

Michelangelo: Through an Illustrator's Eyes

Alexandra Itzstein

Student number – 2217801

Course – Illustration

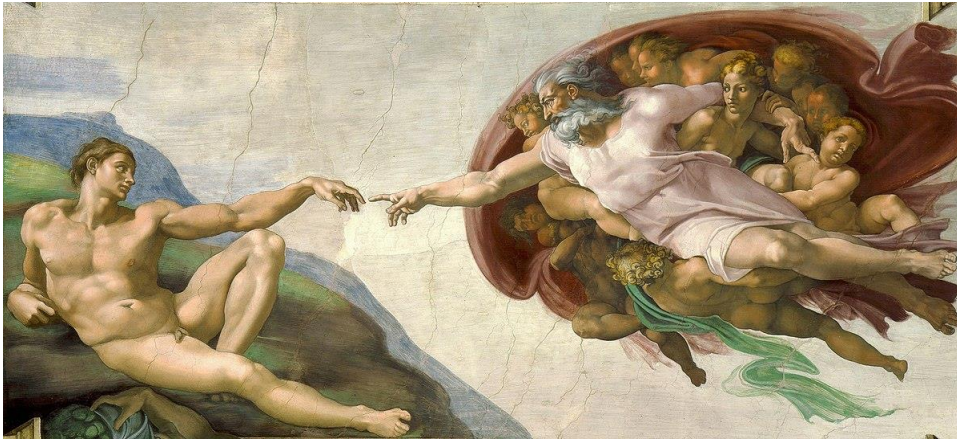
Module Title- Ways of Thinking (ADAD4018)

Word Count - 1,559

Tutor name- Gwenllian Beynon

Michelangelo was a world-famous artist sculpting the art world as we know it today and provided some of the most famous and iconic pieces of art ever developed. Michelangelo and his art style have always intrigued me and sparked a passion within me to create art of my own. Michelangelo was an Italian artist born on 6th March 1475 He was most well-known within the Italian renaissance era for his incredible sculptures, oil painting and murals. I want to talk about how Michelangelo's work ignited my love for Italian renaissance art and sculpting. (Goldsheider,1953, P. 2). Through extensive research and experimentation in this essay, the primary focus will be on what exactly intrigued me to pick Michelangelo as my focus and how his work relates to my own illustration interests. I will touch upon religion and mythological influences that are shown throughout his work whilst also discussing theorists and practitioners.

Michelangelo's artwork primarily consists of religious influences and beliefs that he had during the Italian renaissance era, his influential scenes and artworks are still worshipped to this day and will remain prominent in the minds of artists and consumers for years to come. One piece that stands out for this is the widely well-known piece featured below.



Michelangelo, (1508–1512) The creation of Adam.

The creation of Adam is one of many frescos based on the bible displayed on the ceiling and walls within the Sistine chapel, they depict Bible stories brought to life from the book of the Old Testament. “According to Michelangelo’s own account the pope gave him a freehand to design it as he would” (Murray, 1980, P. 63). This goes to show how much of a renowned artist he had become in the renaissance era to be trusted to paint highly religious architecture with his own free hand, also showing the strong connection he must have had with his faith.

The colours used in the “creation of Adam” (Michelangelo 1508-1512) fresco show a soft, heavenly and gentle pastel tone, this is very fitting to a piece that contains heavy religious influence that is portrayed as heavenly and otherworldly. The well-known mural is seen depicts God the Almighty reaching out to his precious creation of man, Adam the creation of man was created when God “formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Isbouts,2019). This is one of the first Chapters within the bible and has an important meaning within Christianity, Michelangelo uses a range of soft and calming tones such as shades of beige and baby blues, these specific colours can spark certain feelings when looking at the artwork, Michelangelo picked colours that affect the overall mood within this place of worship and make it seem softer and more religious so that the spectators may feel like they have more understanding and a stronger connection to God. The moods that certain colours give can be seen in (How Colour can affect your mood, 2021).

“When you go into a renaissance church or chapel you have the feeling that the images on the wall are records of the building’s interior life” (Berger,1972). Michelangelo’s artwork within the Sistine chapel wraps around the historic architecture of the building truly making it feel that he has put his stamp onto the chapel and is the one that truly brings the interior to life. The crack’s shown in the frescos painted onto the chapel show us how old they are and how time will eventually take its toll on everything in life.



