

Teachers' Guide for the BP special exhibition  
*Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master*  
23 March – 25 June 2006



Michelangelo, **Study for Adam**, c.1511, red chalk. The British Museum

Including:

- an introduction to the exhibition
- notes on how to use this guide
- curriculum links and themes
- activities and discussion points for use in the gallery or classroom
- key images
- links and further museum/school activities

Suitable for teachers of KS3-4  
Specialist KS2 resources available online

By Kate Soden and Sarah Longair  
Department of Learning and Information

## GENERAL INFORMATION

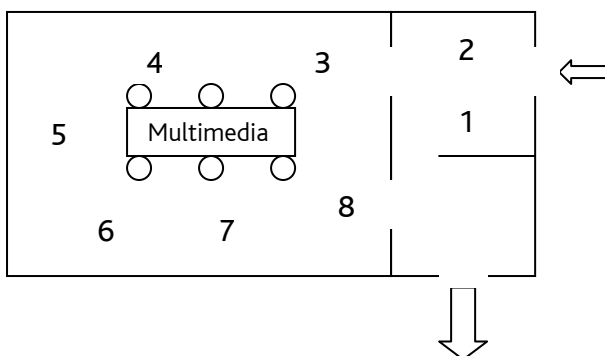
### EXHIBITION OUTLINE

The first Michelangelo exhibition at the British Museum in over thirty years, *Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master* offers an extraordinary insight into the creative thinking of one of the greatest artists of the Renaissance. Michelangelo fulfilled the Renaissance ideal of universal artistic genius, excelling as a sculptor, painter and architect.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to follow the evolution of some of the world's most celebrated artworks through the medium of drawing – a common strand that underlies and unites Michelangelo's masterpieces. The exhibition traces sixty years of Michelangelo's stormy life through his drawings; from intimate studies made when he was in his early twenties to the visionary Crucifixion scenes carried out shortly before his death. Reuniting material not seen together since the dispersal of the artist's studio more than 400 years ago, this exhibition offers a wholly different perspective on the defining genius of the Italian Renaissance.

### EXHIBITION LAYOUT

*Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master* is arranged in 8 sections, each of which addresses a different period, theme or seminal work in the career of Michelangelo. In the central section of the exhibition there is a multimedia interactive which allows students to select a preparatory drawing for the Sistine chapel and watch its evolution on screen into the finished fresco on the ceiling. There is also an overhead projection which shows the frescoes on the ceiling which relate to the surviving preparatory drawings in the show.



### PRACTICAL INFORMATION FOR A VISIT

The exhibition runs from 23 March to 25 June and is open from 10:00 – 17:30 Monday to Wednesday and weekends, and 10:00 – 20:30 on Thursday and Fridays.

A time slot of **10:00 – 11:00 on Mondays** has been specially allocated for school visits and we strongly urge teachers to take advantage of this and arrange their visit during this time. Under 14s visit the exhibition for free, age 14-18 pay £5 and adults £10. There is a discount for group bookings.

School groups must book in advance both for the exhibition and for the Ford Centre schools' facilities at the Museum Box Office T: 020 7323 8181  
E: [boxoffice@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](mailto:boxoffice@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk).

Teachers should plan their visit very carefully using the suggestions in this pack. The exhibition is likely to be very busy so you cannot teach in the exhibition space outside of the Monday schools slot (see above). However, you can informally discuss works in groups of no more than 6.

### HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This teachers' pack provides the background for a teacher bringing a school group to the exhibition and suggestions for how to use the exhibition effectively. It is aimed at secondary students, and KS2 activities can be found on the children's Compass tour: [www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/childrenscompass](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/childrenscompass).

Three overriding contextual themes are explained on page 3. The resource is then based around the 8 sections of the exhibition. In each, the theme of the section is summarised and a key object selected as an example of the section. The related activities can be applied to any drawing in this section, for a discussion at the museum or back at school.

For a successful visit, students should have a clear line of enquiry before going into the exhibition and know exactly what information and ideas they must collect.

Drawing will not be permitted in the exhibition outside of the Monday schools slot (see above). However, the Museum's expansive collection of classical sculpture will be available throughout the run of the exhibition. Drawing in these galleries will provide an excellent opportunity to apply techniques learnt on the visit and to be inspired by the antique as Michelangelo himself was.

## THEMES

### 🌀 DRAWING: HOW AND WHY

#### **National Curriculum: Art and design, History of Art**

What type of media did Michelangelo use? Michelangelo preferred high grade cream or white paper and, although the paper was inexpensive, would rarely leave a reverse side unused. Michelangelo uses three media: ink, black chalk and red chalk. The latest pen and ink drawings are made in the 1520s and after this Michelangelo nearly always preferred black chalk. What purpose did these drawings serve? Michelangelo made meticulous preparatory studies for all of his commissions and although only 600 of his drawings survive, we can be certain that this number only represents a fraction of the total number he created. The drawings vary in finish drastically and the exhibition includes examples of thumbnail sketches, compositional studies, more polished studies for individual figures, studies of one component, for instance, drapery, and drawings which are finished works of art in their own right.

#### **Project – Focus on Drawing**

**Exhibition:** Examine where and why Michelangelo has used these different materials and techniques. Develop pupils' language and vocabulary to describe his techniques, by picking out significant aspects in individual drawing. Vocabulary : e.g. form, tone, line, light, shade, sketch, hatching, perspective, foreshortening.

**School:** Start off with very simply with drawing activities (left-handed, 2 handed, eyes closed, drawing from memory), then try drawing from life or statues, sampling and documenting the experiments. Choose one of Michelangelo's commissions and interpret it, first with drawing, then in another medium, e.g. painting, print, sculpture.

