

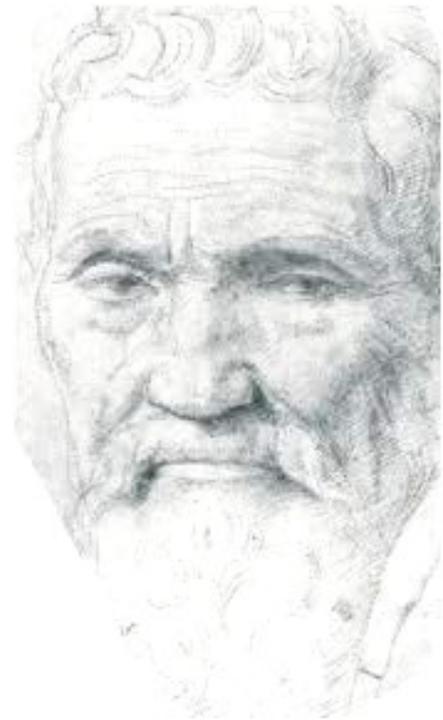
# Michelangelo di Bounarroti

**B. 6 March 1475**

Caprese, Tuscany, Italy

**D: 18 February 1564**

Rome, Papal States, Italy



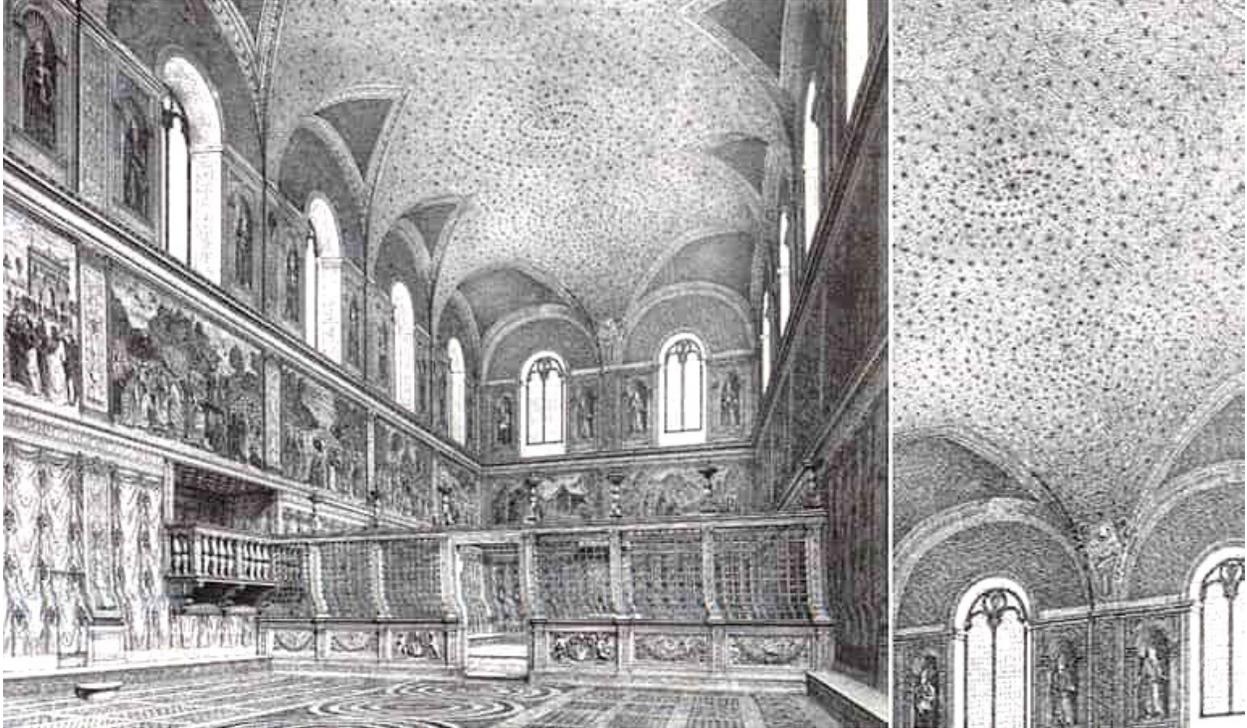
Michelangelo's father wanted the boy to be a lawyer but the young boy kept escaping school to draw the things he saw in and around Florence's Cathedral. It is Michelangelo who named Ghiberti's doors the "Gates of Paradise". Eventually, Michelangelo's dad got tired of constantly retrieving his son and apprenticed him to a painter.

