

The surrealist journey of Michelangelo

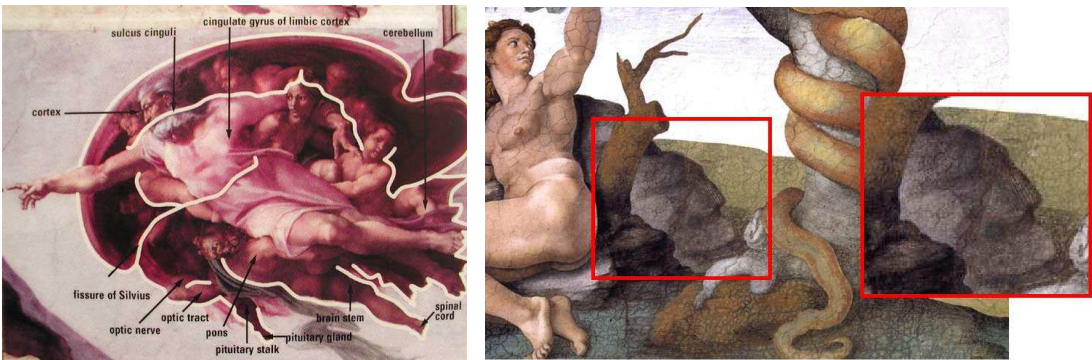
1- The discovery of surrealism (1501)

(p2)



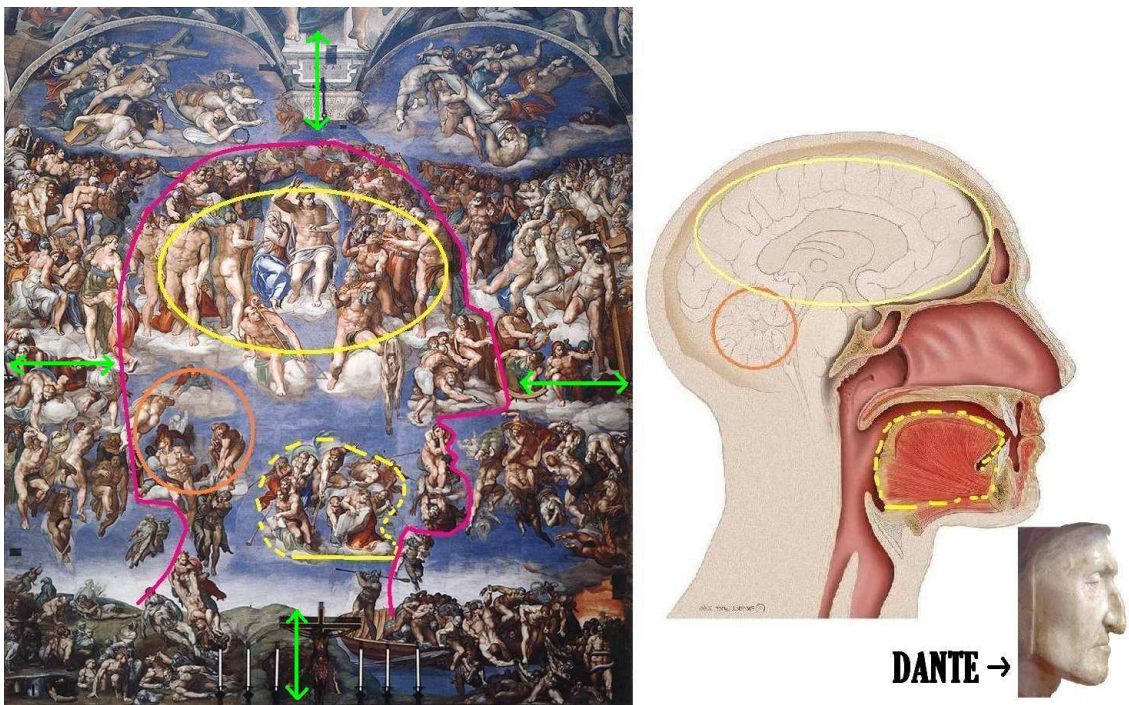
2- Hidden anatomy lesson (1508-12)

(p4-9)



3- Giant portrait of Dante Alighieri (1534-41)

(p10-19)



4- Conclusion

(p20-22)

The discovery of surrealism

Michelangelo probably discover surrealism by accident in 1501-02 in the following drawing and he continued to develop this kind of art later in the Sistine chapel.



Here are the comments of art historian Frederick Hartt about the double image of this drawing:

15. *Studies of a man digging, a head and shoulders seen from the back, and sketches of shoulders*

Probably 1501-2

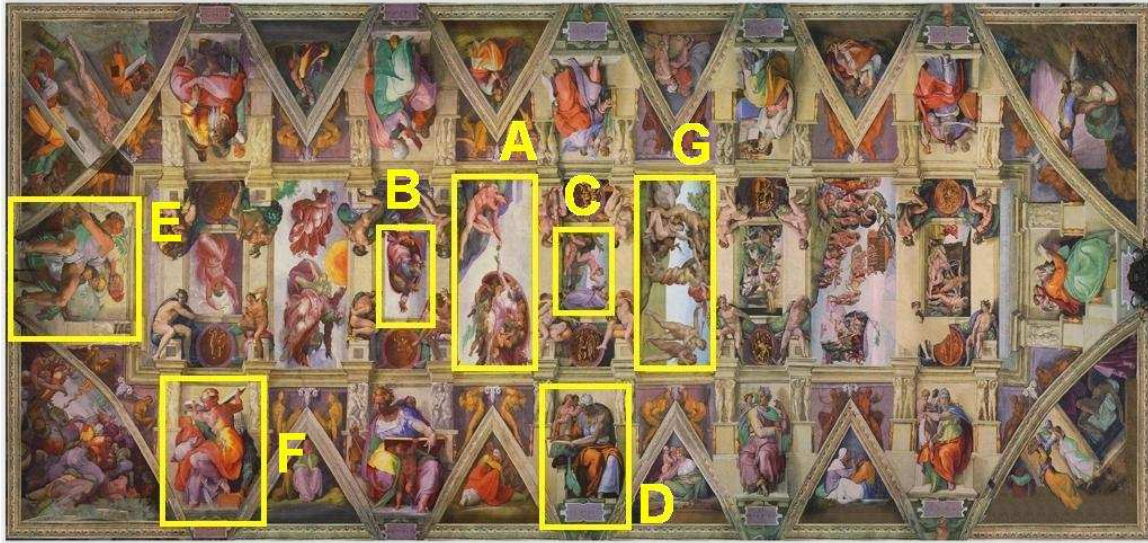
Pen, $10\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{3}{8}$ ", cut down

PARIS, LOUVRE, 714 verso (for recto see No. 20)