### 🌀 MICHELANGELO THE MAN

#### **National Curriculum: History, History of Art, Religious Studies, English**

What does the exhibition tell us about Michelangelo the man? An insight into his character is developed in the panel texts and can be seen in his poems, letters and the quotations printed on the walls. He is a perfectionist as we can tell from the vast numbers of preparatory work he makes. He had a solitary nature, working long hours alone without assistants. He was very famous even in his own lifetime; he is the only living artist to be included in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*. Michelangelo even commissions his own biography from Condivi in 1553. Various portraits of Michelangelo exist and in his lifetime he is keen to cultivate the status of both himself as an artist, and his family who had fallen on hard times. Michelangelo was a highly accomplished sculptor, painter, draughtsman and poet. He even has beautiful handwriting!

#### **Project – The Renaissance Man?**

**Exhibition:** Find out as much as possible from the artist's letters and drawings about his character, his rivals in the art world, his patrons and the world he lived in.

**School:** Research what are the qualities of a Renaissance Man (see Machiavelli, Castiglione). Find out more about his rivals and their famous commissions. Examine the evidence from the exhibition and assess its reliability and usefulness to historians. Write an obituary of Michelangelo and argue whether or not he was a Renaissance Man.

### 🌀 ART AND THE CHURCH

#### **National Curriculum: History, Religious Studies**

What was happening to the church at this time? This was a very turbulent time for the Catholic Church. It was under attack because it was seen to care more of money and splendour than devotion to God. Martin Luther is a key character in this history, as are characters closer to home like King Henry VIII. What do we learn about Michelangelo's own faith from the exhibition? We know Michelangelo was a devout man, and we see him becoming increasingly fixed on his mortality in the last years of his life. How does Michelangelo depict religious scenes? Many of Michelangelo's greatest commissions are of a religious nature. Many of his works were actively meant to encourage devotion. Think about in what way an image successfully does this.

#### **Project – Patronage and the Papacy**

**Exhibition:** Examine the major religious papal commissions depicted in the exhibition. Note down references to Michelangelo's own faith, and when they occur. Analyse the religious messages which are contained within these images.

**School:** Research the Reformation and schism in the Church throughout Europe. Think further about these particular commissions according to other important religious events in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Develop a pictorial timeline of religious monuments created in Rome, and suggest reasons why they were created. Remember the rise of Protestantism and the emphasis on not worshipping images – how does the Papacy respond to this?

## CURRICULUM LINKS

### ★ HISTORY OF ART

This exhibition is a unique opportunity to explore in depth the working methods of one of the greatest Renaissance artists. Various themes can be explored, including the role of religion in artistic creation and patronage – both princely and papal. The insight into the creation of the great masterpieces demonstrates the significant development in artistic technique that occurred in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Comparing Michelangelo with his Italian contemporaries – Leonardo, Titian and Raphael – and their various legacies would also form an interesting study. The exhibition highlights his relationships with his small number of pupils and studio, as well as his personality via his letters and contemporary biographies.

### ⌘ HISTORY

The context in which Michelangelo was working is a fascinating one. The emergence of Protestantism in Michelangelo's lifetime meant that religious commissions were of particular importance in demonstrating the power of the Papacy and Catholicism. At the same time these encouraged critics of the Catholic Church to attack the expenditure on art, and to contrast this with the reformers' concentration on the spoken and written word. A discussion could focus on images and commissions before and after the Sack of Rome of 1527. The rivalries between the Italian states form part of the background to Michelangelo's work, as well as the varying forms of government in Florence, his home town. His patrons included a number of members of the Medici family, some of whom became Popes and Cardinals. There are many opportunities to use images and text as primary sources and test their reliability.

### ✚ RELIGIOUS STUDIES

There are three main angles to explore for religious studies. This exhibition forms an ideal opportunity to examine the context of the Reformation, and to explore the roles of different popes' ambitions to patronise artists. A particular focus could be the Papacy's use of artists in a time of crisis. A second enquiry would be a purely visual analysis of the depictions of the various religious events depicted by Michelangelo. Students could compare these with other images of Creation, the Last Judgement, the Crucifixions and try to explore the theological messages within them. Thirdly we are given a remarkable opportunity to explore Michelangelo's own faith, particularly towards the end of his life. Students can explore the concept of mortality, in contrast to the immortality of Michelangelo's masterpieces.

### ✍ ART AND DESIGN

The insight into the preparations for painting, sculpture and architecture shows the importance of drawing, through technique, practice, trial and error, which will inspire art students in their portfolio and preparatory work. The comparisons with the finished works illuminate Michelangelo's visionary draughtsmanship. The variety of types of drawing (see previous page in Themes) show deliberate choice of one drafting material over another. Life drawing is seen here at its best: foreshortened hands, muscular torsos and facial features. These drawings were revolutionary at the time; they were influential and copied by many artists. A life drawing project moving into a final finished painting or sculpture would be an ideal response to images in the exhibition.

### 📖 LITERACY AND ENGLISH

Michelangelo left a large quantity of written material which effectively offers a chance to create a biography of his life. His confidence, perfectionism and impatience are clear from his letters and poems, which when combined with images of his masterpieces, would make a fascinating non fiction text. His poems (available in the Catalogue appendix) illustrate the variety of creative endeavours he undertook and reflect his personal concerns and passions.



Ex. no. 66 Ideal **Head of a Woman**, black chalk, c.1525-8 The British Museum

These symbols are used throughout to indicate the curriculum links.

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

### MICHELANGELO THE DRAUGHTSMAN

Drawing is the thread that connects Michelangelo's work as a sculptor, painter and architect. His drawings offer a unique insight into how he worked and thought, bringing us closer to Michelangelo as an artist and a man.

Most of the works in the exhibition are working studies towards the creation of a finished piece. Despite their extraordinary beauty, almost all of these drawings were never intended for public display and, indeed, Michelangelo would be appalled to see them exhibited as he was paranoid about showing them to outsiders. Furthermore, at the end of his life, he destroyed a large number, probably to prevent them falling into other people's hands and because he wished to conceal the amount of preparation behind his major works.

