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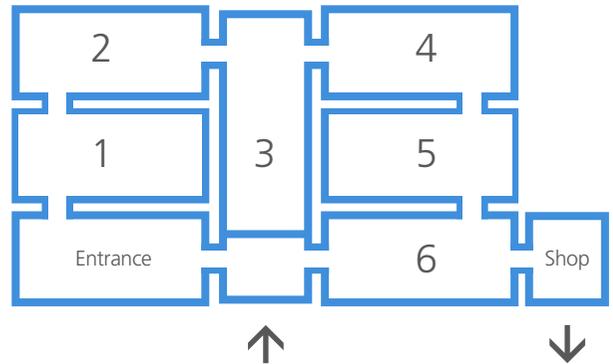
The Credit Suisse Exhibition

MICHELANGELO
& SEBASTIANO

15 March–25 June 2017

CREDIT SUISSE 
Partner of the National Gallery

EXHIBITION PLAN



A chronology of the lives and times of Michelangelo and Sebastiano is at the back of this booklet.

Within the exhibition, light levels are kept low to protect the works. If you have difficulty reading this booklet or the labels on the walls, please pick up a large-text version from the dispenser at the exhibition entrance.

The exhibition has been made possible by the provision of insurance through the Government Indemnity Scheme. The National Gallery would like to thank HM Government for providing Government Indemnity and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England for arranging the indemnity.

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MICHELANGELO & SEBASTIANO

The story of the friendship between the world-famous Florentine artist Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) and the lesser-known Venetian painter Sebastiano Luciani, called Sebastiano del Piombo (1485–1547), is both epic and personal. The two came from widely different artistic traditions, and Michelangelo's fierce independence made him an unlikely candidate for collaboration. But after meeting in Rome in 1511, at a time now recognised as a high point of the Renaissance, they came together to create works of striking force and originality. Spanning about twenty-five years, their tale is one of camaraderie, mutual influence and eventually of rupture and acrimony. It takes place against a backdrop of bitter rivalries, political turbulence, religious schism and war. Through a selection of their works and personal correspondence, this exhibition explores an extraordinary meeting of minds that shaped the development of Western art.

ORIGINS

Michelangelo and Sebastiano came from two very different artistic traditions.

Michelangelo trained with the Florentine painter Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–1494), and subsequently learned to sculpt at the court of Lorenzo de' Medici, 'the Magnificent' (1449–1492), Florence's de facto ruler. Prodigiously talented, he quickly assimilated the systematic working method practised in Tuscany, in which a composition was prepared scrupulously in advance, largely through drawing.

Sebastiano, ten years Michelangelo's junior, was the most accomplished Venetian artist of his generation. He mastered the improvisatory painting method introduced by his mentor, Giorgione (about 1477–1510), which favoured atmosphere over precision. His organic approach to picture-making and his range as an oil painter, combining rich colour and subtle passages with ones of unprecedented expressive boldness, stood in marked contrast to Michelangelo's way of working.

1 MICHELANGELO
**The Virgin and Child with
Saint John and Angels**
(‘The Manchester Madonna’)
about 1497, possibly as early as 1494

This remarkably sculptural, unfinished early picture reveals the meticulous painting method Michelangelo learned from his master, Ghirlandaio. Working in quick-drying egg tempera, he adopted a piecemeal approach, barely laying in some elements while completing others with exquisite subtlety. The relative rigidity of the underdrawing visible at left indicates Michelangelo was copying from a carefully prepared drawing; a method typical of Florentine painting.

Tempera on poplar

NG809. The National Gallery, London. Bought, 1870

2 MICHELANGELO
**Study of the Virgin and
Child with another figure**
about 1517

In March 1517, Sebastiano’s friendship with Michelangelo was such that he could ask him for a drawing of the Virgin and Child for a painting, (very likely 3). This lively sketch, quickly made in red chalk, is likely to have been Michelangelo’s response. As a point of departure for the picture, it shows how just a cursory visual prompt could stimulate a new composition.

Red chalk, upper borderline in black chalk, on paper

X9020. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, inv. no. I 198 (Koenigs Collection)

3 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
**The Virgin and Child with
Saint Joseph, Saint John the
Baptist and a Donor**
1517



After six years in Rome, Sebastiano had thoroughly assimilated Michelangelo’s sculptural and dynamic approach to the figure. The Christ Child in this picture, for instance, is remarkably similar to the one in Michelangelo’s ‘*Taddei Tondo*’ nearby – a work Sebastiano probably never saw. His Venetian roots are still apparent in the richly saturated colouring and the typically Venetian horizontal format of the painting. The donor is almost certainly the Florentine banker Pierfrancesco Borgherini (1488–1558), an important patron to both artists (see room 5).

Oil on wood

NG1450. The National Gallery, London. Bought, 1895

4 MICHELANGELO
**The Virgin and Child with the
Infant Saint John the Baptist**
(‘The *Taddei Tondo*’)
about 1504–5



The Virgin reaches toward the young Baptist who offers her son a fluttering goldfinch, a bird associated with Christ’s later suffering. The infant Christ shies away, but looks back, awakening to his fate. While the relief is probably unfinished, the varying levels of completion are typical of Michelangelo’s aesthetic. Raised areas are smoothly polished while shade is texturally evoked using a claw chisel, hatched as if the artist were drawing in stone. This *tondo* (roundel) is named after its Florentine patron, Taddeo Taddei.

Marble

X9025. Royal Academy of Arts, London

5 MICHELANGELO
Studies of children
about 1503–5

This sheet contains a number of lively studies of a walking toddler. Exploratory figural sketches like these, some drawn from life and others from memory, often made their way into Michelangelo's finished works. Here, the profile studies at bottom informed the young Saint John the Baptist in the marble *'Taddei Tondo'* (4).

Pen and brown ink over traces of black chalk, on paper

X9011. The British Museum, London

6 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
**Saint Bartholomew
and Saint Sebastian**
about 1510–11

These paintings, now framed together, once decorated the outside of a pair of organ shutters in the Venetian Church of San Bartolomeo al Rialto. Standing beneath a Roman-style triumphal arch, the saints appear, like classical statues brought to life through rich colour. Sebastiano deftly handles the medium of oil paint, contrasting areas of great subtlety with vigorous, broadly painted passages, such as Bartholomew's cloak and Sebastian's drapery.

Oil on canvas

X9235 and X9236. Venice, Church of San Bartolomeo, on deposit at the Gallerie dell'Accademia

7 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
Judith (or Salome?)
1510

This is either Judith, the Old Testament heroine who beheaded the enemy general Holofernes to save her tribe, or Salome, who, as described in the New Testament, requested the beheading of John the Baptist. Both were common subjects, although depictions of Judith were more popular in Venice. The refinement of this woman's features, the flashing blue of her sleeve and the radiant sunrise show Sebastiano's virtuoso handling of oil paint, while her protruding elbow demonstrates his interest in sculptural form.

Oil on wood

NG2493. The National Gallery, London.

Salting Bequest, 1910

8 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
The Judgement of Solomon
about 1506–9



King Solomon solves a dispute over maternity by ordering that the contested child be cut in two, prompting its real mother—probably at right—to save the infant by offering it to the false mother, presumably pointing at left. The painting is unfinished, and no child is visible. The vigorous underdrawing and many radical revisions testify to Sebastiano's improvisatory approach. Also evident is his interest in group dynamics and the wide variety of reactions to the event.

Tempera (lower layers) and oil on canvas,
traces of gold leaf (in half-dome)

X8326. Kingston Lacy, The Bankes Collection
(National Trust)

FRIENDSHIP & RIVALRY

Rome, the home of the papacy, was a natural destination for artists seeking powerful patronage and knowledge of classical art. It was a centre of ecclesiastical power and wealth as well as antique ruins and monuments. The young Michelangelo made his name there in the 1490s with his sculpted *Pietà* (9), and returned in 1506 to work for Pope Julius II (reigned 1503–1513).

Sebastiano arrived in 1511 and soon met Michelangelo, who was working on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. He also encountered the exceptionally talented young painter from Urbino, Raphael (1483–1520), who had just completed his fresco decoration of the pope's personal library, including the famous *School of Athens*. In comparing the two artists, critics praised Michelangelo's imagination and ability to render figures sculpturally, but declared Raphael the better painter because he combined these skills with a more sophisticated use of colour.

Michelangelo detested Raphael. In order to thwart him, he sought an alliance with Sebastiano, whose mastery of oil painting in the newest Venetian manner, little seen in Rome, was attracting attention. By providing Sebastiano with drawings and designs, Michelangelo hoped he and younger Venetian could marginalise their rival. This alliance led to a close friendship.

9 AFTER MICHELANGELO

Pietà (copied after *Pietà*,
1497–1500, St Peter's,
Vatican City)



1975

This is a cast of the famous sculpture, still in Rome, with which the 25 year-old Michelangelo established his fame. In it he replaced the usual focus on the Virgin's anguish and Christ's suffering, with an elegantly restrained yet intensely emotional contemplation of a mother's loss. In addition to emphasising the Virgin's femininity and immaculate purity, he significantly enlarged her scale, acknowledging her importance as mother of the Church.

