

**(Im)material Michelangelo: Toward a Visual Historiography of Sculpture
Between Reproduction and Art-Historical Enquiry**

6th International Conference (Post-Doc) by the Rome Art History Network (RAHN)

Conference date: November 12th, 2020

Rome - Bibliotheca Hertziana, Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte

Deadline for submissions: **June 5th, 2020**

International conference organized by Giulia Daniele (RAHN) and Daniele Di Cola (Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies).

In collaboration with the Bibliotheca Hertziana, promoted by the Rome Art History Network (<https://www.romearthistorynetwork.com>).

Reproducing, representing, copying, or recording an artwork is the inevitable result of an interpretation, which can reveal some neglected aspects of the original model, as well as disguise or change many others. This is due both to the intentions of those involved in making or in requesting the copy or the reproduction and to the intrinsic difficulties of the "translation" process from one medium to another. These problems are shared by "artistic" copies as much as by documentary or scientific reproductions, a fact that undoes the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity, between classic media (e.g. painting, sculpture, engraving) and the "mechanical" reproduction typical of the new media (photography, video, digital technologies). For these reasons, reproductions of an artwork (independently of the medium used) could become a useful source for reconstructing the historiographic path of the work itself, something we could define as "visual historiography" [Johnson 2013]; they can document how a specific artwork has been observed and interpreted over time, sometimes in close connection with the textual sources of art literature and art criticism, while at other times actively influencing their very formation.

Considering these general and methodological premises, the conference intends to examine the reproductions and copies, through different media, of Michelangelo Buonarroti's sculptural works, exploring and investigating them as evidence of the artist's "visual historiography", from the 16th century to today. In fact, Michelangelo's uninterrupted legacy provides a wide-range of visual documentation relating to his sculptures, now found all over the globe, making it possible to record the continuous mutations and transformations of the reception of his plastic works over time: from pictorial and graphic copies, to the *mise en abyme* of his sculptures in narrative and celebratory paintings; from plastic copies, such as small bronzes, to the diffusion of plaster casts for academic collections; from the engravings included in the first art-historical texts to the diffusion of photography; from video shootings in films and documentaries to the scans and the virtual

reconstructions of the Digital Michelangelo Project. Most of these examples, and well before the invention of photography, had (and still have) the purpose to document Michelangelo's sculptures for their physical and material qualities (e.g. as sculptures), reproducing them not just as artistic models to imitate. If representing sculpture in another medium is often a great challenge, due to its three-dimensionality and its intrinsic relationship with space, in the case of Michelangelo's works this has raised additional problems because of his particular way of dealing with the material, exposing overtly the traces of the working process, the uneven treatment of the surfaces and the use of fragmented or sketched elements, according to the well-known poetics of the *non finito*. The "translation" of these aspects usually led to a necessary "remediation" between original and copies. The copies can in fact change or reinvent the sculptures, completing some parts Michelangelo had left unfinished, or they can respect the formal appearance of the originals. They can represent a sculpture from a unique and conventional point of view or, on the contrary, the experiences of its interaction with the beholder. They can decontextualize and recontextualize a sculpture; transfiguring its objecthood and its material aspects or emphasizing them by means of the plastic forms or the magnification of details.

The conference, in brief, intends to investigate "how" and "why" Michelangelo's sculptural works were copied, represented and documented, and which factors (social, economic, cultural, etc.) influenced the creation and diffusion of these reproductions, considering in particular:

- a) how these images should be interpreted in terms of "visual" evidences of the aesthetic, historiographic, and critical transformations concerning the most characteristic formal features of Michelangelo's sculpture.
- b) the functions and meanings of the reproduction of the physical and spatial qualities, or the materials and techniques of Michelangelo's sculpture, and the issues and challenges raised by the process of translation.

Proposals addressing these historical, theoretical, and methodological problems will be particularly welcome, especially if they take the form of case studies concerning the reception of individual Michelangelo's work, the use of specific media, the activity and impact of individual artistic and historical figures (treatise writers, art historians, etc.) who had an outstanding role in the development of the "visual historiographical" discourse on the artist.

The conference is organized by Giulia Daniele and Daniele Di Cola, in collaboration with the Bibliotheca Hertziana, thanks to the initiative of the Rome Art History Network (RAHN) (<https://www.romearthistorynetwork.com>).

The call for papers is addressed to scholars who will have completed their PhD before the conference date.

A short abstract (max 2000 characters, including spaces) and a CV must be submitted by **June 5th, 2020** to the following address: michelangeloimmateriale2020@gmail.com.

Presentations should be in either Italian or English. The publication of the conference proceedings will be taken into future consideration.

Please note: unfortunately, the organizers will not be able to cover any travel or accommodation expenses.

Selected bibliography:

- Alberti, A., Rovetta, A., Salsi, C. (eds.), *D'après Michelangelo*, 1 vol. + USB stick, Venezia 2015.
- Barnes, B.A., *Michelangelo in Print: Reproductions as Response in the Sixteenth Century*, Farnham 2010 [in particular: pp. 144-165].
- *Der Göttliche. Hommage an Michelangelo*, cat. della mostra (Bonn, Kunst und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 6 February - 25 May 2015), curated by Satzinger, G., München 2015.
- Hamill, S., Luke, M.R. (eds.), *Photography and Sculpture: The Art Object in Reproduction*, Los Angeles 2017.
- Johnson, G.A. (eds.), *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, Cambridge 1998.
- Johnson, G.A., "(Un)richtige Aufnahme": *Renaissance Sculpture and the Visual Historiography of Art History*, in «Art History», 36, 1, 2013, pp. 12-51.
- Messina, M.G., (eds.), *Scultura e fotografia. Questioni di luce*, Firenze 2001.
- *Ri-conoscere Michelangelo: la scultura del Buonarroti nella fotografia e nella pittura dall'Ottocento a oggi*, cat. della mostra (Firenze, Gallerie dell'Accademia, 18 February - 18 May 2014), curated by Maffioli, M., Bietoletti, S., Firenze 2014.
- Rosenberg, R., *Beschreibungen und Nachzeichnungen der Skulpturen Michelangelos: eine Geschichte der Kunstbetrachtung*, München 2000.
- Rosenberg, R., *The Reproduction and Publication of Michelangelo's Sacristy: Drawings and Prints by Franco, Salviati, Naldini and Cort*, in Ames-Lewis F., Joannides P., *Reactions to the Masters: Michelangelo's Effect on Art and Artists in the Sixteenth Century*, Aldershot 2003, pp. 114-136.
- Rosenberg, R., *Artists as Beholders: Drawings after Sculptures as a Medium and Source for the Experience of Art*, in Frangebert T., Williams R. (eds.), *The Beholder. The Experience of Art in Early Modern Europe*, Aldershot 2006, pp. 103-122.