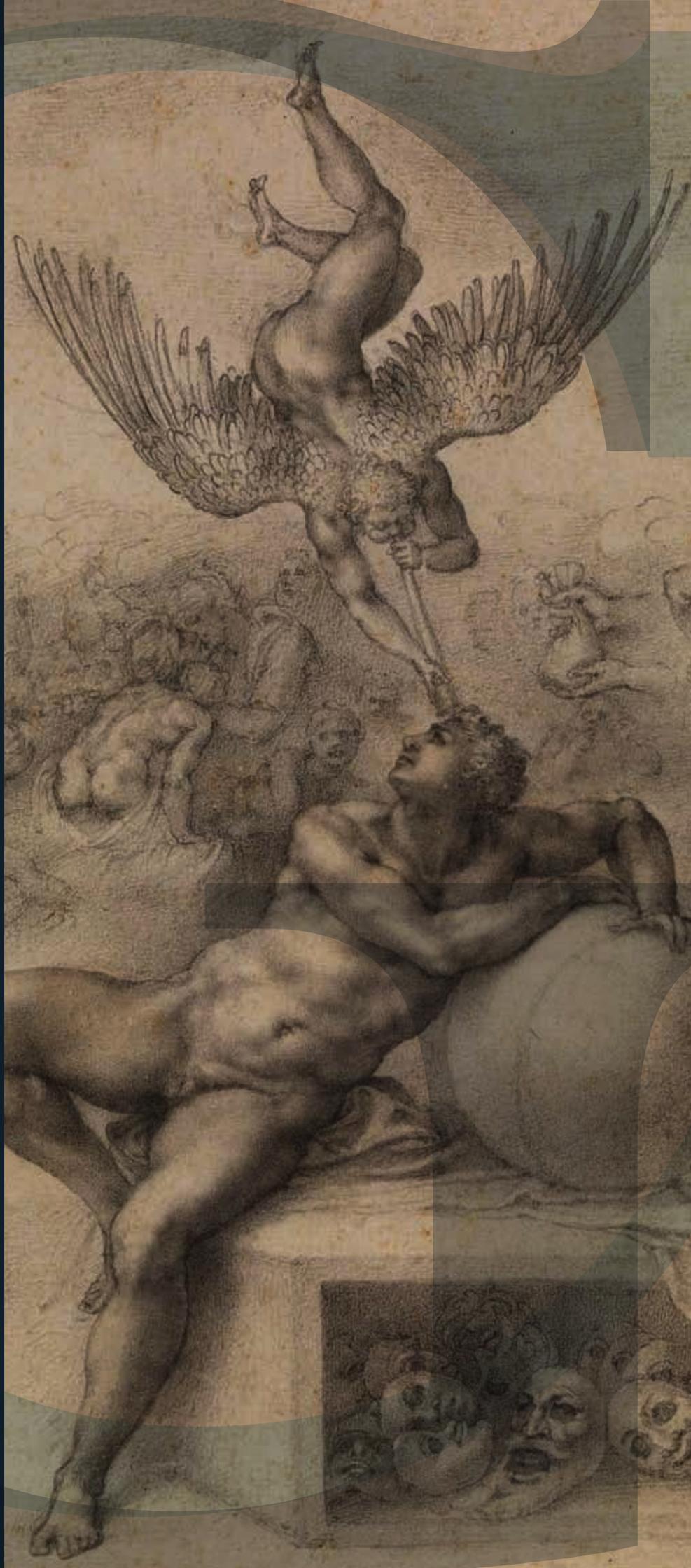


# TEACHERS' RESOURCE

MICHELANGELO'S DREAM  
18 FEBRUARY – 16 MAY 2010



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The Teachers' Resources are intended for use by secondary schools, colleges and teachers of all subjects for their own research. Each essay is marked with suggested links to subject areas and key stage levels. We hope teachers and educators will use these resources to plan lessons, help organise visits to the gallery or gain further insight into the exhibitions at The Courtauld Gallery.

**FOR EACH ESSAY CURRICULUM LINKS ARE MARKED IN RED.**

To book a visit to the gallery or to discuss any of the education projects at The Courtauld please contact:  
education@courtauld.ac.uk  
0207 848 1058

Cover image and right:  
Michelangelo Buonarroti  
*The Dream (Il Sogno)*  
c.1533 (detail)  
Black chalk on laid paper

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# WELCOME

The Courtauld Institute of Art runs an exceptional programme of activities suitable for young people, school teachers and members of the public, whatever their age or background.

We offer resources which contribute to the understanding, knowledge and enjoyment of art history based upon the world-renowned art collection and the expertise of our students and scholars.

The Teachers' Resources and Image CDs have proved immensely popular in their first year; my thanks go to all those who have contributed to this success and to those who have given us valuable feedback.

In future we hope to extend the range of resources to include material based on the permanent collection in The Courtauld Gallery which I hope will prove to be both useful and inspiring.

With best wishes,



Henrietta Hine  
Head of Public Programmes  
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# 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

THESE BEAUTIFUL AND COMPLEX WORKS TRANSFORMED DRAWING INTO AN INDEPENDENT ART FORM AND ARE AMONGST MICHELANGELO'S VERY FINEST CREATIONS IN ANY MEDIUM.



Michelangelo's masterpiece *The Dream* (Il Sogno) has been described as one of the finest of all Renaissance drawings and it is amongst The Courtauld Gallery's greatest treasures. Executed in c.1533 when Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) was at the height of his career, it exemplifies his unrivalled skill as a draughtsman and his extraordinary powers of invention. The exhibition *Michelangelo's Dream* examines this celebrated work in the context of an exceptional group of closely related drawings by Michelangelo, as well as original letters and poems by the artist and works by his contemporaries.

The *Dream* is one of Michelangelo's 'presentation drawings', a magnificent and famous group of highly refined compositions which the artist gave to his closest friends. These beautiful and complex works transformed drawing into an independent art form and are amongst Michelangelo's very finest creations in any medium.

The *Dream* was probably made for a young Roman nobleman called Tommaso de' Cavalieri, who was celebrated for his outstanding beauty, gracious manners and intellect. Michelangelo had first met him in Rome in the winter of 1532 and had instantly fallen in love. The *Dream* is likely to have been part of the superb group of drawings which Michelangelo

gave to Cavalieri during the first years of their close friendship. This group forms the heart of the exhibition and includes *The Punishment of Tityus*, *The Fall of Phaeton*, *A Bacchanal of Children* and *The Rape of Ganymede*. In his *Life of Michelangelo* (1568) the biographer and artist Giorgio Vasari praised these exceptional works as 'drawings the like of which have never been seen' – and they are still regarded as amongst the greatest single series of drawings ever made.

Michelangelo's drawings for Cavalieri have not been seen together for over twenty years and this is the first time that *The Dream* will be shown as part of this group. Exceptionally also, *The Fall of Phaeton* will be reunited with two earlier versions of this composition. Both carry inscriptions in Michelangelo's hand, one requesting Cavalieri's approval of the preliminary design.

The exhibition starts with the earliest surviving letter from Michelangelo to Cavalieri, dated 1 January 1533, in which the artist expresses his delight that Cavalieri had agreed to accept the gift of some drawings. Cavalieri is thought to have been no older than 17 at the time and, according to Vasari, Michelangelo's gifts were primarily intended to teach him how to draw.

The mythological stories such as Phaeton falling to earth with the chariot of the sun, the abduction of Ganymede – the most beautiful of mortals – and the punishment of the lustful giant Tityus may also have been intended to offer moral guidance. The drawings certainly also served as expressions of Michelangelo's love for Cavalieri.

Michelangelo's ardour is eloquently described in the poems which the artist composed for Cavalieri, mainly in the early phase of their friendship. Five handwritten sonnets are included in the exhibition; most of these are here shown for the first time. Whilst adhering to the conventions of love poetry, these sonnets record with extraordinary intensity Michelangelo's adoration of the young man whose sublime beauty he regarded as a reflection of God's eternal beauty on earth. The poetic





imagery of dreaming, transcendence and the struggle between the carnal and the spiritual realms offers insight into the meaning and function of the presentation drawings, and *The Dream* in particular.

The presentation drawings created an immediate sensation at the court of Pope Clement VII in Rome. In an early letter to Michelangelo, included in the exhibition, Cavalieri wrote that they had been admired by 'the Pope, Cardinal de Medici and everyone', adding apologetically that the Cardinal had already taken away *Ganymede* to have a replica made in crystal. *The Dream* too became famous amongst Renaissance collectors and artists soon after its completion and was copied numerous times. However, its precise meaning has remained elusive. Rather than illustrate a text, the drawing engages with contemporary (Neo-Platonic) ideas about the ascent of the soul to the divine, aided by beauty. The composition shows an idealised nude youth reclining against a globe. Masks fill the open plinth on which he is seated. The swirling dreamlike mass of figures surrounding the young man have traditionally been linked with the vices. They enact scenes of gluttony, lust, avarice, wrath, sloth and envy, with a large phallus adding to the carnal imagery. A winged spirit – possibly a personification of beauty and chaste love – approaches the youth with a trumpet, awakening him from the illusions and deceits of the earthly realm to a new spiritual life. A single precise meaning for this complex allegory seems unlikely as the presentation drawings were clearly intended for careful scrutiny and prolonged learned discussion and enjoyment.

A further highlight of the exhibition is a superb group of drawings by Michelangelo of Christ's resurrection, which concentrate on the heroic nude figure of the reborn Christ leaping free of the tomb and the bondage of life on earth. These drawings offer close thematic and formal comparisons with *The Dream*. This group includes the glorious *Risen Christ* – widely celebrated as one of the most magnificent and potent figures in Michelangelo's art.

The exhibition will further investigate the meaning of the *The Dream* in the context of closely related works by Michelangelo's contemporaries which address themes of

rebirth, dreaming and the nature of Man. This section of the exhibition includes Albrecht Dürer's enigmatic drawing of a bound youth and Giorgio Vasari's free interpretation of *The Dream*. The final section of the exhibition focuses on copies of *The Dream* and illustrates how Michelangelo's contemporaries and later admirers responded to the puzzling subject matter and the extraordinary technical virtuosity of Michelangelo's great work.

In 1533, Cavalieri wrote appreciatively to Michelangelo that he had been studying the drawings which the artist had given him for two hours a day. The friendship between the two men would endure for thirty years. Cavalieri was present at the artist's death in 1564 and subsequently helped to realise some of his architectural schemes. He so valued the drawings by Michelangelo that Vasari was to say: '...in truth he rightly treasures them as relics'.

The exhibition has been developed with the support of major international collections including The Royal Collection, Windsor; The British Museum, London; Casa Buonarroti, Florence; Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome; The Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth; the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne; Christ Church Picture Gallery, Oxford; Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich; Das Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main; Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris; Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge MA, and the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Right:  
Michelangelo Buonarroti  
*The Risen Christ*  
c.1533  
Black Chalk and stylus on laid paper  
Royal Collection © 2010  
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

**INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION**  
Written by Dr Stephanie Buck, exhibition curator and curator of drawings at The Courtauld Gallery.

