

Michelangelo's Art Through Michelangelo's Eyes

PART **ONE** of THREE

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Michelangelo thought he was divine. His contemporaries called him *Il Divino* and he was modest enough (depending on your outlook) to recognize that he alone could not create his works but that God guided his hand. He was proficient in sculpture, painting and poetry and, like Leonardo, was an expert anatomist, dissecting numerous bodies in an age when the human interior was largely unexplored. As for his painting, the frescoes in the Sistine chapel have been studied by every subsequent great artist either in the original or through one of many reproductive engravings. Yet what Michelangelo saw in his work was quite different from what the Pope and his contemporaries saw, or from what art scholars see today. His visual perception, not surprisingly, was special. Most experts assume, naturally enough, that Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* depicts the Last Judgment though it is known that a Resurrection was the original commission. Yet there was no precedent in a scene of the Last Judgment for including fictional characters from Dante's *Comedy* nor a Christ who is blond and smooth-shaven, nor, far more improbably, angels *without* wings. A strangely passive Mary is most unusual while a saint holding his *own* flayed skin looks nothing like himself. Then there is the Old Testament character who, though hung in the Bible, is crucified by Michelangelo without any holes for the nails. This cannot be error because great masters do not make mistakes in their masterpieces. Only we do, in interpreting them. As for the vast amount of inappropriate and full frontal

nudity.....you get the picture: not much makes sense. Despite all these problems, discrepancies and more, the world persists in seeing a poetic illustration of the Last Judgment. Michelangelo, I discovered eight years ago, did not.

In discussing Michelangelo's *oeuvre* this three-part article will focus on the first, often overlooked, step in establishing the aesthetic value of a work of art: what are we looking at? Without correct visual perception, any attempt at interpretation is worthless. Indeed the prevailing belief that there are many equally valid ways of viewing a picture misleads. What the artist saw and what he intended must take precedence over all other interpretations. Good scholarship should first describe that, the artist's viewpoint, a task easily accomplished for a mere painter who copies external reality but much more difficult in the case of a great master.¹

Each article in this series aims to be concise, presenting a lot of new information in a few pages. This will require readers to look through filters, switching back and forth between various levels of perception. Children delight in such optical tricks, particularly when they discover that the entrenched perception of an adult finds the task difficult. Experts usually dismiss such 'games' preferring to analyze the mind of a contemporary viewer, generally a writer or poet, whom they believe will have a more revealing understanding of the artwork than, say, another artist. All the evidence suggests that this premise is false. Only a mind with a keen *visual* sense can see the art in great art; a literary mind without that sense is useless.² To start demonstrating this we will begin by explaining what you *ought* to see in *The Last Judgment* as opposed to what writers *have* seen. This will lead to some stunning revelations on the ceiling which, in turn, will take us back to Michelangelo's preparatory sketches to prove that what has been shown in the mural was

indeed his principal objective. In the third part a broader selection of Michelangelo's works will be examined with similarly dramatic results.