Plaster cast from five-piece moulds,
with wood and iron armature

X9026. Vatican Museums, Vatican City

10 MICHELANGELO

The Entombment
(or *Christ being*
carried to his Tomb)

about 1500–1

In this unfinished altarpiece, the lithe body of Christ is held up for our contemplation as he is carried to his tomb. Although Michelangelo – unusually – painted it in oil, he did not exploit the medium's potential for layering or correction, opting instead for the piecemeal approach used when painting in fresco or egg tempera. This interpretation of the dead Christ was one he returned to time and again.

Oil on poplar

NG790. The National Gallery, London. Bought, 1868

11 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
Christ carrying the Cross
about 1513–14

Sebastiano depicts Christ staggering beneath weight of the cross as Simon of Cyrene comes to his aid. A soldier goads them on, while in the background, against a fiery sunset, a procession makes its way to the place of crucifixion. Painted early in Sebastiano's Roman career, this picture shows how rapidly he assimilated Michelangelo's monumental treatment of the figure. The darker colouring and emphasis on Christ's distress demonstrates a newfound spiritual solemnity.

Oil on canvas

X8986. Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid

12 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
Study for Christ carrying the Cross
about 1513–14

This study, made for *Christ carrying the Cross* (11), was probably drawn from a live model. Sebastiano's soft handling of the chalk lends an atmospheric quality to the drawing, similar to the effects he was able to achieve in oil paint. He also imbued the figure with an emotional, melancholy mood. In the final painting Sebastiano altered Christ's hair and made his beard fuller.

Black chalk and white body colour on faded blue paper

X9518. Private Collection

13 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
The Virgin and Child
about 1517

The figures and bright colouring in this picture owe much to Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling. The Madonna recalls its Cumaean Sybil while the muscular Child is an echo of Adam in the *Creation of Man*. Although the *tondo* (roundel) was a particularly Florentine format, Sebastiano uses the typically Venetian device of dividing the background between a flat, dark wall and an atmospheric landscape view. Sebastiano's later, more abstracted style, is already present in this work's pared down, blocky monumentality.

Oil on poplar

X8985. The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. Acquired with grants from the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Art Fund with contributions from the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum, the Gow, Percival and University Purchase funds and the Perrins Bequest

14

SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
after partial designs by Michelangelo

Lamentation over the Dead Christ (*Pietà*)



about 1512–16

This altarpiece for the church of San Francesco in Viterbo, north of Rome, marks the first collaboration between Michelangelo and Sebastiano. Michelangelo supplied the drawings, rethinking his earlier *Pietà* (9) by placing Christ on the ground before the Virgin, thus isolating her in her grief. In the chapel, this made it look as if Christ was laid upon the altar, a clear reference to the rite of Eucharist, in which worshippers commemorate Christ's sacrifice by ingesting his body and blood in the form of bread and wine. Sebastiano's painting of Christ's body is exceptionally sensual while his nocturnal landscape, unprecedented on this scale, is astonishingly freely handled. Pale moonlight illuminates the figures and the desolate landscape; a reminder to the faithful of the pain of earthly suffering and the promise of transcendence offered by a mother's love.

Oil on poplar

X8991. Museo Civico, Viterbo

MICHELANGELO AND
SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO

Sketches on the reverse of the Viterbo *Pietà*

about 1512

These informal charcoal studies represent a number of loose visual ideas, probably by both artists, suggesting their close proximity at the time they undertook the *Pietà*. A number of the smaller figure studies appear to be Michelangelo's ideas for designs that he would paint on the Sistine

ceiling in 1512, while the head study and sketches of standing figures are probably by Sebastiano, drawn in emulation of his older colleague's style.

Charcoal? on poplar

15

MICHELANGELO

Seated nude and two studies of an arm

about 1510–12

This strongly defined yet sensitively handled figure study is for the *ignudo* (male nude) that sits adjacent to Adam in Michelangelo's famous *Creation of Man* on the Sistine Chapel ceiling (see illustration). Michelangelo gives his figure real weight and volume, while the complex torsion of the body lends it animation. At lower left, he studies further the articulation of the arms and hands.

Red chalk and white body colour, over
stylus indentation on paper

X9021 front. ALBERTINA, Vienna



Ignudo between *The Creation of Man* and *God the Father dividing Water from the Earth*, Sistine Chapel. Fresco. Vatican Museums, Vatican City
© akq-images / Album / Prisma

16

MICHELANGELO

Study of a male upper torso with hands clasped and six studies of hands

about 1510–12

These studies of a male torso and clasped hands, drawn from a live model, were made as preparatory studies for the Virgin Mary in Sebastiano's Viterbo *Pietà* (14). It was rare to use female models at the time. Michelangelo was also working on the theological principle that Adam, as God's first human, represented the Creator's idea of physical perfection. This may account for the Virgin's distinctly masculine features in the final painting.

Red chalk, traces of white body colour, black chalk, pen and brown ink, on paper

X9021 back. ALBERTINA, Vienna

17

MICHELANGELO

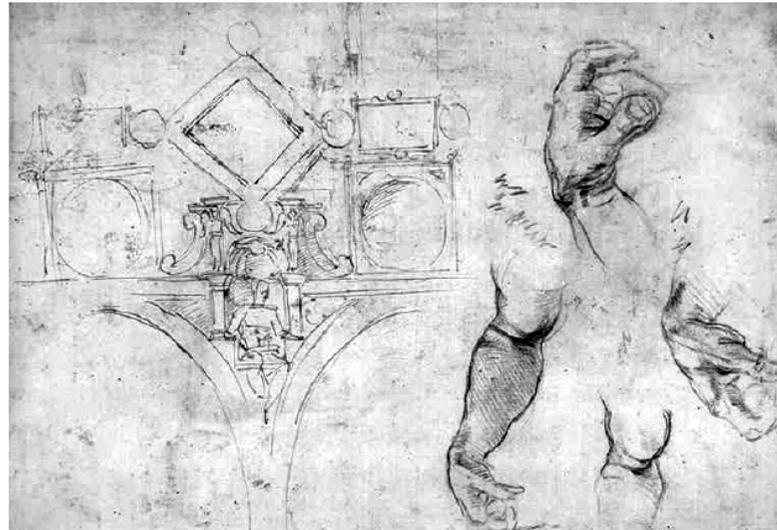
Study of drapery for a seated figure: a seated figure

1508

The erasures, drips and the mark left by a glass are emblematic of Michelangelo's thinking about drawing primarily as a working tool. This drapery study is for the Delphic Sibyl on the Sistine ceiling and later formed the basis of the Virgin's robe in the Viterbo *Pietà* (14). The reverse of the sheet (see illustration), not shown for conservation reasons, includes an early diagram for the Sistine ceiling decoration, as well as arm and hand studies that anticipate Michelangelo's famous *Creation of Man*.

Brush and brown ink over a light greyish preparation (drapery study); black chalk overlaid with brown wash (seated figure); stylus indentation, on paper

X9004 back. The British Museum, London



Michelangelo, *A scheme for the decoration of the vault of the Sistine Chapel; studies of arms and hands*, 1508. Brush and brown ink over a light greyish preparation (drapery study); black chalk overlaid with brown wash (seated figure); stylus indentation, on paper. The British Museum, London © The Trustees of The British Museum

DEFINING THE ROMAN STYLE

Sebastiano's assimilation of Michelangelo's sculptural approach to the figure, coupled with his capacity to create works of psychological insight and spiritual solemnity, played a key role in the development of the new Roman style that had been established by Michelangelo, Raphael and others. Sebastiano's example became the model for much of Roman art of the next century and a half and reverberated significantly beyond Italy, notably in Spain and France.

His distinctive approach began to take form around the time he painted the triptych for the Spanish ambassador to Rome in 1516 (18, 19 and 20) and in the great *Raising of Lazarus* (22) that followed. Although Michelangelo contributed importantly to the latter, these works were essentially Sebastiano's creations. *The Raising of Lazarus* was one of two altarpieces commissioned by the powerful Cardinal Giulio de' Medici (1478–1534), the future Pope Clement VII, for his new bishopric of Narbonne, in France. The other work, a *Transfiguration*, went to Raphael. This put the two artists in direct, increasingly bitter competition.

18 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO *The Descent into Limbo*

1516



Oil on canvas

X8987. Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid

19 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*

1516

Oil on canvas, transferred from wood

X8971. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

20 FRANCISCO RIBALTA after Sebastiano del Piombo *Christ appearing to the Apostles* about 1612–16

Oil on canvas

X9047. Museo de Bellas Artes de Valencia

These three paintings were designed as a triptych for the Spanish ambassador to Rome, Jerónimo Vich y Valterra, the first of several important Spanish patrons who supported Sebastiano. The theme is Christ's death and resurrection with the central *Lamentation* showing his body laid out before the tomb while Mary swoons in grief.

The evening setting and Christ's recumbent pose recall the Viterbo *Pietà* (14), although the broader range of colours and dynamic sense of movement across a large group of figures is new. In the left panel, Christ descends into Limbo, an area of hell believed to be occupied by the souls of the righteous who had died before him. Here he reaches out towards Adam and Eve in a gesture of blessing. In the right panel, since lost and represented here by a 17th-century Spanish copy, the sense of drama and emotion continues as the risen Christ, dressed in green and red, appears to the Apostles.

21 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO

Study for the Dead Christ

about 1515–16

Sebastiano learned to draw on blue Venetian paper, and favoured it throughout his career. Here, it provides a mid-tone to set off the black chalk and brushed-on, white body colour. This study was probably for his *Lamentation Over the Dead Christ* (19), displayed nearby. It was squared up to help him transfer the design to the panel, but in the painting, he seems to have abandoned this study in favour of a different arrangement.