**CURRICULUM LINKS: KS3+**  
Art and Design, History, Art History, Sociology, Philosophy and other Humanities

## 2: UNDERSTANDING THE DREAM: MICHELANGELO'S DRAWING AND BELIEF

The state of dreaming has continually inspired fascination in humans, and not the least for Michelangelo, who in his poetry explored its links with night, death, and artistic creativity. It was not Michelangelo himself, however, but Giorgio Vasari, the great artist and writer of the middle of the sixteenth century, who described the drawing in the Courtauld's collection as *Il Sogno*, or *The Dream*. But without any specific information about the drawing from Michelangelo himself, countless writers have hoped to explain why it is a dream? Important questions are left open: who is dreaming, what is he dreaming of, and who is the figure blowing a trumpet above him? When we look at the image it might even be worth questioning if it is really a 'dream'? In the centre the male figure is not sleeping, but looking upwards, shifting his attention away from a globe and a box of masks and away from the clouded scenes of men that surround him, towards the angelic creature above. In fact the drawing shows not simply a man dreaming and asleep, but shows him *awakening* from a dream. In this essay, we will consider how Michelangelo might have intended the drawing to be interpreted, and how the drawing might fit in with Michelangelo's religious and philosophical beliefs.

The focal point of the drawing is the figure of the young male, situated in the centre and drawn in a much more finished way than other aspects of the image. Michelangelo has skilfully used his chalk to highlight the contours of a beautiful, strong, nude body which lies exposed to the viewer. In spite of this detail, however, the identity of this man is highly ambiguous. Partly this is because his face is shielded from us as it turns to look upwards, but it is also because in his nakedness he is shown as a perfect, idealised figure of human beauty and strength, a body-type that Michelangelo reuses in other works to depict heroic and divine figures from the Bible or from mythology. His body can be compared with other important male figures in Michelangelo's art, such as in his painting *The Creation of Adam* on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or in his drawings of the Risen Christ, Lazarus (image right), Ganymede or Tityus seen in this exhibition.

In *The Dream*, scholars have not identified the male as a specific figure from history or fiction, but have suggested that he represents mankind much more generally, that he is an example of the potential of man to achieve perfection.

The winged creature above him is also difficult to identify. As a winged child flying downwards with a trumpet he could be interpreted in several different ways. Some scholars have believed him to be the personification of 'Fame', since Fame was often shown in this way blowing out the names and reputations of the famous. Others see him as a personification of Love and Beauty, inspiring the dreamer through his beauty. It is now thought that the figure is more likely to be an angel, an observation which is reinforced by the fact that the figure flies downwards as if it descends from heaven. Indeed angels were often represented playing musical instruments, and often blowing a trumpet to awaken mortals from sin or to rejoice in the glory of heaven. A particularly famous example of this is in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* painted much later in the Sistine Chapel in Rome, in which the angels blow trumpets at the figures arising from their tombs. If this is the correct interpretation - there are again clear parallels with some of the other images by Michelangelo already mentioned, in which the beautiful naked male looks up towards a divine figure. Adam, for example, lies back as he looks towards - and touches God; Lazarus, looks upwards as he is brought back to life by Christ; Christ looks up to heaven as he rises from his tomb, and Ganymede looks up as he is seized by the pagan God Jupiter. In *The Dream*, as in these other examples, the beautiful human male is shown in the specific moment when he interacts with, or sees a godly figure.

There are important features in the image that connect with Michelangelo's religious beliefs, even if the figures are not directly connected with a Biblical story. This is confirmed by the clouded scenes that encircle the central male figure which show nude men and women committing acts of violence, lust, gluttony and laziness, all activities that are strongly associated with the Seven Deadly Sins, the seven main vices that were listed by the Church since



Above:  
Michelangelo Buonarroti  
*The Dream (Il Sogno)*  
c.1533 (detail)

### UNDERSTANDING THE DREAM

Written by Emily Gray, a current PhD student at The Courtauld Institute of Art.

**CURRICULUM LINKS: KS3/4+ Art and Design, Art History, History, Religious Studies and other Humanities.**

## THE MASKS STORED AWAY IN THE BOX ARE SIMILARLY IMPORTANT SYMBOLS OF THIS DREAM-WORLD



the Middle Ages: Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Greed, Gluttony and Lust. Bodies, crowded together in a disorderly cluster are shown committing these sins: one holds a bag of money to show avarice; figures are seen gripping a phallus or making love in order to suggest the sin of lust, others are shown drinking from a wineskin to signal gluttony. The sin of anger is suggested by fighting, and sloth is indicated by slumped bodies. In the fifteenth century these sins were increasingly shown in paintings and prints, especially in scenes of the Last Judgement such as Michelangelo's painting for the Sistine Chapel, where they would remind sinners of the punishment they would receive in Hell as a punishment for committing these acts against God.

Here these scenes of sin are made separate from the main central figure and the angel by the misty quality of the figures that are in contrast to the clear drawing of the central scene. Because of the sketchy way in which the figures are drawn and the way that parts of bodies are huddled together, it is difficult to see whole details. This cloudiness is intentional as it disconnects the images from the space of the central male nude, who looks away from them towards the angel above. The murkiness suggests that the actions take place in the darkness of night, in a different world and time where things are not clear, and actions, bodies and people are uncertain. It is probable that these scenes represent the 'dream' mentioned in the title given to the drawing by Giorgio Vasari: they are the unreal, uncertain, clouded events of the dream world, or perhaps of a world of nightmares.

The 'dream' of the image, then, might be understood as a metaphor for a human life that is led full of sin and ignorance. It was a popular poetic motif to compare the temporary and illusory quality of mortal life with the unreal and fleeting nature of a dream and a similar metaphor was used in a very different context, and almost a century later, by William Shakespeare when he said that 'We are such stuff As dreams are made on' in *The Tempest*. For this reason, the drawing has sometimes been called 'the Dream of Human Life'. If we look at the image with this title, the young male is awakening from mortal life, a world in which humans are seduced into committing sins, into a new, divine and eternal life

which is in harmony with the will of God, and which is real and things are light, beautiful and clear as opposed to dark and uncertain.

The masks stored away in the box are similarly important symbols of this dream-world. Masks were often used in pictures and poetry as symbols of dreams or of human life because dreams, like the masks used by actors in plays, were imaginary, false, even deceptive. Michelangelo, for example, included a mask on his funerary tomb for the Medici in the church of San Lorenzo, Florence where the masks accompany the figure of Night. In this sculpture the mask is clearly connected with the world of night and death, worlds where illusions might take place. In this drawing, however, they are placed in a box beneath a large globe, a symbol of the earth and thus the worldly life (as opposed to eternal, heavenly life). By positioning the masks near this globe, Michelangelo seems to combine the ideas of illusion, dreaming, night, death and mortal life on earth, ideas which can be connected directly with the misty scenes of sin that encircle the central male figure.

One plausible interpretation of Michelangelo's drawing is that the young male represents the awakening of the human body and soul from a mortal life of sin to an eternal life by the call of a divine messenger. This reading of the image fits in with the ideas often expressed in Michelangelo's own poetry as well as the popular philosophical ideas that were frequently discussed by intellectuals in Michelangelo's time. Italian scholars, as they increasingly examined the works of the Greek philosopher Plato, developed a revival of Platonic philosophy, today known as Neoplatonism. Essentially, they were attracted by the concept that the universe was divided into two realms, one of material forms, which included all things that we perceive with the senses of sight and touch, and another realm of eternal, immaterial ideas which includes perfect, abstract forms of things, that could not be understood through the senses. For the philosophers who discussed these philosophical ideas in Michelangelo's time, these thoughts were adapted to fit in with Christian beliefs. In this way, the world of eternal ideas included the Christian soul, the divine and heavenly realm, and God



Right:  
Michelangelo Buonarroti  
Studies of a reclining male nude: Adam in the fresco 'The Creation of Man' on the vault of the Sistine Chapel.  
c. 1511 (detail)  
Dark red chalk over some stylus underdrawing  
© The Trustees of the British Museum

himself, whilst the body and the mortal life belonged to the world of material forms. Mankind was a mixture of these two parts: part body, part soul. The important aspect of this conception of the universe, was the understanding that the body and material forms corrupted the spiritual and perfect world eternal *ideas*. It naturally followed that the soul of man was corrupted by his body, and only through death of the body could the soul be free to join again with God. The body, it was thought, caused the sins and vices like those shown in the drawing.

Michelangelo was strongly influenced by these complex thoughts, and he was continually troubled by the burden of his body and flesh and the sins that it might lead him to commit. A particularly important aspect of this for Michelangelo was his homosexuality and desire for Tommaso Cavalieri, to whom he wrote many love poems. Moreover, *The Dream*, like his other drawings shown in this exhibition depicting Tityus and Ganymede, is a celebration of the beautiful male body, and there can be little doubt that the open postures and delicate flesh are full of sensuality. We might ask: why does Michelangelo use a very sensually drawn male to show the awakening of the body out of the corruptions of the mortal life and its sins?

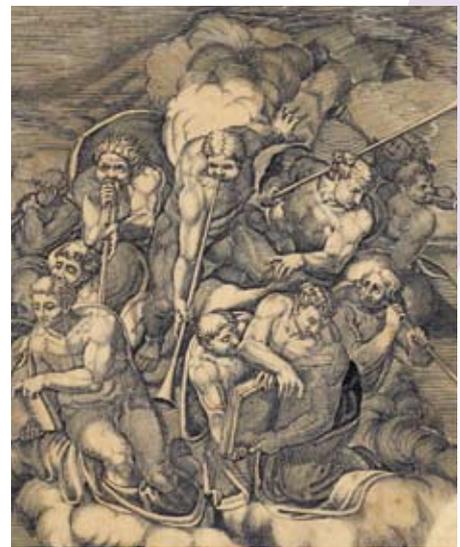
The answer lies in the fact that many Neoplatonic poets and philosophers also believed that exceptional human beauty, either in reality or constructed by the imagination in art or poetry, might give a glimpse of the divine world of eternal *ideas*. It stemmed from the thought that beauty could be a sign of such perfection that it might be a reflection of God and his divine world. The important Florentine poets that so influenced Michelangelo – Dante and Petrarch – both imagined the beauty of their beloved women – Beatrice and Laura – as a sign of divine beauty and love and a link to the eternal world of *ideas*. A similar thought can be found in Michelangelo's appreciation of the beautiful male nude, especially the beauty of his beloved, Tommaso Cavalieri. For Michelangelo, then, the beautiful human body might be a way to visualise a divine beauty, a way to perceive a world greater than the world of the flesh and of earth. This beauty might be a way to awaken

from the dream, illusion and sins of human life. For this reason, the angel has been interpreted as the personification of Divine Love and Beauty, calling the young male to move away from worldly pleasures to a more perfect beauty.

