

Michelangelo's Treatment of the Figure

Italian Renaissance artists became anatomists by necessity, as they attempted to refine a more lifelike, sculptural portrayal of the human figure. Michelangelo dissected many human bodies in order to investigate the muscles and understand the nude in a more modern way.

Michelangelo's study of beauty in the human body and portrayal of perfection in his paintings could only be surpassed in his sculpture.

He was the greatest ever painter of the male nude. No artist who has followed him in this area has remained uninfluenced by his figures. Also, his figurative expressiveness remains unequalled. These achievements - exemplified by his iconic fresco *The Creation of Adam* on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel - had a lasting impact on the theory and practice of fine art.

In sculpture - his main forte - his understanding of space, form and appearance remains unmatched, as does his ability to express a wide variety of differing emotions in three-dimensional marble, all of which makes him one of the greatest sculptors we have seen.

However the females from his paintings arguably appear to be men with breasts. For many women, especially women from the upper classes, there was strict control over their dress and comportment in the Renaissance. It's also true that many of the female figures in renaissance paintings were based on male models.

Michelangelo saw himself as a sculptor first and foremost and his sculptural thinking can be seen in his drawings and paintings. Michelangelo celebrated the body as a mirror of God's perfection.

- Monumental heroic male nudes
- Emphasis on the volume of his figures
- Careful attention to anatomical detail
- Use of movement and gesture for expression
- Emotional expression more important than a technically perfect finish
- Use of contrapposto
- Influence of Roman and Greek sculpture
- Idealisation of the human figure
- Use of the human body to express emotions
- Figures imitate ancient roman sculptural forms

- Frequent use of foreshortening in his figures
- Figures modelled with both colour and tone