Michelangelo's primary focus as an artist was the male body as is reflected by his drawings. When looking at his drawings, the viewer is able to observe his relentless search to find the poses that best express the emotional and spiritual state of the subject.

**Anatomy** Michelangelo's mastery of the human anatomy was based on intense study, both of flayed corpses and of life models. This brought him a profound knowledge of the structure and articulation of the human body.

**Variation** Michelangelo's long experience of life drawing enabled him to imagine many variations of a pose as is shown in studies for the Sistine chapel ceiling. He is able to suggest the tension of a figure's muscles through minute changes of pressure in his handling of the quill or chalk.

**Manipulation** Although Michelangelo's art is rooted in naturalistic observation he often manipulates human anatomy for expressive effect, creating poses that look natural but are in fact impossible. Think about this when looking at drawings like *Study for Adam*.

**Creativity** Drawing was also an essential tool for Michelangelo to explore and develop ideas formed within his imagination. In early studies for works like *The Last Judgement*, there is a strong sense of how Michelangelo's creativity was stimulated by the very process of drawing – the flow of his ideas quickening as he captured them on paper.

### ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

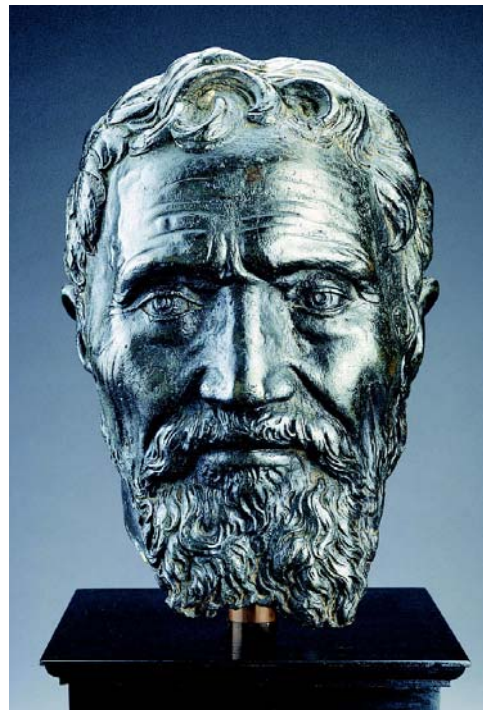
🕒 Look at the timeline that runs throughout the exhibition and research other events that were taking place during Michelangelo's career.

📖 Write a magazine profile of Michelangelo based on the information you have collected throughout the exhibition – perhaps listing what you imagine to be his likes and dislikes.

✍️ Design the front cover of Michelangelo's biography, or that of your family, friends or famous people.

🔍 Find images of Michelangelo's finished works in the exhibition or on the internet and in books.

★ Notice in his portraits that Michelangelo has a bump in his nose – it was broken in a fight with another artist. The story goes that Michelangelo criticised the drawing of another young artist and the latter responded by breaking his nose! Consider what the benefits and pressures of working or studying with Michelangelo might have been.



Ex. no. 109 Daniele da Volterra **Portrait of Michelangelo**  
c. 1564–66. Bronze. The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

### MICHELANGELO: KEY DATES

**1475** Born in Caprese, Arezzo

**1487** In Ghirlandaio's workshop

**1488/92** Living in Medici palace

**1496** Rome. Commission for *Bacchus*

**1498** Contract for *Pieta*

**1501** Florence. Commission for *David*

**1504** Commission for *Battle of Cascina*

**1505** Rome. Pope Julius II commissions tomb

**1508** Begins Sistine chapel ceiling

**1512** Finishes Sistine chapel ceiling

**1524** Florence. Medici chapel work begins

**1527** Sack of Rome.

**1536** Rome. Begins painting *Last Judgement*

**1541** *Last Judgement* finished

**1546** Takes over design of St Peter's church

**1550** Biography by Giorgio Vasari published

**1553** Biography by Condivi published

**1564** Dies aged 88. Buried in Florence

*'The way Michelangelo's talents and character developed astonished Domenico, who saw him doing things quite out of the ordinary for boys of his age and not only surpassing his many other pupils but also very often rivalling the achievements of his master himself!'*

Giorgio Vasari, biographer

## SECTION 2: THE EARLY YEARS 1475 – 1501

### IN GHIRLANDAIO'S WORKSHOP c.1487-8

Michelangelo's artistic career began when he was apprenticed to the successful Florentine artist Domenico Ghirlandaio at the age of twelve in 1487. His years with Ghirlandaio were formative, though later in life he claimed to be entirely self-taught.

Ghirlandaio's influence on Michelangelo can be seen by comparing their works. In the period that Michelangelo was in his studio, Ghirlandaio was working on the frescoes for the Tornabuoni chapel in the Florentine church of Santa Maria Novella. Three of Ghirlandaio's preparatory studies for this project are in this exhibition.

*Standing Woman* is a study for a female figure in the fresco cycle in the Tornabuoni chapel. Ghirlandaio records precisely and rapidly the folds of the dress and decorative detail. The sumptuous dress was most likely modelled here by a boy apprentice, hence the head would be drawn separately. This drawing and the other two by the artist in the exhibition convey Ghirlandaio's practical approach to designing a large scale commission.

In his time in Ghirlandaio's workshop Michelangelo would have seen hundreds of drawings like *Standing Woman*. There is no doubt that aspects of his style and working practice can be traced back to this early period. By comparing his early drawings with those of his master we can see similarities in the pose, handling of drapery and hatching. Although still an inexperienced artist, Michelangelo's drawing surpasses Ghirlandaio's. Michelangelo's figure has a more convincing depiction of volume and solidity, achieved by much denser cross hatching, a time consuming method of modelling that was employed sparingly by Ghirlandaio.