Fig. 1 Michelangelo, *The Last Judgment*

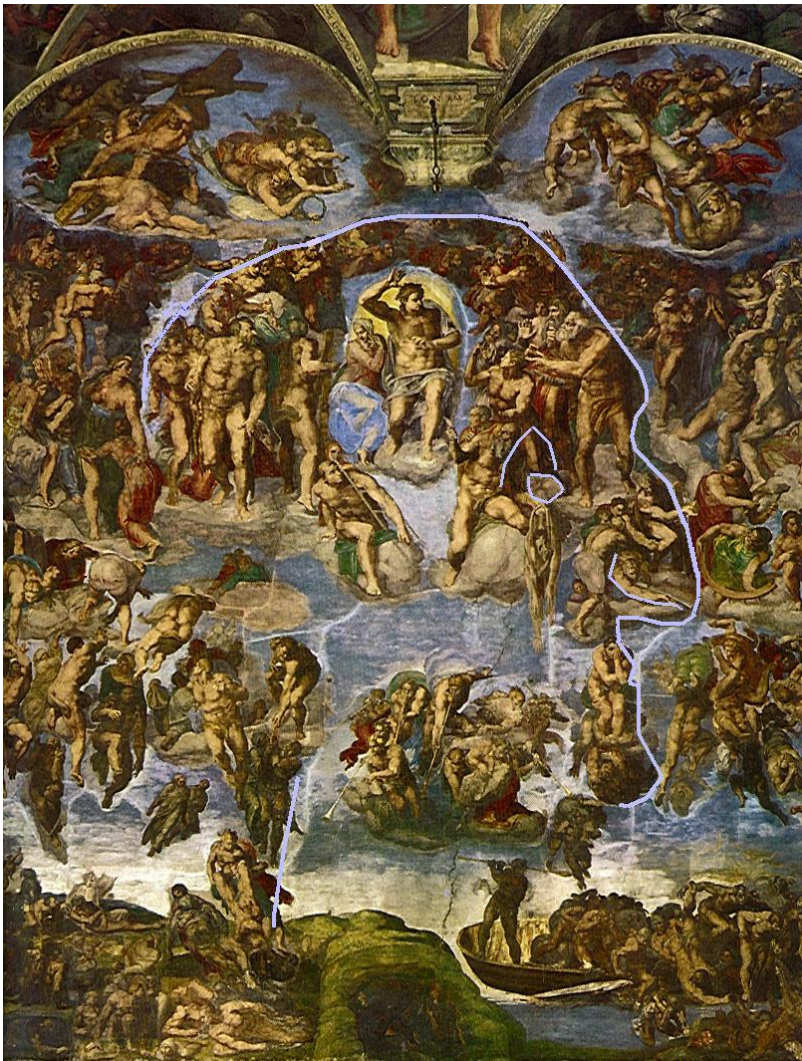


Fig. 2 Diagram of *Last Judgment*

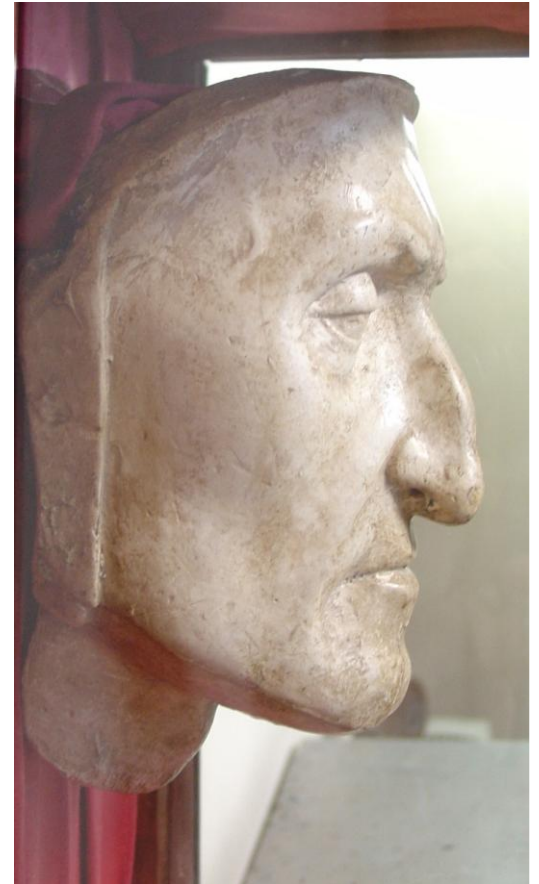


Fig. 3 Life-mask of Dante Alighieri

The gap between what viewers see in *The Last Judgment* and the real scene is stark. It is not a view of Judgment Day when all souls who have ever lived will be consigned to heaven or hell for eternity. Michelangelo would not have painted such a one-dimensional scene. What he actually depicted is a literal and imaginative view inside the mind of a divine poet in the throes of artistic creation. Thus, dominating this scene of creative struggle, is a profile of Michelangelo's great master and muse, Dante Alighieri. Compare the mural behind the altar in fig. 1 to the diagram in fig. 2 and you will see the giant silhouette of the Florentine poet's distinctive profile (fig. 3) is formed from a multitude of figures. Note how each group of figures in their own space produce a

communal contour, which links them by and large to that of the next group.³ By this method Michelangelo created a continuous line. It starts half-way up on the left at the back of Dante's head, goes up and over his crown, down his forehead, nose, mouth and chin until it comes to a halt in the front near the base of his neck. Up in the center of Dante's brain exactly where you would expect Him – if He were there at all – is Jesus Christ orchestrating the scene. No wonder Christ, silhouetted by a golden aureole, resembles Apollo, god of the Sun and the arts. This beardless and blond Apollonian Christ is that spark of divinity in Dante's mind that Neo-Platonists and mystics recognize in all matter. Once Dante's profile is seen, all previous interpretations appear to be what they are: descriptions of the surface scene, of the layer intended for popular and ecclesiastical consumption.

This stunning observation was not made yesterday but in 1951 by a Venezuelan diplomat. It should rank in significance with the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb but has inexcusably been forgotten, ignored. Although Joaquín Díaz González wrote a book about it in Italian, published in two editions, only *three* other scholars to my knowledge have mentioned this insight in print, the last time thirty-five years ago. ⁴ Academics agree, however, that Michelangelo modeled his life on Dante. Paul Barolsky, an insightful specialist on the artist, has written:

“It has often been said that Michelangelo portrayed himself in the subjects of his work He assumed the identities of the subject of the works he made.....No artist before him was so autobiographical in his art as he was – although the seeds for his creation of himself, of his own life, were sown by Dante.”

This means that Michelangelo imagined himself *as Dante*. Dante on the wall of the Sistine Chapel is an *alter ego* of the poetic painter. Barolsky goes on to describe Michelangelo's “*imitatio Dantis*”, how he is “imitating Dante in a deep sense.” He further observes the artist's many references to

Dante *within* the *Last Judgment* and how Giorgio Vasari in his description of the mural:

“completes Michelangelo’s allusions to all three parts of Dante’s work, implying that in creating his grandiose apocalyptic image Michelangelo had created a work comparable in sheer scope to Dante’s entire poem.”⁵

Michelangelo’s passion for Dante was such that he committed much of the *Divine Comedy* to memory and was considered an authority on the poet’s works in old age.



