



# 50 MICHELANGELO

1475 - 1564

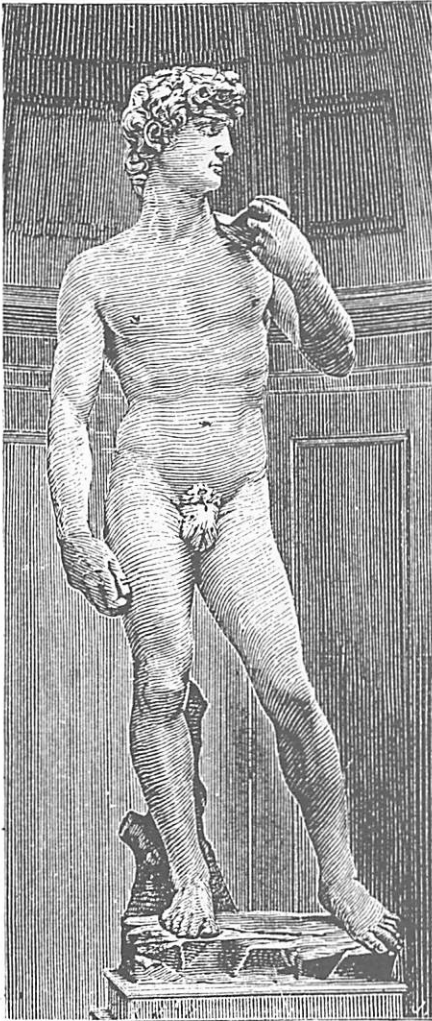
The great Renaissance artist Michelangelo Buonarroti is the outstanding figure in the history of the visual arts. A brilliant painter, sculptor, and architect, Michelangelo left behind an assortment of masterpieces which have impressed viewers for over four centuries. His work profoundly influenced the subsequent development of European painting and sculpture.

Michelangelo was born in 1475, in the town of Caprese, Italy, about forty miles from Florence. He showed talent at an early age, and at thirteen he was apprenticed to the famous painter Ghirlandaio, in Florence. When Michelangelo was fifteen, he was taken to live in the Medici palace, almost as a member of the family, by Lorenzo the Magnificent, the ruler of Florence, who

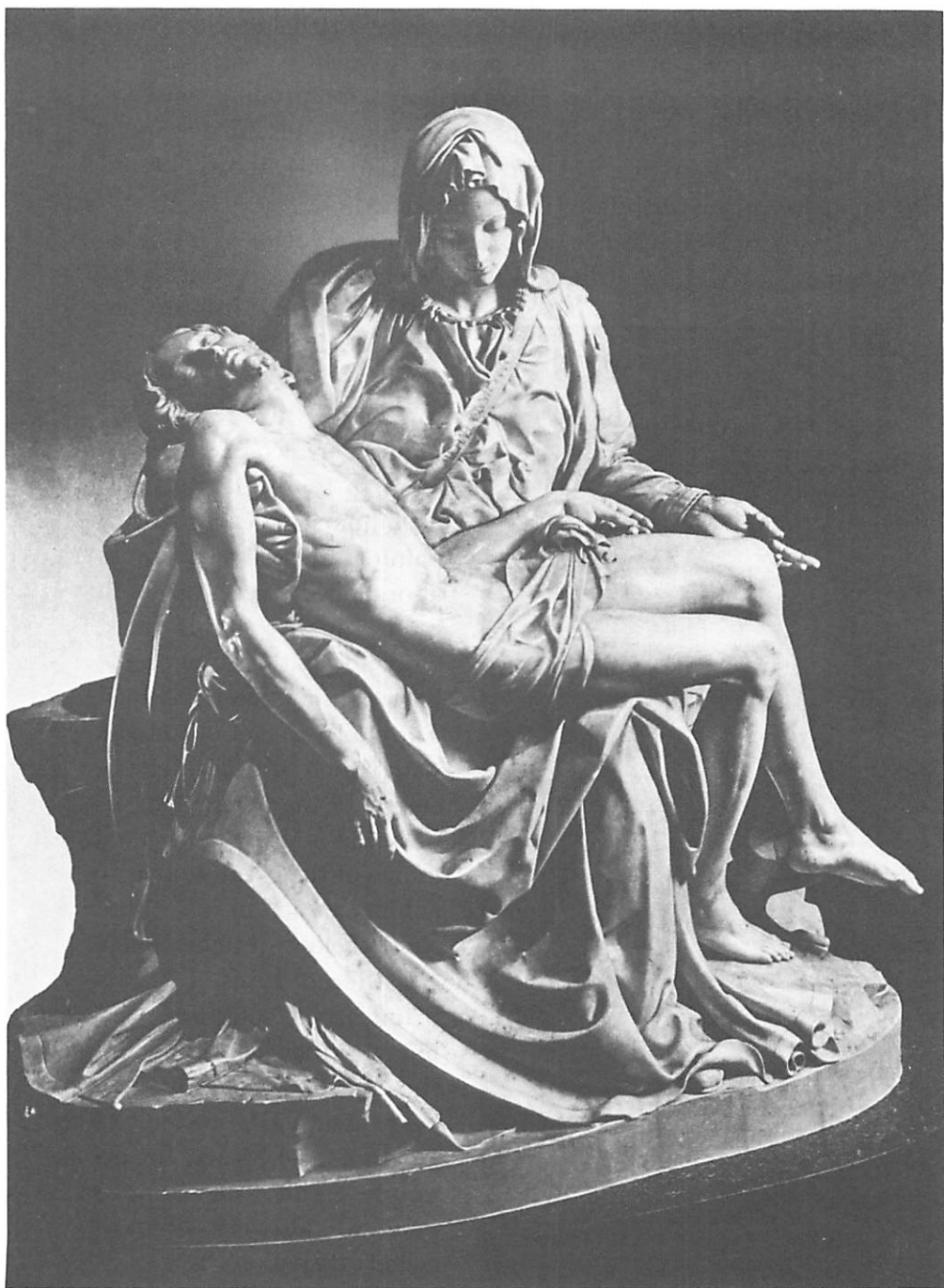
became his patron. Throughout his career, Michelangelo's enormous talent was obvious, and he was frequently commissioned by popes and secular rulers alike, to design and produce works of art. Although he lived in various places, most of his life was spent in Rome and Florence. He died in Rome, in 1564, shortly before his eighty-ninth birthday. He never married.

