



Michelangelo's involvement in the four-nailed Crucifix model and Vittoria Colonna

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Michelangelo's involvement in the four-nailed bronze Crucifix prototype: Doctrinal, documentary and stylistic foundations.

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The purpose of this study is not to determine the autograph character of the bronze. Since, it is cast using the indirect method, it cannot be considered as the sole original. Furthermore, one cannot prove the direct participation of Michelangelo in the finishing of the intermediate wax model or the cold work. Nonetheless, the attribution of the design of this model to his genius is currently accepted almost unanimously. In this regard we would like to elucidate to what extent Michelangelo was involved in the conception of this model and demonstrate the grounds on which our bronze can be considered the closest version to Michelangelo's "primo pensiero", drawing or wax model, which has given rise to one of the most beautiful sculpted images of a Crucified Christ in Art History.

The origin of the connection of this model with Michelangelo will always be linked to Prof Manuel Gómez Moreno. As the owner of one of Spanish first-generation silver casts of this model, he studied the attribution of the design of Spanish metal series of the four-nailed Crucified Christ, initially assigning it to Alonso Cano with many doubts. However, he later strongly believed that this heterodox model had its origin in Michelangelo, based on its link with the Crucified Christ of four nails mentioned by Pacheco in his book "El Arte de la Pintura" 1641.

Fig. 1. *Christ Crucified*, silver, by **Juan Bautista Franconio** circa 1600, Manuel Gómez Moreno > collection, Fundación pública andaluza Rodríguez-Acosta



Manuel Gómez Moreno, in his article "El Crucifijo de Miguel Ángel," 1930, considers this Spanish metal series of Crucified Christs as cast from Michelangelo's bronze Crucifix model, which, according to Pacheco, Juan Bautista Franconio brought from Rome to Seville in 1597. He supports his thesis in Vasari when he mentions that in his final years, Michelangelo designed a bronze tabernacle for the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Rome, whose execution his assistant Jacopo Siciliano del Duca began in 1565, as referred in a letter from Jacopo to Michelangelo's nephew, Lionardo. Among the eight bronze reliefs on the tabernacle, one of them depicts a scene of Calvary with a Crucifix that is identical in design to the Spanish metal Crucifixes, except for the position of the arms and the inclination of the legs (Fig.2). This is the evidence Gómez Moreno was seeking to confirm Pacheco's claim that the four-nail Christ, arrived in Seville in 1597 and from which Juan Bautista Franconio made several casts, was effectively Michelangelo's work. A relief representing a Crucifixion nearly identical to the Spanish Crucifixes could be found in the Capodimonte Museum, Naples. Charles de Tolnay, 1978, also mentions that this tabernacle was moved from the Farnese collection to the Palazzo Capodimonte in 1734, and he identifies another tabernacle's project for the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence, created between 1525 and 1526, and another cast for Philip II of Spain by Jacopo del Duca which remain unfinished and whose whereabouts are unknown, possibly because it was later rejected by the King.⁽¹⁾

The tabernacle referred to by Gómez Moreno currently located at the Charterhouse of San Lorenzo in Padula, Salerno bears, cast in its relief representing the Calvary, the date of execution, 27 January 1574, showing noticeable traces of wax (Fig. 2). Thus, this date serves as a "terminus ante quem" regarding the existence of a wax model supposedly created by Michelangelo, which would have been available before 1573. The nine years that elapsed between its start in 1565 and its completion in 1574, combined with the fact that it was still unfinished in 1574, suggest that Michelangelo's project for the bronze tabernacle at the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli went through many setbacks, ultimately failing. It appears that the project for the tabernacle at the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence and the one intended for the Escorial also did not come to fruition, leading Jacopo del Duca to sell the unfinished project to the Carthusians of San Lorenzo in Padula, where it currently resides. This would explain the nine-year gap between Jacopo del Duca's 1565 letter to Michelangelo's nephew, indicating the commencement of the tabernacle, and the 1574 execution's date inscribed on the relief of the Calvary. It also explains the different location of the tabernacle compared to what Vasari mentioned.



Fig. 2. Relief representing the Crucifixion of Christ, bronze, 1574, Jacopo del Duca, Tabernacle of San Lorenzo in Padula, Salerno, Italy

Charles de Tolnay put forward the idea that the model of Christ Crucified with four nails was conceived by Michelangelo for the altarpiece of the New Sacristy of the Medici Chapel at the Basilica of San Lorenzo, Florence. Furthermore, he considered that it was cast in bronze after a wax model made by Michelangelo (opus cit 1978). As Joannides wrote in his paper (opus cit October 2022), it is certainly an intriguing idea and cannot be ruled out, because the dates assigned for the conception of the four nailed Crucifix design, 1533 correspond with last period of the New Sacristy, though no document can attest this hypothesis.

Fig. 3. *New Sacristy*, **Michelangelo**, 1524/34, Medici Chapel, Basilica di San Lorenzo, Florence



Fig. 4. *Christ Crucified*, Black chalk, After **Michelangelo**, 1533 Windsor Castle >



Paul Joannides, the latest historian to address this model, in an article dated October 2022, takes a conclusive stance on Michelangelo's four-nail Christ where he confirms that this conception was the origin of several drawings made by Michelangelo around 1533, representing the naked Christ, bowed head, arms raised, and legs crossed. One of these sketches is currently in the Teylers Museum Haarlem (Fig. 5), whose reverse has the same design, but with the calves crossed in the opposite direction (c1533-40) (Fig. 7); another is a copy of an original currently in the Royal Collection Windsor Castle (c1533) (Fig. 4) and another one is a study made by his pupil, Raffaello da Montelupo owned by the Louvre (c1534) (Fig. 9). They were preceded by the small Crucifix sketch and the preparatory drawing for a relief representing the three Crosses, both currently in the British Museum (c1520) (Fig. 8), in which Michelangelo shows for the first time his spiritual interest in the revelation of St Bridget. Joannides maintains that the drawing in the Teylers Museum is a design studied from various angles for a sculpture, a view consistent with that of Carmen Bambach. From this conclusive opinion, one could infer that between the Roman bronze versions of this model and the aforementioned drawing, Michelangelo most likely created a wax model, hitherto unknown. A question raised by Michael Riddick regarding whether Michelangelo's letters to Vittoria Colonna (1538/41) could refer to the gift of a small wax Crucifix model instead of a drawing of a living Christ looking towards the Father (British Museum), as maintained by Joannides and most of the scholarly community following the description provided by Vasari and Condivi.⁽²⁾



Fig. 5. *Studies for a Crucifixion*, Michelangelo, drawing 1533-40, Teylers Museum Haarlem >

A close reading of Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo correspondence suggest that these letters could likely refer to a small wax Crucifix model, a "cosa", defined by the Marchesa as unfinished but inherently perfect, apparently awaiting its bronze casting process to be completed by one of Michelangelo's assistants and capable of displaying all the splendour of its details only with lenses and appreciated from all angles with the help of a mirror. This interpretation put forth by Michael Riddick is, reasonable, conclusive, well documented and consistent with the dating of the cast of our bronze, 1560-70, based on technological and iconographic grounds. Its relevance lies in both, a coherent interpretation of the exchange of letters referring to a Crucifix and a contextual interpretation of Condivi and Varchi quotes regarding a lifeless nude Christ Crucified given to the Marchesa by Michelangelo. In light of the newly discovered bronze Crucifix prototype designed by Michelangelo, we intend to infer from these documents his direct involvement in a bronze project of a Crucifix for Vittoria Colonna, not only in its conception but also in the execution of the wax model hitherto unknown which could be the original model from which our bronze Christ was cast, an idea perfectly possible within Michelangelo's artistic and spiritual interests.

