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Furniture and Product Design

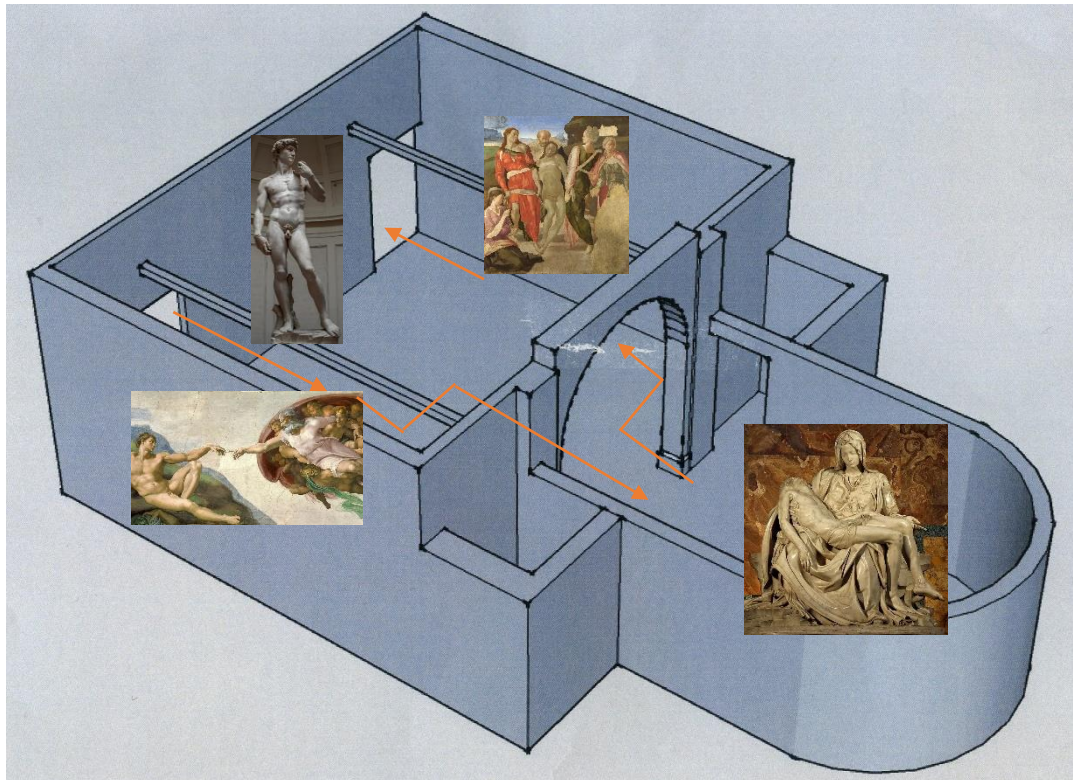
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Julia Lockheart

The Path of Life and its Betrayals:

