

Madonna della Scala

Madonna and Child with Angels

The putti holding the sheet in the background have been seen as a premonition of the death of Christ and a reference to his shroud, while the reason for the presence of the staircase has been traced back to a number of religious texts in circulation in those years, such as the *LIBRO DELLA SCALA DEL PARADISO*, the third edition of which was published in Florence, in 1491. The relief is reminiscent of the composition of Donatello's *Pazzi Madonna* (Berlin Staatliche Museen), but it is also possible to find links with the figures on ancient Roman sarcophagi. From Donatello, the artist also derived the technique of «squashed relief,» which gives the forms a pictorial rather than sculptural appearance. This work is a significant demonstration of the freedom and masterly skill with which the young Michelangelo took ideas and inspiration from the ancients and the best of modern artists. Vasari records the work as being in the house of Michelangelo's nephew, Lionardo. The latter gave it to Cosimo I in 1566. It was then returned to the Buonarroti family and kept by them in the same house that Michelangelo had bought for his nephew.