

Cleopatra

This beautiful drawing was given to Cavalieri by Michelangelo around 1533. It forms part of a series of portraits on paper executed according to the dictates of classical art and described by Vasari as «the divine heads» for their innovative and fascinating character. The *Cleopatra*, probably inspired by Piero di Cosimo's *Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci*, differs from its model in the greater dramatic force of the pose, which evokes the moment at which Cleopatra committed suicide by allowing herself to be bitten by a venomous snake. The elaborate hairstyle and the typology of the naked bust without arms are explicit references to classical art.