A year after his apprenticeship, Michelangelo was placed in the home of the Medici family, and schooled alongside the Medici children and nephews. Two of these schoolmates later became Pope Leo X (the one who excommunicated Martin Luther) and Pope Clement VII (the one who publicly approved Nicholas Copernicus's laws of planetary motion and also denied English King Henry VIII his divorce—thus sparking England's break from Rome.) Both hired Michelangelo for various projects.

While he was trained in drawing and painting, sculpture was his passion—though today he is most known for two paintings he hated creating—the Sistine Chapel's ceiling and Last Judgement on the Sistine altar wall. He never trained in FRESCO, however, the technique of painting on fresh plaster, and learned on the job—while screwing up and having to start all over as techniques didn't work, mold and mildew set in and plaster didn't set correctly. Several times, he nearly gave up early in despair.

Michelangelo did not lay on his back for this assignment. (That image is due to the 1965 movie, "The Agony and the Ecstasy") He built a bridge across the chapel from one wall to the other, leaving the floor free for services to continue.

Michelangelo painted one side of the Sistine Chapel, then unveiled it before moving his scaffold. Once seeing his work on the floor, he realized the scenes with LOTS of human figures were difficult to see (Noah's Flood). So he limited these scenes on the other half of the ceiling (God creates Adam) and made the human figures bigger. Incidentally, the artist **Raphael** tried to snatch the commission to the second half of the Sistine Chapel away from Michelangelo. Thankfully, the Pope refused and told Raphael to work on his own projects in his own assigned area of Rome.



An engraving of the Sistine Chapel before Michelangelo's work. You can see the star-spangled sky. The reason the ceiling was re-done was an underground water leak caused the foundations to shift under the chapel. They were shored up—but in the process, the ceiling's plaster cracked and fell. Rather than repaint the usual starry sky, Pope Julius II chose Michelangelo, the sculptor, to paint the 12 apostles.

Michelangelo was less than thrilled with this assignment. A church ceiling was usually assigned to lesser artists, not master craftsmen. He asked Julius II to create his own plan for the ceiling, and Julius, eager to keep the temperamental artist from fleeing Rome under the cover of darkness—AGAIN—agreed.



Michelangelo learned to write (and loved to write!) poetry while he studied with the Medici family. This sketch was included alongside a letter he wrote to his friend, Giovanni da Piostioia in poem form about how much he hated this project and how much pain it caused him.

Here are a couple of the stanzas from this letter/poem:

*“My beard toward heaven, I feel  
the back of my brain*

*Upon my neck, I grow the breast  
of a Harpy*

*My brush, above my face  
continually*

*Makes [for] a splendid floor by  
dripping down”*

And later...

*“Giovanni, come to the rescue  
Of my dead painting now, and of  
my honor*

*I’m not in a good place and I am  
no painter*



*Michelangelo's diagrammatic sketch for the scaffolding.*

Michelangelo arrived in Rome to find the Pope's Architect, Donato Bramante, had designed a system of platforms on pulleys anchored to the ceiling by hooks. Michelangelo asked how the hooks would be removed and how he could paint around the hooks without leaving holes.

Bramante told him if he didn't like the solution already prepared, figure out a better one, and left.

Michelangelo realized if the chapel was a RIVER then the walls could act like pilings or anchors. If he attached the scaffold to the walls and made an arched bridge, he would leave the floor clear while he worked. (a condition of Pope Julius.)

The holes Michelangelo used to anchor his bridged scaffold still exist, and were used to anchor the restoration scaffold in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*(Above: Michelangelo's sketch of the Sistine Chapel's ceiling scaffold.*

*Below: The Restoration Scaffold using the same anchor holes Michelangelo drilled into the walls (virtually out of sight just above the windows) and using a similar design-look at the difference between the cleaned and uncleaned sections of the ceiling.)*





Sketches for the Libyan Sybil. Note how many times Michelangelo drew details he was unhappy with—like the big toe, the left hand, and the torso. There were no erasers, so he just moved over slightly. Despite the fact this is meant to be a female figure, Michelangelo nearly always used male models, hence the extreme musculature.