Black and white chalk over squaring in stylus on blue-grey paper

X9015. Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana
Pinacoteca - Milano

22 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO

after partial designs of Michelangelo

The Raising of Lazarus



1517–19

Christ speaks, and Lazarus awakens from death (John 11: 1–44). Still stiff with rigor mortis, he stares at his saviour in shock. The apostles and other bystanders react with everything from reverence to horror. Some are debating what has happened while others hold their noses at the stench from the tomb. Lazarus's sister Mary, in yellow, kneels, and his other sister, Martha, in red and lilac, recoils. The variety of responses is an invitation for the viewer to participate in contemplation and discussion.

Michelangelo designed the tense, muscular figure of Lazarus and the workmanlike attendants removing his burial shroud.

Sebastiano devised and arranged the teeming crowd, colouring their clothes in the high-keyed tones of Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling and giving them depth and nuance through his virtuoso, layered oil technique. True to lived experience, Sebastiano painted afternoon sunlight striking Roman ruins and setting autumnal leaves aglow.

Oil on synthetic panel, transferred from wood

NG1. The National Gallery, London. Bought, 1824

The Frame for The Raising of Lazarus

Constructed by the National Gallery's Framing Department, this frame is entirely based on, and in part made from, authentic 16th-century elements. The plinth copies the only surviving part of the original frame, still in the Cathedral at Narbonne. It may have been carved to Michelangelo's design: the curling, empty scroll is unusual and highly imaginative and he made use of similar, classically derived festoons and ribbons in the New Sacristy at San Lorenzo, Florence. The feathers set in diamond rings above them are the Medici crest.

23 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO

Study for Martha and other figures

probably 1518

In this study for *The Raising of Lazarus* (22), Sebastiano's use of subtle lighting and precise body language captures Martha's revulsion at the stench of her brother's open tomb. The gesturing figures behind her were initially included in the painting but were subsequently replaced with the three women holding their noses. The study at right is probably a placeholder for the servant leaning over Lazarus designed by Michelangelo (see 24).

Black stick material (charcoal?) and white body colour, pen and black ink over stylus indentation (at edge of shoulder garment) on grey blue paper

X9002. Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

24 MICHELANGELO
Lazarus, nude and with his right arm outstretched, supported by two figures; studies of a left foot; study of a right shoulder seen from above
probably 1518

Michelangelo's design for Lazarus was adapted from Adam, given life through touch, in the Sistine Chapel *Creation of Man*. Infrared reflectography reveals that Sebastiano used this drawing as reference to paint over an existing figure, probably of his own design. He subsequently revised the figure again, using the nearby drawing (25). The studies of feet may be for the figure of Christ, while the black chalk study is for the torso of the figure above Lazarus.

Red and black chalk on paper

X9005. The British Museum, London

25 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
Lazarus with his right arm held across his chest, draped in a shroud; the upper part of Lazarus's body (upside down)
probably 1518

This is Michelangelo's revised design for the figure of Lazarus, more or less as it appears in the final painting. It replaced the figure established in drawing 24, which Sebastiano had started painting. The two artists probably decided that the outstretched arm of that design would not work

for the composition. A small alternate, earlier sketch for the figure can be seen upside-down at top, overlapped by the main study.

Red chalk on paper

X9006. The British Museum, London

26 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
Head of a woman
about 1517–18

Lacking the specifics of a portrait, this female head is probably a character study. It is unrelated to *The Raising of Lazarus* (22), for which there are sketches on the reverse of the sheet. The drawing, perhaps intended as a gift rather than as a preparatory work for a painting, shows Sebastiano's technique at its most subtle and refined.

Black chalk and white body colour on laid blue paper

X8993 front. Musée du Mont-de-Piété, Ville de Bergues

27 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
Studies of a male torso and male kneeling figure
about 1517–18

The main study is for Saint Peter, at the lower left of *The Raising of Lazarus* (22). The outline sketch under it appears to be for Lazarus himself and seems to record Sebastiano's first thoughts for him. Infrared reflectography of the painting reveals that a figure of Lazarus, much like this drawing, with his shoulders aligned horizontally rather than diagonally, lies beneath the figure subsequently designed by Michelangelo in drawings 24 and 25.

Black chalk and white body colour on laid blue paper

X8993 back. Musée du Mont-de-Piété, Ville de Bergues

THE CORRESPONDENCE

In 1516 Michelangelo was sent to Florence by Pope Leo X to work on the façade of the church of San Lorenzo. From that point until his permanent return to Rome in 1534, he and Sebastiano kept in touch through letters. The surviving documents, 37 from Sebastiano and six by Michelangelo, reveal the complexities of their friendship as well as the treacherous politics of their work. Michelangelo's language is cultivated and eloquent – in addition to being an artist he was a major poet – and his handwriting is carefully crafted and elegant. Sebastiano writes in the language of the merchant class and consistently uses his native Venetian dialect, one senses with some pride.

The Letters of Michelangelo (London, 1963),
edited and translated by E.H.Ramsden,
reproduced by permission of Peter Owen Publishers.

Translation of the Sebastiano letters
Amanda Lillie and Livia Lupi
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28 Sebastiano del Piombo in Rome to Michelangelo in Florence

Friday 2 July 1518

Sebastiano gives news of *The Raising of Lazarus* (22) and expresses his mistrust of his competitor Raphael, whose *Transfiguration* had been commissioned at the same time. Leonardo Sellaio, mentioned in the letter, was a mutual friend who looked after Michelangelo's house in Rome.

Dearest friend, dearer to me than a father, greetings. I believe Leonardo has told you everything about how things are going for me and about the delay in delivering my work. I have kept it for so long because I do not want Raphael to see mine until he has delivered his.

I was promised this by Our Most Reverend Monsignor [Cardinal Giulio de' Medici; the future Pope Clement VII], who has visited my house many times, and I think is a man of very good judgement, more than I would ever have thought, and as you once assured me. Just now I am not working on anything else, so that I will be able to send it very soon ... and I do not think you will be ashamed of me. Raphael has not yet begun his.

X9061. Fondazione Casa Buonarroti, Firenze

29 Sebastiano del Piombo in Rome to Michelangelo in Florence

Thursday 29 December 1519

Following the birth of Sebastiano's first son, Luciano, this letter marks a deepening of the relationship between the two artists. The word *compare*, meaning godfather, becomes their usual mode of address, signifying close kinship.

My dearest compare, it is many days since I received your most welcome letter, and I am extremely grateful that you did me the honour of agreeing to be my son's godfather ...

I had the baby baptised some days ago and called him Luciano, which is my father's name. As for Domenico Boninsegni [treasurer to Cardinal Giulio de' Medici], I would be especially pleased if he agreed to be my compare, because I only want respectable men as compari.

Apart from this, I am writing to let you know that I have finished the painting [The Raising of Lazarus] (22) and delivered it to the [Vatican] Palace. Everyone seemed to like it rather than dislike it, ... the most reverend Monsignor [Cardinal Giulio de' Medici] told me that I had given him more satisfaction than he was expecting.

... I beg you to persuade Messer Domenico [Boninsegni] to have the frame gilded in Rome, and to leave me to arrange the gilding, because I want to make the Cardinal realise that Raphael is robbing the Pope of at least 3 ducats a day for gilding. Besides, my work will have more grace framed than if it were bare.

X9514. The British Library

30 Sebastiano del Piombo in Rome to Michelangelo in Florence

Thursday 12 April 1520

Writing six days after Raphael's death, Sebastiano seeks Michelangelo's help in securing one of Raphael's unfinished commissions at the Vatican Palace, despite it being earmarked for the dead artist's assistants.

My dearest compare, I believe you have heard that poor Raphael of Urbino has died, something which I think you must be very sorry about; may God forgive him.

Now I should briefly inform you that the Sala dei Pontefici [a room in the papal apartments] needs to be painted, something that Raphael's workshop assistants keep boasting about, and they want to paint it with oils. I beg you to remember me in this case and to recommend me to the most reverend Monsignor [Cardinal Giulio de' Medici]; and if I'm any good at this type of work, please let me carry it out, because I will not bring you shame, as I believe I have not shamed you until now.

I also wanted to let you know that today I brought my painting [The Raising of Lazarus, 22] again to the Palace with the painting Raphael made [The Transfiguration], and I was not ashamed of it. And above all, you should watch out because one of Raphael of Urbino's assistants is coming to Florence, so as to get all the jobs in the Palace from the most reverend Monsignor. Please make sure that I am given at least one of these jobs.

X9063. Fondazione Casa Buonarroti, Firenze

31 Michelangelo to Cardinal Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena in Rome [draft]

31 May 1520

Written on top of an architectural design, this is a draft of a recommendation Michelangelo wrote on Sebastiano's behalf (calling him 'Bastiano Veneziano') to Cardinal Bibbiena (1470-1520), who oversaw decorative projects at the Vatican Palace. His joking tone suggests that he thought his friend's aspirations were unrealistic.

Monsignor – I beg your Most Reverend Lordship – not as a friend, nor as a servant for I am unworthy to be either the one or the other – but as a man of no account, poor and foolish, to obtain Bastiano Veneziano, the painter, some share in the work at the Palace, now that Raphael is dead. But should Your Lordship think that the favour would be thrown away on a man like me, I think that one might still find some pleasure in granting favours to fools, just as one does in onions as a change of diet, when one is surfeited with capons. You are always granting favours to men of esteem; I beg Your Lordship to try out the change with me. The said Bastiano is a capable man and the favour would be considerable, which, though it might be wasted on me, would not be so on him, as I'm sure he will do credit to Your Lordship.

