



# Michelangelo: A Life in Six Masterpieces

By Miles J. Unger

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## Michelangelo: A Life in Six Masterpieces By Miles J. Unger

This is the life of one of the most revolutionary artists in history, told through the story of six of his greatest masterpieces: “The one indispensable guide for encountering Michelangelo on his home turf” (*The Dallas Morning News*).

Michelangelo stands alone as a master of painting, sculpture, and architecture, a man who reinvented the practice of art itself. Throughout his long career he clashed with patrons by insisting that he had no master but his own demanding muse. Michelangelo was ambitious, egotistical, and difficult, but through the towering force of genius and through sheer pugnaciousness, he transformed the way we think about art.

Miles Unger narrates the life of this tormented genius through six of his greatest masterpieces. Each work expanded the expressive range of the medium, from the *Pietà* carved by a brash young man of twenty-four, to the apocalyptic *Last Judgment*, the work of an old man weighed down by the unimaginable suffering he had witnessed. In the gargantuan *David* he depicts Man in the glory of his youth, while in the tombs he carved for his Medici overlords he offers perhaps history’s most sustained meditation on death and the afterlife of the soul. In the vast expanse of the Sistine Chapel ceiling he tells the epic story of Creation. During the final decades of his life, his hands too unsteady to wield the brush and chisel, he exercised his mind by raising the soaring vaults and dome of St. Peter’s in a final tribute to his God.

“A deeply human tribute to one of the most accomplished and fascinating figures in the history of Western culture” (*The Boston Globe*), *Michelangelo* brings to life the irascible, egotistical, and undeniably brilliant man whose artistry continues to amaze and inspire us after five hundred years.

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## Editorial Review

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\*Starred Review\* In Michelangelo, the poet Ludovico Ariosto saw an “angel divine.” The Michelangelo whom Unger delivers in this probing biography is no angel but, rather, a fallible, even devious man. But he does evince powers not previously seen among mere human beings in the way he defies the limits that previously circumscribed the role of the artist. Readers watch this multifaceted genius acquire these powers as the bold young sculptor of the Pieta matures—dazzling Rome with his David, stunning the Vatican with his Sistine Chapel Creation, baffling his rich patrons with his daringly innovative Medici tombs, and finally overwhelming the ecclesiastical hierarchy with his anarchic Last Judgment. But the creative feat that unifies this string of masterpieces is Michelangelo’s forging of an entirely new conception of the artist. No longer just a craftsman intent on selling his skills, the artist that emerges in Michelangelo is a visionary insistent on his imaginative autonomy. Michelangelo thus fashions a dynamic new identity for the artist as a revolutionary, opening new vistas for an astonished society. Unger highlights Michelangelo’s singular achievement without glossing over the defects in his mercurial character—or obscuring the corruption and violence pervading his Renaissance world. A masterful portrait of a dauntingly complex figure. --Bryce Christensen

### Review

“Provides insightful perspective on Michelangelo. . . . [Michelangelo] made some of the most enduring art in Western civilization and profoundly changed the way we think about artists. Thoughtful exploration of his work, which this book most definitely is, will always be rewarding.” (Travis Nichols *The Washington Post*)

"A deeply human tribute to one of the most accomplished and fascinating figures in the history of Western culture." (Michael Washburn *The Boston Globe*)

“A masterful portrait of a dauntingly complex figure.” (*Booklist (starred review)*)

“Unger is an astute critic and an able storyteller; his remapping of familiar territory should please both readers new to Michelangelo and those who think they know him inside out.” (Ann Landi *ArtNews*)

"Wonderfully perceptive art history embedded in a fascinating life story and delivered via Unger's supple and exquisite prose." (Tony Lewis *The Providence Journal*)

“Part biography, part art analysis and thoroughly tantalizing. By focusing on six works, presented in chronological order, Unger presents a portrait of the artist that gives a panoramic view of Michelangelo’s life but also focuses keenly on putting the artwork itself in context, giving readers the whys and wherefores that provide a rich, provocative understanding.” (Catherine Mallette *The Star-Telegram (Fort Worth)*)

"[Unger] is also an engaging writer and has chosen his illustrative examples well. . . . [His] critical remarks . . . are especially lithe and discerning. . . . An elegant introduction, and the approach, of singling out a handful of representative works for microscopic scrutiny and macroscopic discussion, makes the subject accessible to a wide audience." (Earl Pike *The Plain Dealer (Cleveland)*)

“Magisterial. . . . This fascinating new biography is highly recommended as a guide to anyone seeking to understand the immortal works of art created by this singular man.” (Catherine Hollis *BookPage*)

“Unger insightfully guides readers through both Michelangelo's life and the culture and history of the times. . . [He] displays keen, humane judgments in interpreting Michelangelo's life by focusing on his motives and talent. The artist's life was complicated, but Unger finds a narrative path that keeps the reader on course for an enlightened biography.” (David Hendricks *San Antonio Express*)

“Unger excels at showing us the artist at work: his reluctance, his caginess, his temperament (easily hurt and angered, he sometimes tried to run away) and his jealousies (da Vinci and Raphael among them). . . . His edged prose shows us a clear Michelangelo emerging from the stone of history.” (*Kirkus (starred review)*)

“This may be the one indispensable guide for encountering the artist on his home turf. There are hundreds of books about Michelangelo di Lodovico di Buonarroti Simone, his art and his times. But few bring it all together in such an entertaining and enlightening whole.” (Bill Marvel *Dallas Morning News*)

#### About the Author

Miles J. Unger is an art historian and journalist. Formerly the managing editor of *Art New England*, he served for many years as a contributing writer to *The New York Times*. In addition to *Michelangelo: A Life in Six Masterpieces*, he is the author of *The Watercolors of Winslow Homer*; *Magnifico: The Brilliant Life and Violent Times of Lorenzo de' Medici*; and *Machiavelli: A Biography*. Visit [MilesJUnger.com](http://MilesJUnger.com).

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