Fig. 4 Michelangelo, *Last Judgment* (Detail of self-portrait in flayed skin. The cloud of “Dante’s eye” is inside the orange ring)

For some time after learning this I presumed that

Michelangelo’s model for Dante’s profile was a painted portrait though many, then as now, were posthumous and lacked

character. Then I discovered a life-mask of Dante in the Palazzo Vecchio (fig. 3). It was reportedly made when Dante was a

public official and, if authentic, must have been the mask

Michelangelo used for Dante’s profile in the *Last Judgment*. Its

contour around the nostrils and brow is very similar to that in the fresco and there are marks on this mask that Michelangelo made reference to in other works. It was chilling to realize as I peered closely at this small object, seemingly neglected in an empty corridor of the Palazzo Vecchio, that Michelangelo probably peered at it likewise long before. The remainder of Dante’s outline is approximate because while Michelangelo intended great masters to see it, he must have wanted it to remain well hidden from others. Nevertheless, some other details are precise. The ‘eye’, significantly in “the central, most brightly lit section”⁶ of the wall, is represented where it should be by a roundish cloud resembling rock (inside the orange oval in fig. 4.) Appropriately for an eye, it is more or less circular, made of dream-like material (cloud) and suggestive of the artist’s favorite medium (stone). This cloud must be the ‘eye’ because three of the mural’s principal figures surround it, including one holding his own self-portrait. Below the little cloud

is a larger one whose left contour and shape delineates the cheek-bone, a prominent feature of Michelangelo's face, less so of Dante's.

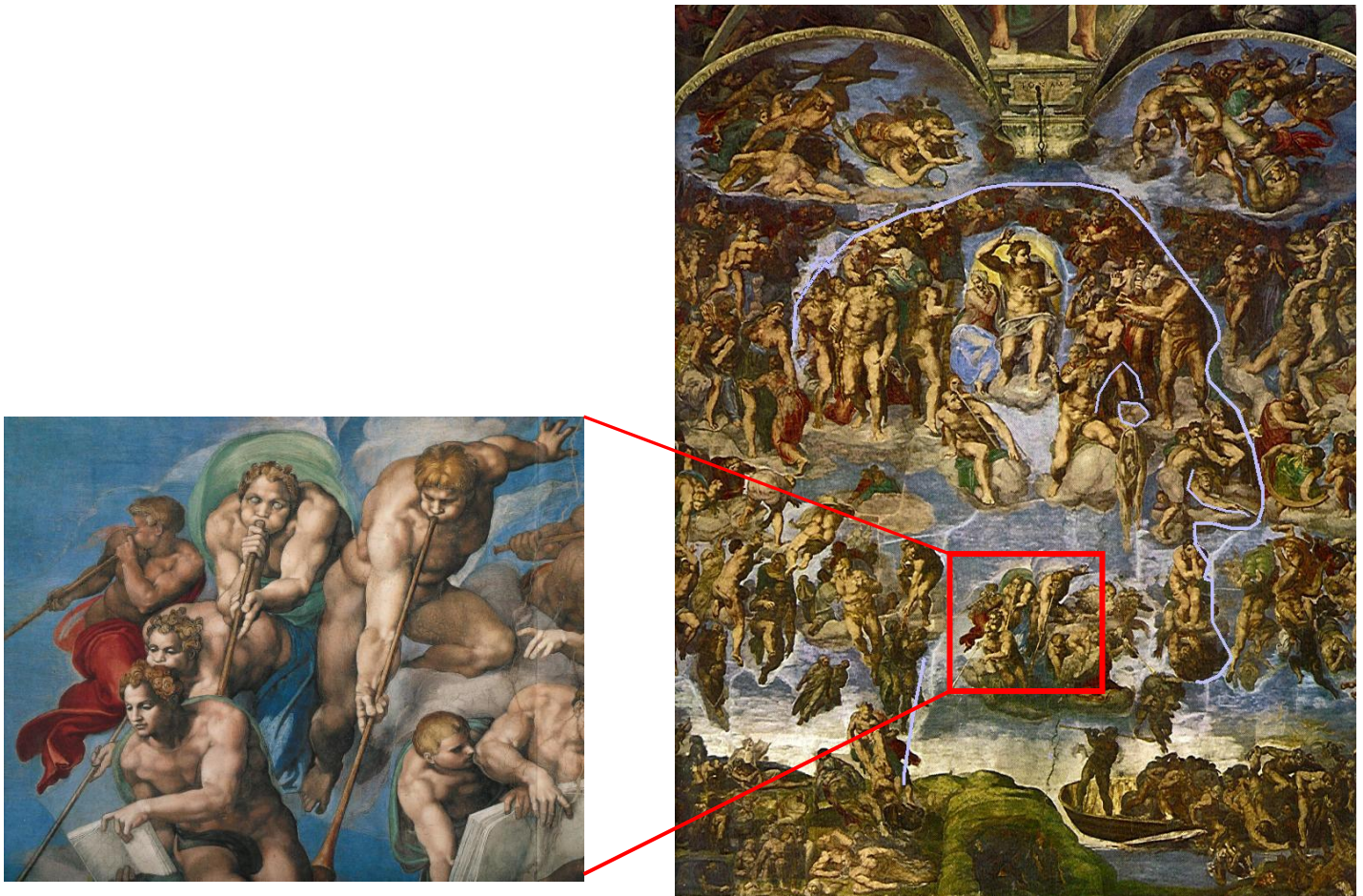


Fig. 5 Michelangelo, Detail of trumpeters in *Last Judgment* and their position within Dante's "throat area" of the facial outline

The final evidence within the mural, besides the direct references to Dante, is that the trumpeters lower down get their breath, so to speak, from being close to his 'throat' and 'wind-pipe' (fig.5). It was thought at the time that wind instruments, powered by breath, unleashed the passions (as opposed to stringed instruments which were spiritually uplifting.)⁷ Here the trumpeters may well refer to the passions because they compositionally balance and are directly below Christ/Apollo in the brain, clear symbol of Reason.