In an authorised biography written by Condivi in 1553, Michelangelo denies that he was ever apprenticed to Ghirlandaio. After a long and successful career it seems that Michelangelo was keen to establish himself as a self taught genius, setting himself apart from and perhaps even above the traditions of artists who came before him. The quotation above is from Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* which included a biography of Michelangelo. Even after Condivi's contradictory biography was published, Vasari insisted and produced documents as proof of the apprenticeship.



Ex. no. 4 Domenico Ghirlandaio, **Standing Woman** c. 1485-90, pen and brown ink, The British Museum.



Ex. no. 5 **An old man wearing a hat (Philosopher)** c.1495-1500, pen and brown ink, The British Museum.

### ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION POINTS

- ✍ Compare the two drawings – how they are similar and where does Michelangelo's drawing differ?
- ✍ Make a study of both drawings or even draw the pose from life with the model wearing heavy robes. Explore how cross hatching can be used to create the impression of solid form.
- 📖 Teacher-pupil relationships: Why did Michelangelo deny he was Ghirlandaio's pupil? Write a letter from Ghirlandaio to Michelangelo describing his feelings in being written out of his pupil's story.
- 📖 The philosopher is holding what some people think to be a skull – add a speech bubble and imagine what the Philosopher might be thinking or saying.
- 🔍 Examine the way Michelangelo has manipulated his biography. Look at the sources and discuss the way to use such documentary evidence.

'A school for all the world'  
Cellini, contemporary Florentine artist

## SECTION 3: FLORENCE 1501 – 1505

### THE BATTLE OF CASCINA

Michelangelo returned to Florence from Rome in 1501 at the age of twenty-six, and remained there for four years. This was to be one of the most productive periods of his life, and he became a lifelong supporter of Florentine republicanism during this time.

The republican government commissioned Michelangelo and his great Florentine rival, Leonardo da Vinci, to paint enormous battle scenes celebrating historic Florentine victories in the Palazzo Vecchio. However, these patriotic works were never realised. Michelangelo's only contribution was a large-scale drawing, or cartoon, intended as the central section of the planned composition called the *Battle of Cascina*, which no longer survives.

The exhibition includes an illustration of an oil painting based on Michelangelo's drawing for the *Battle of Cascina*. The scene shows Florentine soldiers hurriedly preparing themselves for battle with the Pisans after bathing in the Arno – they are the victims of a surprise attack, though, as the legend goes, the Florentine army were still victorious over their enemy.

Michelangelo's drawing caused a sensation because of his dynamic portrayal of over life-size figures in action. Many artists flocked to study Michelangelo's hugely influential cartoon. They were thrilled by the way he showed nude and semi nude figures in a variety of unique poses, the whole scene pulsating with movement and drama. The quotation above appears in Cellini's autobiography, he like other artists found the drawing a great inspiration. Sadly the delicate cartoon was eventually destroyed. Normally Michelangelo prevented anyone from seeing his drawings but failed in this instance because after 1505 he was frequently away from Florence.



Ex. no. 10 **A male nude**, c. 1504-5, black chalk heightened with lead white. The Teyler Museum, Haarlem.

The idealised nude, illustrated above, is inspired by classical sculpture and has an incredibly dramatic pose. We see the figure from behind, his torso twisting violently and his head looking the other way. The overall effect is that of a dramatic and sharp motion.

Michelangelo must have had a clear idea of the design before embarking on detailed life studies such as this one. He only outlines the left calf of the figure because he knows that in the finished work it will be obscured by an overlapping figure. Michelangelo runs out of space so he simply redraws the right arm in the intended position as an accurate record for later. He would not want to waste time or paper by starting again.

### ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION POINTS

🕒 / ✨ What was the difference between a republican government and a princely government? Why would the two governments be keen to employ the two greatest Florentine artists of the day to depict Florentine battle victories? Can you think of other regimes in history that used art in this way?

🖋️ / ✨ Rivalries in art: what do you know about Leonardo da Vinci? Have a class debate about who was the greater master, Michelangelo or Leonardo.

🖋️ / ✨ How are movement and surprise suggested in this figure drawing? Research Cezanne's *Bathers* and see how a similar subject has been painted in an Impressionistic way.

🖋️ / ✨ Compare Michelangelo's cartoon with a piece of modern art that has caused a sensation, such as Cezanne's proto-cubist works or Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* or *Guernica*.

📖 Find the image which illustrates a copy of Michelangelo's lost *Bathers* cartoon. Imagine you are one of the artists who saw the original, write a letter to a fellow artist describing the cartoon.

🖋️ Look at the classical sculptures in the museum's galleries – make your own drawings from them like Michelangelo did in the Medici gardens in Florence.

*'I have finished the chapel I have been painting: the Pope is very well satisfied'*

## SECTION 4: THE SISTINE CHAPEL 1508 – 1512

### AN EPIC ACHIEVEMENT

In 1508 Pope Julius II commissioned Michelangelo to paint the Sistine chapel ceiling in the Vatican palace. The thirty-three year-old artist had little experience of fresco technique, and the ceiling painting was an extraordinary achievement.

Michelangelo's design was a very ambitious one that included painting an architectural framework. He divided the ceiling (over 40m long) into nine compartments, filled with fresco scenes of the creation of the world and man's early history as told in the Bible.

Fresco painting is notoriously difficult, as it involves applying water-based pigments to wet plaster and has to be done very quickly. Nevertheless, Michelangelo appears to have painted the vault almost single-handed. He soon dismissed his assistants, an indication perhaps of his perfectionism and single-mindedness. The fresco was painted from a stepped scaffold suspended on wooden rafters. This meant that Michelangelo painted standing up – contrary to popular belief that he lay on his back.

