



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and bibliography of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at <http://www.neh.gov/grants/research/summer-stipends> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and bibliography, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Michelangelo in Print: The Early Reproductions in the Creation of a Canonical Figure

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Institution: Wake Forest University

Grant Program: Summer Stipends

Narrative

Michelangelo in Print: The Early Reproductions in the Creation of a Canonical Figure

Michelangelo is one of the great canonical figures in western art history, but we often forget that during his lifetime and for the next two centuries, his work was often difficult to access or to know in any sense of the word. The availability of engraved copies of Michelangelo's work allowed a critical discussion to take place and a method of art historical study to take shape around his work. In my book on Michelangelo's Last Judgment (1998), I began to explore how engraved reproductions supported the critical discussions and eventual censorship of that fresco in the 16th century. In my new project, I will examine how Michelangelo's art became public--how works were selected for publication, then edited, marketed, and received in the print medium.

Although listings of prints after Michelangelo's work have existed since the 19th century, only three publications have attempted to analyze the prints. Two are catalogues based on the collections in the Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe in Rome (Rotili 1964; Molteda 1991); the third is an article that also discusses prints in the Vatican collection (Morello 1994). Large collections of these prints exist in other museums, but they have barely been studied other than being noted in cataloguing the work of individual printmakers. The literature as it stands now is most comprehensive in the Italian publications; it is otherwise very diffuse and not well known to scholars who are not specialists in prints.

The study of these prints, however, is of great interest to Michelangelo scholars, Renaissance art historians, and scholars of cultural history. In some cases, the paintings or sculptures reproduced were in very restricted spaces. This was true of Michelangelo's paintings in the Vatican palace: the Sistine ceiling, the Last Judgment, and the Pauline Chapel frescoes. Although The Last Judgment was reproduced almost immediately after its completion in 1541, only a few scenes from the Sistine ceiling were published in the 16th century. The earliest of these date from the 1540s, nearly 30 years after the ceiling was unveiled; engravings that showed the entire ceiling did not appear until the late 18th century. Why certain scenes were published early and often, while others were almost totally ignored, provides insights into public demand and collectors' habits, as well as the Vatican's own desire (or lack of desire) to provide public access to these works.

Other works, like the drawings for his intimate friends, Tommaso de' Cavalieri and Vittoria Colonna, were made as very private gifts. How they came to be published suggests a system of private circulation among a network of friends, patrons and collectors, which was then

replaced by the more public exposure of the print medium. With this shift of audience, explanatory texts, new dedications, and prayers (in the case of the religious images) were added to make these sometimes recondite subjects more easily understandable and more marketable.

Still other examples raise the question of whose purposes these prints served. Some appear to have been made as propaganda for the French king or for the Medici family, while others were modified by inscriptions that justified controversial works commissioned by the Papacy. Although the changes to some of the figures in these prints have been interpreted as a way of covering up Michelangelo's controversial beliefs (see Steinberg 1975) little attention has been given to the inscriptions or the physical configuration of the prints as indications of their use by Renaissance viewers.

These prints also show, for the first time, that recently made works of art or architecture could be objects of historical study. In the 16th century, prints that reproduced other works of art were generally made under the close supervision of the artist and most often served the purpose of publicizing new works. Those paintings that had acquired some fame in the early 16th century were sometimes copied piecemeal, with printmakers selecting a few figures to place in their own compositions. Michelangelo's own early works, such as *The Battle of Cascina*, were subjected to this sort of selective copying. In the 1540s, however, Michelangelo's works were the first to have been recorded as historical objects; that is, the printmakers reproduced complete compositions and gave full credit for the compositions to the artist. Some of these prints were inserted in albums containing engravings of ancient Roman monuments that were purchased by well-to-do, 16th-century tourists. The fact that Michelangelo is the only contemporary artist to be represented with any regularity in these collections indicates that his work was already being inserted into the canon of masterpieces. While it would surprise no one today to think of Michelangelo's work as canonical, this study of the prints shows how social and historical forces have worked to construct a canon that we now take for granted.

Not everything that Michelangelo made was reproduced, and the works that were published appeared in a very different order than the original works. The Michelangelo known to Renaissance viewers who encountered his work through prints was very different from the complete Michelangelo whom we know today. The process of selection is at least as important now in deciding what belongs in the canon, but the canon is hardly a fixed entity. Its particular configuration is the result of many factors: aesthetic ideals and the goal of teaching students about the best works of art are among them, but so are politics, popular interests, and the simple availability of images. I would like this study of the quintessential old master to serve as a reminder that these forces were at work in the 16th century as much as they are now.

I worked on this project full-time during a sabbatical leave in the 2001-2002 academic year.

To date, I have concentrated on mastering the literature on Renaissance reproductive prints, on the circumstances surrounding the particular works that were chosen for reproduction, and on the individual publishers and printmakers; there are about 25 of significance and about 15 others who occasionally made prints of Michelangelo's work. In the current academic year, I will continue synthesizing this information; I have begun two articles that I should be able to complete before the summer. Last year, I was also able to travel to several important print collections in Italy and the United States, and as a result of those visits, I have compiled a database of about 250 prints and copper plates. With this database established, I am not able to efficiently compare versions of the prints in different collections and add new information without duplicating past efforts. I've been very pleased to find out that, even in its raw state, my database has been put to good use in cross-referencing the prints held by the Metropolitan Museum.

However, I also learned through this research that several other collections have very specific resources that are essential to the completion of this book and several articles related to it. These are, specifically, the Print Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, which holds the Dyce collection of prints after Michelangelo's works, and the Calcografia Nazionale in Rome, which holds the surviving engraved plates of some of the most important 16th-century reproductions after Michelangelo. In addition, there are several Michelangelo drawings in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle in England that I have to examine in order to check specific points related to reproductions made of these works. I would also use the opportunity to work at the British Library, to see the fundamental collection of prints at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, and to recheck some of the works in the Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe in Rome. Judging from my experience when visiting collections last year, I will have to spend about a week in London and Paris, perhaps two weeks in Rome. An NEH Summer Stipend would provide me with the resources to travel to these collections and then to spend the rest of the summer completing the book.

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