

Michelangelo's Handling of Style in Different Mediums:
Painting, Fresco, and Sculpture

Aviv Tome

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Dr. Christine Neal

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Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni was a consistent painter and sculptor because he kept his style represented in different mediums, and his art evolved from two-dimensional formats into full three-dimensional free-standing sculptures. Even when each medium, such as oil tempera on wood, fresco painted on plaster, or sculpture on marble, had its unique techniques and limitations. The pieces to analyze as examples are: Doni Tondo, which used tempera grassa on wood made in 1508, Christ in the Last Judgement fresco made in 1534-1541, and Florentine Pietà sculpture on marble made in 1550.

Starting with Michelangelo's evolving sculptural presence in two-dimensional formats, there is Doni Tondo. It is a holy family painting in a pyramidal compact composition showing a sculptural quality in clothing and body. Michelangelo gave the painting a sculptural effect on its figures using the colorist effect named *cangiante*, which means to move from a darker color to a lighter one. The holy family poses without halos and crowns but instead in a quiet moment where St. Joseph passes the infant Christ to his mother, the Virgin Mary. The Virgin is sitting on the floor, barefoot. The child holds his mother's hair to feel secure and establish movement while gracefully twisting his body. The family is in the first plane, divided by a limestone fence, and in the right-hand corner, there is St. John the Baptist. There are pagan figures in the background with very sculptural qualities that may represent life before Christ as St. John the Baptist crosses the division into Christianity.

Next, there is The Last Judgement buon fresco, where the central image is Christ's figure. The medium is pigments on wet plaster. Christ is a robust figure seated in a stone surrounded by his atmosphere with a sun-like figure behind him. The Virgin Mary, on his side, is in her unique red and blue clothing. She is looking into another direction resigned because Christ is about to judge humanity. The Biblical story is the final and eternal judgment of souls for the second coming of Christ. The movement on Christ's arms implies a potential swirl-like action that divides the destiny of each soul. This 'superhuman' muscular Christ seems to be gravitating; therefore, it does not seem heavy. The lightness of robust figures was a trait of Michelangelo's art, which created a contradiction. The light's handling was noticeable after cleaning the Sistine Chapel, where the real colors popped.

Finally, there is Bandini Pietà. In this Pietà, there is present anguish and suffering. Four figures are in a pyramidal composition, and the moment was the deposition of Christ. Nicodemus holds Christ with the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. The robust anatomically correct bodies are the same as in Michelangelo's paintings without compromising the light effects. In this case, how the natural light falls onto the marble. The superhuman quality is always present where Christ's body is in a serpentine position. It is interesting to see how all the heavyweight of Christ's dead body seems easy to lift by Nicodemus, Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene.

Whichever medium Michelangelo used, either in a painting or sculpture; his figures were robust, almost defying gravity. With the use of light, color, and form, he developed a unique style. Whether the medium was a time-sensitive wet plaster or a massive marble slab, there were no obstacles for him to maintain his human forms' beauty.

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Fig. 1 Michelangelo, “ Doni Tondo,” oil paint, 1504-1506, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 2 Michelangelo, “ The Last Judgement,” fresco, 1535-1541, Sistine Chapel, Città del Vaticano,VA.



Fig. 3 Michelangelo, “ Bandini Pietà,” marble, 1547, Museum of Opera of Saint Maria of Fiore, Florence, Italy.