The drawings in this exhibition are rare survivors from the many hundreds that Michelangelo made to prepare the ceiling. How did he transform these small-scale figures into their gigantic counterparts on the ceiling? The normal method of enlarging a drawing was to overlay it with a grid of squares, which allowed the design to be copied into larger squares on a cartoon. Michelangelo then transferred the figures to the wet plaster, either by cutting through the outlines on the paper with a knife, or by dusting charcoal through holes punctured in the cartoon.



Ex. No. 25 **Study for Adam** c. 1511. Red chalk, The British Museum

Michelangelo painted the ceiling in two halves, 1508-1510 and 1511-12. He painted the famous figure of Adam, on the second half of the ceiling, around 1511. Adam reclines on his right side, his left arm resting on his left leg stretches out to receive life from God. The figure's stretching motion seems natural but in fact relies on an impossible dislocation of the upper body. Michelangelo is blurring the boundaries between the realities of the human figure and an invented ideal form.

Michelangelo has exploited the qualities of the red chalk to create a warmth of tone as he drew from the life model. Michelangelo only indicates the outline of the head and hands as these would have been the subject of a special study (note how Ghirlandaio does this in *Standing Woman*). Instead he concentrates on the torso and upper legs of his model, whose anatomy is indicated by detailed shading, especially on the chest and stomach areas. The figure appears to be very three dimensional and we know that Michelangelo considered himself primarily as a sculptor.

### ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION POINTS

ALL SUBJECTS: Have a go with the multimedia exhibit in the centre in exhibition – do the drawings look like their finished counterpart in fresco?

- ✳ Explore the varying drawings for the Sistine chapel. By piecing together the surviving information like an archaeologist work out how many stages Michelangelo seems to go through before he executes the fresco.
- ✍ Explore the techniques used by Michelangelo and the unusual and varied figurative poses. Try drawing directly above your head while standing up – imagine doing this for 3 years!
- ✍ Make your own cartoons by pricking holes on the outlines of a full scale drawing and then dusting powder over the holes to leave an outline on the surface beneath. You can repeat this image several times, creating a pattern or abstract drawing.
- ✍ Take a copy of the image and fill in the head and hand however you wish
- ✚ Compare creation stories with those in other religions. The Sistine Ceiling has very famous depictions of the Creation. Read Genesis and try to show the whole story in a single composition.
- 🕒 Why would the Pope commission such a grand work? What does it say about the Papacy?
- 📖 The sibyl is able to predict the future. Students could write a story that involves a prediction and give two endings where the prediction does and does not come true.



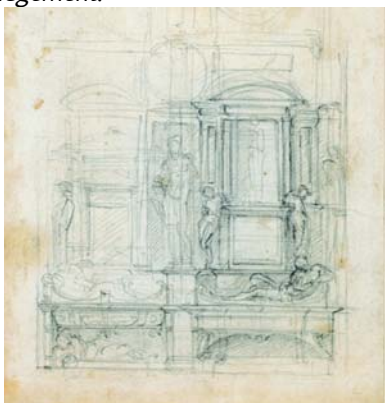
*'Medici is made Pope, which I think will rejoice everyone. I expect, for this reason that as far as art is concerned that many things will be executed here.'*

## SECTION 5: WORKING FOR THE MEDICI 1516 – 1534

### THE MEDICI CHAPEL

Michelangelo returned to Florence from Rome in 1516 at the age of forty-one, and remained there for almost twenty years. During this time he worked mainly for the Medici family, who had regained control of the city in 1512.

Florence, Michelangelo's native city, became the focus of papal patronage because of the election of two Medici popes: Leo X in 1513 and later his cousin Clement VII in 1523. Initially, Michelangelo was called to design a magnificent marble façade for the Medici church of San Lorenzo in Florence. However, this plan was cancelled in 1520. Instead he received two smaller architectural commissions for the same church: a funeral chapel (known as the Medici chapel) and the Laurentian library. Neither building was completed by the time he was called to Rome in 1534 to paint the *Last Judgement*.



Above: Ex. no. 40 Studies for a double wall tomb, c.1520-1. Black chalk (detail) The British Museum

In the Medici chapel Michelangelo designed the architecture and sculpture of the tombs in unison. We can see this in the study for a double wall tomb above. Michelangelo keeps modifying the height of the left niche and this affects his ideas for sculpture.



Ex. no. 49 Studies for *Day* c. 1524-5, Black Chalk, The Teyler Museum, Haarlem

The drawing above is the first that we have seen which is a preparatory work for a sculpture rather than a painting. We see him here considering the shoulders of one of the allegorical tomb figures, *Day*. Interestingly Michelangelo includes the two allegorical figures of *Night* and *Day* on the tomb of Giuliano de' Medici rather than any religious ones.

The model, with drapery around his waist, was presumably drawn seated with his arm behind his back and the other facing forward. The complex 'arm lock' position was studied three times on this one sheet, the drawing on the right overlaps the study. Michelangelo considers all angles of his sculptures, he even includes areas invisible to the viewer.

Michelangelo's drawing is incredibly detailed. He shows up the bulging veins on the underside of the forearm, which also appear on the finished sculpture. Also astonishing is his use of varying tones of the black chalk to render the nuances of light and shade. We know that Michelangelo used his fingertips, or a small stump of cloth, to blend the shades. It is almost as if Michelangelo is turning the model's flesh into marble.

### ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION POINTS

🕒 / ✨ / 🏛️ Who were the Medici family? Why is it important that they had Papal connections?

✨ / 🖋️ How are architecture and sculpture united in the tombs? What skills does an artist require to be an architect and vice versa?

✨ / 🖋️ How does Michelangelo capture the musculature of the body in *Day*? What techniques does he use?

📖 Write a letter to Michelangelo commissioning your own monument, describe what you would like.

🏛️ This family chapel would have been used for continuous prayers and ceremonies. Think about the religious aspects of a tomb design, for instance which direction should the tomb face? How might designing a tomb for a particular family cause contradictions with the religious aspect of tomb design?