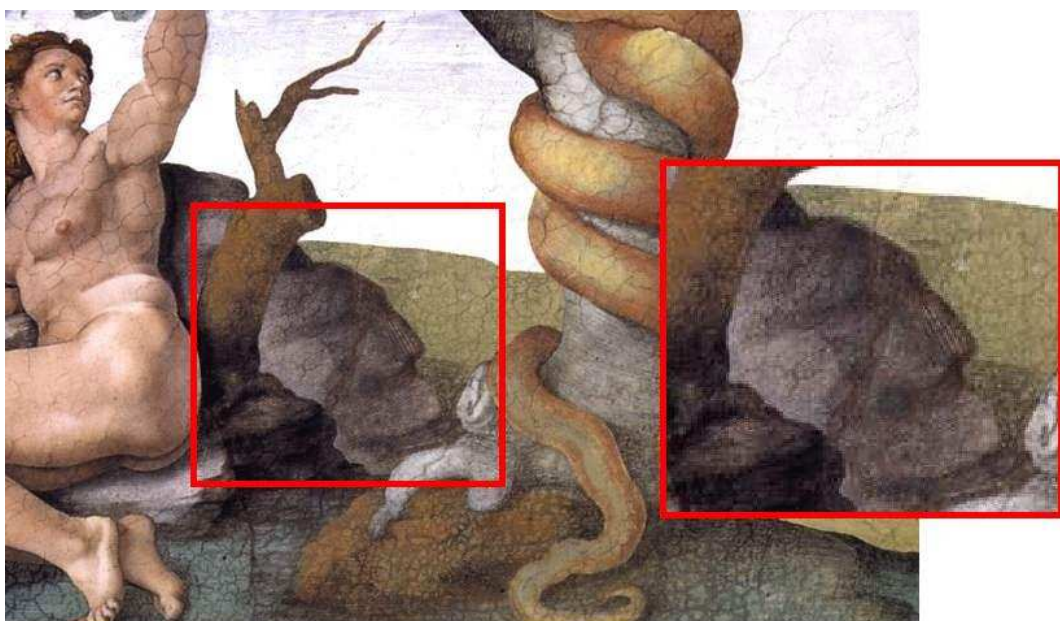
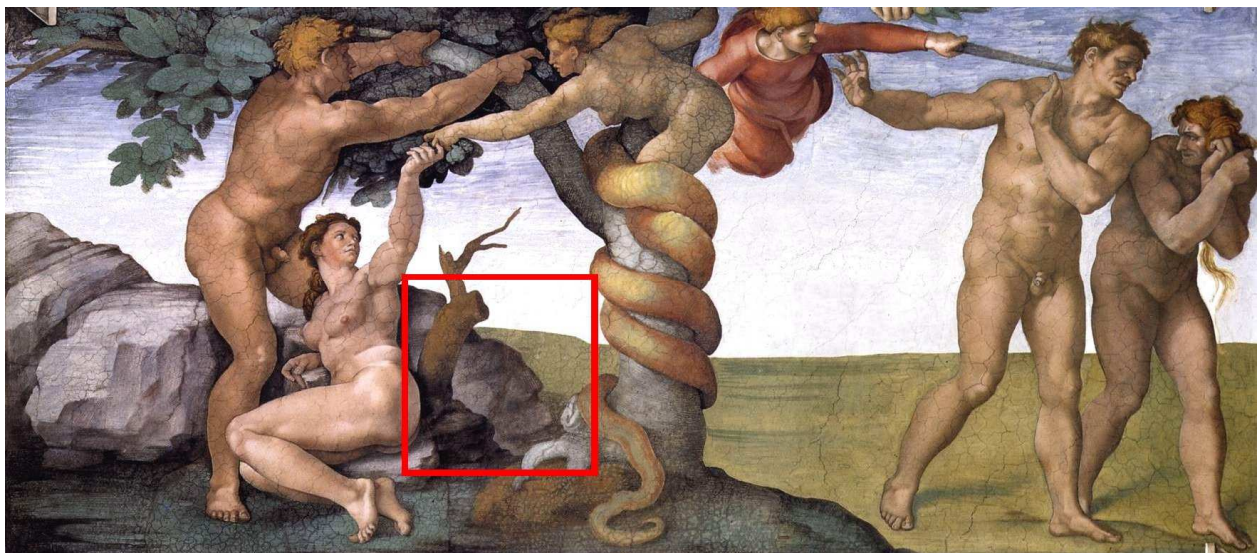
The digging man repeats in reverse, as is generally known, the *Adam Digging* by Jacopo della Quercia on the portal of San Petronio in Bologna, which Michelangelo had had opportunity to study in 1494-95. The pose is enriched here and there by study from a living model, who was then studied from the back in the carefully hatched and crosshatched study at the lower left. Between the head of one figure and the arm of the other, the artist has drawn the head a second time, converting the previous head into a shoulder for the new one, so that it functions as a double image, with almost Surrealistic effect. Above, the right shoulder of the digging figure has been analyzed in line, and at the right the back view of the right shoulder restudied twice to determine the behavior of the bones and muscles. The lines at the top of the sheet, "To the sweet murmur of a little river, which descends slowly from the green shadow of a clear spring," are not otherwise known, nor is the purpose of the drawing.

Sistine Chapel ceiling: hidden anatomy lesson

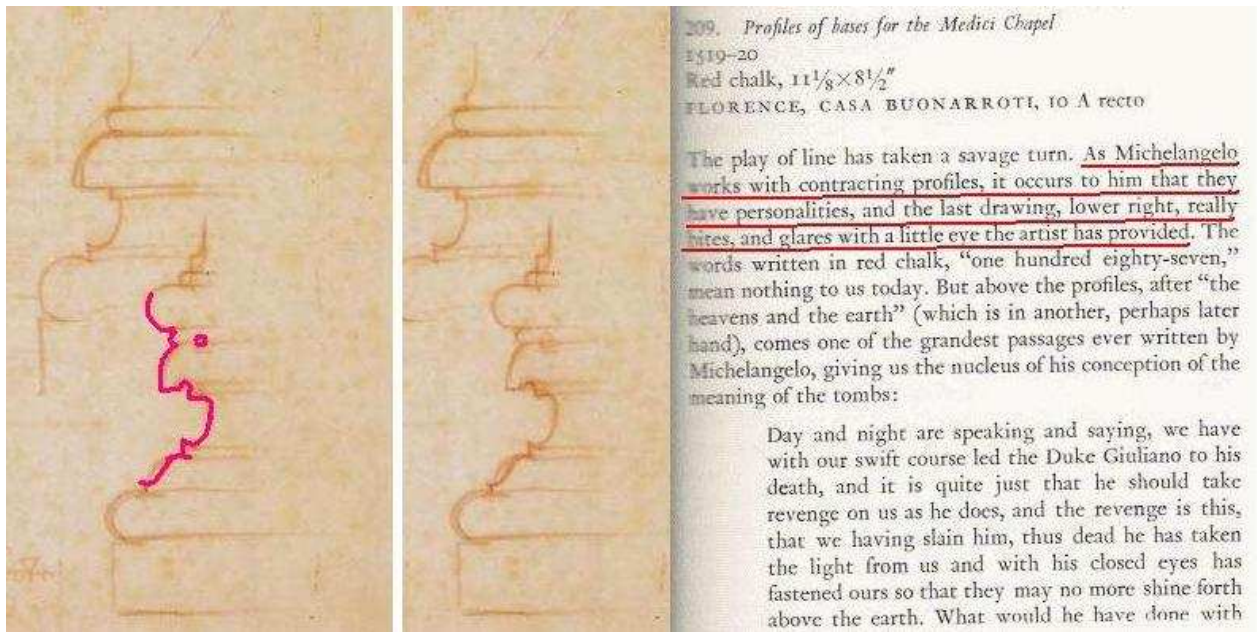
There are many panels with possible double images of anatomical illustrations. In about all cases, we can find some correspondences with the context of the panel. I'm absolutely convinced that those double images are intended by Michelangelo. Anatomy was one of his passions outside art. It's hard to believe in a multiple occurrence of a coincidence all related to human anatomy.



The whole idea of creating a hidden anatomy lesson starts here with a rock with a personality on the fourth panel. This double image was done probably by Michelangelo in a last moment inspiration and even maybe on the scaffold. The size of the red section is about 10-20 sq feet: difficult to say that that the greatest artist of all time did not understood the hidden face in the rock that he painted.

