

# MICHAEL HIRST

David Michael Geoffrey Hirst

5 September 1933 – 14 December 2017

elected Fellow of the British Academy 1983

by

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*Summary.* Michael Hirst, who spent his entire professional career at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London (1961-97), was one of the leading historians of Italian renaissance art of his time. The author of numerous ground-breaking articles and three major books – *Sebastiano del Piombo* (1981), *Michelangelo and his Drawings* (1988), and *Michelangelo: The Achievement of Fame 1475–1534* (2011) – he was also responsible for two important exhibitions, *Michelangelo Draftsman* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Louvre (1988-89), and *The Young Michelangelo* at the National Gallery (1994-95). His scholarship combined deep historical understanding with extraordinary visual acuity.

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Omj fluit

David Michael Geoffrey Hirst (always known as Michael) was born on 5 September 1933. His grandfather had founded the shoe and slipper factory of Messrs J.H. Hirst in Rossendale, Lancashire. His father kept it going and its success enabled him to form an important collection of rare books, which filled the distinctly gloomy and cold house where Michael and his brother John grew up during the austerities of the Second World War. At the age of twelve, he dazzled his soon-to-be headmaster, the legendary founder of Stowe, J.F. Roxburgh (1888-1954), by correctly identifying all eight Medici prints surrounding the fireplace in the great man's study. As he liked to recall, one of them was Piero della Francesca's *Portrait of Federigo da Montefeltro*.

At Stowe, alongside his academic studies, he painted, in a style he himself described as a species of romantic post-post-impressionism. No doubt, even as a teenager his gleeful near-addiction to merciless self-criticism was already up and running, and it soon led him to lay down his brush. Nevertheless, his later writings reveal an unusual sensitivity of response to works of art, often inspiringly more that of a creative spirit than of a dry-as-dust scholar.

The next step was to spend three years reading History at New College, Oxford. It was not a period in his life which he appears to have looked back on with any particular fondness, for all that it brought him a select few undying friendships. Be that as it may, and in the best sense, it marked him for life: in his hands – and this is by no means invariably the case – the history of art represented an authentic branch of history. A thread of serious archival and documentary study ran through his work from first to last, and reached its apogee in his final book, *Michelangelo: The Achievement of Fame 1475–1534* (2011), which will be returned to in due course.

By the time he confronted Dame Margaret Whinney (1897–1975) at his interview for postgraduate study at the Courtauld Institute of Art, he had already fled the postwar austerity of Britain to visit Venice for the first time, and had inevitably fallen in love with the Serenissima (that love of Italy would last a lifetime, and in later years his conversation would be peppered with Italian words and phrases). At the same time, he was sufficiently art historically primed to be capable of debating with his interlocutrix the merits of the analysis (Sir) Denis Mahon (1910–2011) had expounded in his 1947 book, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, of Monsignor Agucchi's influence on Guercino.

When, in the fullness of time, he in his turn was required to interview potential Courtauld students, the task could hardly have come lower down his list of priorities. Amusingly enough, he subjected a candidate to a photograph test that required them to identify Giovanni Bellini's *Saint Francis* in the Frick Collection in New York and then a decade later – by which time the candidate was teaching – he was able to advise one of his students to prepare for their Courtauld interview by getting to know everything there was to know about that particular painting. Sure enough, the *Saint Francis* was indeed what the student was shown by Michael.

The Director of the Courtauld was of course Anthony Blunt (1907–83), but for Michael it was always more significant that it housed the great Viennese scholar, Johannes Wilde (1891–1970). Wilde's twin passions for Venetian art of the 16th century and for Michelangelo were to have an obvious effect on Hirst's future development, yet his brand of art history was arguably even more determining. Crucially, both Wilde and Michael passionately believed in really close looking, and were models of what is now commonly referred to as object-based art history (it is not hard to imagine the latter wondering tartly if there is any other sort). Unsurprisingly, it was Michael who wrote Wilde's obituary in the March 1971 issue of the *Burlington Magazine* (pp. 155–7), and Wilde was also the dedicatee of his first book.

At the outset of his time at the Courtauld his great rival, not least for the mantle of Wilde, was John Shearman (1931–2003), and a wary tension between them never wholly disappeared, for all that they collaborated on the editing of Wilde's *Michelangelo: Six Lectures* for Oxford in 1978. Shearman, who was the senior by only a couple of years, looked upon himself as an older and wiser colleague. Michael loved telling the story of how one day Shearman advised him that, if he wished to be a truly complete art historian, he would have to learn to type and to drive a car, only to receive the characteristically sharp-witted riposte: 'Well, John, actually, I think you will find that Vasari couldn't do either.' Whether he knew it or not, 'actually' was unquestionably Michael's favourite word.