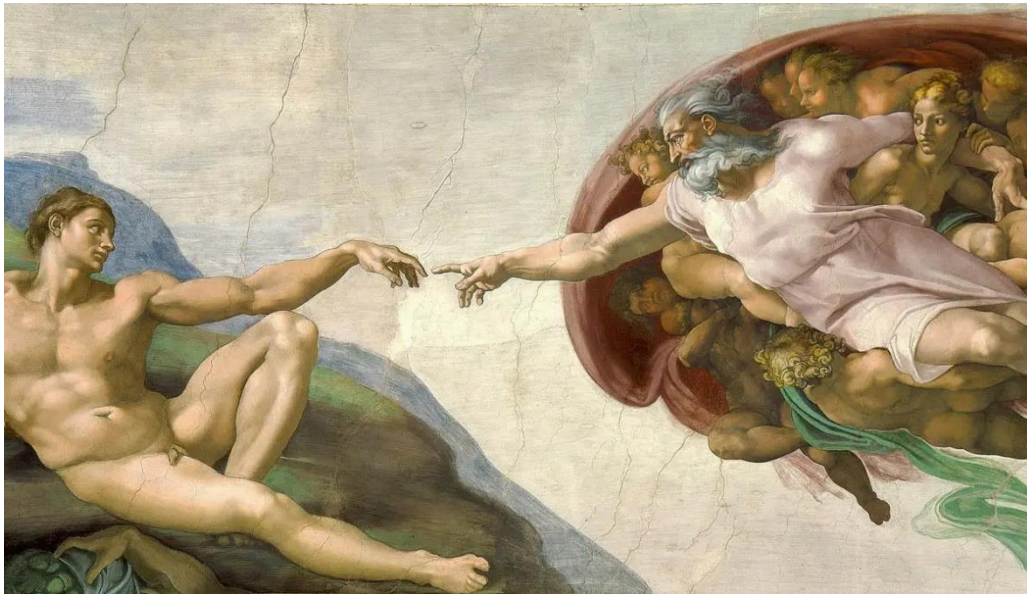
For this exhibition my plan is to tell a story many have lived through, The Path of Life and its betrayals. I chose four pieces of Michelangelo's work as they depict what the path of life looks like to the average person: Birth, Love and Betrayal, and Death. Michelangelo's pieces are packed full with emotion, highlighting the divine beauty that birth is, youthful strength, how heart-wrenching love can actually be, and how death doesn't have to be the end. Although these artworks are over 4 centuries old, they are still relevant to this day due to them being a huge influence in the Renaissance, or the "rebirth" of our civilization. They made a massive transformation within society, affecting the way people thought by changing it "from darkness to light" (Art in context, 2023) and rediscovering "classical philosophy, literature and art" (History.com 2018) which led to the Enlightenment period.

The title of the exhibition as well as Michelangelo's creations both have religious connotations as in the Bible it states "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore," (Psalm 16.11 ESV); "fullness of joy" hints at how God has a plan for your life which "involves fullness of joy in His presence" (David Platt, 2018), however it can be said we have been cheated of this multiple times as, religious or not, we've all felt betrayed by others, ourselves and the reality of which life is. Michelangelo portrays these feelings through his paintings and sculptures, flowingly telling a story of creation, strength, compassion and the inevitable end. Through this he made a massive impact toward the Renaissance which then started the cultural movement called Humanism promoting the idea that "man was the centre of his own universe, and people should embrace human achievements [leading to advances] that changed the way people understood and interpreted the world around them" (History.com 2018), furthermore changing society from darkness to light as earlier mentioned, which can be linked back to one of Michelangelo's pieces, Pieta, meaning pity or compassion in Italian, it can be interpreted that death doesn't have to be the end and hinting at the idea of rebirth which some may describe the Renaissance period as.



While researching different artworks which would tell the story I had in mind, I found how Michelangelo's work told a story too which led me to finding more about him as a person and the reasoning behind his creations. Michelangelo was an Italian artist majorly known for his paintings, sculptures, architectural designs and poems. He "exerted an unparalleled influence on the development of Western art" (Creighton E. Gilbert, last updated 2023) furthermore "His work demonstrated a blend of psychological insight, physical realism and intensity never before seen" (History.com, 2018) and through that he was then considered one of the greatest artists of the Renaissance period.

I noticed how some of his creations all interlinked telling a beautiful story which I wanted to share with others, The path of life and its Betrayals. In the gallery floorplan, against the wall in the entrance and starting off the story of the Path of Life, The Creation of Adam is ideally the first painting you will get drawn to, which is usually referred to as the divine breath of life; "the moment when God created human life" (The collector, no date). Following the orange arrow along, Michelangelo's sculpture "Pietà", meaning pity or compassion in Italian, showcases the betrayal part of the exhibition as Mary holds the lifeless body of her son after the crucifixion, where the "people's broken relationship with God was restored, [which is also] known as The Atonement" (BBC religions 2009). Displayed on the opposite wall to The Creation of Adam painting and heading towards the exit, is the unfinished painting called The Entombment. Similar to Pietà, both of these creations hint at death not being the end of the road in different ways, as Pietà shows "Christ's death as one of peace and quietude" (Tracy, Erin M, 2015) and The Entombment being an unfinished painting hints at death being an unfinished story, following the question everyone has once asked: "what happens after death?". In the middle of the gallery, between the entrance and exit, David stands, telling his own story; a symbol of independence, strength and youthful beauty.



