

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Michelangelo: Divine Draftsman & Designer

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Nov 13, 2017 – Feb 12, 2018

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art's wide-ranging exhibition "Michelangelo: Divine Draftsman & Designer" examines the artistic production and development of the Renaissance master through his drawings. The exhibit is a result of the recent scholarly interest in drawings and their importance within the artistic process. The show spreads over twenty galleries and displays more than 200 works of art in diverse media: sculpture, paintings, architectural models, and drawings. On view are 133 drawings by Michelangelo, from fifty public and private collections in the United States and Europe, including studies of anatomy, preparatory sketches, as well as highly finished compositions. The exhibition celebrates Michelangelo as a *disegnatore*, draftsman, and demonstrates his extensive use of *disegno*, drawing, from his early days in Florence until his death in Rome.

The first gallery of the exhibition illuminates Michelangelo's artistic background in the Florentine workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio, a follower of the Florentine tradition of *disegno*, who explored diverse materials such as pen and ink, metal point, and black chalk. The exhibition demonstrates the themes Michelangelo explored in his drawings, particularly humanistic matters, as seen in *Il Sogno*, a presentation drawing meant to invoke intellectual debate (fig 1). Notable projects of Michelangelo are also featured; among them is the planning of the Tomb of Pope Julius II, who wished to have a grandiose tomb in St Peter's Basilica.

While Michelangelo is known to have been a solitary person, curator Carmen Bambach revealed his engagement in artistic exchanges in the form of correspondence and his influence on other artists. Prominent in the exhibition is Michelangelo's communication with Tommaso de' Cavalieri, a Roman collector, who received *Il Sogno* and *Cleopatra*. The master also collaborated with other artists, such as Marcello Venusti, Daniele da Volterra, and Sebastiano del Piombo, who are included in the exhibit.

The main point of criticism concerning the curation of the exhibition is directed towards the gallery's center which features preparatory drawings for the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The plethora of drawings demonstrates the painter's artistic process and compositional planning. His artistic abilities and genius are also visible through the variety of materials, such as red and black chalks and ink. Hidden among the many drawings is the famed *Studies for the Libyan Sibyl* (fig 2). However, overshadowing these drawings, both literally and figuratively, is the digital projection of the famed ceiling in its completed state. Meant to situate the preparatory drawings within the greater context of their production, the digital projection, while novel in conception, unfortunately, served more as a visual distraction, divorcing drawings from the finished masterpiece (fig 3).

The renewed academic interest in Michelangelo's drawings is shown to the public in this rich display of his oeuvre. Through his drawings, the exhibition effectively displays Michelangelo's versatility as an artist

as the works relate to all the artistic fields in which he was active. Beyond that, the exhibit shows him not as a solitary artist, but rather as one operating within a greater artistic network of patrons and artists.

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Figure 1. Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Il Sogno (The Dream)*, c. 1533, black chalk on laid paper, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Photograph taken by Rebecca Arnheim.



Figure 2. Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Studies for the Libyan Sibyl (recto)*, c. 1510-11, red chalk and white chalk, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

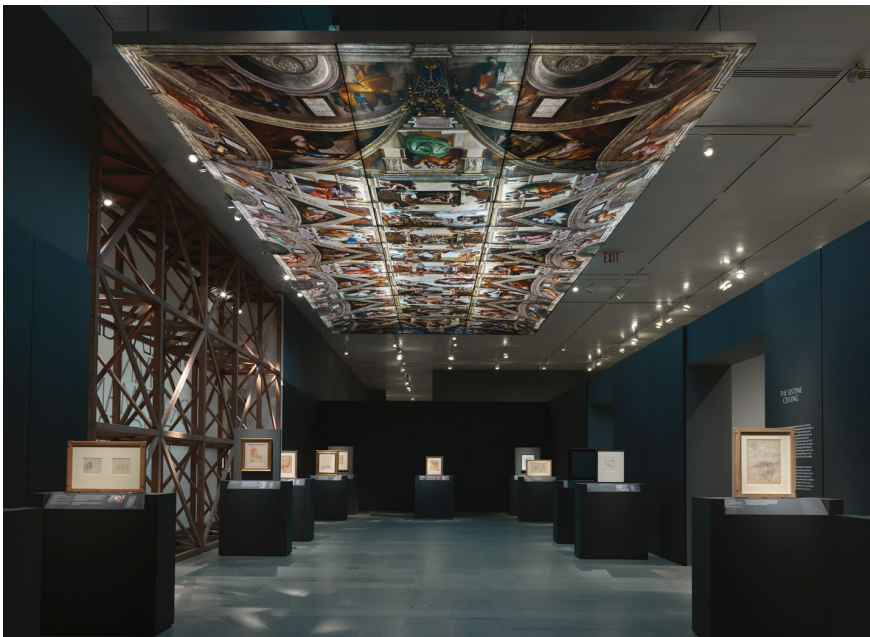


Figure 3. Gallery view of the exhibition Michelangelo: Divine Draftsman and Designer, photograph taken from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Website.