🖋️ Design a tomb for a famous person in history thinking about the architecture, sculptures and how to portray a sense of the character you have chosen.

🕒 / ✨ Consider the advantages and disadvantages of working for one family.

*'Draw Antonio draw Antonio, draw and don't waste time'*

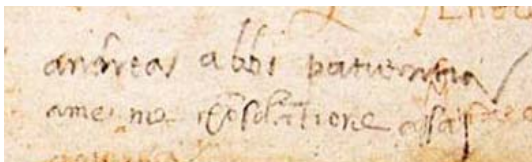
## SECTION 6: THE PRIVATE MICHELANGELO 1516 – 34

### MICHELANGELO AND HIS PUPILS

Many drawings survive from Michelangelo's time in Florence, where they could be safely lodged in the family archive. They reveal that his activities extended far beyond just his official commissions for the Medici.

During his time in Florence, Michelangelo tried to pass on his skills as a draughtsman to a group of pupils and assistants. Some of the works on display here include copy exercises by these apprentices.

Unlike his contemporaries, Titian and Raphael, Michelangelo produced very few portraits. However among the many drawings to survive from this Florentine period is a portrait of one his favourite pupils, Andrea Quaratesi (no. 70). In this period Michelangelo made a number of finished drawings of ideal heads, exhibited here in this section. These are wonderful examples of Michelangelo's delicate and polished draughtsmanship which contrast with the sketchy preparatory studies he made for commissions like the *Last Judgement*.



Ex. no. 60. Detail of inscription to Andrea Quaratesi, one of Michelangelo's favourite pupils – translated 'Andrea, have patience'



Ex. no. 60 Michelangelo and pupils **Studies for profiles, eyes and locks of hair**, c. 1525, red and black chalk, Ashmolean museum, Oxford.

This drawing with red and black chalk gives us an endearing insight into Michelangelo's drawings technique. Michelangelo provides drawings for his students to copy. Generally it is thought that the youth in profile at the top right is by the artist and the one below a copy. The eyes have proved more difficult to tell apart; most scholars agree that the eye in profile at the top left and the eye seen from straight on in the middle of the top row are both by Michelangelo. Copying studies in the same sheet was a traditional practice and may have been something that Michelangelo himself learned to do as a young apprentice in Ghirlandaio's studio.

On the bottom right of the papers reads an encouraging inscription (detail, above left) by Michelangelo; '*Andrea abbi patientia*' [Andrea have patience]. We know this pupil to whom he writes; his name is Andrea Quaratesi the subject of the only portrait drawing that survives by Michelangelo. (Ex. no. 70)

### ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION POINTS

- ✍ Pass a sheet with a simple study on it around a group and ask them all to add a copy. See how the motif selected develops – like Chinese whispers but in pencil!
- ✍ Find the portrait of Andrea Quaratesi in the exhibition. Back at school, make your own portraits in black chalk or pencil. See if you can distance the sitter from the viewer like Michelangelo by turning them away from you slightly.
- ✍ Look in other galleries in the museum, select a feature (e.g. eyes or noses) and draw a selection, from different angles.
- ★ Why was it important that Michelangelo teach young students? Why might he have been reluctant to set up a workshop or have trained assistants like his contemporary Raphael?
- 📖 Examine the handwriting in the exhibition – Michelangelo was very particular about this – write a letter from Michelangelo to his nephew instructing him to improve his handwriting. Use your finest handwriting.
- 📖 Explore this section looking for insights into the private person – how does he present himself in his writing? What other information can you discover about Michelangelo the man?

*'to give you a contract for something beyond your dreams'*  
 Sebastiano del Piombo, a fellow artist, tells Michelangelo of Pope Clement VII's plan

## SECTION 7: THE LAST JUDGEMENT 1536 – 41

### THE LAST JUDGEMENT

In 1534 Pope Clement VII invited Michelangelo back to work on the altar wall in the Sistine chapel. Michelangelo had not painted in fresco for over twenty years, yet his *Last Judgement* was a highly original, if controversial, masterpiece.

The Last Judgement was a common theme in church art, but Michelangelo's interpretation was entirely novel. His vision of the Apocalypse is a swirling maelstrom, filled with thick-set and muscular naked figures. Traditional symmetry and order are replaced by dynamic, often violent, action, in which the rules of perspective and proportion are suspended. The painting speaks directly about the salvation of souls – an issue which was widely debated in this period of religious upheaval.

Although Michelangelo took great care to strip the nude figures of their sensuality, the *Last Judgement* still caused offence to some members of the church. After his death in 1564 there were calls for it to be censored, largely because so many prints of the painting were circulating. As a result, Michelangelo's friend Daniele da Volterra painted drapery on some of the figures.



Ex. no. 86 **A male nude seen from behind** c. 1539 – 41, black chalk. The British Museum

This is a study for the soul emerging from a grave at the bottom left of the *Last Judgement*. The detail in the drawing contrasts with other drawings for the same commission. This drawing is more detailed because of its position on the altar wall – it is one of the lowest and therefore most visible to the viewer. The chapel is rather gloomy and so any detail higher up would have been pointless. The foreshortening of the arms, elbows, wrists and hands in this image is remarkable. Michelangelo convinces us that the body is rising up from the grave with real force.

Compare this black chalk drawing of a male nude with the drawing for *Day* (page 9). One drawing is for a sculpture and the other for a fresco painting. Michelangelo uses heavier outlines in this drawing as he knows the end result will need to be sharply delineated on the chapel wall. Whereas in the *Day* drawing, Michelangelo focuses not so much on line but on modelling the surface of the back.

### ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION POINTS

🔗/📖 This was a crucial time in the church – find out more about it and look at the whole painting. What messages is it trying to convey?

🔗 How is the altar wall of the *Last Judgement* different in both style and tone to the creation scenes painted on the ceiling some thirty years earlier?