X9064. Fondazione Casa Buonarroti, Firenze

32 Sebastiano del Piombo in Rome to Michelangelo in Florence

Tuesday 3 July 1520

Sebastiano reveals the hurt inflicted by Michelangelo's tongue-in-cheek letter of 'recommendation' when he meets its recipient, Cardinal Bibbiena (see 31).

My dearest compare, greetings. Already many days ago I received a most welcome letter from you, accompanied by a letter addressed to the Cardinal of Santa Maria in Portico [Bibbiena]. I myself delivered the Cardinal's letter, and he was affectionate and made me many offers; but, about the thing that I was requesting, he told me that the Pope had assigned the Sala dei Pontefici [at the Vatican, see 30] to Raphael's assistants, who had made a trial demonstration of a figure painted in oil on the wall, that was a thing of beauty, so much so that no one will ever look again at the rooms Raphael painted; because this Sala will surpass everything else, and there will not have been a more beautiful work painted since antiquity. Then he asked me whether I had read your letter. I said, 'No, I had not', and he laughed a lot at this, as though it were a great joke, and then with fine words I left.

Afterwards I heard from Bacino de Michelagnolo [the sculptor Baccio Bandinelli, 1493–1560] ... that the Cardinal had shown him your letter and had also shown it to the Pope, and your letter is practically the only topic of conversation at the Palace, and it makes everyone laugh.

X9065. Fondazione Casa Buonarroti, Firenze

33 Sebastiano del Piombo in Rome to Michelangelo in Florence

Monday 15 October 1520

As part of his ongoing efforts to receive a papal commission, Sebastiano has an audience with Pope Leo X. He reports the pope's assessment of Michelangelo as *terribile*, meaning fearsome, passionate and hence difficult.

My dearest compare, do not be surprised if after many days I still haven't replied to your last letter. It is because I spent many days at the [Vatican] Palace trying to speak to His Holiness Our Lord [Pope Leo X], and I could never gain the audience I desired. Lately I spoke to him, and His Holiness heeded me with benevolence, to the extent that he sent away all those that were in the room and I remained alone with Our Lord and a servant I trust, so that I could get my point across. His listened to me willingly because I offered myself, along with you, for any kind of service that he might wish ... And he replied: 'I have no doubt of that, because of all you have learned from him.' And, for the trust there is between us, I will reveal to you that His Holiness told me more: 'Look at the works of Raphael who, as soon as he saw Michelangelo's works, immediately abandoned Perugino's way of painting and strived to imitate Michelangelo as closely as possible. But he is terribile, as you see; one cannot deal with him.' And I replied to His Holiness that your terribile character did not harm anyone, and that you appear terribile for love of the great works you carry out.

X9066. Fondazione Casa Buonarroti, Firenze

POPE CLEMENT VII

In 1523 Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, patron of *The Raising of Lazarus* (22), was elected Pope and took the name of Clement VII. His papacy faced economic ruin, the widening religious rift caused by the Protestant Reformation sweeping Northern Europe, and escalating wars across the Italian peninsula.

In 1527 an ill-fated alliance with the French led to the Sack of Rome by Imperial troops. Thousands died as the city was burned and looted. Clement spent months under siege in the fortress of Castel Sant'Angelo before eventually brokering peace with Emperor Charles V (1500–1558). Sebastiano seems to have shared those months of despair with Clement who rewarded him by appointing him *piombatore*, which entitled him to wield the lead seal, or *piombo*, of the apostolic office, earning him his nickname.

Clement was also one of Michelangelo's most sympathetic patrons, commissioning his two great projects at San Lorenzo in Florence – the Medici burial chapel and the Laurentian Library – and the *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel.

34 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO Portrait of Pope Clement VII



about 1525–6

Painted in the early years of Clement's pontificate, this portrait presents the famously handsome pontiff as a monumental, confident, even arrogant figure. Sebastiano used the compositional formula established by Raphael in his famous *Portrait of Julius II*, about 1511 (National Gallery permanent collection, Room 8), but drew on Michelangelo's great prophets on the Sistine ceiling for the brooding, heroic grandeur.

Oil on canvas

X8988. Napoli, Museo di Capodimonte

35 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO Portrait of Pope Clement VII with a Beard

about 1531

Sebastiano made several portraits of Clement around 1531. Most were for official use, but this one is surprisingly unfiltered, even private. Wearing the beard he had grown after the Sack of Rome as a gesture of penitence, Clement looks inward, as if marked by the calamities he had lived through and the ill health he was suffering. Sebastiano painted this work on slate, a material he increasingly favoured, which gives it a dark base tone.

Oil on slate

X9233. Napoli, Museo di Capodimonte

36 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO The Holy Family with a Donor (Pope Clement VII?)

about 1530

The kneeling figure at the lower right of this study may depict Pope Clement VII. If so, the globe held by the Christ Child would represent the Church's worldly dominion. This imagery suggests that the drawing may have been made following the Sack of Rome, during Clement's lengthy peace negotiations with the Emperor Charles V, which Sebastiano attended.

Black chalk and white body colour on paper

X9043 front. Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

37 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO The Infant Christ

about 1530

This detailed study directly relates to the infant Christ depicted on the other side of the sheet. But here, to help achieve the more three-dimensionally modelled form he was after, Sebastiano prepared the surface with blue watercolour to imitate Venetian dyed paper. The infant's pose, which contains a sense of both forward movement and recoil, is a reinterpretation of the Christ Child he painted over a decade earlier in his tondo, *The Virgin and Child* (13, room 2).

Black chalk on blue-grey prepared paper

X9043 back. Lent by her Majesty The Queen

38 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO Study of a seated woman

about 1530–2

Unusually for the time, this study was probably drawn from a nude female model. The pose of her upper body echoes *La Madonna del Velo* (39), but the fact she is seated suggests Sebastiano was thinking about another composition. This is a prime example of the way he would rework figures for new contexts. The blocky articulation of the body is typical of the increasing abstraction Sebastiano brought to the human figure in his later years.

Black and white body colour on faded blue paper

X9016. Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana,
Pinacoteca - Milano

39 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO The Holy Family with Saint John the Baptist (‘La Madonna del Velo’)

about 1525

In a gesture familiar to anyone who has put a small child to bed, Mary covers her sleeping son with a veil while Joseph and the young John the Baptist look on. She possesses a sculptural monumentality that Sebastiano learnt from Michelangelo, but also the restrained emotionalism that so characterises Sebastiano’s work. Her tender glance reveals her understanding that her son’s sleep suggests his future death and that the veil anticipates his burial shroud. The work was almost certainly painted for Clement VII.

Oil on poplar

X8989. Archbishopric of Olomouc – Archdiocesan
Museum Olomouc

40 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO Study for the head of the Virgin

about 1530

This exquisite head study was probably made after Sebastiano had embarked on a second version of *La Madonna del Velo*, today in Naples, in which the Virgin’s head faces to the left. He used it to rethink the Virgin’s expression and headgear, but exchanged clarity of detail for a looser, more suggestive drawing style. This enhances her wistful expression, meant to convey her foreknowledge of her son’s death.

Black chalk and white body colour on
faded blue paper

X9194. By permission of the Governing
Body of Christ Church, Oxford

THE RISEN CHRIST

Christ's resurrection fascinated Michelangelo. It struck at the root of his interpretation of the human body as a portrait of the immortal spirit, rather than imperfect physical form. In his resurrected state, Christ was the embodiment of divine beauty, grace and energy. Michelangelo, like other progressive Christian thinkers of his day, believed that the idealised depiction of the human form achieved in antiquity, pagan though it was, could help bring the faithful closer to the eternal truth of the Christian message. In 1514 he was able to realise his ideas in marble for a commission from a like-minded patron for a nude resurrected Christ. Michelangelo had to abandon the sculpture due to a flaw in the marble and delivered a radically revised second version in 1521. Sebastiano, who seems to have shared Michelangelo's progressive ideas, helped him install the work. Surrounding these sculptures are drawings by both artists and letters documenting the complexities of the commissions and their continuing relationship.

41 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO

Study for Christ carrying the Cross

about 1520–5

Using his preferred Venetian blue paper, Sebastiano blurs the boundaries between drawing and painting by fusing greasy black chalk, thick white gouache and grey wash. This harrowing image, probably developed from his painting, *Christ carrying the Cross* (11, room 2), was drawn on top of a smaller one, similar in scale to the upside-down head at the bottom of the sheet.

Black chalk with white body colour on paper prepared with a blue-grey ground

X8964 front. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques

42 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO

God the Father creating the Sun and the Moon

about 1525

Strongly inspired by Michelangelo's depictions of God on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, this drawing of the airborne Creator is less expressive and atmospheric than many Sebastiano studies. Its dry simplicity suggests his priority here was to work out God's pose and the movement of his drapery. The figure was for one of eight scenes of Creation Sebastiano planned for the circular 'drum' supporting the roof of a chapel built in the church of Santa Maria del Popolo, for the banker Agostino Chigi (1466–1520).