The Inner Organs of the Sistine Chapel

A skeptical spectator, wanting further confirmation that Christ appears within Dante's brain, need only look up at the ceiling to notice that Michelangelo had a habit of depicting God *inside a brain*. There Michelangelo's God, painted thirty years earlier, creates Adam. He, too, is depicted in a slice of gray matter, a sort of great master's brain scan with divinity inside. The artist used knowledge gained from his dissections to form the cloak around God into the hemispheric shape of a *cerebral cortex* (figs. 6-7). Thus, while scholars have often focussed on the hands, Michelangelo really emphasized *the hand's dependence on the mind* and how *in the creation of art* both work as one.

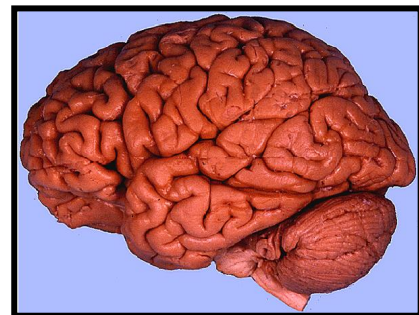
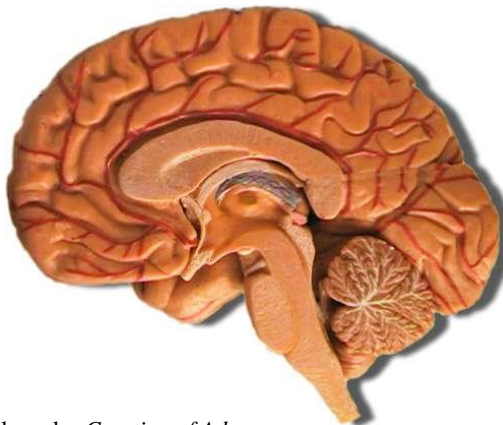
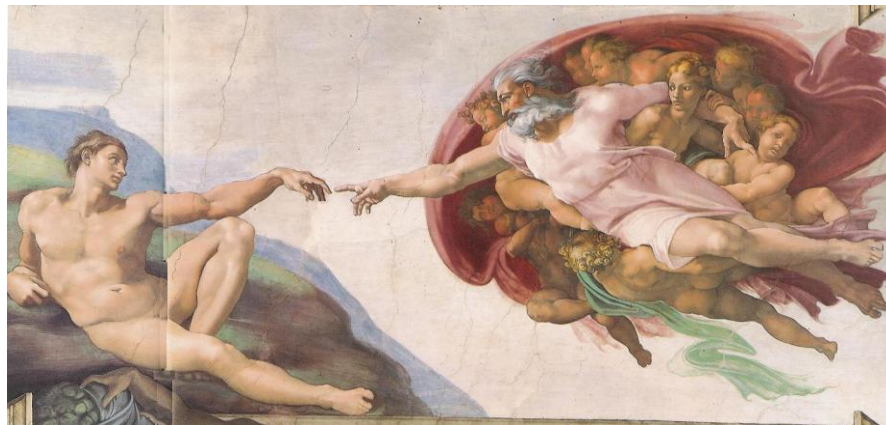


Fig. 6 Michelangelo, *Creation of Adam*

Fig. 7(below) Two 3-D models of the cerebral cortex



Fig. 8 (right) Image from homepage of *neurosurgeon.com*

The cortex's discovery was also published long ago, by a neurosurgeon in 1990, and the accuracy of the cortex's contour includes precise medical detail.⁸ As Dr. Meshberger the discoverer described it:

"the angel's backs is the pons,..the legs and hips are the spinal cord... The knee of the flexed right leg of the angel.. represents the transected optic chiasm, the thigh the optic nerve and the leg itself the optic tract..."

The homepage of *www.neurosurgeon.com* now uses this image (fig. 8). Their viewers need no explanation of what they are looking at and they are provided none. Though the doctor's insight was published in newspapers and on television around the world and is still discussed on the web, I have yet to find a single published comment on this in the fifteen years since. The brain, representing the perfect mind, is not just any mind but the ultimate artist's. He left a clue, as if we needed one. The blond figure holding up the whole confection, including God, is the Archangel Michael... Michael Angelo.