In his youth, Michael suffered from chronic asthma, which spared him National Service and happily disappeared with age. It led to his being lifted over the hurdle of – as it then was – the postgraduate diploma at the Courtauld. Next, he started to work on a doctorate on artists in Rome in the third, fourth, and fifth decades of the 16th century. In the event, he never completed it, with the result that his first employment and all his subsequent accomplishments and honours, by no means the least of them being his Fellowship of the British Academy from 1983 onwards, whose Italian Lecture on 'Michelangelo and his First Biographers' he delivered in 1995, and whose Serena Medal he was awarded in 2001, were heaped upon him without his having acquired a single qualification in the history of art (he was also made an Accademico d'Onore of the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno in Florence in 1991, and was a member of the Ateneo Veneto). The fruits of the research for his unfinished doctorate were to be a whole procession of stunning articles on such artists as Daniele da Volterra, Perino del Vaga, Rosso Fiorentino, Francesco Salviati, and Pellegrino Tibaldi, not forgetting his book on Sebastiano del Piombo.

Michael Hirst spent his entire professional career at the Courtauld, where he taught from his appointment as a Lecturer in 1962. His progress up the academic ladder was untroubled: he became a Reader in 1980, and a Professor in 1991, retiring in 1997. He did not much enjoy lecturing, especially when it came to participating in undergraduate

survey courses, and as a rule found his dealings with students more and more rewarding the further they progressed. As he had, many postgraduates came to the Courtauld without previously having studied the history of art (Oxford introduced undergraduate art history in 2004, and at Cambridge until 1999 it was only possible to study the subject for the final two years of the BA degree). As a result, at least until comparatively recently, the first year of the Courtauld postgraduate MA represented a species of transition for many.

Unsurprisingly, as a teacher Michael was at his best supervising PhD students. At whatever level, he only found the very best of them inspiring, and his criticisms of the rest – but equally of senior academics – could be devastating. On being asked by a recently graduated Italian whether he might come and study with him as an occasional student, he silenced that line of enquiry by riposting: ‘When were you not?’ He refused to feign an interest he did not feel, made no effort to beguile his charges, and would have been bewildered by such modern delights as teaching staff being graded by their students.

This all meant that only people who truly recognised his remarkable qualities sought to be his doctoral students, and that those who stayed the course remained exceptionally loyal to someone who so staunchly resisted hero-worship. For them, he was a mentor long after they received their PhDs, and moreover represented a *beau idéal* for the rest of their lives. It is also tempting to suspect that under his sway they were more clearly of a piece than the students of many of his colleagues. It is important to add that he was also revered by a number of younger Italian scholars whom he had never actually taught, and above all by Giovanni Agosti and Francesco Caglioti, whose admiration he wholly reciprocated. Many colleagues were also true friends, but perhaps none more so than Bernice Davidson (1927–98), always known as Bunny, whom he first knew during his early years of study in Rome.

Moving on to what we are now encouraged to describe as his outputs, the sort of jargon he would have mocked, Michael’s writing is distinguished by its elegance and precision, but perhaps above all by its range. This is not meant to suggest that he covered everything from the caves of Lascaux to his near-namesake Damien Hirst, but rather that he was a master of documents with a fabled eye, and an authority on iconography who also understood how things are made: not for nothing, in spite of his aversion to joining boards and the like, was he part of the Pontifical Commission for the Restoration of the Sistine Chapel ceiling in the 1980s under the aegis of another dear friend, Fabrizio Mancinelli (1940–94), whose obituary he wrote for the October 1994 issue of the *Burlington Magazine* (pp. 705–6). Perhaps above all – and almost uniquely – he was someone equally at home with paintings, drawings, sculpture, and architecture. At the same time, he was infinitely better read, so to speak, in the visual arts than a mere perusal of the titles of his publications might seem to indicate. Passing allusions to works by the

likes of Bernardo Strozzi, Poussin, and Rubens were never mere grace notes intended to impress the reader, but rather reflections of his genuine familiarity with their works. In the same way, three contributions to the *Burlington Magazine* – a December 1994 review of three books on Donatello (pp. 843–4), a collaboration with his wife, Diane Zervas, entitled ‘Florence: The Donatello Year’, in March 1987 (pp. 207–10), and another exhibition review in May 1992 devoted to a Mantegna show (pp. 318–21) – were his only publications to focus on the art of the 15th century in Italy, yet his knowledge of the period was profound.

These days, the art historical ‘eye’ is a distinctly controversial topic, not least because the acknowledgment of its existence carries with it the undeniably tragic realisation that some people – Michael being an example *par excellence* – have it and others do not. Its more nebulous and indefinable aspect revolves around the related notions of style and quality. With regard to style, in the case of renaissance works of art, and indeed many later ones, the absence of either signatures or related documentation means that they are in effect anonymous other than on the basis of their appearance. Often, they reach us with a traditional attribution: this is by no means infrequently entirely convincing and is straightforwardly agreed with, but can of course be wrong. If so, the works in question need to be returned to their actual creators, which requires a deep understanding of their style or what is sometimes referred to as their artistic ‘handwriting’, and also of the manner in which it evolved over the length of their careers. Turning to a sense of quality, it can allow its fortunate possessors to tell whether works whose authorship is not immediately apparent are by somebodies or nobodies, and moreover allow them to differentiate originals from copies.