The Creation of Adam:

the Creation of Adam is one of the "most replicated religious paintings of all time." (The Artist, no date). It shows God's and Adam's fingers "ready to strike a spark upon contact" (Sistine Chapel, no date) which references to The Divine Breath of Life, where "God's breath is a giving of God's life, [suggesting], a reflection of his likeness." (Davis Wetherell, 2019). Michelangelo beautifully decorated the Sistine Chapel's ceiling with The Creation of Adam, among other artworks and completed it in 1512. He painted it using a mural painting technique called Fresco which "involves painting with water- based paint directly onto wet plaster so that the paint becomes an integral part of the plaster" (Tate, no date).

Linking back to the idea of life and birth, in this painting around God's arm there's a "prominent female character, perhaps a mother counterpart to God's father-like role [to Adam, almost hinting to the public that Michelangelo understood] the importance of women in childbirth and creation, [making a] complex argument for equality of the sexes within the Biblical story of creation" (The collector, no date), meanwhile others would argue "that the shape God and the angels create resembles that of a womb and placenta, suggesting Adam was given birth to, rather than being created by God in thin air" (the collector, no date) furthermore why this would be the first display to the gallery.



The Pietà:

The Pietà, meaning “pity” or “compassion” in Italian, was sculpted out of Carrara Marble in 1499 for the French Cardinal Jean de Bilhères for his Mausoleum in the Chapel of Santa Petronilla. It represents “Mary sorrowfully contemplating the dead body of her son” (smart history, no date) after his crucifixion. Mary’s facial expressions come across as peaceful first, but through empathising with the situation her peacefulness becomes restrained emotions, moreover feeling betrayed, as after raising her child, he is condemned to death in order to restore “the people’s broken relationship with God” (BBC.com, 2009). The placing of this sculpture being in the middle yet almost separated of the rest adds layers to this Path of Life and its Betrayals story as it leaves the spectator with the feeling of hope almost as it is not the end of the exhibition even though it might feel like the end of the story, which then takes to the next painting, the entombment.

The Entombment:

Even though this oil-on-panel painting depicts the burial of Jesus after his crucifixion, there is an ironic beauty behind it never having been finished, almost hinting at the death of Jesus not being the end, and possibly the same for any other human, taking back to the rhetorical question of: what comes after death?

Leaving interpretations aside, the reason why this painting was never finished, is due to “the result of his failure to procure the prized pigment” (The Paris Review, 2015) as the blue shade Ultramarine “was made with lapis lazuli, a luminous blue mineral mined in Afghanistan” (Evie Hatch, 2019) before the 19th century. Due to its rarity, it was “immensely expensive, [and] As a result, it was used sparingly, usually reserved for the robes of the Virgin Mary and other holy figures. The colour came to symbolise humility and purity, as well as signifying the wealth of the patron who commissioned its use” (Evie Hatch, 2019)





David:

Finished in 1504, Michelangelo created one of the most famous Renaissance sculptures out of “a block of marble that other artists had considered unworkable” (Aarushi Maheshwari, 2018). Michelangelo’s David differs from the other sculptures, as instead of him being “represented the hero standing victorious over the head of Goliath,” David is depicted before his battle.” (Wikipedia, no date)

The statue of David symbolises “independence and strength in the perfect image of youthful beauty”, “and not only is a Symbol of the Renaissance but also a representation for the city itself, Florentine Republic” (context, no date) which is why I feel as though the best placement for this sculpture is in the centre of the gallery, as even though it doesn’t line up with the “Birth”, “Betrayal” and “Death” theme the previous artworks flow through, it links with every creation in its own specific manner, as well as being the pinpoint of the Renaissance, due to David having a much greater impact on the “rebirth” of our society compared to The Entombment, Pietà and Adam’s Creation.

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