Fig. 9 Michelangelo, *God Separating the Waters from the Firmament*

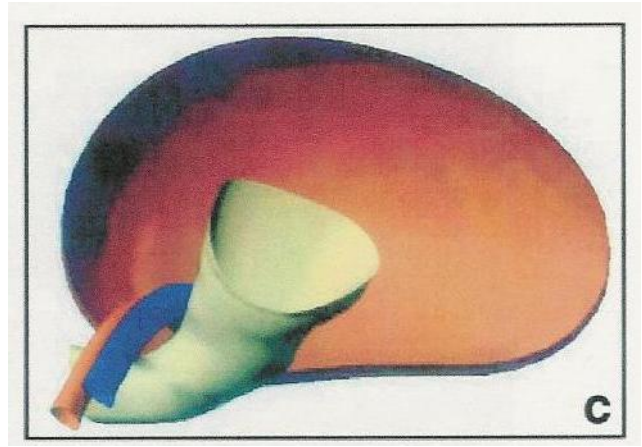


Fig. 10 Anatomical diagram of a kidney

Should there be any doubt in turn about this finding, consider another panel on the ceiling, *God Separating the Waters from the Firmament*. A nephrologist, a medical specialist in kidneys, demonstrated five years ago that the shape of God's cloak is that of a right bi-sected kidney with God appearing from the ureter (fig. 9-10.) The details are such that the renal artery and vein (blue and red pipe in the diagram) are accurately represented in the ends of the cloak near the hand of his assistant. What does a kidney do? It separates liquid from matter, or in Michelangelo's poetic mind, waters from the firmament.⁹ The two doctors were apparently unaware of each other's findings and Michelangelo scholars, as far as I can tell, have made no mention of either.

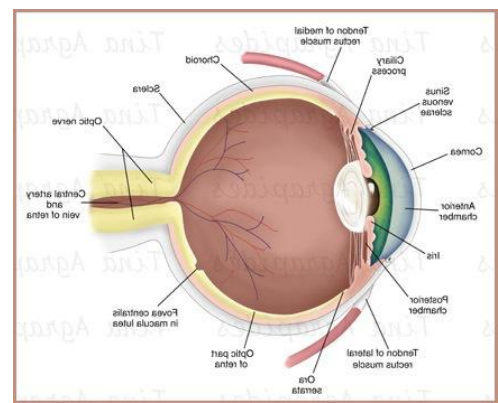


Fig. 11 Michelangelo, *Jonah* (Sistine ceiling)

Given Michelangelo's expertise in dissection and vast knowledge of the body's interior, he is unlikely to have restricted his use of inner organs on the ceiling to just the cortex and the kidney. I found one within five minutes of looking for more. The figure of Jonah dominates the chapel from his central position on the far wall as one enters (fig. 11). He is also the largest and the only one of the otherwise heavily-cloaked prophets stripped down to his loincloth and vest without book or scroll.¹⁰ Like all the figures, he represents Michelangelo, this time at work. His strange position, the subject of much commentary, is clearly one an artist might take while painting the ceiling sitting on a scaffold and leaning back to get more paint from his non-existent palette on the ledge. In place of brush and palette his fingers form the profile of a head like that of his assistant (figs. 12-14). The negative 'profile' is a 'mental image' of what he might or has 'painted'.



The real putto's outspread hand is placed prominently in front of the only flowing drapery in the panel (fig. 15). Knowing that Michelangelo continually refers to the unity of his eye and hand, I easily guessed that the drapery behind the hand is an anatomical diagram of the optic system. Michelangelo depicted the cornea and anterior chamber; the large tail of drapery is the optic nerve; and the thin piece of drapery flying at top is the tendon of the medial rectus muscle (figs. 15-16).



Discovery would have taken much longer had I not known and agreed with the findings of those two doctors nor known of Michelangelo's interest in eye and hand. Knowing both, it took no time at all. Current orthodoxy concerning an artwork's meaning wrongly privileges the viewer's perception when it is from the artist's vantage-point, not the spectator's, that one can most easily unravel a great picture.

Proof Drawn from Michelangelo's Sketches

The main subject of the *Last Judgment*, regardless of subsequent theological and philosophical interpretations, is a depiction of inner reality as a soul seeks perfection. The few remaining studies clearly demonstrate this. Michelangelo obscured the paper trail of his thoughts by destroying preparatory drawings during his lifetime and many of the rest just before his death. Would the Pope have ordered destruction of his work in the Sistine chapel had he discovered the secret? Perhaps. In the extant studies though, Michelangelo's intentions are clear even if, as in the finished works, they have remained unseen. In one sketch "a bearded head" suspiciously similar to Michelangelo's own replaces Dante's (figs. 17-19).¹¹ The eyeballs and pupils are clearly marked, one eye seemingly with wings (fig. 20). Christ emerges from this head like Athena from Zeus', a likely scenario because the two ideas fuse a God with a goddess, Christian and pagan.



Fig. 17 Michelangelo, Study for the *Last Judgment*
(with eyes and eyebrows indicated)



Fig. 18 Marcello Venusti (attrib.), *Portrait of Michelangelo*



Fig. 19 Michelangelo, Study for the *Last Judgment* (See fig. 17 for diagram)



Fig. 20 Detail of left “eye” in fig. 18

The fusion of a God with a goddess, even as here in a disguised idea, raises the issue of Michelangelo’s muscular women. Earlier commentators thought that they were examples of his passion for the male body; the result of using a male model; or an attempt to denounce sensuality through suppressing the distinction between the sexes.¹² My ten years of research have proved, though, that this characteristic of Michelangelo’s women represents the androgynous nature of the perfect mind and that of God. “A man in a woman, or rather a god, speaks through her mouth” is what the artist said of the elderly woman who late in life became his muse.¹³ Androgyny is a prerequisite of perfection. Michelangelo’s women are not historical characters or individuals; they are ways of thinking about himself, characters who peopled his mindscape. His own creative powers, a mystery to himself as to everyone else, are symbolized by the mysteriously creative power of the womb. Male strength, the other characteristic of Michelangelo’s women, symbolizes both the mental and physical power needed to carve marble or paint a ceiling. Until the viewer recognizes that Michelangelo’s women are internal representations of his own androgynous powers, any interpretation of his art will be far off the mark.

