

Michelangelo  
represents a twenty-  
year span of  
frustrating delays



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Michelangelo was pessimistic in his poetry and an optimist in his artwork. Michelangelos artwork consisted of paintings and sculptures that showed humanity in its natural state. Michelangelos poetry was pessimistic in his response to Strazzi even though he was complementing him. Michelangelos sculpture brought out his optimism. Michelangelo was optimistic in completing The Tomb of Pope Julius II and persevered through its many revisions trying to complete his vision. Sculpture was Michelangelos main goal and the love of his life.

Since his art portrayed both optimism and pessimism, Michelangelo was in touch with his positive and negative sides, showing that he had a great and stable personality. Michelangelos artwork consisted of paintings and sculptures that showed humanity in its natural state. Michelangelo Buonarroti was called to Rome in 1505 by Pope Julius II to create for him a monumental tomb. We have no clear sense of what the tomb was to look like, since over the years it went through at least five conceptual revisions. The tomb was to have three levels; the bottom level was to have sculpted figures representing Victory and bond slaves. The second level was to have statues of Moses and Saint Paul as well as symbolic figures of the active and contemplative life-representative of the human striving for, and reception of, knowledge. The third level, it is assumed, was to have an effigy of the deceased pope.

The tomb of Pope Julius II was never finished. What was finished of the tomb represents a twenty-year span of frustrating delays and revised schemes.

Michelangelo had hardly begun work on the popes tomb when Julius commanded him to fresco the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel to complete the

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work done in the previous century under Sixtus IV. The overall organization consists of four large triangles at the corner; a series of eight triangular spaces on the outer border; an intermediate series of figures; and nine central panels, all bound together with architectural motifs and nude male figures. The corner triangles depict heroic action in the Old Testament, while the other eight triangles depict the biblical ancestors of Jesus Christ.

Michelangelo conceived and executed this huge work as a single unit. Its overall meaning is a problem. The issue has engaged historians of art for generations without satisfactory resolution. The paintings that were done by Michelangelo had been painted with the brightest colors that just bloomed the whole ceiling as one entered to look. The ceiling had been completed just a little after the Pope had died. The Sistine Chapel is the best fresco ever done.

Michelangelo embodied many characteristic qualities of the Renaissance. An individualistic, highly competitive genius (sometimes to the point of eccentricity). Michelangelo was not afraid to show humanity in its natural state - nakedness; even in front of the Pope and the other religious leaders. Michelangelo portrayed life as it is, even with its troubles.

Michelangelo wanted to express his own artistic ideas. The most puzzling thing about Michelangelos ceiling design is the great number of seemingly irrelevant nude figures that he included in his gigantic fresco. Four youths frame most of the Genesis scenes. We know from historical records that various church officials objected to the many nudes, but Pope Julius gave Michelangelo artistic freedom, and eventually ruled the chapel off limits to

anyone save himself, until the painting was completed. The many nude figures are referred to as Ignudi.

They are naked humans, perhaps representing the naked truth. More likely, I think they represent Michelangelos concept of the human potential for perfection. Michelangelo himself said, Whoever strives for perfection is striving for something divine.

In painting nude humans, he is suggesting the unfinished human; each of us is born nude with a mind and a body, in Neoplatonic thought, with the power to be our own shapers. Michelangelo has a very great personality for his time. In Rome, in 1536, Michelangelo was at work on the Last Judgment for the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel, which he finished in 1541. The largest fresco of the Renaissance, it depicts Judgment Day. Christ, with a clap of thunder, puts into motion the inevitable separation, with the saved ascending on the left side of the