at his table, or rarely; and he would not accept presents from anyone, because it appeared to him that if anyone gave him something, he would be bound to him for ever. This sober life kept him very active and in want of very little sleep, and often during the night, not being able to sleep, he would rise to labour with the chisel; having made a cap of thick paper, and over the centre of his head he kept a lighted candle, which in this way threw light over where he was working without encumbering his hands. Vasari, who had seen the cap several times, reflecting that he did not use wax, but candles of pure goat's tallow, which are excellent, sent him four bundles of these, which weighed forty libbre. And his servant with all courtesy carried them to him at the second hour of the evening, and presented them to him; but Michelangelo refused them, declaring that he did not want them; and then the servant said: "They have broken my arms on the way between the bridge and here, and I shall not carry them back to the house. Now here in front of your door there is a solid heap of mud; they will stand in it beautifully, and I will set them all alight." Michelangelo said to him: "Put them down here, for I will not have you playing pranks at my door."

While Michelangelo was having the tomb of Julius II finished, he caused a marble-hewer to execute a terminal figure for placing in the tomb in S. Pietro in Vincola, saying to him, "Cut away this to-day," "Level that," "Polish here"; insomuch that, without the other noticing it, he enabled him to make a figure. Wherefore, when it was finished, the man gazed at it marvelling; and Michelangelo said: "What do you think of it?" "I think it fine," he answered, "and I am much obliged to you." "Why so?" asked Michelangelo. "Because by your means, I have discovered a talent that I did not know I possessed."

Now, to be brief, I must record that the master's constitution was very sound, for he was lean and well knit together with nerves, and although as a boy he was delicate, and as a man he had two serious illnesses, he could always endure any fatigue and had no infirmity, save that in his old age he suffered from dysuria and from gravel, which in the end developed into the stone; wherefore for many years he was syringed by the hand of Maestro Realdo Colombo, his very dear friend, who treated him with great diligence. He was of middle stature, broad in the shoulders, but well proportioned in all the rest of the body. In his latter years he wore buskins of dogskin on the legs, next to the skin, constantly for whole months together, so that afterwards, when he sought to take them off, on drawing them off the skin often came away with them. Over the stockings he wore boots of cordwain fastened on the inside, as a protection against damp. His face was round, the brow square and spacious, with seven straight lines, and the temples projected considerably beyond the ears; which ears were somewhat on the large side, and stood out from the cheeks. The body was in proportion to the face, or rather on the large side; the nose somewhat flattened, as was said in the Life of Torrigiano, who broke it for him with his fist; the eyes rather on the small side, of the colour of horn, spotted with blueish and yellowish gleams; the eyebrows with few hairs, the lips thin, with the lower lip rather thicker and projecting a little, the chin well shaped and in proportion with the

rest, the hair black, but mingled with white hairs, like the beard, which was not very long, forked, and not very thick.

Truly his coming was to the world, as I said at the beginning, an exemplar sent by God to the men of our arts, to the end that they might learn from his life the nature of noble character, and from his works what true and excellent craftsmen ought to be. And I, who have to praise God for infinite blessings, as is seldom wont to happen with men of our profession, count it among the greatest blessings that I was born at the time Michelangelo was alive, that I was thought worthy to have him as my master, and that he was so much my friend and intimate, as everyone knows, and as the letters written by him to me, now in my possession, bear witness; and out of love for truth, and also from the obligation that I feel to his loving kindness, I have contrived to write many things of him, and all true, which many others have not been able to do. Another blessing he used to point out to me himself: "You should thank God, Giorgio, who has caused you to serve Duke Cosimo, who, in his contentment that you should build and paint and carry into execution his conceptions and designs, has grudged no expense; and you will I remember, if you consider it, that the others whose Lives you have written did not have such advantages."

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Poem 285, 1552-54

a

The voyage of my life at last has reached,	1
across a stormy sea, in a fragile boat,	2
the common port all must pass through, to give	3
an accounting for every evil and pious deed.	
So now I recognize how laden with error	5
was the affectionate fantasy	6
that made art an idol and sovereign to me,	7
like all things men want in spite of their best interests.	8
What will become of all my thoughts of love,	
once gay and foolish, now that I'm nearing two deaths?	10
I'm certain of one, and the other looms over me.	11
Neither painting nor sculpture will be able any longer	
to calm my soul, now turned toward that divine love	
that opened his arms on the cross to take us in.	14

a. Sonnet, among M's best-known poems, which underwent numerous drafts between October 1552 and September 1554. One version is written on a draft of a letter to his nephew Lionardo from April 1554 (C. MCXCIV; R. 388), another on TC no. 423v (see nos. 281-84). The final version was sent to Giorgio Vasari in a letter of September 1554 (C. MCXCVII; R. 390); Vasari replied with a sonnet in matching rhymes and later reprinted and discussed the poem in the second edition of his *Lives* (VM 7:246; VB p. 406). The contrast in theme with M's earlier sonnet no. 277, dedicated to Vasari, is marked; cf. no. 288, also sent to Vasari.

1-3. The image of life as a storm-tossed boat seeking port recalls Petrarch, no. 189, "My ship laden with forgetfulness," and (more generally) his no. 80. Cf. similar boat images in nos. 45:13-15, 299:5-8.

3. common port: death, the final harbor shared by all souls and the time for divine judgment. 5-S. It was my own lack of understanding (fantasy)-which was, however, well intentioned and impassioned-that made me exalt art, as all men pursue some worldly desire even though it is sinful or distracting (cf. no. 284).

5. *laden with error*: cf. Petrarch, no. 132:12.

10-11. *two deaths*: that of the body, which is certain, and that of the soul in damnation, which seems imminent. Cf. nos. 43:12, 293:3.

14. This line parallels the fantasy of heavenly embrace in a poem by Girolamo Benivieni, "Already, in thought/I seem to be welcomed into his arms" (*Opere*, Venice, 1522, f. 100v); cf. also Petrarch, no. 264:14-15. Visually, it recalls M's series of late Crucifixion drawings showing Christ with his arms outstretched (TC nos. 410-421). For similar images of arms, cf. nos. 161, 290

(Translation by James M. Saslow)

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