The other major way in which having a ‘good eye’ can help is reliant upon possessing an excellent visual memory, which in addition needs to be combined with a mind extremely well stocked with images of works of art. Many of the connections that Michael established involve in effect bringing two images together in the mind’s eye and recognising that they both match. Once they are put side by side, a child of six would be able to see the resemblance, but someone has to spot it first. A typical instance, which led to an article in the *Burlington Magazine* (March 1964, pp. 120–6), involved realising that a drawing in the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh, traditionally attributed to Francesco Salviati, no doubt on the basis of the old but decidedly later inscription it bears naming him as its creator, was not by him. In all probability, Michael’s initial reason for studying it was his interest in Salviati; however, having grasped that it could not be by him, there was more to do. The next step – as always in such cases – was to establish whom it was actually by. In fact, Michael must have known instantly, since it is a study for the figure of Eve in Rosso Fiorentino’s *Fall of Man* in Santa Maria della Pace in Rome, a fresco with which – given the topic of his doctoral research – he would have been extremely familiar.

As his article explains, he then satisfied himself that it was a preliminary study for the *Fall* and not merely a copy after it, principally on the basis of the differences between them.

This example is only one among very many such associations throughout his career. One of the most inspired – and out of the ordinary – involved his identification of a double-sided drawing by Correggio. Michael ran across it in the 1960s in the equivalent of a bargain box that Colnaghi's (then in Bond Street) used to stock with insignificant items, where it was attributed to Bernardino Gatti, a second-rate artist active mostly in Cremona and Parma, and priced at £30. Having realised that both sides of the sheet in question were studies for works by Correggio, in the case of the recto for his altarpiece in Parma known as the *Madonna della Scodella*, and in the case of the verso for one of the pendentives of his cupola fresco in San Giovanni Evangelista in the same city, he asked if he might have a word with the firm's drawings specialist, James (Jim) Byam Shaw (1903–92), who occupied that position from 1937 to 1968. Byam Shaw was no *petit fonctionnaire*, but rather a considerable eminence in the field, and the author of numerous books and catalogues, above all on Italian drawings. Michael explained the reasoning behind his attribution to Correggio and Byam Shaw responded by graciously acknowledging that he must be right. Even more graciously, he asked Michael if he was interested in buying it, adding that the asking price was £30. The lucky purchaser was unable to hold onto it forever, and at a later date it was acquired by the oil mogul, Armand Hammer, before eventually entering the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. Michael also managed to spot and obtain other 'sleepers', albeit not of this stature, and more generally his immense discernment allowed him to surround himself with a fine collection of works of art.

In terms of his publications, Michael – so to speak – emerged fully armed from the head of Zeus. In 1961, a mere handful of years after starting to study at the Courtauld, he published two articles, of which by far the more substantial and significant is his 'The Chigi Chapel in Santa Maria della Pace', in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, pp. 161–85 (the other will be discussed in due course).

It represents an art historical debut of almost unrivalled brilliance. As Michael himself explained its genesis, one day it occurred to him that an important group of drawings by Raphael dating from the 1510s, some of them highly finished figure studies, which were evidently first ideas for a major painting of the *Resurrection*, must have been designs for a never-executed altarpiece for the Chigi Chapel in the church of Santa Maria della Pace in Rome (in the article, he generously underlines the fact that John Shearman had also had the same notion). A generally overlooked letter from Leonardo Sellaio in Rome to Michelangelo in Florence reveals that – after Raphael's death in 1520 – the commission for the Chigi Chapel altarpiece was given to Michelangelo's friend and associate, Sebastiano del Piombo, for a number of whose works he is known to have

made drawings. Sebastiano likewise failed to execute the altarpiece, and its subject-matter remained a mystery.

Michael then decided to go to Rome in the hope of finding documentary evidence to confirm his hypothesis, and on his first day of archival research found a contract dating from 1 August 1530, in which Sebastiano del Piombo was commissioned to paint altarpieces for the respective Chigi Chapels in Santa Maria del Popolo and Santa Maria della Pace. By no means all such documents specify the subject-matter of the works being ordered, but this one did, and stated that he was to execute the *Birth of the Virgin* for the former (it remains *in situ*) and ‘the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ’ for the latter. While, strictly speaking, this does not prove that Raphael was called upon to paint the identical subject, Michael offered compelling arguments which demonstrated that the iconographic content of other elements of the chapel’s decoration, frescoed by Raphael, made it hard to doubt that he too was planning to produce a *Resurrection* for the altar.