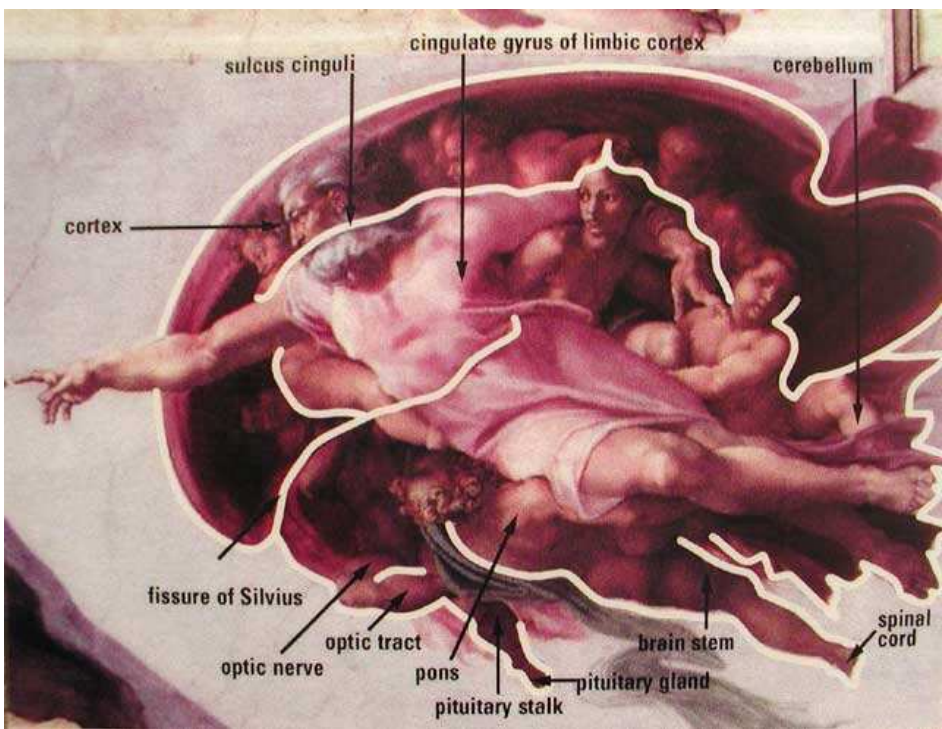


This rock with a personality is similar to this column study done in 1920.



HIDDEN ANATOMY

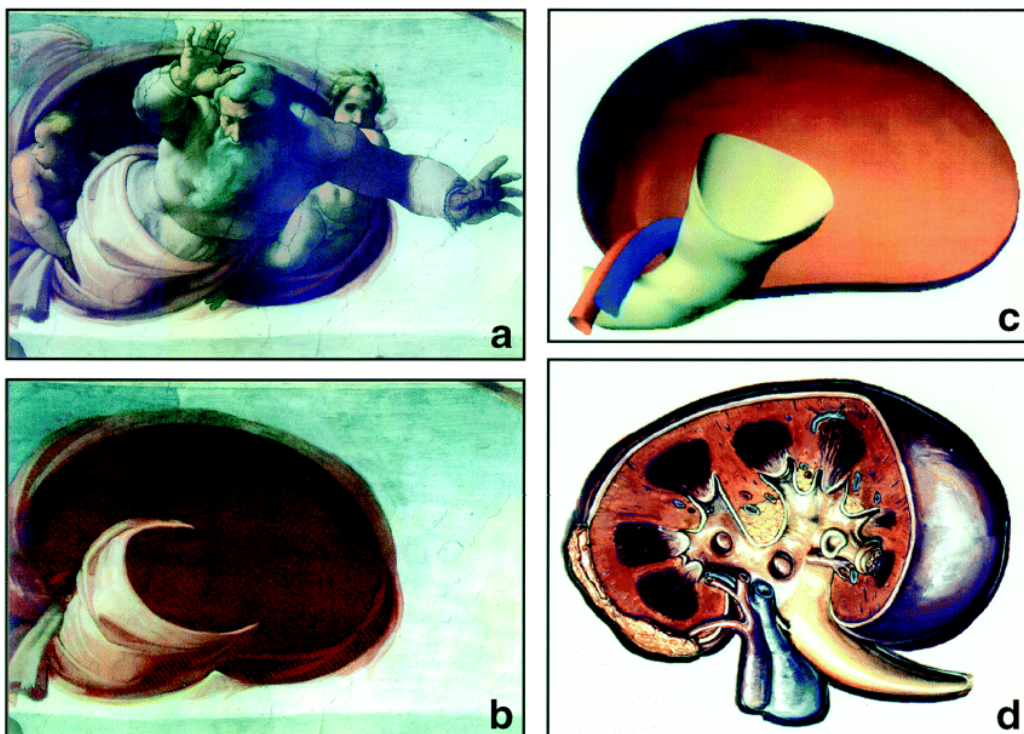
A) God creates Adam : Human brain
(1990, Frank Meshberger)



The most famous double image of Michelangelo is undoubtedly the hidden brain in the creation of Adam. It was discovered in 1990 by Frank Meshberger. The context here is very complimentary; God is the prevalent religious figure of the fresco and the brain the instrument of the human intellect. The anatomical image is very complex with multiple smaller anatomical parts.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CE0DE143DF933A25753C1A966958260>

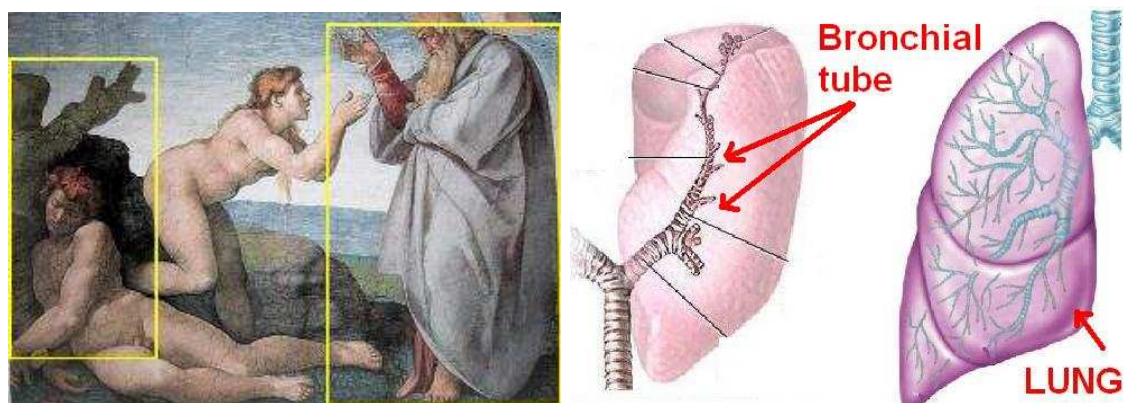
B) God divides the water from the earth : human kidney
(1999, Garabed Eknayan)



This is a complex anatomical drawing, with some more internal details of the kidney. To the known medical concepts in the early 1500's, the kidney separate solid from liquid. This medical function is matching perfectly the theme of this section of the ceiling.