Fig. 6. *Anatomic drawings*, detail. **Michelangelo**, 1513-20, Teylers Museum, Haarlem

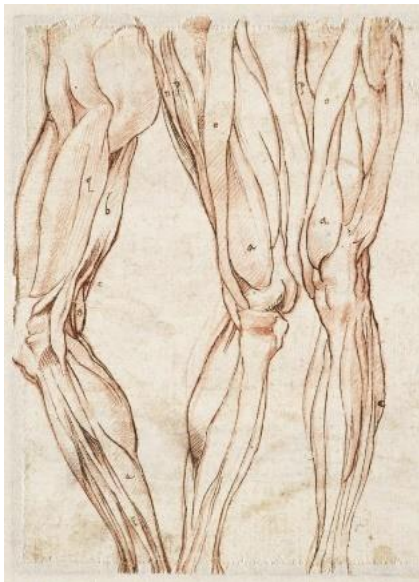


Fig. 7. *Study for Crucified Christ*, drawing, **Michelangelo**, 1533/40 Teylers Museum, Haarlem



Fig. 8. *Crucifixion*, **Michelangelo**, drawing, detail, early 1520, British Museum



Fig. 9. *Christ Crucified*, drawing, **Raffaello da Montelupo** after Michelangelo, ca. 1534, 24,4 x 12,3 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre

It is generally assumed Michelangelo's artistic interest in the figure of the Crucified Christ and his participation in bronze sculptural projects. According to Vasari and Condivi he learned the craft of bronze as a young man in the workshop of Bertoldo di Giovanni, the favourite bronze sculptor of Lorenzo the Magnificent and it is documented that he participated in several bronze projects all over his life ⁽³⁾. Vasari, refers to Michelangelo's first wooden Christ sculpture created for the Church of Santo Spirito in Florence, ca 1491 (Fig. 41), as a token of gratitude for having been allowed to work on dissections cadavers for his anatomical studies, that has come to us thanks to the rediscovery of Margit Lisner. One can consider it is the first image that brings closer the spiritual feelings maintained by Michelangelo throughout his life with an evident connection to the above- mentioned drawings, even on an anatomical point of view (Fig. 6) and to the bronze Crucifix's model under study, presenting a compelling figure of Christ Crucified in dialogue both with God and Humanity. (Fig. 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11) ⁽⁴⁾

Furthermore, there are others testimonies of Michelangelo's continuous interest in the figure of Christ Crucified. Paul Joannides (October 2022) mentions a project of Crucifixion's group in marble related with a drawing (ca 1520) at Casa Buonarroti, representing three blocks with different dimensions for the Corpus of Christ, the Virgin and St John. In his last years Michelangelo returned to the figure of Christ Crucified as attested by the letter he wrote on 1562 to his nephew Lionardo, expressing his intention to sculpt a wooden Crucifix, which could well be the one rediscovered by Charles de Tolnay today in the Casa Buonarroti (Fig. 12). It features a lifeless body, a bowed head, and a position of the feet separated that suggests the use of four nails ⁽⁵⁾. Vasari also mentions Michelangelo's intention to give a Crucifix as a gift to his friend Menighella ⁽⁶⁾. However, where the reference to a small Crucifix becomes clearer, it is in all the documents related to the Marchesa di Pescara and Michelangelo, in particular in their correspondence.

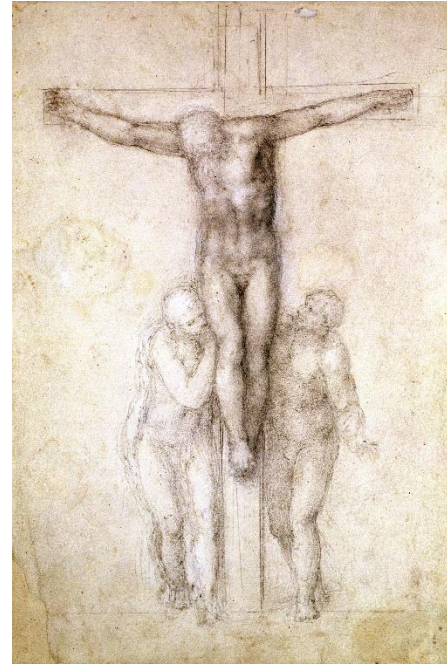


Fig. 10. *Study for a Crucifixion*, Michelangelo, 1550-60, British Museum



Fig. 11. *Study for a Crucifixion*, Michelangelo, 1552-54, Musée du Louvre



Vasari frequently mentions the poems that Michelangelo wrote to the Marchesa, expressing their mutual interest in the figure of Christ and also to the process of casting ⁽⁷⁾. Documented evidences indicate that both shared the reformation principles of Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga by the late 1530s.

Michelangelo's biographer, Ascanio Condivi, in 1553, referred to a nude Christ, without a cross, depicting a lifeless body in a position of complete abandonment with the legs falling collapsing that Michelangelo gifted to the Marchesa di Pescara ⁽⁸⁾. In the elegy for Michelangelo's death, Benedetto Varchi relates this same nude Christ Crucified given to the Marchesa with regard another distinct Christ that Michelangelo sculpted in marble in Rome for the Minerva. This *parangone* suggests that the gift to Vittoria Colonna had a sculptural character, not a drawing or a painting. ⁽⁹⁾

One should notice also the striking connection of Michelangelo's four-nails Crucified face and the traditionally considered Vittoria Colonna's portraits attributed to Michelangelo (Fig. 13, 16). The precise description made by Paolo Giovio in the "Dialogui" of Vittoria Colonna's countenance would likely be appropriate for both, the face of our Michelangelo's bronze Crucified Christ (Fig. 14) and that of the drawing representing a portrait of Vittoria Colonna, permitting a reasonable identification of the sitter represented in the drawings:

"the eyelids like tenders wings protect and decorate the eyes ... her eyebrows do not adjoin ... they are only slightly curved ... her face is encircle by ebony black hair interwoven with gold ... flowing down ... across her temples ... adorns the broad, free, serene forehead ... the onlooker's eyes are fascinated by her pretty ears ... and what a lovely nose, resembling the noses of the Arsacid Dynasty ... executed in such a moderate and adroit way that, what hints at male astringency, does not at all impair her female charm".

< Fig. 12. **Michelangelo**, sketch for a Crucifix, 27 cm., 1562, Casa Buonarroti, Florence



Fig. 13. Probably *Vittoria Colonna*, portrait, drawing, **Michelangelo**, Ashmolean Museum, UK