One more compositional sketch for the *Last Judgment* includes a smaller head, bearded and looking in the other direction (figs. 21-22). The Christ-figure (shaded in the diagram) looks downwards directly between the head's eyes. Across the rest of the sheet are smaller figures, some, if not all of which, are also attempts to make faces out of their torsos and limbs.



Fig. 21 Michelangelo, Study for the *Last Judgment*

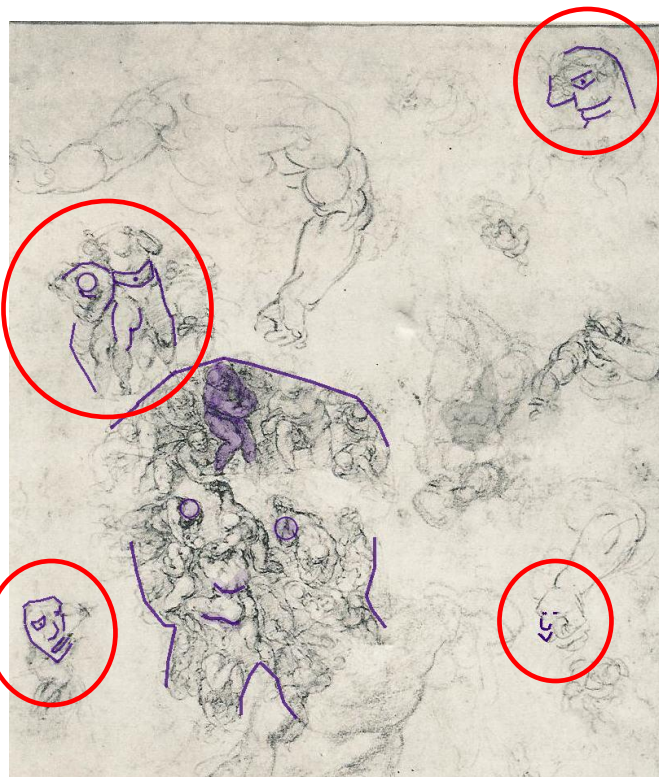


Fig. 22 Diagram of fig. 21 (Additional faces circled and outlined)



Fig. 23 Michelangelo, Profile of Base for the Medici Chapel (detail)



Fig. 24 Michelangelo, Profiles of Cornices for the Laurentian Library (detail)

Until now the only “known” evidence, accepted by scholars that is, of Michelangelo’s penchant for making faces out of something else are two simple, architectural sketches in which he added “eyes” to cornices (figs. 23-24). Seemingly of little substance, their significance has been missed. Of course, the process Michelangelo used in the mural is far more subtle but other artists have also turned things into faces. Arcimboldo, the most famous example, was not only commissioned by Emperor Rudolf II to make such portraits but even portrayed his patron as a bunch of vegetables. Though Arcimboldo’s strange portraits appear to the modern eye like caricatures, scholars accept that there is hermetic and esoteric content in them, much still unrecognized, because the Emperor was a passionate alchemist whose court attracted hermeticists.

Michelangelo’s depiction of the inner workings of his mind should not be confused with the subject matter of psychoanalytic theory as used in art scholarship. Writers using that methodology describe evidence that can be linked to theories developed in the twentieth century, mostly of a biographical nature, initially following Freud; Jung’s more universal theories have never really caught on amongst art scholars though they have merit to them. Michelangelo, on the other hand, is only ever concerned with the source of creative power and a soul’s journey

towards perfection. In the *Last Judgment* he has used a Bible story as an allegory for both. As a Neo-Platonist (which he is assumed to have been), or even as a Christian mystic which he certainly was, he had to look inside himself to find truth. His experience as an artist would have made him well aware that our perception of the exterior world is deceptive and untrustworthy, and that reality must be searched for inside. "Know thyself" is the motto of all mystics.



Fig. 25 Michelangelo, *The Dream of Human Life*

This interior search is by no means confined to Michelangelo's depiction of the *Last Judgment* but pervades his *oeuvre*. Without knowing this, a viewer cannot understand Michelangelo's art and his images remain enigmas. No writer, for instance, has noted that in the drawing, *The Dream of Human Life*, the semi-circle of figures form the crown of the artist's head from the temples up (fig. 25). The trumpeting angel breaks through the skull at the fontanelle, the same point where Christ emerges in the prior sketch for the *Last Judgment*. The crack through

the crown was said to be the opening where the soul entered at birth and left at death. The open box supports this description of the drawing as the interior of Michelangelo's head because he

described his brain in a sonnet as “my memory-box”.¹⁴ Inside it are masks, the most prominent of which is a self-portrait. The others, including one with the ski-jump nose of his first patron, Lorenzo the Magnificent, represent some of the various characters he adopted in his imagination and art.

The sphere, suggestive of a globe and thus universality, is probably a third eye, the mind’s eye, the only organ, metaphorically speaking, capable of seeing reality. It was a shape then commonly used to depict how imagination worked in the mind (fig. 25). To Platonists and mystics, reality is not the exterior world. In the exterior world forms of animals, vegetables and other things are poor copies of the originals. Indeed it is imperfect copying that has resulted in individuality. Only the mind’s eye can see the *real* forms which never change. Thus, in portraying reality, Michelangelo had to sculpt and paint the perfect forms he “saw” inside his mind not the corrupt copies we see on the outside.



