

5504641233

Pitsanupul Sunanand

Michelangelo

1036 words

It is very common that we always take a lot of pictures while traveling around. Those photos will definitely bring back memories of good old days whenever we look at them. That is mainly because a picture is worth of a thousand words. Similarly, when it comes to the world of art, the artists usually leave some messages on their artworks most of which are based on their perceptions of beauty toward people and surroundings. Most of them also interpret very important events during their time in their art. Michelangelo Buonarroti is considered one of the most well-known examples of such kind. Because he lived an extremely long life, he had a chance to be a witness or even a participant in all cultural and political changes in ancient Italy.<sup>1</sup> That is the reason why such famous works of his as *Pietà*, *David*, and *Battle of Cascica* represent his own thoughts of Italian cultures and politics in each historic period of Italy, the home to Renaissance.

Michelangelo di Ludovico Buonarroti Simoni, shortly known as Michelangelo, was born near Arezzo, in Caprese, Italy in 1475. His family was natives of Florence. Therefore, they moved back to Settignano, a village situated on the Florentine hill, after a few weeks of his birth. Unfortunately, his mother died during his childhood which

---

<sup>1</sup> “Michelangelo. Art, life and bibliography.” *MoodBook*. 28 Jan. 2013.  
<<http://www.moodbook.com/history/renaissance/michelangelo-art-and-life.html>>

resulted in his difficult relationship among his family, made him lack affection and tend to keep to himself. When he turned to 13, he enraged his father after persuading him to allow him to leave grammar school and becoming an apprentice in the workshop of the painter Domenico Ghirlandio. With Michelangelo's prodigious skills, Domenico was very impressed, and soon recommended him to Lorenzo De Medici, the ruler of Florence. He was invited then to live in the Medici household, and went on to study at the sculpture school in the Medici gardens. There he had an opportunity to converse with many prominent people at that time who tremendously helped broaden and modify his outlook on art.<sup>2</sup>

After the death of Lorenzo De Medici in 1492 and under Savonarola's influence, Florence became increasingly politically unstable as Savonarola and his followers denounced the corruption of Florence, and demanded an open and transparent government with no influence from the Vatican or from the nobility. Without his patronage, that was when Michelangelo's life began to take a downturn. He later decided to pack up, and fled to Rome after the invasion of Italy by Charles VII of France in 1494. There Michelangelo was exposed to lots of newly unearthed classical statues and ruins. He was soon commissioned by French cardinal Jean De Billheres to produce one of his greatest works of sculpture of all time, *Pietà*, which also marked a watershed event in the Italian High Renaissance.<sup>3</sup> At that time the lamentation of Christ was a common theme popular in Christian art from the High Middle Ages to Baroque, and prevailed in

---

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia contributors. "Michelangelo and the Medici." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 28 Jan. 2013. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelangelo\\_and\\_the\\_Medici](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelangelo_and_the_Medici)>

<sup>3</sup> Grömling, Alexandra. *Work and Life*. 1999, p.23.

Northern European art since the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> The *Pietà* brought Michelangelo enduring fame, mostly because his interpretation of young Mary holding a dead body of Christ in her arms was notable in its faithfulness to the Renaissance Humanist ideals of physical perfection and beauty.<sup>5</sup> Also, it was the only work that Michelangelo ever signed, but later regretted doing so out of his prideful anger. Michelangelo vowed to never again sign a work of his hands.<sup>6</sup>

After being renowned as Italy's foremost sculptor thanks to *Pietà*, Michelangelo was able to return to Florence as a hero in 1501 when the Florentine Republic was asserting its newly found independence from Medici rule. Despite constant threats from the opposed, Michelangelo accepted the commission to sculpt a statue of *David*. Unlike his previous work, Michelangelo expressed his political orientation through this marble statue of his. Because Florence was experiencing several years of political confusions at that time, Michelangelo used *David* as a model of heroic courage, in hopes of that the Florentines would get his message that they should be active and well-prepared to confront any permanent threats. He also chose to represent *David* as a very concentrated and ready-to-fight protector of the city with worried look, holding a stone in his right hand. This political symbolism conveyed some warning to the Florentines that they should become aware of their responsibilities and committed to accomplishing their

---

<sup>4</sup> Wikipedia contributors. "Lamentation of Christ." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 28 Jan. 2013. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamentation\\_of\\_Christ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamentation_of_Christ)>

<sup>5</sup> "Michelangelo's Pieta." *Moodbook*. 28 Jan. 2013 <<http://www.moodbook.com/history/renaissance/michelangelo-pieta.html>>

<sup>6</sup> "Michelangelo Sculpture." *HowStuffWorks*. 28 Jan. 2013 <<http://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/arts/artwork/michelangelo-sculptures1.htm>>

duties for the well being of the entire society.<sup>7</sup> As a symbol of the new Republic, Michelangelo insisted that the statue of *David* should stand before the townhall of Florence, The Palazzo Vecchio.

A few years later, Michelangelo was again commissioned by the Republic of Florence to depict the Battle of Cascina as to decorate its prestigious new hall of state with grand-scale paintings on the walls. So was Leonardo da Vinci, one of the greatest Florentine artists of the Renaissance era, to paint the Battle of Anghiari. It was meant to place two brilliant art influencers of that period in fresco battle-scene competition to promote the republic's legitimacy.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, both of them failed to complete their artworks due to some technical difficulties and interruptions. However, the unfinished battle painting of Michelangelo still depicted a scene at the beginning of the battle where the Florentine soldiers were caught off guard while taking bath naked by their leader's trumpet which warned them of a sudden attack of the enemies. The painting *Battle of Cascina* was believed to be Michelangelo's warning to the city of Florence. Because the state of Republic was just established, the Florentines should be resilient to any externalities unlike those naked soldiers in his painting if they wanted their newly found independence to carry on.

In summary, with above-mentioned and other artworks of his, Michelangelo contributed significantly to the development in the world of art. His abilities as a sculptor

---

<sup>7</sup> "Michelangelo Sculpture." *HowStuffWorks*. 28 Jan. 2013 <<http://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/arts/artwork/michelangelo-sculptures1.htm>>

<sup>8</sup> "The Battle of Cascina." *Italian Renaissance Art*. 30 Jan. 2013 <<http://www.italian-renaissance-art.com/Battle-of-Cascina.html>>

and a painter were also considered superior to any modern artists' in his day due mainly to his unsurpassed skills of combining meanings and expressiveness into the formal beauty.<sup>9</sup> Also, each of his works reflects his cultural and political beliefs in most of the important times in the history of ancient Italy. Needless to say, although it has been centuries after his death, the world will still remember Michelangelo as the pinnacle of the Renaissance art.

---

<sup>9</sup> Grömling, Alexandra. *Work and Life*. 1999. p.90-91.