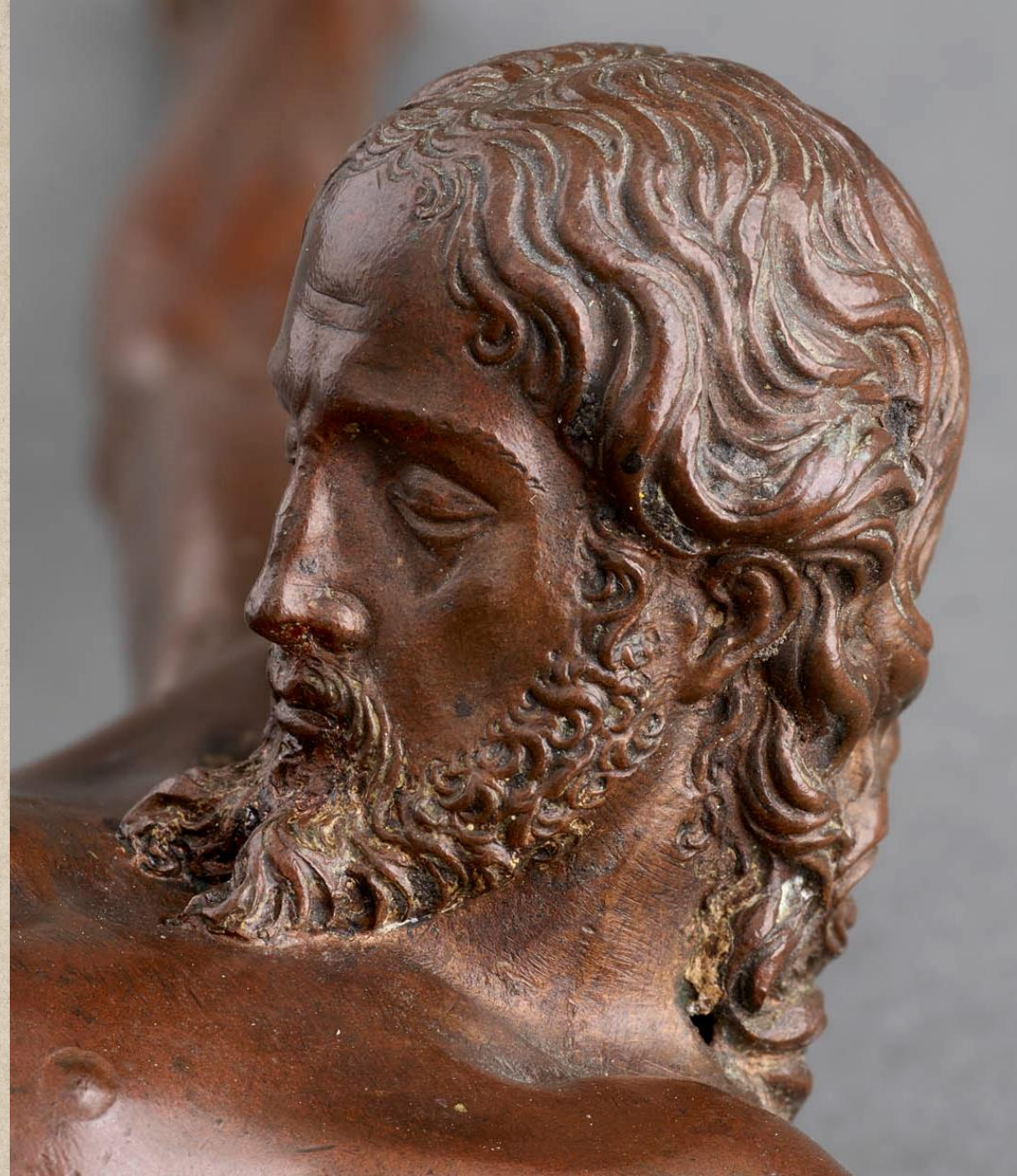


Fig. 14. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection

Michelangelo preferred human beings whose faces and bodies united the male and female in a way that appeared to him divine (Fig. 15). In this regard Vittoria Colonna's androgynous appearance described by Giovio matched very well with his stereotype of beauty which he transferred to an idealized physiognomy of Vittoria Colonna rendered in the drawings and to the features of the Crucified Christ recently discovered, no doubt also reminiscent to his canonical sense of male beauty burned into his mind thanks to the sensual relation he had with his apprentices all over his life, in particular with Tommaso Cavalieri and marvelously conveyed in the series drawings he gave to him. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Three letters exchanged between Michelangelo and the Marchesa deserve a detailed study in order to guess the nature of the Crucifix and his intercourse with the Crucified Christ we are now studying:

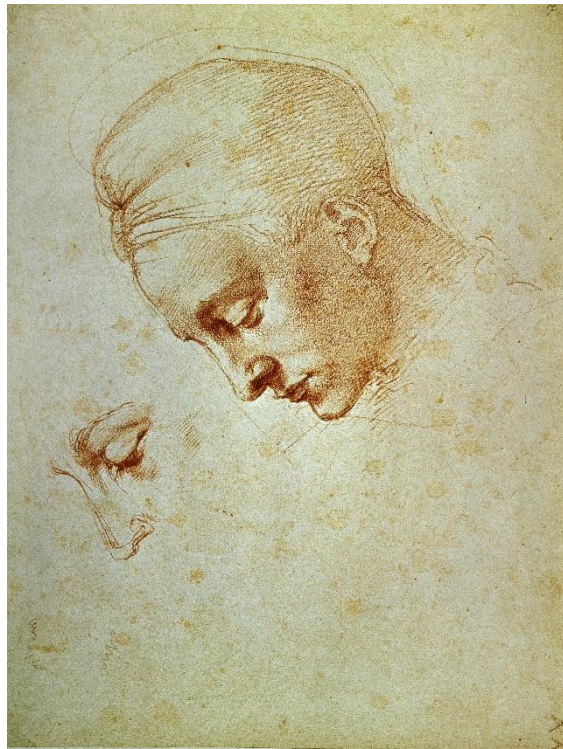


Fig. 15. *Study for the head of Leda*, drawing, 1530/32, **Michelangelo**, Casa Buonarroti, Florence

"Dearest Sir Michelangelo, I kindly request to send me for a while the Crucifix, even though if it's not finished, because I would like to show it to the most reverend Cardinal of Mantua, and if you are not busy today, please protect yourself to come and talk with me at your convenience. At your command. The Marquise of Pescara." ⁽¹¹⁾

From this letter of the Marchesa di Pescara to Michelangelo, it can be inferred that the Crucifix is a model or a design which will be returned to Michelangelo in a while, in order that the Master or his assistant may finish the work or complete a planned work.



Fig. 16. *Ideal head of a woman*. Probably Vittoria Colonna, drawing, **Michelangelo**, British Museum, UK

"Unique master Michelangelo and my most singular friend. I have received your letter and seen the Crucifix, which certainly has crucified in my mind all other image I have ever look at, I have never seen anything better made, more vivid and finished, nor explained how delicately and wonderfully it is made. Therefore, I have resolved not to give it to other hands than yours. So, if I may ask you, enlighten me, whether it is yours or another's. If it is yours, I want it from you at all costs, but if it is not yours and you wish to have it done by that person of yours, let us talk about it first, because knowing the difficulty that exists in imitating it, I am more inclined for that person to create something else than this. But if this is yours, I beg you to be indulgent, because I will not return it. I have been looking at it, in light, with a magnifying glass, and with a mirror, and I have never seen anything more accomplished and exquisite. I am at your command. The Marchesa di Pescara". ⁽¹²⁾

The apparent contradiction between the highly finished nature of the object mentioned at the beginning of this letter and the reference to an uncompleted piece indicated in the first letter, confirms our thesis that this Crucifix could likely be a perfect model in itself, most probably conceived and manipulated by the Master.

In the second part of this letter Vittoria Colonna clearly talks about two different works: the exquisite small "cosa" she has inspected closely with a lamp and the planned work which she fears won't reproduce the model's faithfully, if is not executed by the Master, something consistent with general meaning of the letters.

The reference to the doubt about whether the exquisite object was made by Michelangelo's own hand or by his assistant, in my opinion, definitely rules out the alternative of being this Crucifix a drawing, because it is difficult to consider that Michelangelo would present to the Marchesa a design executed by an assistant. Furthermore, the mentioned difficulty in reproducing the object reinforce even more our thesis of being the Crucifix a wax model, ready for casting. All the more, the Marquise on the one hand acknowledges the huge challenges of the casting technique, as expressed in a poem written by Michelangelo and, on the other hand, is fully satisfied to keep the object in its current state, if the Master confirms its autograph character, suggesting that in this case Michelangelo's assistant should be occupied with another task; All this, provides further evidence that the Marchesa considers the small Crucifix model lended by Michelangelo more precious than the planned work and that the model's quality, formal aspect and size should be similar to the final work, something consistent with a wax model with regard to its cast.



Fig. 17. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, > cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, IOMR Collection

Finally last sentence is even more illuminating with regard to our thesis when she mentions a "cosa", meaning an object whose quality can only be appreciated in all its splendour with a lamp and lenses and inspected from different angles thanks to a mirror, definitely supporting the idea that the object must be a small three-dimensional sculpture, characterized by intricate details and great virtuosity in its execution, all virtues that can be attributed to a wax model for cast.

"Signora Marchesa. Knowing that I am in Rome, I do not think it is fair that to entrust the Crucifix to Mr Tommao and make him an intermediary between your Lordship and me, your servant, so that I can serve you. In particular because I have fulfilled your most desired wishes to a greater extent than for anyone in the world. But the great occupations in which I have been and still am involved have prevented me from making this known to you Lordship. Because, I know, that you know that love does not want a master, and he who loves does not sleep nor need intermediaries. Although it may seem that I have forgotten, I was doing something unexpected that I have not mentioned. Now my design has been thwarted." Vatican Apostolic Library. ⁽¹³⁾

This letter expresses on the one hand Michelangelo's dissatisfaction with the return of the Crucifix through an intermediary and a certain exculpatory tone. On the other hand, it highlights the Marchesa's displeasure and disappointment, who returned the Crucifix in such a haughty manner, considering their friendship.