As if this were not enough, the article added two further revelations of considerable importance. In the first place, it explained that two bronze roundels, now in the Certosa di Pavia, for which there survive design drawings by Raphael, must equally have been intended for the Chapel, and – last but by no means least – proposed that a number of drawings of the *Resurrection* by Michelangelo, whose purpose had hitherto not been explained, were created to help Sebastiano with the Chigi Chapel commission at exactly the right date: Michelangelo returned to Rome in 1532 and is then documented as having been providing his protégé with assistance with other projects. Michelangelo and Sebastiano were to remain lodestones for Michael’s future studies, and in the catalogue of the National Gallery’s *Michelangelo and Sebastiano* exhibition of 2017, its curator, Matthias Wivel, wrote that ‘Michael Hirst’s scholarship on our two artists has been a guiding light throughout’.

Thereafter, many of Michael’s most important contributions continued to be in the form of articles, but by no means all of them would be equally lengthy. They were complemented by reviews, both of books and of exhibitions. Nevertheless, in both contexts, at least in the history of art, it is perfectly possible – as examples like his offerings on Rosso Fiorentino discussed above, and on Rembrandt to be discussed below, make plain – to advance understanding of the subject in a page or three.

Michael’s first book, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, was published by the Oxford University Press in 1981, when he was nearly fifty, although in fact the book’s Preface is dated October 1978. The subject was in a sense a natural one for him to pursue, given the very particular circumstances of Sebastiano’s career. As he himself observes in that same Preface, Sebastiano ‘cannot be “programmed”’, and creates all sorts of organisational problems for the writers of general histories of Italian renaissance art. In this connection, the fact that the two main areas of expertise of his great mentor, Johannes Wilde, to whom the monograph is dedicated, were Venetian painting of the first half of the 16th

century and Michelangelo is self-evidently no coincidence, since – uniquely – in 1511 Sebastiano had moved from the Venice of Giorgione and the young Titian to the Rome of Michelangelo and Raphael, and was to enjoy a uniquely close artistic relationship with the former.

In the history of art, by 1981 it was already standard practice to build up to the appearance of a monograph of this kind by publishing various articles that cover particular aspects of the subject in advance, but in those terms Michael's text is overwhelmingly new. It is of course true that his aforementioned spectacular article on the Chigi Chapel in Santa Maria della Pace of two decades earlier crucially involves Sebastiano, but it was only followed by three further contributions in this direction, namely 'A late work by Sebastiano del Piombo' (1965) and 'Sebastiano's Pietà for the Commendador Major' (1972), both in the *Burlington Magazine*, and 'The Kingston Lacey "Judgment of Solomon"' in the 1979 proceedings of the Castelfranco Giorgione conference of the previous year.

Characteristically, Michael's Preface also announced that 'I have tried to write the book I wished to write', and he followed that statement up by failing to apologise for the absence of a catalogue by adding that 'to amend the *mot* of an Oxford historian, the counting of copies may have effects dangerously similar to the counting of sheep.'

One of the consequences is that he accords individual works of art vastly different degrees of attention. This is strikingly apparent in the masterly chapter on portraiture, one of Sebastiano del Piombo's greatest strengths. All the portraits he accepts as auto-graph are of course referred to and reproduced, but whereas such major works as the presumed *Portrait of Antonfrancesco degli Albizzi* in Houston and the *Portrait of Andrea Doria* in Rome inspire extensive and detailed analysis, all that he has to say about the *Portrait of a Cleric* in the Cini Foundation in Venice is that it probably dates from early in the 1530s and shares the characteristics of a *Head of Pope Clement VII* in Naples.

A number of Sebastiano's sitters are identifiable, but only one of his portraits has its date of execution inscribed upon it by the artist, and very few are signed. For the rest, the great challenge is to establish a convincing corpus and to propose a logical sequence of execution for the works it contains. In order to achieve this, Michael combined considerable historical research into the lives of the sitters with illuminating stylistic analysis of the portraits of them.

The book's opening chapter on Sebastiano in Venice posed different problems, not least given the total absence of contemporary documentary assistance, and the existence of only two paintings, both for churches, whose original locations are known. Michael set himself the task of trying to define Sebastiano's oeuvre prior to his move to Rome, and of differentiating his work from that of such illustrious contemporaries as Giorgione and Titian. Looking back on his reconstruction from a distance of almost half a century, on the whole his cautiously restrictionist conception of Sebastiano's production has

stood the test of time impressively well, as has his chronological ordering of it. As will be discussed below, he himself played a part in virtually the only major revision to his account.

His second and third books, *Michelangelo and his Drawings* and *Michelangelo: the Achievement of Fame 1475–1534*, were both published by Yale University Press, respectively in 1988 and 2011. When, in his obituary of Wilde, he had referred to the study of Michelangelo's art as 'the deepest intellectual passion of his life', he doubtless did so with more than a hint of self-identification. Similarly, in the Introduction to his *Michelangelo Draftsman* catalogue, discussed below, in writing of the artist's 'commitment of a lifetime', he may also have been thinking about his own. In addition to these two books and two exhibition catalogues, he published a host of articles and reviews on Michelangelo, three of the most substantial of which appeared in Italian translation in a volume entitled *Tre saggi su Michelangelo* in 2004, and in 1998 contributed to an Italian edition of Ascanio Condivi's *Life of Michelangelo* of 1553, which Michael described elsewhere as a 'highly protective biography'.