Black chalk on paper

X8964 back. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques

43 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO God the Father separating Light from Darkness

about 1525

This is another study of a Creation scene (with 42) for the Chigi Chapel at Santa Maria del Popolo, in Rome. Both drawings carry framing lines, indicating the areas between the windows into which the figures would be placed. Particularly characteristic of Sebastiano are the expressive hands. Below are studies of what looks like a candlestick and an urn, seen in profile.

[Black chalk on paper](#)

X8965. Paris, Musée du Louvre,
Département des Arts graphiques

44 MICHELANGELO Study for a Risen Christ

about 1532–3

For unknown reasons, though possibly stimulated by Sebastiano's commission for a painting of the subject, Michelangelo drew the Risen Christ many times in the early 1530s. This sketch shows him trying out alternate positions for Christ, especially for his legs. The revisions have the effect of animating the figure, lending it vital energy that he subsequently managed both to contain and retain in the more developed design nearby (45).

[Black chalk on paper](#)

Fondazione Casa Buonarroti, Firenze

45 MICHELANGELO The Risen Christ

about 1532–3

Building on his preliminary sketch (44), Michelangelo here solidifies the figure of Christ rising weightlessly from his tomb. Christ's gesture, which recalls Sebastiano's *Descent into Limbo* (18, room 3), conveys his compassion for those who remain while also signalling a farewell. The drawing may be identical to one sent to Sebastiano in 1532, probably for another Chigi commission taken over from Raphael, at the Church of Santa Maria della Pace.

[Black chalk on paper](#)

X9010. The British Museum, London

46 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO God the Father

about 1532–3

Inspired both by Michelangelo's figures of God in the Sistine Chapel and his drawings of the risen Christ, this soaring God the Father shows Sebastiano's drawing at its most vibrant. Less concerned with proportion or modelling than Michelangelo, he conveys a sense of weightless elation by stretching the figure and making it seem transparent. It was probably an early study for Sebastiano's great 1530s altarpiece of the *Nativity of the Virgin Mary* for the Chigi chapel at Santa Maria del Popolo.

[Black chalk and white body colour on paper](#)

X8973. Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

47 MICHELANGELO
The Risen Christ
about 1532–3

Michelangelo evokes a feeling of exuberance, power and even joy in Christ's triumph over death, rarely found elsewhere in his work. The billowing drapery lends current to the pulsing energy of the figure – a beardless, idealised Christ reaching into heavens to share in his Father's limitless power.

[Black chalk on paper](#)

X8972. Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

48 MICHELANGELO
The Resurrection of Christ
about 1532–3

Christ stands triumphantly on the edge of his sarcophagus as the terrified soldiers scatter around him. He holds the thin, bannered cross associated with his Resurrection. His posture is closely derived from that of Lazarus in Sebastiano's altarpiece (22, room 3), while his gesture also recalls Michelangelo's second sculpted *Risen Christ* (52). The drawing is presented as seen through an oval aperture, as if from inside a cave.

[Black chalk on paper](#)

X9009. The British Museum, London

49 MICHELANGELO
**Studies for a statue
of The Risen Christ**
1518, possibly as early as 1514

This cropped sheet is one part of a larger assemblage of studies by Michelangelo for his second version of the *Risen Christ*. We can follow Michelangelo developing Christ's dynamic posture: both sides contain sketches of the leg stepping forward. On this side, he consolidates the turning posture by picking up his red chalk layout in pen and ink.

[Red and black chalk, pen and brown ink on paper](#)

X9017 front. Private Collection

50 MICHELANGELO
**Studies for a statue
of The Risen Christ**
1518, possibly as early as 1514

The drawing, reinforced in pen and ink, of a pair of striding legs is drawn on top of studies closer to the finished statue (52). This suggests a late moment of inspiration for an even more dynamic way of emphasising Christ's forward movement, which was probably too radical to be workable in a marble sculpture.

[Red chalk, pen and brown ink on paper](#)

X9017 back. Private Collection

51

MICHELANGELO

finished by an unknown
seventeenth-century artist

The Risen Christ (‘The Giustiniani Christ’)



1514–15, finished in the
early seventeenth-century

Holding the cross, Christ stands in triumph over death. Michelangelo’s contract stipulated, highly unusually, that Christ be depicted nude. This was not a provocation, but a means of conveying spiritual perfection using classical form. Christ appears like a pagan god. Characteristically, however, Michelangelo rendered his body with striking sensuality. The vein of black marble visible in Christ’s face caused Michelangelo to abandon the statue. The right hand, parts of the face and the back were carved in the early seventeenth century.

Carrara marble

X9060. Church of San Vincenzo Martire, Monastero dei Silvestrini, Bassano Romano (Viterbo)

52

AFTER MICHELANGELO

(copy after The Risen Christ, 1519–21,
Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome)



The Risen Christ

about 1897–8

This cast of Michelangelo’s original, which remains in the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome, shows his radical reinterpretation of the abandoned first version of *The Risen Christ* (51). Here Christ steps forward while looking over his shoulder, not only activating the space around him but also suggesting an unfolding story. Christ’s appearance changes depending on the angle from which he is viewed, almost as if he moves with the viewer. The turning pose, arm crossing the chest, recalls Lazarus (22, room 3).

Plaster cast from approximately eight piece moulds
consisting of approximately 81 individual pieces

X9174. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

53

CORRESPONDENCE

Michelangelo in Florence to (?) Domenico Buoninsegni in Rome [draft]

late February – 10 March 1520

Probably writing to Domenico Buoninsegni, Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici’s treasurer, Michelangelo outlines the complex logistics and vast expense of Pope Leo X’s commission for the façade of the church of San Lorenzo in Florence. Responding to the project’s (permanent) suspension, Michelangelo reveals a hard-nosed negotiation style.

When I was in Carrara on business of my own... Pope Leo sent for me with reference to the façade of San Lorenzo, which he wished to execute in Florence. ... I went to have the said marbles quarried at Seravezza, a mountain near Pietra Santa in Florentine territory... I went to Florence on the twentieth day of March, fifteen hundred and eighteen [Florentine style, i.e. 1519] for money to begin transporting the said marbles... and on the twenty-sixth of March, fifteen hundred and nineteen, the Cardinal [Giulio] de’ Medici had paid to me on behalf of Pope Leo for the said work, through the Gaddi of Florence, five hundred ducats, for which I accordingly gave a receipt. Afterwards, in this same year, the Cardinal, by order of the Pope, told me not to proceed further with the work aforesaid, because they said they wished to relieve me of the trouble of transporting the marbles, and that they wished to supply me with them in Florence themselves, and to make a new contract.

... the Cardinal has told me to account for the money received and the expenses incurred and has said that he wishes to release me... I am not charging to his account, over and above, the wooden model of the said façade which I sent to him in Rome. I am not charging to his account, over and above, the space of three years I have lost over this; I am not charging to his account the fact that I have been ruined over the said work for San Lorenzo; I am not charging to his account the enormous insult of having been brought here to execute the said work and then of having it taken away from me; and I still do not know why. I am not charging the loss, amounting to five hundred ducats, on my house in Rome, which I left, including marbles, furniture and completed work. Without charging the aforesaid items to the account, out of two thousand three hundred ducats, I am left with not more than five hundred ducats in hand.

X9028. The British Library

54 Michelangelo in Florence to Leonardo Sellaio in Rome [draft]

21 December 1518

In response to encouragement from his friend Leonardo Sellaio to press on with his work, Michelangelo laments how low water on the river Arno has delayed all shipments of marble. This affected his much-delayed replacement for the abandoned *Risen Christ* (see 51 and 52). Metello Vari (about 1488–1554) was the patron of that commission.

Leonardo,

You exhort me in your last letter to press on; I appreciate this, because I see that you do it for my good. But I must make it clear to you that such exhortations are, nevertheless, so many knife-

thrusts, because I'm dying of vexation through my inability to do what I want to do, owing to my ill luck. A week ago this evening my assistant Pietro [Urbano] returned from Porto Venere with my assistant, Donato, who is in charge of the transport of the marbles at Carrara, leaving a loaded boat at Pisa, which has never appeared because it hasn't rained and the Arno is completely dried up. Another four boats are commissioned for the marbles in Pisa, which will all come loaded when it rains, and I shall begin work in earnest. On this account I am more disgruntled than any man on earth. I am also being pressed by Messer Metello Vari about his figure [The Risen Christ], which is likewise there in Pisa and will be in one of the first boats. I have never [in the sense of 'not'] replied to him, nor do I wish to write to you again, until I have started work: because I'm dying of anguish and seem to have become an impostor against my will.

X9062. Fondazione Casa Buonarroti, Firenze

55 Sebastiano del Piombo in Rome to Michelangelo in Florence

Friday 6 September 1521

Sebastiano acted as Michelangelo's middleman for the installation of the finished *Risen Christ* at Santa Maria sopra Minerva (52). Here he lists the botched finishing touches added by Michelangelo's young assistant, Pietro Urbano, which had to be corrected by another sculptor, Federico Frizzi.

