



Michelangelo
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Portrait of Michelangelo (1535) by Marcello Venusti is among the works that will be exhibited at SU.

DRAWING ON GENIUS

The University will unveil a major exhibition of rare Michelangelo works from Italy in August

BY JAY COX

Imagine Michelangelo at work. While such a thought may conjure images of the great Italian Renaissance artist putting his brush to the Sistine Chapel ceiling or chiseling away on the sculpture of *David*, the reality is that he wrestled with the creative process like any artist, scribbling and scratching out ideas for paintings, sculptures, buildings, and other works. “Michelangelo created this great sort of myth around himself—that everything he did was somehow already in his mind, that it was there waiting to be discovered,” says fine arts professor Gary Radke '73, a leading scholar on Renaissance art. “His drawings tell us a whole different story: Yes, they tell us he was a great genius, but they also tell us that he worked at it, developing ideas, trying alternatives. We see him changing his mind, canceling out things, and moving things. It's very dynamic.”

This will be evident when *Michelangelo: The Man and the Myth*, a major exhibition of his drawings and related materials, is unveiled for showings on campus and at the University's Lubin House in New York City. The exhibition is scheduled to run from August 12 through October 19 at the SUArt Galleries, and from November 4 through January 4, 2009, at the Palitz Gallery. It will feature 28 works from the Casa Buonarroti museum in Florence, established by Michelangelo's family in the 17th century to preserve his legacy. Among the treasures on display will be 12 drawings of figures and architectural studies from the hand of the master artist, as well as a handwritten madrigal, four epitaphs, and other writings. In addition, there will be portraits, books, and other items devoted to the artist. “This exhibition stands alone in my mind as the most notable in Syracuse in years,” says Domenic Iacono, director of the SUArt Galleries. “We anticipate thousands of people will come to see it.”

According to Radke and Iacono, fewer than a half-dozen Michelangelo works are typically on display in the United States at any one time, so this exhibition will more than double the amount of original material available for viewing. “It's an extraordinary opportunity,” Radke says, noting that such drawings are rarely displayed because of their sensitivity to light and other environmental factors. “Many

people who are deeply interested in the Renaissance, including professionals, will not have seen these works.”

Jeffrey Hoone, executive director of the Coalition of Museum and Art Centers (CMAC), the umbrella organization for the University's visual and electronic arts (see page 28), says University resources were instrumental in pulling the exhibition together, with Radke guiding the scholarly activities and Iacono and his staff handling the design and installation at both locations. “When something of this scale happens, it always involves people from different institutions,” Hoone says. “But we're fortunate to have all these people here at Syracuse to make an event this rare happen. As far as I can tell, from a historical perspective, this will be the most significant exhibition we've ever done at the University. It's really a special event—not only for the University and the community, but for scholarship about Michelangelo's artwork and the interest in him.”

As the title suggests, *Michelangelo: The Man and the Myth* will offer not only the opportunity to see rare originals, but also to explore how the artist was viewed by others, Iacono says. A Renaissance Man in the truest sense, Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) was an artist, sculptor, poet, architect, and engineer. His tremendous talents put him at the service of popes, kings, and powerful aristocrats. He also endured struggles like any human being and proved

Sparking a Syracuse Renaissance

AS THE CENTRAL NEW YORK COMMUNITY moves toward a knowledge-based economy focused on leading technologies, the arts will play an important role in sparking what some believe could be a “renaissance” for Syracuse. For the Coalition of Museum and Art Centers (CMAC) at Syracuse University, the upcoming Michelangelo exhibition represents a major step in that direction. “Having the work of an artist of his stature tells a lot about what’s going on in Syracuse,” says CMAC executive director Jeffrey Hoone.

CMAC was established in 2006 to bring together the University’s vast holdings in the visual and electronic arts. It comprises Light Work/Community Darkrooms, the Special Collections Research Center, the Community Folk Art Center, the Point of Contact Gallery, the Warehouse Gallery, SUArt Galleries, and the Louise and Bernard Palitz Gallery. Each of these entities has a specialized focus, creating an arts union that offers everything from contemporary photography and prized prints to rare manuscripts, folk art, and artwork from the Americas.

As the guiding force of CMAC, Hoone brings decades of experience of collaborating with renowned and emerging artists, organizing exhibitions, and producing art publications. Since 1982, he has served as the director of Light Work, which he built into an internationally recognized organization known for its progressive support of the photographic arts. He is developing CMAC along similar lines, aiming to create a synergy among coalition members and elevate the visibility of the arts.

The Michelangelo exhibition

represents a prime example of how capitalizing on collaboration and University resources can provide a unique opportunity for the region. The exhibition evolved out of a long-standing interest SUArt Galleries director Domenic Iacono had in tapping the expertise and Italian art connections of fine arts professor Gary Radke ’73 to bring such a show to Syracuse. Working with Hoone and other SU administrators, as well as Pina Ragionieri of the Casa Buonarroti, Iacono and Radke turned the idea into a reality. Of course, staging an exhibition of this magnitude requires CMAC to tap an organizational support network that goes beyond the arts to areas of academics, business, security, publicity, sponsorship, and community outreach.