The Preface to *Michelangelo and his Drawings* opens with a sentence of almost comic modesty: 'This essay is concerned with Michelangelo's practice as a draughtsman.' The truth, however, is that each of its ten chapters ('Introduction', 'The Concerns of the Artist', 'Survival and Destruction', 'Chronology, Consistency, and Change', 'Inventing the Motive', 'Composing the *Storia*', 'Copying, Studying, and Implementing the Design: Figures', 'Demonstrations for the Patron', 'Copying, Studying, and Implementing the Design: Buildings', 'The Making of Presents') represents a fundamental contribution not just to the study of Michelangelo's drawings but also to that of Italian renaissance drawing more generally.

The book displays an absolute mastery of its subject. It is hard to imagine anyone has ever looked more closely at Michelangelo's drawings or understood them more completely. Much space is devoted to their attribution, chronology, and function, and furthermore they are subjected to an at times literally microscopic attention in order to ascertain how they were made, as for instance when correcting Wilde's assumption that Michelangelo used a technique of stippling. Elsewhere, it is instead a matter of Michael's naked eye having looked more carefully than anyone else's, as when he observes what he describes as 'a significant but unnoticed *pentimento*' at the base of the artist's presentation drawing of *Christ on the Cross* in the British Museum. Typically, here as throughout the book, he moves seamlessly from an investigation of how drawings are made to an analysis of their subject-matter and its interpretation. Thus, in this particular instance, he begins by noting that Michelangelo's decision to depict Christ alive rather than dead was an unusual one, and then proceeds to expound the tellingly different interpretations given by Vasari and Condivi of which moment in the Crucifixion narrative is being shown. With characteristic prudence, given that either of them might be correct, he

makes no attempt to decide which is right. Finally, as so often, he reveals the breadth of his range of reference by pointing out that Michelangelo's *Cristo vivo* was to prove highly influential on figures of the stature of Giambologna, El Greco, Barocci, Guido Reni and Rubens, among others.

The study of drawings, even when it is as wide-ranging as it is here, can sometimes run the risk of becoming somewhat self-contained. Happily, Michael the historian avoids that risk by foreshadowing his third and last book by making sure the lives and concerns of Michelangelo's patrons, and his relations with them, are never overlooked, not least by exploring in depth his copious surviving correspondence, both in the form of letters sent and letters received. At the same time, when it seems appropriate to do so, he is not afraid to put his emotional passion for drawings into words with enviable eloquence. In writing about Michelangelo's *Children's Bacchanal* and comparing it with an earlier painting by Titian, he explains that 'Torpor, melancholy, and a drunken sleep dominate the later invention, in a setting deprived of sun or sky.'

*Michelangelo: the Achievement of Fame 1475–1534* came out in 2011, when Michael was nearing the age of eighty. It was straightforwardly intended to be the first of two volumes chronicling its hero's life, ending with his definitive move to Rome. Michelangelo still had thirty years to live, and with uncharacteristic optimism the author expresses the hope that 'an account of these later decades can be returned to', but at some level he must have recognised that in all probability it was destined to stand alone.

In the Preface, it is explained that the book takes full advantage of 'the emergence of much revised and new material concerning the artist, his life and his work'. Indeed, it is only the sheer volume of surviving biographical material concerning Michelangelo, who enjoyed considerable celebrity during his own lifetime, that made such a substantial biography – it is 438 pages long – possible. Its character is well exemplified by the chapter entitled 'The Sistine Chapel ceiling', where solid facts are what matter, and moreover it is the artist's life from 1508 to 1512 – the years when he was working on the ceiling – and not simply the work itself that is covered in exhaustive and compelling detail.

In consequence, this is not the place to go in pursuit of art historical criticism or analysis, although Michael does conclude the chapter with a summary account of the way Michelangelo's style evolved from the beginning of the project to its end. Moreover, he offers guarded comments concerning such matters as where on the ceiling to place the break in the execution of the frescoes on the basis of 'changes in pictorial style and scale'. At the same time, he takes it for granted that his readers will already be tolerably familiar with the story he has to tell and most strikingly that they will be well versed concerning what is actually depicted on the ceiling.

As a result, while he explains that there was a change of plan concerning the subject-matter of the decoration of the ceiling, he does not bother to inform us what replaced what. Similarly, there are passing references to individual narratives and figures,

but nothing approximating to an A–Z of the decoration. Instead, information from bank books, the diary of Paris de Grassis, the pope's master of ceremonies, the artist's own correspondence and that of his family and associates, not forgetting a number of his extraordinary poems, is marshalled to paint an absorbing picture of what he was doing and how he was feeling in the relevant years. As had been the case since the outset of his career, Michael was determined to concentrate on what mattered to him, namely in this instance Michelangelo's life, regardless of what others might feel. In view of the fact that on Kubikat, a peerless online bibliographical resource for renaissance art, the word 'Michelangelo' yields over eight and a half thousand references to publications on him, it may reasonably be supposed that there is no particular shortage of books devoted to the 'Life and Works' of the artist, and that a different approach under the guidance of a master has much to recommend it.