<http://www.nature.com/ki/journal/v57/n3/full/4491441a.html>

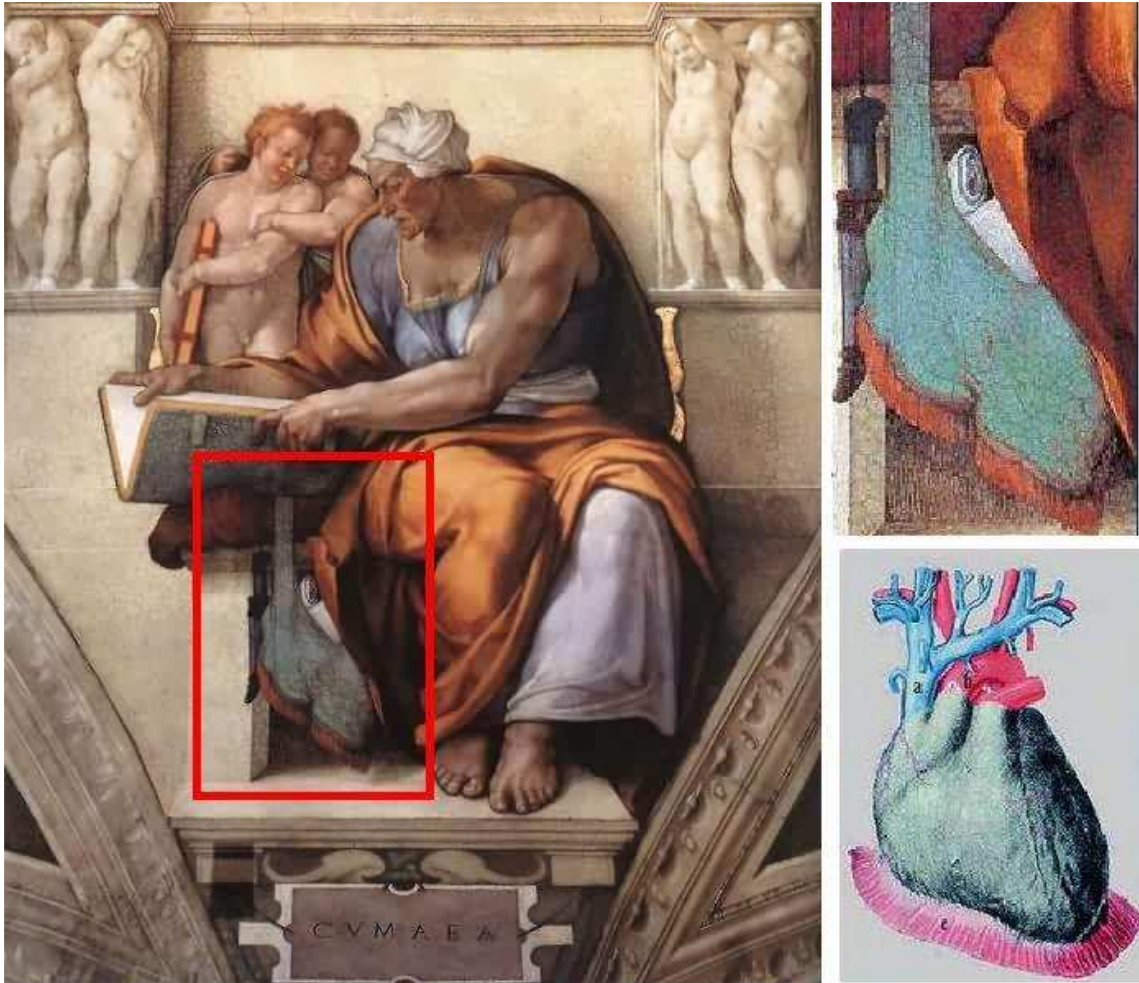
C) God creates Eve : Lung
(2005, Gilson Barreto and Marcelo de Oliveira)



Side by side there are two corresponding part of human anatomy, the bronchial tube and the lung. Gilson Barreto said about this scene of the ceiling: we could say God is imparting the "breath of life" into Eve. Some may refuse to believe in it. It's not the most obvious hidden anatomy of the ceiling, but the two anatomical elements here are closely related.

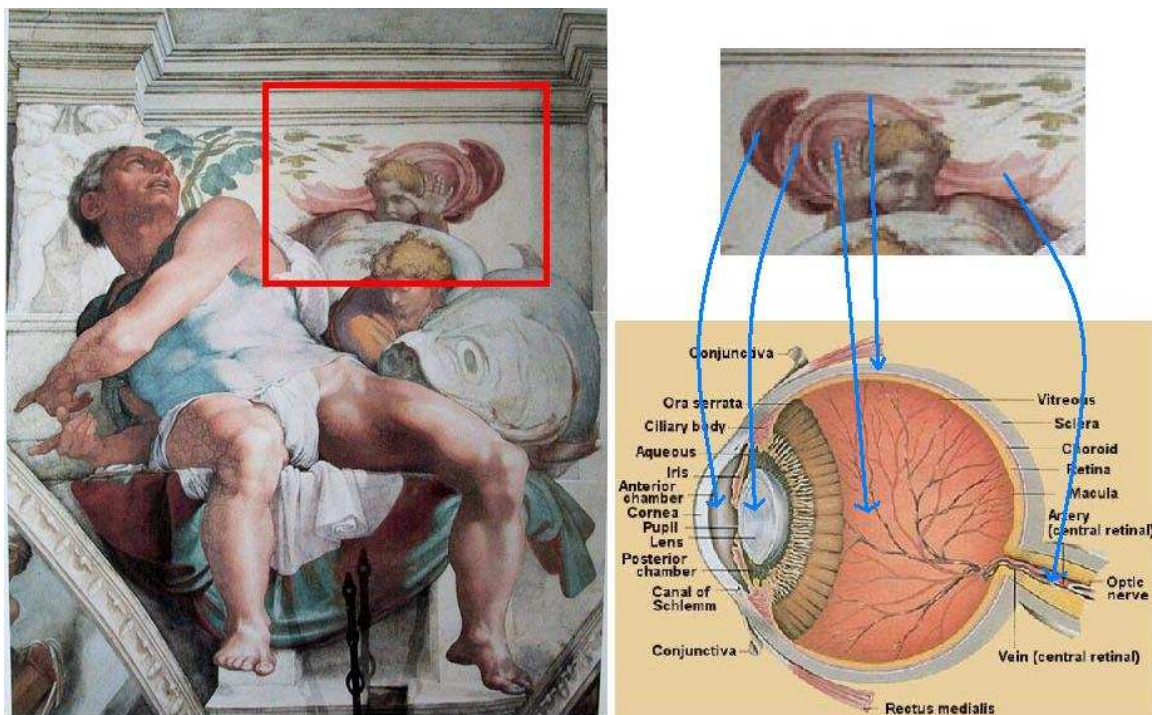
http://www.redorbit.com/news/science/156539/brazilian_doctors_uncover_michelan_gelo_code/

D) Cumean Sibyl: human heart
(2005, Gilson Barreto and Marcelo de Oliveira)