Although he was not quite as universal a genius as his older contemporary, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo's versatility is still extremely impressive.

He was the only artist, indeed, perhaps the only person, ever to reach the highest peaks of achievement in two separate fields of human endeavor. As a painter, Michelangelo ranks at or near the very top, both in the quality of his finest work and in the influence he has had upon later painters. The enormous set of frescoes with which he decorated the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome is justly celebrated as one of the greatest artistic achievements of all time. Nevertheless, Michelangelo considered himself to be primarily a sculptor, and many critics consider him the greatest sculptor who ever lived. His statues of David and of Moses, for example, and the famous *Pietà*, are all works of unexcelled artistry.



*The "David," in the Accademia in Florence.*

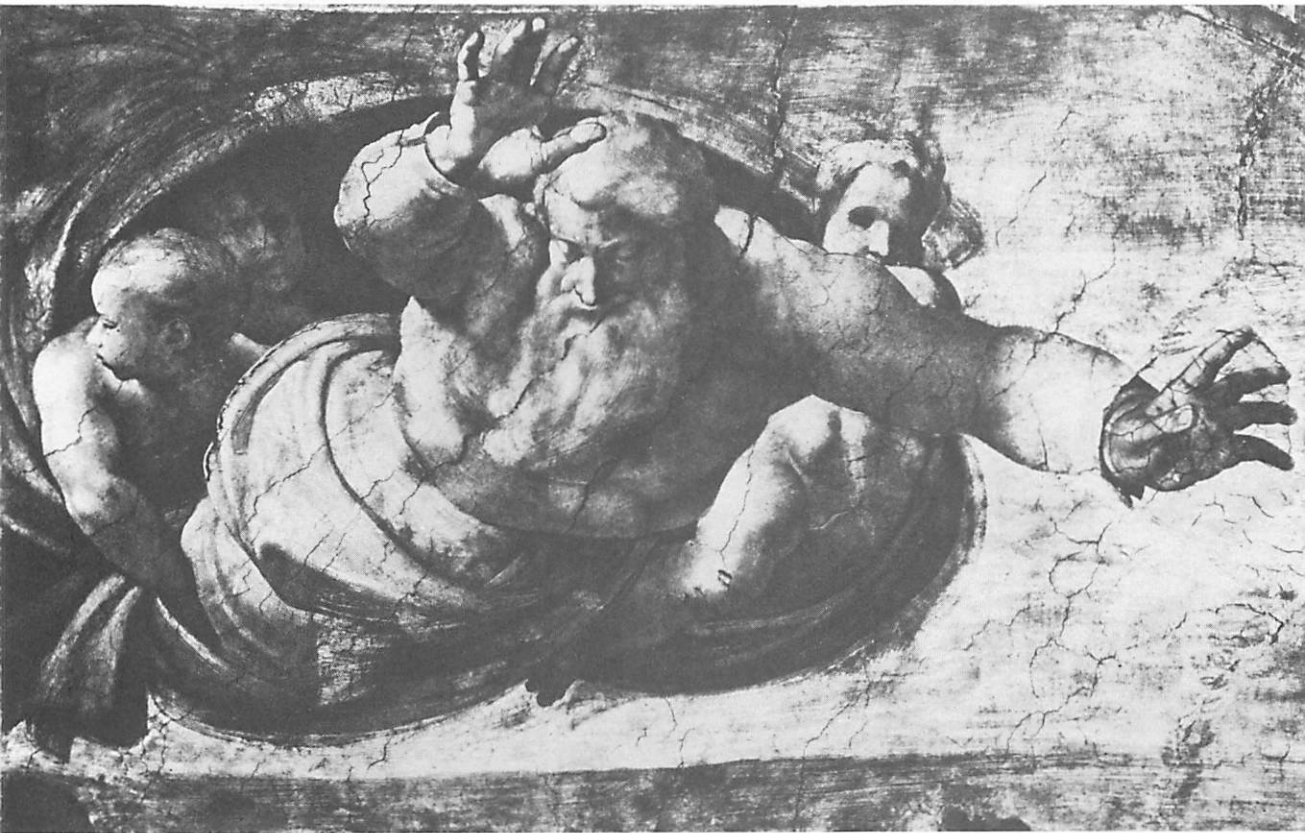


*The "Pietà," in the Vatican in Rome.*

Michelangelo was also a highly talented architect. Among his well-known achievements in this field is the design of the Medici Chapel in Florence. For a good many years, he was also the chief architect of St. Peter's in Rome.

Michelangelo composed many poems during his lifetime, some 300 of which survive. His numerous sonnets and other poems were not published until well after his death. They provide considerable insight into his personality, and clearly show that he was a talented poet.

As I have explained in the article on Shakespeare, it is my belief that art and artists in general have had comparatively little influence upon human history and everyday life. It is for that reason that Michelangelo, despite his eminence as an artistic genius, appears lower on this list than many scientists and inventors, many of whom are far less famous than he.



*"God Dividing the Waters from the Earth," section of the Sistine Chapel ceiling.*