Fig. 26 Illustration of the Cell Doctrine from Albertus Magnus, *Philosophia Pauperum* (ed. 1506)



Fig. 27 Detail of 'head' on left of Michelangelo's *Dream*



Fig. 28 Diagram of fig. 27

As a final observation on this drawing it is worth noting that there are hidden faces in the jumble of figures forming the hair of the "head" (figs. 27-8). In the detail illustrated above a disembodied phallus forms the left eyebrow of a face, the pubic hair above the nose. One eye is formed by male buttocks while two torsos and a nipple form the other. These erotic building blocks around the eyes reinforce the theme of creativity, many verbal terms of which, such as *reproduction*, *conception* etc. are sexual in nature. By no coincidence, much mystical terminology is sexual in nature too.

Over the centuries there have been many attempts by subsequent artists to transform the *Last Judgment* into something new. To do so well, they *must* understand its meaning because there is a hidden logic in such a source that enhances the aesthetic quality of its offspring. Auguste Rodin, as one example, was an admirer of Michelangelo's art, fully aware of Michelangelo's theme. His

unfinished *The Gates of Hell* with its mass of twisting figures is even known to be based on the *Last Judgment* (figs. 29-30). Yet, although his celebrated figure overlooking the scene is universally known today as the *Thinker*, Rodin himself called it *The Poet*. And not just any poet, but Dante.

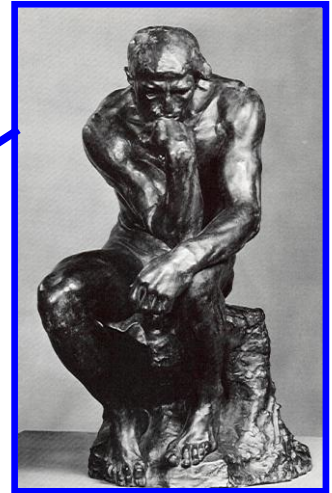


Fig. 29 (above) Rodin, *The Thinker*
Fig. 30 (left) Rodin, *The Gates of Hell*

The text so far might have left the impression that the *Last Judgment* has more to do with poetry than spirituality. The two are intimately connected and their lop-sided presentation here reflects the author's greater knowledge of art. The content of *The Last Judgment* is indeed supremely spiritual, mystical even. Ten years of research, though, have left me certain that Michelangelo did not read the Scriptures like we were taught to read them any more than he painted the orthodox theology of his patrons. Underlying the Scriptures, as in Dante's *Comedy* and his own art, is an allegorical level where a form of truth is to be found. It was never intended for everyone to recognize.

An allegorical reading of the Bible in which heaven represents the soul separated from matter and Hell represents the material world is a legacy of Platonic thinking. It is perfectly in tune with Neoplatonic beliefs current in the Renaissance. This approach to the Bible, always alive in the Western tradition in one sect or another, does not primarily consider Jesus as a historical figure but as the perfect Man who when resurrected represents our own souls reunited with God. Many artists in the early twentieth century were known Theosophists and would have read the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, in a similar light. This strain of religious thought has often been ignored for obvious reasons and is still little known today though its adoption by celebrated thinkers throughout the ages suggests that it deserves far more attention from mainstream academia.

One believer with solid Establishment credentials has publicly dismissed a literal reading of the Bible:

“Who is so silly as to believe that God, after the manner of a farmer, “planted a paradise eastward in Eden,” and set in it a visible and palpable “tree of life”, of such a sort that anyone who tasted its fruit with his bodily teeth would gain life:

and again that one could partake of “good and evil” by masticating the fruit taken from the tree of that name? And when God is said to “walk in the paradise in the cool of the day” and Adam to hide himself behind a tree, I do not think anyone will doubt that these are figurative expressions which indicate certain mysteries through a semblance of history and not through actual events.”¹⁵

The writer was Origen, born just 150 years after Christ. He became a bishop and the Church’s first theologian, the first to grapple with Christian concepts intellectually. He is regarded to this day as one of the most distinguished Fathers of the early Christian Church. Most importantly, for our purposes, he was a Platonist, as were other Church Fathers.

I am reluctant to pursue Michelangelo’s theology much further but it is important to show what appears to be happening in the so-called *Last Judgment*. All the figures in Michelangelo’s mural represent aspects of himself, not as a human being but as Adam or Everyman whose creation on the ceiling set in motion the universal cycle on the wall to which, on a mystical level, all souls aspire. These characteristics proceed in a circular motion around the wall, falling on the right side from heaven into hell before struggling to return to the area of the Elect once more on the left, to the original Eden. Moreover unlike contemporary depictions of the Last Judgment Michelangelo did not distinguish clearly between who was saved and who was damned. Here the damned will be saved because they are all emanations of one and the same mind. There is no way, therefore, that this mural can be interpreted as a biblical Last Judgment when seen through Michelangelo’s mysticism. Academics describe Christ’s gesture as ambiguous because he is standing, rather than seated in judgment. He is only ambiguous because he represents both the judge in Man’s conscience and the resurrected soul, reborn, rising like the resurrected Christ. Anyone at all familiar with mysticism will recognize in this account the journey of the individual soul as it falls, newly entombed in a physical body, into the pain and misery of this world. In the

mind of a mystic the soul can then escape the bonds of exterior reality through reunion with the Godhead where, in a moment often described through erotic metaphor, the soul is *resurrected* from the Hell of this world and becomes reunited with the divine. This explains why the Virgin Mary's body clings intimately to Christ's as though in a foetal position; they are united in one androgynous Godhead. Michelangelo's Hell, like Dante's or William Blake's, is not evil, as it is in literal terms, but a cauldron through which the soul and the creative mind must pass to reach perfection. It is the soul's forge in the world we inhabit. The four hundred or so figures on the wall are not four hundred separate people but are, like Dante's cast of characters, four hundred separate representations of the same individual soul, the artistic soul shared by great artists and great prophets and which are here all represented by Dante, the great poet who on a narrative level consigned several real Popes to Hell.