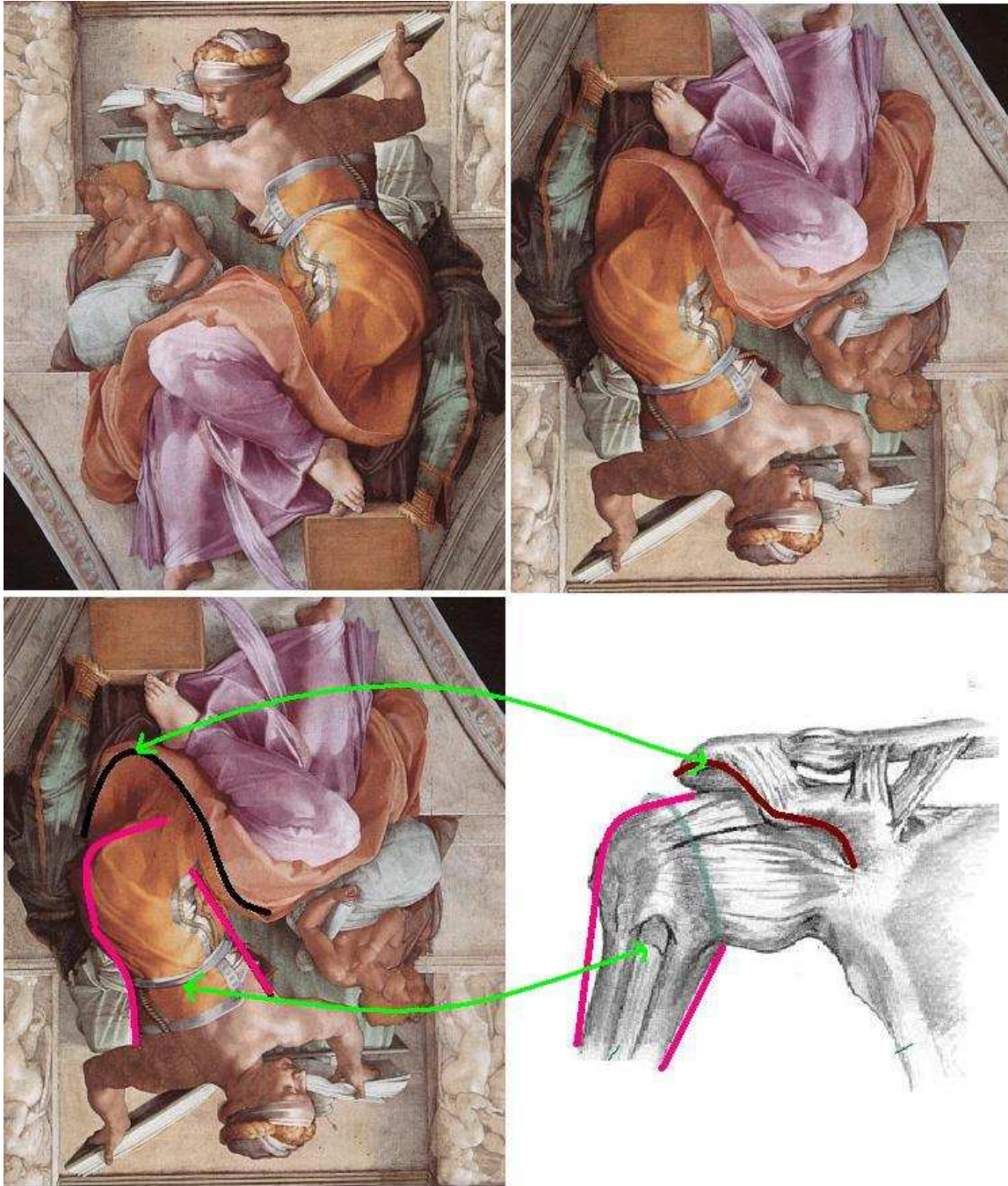
This is not a very complex anatomical drawing, but the history of the Sibyl is very interesting. The Cumean sibyl received from Apollo a thousand years of longevity. We could say that the heart is the engine of the human body and the most vital organ for longevity. Michelangelo knew probably the function of the heart.

E) Prophet Jonah: human eye
(2005, Gilson Barreto and Marcelo de Oliveira)

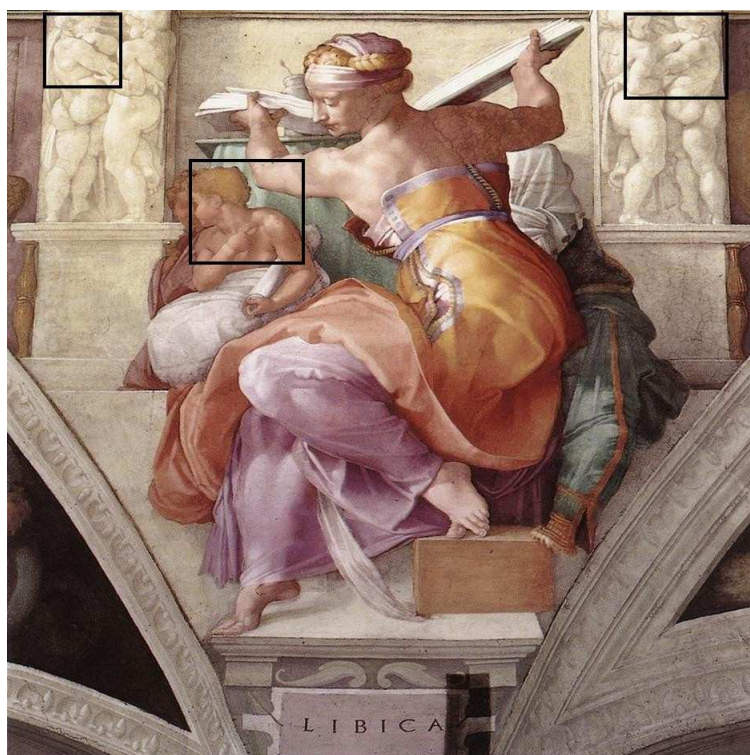


Here a very complex anatomical drawing, almost perfect. Prophet Jonah here is looking at God on the upside. It's hard here to ignore the correspondence between the action of looking upside and the anatomy of the eye.

F) Libyan sibyl: shoulder joint
(2005, Gilson Barreto and Marcelo de Oliveira)



The Libyan sibyl, upside down, looks like the human shoulder joint. Below we see that 3 figures pointing their shoulder.



Anatomy in the art of the Renaissance

Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci were known to be familiar of internal human anatomy.

According to four British researchers, Michelangelo, Raphael and Gerard David have hidden elements of anatomy in their works. According to their theory, there are other works with hidden anatomical features.

Links: brain imaging in renaissance masterpieces

<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=2121627>

<http://streetanatomy.com/blog/2008/01/22/hidden-brain-imaging-in-renaissance-masterpieces/>

Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci



Gerard David



Raphael : Transfiguration of Christ

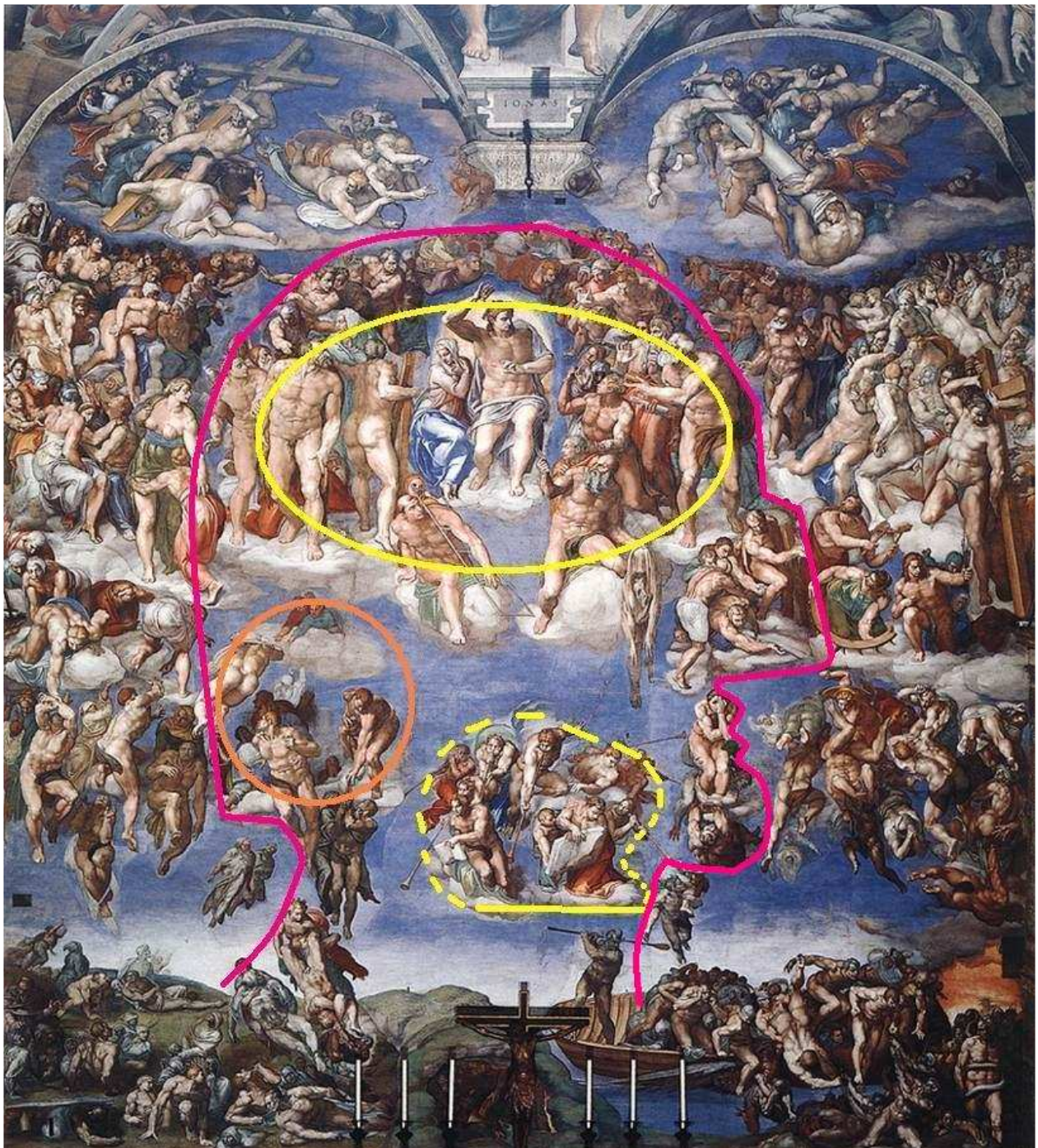


Giant portrait of Dante Alighieri

In 1950, Joaquin Diaz Gonzalez identifies a colossal portrait of the medieval poet Dante in the Last Judgement fresco. This theory is almost completely unknown. To be honest the first reaction I got was not too good about this theory. I hesitate to believe in this theory for the first weeks of observation, but more I look at the fresco more it become true to me. Eventually I found many others clues. Those clues makes me completely sure of the intention of the artist to create this hidden profile. I will try to highlight the elements to judge of seriousness of this theory.

- A) Profile of Dante (deformed nose)
- B) Position, angle and proportion of huge portrait
- C) Representation of the human brain
- D) Representation of the human oral cavity
- E) Additional double images
- F) Personification (Dante, Michelangelo, Cardinal Biagio da Cesena)

A) Profile of Dante



Times Online article (see 3 first paragraphs):

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article4113094.ece>

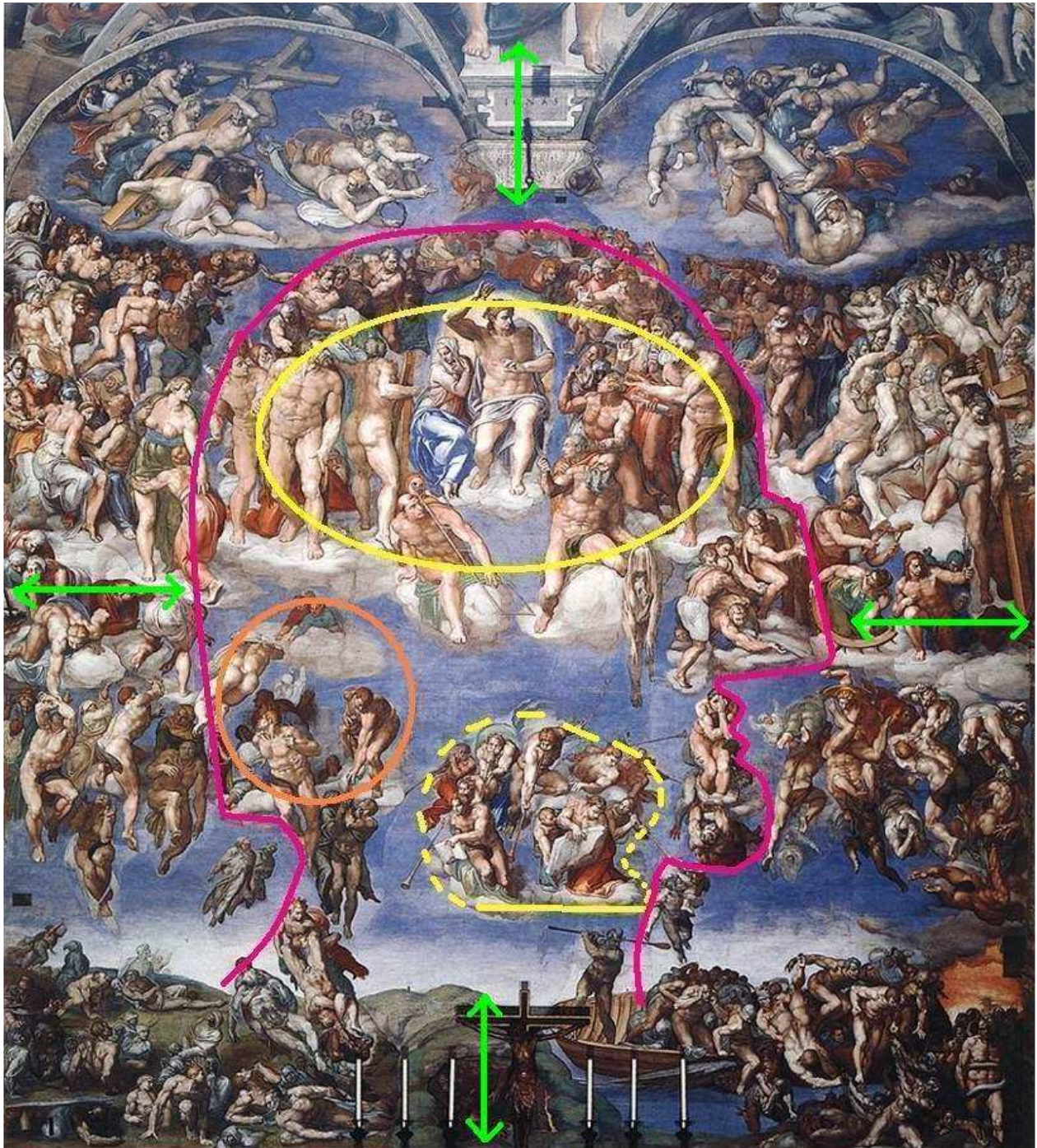


We find the characteristic nose of Dante in the huge profile; Michelangelo had access to Dante's portrait by his death mask below.