The return of the Crucifix presupposes in itself the resolution of the enigma we intend to elucidate regarding these exchanged letters:

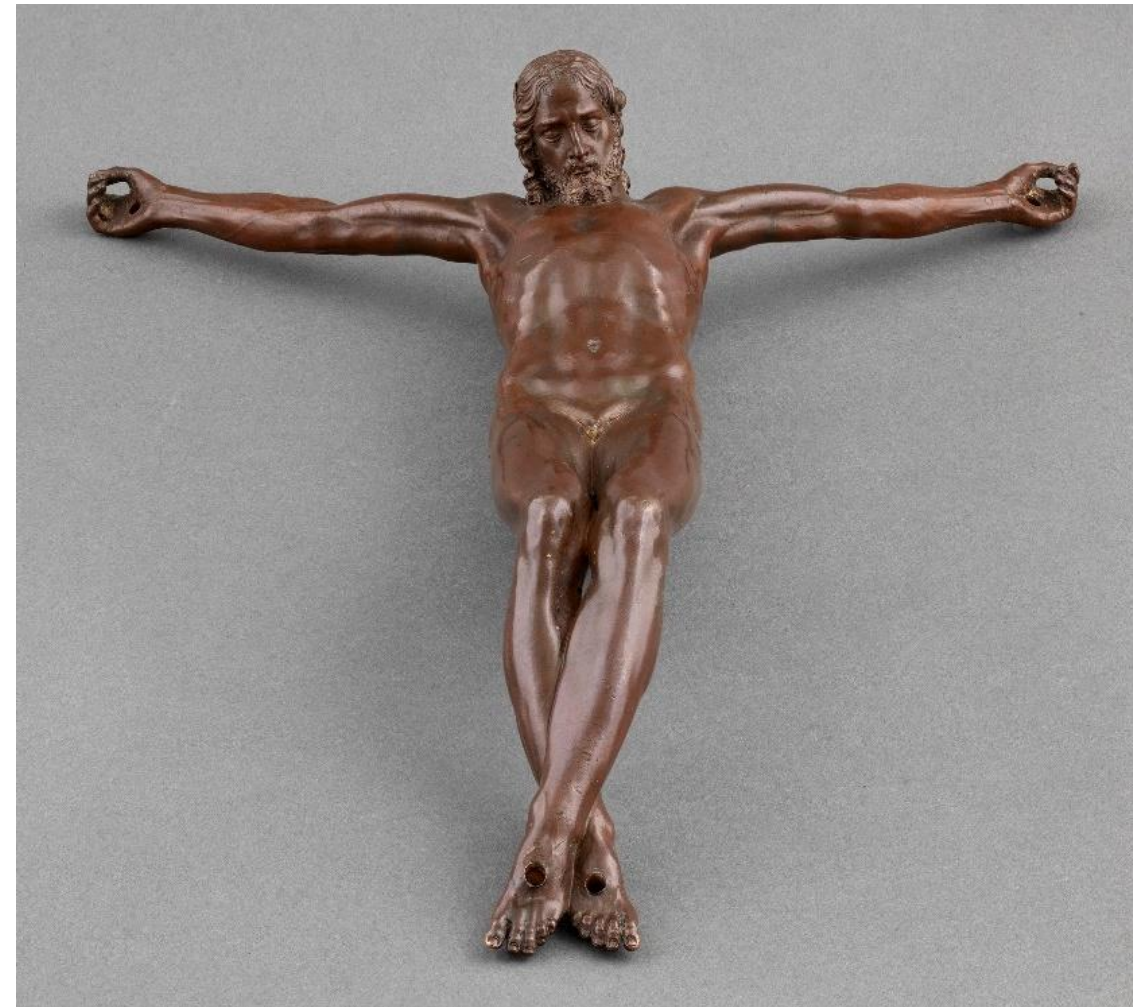


Fig. 18. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, > cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, IOMR Collection

Why did the Marchesa return the object to Michelangelo? probably because he did not answer to her requests, or even though the model was created by his own hand, it needed to be perfected, in line with our thesis that the process for which the model had been created might need to be completed. Certainly, it was the delay in picking up the model for accomplishing the project that caused the Marchesa's displeasure, leading her to return the Crucifix in such a nasty way, through a third party. However, it seems clear that Michelangelo was apologizing for not having completed a task for her, without specifying in the letter what task he was referring to, as if it were understood. An idea consistent with the Crucifix being a wax model lended to the Marchesa, the initial stage of the complex casting process that Michelangelo no doubt had not completed, at least before writing this letter.

As Linda Borsch suggests, this letter could infer that the Crucifix was more a result of a commission than a gift. This hypothesis could be connected to Pope Paul III granting Vittoria Colonna's permission to create a convent for nuns in Montecavallo, owned by her family. The bronze Crucifix have been a commission related to the decoration of this convent. This aligns with the idea that a, bronze Crucifix was commissioned, and its wax model lended by Michelangelo to the Marchesa. ⁽¹⁴⁾

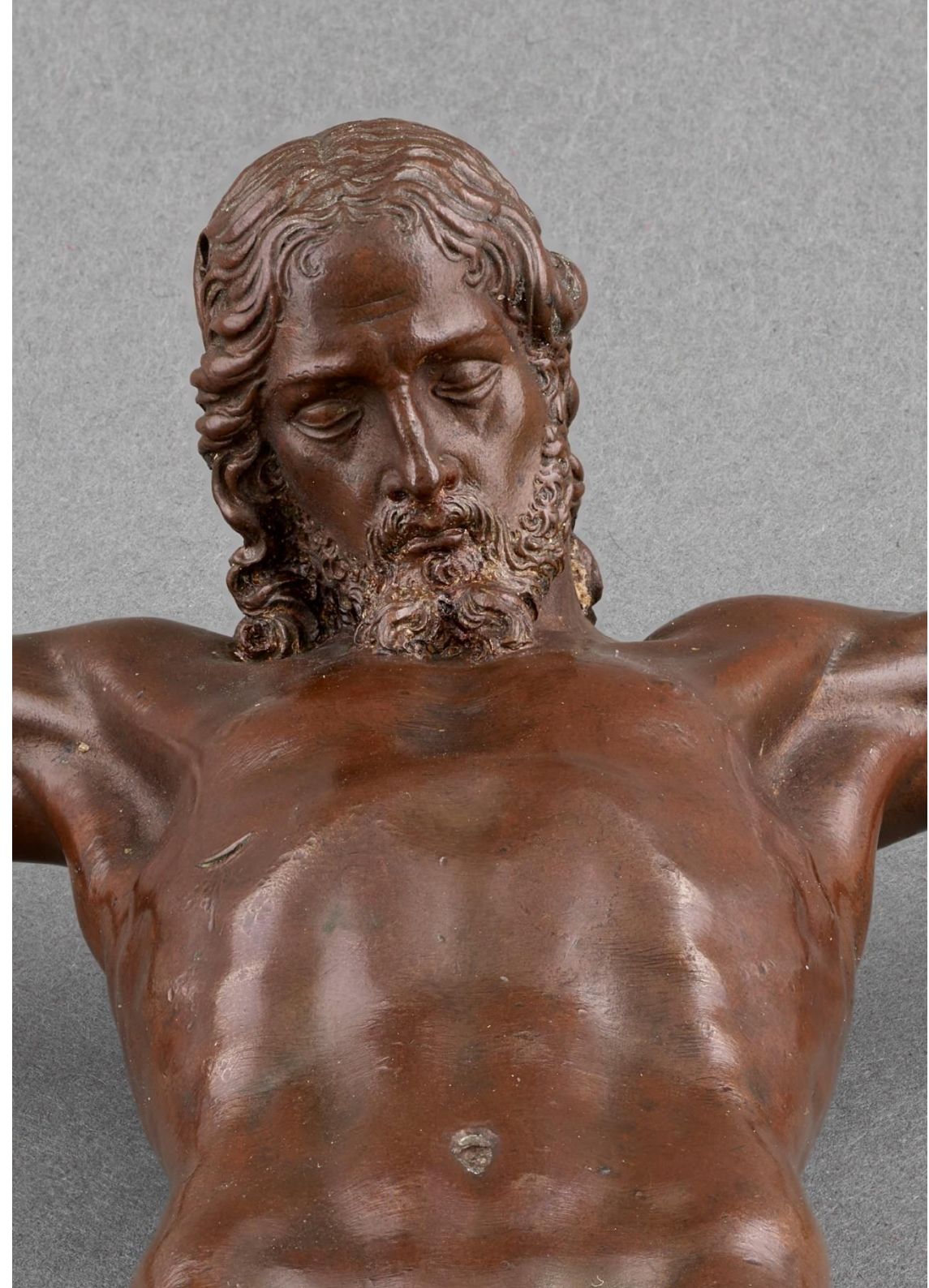


Fig. 19. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast > in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection

The bronze Crucifix model we are studying evinces Michelangelo's stylistic hallmarks of grand serenity mixed with Pathos, a true touchstone when assessing a work of Michelangelo.