My dearest compare, I believe you must be sick of hearing the news about your Pietro Urbano, and I won't write to you about what does not concern you, because it is not my job to speak ill of anyone, especially those who have not caused me displeasure. But, since he shamed you and showed

*you little respect, for the sake of the love
I have for you, I am obliged to inform you of
his good conduct.*

*First of all, you sent him to Rome with the figure
so that he could complete it and put the finishing
touches to it, and on this count you know what
he did and didn't do. But I must tell you that
everything he has worked on he has wrecked,
especially the right foot which he has shortened,
being obviously visible in the toes that he has
hacked. He has also shortened the fingers of the
hands, especially the one that holds the cross,
which is the right hand. Frizzi says that it looks
as if they had been worked by people who make
doughnuts. They certainly don't look as if they
had been worked from marble; rather, they look
stunted as though they were worked by those who
make pasta. I am not an expert in this, because I
don't know how to work marble, but I tell you that
to me the fingers look very stumpy. I should tell
you that one can clearly see how he has worked
the beard in a way that I believe my little boy
would have shown more discernment, because it
looks as if he had worked that beard with a blunt
knife – but it's easy to remedy that. Besides, he has
hacked a nostril out of the nose so that if it had
been damaged just a little more,
only God could have fixed it.*

X9067. Fondazione Casa Buonarroti, Firenze

Room 5



THE BORGHERINI CHAPEL PROJECT

In the spring of 1516, the young Florentine banker Pierfrancesco Borgherini (1488–1558), Michelangelo's friend and broker, commissioned Sebastiano to decorate a chapel at the Spanish church of San Pietro in Montorio, in Rome. This masterpiece is reproduced here at slightly reduced scale, using 3D printing technology. Surrounding it are preliminary drawings for the project. Borgherini's understanding was that Michelangelo would provide the designs, but since Michelangelo departed to live in Florence that year, he only made drawings for the central *Flagellation of Christ* and possibly a layout for the half-dome *Transfiguration*. Sebastiano completed the decoration on his own between 1519 and 1524. He painted the upper sections in fresco and successfully experimented with applying oil directly to the wall in the lower parts, including the *Flagellation*. The atmospheric effect he achieved, coupled with Michelangelo's design, made it the most influential of their joint works, inspiring countless later renditions of the subject.

56 MICHELANGELO
The Flagellation of Christ
1516

This early sketch for the Borgherini *Flagellation* is expansive, showing little regard for the spatial constraints of the chapel. It also broadens the scene's narrative. In it Christ's head is raised, which makes him appear more defiant than in the final work. Pontius Pilate, who ordered his torture, is enthroned at left, while at right an onlooker brings a small child to witness the spectacle.

Red chalk over stylus indentation with unrelated marks in black chalk on paper

X9007. The British Museum, London

57 MICHELANGELO
Christ at the Column
1516

Close to the final arrangement of the figure of Christ in the Borgherini *Flagellation*, this expressive drawing suggests movement in the repetition of contours and the blurring of form. The feeling of physical and spiritual suffering is palpable. The lack of facial detail accentuates the gaping mouth and stands in contrast to the exquisite modelling of Christ's muscular torso. Made with Sebastiano in mind, Michelangelo emulates his friend's suggestive, even painterly approach to drawing.

Black chalk and white body colour over stylus indentation on paper

X9008. The British Museum, London

58 GIULIO CLOVIO
after Michelangelo
The Flagellation of Christ
about 1540

This is a copy after a lost drawing by Michelangelo of the final arrangement of the figures in the Borgherini Chapel *Flagellation*. Characteristically for Michelangelo, they are drawn in the nude, like classical statues, only to be dressed when painted. The Croatian miniaturist and illuminator Clovio (1498–1578), who made this copy, was a close follower of Michelangelo.

Red chalk over black chalk on paper

X8974. Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

59 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
**Head of a man
looking up to right**
about 1516–20

Based on an antique sculpture in the collection of Sebastiano's patron Agostino Chigi, this powerful study seems to have been subsequently modified and used for the figure of Saint Peter at the lower left of the chapel half-dome. The strong contrast of light and shade is suggested with vigorous strokes of the chalk/charcoal and boldly applied white highlights.

Black chalk (charcoal?) and white body colour, stylus indentation and some red chalk on faded blue paper

X9013 front. The British Museum, London

THE BORGHERINI CHAPEL 501

Essential to the meaning of the Borgherini Chapel scheme is that Christ appears twice. First, below, in physical suffering during his Flagellation, and above, at the prior event of his Transfiguration, when he appeared to his awestruck disciples in dazzling white, alongside the Old Testament prophets, Moses and Elijah. Above the arch sit another two Old Testament prophets, Isaiah and Ezekiel, who foretold the first and second coming of Christ. The figures to either side of the *Flagellation*, Saints Peter and Francis of Assisi, are protectors of the Franciscan church, San Pietro in Montorio.

The scheme was inspired by a contemporary prophetic text, the *Apocalypsis Nova*, which heralded the coming of a messianic pope, an Angelic Pastor, who would usher in a new era of peace. Within this context, the Flagellation represents the current, corrupted state of Christianity and the Transfiguration the glorious future to come. The *Apocalypsis Nova* was popular among progressive-minded Catholics eager for Church reform, with whom Borgherini, Michelangelo and Sebastiano sympathised.

The facsimile of the Borgherini Chapel in San Pietro in Montorio was supported by Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Conservation, Madrid. The Photographic recording of the chapel and the production of the facsimile was carried out by Factum Arte, Madrid.

© Real Academia de España en Roma



60 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO *Study of a walking figure* about 1516–20

This finely articulated study of a man pulling his hair in seeming distress was not used in any known painting by Sebastiano. His youthfulness and long hair are common attributes of Christ's disciple, John. John is often included among the more emotional figures weeping over Christ's body in scenes of the Lamentation, suggesting Sebastiano may have had such a composition in mind.

Black chalk and white body colour on faded blue paper X9013 back. The British Museum, London

61 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO *Cartoon for the head of Saint James Major* about 1519–20

This is a fragment of a series of sheets that combined to form the full-scale design, or cartoon, of the apostle Saint James Major, who appears on the right side of the chapel half-dome. Sebastiano would have used this cartoon to transfer the figure directly onto the wall, which would have been prepared with wet plaster, by pressing or blowing charcoal dust through the tiny holes you can see pricked into the drawing's surface.

Black and white chalk (charcoal?) on two joined sheets of paper, pricked for transfer and mounted X8975. The J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

62 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
**Study for the head of
Saint Francis; hand study**
about 1517–19

Strongly lit and evocatively modelled, this is a head study for the figure of Saint Francis, who stands to the right of the *Flagellation* scene. The drawing is much brighter than the dark tonalities of the finished painting, in which the fleeting smile we see here becomes a stern grimace. The finely articulated hand study may be for the figure of Saint Peter at the lower left of the half-dome.

[Black chalk on paper](#)

X9001. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe

63 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
**Seated Prophet and an Angel;
study for the left spandrel of
the Borgherini Chapel**
about 1518

This majestic study for the figure at top left of the Borgherini Chapel, above the archway, depicts either Ezekiel or Isaiah, both Old Testament prophets. His pose is adapted from Michelangelo's figure of Lazarus (22, room 3) while the subtle illumination on his rugged profile conveys the moment of divine insight as he converses with an angel. This is a finished design, squared up in red chalk so that the image could be enlarged to a full-scale cartoon (see 61).

[Black chalk, grey and brown wash and white body colour above four stylus arcs at bottom right, squared with red chalk, on blue paper](#)

X9024. National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Robert H. and Clarice Smith, 1985

64 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
**Portrait of a man
(Pierfrancesco Borgherini?)**
about 1516–17

This handsome young man closely resembles the donor in Sebastiano's 1517 *Holy Family with St John and a Donor* (6, room 1). This makes him likely to be Pierfrancesco Borgherini, the patron of the Borgherini Chapel. Sebastiano, who was increasingly in demand as a portraitist, expertly captures his sitter's good looks and intellectual presence – qualities Michelangelo himself appears to have appreciated in Borgherini. Michelangelo was apparently infatuated with the young, progressive-minded banker.

[Oil on wood, transferred from wood](#)

X9070. The San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Anne R. and Amy Putnam 1950.107

65 PROBABLY BY
SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO
Portrait of Michelangelo
 about 1518–20

Michelangelo, dressed as a gentleman, invites us to look at a sketchbook, emphasising the centrality of the practice of drawing and study of anatomy to his work. A recent discovery, the picture is very close to Sebastiano's portraiture in style and technique, although its compromised condition makes certain attribution difficult. In contrast to the many famous likenesses in which Michelangelo appears distant, this portrayal is warm and informal, suggesting that it was painted by a close friend.

[Oil on wood](#)

X8980. Galerie Hans, Hamburg

A PARTING OF WAYS

Sebastiano rejoiced at Michelangelo's return to Rome in 1534 to paint the Last Judgement in the Sistine Chapel. But after almost twenty-five years of friendship, this project would bring their collaboration to an acrimonious end.

On Sebastiano's advice, the vast wall for the *Last Judgement* was prepared for painting in oil. However, in early 1536 Michelangelo ordered it prepared anew for fresco, the technique in which he completed it. He would later deny it, but he must initially have approved of the idea and perhaps even tried his hand at painting the wall in oil before deciding it did not suit him.

After Sebastiano's death in 1547, Michelangelo disowned him, describing him as lazy. Sebastiano was indeed less productive in his later years, but the austere, abstracted approach to form and intense spirituality he achieved, evident in his late *Visitation* mural, was highly original and would prove influential. He and Michelangelo had diverged from each other in more ways than one.

66 FACSIMILE

Michelangelo in Florence to Sebastiano in Rome [draft]

May 1525

In this draft of a lost letter, reproduced here in facsimile, Michelangelo makes an emotionally charged demonstration of affection for Sebastiano, and expresses an appreciation of his work, perhaps in recognition of his friend's low self-esteem.