No doubt under the influence of Wilde, Michael was on the whole perfectly happy *not* to publish his numerous discoveries. It never seems to have occurred to either of them that it might have been a kindness to share their insights with the scholarly community, not to mention the wider world.

In the case of Wilde, two books of his Courtauld lectures were subsequently published (*Venetian Art from Bellini to Titian*, 1974, and the aforementioned *Michelangelo: Six Lectures*, 1978), but it is impossible to know what other pearls of wisdom have been lost to posterity. When it comes to Michael, there are four particularly striking instances of significant discoveries that only properly saw the light of day long after they were made. Two were published thanks to pressure from former students, a third appeared in the form of an entry in an exhibition catalogue, while the fourth and last followed on the coattails of a book review on a relevant subject.

The first of these eventually awakened Sleeping Beauties is a *Madonna with Angels* by Francesco Salviati from San Lorenzo in Damaso in Rome, which featured in an exhibition called *Rubens and the Italian Renaissance*, first at the Australian National Gallery in Canberra, and then at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne in 1992. The show was curated by David Jaffé, a former MA student of Michael's on a special subject course at the Courtauld in 1978 on renaissance Rome under Paul III Farnese. The opening sentence of the catalogue entry reads as follows: 'This painting was discovered by the present writer in a sacristy of the church of San Lorenzo in Damaso more than twenty years ago but has remained unpublished.' It is further explained that it is discussed in Vasari's biography of the artist in the 1568 edition of his *Lives*, but that his having described it as a fresco meant that it was presumed to be lost when it was in fact hiding in plain sight. Later that year, Salviati's authorship was accepted by Luisa Mortari, who included it in the first modern monograph to be published on the artist.

In Michael's chapter on portraits in his *Sebastiano del Piombo*, two major reattributions were consigned to the briefest of footnotes. One concerned Parmigianino's

*Portrait of Cardinal Lorenzo Pucci*, formerly in the collection of the Duke of Abercorn, and now in a different private collection. It came to Michael's attention because it had been published as the work of Sebastiano del Piombo by Derek Hill in *Apollo* in 1974. In a footnote (p. 92, note 11), after discussing Parmigianino's *Portrait of Lorenzo Cybò* in Copenhagen and the links between the two artists in the main text, Hirst adds the haiku-like sentence: 'For a portrait of Parmigianino's even more markedly influenced by Sebastiano than the *Cybò*, see the former's Abercorn *Lorenzo Pucci*, which I hope to discuss elsewhere.' In the event, it was not until nearly twenty years later, in June 2000 that he did the portrait proper justice in a five-page article in *Apollo*, which included a full-page colour reproduction of it. As *Apollo*'s editor at the time, I managed to cajole him into publishing it, not least because it could then appear in the same issue as another previously unknown Parmigianino portrait. In his article, Michael explained that he had first seen it in the summer of 1977, and added that at the time of publication it was on loan to the National Gallery. Its autograph status has since been universally accepted.

Michael Hirst had long been convinced that a celebrated *Portrait of Cardinal Rodolfo Pio da Carpi* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna could not possibly be by Sebastiano, and must instead be by Francesco Salviati. The work in question was honoured with one of the sixty-four full-page colour illustrations in Mauro Lucco's *L'opera completa di Sebastiano del Piombo* of 1980; however, in a review published in *Arte Veneta* later that same year, Michael rejected the traditional attribution without putting forward an alternative name. It was only the year after, in his monograph (pp. 90–91, note 3), that he pronounced with almost oracular certainty: 'I believe the work is by Francesco Salviati.' However, it was not until the publication of the catalogue of Catherine Monbeig Goguel's exhibition, *Francesco Salviati ou la Bella Maniera*, which was shown at the Villa Medici in Rome and the Louvre in 1998, that the case was fully and entirely convincingly argued (pp. 230–31, cat. no. 86). Salviati's authorship has never subsequently been doubted.

The fourth and final discovery is of a different order, since it does not involve establishing the correct attribution of a painting, but rather the exceptionally brilliant observation of the existence of a connection between Caravaggio's *David* in the Borghese Gallery in Rome, which must date from the first decade of the 17th century, and Rembrandt's *Lucretia* of 1666 in the Minneapolis Institute of Art. In view of the fact that Rembrandt never visited Italy, and neither Caravaggio's *David* nor any other pictures by him reached the Low Countries during Rembrandt's lifetime, it had always been assumed that he must have known about Caravaggio's revolutionary chiaroscuro manner at second hand. This remains the case, but through a drawn – or, more probably, painted – copy, Rembrandt was undeniably familiar with the composition of the *David*, which then inspired one of his late masterpieces.

