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Michelangelo – Part II

Lead: Between 1508 and 1512 Michelangelo Buonarrati painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel – one of the greatest accomplishments in the history of art.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The Sistine Chapel, built in 1473 in the Vatican Palace, was named for Pope Sixtus IV. In 1508 his successor Julius II commissioned 33-year-old Michelangelo to paint the unadorned ceiling of the chapel, but the artist abandoned the original plan, which was to surround the

twelve Apostles with geometric ornaments.

Instead of the twelve Apostles, Michelangelo painted seven Old Testament prophets and 5 sibyls (female prophets from classical myth) in the large triangular panels on the edges of the ceiling. On the central portion of the ceiling he painted nine scenes from the Old Testament— three depicting the creation of the world, three the stories of Adam and Eve, and three descriptions from the story of Noah. Also included in the project were smaller figures representing the generations before Christ.

To reach the high, barrel-vaulted 60 foot ceiling, Michelangelo

constructed a scaffolding with a series of zig-zag ladders. Physically it was challenging. He had to bend over backwards and paint over his head or lie down and paint on his back. The ceiling was a fresco, 133 by 45 feet. He first plastered the ceiling, then applied preparatory drawings, called cartoons and then transferred the cartoon outlines by scoring the plaster through the paper with a slate point. As the years passed it is believed Michelangelo was able to eliminate the cartoons thus speeding the work. By October 1512 the ceiling was finished. Twenty-years later he returned to paint the magnificent altarpiece, *The Last Judgement*, which is the largest single fresco of the Renaissance.

On a visit to Rome in 1787, German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe rendered this judgement, “Without having seen the Sistine Chapel one can form no appreciable idea of what one man is capable of achieving.” The stunning quality of the expressiveness, movements, and beauty of the human body that Michelangelo projected in the Sistine frescoes make the chapel one of the greatest art treasures in the world.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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