



VII.

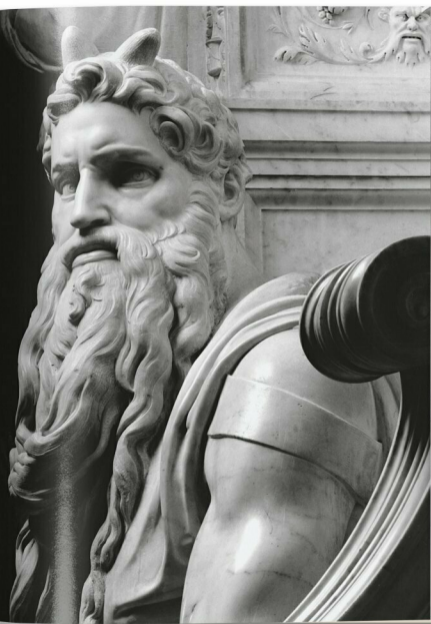
The sculptor

1513–1534

Frank Zöllner

I] have always tried to hold my ground before the scornfully angry gaze of the hero, but sometimes I have slipped scarily out of the semi-darkness of the interior, as if I myself was one of the rabble upon whom his gaze rests, the riffraff unable to sustain a conviction, unwilling to wait or trust, and jubilant when the illusion of the idol is restored to it.

— SIGMUND FREUD



Artistry in death had forces of similarly enormous strength and daring involvement, but as symbols of unswerving physical deeds or of operating against the gods above and their rule. In this case it is the deliverer of eternal commandments to the people, the opposer of the Almighty King¹⁰, who in fulfillment of this mission assumes and subdues to himself and others a will opposite and destructive of divine.

—ERIC SPOFFORD

was immediately installed in a much more prominent position within S. Maria sopra Minerva. Such changes in final location were typical of Michelangelo's sculptures.

Maestro Vieti was one of Michelangelo's most patient patrons. Although he grew angry over the artist's slow progress on the *River Christ*, he did not let himself be discouraged by the delays. Despite the problems with the first marble block, Michelangelo completed this comparatively small commission, for which his fee was only two gold ducats, relatively late, perhaps because he was more inclined to honour his professional obligations towards smaller customers than towards clerics and princes causing only irritation.

Indicative of this is a letter from the artist to Leonardo Sellaio in Rome, written in late December 1517: "I have also been pressed by Master Morillo Vieti regarding his statue [the *Christ for S. Maria sopra Minerva* in Rome], which is also in Pisa and will arrive on one of the first barges. I have never replied to him and will not do so until you again send me a line saying of embarkation and fee like a contractor against my own wishes."

But even before Michelangelo could resume work on the second version of the *River Christ* in December 1519, the coroner of that same year saw the conception of another



large project whose contract scope was to encompass anything that had gone before: the Medici Chapel (New Sacristy) and the Laurentian Library in Florence. Writing a few years after the event, the prince of S. Lorenzo, Giovanni Barberi Fignorani, described the origins of these two projects. Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, the last Pope Clement VII, spoke to the artist during this period and announced his intention of spending, in addition to the budget for the facade of the church itself, another seven thousand on the library and sacristy of the S. Lorenzo complex. He was particularly anxious to build a new burial chapel for his Medici forebears and relatives.

Since in rebuilding by Filippo Brunelleschi, the church of S. Lorenzo, together with its Old Sacristy adjacent to the south transept, had served as the principal burial place of the Medici family, the founder of the Medici line, Giovanni di Ricci (d. 1428) and his wife Piccolina Rustici were interred in the Old Sacristy, and Cosimo di Vecchio de' Medici (d. 1464) in the crypt of S. Lorenzo. The latter's sons, Piero de' Medici (d. 1492) and Giovanni de' Medici (d. 1495), were also buried in the Old Sacristy, as were Giuliano de' Medici (d. 1497) and his brother Lorenzo de' Medici, di Magnifico (d. 1492). In 1519, however, at the instigation of Cosimo I de' Medici, those two last members of the family were re-interred in the New Sacristy.