We might interpret *The Dream* in many ways, as many different scholars have done since the drawing was first made. It is probable that Michelangelo wanted it to be this way: he hoped that those who saw the drawing would be intrigued by its enigmatic symbols and complex ideas, and would engage in intellectual discussion. There is no definite way to read this drawing: Michelangelo himself did not even leave a title to help us understand it, and the title *The Dream*, may not be entirely correct. But by examining the way Michelangelo's contemporaries might have understood the symbols and scenes of vices, we can suggest likely interpretations. The young male, has been disturbed from his fascination with the illusions of the impermanent world, represented by the masks and the globe, and the sins and temptations of the flesh which surround him as if in a dream. He has been awakened by an angelic figure blowing a trumpet, and has been renewed into a beautiful, heroic body, not unlike the renewed beautiful bodies that Michelangelo also gave to the first man Adam made by God himself; to Christ, as he arose from death, and to Lazarus who was brought back to life from death by Christ. This new body is the perfect harmony of the abstract, eternal world of immaterial ideas and the world of the body, the body free from the vices which corrupted it in the world. In the awakened beautiful body, the young male has awoken from his dream of human life into a more real, divine world. In *The Dream*, Michelangelo created a highly intellectual drawing, which connects with his religious, poetic and artistic interests.

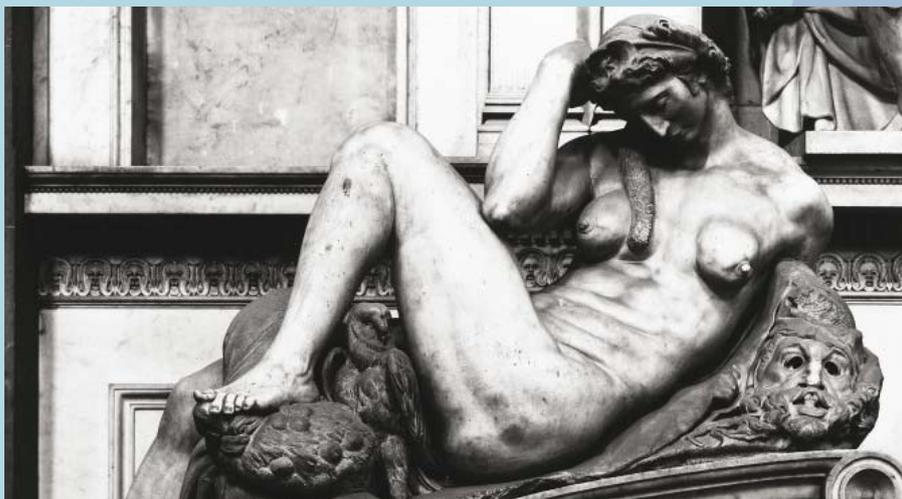
#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

*Michelangelo's Dream*, ed. by Stephanie Buck, London, 2010  
*Michelangelo Drawings*, ed. by Craig Hugh Smyth, Washington 1992  
 David Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, Princeton, 1981



Above:  
 Michelangelo Buonarroti  
 Scene from *The Last Judgement*  
 16th Century engraving by Antonio Salamanca  
 (Milanese engraver, ca. 1500-1562)

Below Left:  
 Michelangelo Buonarroti  
*Night* c.1526-31  
 Marble,  
 Medici Chapel, San Lorenzo, Florence



# 3: MY SOUL TO MESSER TOMMASO: MICHELANGELO AND TOMMASO DE'CAVALIERI

**IF AS I'VE SAID, I  
WERE EVER TO HAVE  
THE ASSURANCE  
OF PLEASING  
YOUR LORDSHIP IN  
ANYTHING, I WOULD  
DEVOTE TO YOU THE  
PRESENT AND THE  
TIME TO COME THAT  
REMAINS TO ME...**

”

Right:  
Giovanni Pisano  
*Plato*  
14th century  
Museo dell' Opera del Duomo, Siena, Italy

## MY SOUL TO MESSER TOMMASO

Written by Rachel Ropeik, recent graduate of The Courtauld Institute of Art and current gallery educator.

**CURRICULUM LINKS: KS4+  
Art and Design, History, PSE and other  
Humanities.**

When we think of historical figures and celebrities, we understandably focus on the reasons why they are famous. For royalty or politicians, it may be the important events that happened during their time in power. For actors, their most popular films, plays, or television shows. For artists, it is mainly their creative output. When Michelangelo is mentioned, people think of the ceiling of the Vatican's Sistine Chapel or the marble David in Florence. In addition to making such famous carved and painted work, though, Michelangelo was also a skilled draughtsman, a poet, and an intensely devoted friend.

Throughout his life, Michelangelo met and struck up intense, long-lasting friendships with people who inspired him. To these friends he wrote lengthy letters and tributary poems, and gave them beautifully finished drawings like several of the works shown in this exhibition, which were made for one particularly important object of his affections, the young Roman nobleman Tommaso de' Cavalieri.

Cavalieri himself remains a bit of a mystery. We know some basic biographical facts: he was born into a wealthy family, married the daughter of another in 1545, and was a patron of the arts and architecture throughout his adult life. However, most of the information we have about him concerns his relationship with Michelangelo.

They met in 1532, when the great artist was 57 and Cavalieri was in his late teens or early twenties. There is no clear record of how they met, but Michelangelo was immediately infatuated. The sixteenth-century artist biographer (and arguably the founder of the discipline of art history), Giorgio Vasari, reported that Michelangelo loved his new young friend 'infinitely more than any of the others', a statement that seems supported by the way Michelangelo proceeded to offer Cavalieri drawing lessons and finished artworks, as well as a series of passionate letters and poems.

In one of these letters, on view in the exhibition, Michelangelo wrote the following:  
*If as I've said, I were ever to have the assurance of pleasing your lordship in*

*anything, I would devote to you the present and the time to come that remains to me, and should very deeply regret that I cannot have the past over again, in order to serve you longer than with the future only, which will be short, since I'm so old.*

Even though this might sound like a letter between lovers to our modern ears, and Michelangelo often referred to Cavalieri's beauty in his writing, it is unlikely the two men were ever involved physically. Other writers of the time also remarked upon Cavalieri's striking physical appearance, and in the sixteenth century, such beautiful young men were often held up for public praise as examples of God's spirit in human form.

One of the hallmarks of the Italian Renaissance was a renewed interest in the art and culture of ancient Greece. Sculptures from this early period were being unearthed all over Greece and Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and artists like Michelangelo made a habit of looking at some of the better known examples as models for their own work. For example, one of the most famous of these Greek sculptures was one now known as the Belvedere Torso, which gave Michelangelo the basic pose for several of the figures he painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

In addition to drawing inspiration from Greek sculpture, Greek philosophy also regained popularity throughout the cultural





centres of Italy during the Renaissance. Plato's theories, especially, came back into fashion, combined with the Christian beliefs of the day and referred to as Neoplatonism.

One idea that resonated quite strongly relates to Plato's famous parable of the cave, about a group of people who have lived all their lives chained in a cave, seeing only shadows on the wall and believing them to be the sum total of reality. Plato claimed that philosophers were like prisoners set free from that cave, able to experience more of the world around them, and that true reality was even a degree further removed from that and could only be found outside the physical in a world of pure thought that all philosophers should try to comprehend. The Renaissance Neoplatonic development of this idea suggested that perhaps that world of ideas is not the only real one, and that the world we experience with our senses is true and important in its own right, as a place to see manifestations of God's work.

How does this all tie back in with Michelangelo and his relationship to Tommaso de' Cavalieri?

After seeing how the artist drew inspiration from physical objects from Greek antiquity for his own art, it is not so surprising that he was also influenced by the ideas from the same period. Neoplatonism was particularly influential in Florence, where Michelangelo lived for a large part of his life, and he embraced many of its beliefs and worked them into his art and writings, including those for Cavalieri. The poems link Tommaso's earthly beauty with the divine. One contains the line, 'Your beauty is no mortal thing, but something divine among us made in heaven above'. Another, 'I see in your beautiful face, my lord, what in this life words cannot well describe; with it my soul, still clothed in flesh, has already often risen to God'. According to the Neoplatonists, visual observation of beauty in the world connected a person to the contemplation of heaven, and Michelangelo put his artistic talent to work capturing the beauty he saw with the intention of drawing closer to God. A young man like Cavalieri, who was not only handsome, but also interested in the arts himself, must have been a great source of inspiration for an artist seeking

a path toward spiritual enlightenment by studying beauty in the world around him. The series of presentation drawings he made as gifts for Cavalieri (numbers 2-8 in the exhibition) are a rare thing for Michelangelo, and indeed for most artists at the time. Drawings were more commonly seen as practice sketches for finished works of art: paintings, sculptures, frescos, etc. They were usually only completed enough to give an impression of the finished composition, or to work out the details of one particular area. In the case of Michelangelo's Cavalieri drawings, however, the artist not only paid extreme attention to the finishing, but also actively sought out feedback from the recipient before creating a final, perfected version. There are notes on two versions of the Phaeton drawing, one that clearly indicates the work-in-progress nature of the project. Written on what is presumably the earliest version of the Phaeton drawing is, 'Messer Tommaso, if this sketch does not please you, say so to Urbino in time for me to do another tomorrow evening, as I promised you; and if it pleases you and you wish me to finish it, send it back to me.' The fact that two more drawings of the same subject also exist indicates that some further work was done before Michelangelo presented his friend with a version that satisfied them both. Clearly the quality of these drawings as complete works of art in and of themselves was important to the artist. They are full of symbolic meaning and borrow subjects and characters from Greek and Roman mythology; yet another link to the Antique tradition that Michelangelo found so inspiring.

However, the meanings of the drawings can also be read as referring to the relationship between artist and recipient. For example, Tityus (see image overleaf) shows the punishment of a giant who attempted to rape the mother of the sun god Apollo and his sister, the moon goddess Diana. For this transgression, he was condemned to be chained to a rock in the underworld where a vulture was set to eat his liver every day, only for it to grow back over night to be eaten again. Michelangelo's drawing, however, has a stillness and restraint that seem at odds with the vicious torture about to take place. At first, this seems a strange subject to choose for a drawing to send to a beloved friend, but a possible meaning comes clear if we look at this drawing

Top:  
Restored by Benvenuto Cellini  
*Ganymede*  
16th century  
Marble  
Museo Nazionale del Bargello,  
Florence, Italy

Above:  
Benvenuto Cellini  
*Ganymede*  
16th century  
Bronze  
Museo Nazionale del Bargello,  
Florence, Italy

TITYUS IS ETERNALLY CHAINED TO THE GROUND AS PUNISHMENT FOR INAPPROPRIATE LOVE, OR, HIS INABILITY TO FREE HIMSELF FROM HIS BASER NATURE...

”

as a mate to another of the Cavalieri presentation drawings, that of Ganymede.