Symmetry in composition, restrained expressiveness in its message, meticulousness in the description of the details and contrast in their meaning to increase the depth and immediacy of the figure. An interplay of virtues that make this sculpture a Masterpiece, whose message seems of a major complexity, only comparable to that conveyed by Christ as God turned into Man which Michelangelo represents in this case dead for the salvation of Humanity.

Comparisons for the figure of Crucified Christ must be sought in Michelangelo's depiction of Human nude and in particular in the Crucifix of the Chiesa Santo Spirito, Florence (Fig. 41). These nudes are treated with the verisimilitude and accuracy of someone who, having dissected cadavers, is intimately familiar with all human muscles which he outlines faithfully, as befits the gesture of the Crucified:

- The external jugular vein is prominently marked on the neck as a consequence of the head flexion. (Fig. 20).
- The armpit muscles are perfectly defined and exaggeratedly extended, a consequence of the forced position of arm opening, with well-defined biceps and basilic veins in both arms, naturally describing the tension of someone nailed to the Cross (Fig. 18).
- The chest is crowned by nipples in the form of typically Michelangelesque aureole and with the noticeable rib-cage, that recalls the figure of Marsyas tied up, a classical feature that the Master frequently uses to express in a contained way resistance of Human being to divine command (Fig. 20, 21).
- The linea alba, a true touchstone of the Master, is subtly indicated by the sunken belly (Fig. 18, 21, 22).



Fig. 20. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast > in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection



Fig. 21. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection

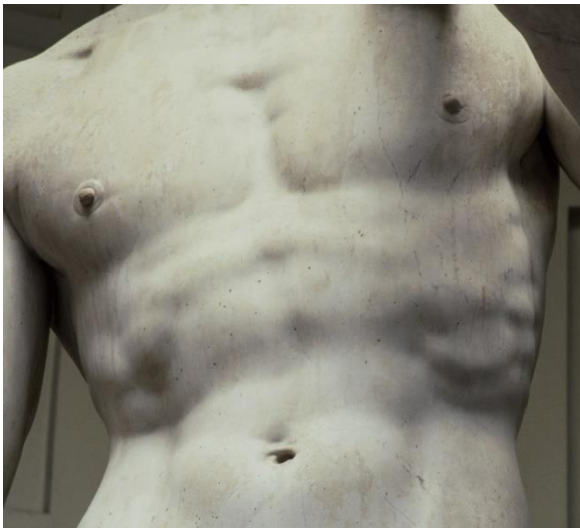


Fig. 22. *David*, **Michelangelo**, detail, 1501-1504, Galería del Academia, Florence

- From the narrowness of the hips, the legs collapse, crossing the left calf over the right, which appears slightly flattened and whose extreme slenderness marks an accurate anatomy, highlighting the serratus muscle, a fundamental muscle in Michelangelo's nudes, that stretches longitudinally, stylizing Christ's figure (Fig. 23).

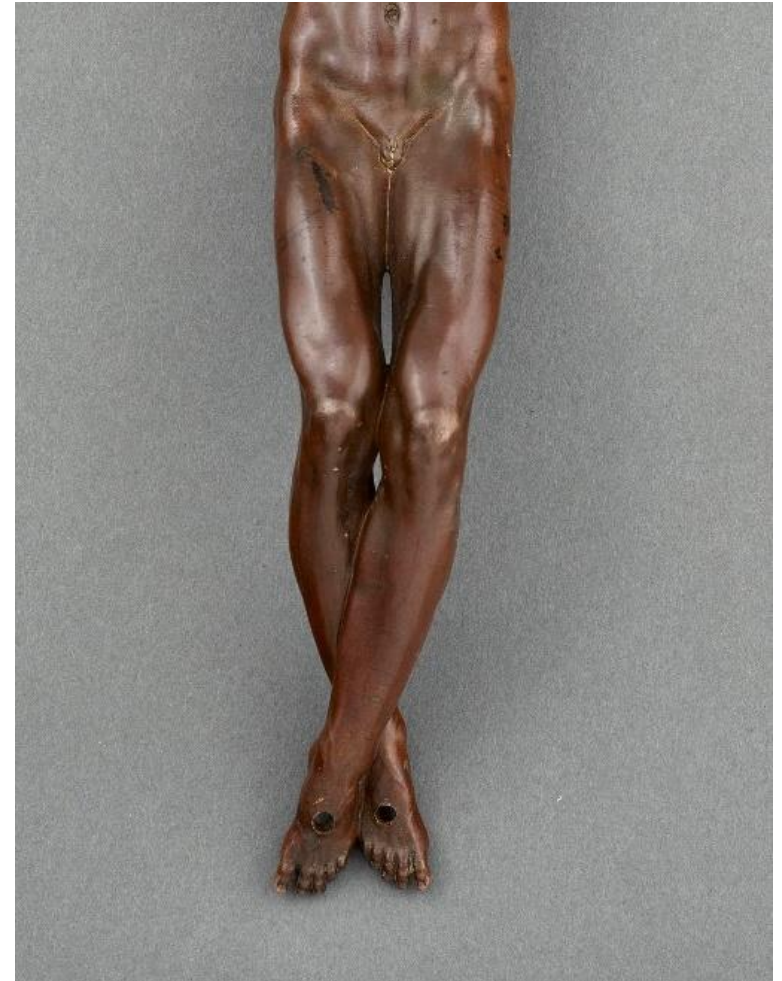


Fig. 23. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection

- The feet and hands, with outstanding technical virtuosity, impress with how they display the tendons and veins thickened by the action of the nails; while the elongated fingers are remarkable for their nails, defined down to the cuticle, another characteristic of Michelangelo. The toes follow the classic position, found frequently in Michelangelo's works, where the second and third toes are almost as long as the big toe. (Fig. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30).



Fig. 24. *Pieta of Michelangelo* detail foot Christ, **Michelangelo**, 1498, detail, Basilica di San Pietro in Vaticano, Rome



Fig. 25. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection



Fig. 26. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection



Fig. 27. Foot of the sculpture representing the day. *Monument decorating the sepulcher of Giuliano de Medici*, **Michelangelo**, 1534, Church of San Lorenzo, Florence



Fig. 28. *David*, **Michelangelo**, detail, 1501-1504, Galleria della Academia



Fig. 29. *Crucified Christ*, bronze, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), cast in Rome before 1597, detail, IOMR Collection

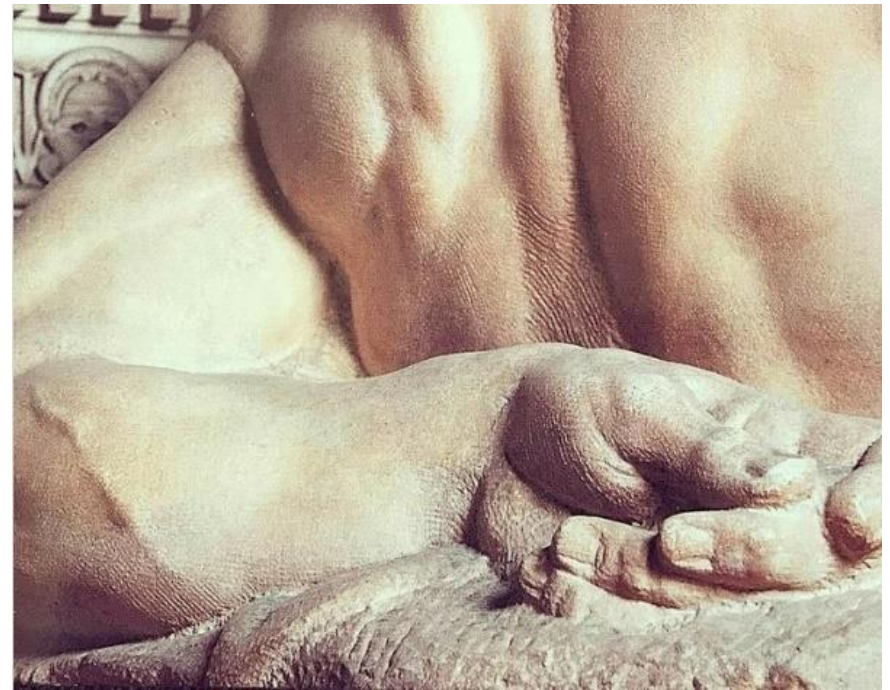


Fig. 30. *Sculpture representing the day decorating the sepulcher of Giuliano Medici*, detail, **Michelangelo**, 1534, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Florence