In another sense, however, the mural is indeed a *Judgment*. *Judgment* and *judiciousness* as descriptors of aesthetic taste were far more widely used in the Renaissance than they are today. The *Judgment of Paris* was a popular myth about aesthetic judgment. A contemporary scholar, working with Michelangelo to preserve the Tuscan tongue, described him as "*judicious*" in comparing him to Dante. Another discussing novelty in Michelangelo's architecture wrote of architects having "*more judgment than the others [italics added]*".¹⁶ Thus the mural in allegorical terms may indeed have something to do with ultimate (*Last?*) *Judgment* in that the soul in reuniting with the Godhead creates ineffable Beauty. The mural, while not the Last Judgment that literal Bible readers expect, is also a *Resurrection*, the actual subject of the original papal commission. Mystics speak of the Resurrection of the soul when it reaches perfection, as depicted here. Today we speak of *born-again Christians* to mean those who "have seen the light". In contemporary parlance "born-again" merely implies a new stage in life, whereas Resurrection in

its truly mystical sense is the attainment of the ultimate goal beyond which no more spiritual progress is possible as it involves total immersion in God and obliteration of the ego.

For those more interested in art than spirituality, do not despair. In canonical art visual perception, which is the imaginative use of one's own eyes, provides aesthetic satisfaction on its own. Moreover, there are a lot more visual gymnastics to come. In the next part of this 3-part series we will unveil never-before-seen self-portraits in the most unexpected of places and discover that Michelangelo's knowledge of the body's interior was, like Leonardo's, far ahead of his time.



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NOTES

¹ The issue of interpretation versus observation is quite complex. Correct visual perception is only possible if you know what to expect. Many of the discoveries revealed in this article could not have been seen without guessing in advance what Michelangelo was up to and why. Thus some knowledge, however limited, of the artist's intention must precede observation. However, if what is seen is inconsistent with the proposed meaning, as is currently the case in academic interpretation of the *Last Judgment*, either the interpretation or the observation is wrong. In some cases, as here, both are wrong. (Unless otherwise stated, all general statements about art and artists in these papers apply only to great masters. The work of minor artists is far more predictable with less content intentionally hidden.)

² Prominent writers whose comments on art are treated with respect by art scholars are often French and include Denis Diderot, Charles Baudelaire, Emile Zola and Stéphane Mallarmé.

³ John Dillenberger, a theologian, has noted that the nude figures all seem to be joined. "It is as if one over-arching event was taking place, in which each group of figures is a part." (Dillenberger, 1999, p. 134)

⁴ Gonzalez, 1954; I have been unable to examine a copy of the first edition which appears to have been published as *Quello che ho visto nel Giudizio Universale di Michelangelo* (Rome) 1951; Diaz Gonzalez's observation was called 'persuasive' in a book about Michelangelo's poetry by a literary scholar (Clements, p.317); Gian Roberto Sarolli approved as well and thought he had found a similar face in the Virgin (Sarolli, pp. 153-4). De Tolnay in his influential monograph in five volumes on Michelangelo makes reference to Diaz Gonzalez in a footnote without comment, presumably unpersuaded (De Tolnay, 1971, p. 119, n.68).

⁵ Barolsky, pp. xvii-xviii and 77-90.

⁶ Wang, p. 3

⁷ Hall, 2005, p. 218, citing Emanuel Winternitz, *Musical Instruments and their Symbolism in Western Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press) 1979, pp. 150-65

⁸ Frank Lynn Meshberger, "An interpretation of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* Based on Neuroanatomy", *Journal of the American Medical Association* 264, 1990, pp.1837-1841 cited in Le Fanu, 2002, p. 4

⁹ Garabed Eknayan, "Michelangelo: Art, anatomy, and the kidney", *Kidney International* 57, 2000, pp. 1190-1201

¹⁰ Hall, pp. 121-2

¹¹ Michelangelo did not abandon the idea of using his own image; he just re-imagined it, as will be shown in Section Three.

¹² Even, p. 29

¹³ Clements, p. 196

¹⁴ “With my beard toward heaven, I feel my memory-box atop my hump..” from Michelangelo, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, trans. J. Saslow, New Haven, 1991, no. 5, pp. 70-72

¹⁵ Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G.W. Butterworth. Reprint. (New York: Harper & Row) 1966, cited in Smoley, pp. 48-9

¹⁶ Both citations from Caroline Elam, “ ‘Tuscan dispositions’: Michelangelo’s Florentine architectural vocabulary and its reception”, *Renaissance Studies* 19, Feb. 2005, pp. 64, 66.