The myth of Ganymede tells the story of a Trojan prince so beautiful that Zeus, taking the form of an eagle, swooped down and carried him up to Olympus to be the cup-bearer to the gods. Michelangelo's drawing captures the moment where Ganymede and the Zeus eagle are in mid-flight, ascending to the heavens. This looks like a more appropriate subject, does it not? A drawing of a beautiful young man to be sent to a beautiful young man. But it is not a portrait of Cavalieri, and if we look at this drawing paired with the Tityus, they can show us the results of two different kinds of love that likely relate to Michelangelo's own feelings toward his young friend.

Tityus illustrates a story of a man punished for trying to pursue physical lust. Ganymede, on the other hand, celebrates the virtue of that Neoplatonic love that focuses on the heavenly plane. While Ganymede is rewarded for his beauty and noble spirit by being elevated to immortality (thereby symbolising the rising of human thought overall), Tityus is eternally chained to the ground as punishment for inappropriate love (or, his inability to free himself from his baser nature). It would seem Michelangelo was making a moral statement about his own values in these drawings, and maybe using them to show his feelings to Cavalieri at the same time: drawn to him in love and determined to elevate that love to a higher

plane.

The poems Michelangelo wrote about Tommaso show a similar juxtaposition of the torments that accompany earthly love and the rewards that come from the spiritual kind. With phrases like 'he who loves you faithfully rises to God above' and 'To the senses belongs not love but unbridled desire, which kills the soul', Michelangelo emphasises over and over the importance of the divine aspect of his love for Cavalieri and denies the value of bodily lust.

All these issues are at play in the drawings and writings that Michelangelo made for Tommaso de' Cavalieri. Their symbolism has been debated by art historians and philosophers ever since they were made, but no matter what meaning any one person reads into them, they certainly represent a group that Michelangelo devoted a great deal of time and emotion to perfecting. Cavalieri was without doubt very important to this master artist to have inspired such an intense, expressive outpouring of written and drawn work.

By showing these and other drawings along with some of Michelangelo's letters and poems, we can give some new context to the artist's life, not only as a creative genius, but also as a person with his own complicated mixture of thoughts and feelings just like people today.

Below:  
Michelangelo Buonarroti  
*The Punishment of Tityus*  
c.1532  
Black Chalk and stylus on laid paper  
Royal Collection © 2010  
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



# 4: DRAWN IN DREAMS:

## DREAMING, DRAWING AND DIVINE INSPIRATION IN MICHELANGELO AND MIRO

No one is asleep in Michelangelo's *The Dream of Human Life*. The central figure of the male youth gazes intently up at the trumpeting angel, his muscles rippling as his body twists uncomfortably. The angel's body shows a similar tension as he grasps and blows through the trumpet, spreading his wings to maintain his precarious position in mid-air. The mass of writhing and brawling figures in the background is alive with movement and activity. Even the hollow eye sockets of the masks are open, staring blankly. If everyone is awake then who is dreaming? Are we seeing someone else's dream? Or are we encouraged to enter into and interpret this dream world ourselves? The interpretation of dreams and dream imagery has been very important in histories and theories of art and literature. Here we will think about the significance of dreams in Renaissance art before jumping forward to early twentieth century Paris to examine the importance of dreams, sleep and drawings in Surrealist Art.

In the Italian Renaissance sleep and dreaming were associated with active inspiration rather than passivity. In falling asleep we leave our rational selves behind, which the Renaissance Neo-Platonists believed provided ideal conditions for divine inspiration to occur. This inspiration would appear as a dream. The exchange between the trumpeting angel and the youth in Michelangelo's drawing pictures this moment of divine inspiration. This intervention's dramatic effect is conveyed both physically and emotionally; through the touch of the trumpet on the youth's forehead and in the rapt, ecstatic expression of the youth. The youth's disturbed expression could represent *furor*, 'a divinely inspired frenzy', which occurs when the mind receives a gift from the gods. The angel does not place the bell of the trumpet at the youth's ear but at the centre of his forehead. This was thought to be the location of the *imaginatio* or *imprensiva* – the part of the brain that received and processed visual impressions. We can read the exchange between the youth and the angel as an embodiment of the moment that an artist finds the inspiration for a great work of art.

This emphasis on the visual and artistic is

found in the iconography of *The Dream* and in Michelangelo's drawing process. Two distinct groups of figures in the drawing show the stages of creating a work of art. The indistinct figures hovering around the edges of the drawing express the initial stage of artistic process, the sketch. A sketch is tangible evidence of the process of invention and the ephemeral moment of inspiration; ideas are generated in the artists' mind and then quickly translated onto paper. In *The Dream*, the figures take shape as they emerge from the hazy mass, the lightness and rapidity of line emphasizes their insubstantiality. The Renaissance writer Giorgio Vasari likened the sketch to the creative frenzy of a *furor*, ideas are captured quickly with a pen or a pencil as pop into the artists mind.

The fragmented and unfinished background figures are contrasted with the highly finished central pairing of the youth and the angel. Their firm outlines and the fine, subtle modelling of their bodies show that Michelangelo intensely worked on these figures. This contrast of drawing styles allows us to see an evolution of the drawing from its sketchy inception to the polished and precise final product. The viewer is invited to participate in this creative process, speculating upon the poses and activities of the hazy figures and then lingering longer on understanding and appreciating the significance of the finished figures of the angel and the youth. Dreaming is here inextricably linked with the process of artistic creation and its physical manifestation: drawing. The frenzied process behind an artists' sketch is analogous to the divinely inspired madness that Renaissance philosophers believed was so important to artistic creation.

Almost four hundred years later the centre of the art world moved from Italy to Paris, but dreaming and drawing were once again understood as essential to artistic creation. Dreaming was central to the thinking and writing of the Surrealist poet Andre Breton. When he was called up to fight in the First World War Breton received medical training at the Centre Neurologique in Nantes in Brittany. He became interested in psychology and psychiatry and it was his ambition to create a poetic language that would provide an explanation of the



Above:  
Michelangelo Buonarroti  
*The Dream (Il Sogno)* c.1533 (detail)  
Black chalk on laid paper

### DRAWN IN DREAMS

Written by Katie Faulkner, current PhD student at The Courtauld Institute of Art.

**CURRICULUM LINKS: KS4+ Art and Design, History, PSE and other Humanities.**

## WE CAN PERHAPS DRAW PARALLELS BETWEEN THE AUTOMATIC DRAWING AND WRITING PRACTISED BY THE SURREALISTS AND THE RENAISSANCE NOTION OF *FUROR*...



unconscious. Breton based his ideas on the work of the Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, who's work he encountered during his wartime medical training.

Freud was a prolific writer but today he is probably best known for his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, published in 1900. Freud's theory of dream interpretation centres on the idea that the events and objects we often dream about can be understood as symbols, which hold the latent or subconscious meaning of the dream. For example, a dream about kings and queens could be related to the dreamer's parents. Dreams about birth, Freud believed, would always be connected with water: one could fall into the water, climb out of it or be rescued by someone, the rescuer symbolized the dreamer's mother. Dreams about dying would feature a departure, such as a train journey. Another area rich in symbolism was 'sexual life – the genitals, sexual processes, sexual intercourse'. Freud claimed that the majority of symbols in dreams were sexual symbols and he complained that this often made the interpretation of dreams very boring.

Breton was attracted to the content of dreams rather than their individual meanings. Accounts of dreams featured frequently in the Surrealist reviews and dream-like imagery is one of the most distinctive features of Surrealist visual art. In addition to using dreams as a source for their writing and visual art, the Surrealists explored the possibility of creating art whilst in a dream-like state. They investigated this through a process they called automatic writing and drawing, often going without food to bring on a visionary state. The process of automatism can be understood in two ways, literally, where the writer or artist tries to draw or write without any sort of conscious direction of his thoughts and more metaphorically, where the artist or writer frees his or herself from achieving any set goal but is still conscious of his or her activity. The Surrealists believed this goal-less exploration allowed for true originality and invention. We can perhaps draw parallels between the automatic drawing and writing practised by the Surrealists and the Renaissance notion of *furor* and Vasari's ideal of the sketch as capturing the creative idea as it emerges from the artists' mind.

Automatic writing and drawing promised an abundance of words and images. This was admittedly foreign to Freud's understanding of the unconscious, which he believed surfaced in gaps or omissions in conscious thought rather than as an effusive flow. Nevertheless, art historians frequently use Freud's notion of the unconscious to interpret Surrealist art. This is especially true of the automatic drawings and sketches of Surrealist artists such as Max Ernst, Joan Miro and Andre Masson. Their works are characterised by a predominance of surface inscription and traces that can be understood to relate to the unconscious and automatic action.

Joan Miro's *The Birth of the World* from 1925 is a large-scale oil painting, which now hangs in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Like the other Surrealists, Miro was fixated on the origins of symbolic systems and the beginnings of art and representation. This is reflected in the multi-layered symbolism of *The Birth of the World*. For example, the orange disc with a tail can be compared to a sperm cell as it navigates its way across the picture plane towards the moment of conception. The reclining black and white figure in the bottom left perhaps refers to Adam, the first man and invokes the Old Testament narrative of Genesis. The cloudy background is evocative of the chaotic and gaseous moment of the creation of the universe. Like Michelangelo's exhibition of two stages of drawing in *The Dream*, Miro provides us with a painterly staging of the creation of his work alongside these more explicit symbols of generation. The forms and colours of the foreground seem to emerge from the smudged and dripping background, much like the indistinct figures around the angel and the youth in Michelangelo's drawing.

The true origins of *The Birth of the World* are found in Miro's sketchbooks. These tattered and fragile books contain many precise preparatory drawings for *The Birth of the World* and Miro's other dream paintings. Their publication in 1976 destroyed the myth that Miro created the paintings automatically in a trance-like state but at the level of the sketch, however, we can see clear evidence of automatic drawing. Miro incorporates chance marks and stains from the pages of his sketchbook into his drawings. Tracings,

Right:  
Oscar Kokoschka  
*The Dreaming Youths: part 12 Eros*  
1907, 1917  
Lithograph

A series of talks that consider the theme of dreaming including Kokoschka's *Dreaming Youths* will take place in The Courtauld Institute of Art Prints and Drawings room.

Thursday 11 March, 22 April and 13 May

For more details please contact  
education@courtauld.ac.uk  
0207 848 1058



where the pressure of the pencil leaves a mark in the pages beneath the top sheet, are also combined in Miro's drawings in a very improvisational way. One of the sketchbooks contains five drawings that relate to *The Birth of the World*. These five drawings form a sequence, with the last sketch in the series being instantly recognizable as a version of *The Birth of the World*. Each page in the sequence is linked through a kind of free association; motifs appear in one sketch only to be irreverently transformed in the next. Traces from the previous pages become imprinted in the pages beneath and become part of Miro's loose assemblages of line and shape.

