

Michelangelo

Michelangelo Buonarroti

1475-87 - Michelangelo was born on March 6 in Caprese near Arezzo, Tuscany. His family had for several generations been small-scale bankers in Florence. His father, Lodovico di Leonardo di Buonarroti di Simoni, however, was Judicial administrator of Caprese and local administrator of Chiusi. Michelangelo's mother was Francesca di Neri del Miniato di Siena. The Buonarroti claimed to descend from Countess Mathilde of Canossa; this claim was probably false, but Michelangelo himself believed it. Several months after Michelangelo's birth the family returned to Florence. As a child Michelangelo lived with a stonecutter's family in the town of Settignano where his father owned a marble quarry and a small farm. Michelangelo once said to the biographer of artists Giorgio Vasari, "If there is some good in me, it is because I was born in the subtle atmosphere of your country of Arezzo. Along with the milk of my nurse I received the knack of handling chisel and hammer, with which I make my figures." As a young boy he studied grammar with the humanist Francesco da Urbino in Florence. The young artist, however, showed no interest in school, preferring instead to copy paintings from churches and seek the company of painters.

1488 - Apprenticed in painting with Domenico Ghirlandaio and in sculpture with Bertoldo di Giovanni at the age of 13. Michelangelo's father managed to persuade Ghirlandaio to pay the 14-year-old artist, which was highly unusual at the time.

1489 - Florence's ruler Lorenzo de' Medici asks Ghirlandaio for his two best pupils. Ghirlandaio sends him Michelangelo and Francesco Granacci.

1490-1492 - Michelangelo attended Lorenzo's school and was influenced by prominent scholars who modified and expanded his ideas on art, following the dominant Platonic view of that age, and even his feelings about sexuality. It was during this period that Michelangelo met literary personalities like Pico della Mirandola, Angelo Poliziano and Marsilio Ficino. Michelangelo finished Madonna of the Steps (1490–1492) and Battle of the Centaurs (1491–1492). The latter was based on a theme suggested by Poliziano and was commissioned by Lorenzo de Medici.

1492 – Death of Lorenzo de' Medici. Michelangelo returns to his father's house. In the following months he produced a Wooden crucifix (1493), as a gift to the prior of the church of Santa Maria del Santo Spirito who had permitted him some studies of anatomy on the corpses of the church's hospital.

1494 - Medici expelled from Florence after the rise of the radical preacher Savonarola. Michelangelo briefly visits Venice and Bologna. The French King Charles VIII is defeated after his invasion of Italy. Threatened Florence is relieved. Michelangelo receives no commissions from the new city government under Savonarola. He links up with the Medicis. During the half year he spent in Florence he worked on two statuettes; a child St. John the Baptist for Lorenzo de Pierfrancesco de Medici and a sleeping Cupid. The Cupid was sold as an original Roman antique to Cardinal Raffaele Riario who found out that it was a fraud, but was so impressed by the quality of the sculpture that he invited the artist to Rome.

1496 – First visit to Rome aged 21. Carves life-size statue of the Roman wine god, Bacchus, commissioned by Cardinal Riario. The work was rejected by the cardinal, and subsequently entered the collection of the banker Jacopo Galli, for his garden.

1497 - The French ambassador in the Holy See commissioned one of his most famous works, the Pietà. Vasari's comment: "It is certainly a miracle that a formless block of stone could ever have been reduced to a perfection that nature is scarcely able to create in the flesh."

1499–1501 – Return to Florence after Girolamo Savonarola's execution (1498) and the rise of the gonfaloniere Pier Soderini. He was asked by the consuls of the Guild of Wool to complete an unfinished project begun 40 years earlier by Agostino di Duccio: a colossal statue portraying David as a symbol of Florentine freedom, to be placed on a buttress of the Duomo (cathedral). The David was completed in 1504 and finally placed on piazza della Signoria in front of the Palazzo Vecchio. During this period, Michelangelo painted the Holy Family and St John (Doni tondo) for the marriage of Angelo Doni and Maddalena Strozzi.

1505 - Invited back to Rome by the newly elected Pope Julius II. Commissioned to build the Pope's tomb. Under the patronage of the Pope, Michelangelo had to constantly stop work on the tomb in order to accomplish numerous other tasks. Because of these interruptions, Michelangelo worked on the tomb for 40 years. The tomb, of which the central feature is Michelangelo's statue of Moses, was never finished to Michelangelo's satisfaction. It is located in the Church of S. Pietro in Vincoli in Rome.