My dearest Sebastiano – Yesterday evening our friend Captain Cuio and several other gentlemen kindly invited me to go and have supper with them, which gave me the greatest pleasure, as I emerged a little from my depression, or rather from my obsession. I not only enjoyed the supper, which was extremely pleasant, but also, and even more than this, the discussions which took place. But later on my pleasure in the discussions increased on hearing the said Captain mention your name. Nor was this all; still later I was infinitely delighted when, on the subject of art, I heard the said Captain say that you were altogether unique and were held to be so in Rome. So that, had it been possible to be more cheerful, I should have been. Seeing, then, that my opinion is justified, don't say, henceforth, that you are not unique, when I write and tell you that you are, because there are too many witnesses and there is a picture here, [Sebastiano's portrait of Anton Francesco degli Albizzi] thank God, which proves, to anyone who has eyes to see, that I'm right.

Fondazione Casa Buonarroti, Firenze

67 Sebastiano del Piombo in Rome to Michelangelo in Florence

Friday 24 February 1531

Sebastiano describes his feelings of lingering shock and creative despondency years after the Sack of Rome in 1527. He had recently returned to Rome after a couple of years in his native Venice, and laments the fact that he was away during Michelangelo's brief visit in 1529.

When I think about it, it is a true miracle that, after so much difficulty, hard work and danger, the Almighty through his mercy and compassion, left us alive and healthy. May the Lord His Majesty always be thanked for this. And if with my pen I could convey how anxious and worried I have been about you, you would be amazed. ... And God knows how much pain I felt when I knew you had gone to Venice, because if I had been there, things would have turned out differently. But that's enough!

Compare, now that we have been through fire and water and faced things we never would have imagined, let us thank God for everything, and let us spend the few years that remain to us to live as quietly as we can: because really we should not take much account of acts of fortune, as it is so sad and painful. I am brought so low as to ruin the universe, but I don't care about it and can laugh at everything. I still don't feel I am the same Bastiano that I was before the Sack; I still don't feel in my right mind. I won't say anything more. May Christ keep you in good health.

X9069. Fondazione Casa Buonarroti, Firenze

68 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO Mary and Elizabeth (The Visitation) about 1518–19

This small painting, which contrasts the youthful and aged faces of Mary and Elizabeth, is exactly to scale with Sebastiano's *Visitation* of 1518–19 (69). Painted on paper using cheap pigments, it was probably used as reference when Sebastiano completed the final picture, and may have been kept as a record of the design. Characteristically, the forms are blocked in simply. Energetic strokes defining the drapery are contrasted with smooth modulation to make the faces come alive.

[Oil on paper mounted on canvas](#)

X9054. Collection Roberto Sgarbossa

69 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO The Visitation 1518–19



This painting depicts the moment described in the Gospel of Luke when the unborn John the Baptist leapt for joy in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth, as she greeted her cousin Mary, pregnant with Jesus. A blazing sunset illuminates their meeting: Elizabeth's husband Zachariah hastens to attend as Mary tenderly touches her cousin's shoulder, modestly avoiding her enraptured gaze. The note struck is both quiet and resonant.

[Oil on canvas, transferred from wood](#)

X8962. Paris, Musée du Louvre,
Département des Peintures

70 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO Study for *The Visitation*

about late 1520s–early 1530s

The nervous energy of this drawing captures the strong emotional charge between the two women who have each found themselves miraculously with child. Following a long-standing tradition, Sebastiano places Elizabeth's left hand tenderly on Mary's hip. But in the mural for which the drawing was intended, of which only the fragments shown nearby survive, Sebastiano characteristically reverted to the more emotionally reticent gestures of greeting he first explored in his 1518–19 version (69).

Black chalk and white body colour on buff paper

X8967. Paris, Musée du Louvre,
Département des Arts graphiques

71 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO Study of four standing women

about 1533–6

This is a study for the women behind Mary in Sebastiano's late, large-scale mural of the *Visitation* – the meeting of the pregnant Virgin Mary with her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, herself miraculously pregnant with John the Baptist. Rather like the onlookers in *The Raising of Lazarus* (22, room 3), these women act as commentators on the scene. The blocky, somewhat abstract character of the drawing stands in contrast to the nearby drawing 70, suggesting that they were made some years apart.

Black and white chalk with traces of squaring
in black chalk, on blue paper

X9014. The British Museum, London

72 SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO *The Visitation* (three mural fragments)



about 1533–6

These three fragments are all that remain of an enormous mural that Sebastiano left unfinished in the octagonal chancel in the Roman church of Santa Maria della Pace. Copies made before it was dismantled in the early 17th century give us an idea of what it looked like (see illustration). For the arrangement of Mary and Elizabeth, Sebastiano drew on his first version of the subject, nearby (69). But he pared down the figures to their bare essentials: to shapes of almost geometric simplicity divided into contrasting fields of colour. He had assimilated Michelangelo's figure style and moved beyond it toward a spiritually intense, quiet solemnity.

Oil on plaster, mounted on canvas

X8977, X8978 and X8979.

Duke of Northumberland, Alnwick Castle



Detail. Copy of Sebastiano del Piombo's *Visitation* (detail).
Late sixteenth century
Oil on canvas. Collection of the Duke of Northumberland
© photo courtesy the owner

73

MICHELANGELO

Lamentation over the Dead Christ

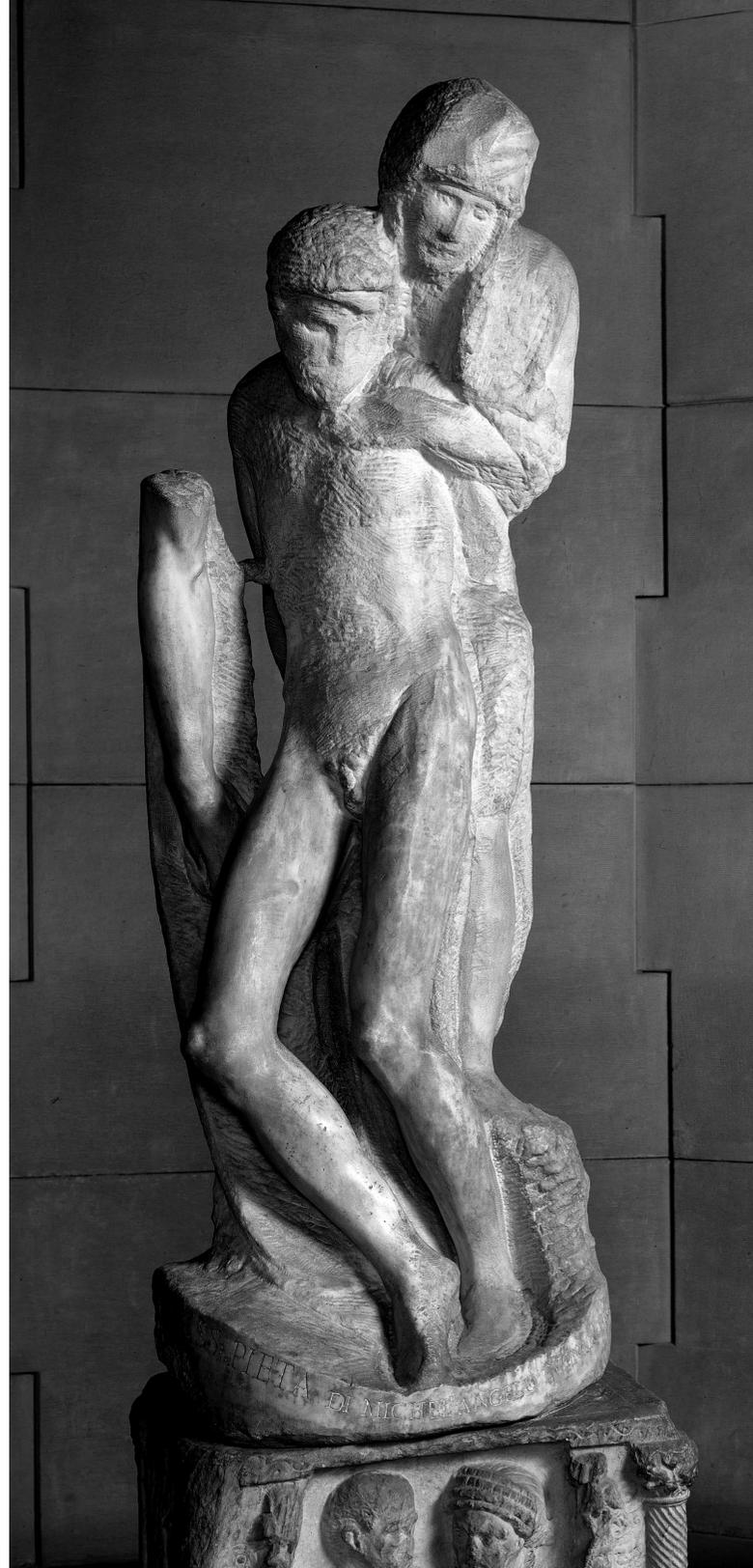
about 1531–4

Handled alternately with sensitivity and boldness, this rendition of Christ being lowered into his tomb by his grieving mother does not relate to any known commission. The arrangement of Christ's slender, powerful body resonated with the artist across the decades: he first devised it for the *Entombment* of around 1500–1 (10, room 2) and it recurs in the sculptural so-called *Rondanini Pietà* (see illustration) that he left broken and unfinished in his courtyard upon his death in 1564.