This procedure displays a high degree of randomness, the drawings advance through a series of detours as if the guiding hand or consciousness of the artist is absent. The leaps in possible meanings from one drawing to the next show Miro's adept use of elastic visual signs and his exploitation of poetic metaphor and meaning. This swift momentum is maintained through the semi-mechanical process of tracing from one sheet of paper to the next. This playfulness undermines our expectations of the serious process of creating a large and important gallery painting and clearly exhibits the inspired audacity of Miro's working method, which was completely at odds with a traditional academic approach.

This transference of marks from one sheet to the next relates to another aspect of Freud's notion of the unconscious: memory. Freud used the metaphor of a writing pad to explain his theory of memory. Freud's writing pad consisted of a wax pad that was covered with a layer of celluloid. The wax pad represented the unconscious mind, protected behind the shield of the celluloid, which represents the conscious mind. The celluloid surface layer was constantly receptive to new impressions but

had no capacity to store them, unlike the wax slab beneath, which retained a trace or imprint that could be read later. Miro's sketchbooks function in a similar way as the wax pad by containing permanent traces of his ephemeral ideas. Miro could revisit and revive these tracings when he chose to convert one of his automatic drawings into a completed painting. The original automatic drawing was the trace of a voice or an idea that emanated from a source other to the author's conscious mind, the unconscious. The Surrealist author or artist becomes a passive conduit for the automatic message from the unconscious, much like Michelangelo's youth receiving divine inspiration through the trumpet of the angel. For the Surrealists, the unconscious and memory were the most significant sources of inspiration, just as the divine provided Michelangelo with his greatest ideas. In these two completely different set of art theories, separated by hundred of years, we can see how drawing and it's power to capture the dreams of the artist were crucial to notions of artistic creativity and origins of art itself.

#### FURTHER READING:

Marie Ruvoldt, *The Italian Renaissance imagery of inspiration: metaphors of sex, sleep and dreams*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

Due to copyright reasons we are unable to reproduce Miro's *The Birth of the World*. The image can be viewed on the internet and can be found using a standard search engine.



Above:  
Michelangelo Buonarroti  
*The Dream (Il Sogno)*  
c.1533 (detail)  
Black chalk on laid paper



Left:  
Andre Masson  
*Vent de Dege*  
20th C entury  
Oil on canvas

# 5: MICHELANGELO'S POETRY

Although they had long been known, Michelangelo's poems were not translated into English, as a complete body, until 1878 when the version by John Addington Symonds appeared. Before that time, English poets had recognised the inherent difficulties of translating Michelangelo's poetry. William Wordsworth complained about his problematic syntax, which he found, 'most difficult to construe' and, whilst expressing admiration for 'the majesty and strength' of the language, was frustrated by its sheer density: 'so much meaning has been put by Michael Angelo (sic) into so little room that I find the difficulty of translating him insurmountable'. Symonds based his work on an edition of 1863 by the Italian scholar Cesare Guasti, which had standardised the texts for the first time by comparing the manuscripts with the first complete published edition, printed by Michelangelo Buonarroti, the artist's great-nephew, in 1623. Buonarroti's versions of the poems were extensively altered from the manuscripts, since he was wary of the roughness of expression and occasional obscurity of thought with which he believed his illustrious great-uncle to have written. The result was a bowdlerisation, which remained uncorrected until Guasti's study of the original texts.

The work of achieving a definitive edition of Michelangelo's verse was not completed by Guasti, however. A new edition was produced by Carl Frey in 1897, but it was not until 1960 that the version appeared from which the numbering system for all subsequent editions has been taken, edited by Enzo Noé Girardi. More recently, there have been a number of translations and editions of Michelangelo's poetry into English. The most accessible are those by George Bull and Peter Porter in the Oxford World's Classics series and the Penguin Classics edition by Anthony Mortimer. Bull and Porter include only a handful of the poems, whilst Mortimer's selection is considerably larger. Both these editions also feature one of the biographies of the artist: Condivi's of 1553 is included in Bull and Porter, while Mortimer translates the first edition of Vasari's *Vita*. Complete editions of the poems have also been published, notably by Christopher Ryan and James M. Saslow. The introductions to

all these editions are helpful, but Saslow's is the most comprehensive in its literary and contextual analysis.

In all, Girardi's edition numbers Michelangelo production at 302 poems, of which some 50 are incomplete or fragmentary. Of the complete poems, all but a handful are short, of twenty lines or less; over forty comprise less than ten lines. Sixty are quatrains, of which forty-eight, together with a madrigal and a sonnet, comprise a sequence of epitaphs for Francesco [Cecchino] Bracci, the cousin of Luigi del Riccio, who died at the age of 16 in January 1544. Other than the quatrain and the sonnet, the form Michelangelo employed most regularly was the madrigal, of which 95 survive as complete poems.

Even allowing for the unfinished poems this comprises a substantial body of work and Michelangelo appears to have been extremely serious about his writing. He worked and reworked his texts, often writing on whatever paper came to hand; his poems are found alongside drawings and bills and on the backs of letters. He gave manuscripts of his poems to members of his close circle, among them the painter Sebastiano del Piombo and the Florentine political exiles Luigi del Riccio, who also advised him on financial matters, and Donato Gianotti, himself a writer, often seeking critical advice. Although he occasionally dismissed his poems as 'clumsy things' and told del Riccio to 'revise as you see fit', he nonetheless felt sufficiently confident to offer critiques of Gianotti's work, while the consistency and regularity with which he wrote and rewrote during his most productive period demonstrates a desire to craft his poetry which belies his easy, self-deprecating description of it as 'crude'.

In the early 1540s Michelangelo conceived, with del Riccio and Gianotti, a plan to publish some of the poems and the three friends went as far as to decide on a selection of 105, but del Riccio's death in 1546 saw the project suspended. A few years later, in 1554, Ascanio Condivi, at the conclusion of his biography of Michelangelo (written as a semi-official corrective to the first edition of Vasari's *Vita* or *Life of the artist*), claimed to have



Above:  
Jan de Bisschop  
Seated Male Figure  
1667-71  
Etching on laid paper, inscribed:  
M.A. Bon. mo. Seb. del. Piombo d. Jb. f.

## MICHELANGELO'S POETRY

Written by Jim Harris, visiting lecturer at The Courtauld Institute of Art

A full set of footnotes and references for this essay are available on request.

**CURRICULUM LINKS: KS5+ English Literature, Art and Design, History, Art History, and Philosophy.**

in preparation an edition of the poems. 'I hope', Condivi wrote, 'in a short time, to publish some of Michelangelo's sonnets and madrigals, which I have collected over a long period of time from him and from others, and this I will do in order to prove to the world how great are his powers of invention and how many beautiful ideas spring from that divine spirit'.

While Condivi's proposed edition never saw light, his remark demonstrates that Michelangelo's poetry formed a potent, publicly acknowledged, part of his myth even during his lifetime.

In spite of his plan to publish a substantial collection having stalled after del Riccio's death, and the failure of Condivi's mooted project, Michelangelo's poetry was known of beyond his intimate acquaintance, and his poems did, very occasionally, appear in print in his lifetime, eventually about a dozen in all. As early as 1517, the madrigal *Com'aro dunche ardire senza vo' ma', mio ben, tenermi' n vita?* ('How will I ever have the nerve without you, my beloved, to stay alive?') was set to music and printed in Naples. In 1550, the first edition of Vasari's *Vita* referred to his sonnets, from which, 'the most celebrated musicians and poets have made songs'. Vasari's second edition, of 1568, is more fulsome, alluding to Michelangelo's love of Dante and Petrarch, noting that he 'delighted in composing serious madrigals and sonnets', and recording two lectures given by the humanist, Benedetto Varchi, at the Florentine Academy in 1547. Of Varchi's lectures, which were printed in 1549, one dealt with the paragone debate regarding the primacy of painting or sculpture, while the other focused on one of Michelangelo's sonnets, *Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto c'un marmo solo in sé non circonscriva col suo superchio* ('Not even the best of artists has any conception that a single marble block does not contain within its excess'). It was a sonnet written for Vittoria Colonna, the Marchioness of Pescara, and Varchi praised it for Michelangelo's having combined classical purity with the linguistic vigour of Dante.

Michelangelo's friendship with Vittoria Colonna was one of the two most important and influential of his life with regard to his writing. The other was with Tommaso de' Cavalieri, a Roman nobleman who Michelangelo met in 1532, when he was 57 and Cavalieri in his early 20s. Girardi connected forty-one of Michelangelo's sonnets with Cavalieri and a similar number directly with Colonna. Together, the poems he wrote between his first encounter with Cavalieri and Colonna's death in 1547 comprise around two thirds of his oeuvre and it is clear that in these two relationships Michelangelo found love, the inspiration for moral and spiritual reflection and a mutual affection and respect which were among the sustaining threads of his life in the years immediately preceding, and throughout, his long old age. The precise nature of the relationship between Cavalieri and Michelangelo, specifically the extent to which it might be regarded as (from Michelangelo's point of view, at least) homosexual, has been endlessly

debated in the scholarly literature. There is no question that Michelangelo loved Tommaso fiercely, but equally there is no evidence that this was ever consummated, nor indeed that Cavalieri reciprocated in kind, although his devotion to the older man is unquestionable; he was with him when he died, alongside Daniele da Volterra, Michelangelo's pupil and disciple.

What is certain is that the poems Michelangelo wrote for Cavalieri and Colonna speak of both passionate love and an aspiration to a chaste devotion, which mirrors that of the soul's approach to the divine in neoplatonic thought and literature. Their tightly interwoven expressions of emotional and spiritual longing express the platonic aim to transform physical desire for a beautiful object or person into a spiritual impulse, elevating the soul towards unity with the divine and the experience of the eternal. Whilst they share some similar themes, the poems for Cavalieri and Colonna possess different qualities. Mortimer suggests that while Cavalieri brought to Michelangelo's writing 'ecstatic and transcendent vision', his poems for Colonna reflect her place as 'a reforming influence, shaping the poet's moral life'. Saslow comments that, for Michelangelo, the world was 'a battleground of titanic moral and spiritual forces [with] the same combat played out most often within himself'. Such a worldview is consistent with the neoplatonic doctrine that the macrocosm is to be found reflected in the microcosm and allows for a more nuanced reading of some of his most deeply 'personal' writing than is permitted by an interpretation based solely on the intense nature of his relationships with his two principal muses.

The language of Michelangelo's verse is knotty and, as his translators have universally noted, extremely problematic to unpick. Symonds saw in its difficulties a similarity with the business of extracting sculpture from stone, describing the sonnets as 'the rough-hewn blockings-out of poems rather than finished works of art'. Indeed, the poems' imagery is often reflective of Michelangelo's principal artistic activities of painting and sculpting, which he uses frequently as metaphors for the process of spiritual development whose (often painful) trials his poems document. No. 46 begins, 'If my rough hammer shapes from the hard stone'; no. 62, written for Tommaso Cavalieri, starts, 'Only with forging fire can the smith bend the loved work to his concept's mastery'; while no. 236, for Vittoria Colonna, deploys the journey from sketch to painting and from model to finished sculpture to illustrate the work of remaking the soul from 'the model born, unprized and vile'.