For Hoone, the importance of such collaboration is apparent. No matter the exhibition or media of artistic expression, collaborative work can generate benefits on several levels, providing showcases for an array of artists and art-lovers alike and supporting a community that values the intangible qualities presented by art. “The Michelangelo exhibition is a great example of what can be achieved when we support and enable talented individuals within the University art community to rise to their potential,” Hoone says. “That a project of the scope and importance of this exhibition is being accomplished completely with SU faculty and staff and at SU art venues in Syracuse and New York City is something we can all take a great deal of pride in as we continue to position the arts as a key component in meeting the educational and cultural goals of the University.”

to be an intensely complicated individual, grappling with personal relationships, politics, and the divine, Radke says. He was a workaholic, given to tirades, moments of ecstasy, and bouts of depression. While he left a vast and personally revealing paper trail, he also destroyed a huge amount of his graphic work later in his life, wanting people to see only his most perfected visions, Radke says.

Several other events, designed to provide insights on Michelangelo, will coincide with the exhibition, which is being funded by the University with generous support from corporate and other sponsors, including SU Trustee Louise Palitz ’44 and her husband, Bernard Palitz. The College of Arts and Sciences will host the Ray Smith Symposium on September 26 and 27, with Radke inviting Renaissance scholars from around the world to give presentations on the era’s arts, poetry, military practices, and other topics that relate to Michelangelo’s work. Along with the symposium, Professor William Wallace of Washington University in St. Louis—this year’s Jeanette K. Watson Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Humanities—will present two public lectures on Michelangelo. Also this fall, SU Abroad in Florence plans to launch the world’s largest bibliographic database devoted to Michelangelo scholarship. “We’ll try to open up Michelangelo, so we have a bigger sense of him as a person who was more than just a painter and sculptor,” Radke says. “We’ll have an incredibly intense and exciting time with these activities.”

Florence Connection

Radke, who first visited Florence as an SU undergraduate more than three decades ago, is co-author of *Art in Renaissance Italy* (2005) and teaches Michelangelo’s Italy, taking undergraduates on a spring-break trip to Florence and Rome. “You get Michelangelo in your bones through this class,” says Radke, a Meredith Professor for Teaching Excellence. “You smell Michelangelo’s Florence, walk the streets where he walked, and visit his family home and the Sistine Chapel.” In 2001, in collaboration with Casa Buonarroti director Pina Ragionieri, Radke organized an exhibition of Michelangelo’s drawings for the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, where he serves as a consulting curator. Most recently, he curated the museum’s traveling exhibition of Italian sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti’s *Gates of Paradise* and edited the exhibition catalog, which was picked by art critics of *The New York Times* as a favorite book for 2007.

When asked how the SU exhibition was arranged with the Casa Buonarroti, Radke cites several factors: the positive presence of the University’s study abroad program in Florence, which has been there for nearly 50 years, and the relationship he has developed with Ragionieri through his scholarly activities and work with the High Museum. Ragionieri, the exhibition’s guest curator, also regularly gives presentations to SU students in Florence. “To bring the myth of Michelangelo across the Atlantic, together with the centuries-long memories of the Casa Buonarroti, is truly an emotional experience,” Ragionieri says. “But to speak to the citizens of Syracuse and New York City about a sublime protagonist of the Italian Renaissance by means of his life





as a man and artist—as well as offer some of his splendid drawings for their admiration—is also a great responsibility. I am happy and proud to arrange this important rendezvous and hope to have found the appropriate way in this exhibition to communicate the superhuman dimension of Michelangelo's creative adventure."

According to Radke, the Casa Buonarroti's holdings are unique. Often overlooked by tourists, its collection includes two of Michelangelo's earliest marble sculptures, his largest surviving architectural model, and his largest surviving model for a figural sculpture. "This museum is really like an undiscovered place in downtown Florence," he says. "It's rare to go there and find a crowd. You can walk into this building that Michelangelo bought for his family and see his earliest works."

The sketches and studies that will be on display in Syracuse and New York City range from nudes for the Sistine ceiling and Roman monuments to plans for a church, a fortification, and a gate believed to be the Porta Pia, an entry through the city walls of Rome. Most of the drawings are in black graphite, and pen and ink, while some feature brown watercolor washes or red graphite. Radke finds himself most intrigued by the nude studies for the Sistine Chapel that show Michelangelo trying different poses and *Sacrifice of Isaac*, which he calls the "most impressive" drawing. "These drawings expand our sense of what Michelangelo was thinking, and would have wanted to do or might have done with some of these," he says. "But, in some cases, the finished work was never completed or didn't survive."

Inside SU Art Galleries

Iacono plans to devote the entire footprint of the SU Art Galleries to the exhibition. "We want to make this an educational experience for people on a number of levels," he says. "Along with the SU community, we want kids from local middle and high schools, students from area colleges, and, of course, an adult audience. We want to contextualize Michelangelo's career for each of these audiences."

Plans call for displaying Michelangelo's original works in the east galleries, with related materials mounted in the west galleries. A center space will be used as a reading and computer room, with bookmarked web sites dedicated to Michelangelo. Other gallery spaces will feature 19th-century photographs of Florence and Rome with a focus on Michelangelo's public art and places he worked, as well as engravings of the Sistine Chapel. The staff is also constructing a 14-foot scale model of the Porta Pia. At Lubin House, the exhibition will be devoted solely to the Casa Buonarroti holdings and housed in the Palitz Gallery and the 1870 Room.

Most notably, the exhibition will bring visitors "as close to the moment of creation as possible," Radke says. "You are seeing a genius at work—you're catching Michelangelo in the act. You get a sense of that struggle that comes with the artist finding his subject. You're standing beside him, watching him work. And that's a rarity, especially considering the separation of nearly 450 years."