Michael's eureka moment was published in the form of a letter entitled 'Rembrandt and Italy' on p. 221 of the April 1968 issue of the *Burlington Magazine*. It occupied less than a column, and the pretext for writing it was a recent review in the journal of Kenneth Clark's *Rembrandt and the Italian Renaissance*, which had come out in 1966. Presumably Michael had made the link between the two paintings at most a few years before, meaning that here decades had not elapsed prior to publication, but – given his fondness for keeping silent – his light could well have remained under a bushel for ages, had there not been a reason to put pen to paper.

In order to give the flavour of Michael's argument, it seems right to quote him at some length:

Correspondence between the two paintings is not confined to the general compositional scheme, the scale of figure in relation to picture area, or even the lighting. Details common to both works seem to exclude the possibility of coincidence. The heads share a similar brooding abstraction. The chain across *Lucretia's* dress echoes the line of *David's* shirt very closely, and the top of her dress reflects the very marked horizontal bone structure of the Borghese *David*. Even the forms below the waist in Rembrandt's picture follow those of Caravaggio's figure. And, perhaps the most curious aspect of all, Rembrandt introduced into his painting the strange motif of *Lucretia* holding what seems to be a bed tassel, in order to preserve the raised clenched left hand of Caravaggio's *David*.

It would be pleasing to be able to report that the world of Rembrandt scholarship was instantly turned upside down, but sadly that is not what happened. The letter is referred to in *European Paintings from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts* (1971), where the *Lucretia* adorns the cover, but more generally for decades it tended to be ignored, and it is only in recent times that the tide has turned in its favour.

Michael's aversion to rushing into print was exceptional even in his own day, and might well have got him into trouble in the 'publish or perish', REF-obsessed world of today, but it seems important to add that it was accompanied by an almost gleeful delight in correcting his own earlier pronouncements with which he subsequently disagreed. For once, the cliché 'He was his own harshest critic' was actually true.

One case in point concerns two small panels representing the *Birth and Death of Adonis*, which are denied to Sebastiano del Piombo in his 1981 monograph, in spite of having been illustrated in colour in the aforementioned catalogue by Mauro Lucco, which – as also noted above – Michael had reviewed. However, he soon changed his mind, and in Federico Zeri and Andrea G. De Marchi's catalogue of the paintings in the collection of the Museo Civico Amedeo Lia at La Spezia of 1997, the latter's entry on them records that he communicated his change of mind in the form of a letter sent to their owner dated 1 July 1983 (pp. 317–19, cat. nos. 141–2).

Even more strikingly, one of his later offerings was a 'Shorter Notice' in the *Burlington Magazine* of March 2002 (pp. 164–5), laconically entitled 'Perino, not Salviati', in which he begged to differ with his younger self. The piece begins with the words: 'Correcting errors of one's own is a duty perhaps more insistent than correcting those of others', a sentence which could arguably only have been penned by someone who made so few. Virtually his first scholarly publication, also in the *Burlington* (June 1961, pp. 236–40), in an issue celebrating the achievements of Johannes Wilde on his seventieth birthday, was an article, 'Francesco Salviati's "Visitation"', in which he connected a drawing of the *Visitation* in the British Museum, previously thought to be by Parmigianino, with Salviati's fresco of the same subject in the Oratorio di San Giovanni Decollato in Rome, and logically enough argued that they were both the work of the same artist, with the drawing preparing the painting. In 2002, he convincingly contended that the style of the British Museum sheet was incompatible with that of Salviati, but instead characteristic of Perino del Vaga, and further proposed that it was a swiftly executed *aide-mémoire* made after the fresco as distinct from a first idea for it.

In view of Michael's notorious reluctance to get embroiled with the public sphere, it could not have been foreseen that he would become involved with the business of exhibitions, admittedly at a relatively late stage in his career, but in the event both his forays in that direction were great successes.

The first exhibition, *Michelangelo Draftsman*, was held at the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, and ran from 9 October to 11 December 1988, in conjunction with a show called *Michelangelo Architect: The façade of San Lorenzo and the drum and dome of St. Peter's*. What was basically the same selection, with one or two absentees and additions, was then shown under the title *Michel-Ange, dessinateur* at the Louvre from 9 May to 31 July 1989. There is nothing surprising about the fact that Michael was asked to write its catalogue: as has been explained, his major monograph *Michelangelo and his Drawings* had been published earlier in 1988. Indeed, in particular when it came to the artist's drawings, the description by J. Carter Brown, the Director of the NGA, and Olivier Chevrillon, the Director of the Musées de France, of Michael as 'one of the leading Michelangelo authorities' is – if anything – an understatement. In the catalogue, it is clearly explained that the organisation of the exhibition was the responsibility of Paola Barocchi and Pina Ragioneri of the Casa Buonarroti, Jane Roberts of the Royal Collection, and Renzo Zorzi and Paolo Viti of Olivetti, who were the sponsors of the show, so Michael was spared all such responsibilities, and indeed treated royally courtesy of Olivetti.