It is the intensity of Michelangelo's relationship with Tommaso de' Cavalieri which most profoundly marks the seven poems whose manuscripts form part of the exhibition 'Michelangelo's Dream'. As Stephanie Buck notes in her catalogue essay, they are remarkably direct and intimate, and yet, 'are not private in today's sense, but were meant, or at least

permitted, to be shared with an elite audience'. Combining personal, human passion with a quest for divine love and beauty, they are paradigmatic of a large section of Michelangelo's poetry, in which his spiritual and emotional life was laid open among a small group of his close associates. This openness did not always result in understanding, and in the sonnet, *Se l'immortal desio*, Michelangelo complains of the distance between himself and Cavalieri brought about by Tommaso's having paid heed to those who were sceptical of the chastity of Michelangelo's intentions. Melancholy and joy respectively characterise the sonnets, *Non so s'è la desiata luce* and *S'un casto d'amor*, and throughout the poems in the exhibition it is possible to sense the emotional and spiritual tension which pervades not only Michelangelo's poetry but, to a large degree his work in painting and sculpture too.



Above:  
Giorgio Vasari  
*Monument to Michelangelo*  
1570  
Santa Croce, Florence, Italy

Audio recordings, in both English and Italian including introductions by Jim Harris, of selected sonnets can be found on the Learning Resource CD.

# 6: THE WORDS DIDN'T MERIT SUCH A SETTING: MICHELANGELO'S MUSIC

Six months after Michelangelo first met Tommaso de'Cavalieri late in 1532, a letter from Michelangelo's friend and fellow artist, Sebastiano del Piombo, tells of an arrangement for two poems on Tommaso to be set to music in Rome. Only a week later, 25th July 1533, Sebastiano sent two madrigals to Michelangelo in Florence, adding that Tommaso had also received copies of them both. By the end of the month, the pieces had been performed by Giovan Francesco [Fattucci], Michelangelo adding 'they are considered wonderful things to sing; the words didn't merit such a setting.' Unfortunately, the two works, by Constanzo Festa and Jean Conseil [Concilion] have not survived, so it is impossible to ascertain which poems Michelangelo released for this project. The settings however, are surely to be regarded as presentation pieces, much as the group of drawings and extensive collection of sonnets which form the subject of this exhibition were intended.

This exchange of letters is the first alert to the interest of Michelangelo's contemporaries in his poetry as possible source material for musical composition. Many composers have followed this early lead, and it seems clear from Michelangelo's self-effacing judgement on his poetic capabilities that adaptation of his poetry as a stimulus to additional artistic endeavour would have been greeted favourably. Indeed, scholars of the sonnets look to his poetry to unveil abiding aesthetic concerns which animate the whole of Michelangelo's work: sculpture, painting, drawing as well as the poetry itself. Christopher Ryan points to the double sestet for Vittoria Colonna, *From birth I was given beauty as a faithful guide to my vocation; it is a light and mirror for me in both the arts...* *This alone carries the eye to those heights which here I set myself to paint and sculpt.* Ryan concludes from these lines that Michelangelo's 'artistic enterprise was an endeavour to make heaven more present on earth.' Art is both an inspiration and a directive to earthly life, the means through which, for an instant, humanity might glimpse an immortal world beyond: be it the Neo-Platonic good which so exercised Renaissance culture, or the Christian heaven. It is surely no surprise

that Michelangelo was engaged in work for the Sistine ceiling at this time. It is through art (and beauty) then, that Michelangelo perceived life. Creativity after his own works can be regarded not as dilution but as a re-iteration of his themes, reaching new audiences and subsequent generations. This essay will explore music influenced by him.

Despite an attempt to publish a selection of poems during Michelangelo's life, the first collection was not seen in print until 1623, in a heavily edited volume by his great-nephew Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger, produced in a time of stringent religious censure. Thorough knowledge of his poetry during his lifetime therefore, is evidenced by discussion in the humanist circle of intellectuals, aristocrats and papal advisors in Florence and Rome. In light of this it is remarkable that the first known publication of his poetry appeared in the second book of composer Tromboncino's *Fioretti di frattole*, in 1518. Two further contemporary settings survive by Jacob Arcadelt, both dating from the late 1530s or early 1540s, a decade distinguished by powerful friendships with Tommaso de'Cavalieri and the poetess and thinker Vittoria Colonna, whom he met in 1536. The text for the two madrigals, 'Deh! Dimmi, amor, se l'alma di costei' and 'Io dico che fra noi potenti dei' is drawn from one poem, 'Deh! Dimmi'. It is easy to see why Arcadelt divided it: the first verse, in a male voice: 'Ah, tell me Love: if that lady's soul were as pitying as her face is beautiful, would there be anyone so stupid as not to renounce his liberty and give himself to her?' The second verse a coquettish reply: 'I declare that among you, powerful gods, every reverse should be patiently borne.' Ryan notes the poem to be for 'the beautiful and cruel lady' of ambiguous identity, giving the poem a date of 1536-1546. There is an interesting symmetry in Michelangelo's actions regarding these settings, however, and those for Tommaso. In this case the poem was given to Luigi del Riccio to find a suitable composer. On receipt of the pieces by Arcadelt, Michelangelo wrote to ask how best to pay for work which was 'considered to be beautiful.' Was this music to serve as a presentation offering, and if so, to whom? In turn, the publication of the madrigal

AH, TELL ME LOVE:  
IF THAT LADY'S SOUL  
WERE AS PITYING AS  
HER FACE IS BEAUTIFUL,  
WOULD THERE BE  
ANYONE SO STUPID AS  
NOT TO RENOUNCE  
HIS LIBERTY AND GIVE  
HIMSELF TO HER?

”

## MICHELANGELO'S MUSIC

Written by Dr Charlotte de Mille, visiting lecturer at The Courtauld Institute of Art.

A full set of footnotes and references for this essay are available on request.

**CURRICULUM LINKS: KS5+ Music, Art and Design, History, Art History and Philosophy.**

# GIAN FRANCESCO BERNANDI WROTE OF A 'BEAUTIFUL REPRESENTATION OF HELL AND HEAVEN, WITH A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE SOUL AND THE BODY', CONTRASTING 'LIGHT AND ANGELIC FIGURES' WITH THE 'FIRE AND DEVILS' OF HELL...



in Arcadelt's *Il Primo Libro de' madrigali d'Arcadelt* in 1538 closes the time frame in which the poem was written. What is most significant here is that Michelangelo's poetry received a wider audience through publication as libretti – Arcadelt's volume passed through 55 editions across Italy between 1528 – 1654; moreover, that in each case, Michelangelo's dealing with composers was indirect.

It is indirect influence which connects Michelangelo to the 'sacred opera' *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo* by Tommaso's son Emilio de' Cavalieri, with a libretto by Augustus Manni. First performed in February of the Holy Year of 1600, Emilio's extraordinary work had to provide suitably extravagant entertainment to substitute for the Roman Carnival traditionally held that month, but suspended in a Holy Year. Destined for the Chiesa Nuova, the work was attended by the majority of the college of cardinals. Emilio's response to potentially conflicting interests was to develop an entirely new genre of music, 'musica affetuosa', since recognized as the first opera. To his contemporaries, Emilio resuscitated the style of rhetoric from ancient Greece and Rome. Emphasizing the need for a variety of 'diverse affects like pity and jubilation, weeping and laughter', the intention of the work was to 'move the spectators to devotion.' To this end, Cavalieri's editor published the work with an extensive preface explaining the novel techniques employed: the first document of its kind. To be performed in a space holding not more than 1000 people, the allegorical characters [chiefly Time, Soul, and Body], were to be fully costumed actors who could interweave declamatory speech with singing, and whose music was as identifiable as their staging. The Soul therefore has a key of G major; the Body G minor; and in addition, the instrumental music was written to 'conform to the affect of the singer.' Doubt was therefore to be syncopated, with an echo invented for moments of crisis (a device subsequently adopted with great skill by Monteverdi in *Orfeo*, 1607); 'the *Repose of God*' distinguished by sustained notes; and Time heralded by rapid notes on the word 'flight' over a steady bass of minims. The reverse of the contemporary genre of pastoral, this music was geared to

the clear communication of a simple text of an overtly moralizing content.

The success of Cavalieri's staging was recorded by contemporaries. Gian Francesco Bernandi wrote of a 'beautiful representation of hell and heaven, with a dialogue between the soul and the body', contrasting 'light and angelic figures' with the 'fire and devils' of hell. The subject is temptation. Act III provides a 'literary and musical counterpart of paintings of the Last Judgement,' Kirkendale claiming the opera to be a 'translation of Michelangelo's fresco into music.' Extreme though this may sound, there is strong evidence that Emilio knew the Vatican fresco, and moreover, it has been established that Michelangelo explored visual motifs for his work in the Sistine chapel in the series of drawings for Tommaso, which Emilio also knew. The Venice Phaeton sheet includes two figure studies relating to the Last Judgement, and comparison has also been made with the reclining figure (the river god Eridanus). Tityus is a giant briefly mentioned in Dante's *Inferno* (XIII), and the verso of this drawing, *The Risen Christ*, further indicates Michelangelo's willingness to mix religious iconography with mythological subjects from Ovid on the same sheet. The central figure in *The Dream* itself has been compared to the Sistine Adam (1511), yet the surrounding Vices suggest the recognition of sin. Thematically, *The Dream* animates that state between waking and sleeping, knowledge and innocence, which may not be far removed from the transformative state of judgement itself.

At base, it is the passage of metamorphosis which held the interest of the Nineteenth and Twentieth century composers who turned to Michelangelo's poetry: principally Richard Strauss, Hugo Wolf, Benjamin Britten and Dmitri Shostakovich. Between the contemporary settings and Joseph Gabriel Rheinberger's *Canzone di Michelangelo 'Vom ersten Seufzer zum letzten Atemzuge'*, 1859, published 1882, [*Drei Gesänge*, no. 3, op 129, setting Michelangelo G 26], Michelangelo's poetry was not a source used for composition, although stories of Michelangelo's genius and sculptural technique had inspired several operas. This is less surprising than it might seem, for editions of the poetry



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Hugo Wolf: 3 Michelangelo Lieder

Benjamin Britten: 7 Sonnets of Michelangelo

Tenor: Joseph Timmons, Baritone: Edmund S (tbc), Piano: Tessa Grobel

**SUNDAY 9 MAY 3-4PM**

Emilio de' Cavalieri, scenes from *Rappresentazione di l'Anima et di Corpo*

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were scarce and inaccurate prior to Cesare Guasti's 1863 volume, which nevertheless failed to represent the chronological development of Michelangelo's work. This was followed by an English edition of the sonnets translated (with changes of gender) by John Aldington Symonds in 1878, and an edition by Carl Frey in 1897. It can be concluded that these editions had a direct and significant impact on the re-emergence of his poetry as a source for composition.