Red and black chalk over stylus indentation,
grey wash, on paper

X9023. ALBERTINA, Vienna

Michelangelo, *The Rondanini Pietà*, 1550s to 1564. Marble
Raccolte d'Arte Antica, Pinacoteca del Castello Sforzesco, Milan
© akg-images / Nimatallah



CHRONOLOGY

1475

Michelangelo Buonarroti is born on 6 March in Caprese, Tuscany, to a Florentine family

1485

Sebastiano Luciani (Sebastiano del Piombo) is born, probably in Venice

1488

Michelangelo starts training in the workshop of the Florentine painter, Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–1494)

1490

Around this time, Michelangelo enters the household of Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492), de facto ruler of Florence, where he learns sculpting

1494

The Medici are expelled from Florence and a Republican government is established

1497–1501

Michelangelo is in Rome. He completes the *Pietà* for St Peter's in 1500

1500–1511

Sebastiano works in the circle of Giorgione (about 1477–1510) and then independently, becoming a leading artist in Venice

1503

Giuliano della Rovere (1443–1513) is elected pope and assumes the name Julius II

1504

Michelangelo completes his *David* for the Florentine Republic

1505

Michelangelo called to Rome by Julius II to work on the pope's tomb

1508

Michelangelo commences five years' work on the Sistine Chapel ceiling at the Vatican Palace. Raphael (1483–1520) arrives in the city and starts work on mural decorations for the papal apartments

1511

Sebastiano arrives in Rome in the entourage of the banker Agostino Chigi (1466–1520). He paints decorations in Chigi's villa (known today as the Farnesina) and meets Michelangelo and Raphael

1512

Michelangelo and Sebastiano begin work on their first collaboration, the *Pietà* (14), an altarpiece for a church in Viterbo, north of Rome

1512

Julius II quells an attempt to deligitimise his papacy by convening the fifth Lateran Council. He also forms the Holy League with Spain, Venice, England and the Holy Roman Empire against the French and successfully expels their armies from the North of Italy. The Florentine Republic falls to the Holy League and the Medici return as de facto rulers

1513

Julius II dies. Giovanni de' Medici (1475–1521) is elected pope and assumes the name Leo X

1513–16

Michelangelo completes the so-called *Rebellious Slave* and *Dying Slave*, as well as *Moses*, as part of his ongoing work on the tomb of Julius II

1516

Sebastiano and Michelangelo prepare for the decoration of the Borgherini Chapel in San Pietro in Montorio, Rome. In the late summer, Michelangelo leaves for Florence to design the façade of the church of San Lorenzo for Leo X. He does not resume residence in Rome until 1534

1516–17

Cardinal Giulio de' Medici commissions both *The Raising of Lazarus* from Sebastiano (22) and the *Transfiguration* from Raphael (today in the Vatican Museums) for the cathedral at Narbonne, France

1517

In opposition to the papacy, Martin Luther (1483–1546) publishes his *Ninety-Five Theses* in Wittenberg, initiating the religious revolt known as the Protestant Reformation

1519

Sebastiano finishes *The Raising of Lazarus*, incorporating designs by Michelangelo. Michelangelo starts work on the Medici Chapel in the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo, Florence. Michelangelo becomes godfather to Sebastiano's first son, Luciano

1520

Raphael and Agostino Chigi die. Sebastiano is hired to complete Raphael's unfinished decorations for Chigi's two Roman family chapels, in the Roman churches of Santa Maria della Pace and Santa Maria del Popolo

1521

Leo X dies. Following the brief reign of his successor Adrian VI (1429–1523), Cardinal Giulio de' Medici (1478–1534) is elected pope in 1523, assuming the name Clement VII

1524

Sebastiano finishes the mural decorations of the Borgherini Chapel

1527

A failed alliance with France leads to the Sack of Rome on 6 May by forces of the Holy Roman Empire. Clement is besieged in the city's fortress of Castel Sant'Angelo for seven months before escaping, an experience Sebastiano appears to have shared. The Florentines expel the Medici and set up a new Republican government. Michelangelo enlists in its support, overseeing the fortifications of the city

1529–1530

Peace negotiations between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire at Bologna. Sebastiano attends as part of Clement VII's entourage

1530

Michelangelo helps defend the Florentine Republic when the city is besieged by Imperial troops. Upon the Republic's surrender the Medici are restored to power. Clement VII ignores Michelangelo's disloyalty and sets him to work again on Medici projects in the city.

1530

Sebastiano resumes work on the two Chigi chapels. Over the following years, he solicits drawings for both from Michelangelo and paints his great altarpiece of the *Nativity of the Virgin* at Santa Maria del Popolo

1531

Clement appoints Sebastiano *piombatore*, or wielder of the papal seal, a position that earns him his nickname Sebastiano del Piombo. The post requires he takes holy orders

1534

Michelangelo relocates to Rome to paint the *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel. Clement VII dies in September. Alessandro Farnese (1468–1549) is elected pope and assumes the name Paul III. He continues to support Michelangelo's commission

1536

Michelangelo and Sebastiano fall out, apparently over the painting technique for the *Last Judgement* (finished 1541)

1547

On 21 June Sebastiano dies aged 62 and is buried at Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome. Michelangelo is appointed architect of St Peter's, a project he will work on for the rest of his life

1550

The first edition of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* is published. Its biography of Michelangelo contains the artist's disparaging remarks about Sebastiano. These are instrumental in diminishing Sebastiano's posthumous reputation

1564

On 18 February Michelangelo dies aged 88. He is buried in the church of Santa Croce, Florence

EVENTS

For more information and bookings please visit nationalgallery.org.uk/michelangelo-sebastiano-events

SWT Sainsbury Wing Theatre
SWMP Sainsbury Wing Guided
Tour Meeting Point

LUNCHTIME TALKS

Free talks by experts

Curator's Introduction

Monday 20 March

1–1.45pm

Location: SWT

Speaker: Matthias Wivel

The Rome of Michelangelo and Sebastiano

Monday 27 March

1–1.45pm

Location: SWT

Speaker: Paul Strathern

Michelangelo and Sebastiano:

An alliance of opposites

Monday 3 April

1–1.45pm

Location: SWT

Speaker: Martin Gayford

The Roman career of Sebastiano:

Michelangelo and beyond

Monday 10 April

1–1.45pm

Location: SWT

Speaker: Piers Baker-Bates

IN CONVERSATION

Invited guests in discussion

Marc Quinn in conversation

Friday 31 March

6.30–7.30pm

Location: SWT

Tickets: £7/£6 conc./£5 Members

Leading British sculptor Marc Quinn discusses how the work of Michelangelo has inspired his own creative practice.

LECTURES

Talks by Gallery experts

Introductory lecture

Thursday 23 March, 13 April &

11 May 11.30am–12.30pm

Location: SWT

Speakers: Gayna Pelham,

Richard Stemp & Siân Walters.

Tickets £6/£5 conc./£4 Members

(per lecture)

Enhance your visit to *The Credit Suisse Exhibition: Michelangelo & Sebastiano* with an hour-long introductory lecture given by a Gallery expert.

COURSES

Tutored learning led by experts

A meeting of minds: Michelangelo, Raphael, Sebastiano

Thursday 18, 25 May & 1 June

11am – 1pm

Location: SWT

Tutor: Siân Walters

Tickets: £42/£36 conc./£34 Members

Learn about the monumental achievements of Michelangelo, Raphael and Sebastiano over three weekly sessions.

WORKSHOPS

Participatory, creative or practical sessions

Drawing Michelangelo: The meaning of life

Friday 24 March

6.15–8.15pm

Location: SWT

Tutor: Gayna Pelham

Tickets: £10/£8 conc./£7 Members

Take inspiration from Michelangelo's depictions of Christ as you work from a draped male model, and be guided in techniques to capture the human form using light, shade and perspective.

SPECIAL FRIDAY LATES

Celebratory evenings of music, events and activities

Renaissance Late

Friday 19 May

6–9pm

Locations: Various

Enjoy a night of music and special events inspired by *The Credit Suisse Exhibition: Michelangelo & Sebastiano*.

START THE WEEKEND

Learn about art in a sociable environment

The shadow of the evening

Friday 21 April

6.30–7.30pm

Location: SWMP

Speakers: Olivia Armstrong

Tickets: £12/£10 conc./£8 Members

Relax in a closed-off room in the Gallery, and enjoy the spellbinding story of Michelangelo's creative friendship with Sebastiano and his intense rivalry with Raphael.

INFORMATION

EXHIBITION OPENING HOURS

Open daily 10am–6pm, (last admission 5.15pm)
Friday until 9pm (last admission 8.15pm)
No readmission

MULTIMEDIA AUDIOGUIDE

£4 / £3.50 concessions

SHOPS

Open daily 10am–5.45pm, Fridays until 8.45pm
nationalgallery.org.uk

EATING AND DRINKING THE NATIONAL DINING ROOMS

Level 1, Sainsbury Wing Entrance
Daily 10am–5pm, Fridays until 8.30pm

THE NATIONAL CAFÉ

Level 0, Getty/St Martin's Place entrances
Monday–Friday 8am–11pm, Saturdays
10am–11pm, Sundays 10am–6pm

THE ESPRESSO BAR

Level 0, Getty/St Martin's Place Entrances
Daily 10am–5.30pm, Fridays until 8.45pm

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