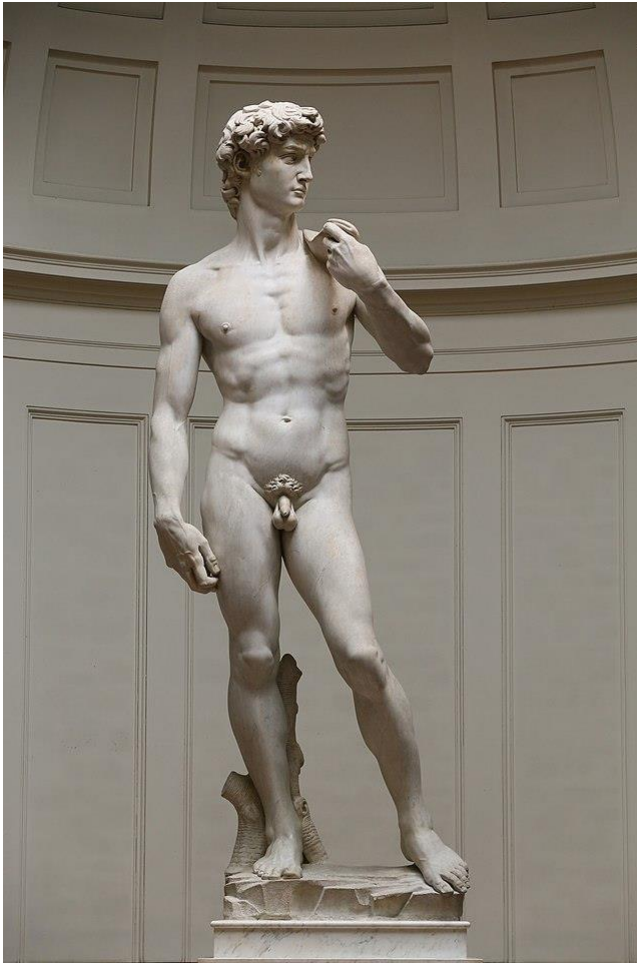
Michelangelo, (1520), Leda and the swan

Symbols and shapes are a crucial part of our everyday life whether we notice them or not, researching Michelangelo's work you get to see the details and semiotics within showing the true meaning behind most of his work. The artwork displayed above “Leda and the swan” shows Michelangelo’s engagement with Greek mythology and how it was intertwined and even worshipped at the time with other beliefs such as Christianity. Many other practitioners before and after Michelangelo such as Leonardo DaVinci can also be seen using the famous Greek story of “Leda and the swan” (Michelangelo, 1520) and how practitioners in the renaissance era loved to have a story to go alongside their work.

“In the nudes of European painting, we can discover some of the criteria and conventions by which women were judged.” (Berger,1972). This remark made by theorist John Berger truly makes one think about this painting and how Leda the woman in the painting can be seen

by some as over-sexualised based on how one would view it shows how people have different ways of seeing. The natural form/nude can be seen in many other renaissance paintings with most being women to appeal more to the fantasy of the spectator and the creator themselves. The most prominent colour red within this piece gives a sense of love and passion, this colour is also strongly associated to show wealth in European history a colour that only the commissioner of the artist would be able to afford (Art in context, 2022). The myth of Leda says, "Zeus repeated his trick of seduction by swan with Leda" (Matyszak, 2010, P. 113). The colour red within this painting is showing how Zeus Seduces Leda, making the colour symbolise seduction and love as it is told within the Greek myths.

"In Ancient Greece, the swans were associated with Aphrodite, the goddess of love. This, in turn, has also strengthened the swan symbolism of love and togetherness" (American Tarantula & Animals, 2022). The swan (Zeus) is a crucial part of this painting and shows us how swans were associated with Aphrodite the Goddess of love (American Tarantula & Animals, 2022), showing that Zeus had a strong passion and love toward Leda. It could also be thought that Zeus thought of himself as a swan symbol, strong, elegant and beautiful.



Michelangelo, (1501-1504) David.

During the Italian Renaissance, Michelangelo explored a vast range of art practices, the practice he is most well-known for and one that has personally inspired me as an illustrator is sculpting. One of his most well-known sculptures is the statue of “David” (Michelangelo,1501-1504). This sculpture is known as “David the giant” due to its enormous size compared to other sculptures at the time (Goldsheider,1953, P. 10). The giant statue displays the commitment and passionate craftsmanship that Michelangelo put into perfecting his practice, "this astonishing Renaissance sculpture was created between 1501 and 1504 It is a 14.0 ft marble statue depicting the Biblical hero David". (Accademia.org, 2020). The commitment to this piece can be seen in the fact that Michelangelo took 3 years to create ‘David’ (Michelangelo,1501-1504) with all the intricate shapes, details and textures.