- On the back all the muscles are clearly outlined, especially the scapula and the triangle of auscultation, which, according to Julia C Ruston and Peter H Abrahams, is the only part of the back without muscle, giving a general impression of still vital resistance, descending from the trapezius that marks the shoulder muscles, following the valley that indicate a curved spine falling into a powerful pelvis, strongly defined by the glutes. (Fig. 31, 32, 33, 34).⁽¹⁹⁾

- In the legs, the muscles of the perineum and soleus are well rendered ending in the heels, emphasized by folds that add a naturalistic touch that gives an even more naturalistic character to the position of the Christ nailed to the Cross (Fig. 35) whose ultimate expression is reached in the wounds on the hands and feet (Fig. 25, 26, 29).



Fig. 31. *Bacchus seen from behind*, **Michelangelo**, 1496-97, Bargello Museum Florence



Fig. 32. *Sketch of a nude man*, 1510-11, **Michelangelo**, Metropolitan Museum, New York



Fig. 33. *Male nude*, **Michelangelo**, 1504, Albertina Museum, Vienna

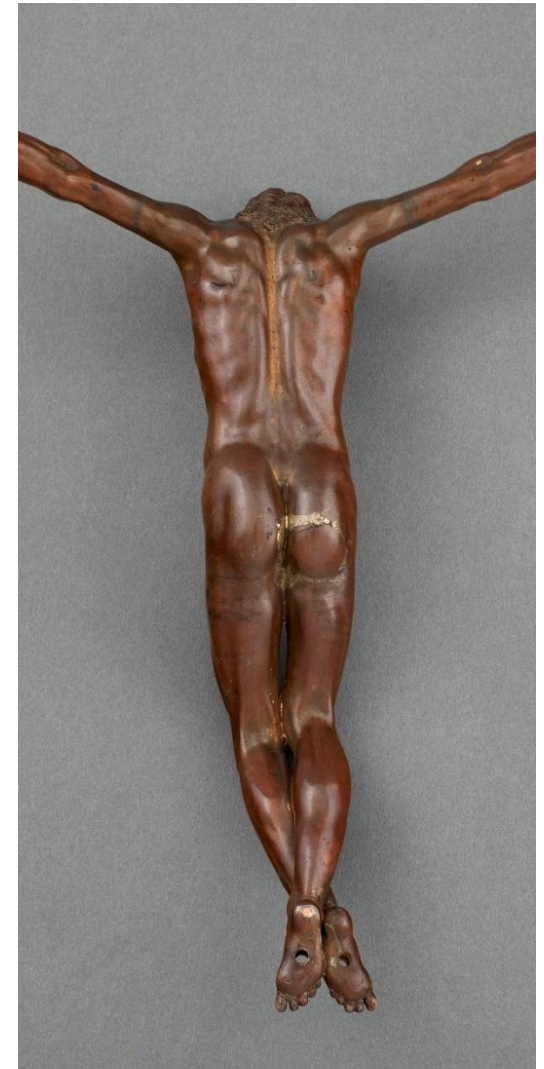


Fig. 34. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection



Fig. 35. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection

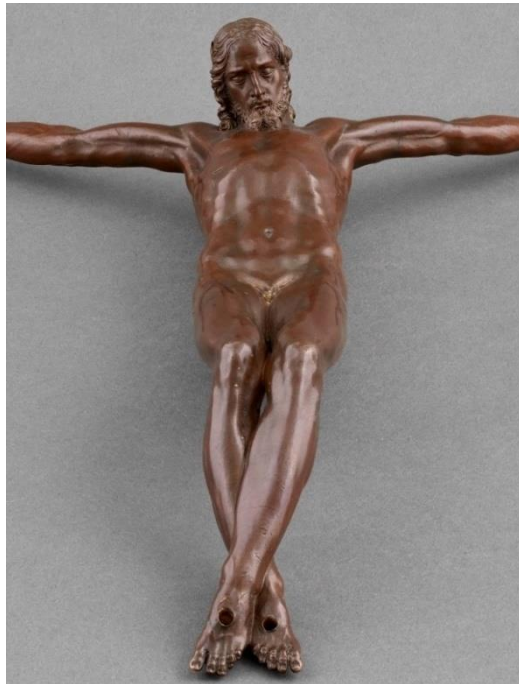


Fig. 36. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection

The resemblance of our bronze Crucifix also appears in the face that correspond to Michelangelo's canon of male beauty which we find depicted in the visage of Christ, such as the dead Christ who collapses in the Vatican Pietà (Fig. 37, 39), in many drawings for his friend Tommaso Cavalieri and in his drawn portraits of Vittoria Colonna attributed to him (Fig. 13, 16).

The countenance of our Crucified is only perceived in its fullness when photographed from the feet, then emanating a sense of classical beauty, that is absolutely moving, as only Michelangelo could have conceived (Fig. 36, 40).

A broad forehead, framed by hair with two symmetrical curls, marked by the lines of pain that reveal a furrowed brow, a technique well known to Michelangelo from the recently discovered Laocoön, to appeal to the sense of pathos with which Michelangelo seeks to imbue the figure of the dead Christ. The eyes, well-spaced apart by a straight nasal bridge, set in a deep hollow delimited by prominent cheekbones that encourage the interplay of light, emphasizing the drama. The slightly fleshy lips, covered by a well-defined beard that lightly reveals a dimple, lending the figure a serene expression of peaceful sleep. The hair, with wavy curls perfectly differentiated from the beard with a more intricate spiral, falls gently on the sides, on its left side pointing to the ear of canonical perfection and on the back, displaying a beautiful interweaving that forms a distinctly Renaissance hairstyle which in this case contributes to enhancing the virtuosity of the bronze caster (Fig. 37, 38, 39, 40).



Fig. 37. *Pietà*, **Michelangelo**, 1498, Basilica di San Pietro in Vaticano, Rome



Fig. 37. *Pietà*, **Michelangelo**, 1498, Basilica di San Pietro in Vaticano, Rome



Fig. 39. *Pietà*, **Michelangelo**, 1498, Basilica di San Pietro in Vaticano, Rome

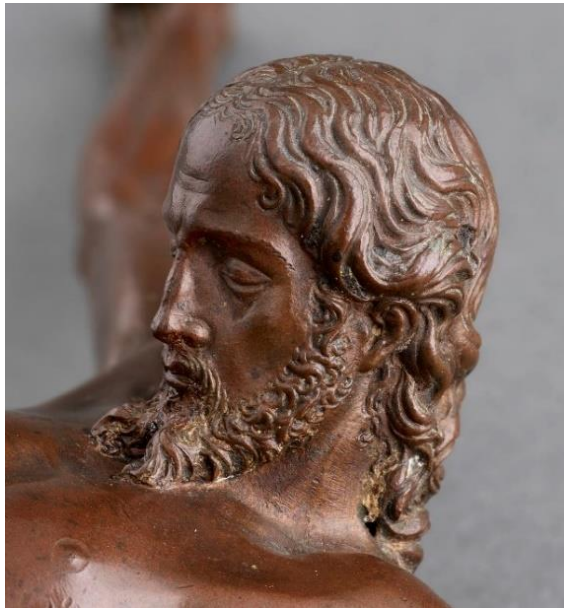


Fig. 38. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection

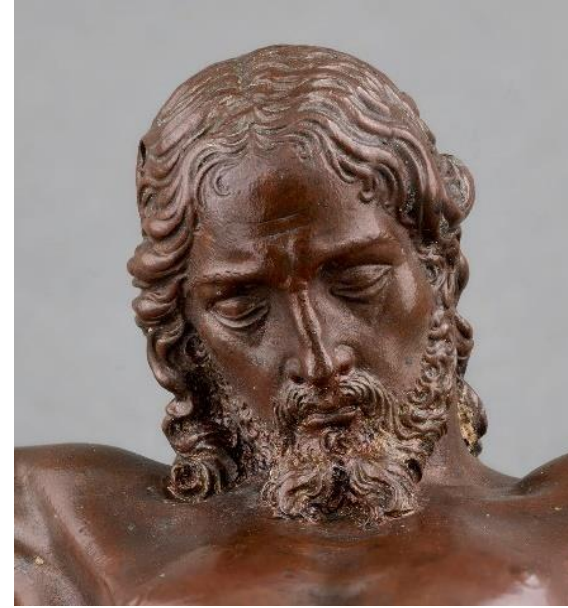


Fig. 40. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection



Fig. 41. *Christ Crucified*, polychromed wood ca. 1491, **Michelangelo**, 1491, 142x135 cm., Church of the Santo Spirito, Florence