Strauss' early setting 'Madrigal' [G 138], the first of his *Fünf Lieder* op. 15 (1886), takes as its subject an impassioned text to the 'beautiful and cruel lady'. The instability of the 3/8 rhythm here mimics the precarious nature of an intolerable state, emphasised by sudden key shifts before Strauss returns to the opening theme re-iterating the first stanzas of the madrigal. Whereas Strauss' setting is an exception in a group of songs for which he otherwise turned to the poet von Schack, Hugo Wolf wrote a group of four Michelangelo Lieder (one of which he never released), and as such is the first composer to form a song cycle from Michelangelo's poetry. Wolf's settings (1897), comprise the last songs he wrote before descending into insanity and an untimely death in a Swiss sanatorium. The music manifests the fragility of mortality with an inevitability which is tortuously progressive. The rising chromatic sequence of quavers which open the first song, 'Wohl denk' ich oft' recall Mussorgsky's 'Lullaby', the opening of *Songs and Dances of Death* (1877). For Mussorgsky the subject, from a poem by Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov, is a mother cradling her infant, helpless against the sickness which is to take the child from her. Wolf's own circumstances, ravaged by disease in a slow stranglehold of impending delirium, surely makes this quotation visceral. The text for this song comes from an incomplete set of 13 octaves addressing unrequited love and personal inadequacy composed by Michelangelo c. 1531-2 [G 54]. Wolf's musical and historical context arguably shifts Michelangelo's original emphasis in the passage he selected: in isolation, the octet's themes of transformation, posterity, and memory are sharpened, directed not so much to the unknown woman but to humanity in general. This motivation is brought to full light in the second song, 'Alles endet, was entstehet', a setting of an early *barzioletta* or *frottola* from before

1524 [G 21]: 'Whoever is born arrives at death'. The key of C# minor despairs at the futility of mortal endeavours, despite a brief reprieve of F major as the dead recall their past lives. Wolf here seems to speak with them, charting his own weakness whilst momentarily facilitating their return through him. In this context, the final setting of a sonnet originally written for Tommaso, 'Non so se s'è la desiata luce' [G 76, ex. P3] assumes an alternative light also, where in Wolf's handling the addressee is not a mortal youth, but God (explicitly so in Robert-Tornow's loose translation). The suspensions of the dotted opening rack up a Schubertian tension which is not resolved until the final chord, and structurally the accompaniment mirrors the C# minor / F major shifts of the previous song. If Wolf aspired to a spiritual transcendence to complement bodily change, his composition leaves his audience in doubt.

It is a very much more vital transformation that the 27 year old Benjamin Britten sought in Michelangelo's poetry, and it is his 7 *Sonnets of Michelangelo* (1940) which most fully complement the emphasis on Tommaso de' Cavalieri in this exhibition. The song cycle, written for Peter Pears while both were in the States, had its premiere in London in 1942. It has been suggested that Britten relied on the mask of Renaissance Italian to obscure meaning from his audience, all too few of whom would read the programme in detail. Yet the Italian language principally served creative and musical purposes: Britten himself had commented on the freedom of a foreign tongue, enabling him to 'respond to Nietzsche's call to "mediterraneanize" music.' He was undoubtedly successful, for the British composer John Ireland wrote 'Britten's detractors, whilst admitting the effectiveness, said – "a pastiche of Verdi, Bellini, and Donizetti." I feel hardly competent to judge. In some ways the music seemed very Italian, also the treatment of the voice part – but some current English harmonies were not entirely avoided.' Mediterranean light and air suffuse the set which opens with a fresh *Tramontana* [G 84], lulling and gathering new force as the sequence develops. The second, 'A che più debb'io mai l'intensa voglia' [G 98, ex. book x] maintains the wave-like sensation of successive gusts animated in a dotted rhythm, an unsettled quality which gives full vent to the railing

doubt of the poet: 'What point is there in my still giving vent to my intense emotion in weeping'? For its sustained line and air of security, the third, 'Veggio co' bei voistri occhi un dolce lume' [G 89], has been regarded as a 'nocturne': the cadences conjuring an encradling peace which complements the cosmological metaphor befitting of neo-platonic sentiment. This joyful hopefulness is sustained despite a coy off-beat opening to 'Tu sa' ch'io so, signor mie' [G 60, ex. P1b] which builds to strain the emotional tension of the opening pair before settling into even tempo of spaciousness. The next pair develop renewed liveliness, with a crisp 'plucked' accompaniment in the fifth [G 95] which seems to come into full body for the sixth [G 59, ex. P1a] – painting the plea voiced mid way through the first of these two: 'make your dark face clear for my power of sight.' To this, the seventh sonnet [G 41] stands as a glorious affirmation of love, transcendent of the conflicts animated in the preceding songs. 'The music is completely original', a contemporary reviewer asserted, suggesting Michelangelo's 'unhappy restlessness with the kind of clairvoyance that is the unmistakable attribute of genius.'

Shostakovich's settings, *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo* (1974), come like Wolf's, from the end of the composer's life. Although Shostakovich was attracted to the 8 sonnets and 3 poems of his cycle for their scope – from awakening to earthly death – Michelangelo's presence as a sculptor is dominant throughout in a staccato, often hammered piano accompaniment. The cycle is framed by a prologue, titled 'Truth' by Shostakovich [G 6] and an epilogue, 'Immortality' [G 194; 184]. Contained within are three sets of three sonnets, which explore love, creativity, and its vulnerability.

What is striking from this survey is the propensity of Michelangelo's poetry to travel: from the contemporary setting by the Franco-Flemish Italian domicile Arcadelt, to recent composers renowned for producing music redolent of their national origins yet which keeps an original voice that cannot be so easily classified. It is music that speaks across cultures and generations, which, perhaps, following Shostakovich's estimation of Michelangelo's poetry itself 'belongs to all nations... [It] appeals by its profound, philosophical thought, its extraordinary humanism and its penetrating reflections on creativity and love.'

#### FURTHER SETTINGS:

Peter Maxwell Davis, *Tondo di Michelangelo*, 2007 (baritone and piano)  
 John Mitchell, *6 Sonnets of Michelangelo*, 1989 (cello and piano)  
 Erich J. Wolff, *An dieser Stätte war's*, *Lieder* no. 6; *Bring' ich der Schönheit die Seele nah*, no. 11; *Da deiner Schönheit Glanz mich hat besiegt*, no. 12 (G 230); *Gemahnt dein Name mich an deine Züge*, no. 22 (G 284); *In schwerer Schuld nur*, no. 33 (G 280); *Kleinodien, Zierat, Perlen und Korallen*, no. 35 (G 115); *Täuscht euch, ihr Augen, nicht*, no. 51; *Wie soll den Mut ich finden?*, no. 58; published 1914  
 Luigi Dallapiccola, *Sei Cori di Michelangelo Buonarroti il Giovane*, 1933 (a capella)



Left and above left:  
 Michelangelo Buonarroti  
*The Dream (Il Sogno)*  
 c.1533 (detail showing vices; wrath and lust)

# 7: LOVE SONNETS IN THE EARLY 16TH CENTURY:

## SIR THOMAS WYATT AND MICHELANGELO'S POETRY

### REGARDE! MFL ACTIVITY: ITALIAN

#### Sir Thomas Wyatt – Sonnet 7, c.1525-1538

Farewell Love and all thy laws for ever,  
thy baited hooks shall tangle me no more;  
Senec and Plato call me from thy lore,  
to perfect wealth my wit for to endeavour.

In blind error when I did persever,  
thy sharp repulse, that pricketh ay so sore,  
hath taught me to set in trifles no store,  
and scape forth, since liberty is liefer.

Therefore farewell, go trouble younger  
hearts, and in me claim no more authority,  
with idle youth go use thy property,

And thereon spend thy many brittle darts.  
For hitherto though I have lost all my time,  
me lusteth no longer rotten boughs to  
climb

#### Sir Francis Wyatt – Sonnet 22, c. 1525-1538

I abide and abide and better abide,  
and, after the old proverb, the happy day,  
and ever my lady to me doth say,  
"let me alone and I will provide".

I abide and abide and tarry the tide  
and with abiding speed well ye may.  
thus do I abide I wot alway,

n' other obtaining nor yet denied.

Aye me! this long abiding  
seemeth to me, as who sayeth,  
a prolonging of a dying death,  
or a refusing of a desired thing.

Much were it better for to be plain,  
than to say abide and yet shall not obtain.

#### Michelangelo Buonarroti, 'Non so se s'è la desiata luce', c. 1534-46

Non so se s'è la desiata luce  
del suo primo fattor, che l'alma sente,  
o se dalla memoria della gente  
alcun' altra beltà nel cor traluce;

O se fama o se sogno alcun produce  
algi occhi manifesto, al cor presente,  
di sé lasciando un non se che cocente,  
ch'è forse or quel c'a pianger mi conduce.

Quel ch'i' sento e ch'i' cerco e chi mi guidi  
meco non è; né so ben veder dove  
trovar mel possa, e par c'altri mel mostri.

Questo, signor, m'avvien, po' ch'i' vi vidi,  
c'un dolce amaro, un sì e no mi muove:  
certo saranno stati gli occhi vostri.

I do not know if it is the very longed-for  
light of the one who first made it that my  
soul feels: or if some other beauty lodged  
in my memory of people shines in my heart.

Or if fame or dreaming brings someone  
before my eyes, or makes him present in

my heart, leaving behind a burning trace I  
cannot describe – perhaps it is this which  
draws my heart to tears.

What I feel and what I seek, and who may  
guide me to it, lie beyond my power; and  
I cannot clearly see where I may find it,  
though it seems that someone may show  
me.

This, lord, is what has happened to me  
from the time I saw you: something bitter  
and sweet, a yes and no move me: it is  
certainly your eyes that have brought this  
about.

#### Michelangelo Buonarroti, 'Se l'immortal desio, c'alza e corregge', c. 1532-33

Se l'immortal desio, c'alza e corregge  
gli altrui pensier, traessi e' mie di fore,  
forse c'ancor nella casa d'Amore  
farie pietoso chi spietato regge.

Ma perché l'alma per divina legge  
ha lunga vita, e 'l corpo in breve muore,  
non può 'l senso suo lode o suo valore  
appien descriver quel c'appien non legge.

Dunche, oilmé! Come sarà udita  
la casta voglia che 'l chor dentro incende  
da chi sempre se stesso in altrui vede?

La mie cara giornata m'è impedita  
col mie signor c'alle menzogne attende,  
c'a dire il ver, bugiardo è chi nol crede.

If desire of the immortal, which raises and  
directs men's thoughts aright, were to make  
mine show clearly, that would perhaps  
make merciful him who rules without mercy  
still in the realm of Love.