The material used to create David was white Carrara marble, many artists including Michelangelo like to use it because it “has an amazing quality of absorbing light a few

millimetres before being diffused, adding a lustrous texture and sophistication". ([MYKU](#), 2022). The white marble gives David a lighter and more rich tone which can also be tied to the holy religious influence it has showing the extreme elegance and strength David possessed in these stories. Many details can be seen but the main ones that influenced me into loving the practice of sculpting were how he managed to capture such small details. Details such as the light refracting into David's eyes can be seen creating a heart-shaped symbol which would not have existed in this era, however, in the eyes of a current society it may be perceived as a symbol of love and compassion, this is how I interpret the art and this demonstrates the reason why it has evolved my interest in sculpting as every detail can be seen differently in the eyes of the individual which allows the work to appeal to a larger audience.

Altogether Michelangelo inspired me as an illustrator to experiment and try more practices such as sculpting and study of the human form. Michelangelo tries to tell a story through his own style using models and architecture creating deeply religious and truly mesmerizing works of art. He was a master of Semiotics and storytelling and has carved his mark into art history while inspiring many more budding artists such as myself. Overall Michelangelo displays his art in unique ways such as frescos and sculptures maintaining the religious influence he believed in at the time, though many renaissance artworks such as Michelangelo's today may be seen as exploitative as he portrays the nude, he embraces it to show the story and beauty mankind possess through his everlasting art forms. Even not being religious myself I still knew who Michelangelo was in the art world along with his creations which invited me to learn more about Christianity and the culture during this time. To conclude Michelangelo through history is shown to be an exceptional artist who has been able to influence how we create stories through art today therefore his work is admired from all over the world no matter the religion or meaning, as his work is open to interpretation and captures timeless imagery of history which will interest people forever. This alone shows the talent that this artist had from such a young age and why his work has rightfully left a statement in the mind of millions.

Goldsheider, L. (1953), Michelangelo, paintings, sculpture, architecture. fifth edition.
Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd.

Michelangelo, (1508–1512) The creation of Adam [fresco]. [Sistine Chapel](https://www.italianrenaissance.org/michelangelo-creation-of-adam/), Vatican City,
Available at: <https://www.italianrenaissance.org/michelangelo-creation-of-adam/> (
Accessed: 15 November 2022).

Murray, L. (1980) Michelangelo. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.

Isbouts, J.P. (2019) Why Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden. Available at:
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/adam-eve-couple-relationship-bible> (
Accessed: 15 November 2022).

Toftegaard (2021) How colour can affect your mood. Available at:
<https://saratoftegaard.com/journal/2021/12/3/how-color-can-effect-your-mood> (Accessed:
15 November 2022).

Michelangelo, (1520) Leda and the swan [tempera on canvas] Available at:
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leda_and_the_Swan_\(Michelangelo\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leda_and_the_Swan_(Michelangelo)) (Accessed: 22
November 2022)

John Berger (1972) Ways of seeing, episode 1. Available at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX_9Kk (Accessed: 22 November 2022).

Art in context, (2022) Shades of Red – Exploring and Using the Red Colour Spectrum
Available at: <https://artincontext.org/shades-of-red/> (Accessed: 22 November 2022).

Matyszak, P. (2010), The Greek and Roman myths, a guide to the classical stories. London:
Thames and Hudson Ltd.

American Tarantula & Animals, (2022) Swan Symbolism: 15 Spiritual Meanings of Swan.
Available at: <https://www.atshq.org/swan-symbolism/> (Accessed: 22 November 2022).

Michelangelo, (1501-1504) David [marble sculpture]. Academia Gallery: Florence, Available
at: <https://www.accademia.org/explore-museum/artworks/michelangelos-david/> (Accessed:
29 November 2022).

Academia.org, (2020) Michelangelo's David Available
at: <https://www.accademia.org/explore-museum/artworks/michelangelos-david/> (Accessed:
29 November 2022).

MYKU, (2022) Why do the artists particularly like Carrara? Available
at: <https://www.myku.co/pages/white-marble> (Accessed: 29 November 2022).