Fig. 42. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast in > Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, IOMR Collection

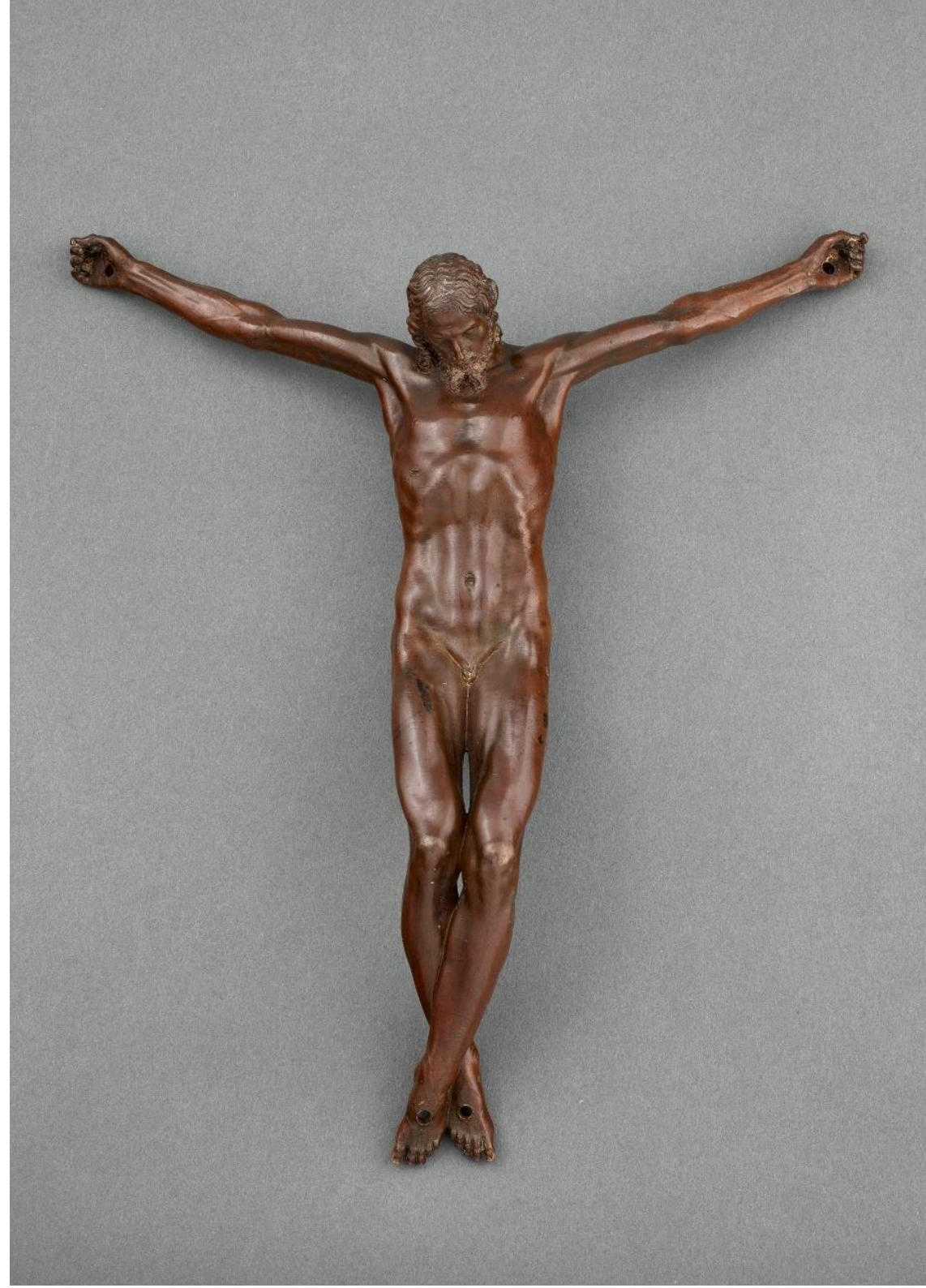




Fig. A. *Adam*, Sistine Chapel, detail, **Michelangelo**, 1508-1512, Basilica di San Pietro in Vaticano

NOTES

1. Manuel Gómez Moreno, "Alonso Cano Escultor, Archivo España y Arqueología", No. 6, M; "Obras de Miguel Ángel en España" AEAA n17, 1930 pp 189-198 "El crucifijo de Miguel Ángel en España", AEAA No. 26, 1930 pp 81-84; Charles de Tolnay "Miguel Ángel. Artista – Pensador – Escritor", 1978, capítulo obras mayores. Anselmo López Morais, "Crucifijo de Miguel Ángel. Un ejemplar en una colección particular en Orense" Historia del Arte Orensano 1988 pp 97- 107. With regard, the Crucifixion by Jacopo del Duca see Giorgio Vasari le Vite dei piu eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori 1550/68 Ed Gaetano Milanesi Florence Sansoni 1963 vol 6 p 273; J P Montagu "Gold Silver& Bronze: Metal Sculpture of the Roman Baroque" Princeton University, p24, ap A1996, refers to a contract signed between Jacopo del Duca and Marco Antonio Hortensio and to a letter dated 1 February 1573.

2. Charles de Tolnay Michelangelo pp 171-172 refers that the wax model was apparently prepared by Michelangelo and created for the New Sacristy "Corpus dei disegni di Michelangelo" Novara Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 1975-80 pp 63-64; Paul Joannides, "Two bronze Crucifixion groups designed by Michelangelo" October 2022, op cit note 10 p43. In this paper Joannides reveals a significant point of view regarding how Michelangelo's mind is obsessed and puzzled with the position of the crossed legs, choosing finally for the bronze Crucified Christ with four nails the left calf crossed over the right calf, in opposition to the testimony of Saint Bridget and in accordance to the Eastern-byzantine-Orthodox tradition, rendered in the Three Crosses drawing 1520, British Museum (Fig. 8) and the reverse of the Haarlem sketch (Fig. 7). Email addressed to Carlos Herrero Starkie 5 October 2023 in which he strongly supports the Teylers sketch represents a primo pensiero of a nude Crucifix for a Sculpture, bearing in mind he has drawn the figure from different angles; Shell op cit 1992 note 10, Bambach 2017, p194 and Paul Joannides op cit 2022, agree in dating the letters 1538/41.

3. Victoria Avery "Michelangelo Sculptor: Brazen Defiance" pp 22-47, 2018. The influence of Bertoldo di Giovanni extends beyond 1500, and although it is not believed he received a training as a goldsmith as Ghiberti, Donatello Verrochio and Pollaiuolo, it is assumed that Michelangelo had an activity in the conception of small bronzes, though only "Hércules Pomarius" circa, 1490 had come to us. Victoria Avery's "Small Sculpture in Bronze", op cit 2018, also discusses Michelangelo's activity in the conception of small bronzes, including one representing a horse for the Duke of Urbino. He considered that it was not cast properly, and claimed the original model from Michelangelo. In 1525, he also made a wax model for the "Hércules and Anteus" commissioned for the Piazza della Signoria. Since the commission was not completed, he gifted it in 1561 to his friend Leone Leoni in gratitude for casting a medal with his likeness. It is interesting to note that in the will of his son, Pompeo Leoni, there is mention of a Crucifix by Michelangelo, which may be one of the metallic versions of our model or another Roman prototype given to him by his father Leone. Additionally, in 1528, Michelangelo made another wax model representing Samson and two Philistines, which Daniele Volterra cast. The best version of this sculpture is in the Frick Collection, and Paul Joannides considers it one of the small bronzes with the greatest significance. There are designs for both the horse and Samson in the Casa Buonarroti and the Ashmolean Museum.