✂️/🌟 No two figures in this fresco painting have the same pose, in fact when it was unveiled it was said that Michelangelo had exhausted all possibilities. Take newspapers and magazines and cut out bodies in different positions and make a collage based on the composition of the *Last Judgement*.

✂️ Examine the foreshortening of the hands – try drawing wrists and hands from various angles.

🔗/🌟 Compare this with other depictions of the Last Judgement - what are the common themes? How is Michelangelo's image different from others, for instance Giotto in the Arena chapel or Signorelli in Orvieto Cathedral?

✂️/🔗 Try to imagine the scale of these drawings – the largest figures are more than life size; imagine the impact this would have had on spectators. Make your own larger than life size image by sticking big sheets of paper together and working on the images in groups.

📖 Imagine it is 1541 and that you are a journalist for a newspaper in Rome. Write an article about the *Last Judgement* including observations on the figurative poses and the depiction of naked biblical characters in a papal chapel.

*'I was forced to work on the fabric of St Peter's....It would be the ruin of the building if I were to quit. It would bring me enormous disgrace throughout Christendom, and be a terrible sin and stain on my soul.'*

## SECTION 8: THE FINAL YEARS, 1534–64

### MICHELANGELO THE ARCHITECT

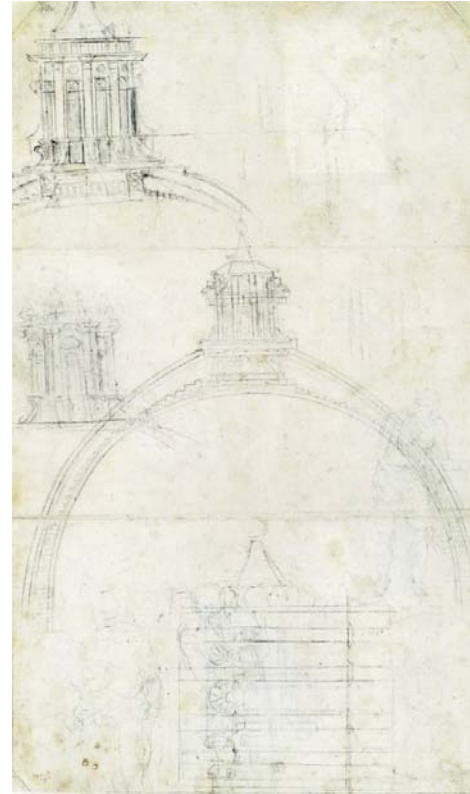
Michelangelo spent the last thirty years of his life in Rome, and never returned to Florence despite numerous invitations. During this time he worked mainly as an architect, notably on the design for the basilica of St Peter's.

After Michelangelo had finished the *Last Judgement*, Pope Paul III asked him to paint the Pauline chapel in the Vatican Palace. He completed these frescoes in 1550, at the age of seventy-five. His main involvement in architecture began in 1546, when Paul III asked him to complete the Farnese Palace in Rome. However, it was the building of St Peter's that occupied him the most, and his design for the basilica is one of his greatest achievements.

During his 17 year appointment as architect of St. Peter's he successfully gave the plan greater coherence by simplifying the interior. The most prominent element in his design was the dome. Michelangelo's designs contain many elements inspired by Brunelleschi's dome of the Cathedral in Florence.



Etienne Dupérac, *Michelangelo's project for St Peter's* c. 1569  
Engraving, The British Museum (Not in exhibition)



Ex. no. 104 *Section through the dome of St Peter's; figure studies*, late 1550s, black chalk over some stylus. The Teyler Museum, Haarlem.

This sheet contains ideas for the dome and the lantern of St Peter's, drawn over figures traced from the other side. The dome has an inner and an outer shell, but the drawing shows that Michelangelo had not yet decided if they were to be differently shaped (as in the main drawing) or both hemispherical (as in the top left design).

### ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION POINTS

✚/ ⌘ Find out why the basilica of St Peter's was being rebuilt. This was the largest church in Western Europe – what does this tell you about the Papacy at the time?

✚/ ⌘ Find out about the Counter Reformation, what do you think Martin Luther would have said about the finished of St Peter's?

✚/ ✨ Compare this dome with other major domes in the world – St Paul's in London, the Duomo in Florence, the Capitol in Washington, Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. Why are domes such a powerful architectural form? How does it feel to be in these spaces? Go into the Reading Room in the British Museum and imagine that St Peter's was more than 3 times higher than this, but only 10 metres wider!

✚/ ✨ Compare these dome designs with St Paul's in London – Christopher Wren was very inspired by St Peter's.

✚/ ✨ Draw a building you see every day using the cross section style that is shown here on the right in Michelangelo's drawing. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this type of drawing?

✚/ ✨ Have a class debate about whether a small intimate and plain sacred space or a large highly decorated one bring a worshipper closer to God.

*'Neither painting nor sculpture can any longer quieten my soul, turned now to that divine love which on the cross, to embrace us, opened wide its arms'*

## SECTION 8. THE FINAL YEARS, 1534-64

### MICHELANGELO'S FAITH

Michelangelo continued to work to within a week of his death, at the age of eighty-eight. His preoccupations with death and redemption are movingly conveyed by his last, unfinished sculpture, the *Rondanini Pietà*, and his final drawings of the Crucifixion (nos. 105–7).

Michelangelo's art and writings show that he was a devout Catholic. Outwardly his faith was evident in his acts of charity and his abstinence during Lent. During his lifetime he witnessed the end of a united Christendom in Western Europe with the emergence of Protestantism. This affected his faith, and he was increasingly drawn to a more devotional and inward-looking form of Catholicism.

The religious imagery in Michelangelo's work is personal and intensely heartfelt. In his drawings he could also explore ideas which he could not use in finished works of art, such as the nudity of the Virgin in *The Holy Family with the Infant Baptist* (no. 80).