But since by divine law the soul has a  
long life, while the body after a short time  
dies, the senses cannot fully tell the soul's  
praise of worth, since this they cannot fully  
perceive.

Alas, then, how shall the caste desire  
which sets aflame my heart within be heard  
by those who always see themselves in  
others?

I am shut off from the dear company of my  
lord who pays heed to falsehoods, while,  
if truth be told, he is a liar who does not  
believe it.

#### GLOSSERY OF TERMS

##### Thomas Wyatt: Sonnet 7

endeavour = strive for

that pricketh ay so sore = that is always so  
painful.

to set in trifles no store = to attach no  
importance to trivialities.

liefer = more desirable.

property = power, capabilities

me lusteth no longer = I no longer wish.

##### Thomas Wyatt: Sonnet 22

abide = wait (patiently)

after the old proverb, the happy day = I

await, as the proverb says, for a happier

(more fortunate) day

I will provide = I will provide satisfaction

tarry the tide = wait for the tide to turn

And with abiding speed well ye may = it is  
possible that, by waiting, you (one) may be  
successful

I wot alway = I reckon, forever

N'other = no other, nothing

as who sayeth = as one might describe it

and yet shall not obtain = even though (she  
knows) that he (I or anyone) will not obtain  
his desire

The sonnet is a form of poetry that can be  
found in lyrical poetry from Europe. The  
term "sonnet" derives from the Italian word  
sonetto, meaning "little song" or "little  
sound". By the thirteenth century, it had  
come to signify a poem of fourteen lines  
that follows a strict rhyme scheme and  
specific structure.

# AYE ME! THIS LONG ABIDING SEEMETH TO ME, AS WHO SAYETH, A PROLONGING OF A DYING DEATH



Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) fu un famoso poeta rinascimentale inglese e ambasciatore alla corte di Enrico VIII; si dice fosse anche l'amante di Anna Bolena. Le sue poesie sono permeate da sentimenti di amor cortese ma allo stesso tempo passionale. Scrisse oltre 200 canzoni e compose epigrammi e satire, sperimentando con nuove forme poetiche quali il rondeau. È noto maggiormente per aver introdotto il sonetto in versi in lingua inglese, componendo lui stesso 31 sonetti, di cui 10 sono traduzioni di versi petrarcheschi. La sua importanza nella storia della letteratura inglese è fondamentale. La forma del sonetto e l'impiego della lingua inglese anziché del latino influenzarono poeti successivi, come Shakespeare.

A prima vista, l'amore passionale di Wyatt sembra essere molto distante dalla concezione più sobria e contenuta dell'amore descritta da Michelangelo. Tuttavia, entrambi gli autori descrivono la sofferenza che l'amore provoca nell'innamorato rifiutato, e la quasi dipendenza esistenziale da esso. I versi 9-11 nel sonetto 22 di Wyatt:

*Aye! This long abiding,  
seemeth to me, as who sayeth,  
a prolonging of a dying death'*

rispecchiano il dolore di Michelangelo nei versi 4-8:

Non so se s'è la desiata luce  
[...] o se fama o se sogno alcun produce  
agli occhi manifesto, al cor presente,  
di sé lasciando un non so che cocente  
ch'è forse or quel c'a pianger mi conduce.

La passione e il desiderio dell'amata, descritti chiaramente in termini fisici nell'immaginario poetico di Wyatt, o suggeriti con più timidezza nella prosa di Michelangelo, sono una forma ricorrente in entrambi i sonetti dei poeti.

Riferimenti stilistici e tematici a poeti come Dante (1265-1321), Petrarca (1304-1374) o al filosofo greco Platone, sono un altro elemento che accomuna i due poeti. Il verso 3 nel sonetto 7, Wyatt rimanda direttamente a Petrarca e a Seneca, mentre nella poesia di Michelangelo, Se l'immortal desio, c'alza e corregge, riferimenti alle idee filosofiche di Platone si riscontrano

nei versi 7 (non può 'l senso suo lode o suo valore) e 10 (la casta voglia che 'l cor dentro incende). Un'attenta analisi del loro linguaggio poetico, del ritmo e della musicalità dei versi, ci permettono di capire come mai furono così apprezzati dai loro contemporanei. Ci aiutano inoltre a capire la concezione dell'amore e della poesia in Italia e in Inghilterra ai primi del Cinquecento.

## SONETTI:

- L'amore ai primi del Cinquecento:
- Come viene descritto l'amore nei 4 sonetti? La visione di Sir Wyatt è differente da quella di Michelangelo?
- Descrizione dell'amata: come viene rappresentata fisicamente l'amata? Potresti dipingere un ritratto o descrivere chiaramente l'amata di entrambi i poeti, basandoti sulle informazioni rilevate nei sonetti?
- Puoi trovare delle corrispondenze tra la rappresentazione dell'amata di Michelangelo nei suoi disegni e nei suoi dipinti?
- Puoi trovare delle particolari sfumature o idee che esprimano che tipo di amore è rivelato nelle poesie di Michelangelo e Wyatt?
- Avendo letto questi sonetti, come definiresti che cos'è un sonetto? Conosci qualche altro esempio di un sonetto? Se sì, di chi?

## ATTIVITA':

Riscrivi in inglese o in italiano corrente i sonetti sopra citati: devi utilizzare la forma del sonetto ma puoi impiegare una vasta gamma di termini. Come si paragona il tuo sonetto con quelli dei tuoi compagni? Leggete i vostri sonetti ad alta voce. Il loro ritmo e la loro musicalità vi ricordano di qualche tipo di musica contemporanea? Puoi convertire il tuo sonetto in un più vivace e moderno linguaggio musicale?



Left:  
Michelangelo Buonarroti  
*Lazarus*  
c.1516 (detail)  
Red and black chalk on laid paper  
© The Trustees of the British Museum

## LOVE SONNETS IN THE EARLY 16TH CENTURY

Written by Alice Odin with Italian translation by Ellida Minelli (for a full English translation see overleaf)

**CURRICULUM LINKS: KS4+  
MFL Italian.**

# REGARDE! LANGUAGE AND ART

**CURRICULUM LINKS: KS4+ MFL ITALIAN.**  
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Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) was a prominent 16th century English poet and an Ambassador at the court of Henry VIII; he was also rumoured to have been one of Anne Boleyn's lovers. His poetry is suffused with sentiments of passionate yet courtly love. While having written over 200 songs, Wyatt also experimented with new poetic forms such as the rondeau, epigrams and satires. He is probably best known for having 'pioneered' the sonnet in English verse, himself writing 31 sonnets, of which 10 were translations of Petrarch.

Wyatt's poetry plays a key role in the history of English literature. His codification of sonnets and his use of the English language (as opposed to Latin) were to influence later poets, such as William Shakespeare, one of the best-known sonnet writers.

At a quick glance, Wyatt's fervent expression of love seems to be at odds with Michelangelo's more restrained depiction of the amorous sentiment. However, both poets compete in depicting the painful emotional and almost existential dependence love can hold on a rejected lover.

Sir Thomas Wyatt's verses 9-11 in sonnet 22:

*Aye me! this long abiding  
seemeth to me, as who sayeth,  
a prolonging of a dying death  
mirrors Michelangelo's pain in verses 4-8,  
Non so se s'è la desiata luce:  
[...] fame or dreaming brings someone  
before my eyes,  
[...], leaving behind a burning trace I  
cannot describe – perhaps it is this which  
draws my heart to tears.*

Desire and longing for the loved one, either depicted in clear physical terms in Wyatt's overall poetic imagery, or suggested more tentatively in Michelangelo's prose, is a constant recurrence in both poets' sonnets. Stylistic and conceptual references to earlier Italian poets such as Dante (1265 – 1321), Petrarch (1304 – 1374) or thinkers of the Antiquity such as Plato, is also a similarity both artists share. Wyatt makes clear references to Petrarch and Senec in verse 3 of sonnet 7, while in Michelangelo's poem, Se

l'immortal desio, c'alza e corregge, clear references to Plato's philosophical views are made in verse 6 ('the senses cannot fully tell the soul's praise') and verse 9 ('the chaste desire which sets aflame by heart'). A close examination of the poetic language, and of rhythms and musicality at play in these sonnets, help us understand why both poets were very successful in their own times. They also help us understand the poetic and love conventions of early 16th century Italy and England.

## LOVE IN THE EARLY 16TH CENTURY:

o How is love depicted in all four sonnets?  
Is Sir Wyatt's view of love different from Michelangelo's?

o Depiction of the loved one: how are the physical attributes of the beloved described? Could you paint a portrait or clearly describe both poets' lovers from the information related in the sonnets?

o How can you relate Michelangelo's depiction of his beloved to his drawing and painting work?

o Can you pick up on any specific nuance, or idea underlying the type of love expressed in both Michelangelo's and Wyatt's poetry?

## SONNETS IN LITERATURE:

After having read these sonnets, can you define what a sonnet is just by reading the examples? Do you know any other poems that are like these examples of sonnets? If so, who by?

## ACTIVITY:

With the help of the glossary, rewrite in contemporary English the Thomas Wyatt sonnets. Then try re-writing the Michelangelo sonnets in contemporary English or Italian: you will have to stick to the form of the sonnet, but are allowed to play with a wide range of vocabulary. What do your final sonnets look like? How do they compare with some of your classmates? Read your sonnets out loud. Do their rhythm, musicality, speak to you, do they remind you of a contemporary form of music? Can you transpose your sonnet into a more lively or modern form of music?

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All images are displayed in The Courtauld Gallery exhibition, Michelangelo's Dream, 17 February – 16 May 2010. All images © Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London/.

This section also includes audio recordings by Jim Harris relating to Michelangelo's poems and poetry.

## 2: SECTION 2 – Michelangelo Drawings

This series of drawings reveal Michelangelo's incredible talent in depicting the human body. Executed between the 1510s and the 1510s, these well-known works of art show Michelangelo's constant commitment to drawing as an art form. All images © The British Museum, London

## 3: SECTION 3 – Dreams in Art

Dreams have always played a key part in artistic representations. The images in this section, all part of The Courtauld Gallery's collection, depict dreams' semi-conscious state in which fantasies, visions and twists of the mind are allowed. All images © The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London

## CURRICULUM LINKS: KS2+ Art and Design, History, Art History, Geography and PSE.

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You will need a web browser such as Internet Explorer, Firefox or Safari to access the contents of this CD. Most computers have such software already installed.

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1: INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION  
Dr Stephanie Buck

2: UNDERSTANDING THE DREAM  
Emily Gray

3: MY SOUL TO MESSER TOMMASO  
Rachel Ropeik

4: DRAWN IN DREAMS  
Katie Faulkner

5: MICHELANGELO'S POETRY  
Jim Harris

6: MICHELANGELO AND MUSIC  
Dr Charlotte de Mille

7: REGARDDE!  
Alice Odin with Italian translation by Ellida Minelli

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TEACHERS' RESOURCE  
MICHELANGELO'S DREAM  
First Edition

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