See Margrit Lisner "Il Crucifisso di Michelangelo in Santo Spirito a Firenze" Munich, 1964. Referred by Vasari, op cit note 23.

See note 2.

4. Paul Joannides, 1996, "Michelangelo and His Influence: Drawings from Windsor Castle" "Two bronzes Crucifixions groups designed by Michelangelo" October 2022; Michael Riddick Renbronze.com,

"Michelangelo's Crucifix for Vittoria Colonna" p1-23 in this article, the author makes a very accurate comparison with Michelangelo's drawings at the Teylers Museum and another drawing that appears in a manuscript dated 1540 in the Vatican Apostolic Library; Carmen Bambach "Divine Draftsman & Designer", Metropolitan Museum, 2017. J Shell Ed Pietro Marani cat exhibition Montreal, "The genius of the sculptor in Michelangelo's work", 1992. With regard to the Christ on the Cross looking upwards related to the British Museum see second edition 1568 of Vasari Vite, Gaetano Milanese Florence Sansoni 1963, vol 6 p273.

5. Letters from Michelangelo to his nephew Lionardo in August 1562. Il Carteggio indiritto di Michelangelo, 1988, Ed P Barrocci-Firenze vol2 p126n 324.

6. With regard to Menighella's, Crucifix see Giorgio Vasari's "Le Vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori" second edition, 1568. Le opere di Giorgio Vasari Gaetano Milanese, Ed 1878-85, Firenze, Vol 7 p282.

7. See Sarah Rolfe, "Michelangelo's Christian Mysticism: Poetry and Art in Sixteenth Century Italy", 2014, Cambridge University Press, p143, Rime 153. In this Poem Michelangelo compares on the one hand Vittoria to the liquid that fills him like the fluid that goes through the channels used to fill the mould and on the other hand he describes himself as the sculpture revealed when the mold is broken.

8. Ascanio Condivi "Vita di Michelangelo Buonarroti", Rome 1553, pp4-46. Michelangelo's first biographer compares two works for the Marchesa of Pescara, one representing a naked Christ without a Cross with the dead body abandoned and another design of a living Jesus Christ with His head raised, looking at His Father with a body that is not dead but appears to be suffering and contorted in agony. The first seems to refer to a sculpture or, alternatively, a painting, but in any case, it faithfully describes the forms and spirit of the Crucifix under study. The second, a design of a living Jesus Christ, appears to refer to some drawings by Michelangelo, especially "Christ on the Cross" from 1538/ 1541 at the British Museum.

9. Benedetto Varchi's "Orazione funerale di Messer Benedetto Varchi, e recitata da lui pubblicamente nell'exequie di Michelangelo Buonarroti in Firenze nella chiesa di San Lorenzo" 1564, p 29 "In Rome, in La Minerva, there is a naked Christ, and another Christ also naked but in a different manner, which he (Michelangelo) gave to the most divine Marchesa of Pescara". The sculptural character of both references is clear and reinforced by the fact that Varchi has already discussed before the drawings given to the Marchesa.

10. Fig. 13 and Fig. 16 have been traditionally considered Michelangelo's drawn portraits of Vittoria Colonna due to the resemblance of the sitter with Giovio's description of Vittoria's face and to its sophisticated coiffure. More recently scholars have been more prone to consider these heads, as the representation of Michelangelo's ideal of beauty characterized by a straight nose, a broad forehead, well separated eyes, lightly curve eyebrows, perfect outlined ears, fleshy lips and a prominent chin. Joannides suggest that it could have inspired an idealized portrait of Vittoria Colonna, in accordance to the long neck, bowed head and concentrated gaze of the sitter, bearing an overall melancholic appearance in close connection with Vittoria Colonna's mood. A canon of male beauty already burned in his mind when he painted the Sistine Chapel (1512/1518) as attested by his depiction of Adam (Fig. A) and the drawings offered to Tommaso Cavalieri who is certainly also an alternative for the identification of the sitter of Fig. 13.

Maria Musiol "Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna letters" ISBN979-3-7365-3628-3 p14-15 Paolo Giovio "Vittoria Colonna subtle description of her physiognomy" quoted from his "Dialogui"; "Vittoria Colonna in Michelangelo's Drawings 1520-1543 pp13-33; Sara Vowles and Grant Lewis "Michelangelo.

The last decades". British Museum, 2024, exhib catalogue, 2024. C1 "Return to Rome". Quoting Vasari, Grant Lewis refers to the beautifully heads drawn by Michelangelo for Tommaso Cavalieri that have disappeared p 41, though the drawing Tityus Royal Collection Trust fully embodies Michelangelo's ideal of male beauty that Tommaso inspired him. In contrast with the sensual relation he had with Cavalieri, Sara Vowles describes in C2 "Vittoria Colonna" how Michelangelo was platonically in love of Vittoria Colonna who was his Muse and spiritual guide. She comments the letters with regard to the British Museum drawing of the living Christ and a painting representing the same Crucifix by Michelangelo's pupil and assistant, Marcellus Venusti. pp76-107.

11. Riddick Michelangelo's and Vittoria Colonna's discussion of a Crucifix Appendix A Renbronze.com, pp1-7. Maria Forcelino, "Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo drawings and painting. A companion to Vittoria Colonna". The Renaissance Society of America, vol 5 pp270- 313

Casa Buonarroti original text CodIX.507. Correspondence collected and published by Ermanno Ferrero and Giuseppe Muller, Turin Loescher, pp268-69: "Cordialissimo mio S. Michel Agnolo. Ve prego me mandiate un poco il Crucifisso se bene non fornido, percha il vorria mostrare a gentilhuomini del R. Cardinal de Mantua et si voi non sete oggi al laboro, protessi venir a parlarli con vostra comodita. Al comando vostro. La Marquesa di Pescara".

12. See note 7. British library, 23139, fol 10. Original text "Unico maestro Michelangelo et mio singularissimo amico. Ho hauto la vostra et visto il crucifisso il qual certamente ha crucifixe nella memoria mia quali altre pitture viddi mai, ne se po veder piu ben fatta, piu viva et piu finita imagine et certo io non potrei mai explicar quanto sottilmente et mirabilmente e fatta, pero il che ho risoluta de non volerlo di man d' altri, et pero chiaritemi, se questo e d altri, patientia. Se e vostro, io in ogni modo vel torrei, ma in caso che non sia vostro et vogliate farlo fare a quel vostro, circa parlaremo prima, perche cognoscendo io la difficulta che e ce di imitarlo, piu presto mi risolvo che colui faccia un'altra cosa che questa; ma si e il vostro questo, habbiate patientia che non son per tornarlo piu. Io l' ho visto al lume et col vetro et col specchio, et non viddi mai la piu finita cosa. Son accomandamento vostro. La Marchesa di Pescara".

13. Vatican Apostolic Library cod. Vatic. Latino 3211c 99. Original text "Signora Marchesa. E non par, sendo io in roma, che egli accadessi lasciar il Crucifisso a messer Tommaso e farlo mezzano fra Vostra Signoria e me suo servo, accioche io la serva e massimo avendo io desiderato di far piu per qu'elle che per uomo che io conoscessi mai al mondo; ma l'ocupacione grande, in che sono state e sono, non ha lasciato conoscer questo a Vostra Signoria: e perche io so ella sa che amore non vuol maestro, e che Chi ama non dorme, manco accadeva ancora mezzi: e benche paressi che io non mi ricordassi, io facebo qu'elle ch' io non diceva per giugnere con cosa non aspettata. E state guasto il mio disegno: ma fa tanta fe si tosto oblia". Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana".

14. Linda Bosch (2018).

15. Domenico Laurenza, "Duality in Art and Anatomy: Men and Animals, Youth and Old Age in Leonardo and Michelangelo" pp221-228; Julia C. Ruston and Peter H Abrams, "Dissecting the Rothschilds Bronzes", "Michelangelo Sculptor", Ed. Victoria Avery, 2018.



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© May 2024 – Michelangelo's involvement in the four-nailed Crucifix model and Vittoria Colonna.
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