

THINK of an artist from the High Renaissance who was not only a great painter, but a sculptor and architect and the name Michelangelo springs to mind. During a period known for its creative activity and great leaps forward in science and invention, Michelangelo led all others. Here was a short stocky man who had enormous abilities, not only in the arts but in being able to concentrate so single mindedly on a work of art that nothing would disturb him.

Birthplace

He was born in a tiny village called Caprese on March 6, 1475. His father, the mayor of the village, named him Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni. As a young child, he was fascinated by painters and sculptors, but it wasn't until he was 13 years of age that his father agreed to let him study with the quite famous Domenico Ghirlandaio from Florence.

It was an unhappy time for Michelangelo though because Ghirlandaio refused to share the secrets of being a successful artist. Michelangelo instead started to look elsewhere and in the gardens of the Monastery of San Marco, Michelangelo discovered the statue.

No ordinary works of art though as these were ancient Greek and Roman statues brought to the gardens by Lorenzo the Magnificent, head of the house of Medici.

The start of great things

As curator and teacher, Lorenzo the Magnificent installed a talented sculptor, Bertoldo who was to become Michelangelo's tutor. It was while working under Bertoldo that Lorenzo took Michelangelo to live with him. In 1492, Lorenzo died and shortly after, Michelangelo left Florence. Fame soon followed when in 1496 when Michelangelo created the 'Madonna della Pieta', a marble group showing the Virgin Mary supporting the dead Christ on her knees.

This is one of the few of his works that was signed and it can now be found standing in St Peter's Basilica in Rome. It was however, his next work of art that the Michelangelo came most famous for. Still only 26, Michelangelo returned to Florence to find an 18 foot marble block that another sculptor had already started to carve. Despite having almost been ruined, Michelangelo spent two years and all his heart and soul, carving the statue we now know as 'David'.

Rome

It is however, another work of art that brought Michelangelo more fame, The Sistine Chapel Frescoes. This was a chapel that had been built by Pope Sixtus IV and had walls decorated by such masters as Ghirlandaio and Botticelli. There was however a vault that Pope Jullius II wanted Michelangelo to paint. And so between 1508 and 1512, Michelangelo painted the vaulted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome with hundreds of giant figures that made up his vision of the world's creation.

Working on a scaffold 60 feet above the floor, Michelangelo set about painting nine main scenes depicting the story of Genesis from the Creation to the Flood. Fours years on, despite the discomfort of painting lying on his back, Michelangelo completed the whole fresco by himself. More than 20 years later, Michelangelo returned to start the enormously powerful fresco 'The Last Judgment'.

This is a work of art that covers the entire wall of the Sistine chapel behind the altar. It's visionary appearance in a spiritual world with -