The catalogue itself consists of a four-page Introduction, which succinctly outlines the exhibition's ambitions, followed by sixty-three entries on individual drawings. Michael explains that 'It has been the present writer's aim not so much to assemble an anthology of graphic masterpieces as to present a series of drawings which will exemplify

Michelangelo's uses of drawing in their striking diversity', but this should not be understood as meaning that there is any lack of sheets of extraordinary visual power (arguably the most conspicuous absentee in this respect is the British Museum study for the figure of Adam in the scene of his *Creation* on the Sistine Chapel ceiling).

Almost no major exhibition ever secures every work on its wish-list, and Michael explicitly expresses his regret that it had not proved possible to borrow two early compositional ideas for the overall design of the Sistine ceiling from the British Museum and Detroit. However, on the plus side he rightly celebrates the bringing together for the first time since they left Michelangelo's *bottega* of the two sheets of studies for the figure of Haman on the Sistine ceiling, respectively in London and Haarlem, as well as all three extant sheets – in Venice, London, and Windsor – for the highly finished presentation drawing of the *Fall of Phaeton*. Moreover, the inclusion of no fewer than eleven either exclusively or predominantly architectural studies reflects Michael's eminence in that field of study, since the entries for them could presumably otherwise have been written by Henry A. Millon and Craig Hugh Smyth, the authors of the catalogue of the partner exhibition, or added to it. In this connection, it will be recalled that a chapter of *Michelangelo and his Drawings* was devoted to 'Copying, Studying, and Implementing the Design: Buildings'.

Turning to the actual entries, Michael states that his primary aim has been to discuss 'the purpose and appearance of the drawings selected'. He adds that he has 'chosen to limit the length of the entries in the hope that they can be read in front of the drawings by the visitor to the exhibition.' In fact, the majority are at most a page long, and the exceptions often turn out to cover more than one sheet. The result is a series of entries that stand as a model of how to combine a genuine sense of the ups and downs in the historical understanding of Michelangelo's drawings, which in the first half of the 20th century were often mistakenly not accepted as his work, with close looking at what is actually represented on the sheets. As usual with Michael's scholarship, there are all sorts of new insights to inspire the admiration of the specialist, but nothing was out of the reach of the general public. It is a blessed relief that there are no distractions or indeed footnotes. Better yet, the bibliography is kept to a minimum, as are the names of earlier scholars, and there is not a single comparative illustration.

*The Young Michelangelo* in the National Gallery's 'Making and Meaning' series, which ran from 19 October 1994 to 15 January 1995, was a very different exhibition, and therefore it should come as no surprise if it inspired a very different kind of catalogue. Michael was responsible for the main essay, 'The Young Michelangelo: The Artist in Rome 1496–1501' (pp. 13–81), which was preceded by a short Introduction by (Sir) Nicholas Penny and followed by an essay by Jill Dunkerton on 'Michelangelo as a Panel Painter' (pp. 83–133). There were only twenty-seven works in the show, including the two paintings generally agreed to be by Michelangelo owned by the National Gallery, namely the

so-called *Manchester Madonna* and the *Entombment*, but the five chapters of Michael's contribution range considerably more widely than that. This is above all because three of them take as their subjects sculptures by him that could never have been included in the exhibition in the form of the originals. Of these, one is concerned with his now lost *Sleeping Cupid*, while the two others respectively focus on his *Bacchus* in the Bargello in Florence and his *St. Peter's Pietà* (happily, a cast of the latter featured in the show).

Michael's prose remains as lucid as ever, but this material is undeniably treated in a more scholarly and in particular historical fashion than was the case with the entries in *Michelangelo Draftsman*. A good deal of it ultimately derived from the fundamental article he published in the *Burlington Magazine* of October 1981 on 'Michelangelo in Rome: an altar-piece and the "Bacchus"' (pp. 581–93), and also from a second *Burlington* article of March 1985 ('Michelangelo, Carrara, and the marble for the Cardinal's Pietà', pp. 154–9), but much was added to them. In the words of Neil MacGregor, the Gallery's then Director, in his Foreword to the catalogue, 'the view of the twenty-one-year-old Michelangelo that emerges here is fuller than ever before, and entirely compelling.'

Beyond the world of the history of art, Michael was a member of an informal discussion group devoted to the novels of Henry James, whose *Italian Hours* were already quoted in his book on Sebastiano. He also deeply loved the opera, with a memory stretching back to the glory days of Giovanni Martinelli and Lawrence Tibbett, and more generally he enjoyed the good life. An undeniable element of his public persona involved purporting to see doom and gloom round every corner, but secretly he was a happy man who had much to be happy about, something that emerged with unexpected and touching force during his last illness.

Michael was married three times: from 1960 to 1970 to Sara Vitali, the daughter of a great collector, with whom he had a son, Anthony; from 1972 to 1984 to Jane Martineau, best known for her work at the Royal Academy and the *Burlington Magazine*; and from 1984 until his death to a fellow art historian, Diane Zervas, whose emotional sympathy and intellectual understanding were always an invaluable support, and ever more so in his final years.

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