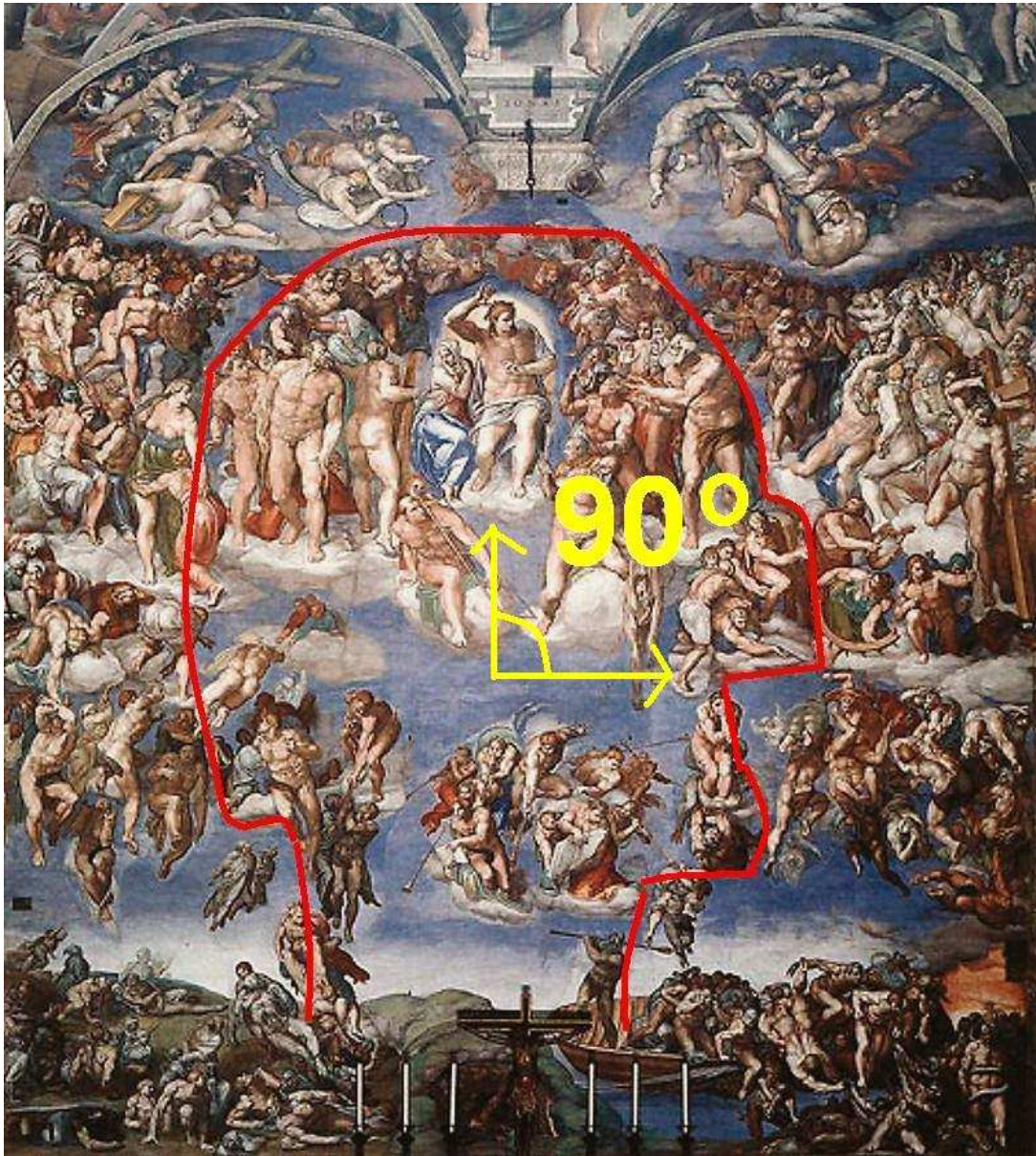


B) Position, angle and proportion of huge portrait

PERFECT POSITION AND PROPORTION

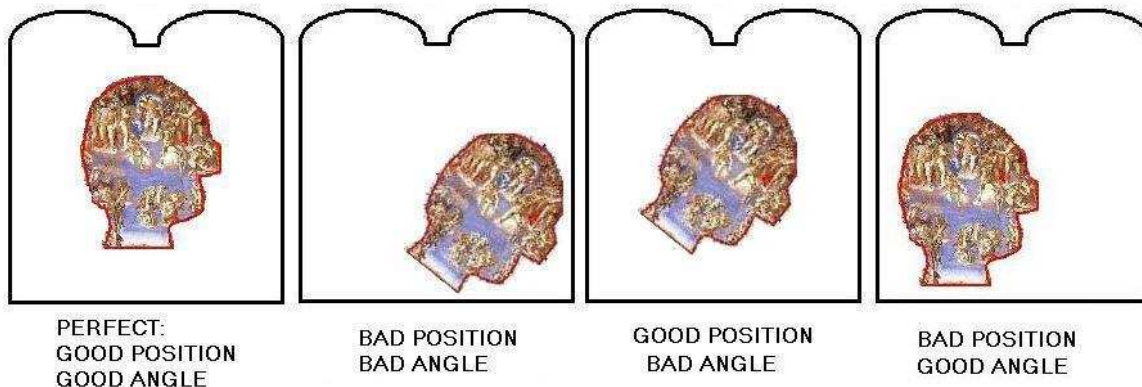


PERFECT ANGLE



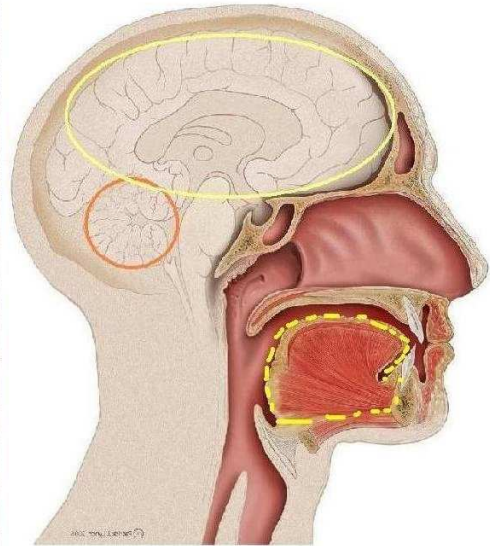
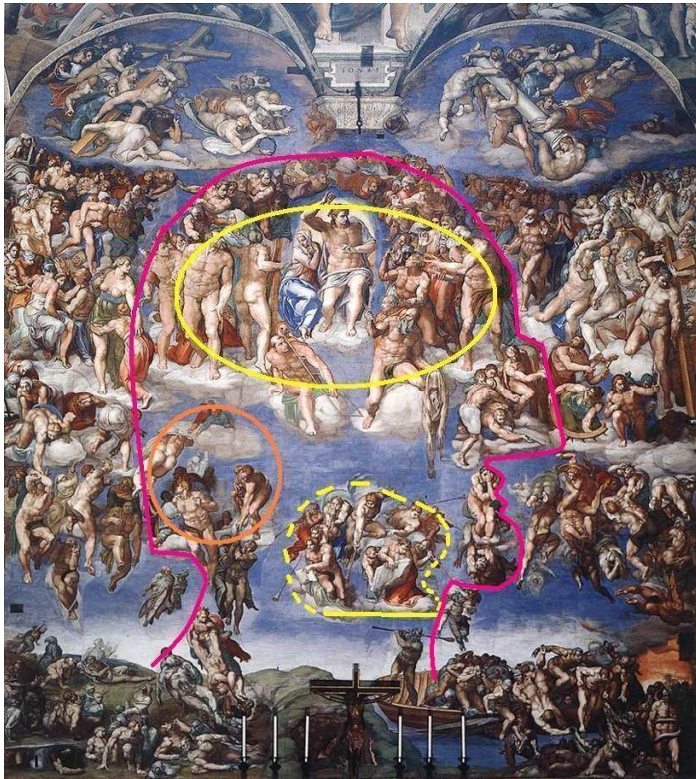
The position of the hidden portrait is perfect, well centered horizontally and well centered vertically. The portrait uses approximately 50% of surface of the fresco. Finally the angle of the portrait is perfectly pointing towards the right.