In the last three decades of his life, inspired by his friendship with the poet Vittoria Colonna and a growing sense of his own mortality, Michelangelo's faith deepened. His meditation on death and redemption bore fruit in his *Last Judgement* in the Sistine chapel, and in the *Crucifixion* studies (nos. 105–7) made right at the end of his life. We can see Michelangelo's age in his faltering hand in these moving and intense images.



Ex. no. 106 **The Crucifixion with the Virgin and St John** c.1555-64, black chalk heightened with lead white. The British Museum.

In this Crucifixion study Michelangelo shows Christ on a Y-shaped cross. He would have seen this old fashioned type of cross in the church of Santa Croce in Florence, which penitents once carried in processions throughout the city. Perhaps Michelangelo included it here to contrast the act of penitence – an individual's mortification of the body to expiate sin – with Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross that Christians believe rescued mankind from sin.

Michelangelo has almost obsessively reworked the poses of the two mourners. He has made heavy use of diluted lead white in the figure of the Virgin, both to define the final form and to cover up some of his earlier work. Her crossed arm gesture, familiar from representations of the Annunciation and from her pose on Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, symbolises her acceptance of her son's death.

### ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION POINTS

✚ Examine and compare the various depictions of the crucifixion. Analyse the figures, and which saints feature, and how they are reacting to the scene.

★ How do these paintings represent the last years of Michelangelo – compared to his earliest work, how has he developed as an artist? Look back at your old drawings; consider how you have developed as an artist.

✚ What do you think Michelangelo was thinking and feeling when he made this moving religious images?

✍ Compare this drawing with earlier drawings in the exhibition, what techniques does Michelangelo use here? Make your own chalk drawing and use white chalk to highlight certain aspects.

⌚ The crisis of Catholicism was continuing – the Wars of Religion in France, with Catherine de' Medici playing a major role, almost led to a full-scale civil war based around religious factions. Examine these drawings in this context.

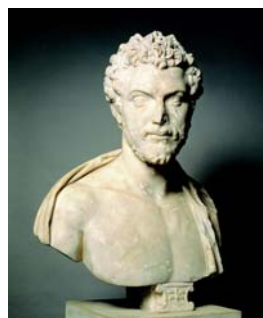
✚ Why is the image of the Crucifixion so powerful to Christians? Think about how often and where you see the sign of the cross. Why is it particularly found at the high altar in churches?

✚ / ★ / 📖 Until 23 April 2006 there will be a free temporary display of Rembrandt's drypoint masterpiece in room 3: an alternative vision of the *Crucifixion*. Write a comparison between Rembrandt's interpretation of the Crucifixion and Michelangelo's.

## FURTHER EXPLORATION IN THE MUSEUM

### Michelangelo and the antique

Visit the classical sculpture galleries (rooms 11-23, 77-85) and be inspired by antique sculpture like Michelangelo. The drawing on the right is from the early stages of his career and we know Michelangelo would have been inspired by antique sculpture in the Medici gardens in his youth. He may have seen an object like the bust here from the British Museum which is featured with the drawing in the exhibition.



Right: Ex. no. 7 **Head of a man in profile**, c.1500-05. pen and brown ink. The British Museum  
Left: Ex. no. 8 **Portrait bust of a bearded man dressed in classical Greek attire**. c. AD130-150. Marble. The British Museum

### Michelangelo Money and Medals



If you wish to find out more about coins and medals in Michelangelo's Italy, visit this free exhibition in Room 69a on the first floor. You can see some of the coins of Michelangelo's time, notably the famous florins and ducats of Florence, Venice and Rome. The exhibition explores the vast wealth that Michelangelo accumulated from the high payments he received for his work. Renaissance Italy also witnessed the birth of the medal and many of Michelangelo's patrons and friends - and the artist himself - appear on some of the finest medals of the age.

Left: **Bronze Medal of Michelangelo** by Leone Leoni, the British Museum

### Michelangelo: a global context

See what artworks were being created in the rest of the world at this time – particularly look at the brass statues and plaques from Benin in Africa (Room 25) and the Mexican Aztec collections (Room 27). Compare how the figure is portrayed and what objects are designed for religious purposes.



Left: **Turquoise Mosaic of a double headed serpent** C15th-16<sup>th</sup> From Mexico, The British Museum  
Brass plaque showing the **Oba of Benin with attendants** 16<sup>th</sup> century. From Benin, Nigeria. The British Museum

### Prints and Drawings Study Room

The British Museum's collection of prints and drawings, which includes over 2 million works on paper, is available to the public in the magnificent Prints and Drawings Study Room. Please telephone 020 7323 8408 to find out more or to make an appointment for a group visit.

## FURTHER EXPLORATION AT SCHOOL

### Films

These films are all showing at the Museum during the run of the exhibition as part of the public programme. Please see [www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/Michelangelo](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/Michelangelo) for details of all *Michelangelo Drawing* events.

**The Agony and the Ecstasy** - Story of Michelangelo and Pope Julius II and the commission for the Sistine chapel.

**Martin Luther** - Recounts Martin Luther's break from Catholicism and the creation of the Protestant movement.

**Elizabeth** - Tells the story of the young English Protestant Queen who takes to the throne in 1558.

**Aguirre, Wrath of God** - The Spanish conquistadors set out to discover Eldorado in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**La Reine Margot** Recounts the massacre in France during the Religious wars of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century (Cert 18)

### Weblinks

Children's compass links for KS2 level activities: [www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/childrenscompass](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/childrenscompass)

For further art and design activities related to the rest of the museum's collection please go to [www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/education/artdesign/home.html](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/education/artdesign/home.html)

### Catalogue

The exhibition catalogue, *Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master* by Hugo Chapman is available online ([www.thebritishmuseum.co.uk](http://www.thebritishmuseum.co.uk)) and in the museum bookshop. Priced at £40 hardback and £25 paperback.