

Night

Sarcophagus of Giuliano de Medici, Duke of Nemours

This was the first of the works in the New Sacristy to be executed. *Night*, stretched out on a pall, is immersed in a troubled sleep and is characterized by an unnatural pose, with one flank resting on a leering mask, with empty eye sockets, that some have seen as a dramatic self portrait of the artist. Beneath her leg is a barn owl, a ghostly and nocturnal bird of prey, while her foot rests on a bunch of poppy seeds, alluding to sleep. Her tresses are held back by a diadem with a crescent moon and an eight-pointed star. The glossy sheen of the surface, contrasting with the roughness of the *Day*, has been linked to the desire to give the figure a pale and lunar appearance, like that of a creature that has never known sunlight. Written on Michelangelo's sketches for this sculpture are some verses that confirm the artist's intention to refer to Neoplatonic theories. In them he says that time and the implacability of its destructive force can only be opposed by the immortal power of the soul.