Michelangelo: Renaissance Painter, Sculptor, Architect and POET
Pietà, located in Saint Peter’s Basilica, Vatican City, was created by Michelangelo in his early twenties. It depicts Mary as a young woman holding the dead Christ in her arms. It is a remarkable technical piece; the flesh under Christ’s shoulder just above Mary’s right hand seems to be soft and pliable. It is also a work of great beauty, capable of eliciting a deeply emotional response in the viewer.
Michelangelo's *David*

One of Michelangelo’s best known creations is the sculpture *David*. The 17-ft tall marble statue shows an alert David waiting for his enemy Goliath. It originally stood in front of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, Italy, but was later moved to the Galleria dell’Accademia.
Moses

Italian artist Michelangelo’s *Moses* was completed around 1515. Originally intended to be part of an immense sculptural tomb for Pope Julius II, it is in the church San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome, Italy.
Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

Michelangelo devised an elaborate scheme for the decoration of the Sistine Chapel ceiling. It features nine scenes from the Biblical Book of Genesis, including the Creation of Adam, the Creation of Eve, the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve, and the Flood. These centrally located narratives are surrounded by images of prophets and sibyls on marble thrones, and by other biblical subjects.
Laurentian Library

Michelangelo designed the Laurentian Library in Florence, Italy between 1524 and 1534. In the entry hall to the library shown here, Michelangelo alternated curves and right angles, concave and convex forms to create a sense of movement and tension.
Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*, the large fresco on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel, dates from 1536-1541—about 30 years after the famous ceiling frescoes were painted. This painting of judgment day, with its grotesque and twisted figures, represents one of the earliest examples of Mannerist art. Christ stands in the center of the fresco meting out justice, while the saved rise on the left and the damned descend on the right.
Saint Peter’s Basilica
Roman Architect Donato Bramante died before completing St. Peter’s Basilica, in Vatican City, Rome, so Florentine artist Michelangelo assumed a supervisory role in 1546. His design simplified and unified Bramante’s architectural elements and created a structure of monumental proportions. Michelangelo’s innovative design for the enormous ribbed dome of Saint Peter’s influenced dome design and construction for the next 300 years.
Poetry

While Michelangelo’s art reveals his genius as an artist, his poetry reveals his humanity. He lived to be 89 years old and began writing verses when he was in his mid-twenties. While he later destroyed most poems he wrote before 60, poetry of his later years received considerable acclaim.

In later life he became dependent for inspiration on a handsome young man Tommaso Cavalieri and dependent for companionship on an austere widow, Vittoria Colonna. Many of his love poems are written to them or about them. He also wrote devotional poetry and eulogies commissioned by friends for someone who had died.
What juster reason for my loving you can there be,
Than to give glory to that eternal peace
which derives from a divine element in you
that brings pleasure?
Hope can indeed appear with my burning desire and not prove false,
If all our emotions were displeasing to heaven, to what end would God have made the world?
False hope is harboured only by that love when beauty is worn away;
Sweet hope is found in a chaste heart; it does not fail because of changes in the husk.

Sonnet for Tommaso Cavalieri, 1546
Fierce desire for an immense beauty
Is not always a harsh and mortal sin
If it so melts the heart
That a divine shaft may penetrate there more swiftly.

Love wakes and rouses and feathers the wings
And does not prevent passion from passing into lofty flight;
For the soul finds itself unsatisfied with that first stage,
And ascends and soars to its creator.

The love I speak of aspires to the heights;
The love of a woman is all too unlike it,
The one love draws us to heaven, the other pulls us to earth
The one is in the soul, the other is in the senses.
The soul, the pure and whole intelligence, ascends free and unbound through the eyes to your high beauty; but great ardour gives no such privilege to the human body, heavy and mortal…

Ah, if you have as much power in heaven as among us
Turn my whole body into a single eye, So that there may be no part of me which does not enjoy you.

Her beautiful face spurs me so far beyond vain desire
I see only death in every other beauty.
O lady, who bring souls through water and fire to blissful days, Pray let me never return to myself.

Poems about Vittoria Colonna
Devotional Fragments

If my rough hammer, in shaping hard stones into the form of human appearance, derives its motion from the Master who guides, directs, and sustains it, then it moves as someone else would have it do.

But the divine hammer, which lodges and abides in heaven, with its own movement, makes others beautiful, and all the more itself.

And, if no hammer can be made without a hammer, then every other hammer is made from that living one. And since every blow is of greater strength, the higher the hammer is raised, the more the blows are from heaven above.
Here I fell asleep according to my fate. But I didn’t die, I only don’t live here anymore.
You cry for me, that’s why I remain in you;
And, here with you, I become transformed into you
Because I loved you who embraced me and in whom my soul still lies.

Short Epitaph
1544
Whereby the impassioned fantasy that drove me to idolize and make a king of art, I now plainly see it for what it always was, full of error, like every other transient object of human desire.

Neither painting nor sculpture now can satisfy the soul, turned to that divine love which opens its arms on the cross to receive us.

“This poetry expresses the most fundamental of Christian attitudes toward the world; and it comes to its true lucidity as part of a rich literary tradition – Renaissance poets- Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Donne. These poets all write about the difference between sensual love and spiritual love.”