1508 – Begins work on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. According to Michelangelo's own account, Bramante and

Raphael convinced the Pope to commission Michelangelo in a medium not familiar to the artist, in order that he might be diverted from his preference for sculpture into fresco painting, and thus suffer from unfavorable comparisons with his rival Raphael. This story is discounted by modern historians.

Michelangelo was originally commissioned to paint the 12 Apostles, but lobbied for a different and more complex scheme. The work is part of a larger scheme of decoration within the chapel which represents much of the doctrine of the Catholic Church. The composition eventually contained over 300 figures and had at its centre nine episodes from the Book of Genesis, divided into three groups: God's Creation of the Earth; God's Creation of Humankind and their fall from God's grace; and lastly, the state of Humanity as represented by Noah and his family. On the pendentives supporting the ceiling are painted twelve men and women who prophesied the coming of the Jesus. They are seven prophets of Israel and five Sibyls, prophetic women of the Classical world.

1512 – Scaffolding taken down and ceiling revealed for the first time. Medici return to power in Florence under Giuliano.

1513 - Death of Julius II. His successor Pope Leo X, is Giovanni Medici Giuliano's brother. He replaces Giuliano in Florence with their nephew Lorenzo elevated in 1516 to duke of Urbino. He commissions Michelangelo to reconstruct the façade of the basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence and to adorn it with sculptures. Michelangelo agrees reluctantly. The three years he spent in creating drawings and models for the facade, as well as attempting to open a new marble quarry at Pietrasanta specifically for the project, were among the most frustrating in his career, as work was abruptly cancelled by his financially-strapped patrons before any real progress had been made. The basilica lacks a facade to this day.

1516 - Completion of Moses for unfinished tomb of Julius II installed in San Pietro in Vinci.

1519 – Death of Lorenzo Medici, duke of Urbino much despised by Florentines for his aristocratic pretensions and life style.

1520 – Michelangelo begins work on the Sacrestia Nuova of San Lorenzo in Florence for his Medici patrons, a funerary chapel for their tombs: the Medici chapel completed after many modifications in 1534. Giuliano (died 1516) and Lorenzo (died 1519), received almost completed tombs.

1524 – Beginning of Laurentian Library (attached to San Lorenzo) in Florence completed by Vasari in 1552.

1527 – Sack of Rome by Imperial troops. Florentines rebel against Medici.

1528-29 – Michelangelo ever the patriot returns to Florence to help of work on fortifications.

1530 – Medici restored to power in Florence.

1532 – At 57 he meets possibly his greatest love the 23 year old Tommaso dei Cavalieri who will remain devoted to him until his death.

1534 – Depressed by repressive Medici rule in Florence returns to Rome to paint east wall of Sistine chapel. The Last Judgement was completed in 1541.

1536 – Meets noble widow and poet Vittoria Colonna, they exchange sonnets and maintain a platonic relationship until her death in 1547.

1537 – Appointed architect of Apostolic (papal) palaces. Works on palazzo Farnese.

1544 – Death of 17-year old Cecchino dei Baracci inspires 48 funeral poems.

1546 – Re-designs piazza del Campidoglio in Rome and dome of St Peter's.

1555 – Smashes his own Pieta in frustration at his own perceived inability.

1564 – Dies in his 89th year on the evening of 18 February.

In his personal life, Michelangelo was abstemious. He told his apprentice, Ascanio Condivi: "However rich I may have been, I have always lived like a poor man." Condivi said he was indifferent to food and drink, eating "more out of necessity than of pleasure" and that he "often slept in his clothes and ... boots." These habits may have made him unpopular; his biographer Paolo Giovio says "His nature was so rough and uncouth that his domestic habits were incredibly squalid, and deprived posterity of any pupils who might have followed him." He may not have minded, since he

was by nature a solitary and melancholy person; he had a reputation for being bizzarro e fantastico because he "withdrew himself from the company of men."

Fundamental to Michelangelo's art is his love of male beauty, which attracted him both aesthetically and emotionally. In part, this was an expression of the Renaissance idealization of masculinity. But in Michelangelo's art there is clearly a sensual response to this aesthetic. Such feelings caused him great anguish, and he expressed the struggle between Platonic ideals and carnal desire in his sculpture, drawing and his poetry, too, for among his other accomplishments Michelangelo was also a great Italian lyric poet of the 16th century.

The sculptor's expressions of love have been characterized as both Neoplatonic and openly homoerotic; recent scholarship seeks an interpretation which respects both readings, yet is wary of drawing absolute conclusions.