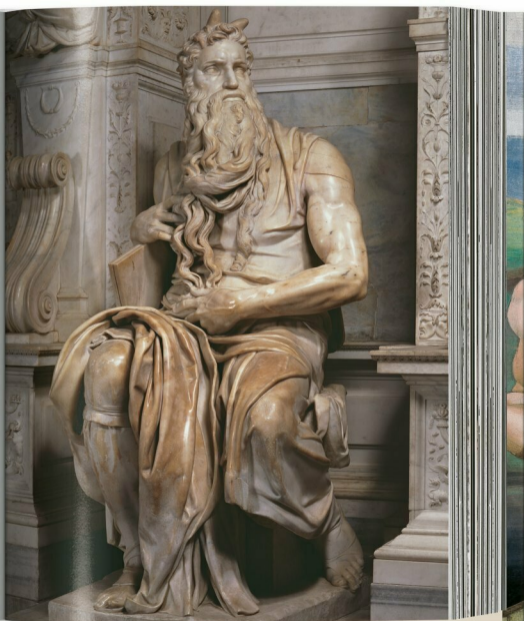
Apart from a few interruptions, work on the family chapel for the Medici in S. Lorenzo would keep Michelangelo busy right up to his final years in Rome in 1524. These fourteen years marked by far his most productive phase as a sculptor. Between 1510 and 1524 he caused a total of thirteen marble figures, almost all of them over-life-size, as well as numerous wax and clay models (Cat. 361), of which only very few survive. These large marble sculptures include the *Mother Madonna*, the two seated figures of the Medici *dulcis* and the four allegories of the Times of Day (Cat. 373-4) for the New Sacristy; the *Vitruvius* (Cat. 376) and the four so-called *Robust Silenus* (Cat. 378-81) for the Julius Terzo and the *Apollis* for Baccio Valenti (Cat. 382).

The reasons for Michelangelo's productivity during these fourteen years lie in his extraordinarily privileged position as artist. With Leo X (b. 1475) in Rome and Cardinal Giulio de' Medici (b. 1478) in Florence (and from 1522 as Pope Clement VII in Rome), the artistic tempo was set by the very people whom Michelangelo had known since his youth and in whose Medicean garrison of S. Marco in Florence he had received his first training as a sculptor. In terms of age, they belonged to exactly the same generation as Michelangelo. All of this contributed to the fact that even activities, such as the abating of the facade project for S. Lorenzo and Michelangelo's active collaboration with the anti-Medici Romanian Republic of 1527-1530, did not lead to a definitive split between the artist and his high-ranking employers.

The decision to build a new Medici burial chapel in S. Lorenzo as a pendant to the Old Sacristy was prompted by the premature deaths of two members of the family of whom much had been expected. Giuliano de' Medici, who was the son of Lorenzo di Magnifico and brother of Leo X, and who had been made Duke of Nemours by the French king in 1514, died in 1516. Giuliano's death was followed ten three years later by that of Lorenzo de' Medici, designated Duke of Urbino, son of Piero de' Medici and nephew of Leo X. With the deaths of the two Medici *dulcis*, the continuation of the elder branch of the family in a direct male and legitimate line (the succession from Cosimo I Visconti was placed secondarily in doubt) by the two remaining male members of the line, Pope Leo X and Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, were both men of the cloth and were not allowed – officially, at least – to stir offspring, while Alessandro de' Medici was a hunchback.

The Medici burial chapel in the New Sacristy of S. Lorenzo thus marked the provisional closing of a dynasty that could look back over an unparalleled ascent

Mass. 6. 1517-1936 and 1517-19
Mattioli, height 102 cm
Rome, S. Pietro in Vincoli



Catalogue of paintings

Frank Zöllner

Sometimes Raphael was held to be superior, at other times Michelangelo, which only ultimately proved that man is such a limited being that, even if his mind has opened itself to greatness, he has never acquired the ability to recognize and pay equal tribute to greatness of different kinds.

— JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