The argument about the angle is more mathematical than artistic. The odds to have a perfect angle (90° , 180° , 270° or 360°) of a random image are about $1/90$. This argument could be meaningless to many art historians, but here it's difficult to say that a random image could be perfectly angled and positioned at the same time. If the artist really tries to hide an image, he will probably do it in a familiar angle as we see here. If the portrait contour found is a coincidence, we likely see an oblique angle or a bad position of the portrait or both.

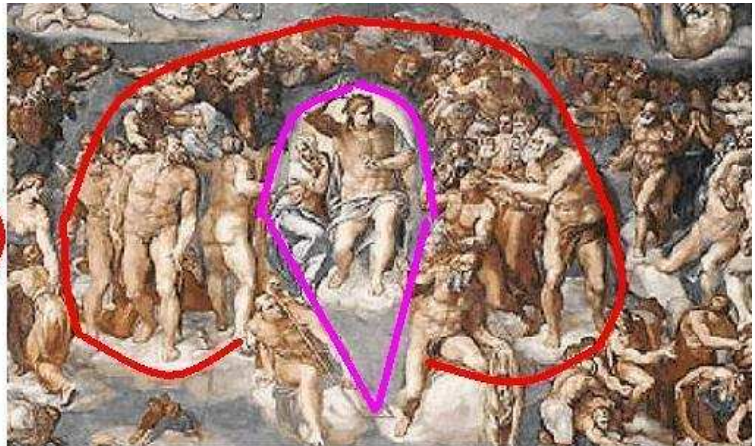
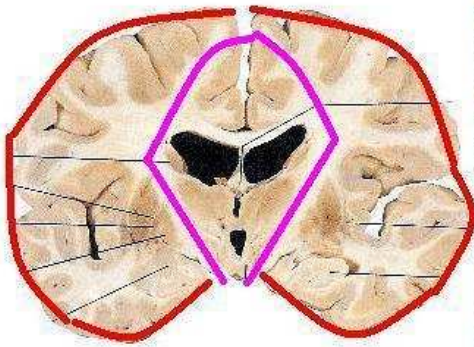


There is a easy experiment that could be done for testing the odds to have a perfect angle: draw a perfect cross on a paper sheet and then make a pen spin on it. If you have a perfect angle (90° , 180° , 270° or 360°) on the first trial, you are lucky.

C) Representation of the human brain



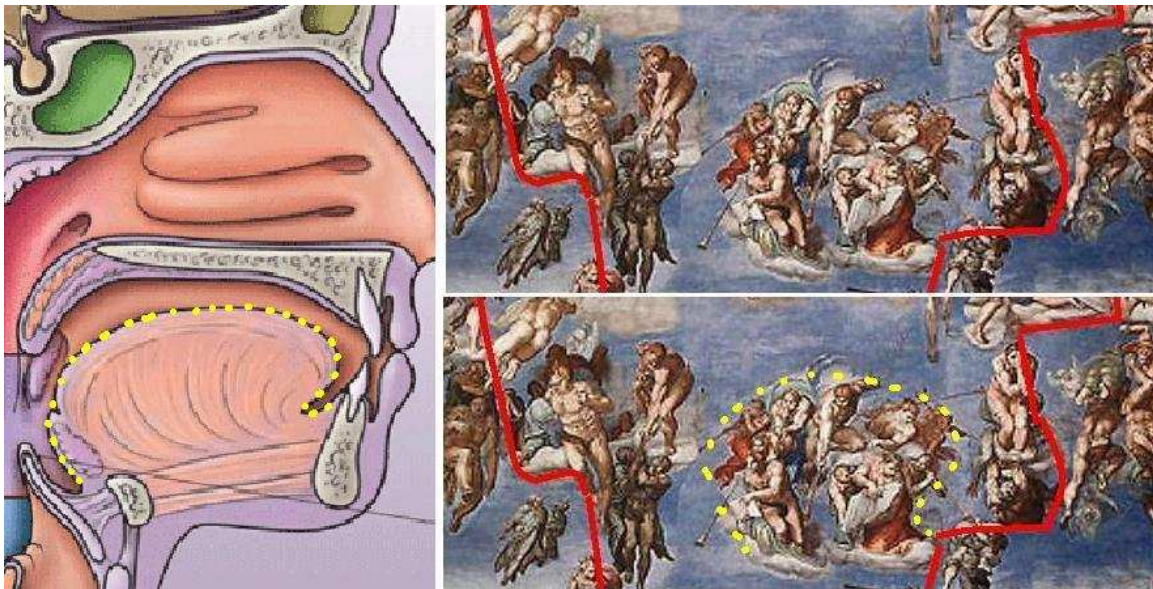
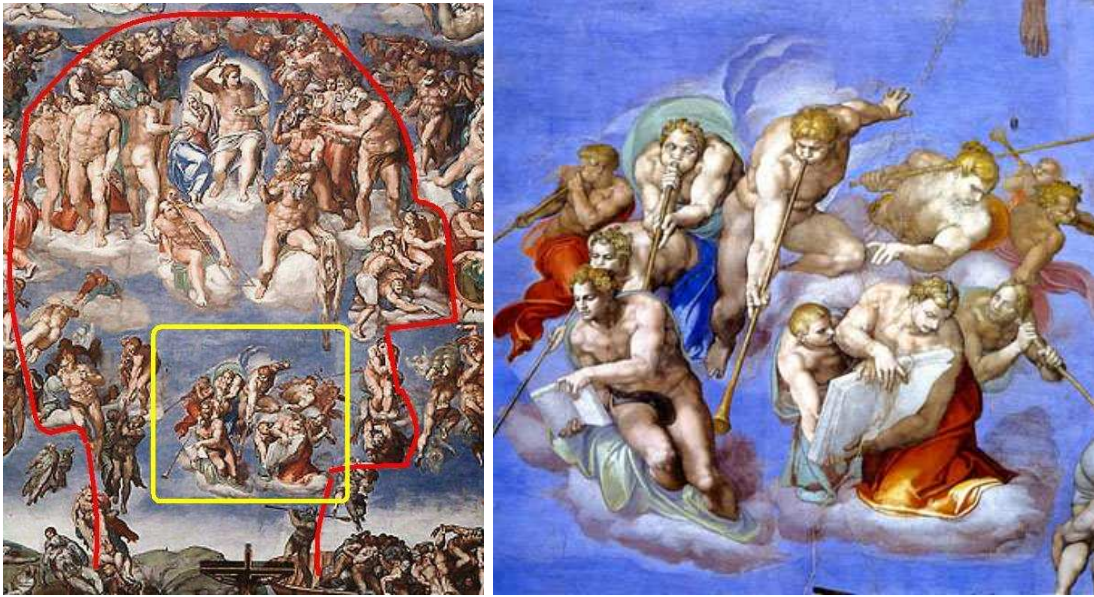
There is clearly an enormous concentration of figures in the area of the brain. It's a clue which lets us believe that there are anatomical allusions in the portrait of Dante. Some might say that the mid-sagittal cross-section of the brain is represented:



See the interpretation of J. Wesson Ashford, M.D., Ph.D. here:

https://docs.google.com/fileview?id=0Bx_c03MXyt-vYjgyOTNIM2MtYzFIMi00Yjg5LTkzZTEtMjJlOTM1OTJhOGY0&hl=en

D) Representation of human oral cavity



There's a second allusion of the human anatomy in the Dante portrait.

- 1) We see perfectly the form of the tongue here.
- 2) The trumpets represent the release of sounds by the human mouth.
- 3) The angle and the position of the tongue are perfectly matching the normal human anatomy.

This is in fact a triple coincidence and to justify that as a simple coincidence not very convincing to me.

We can see also 2 books shown by the angels. We could see that as an ambiguity: do the books represent the bible or Dante's texts?!

E) Additional double image

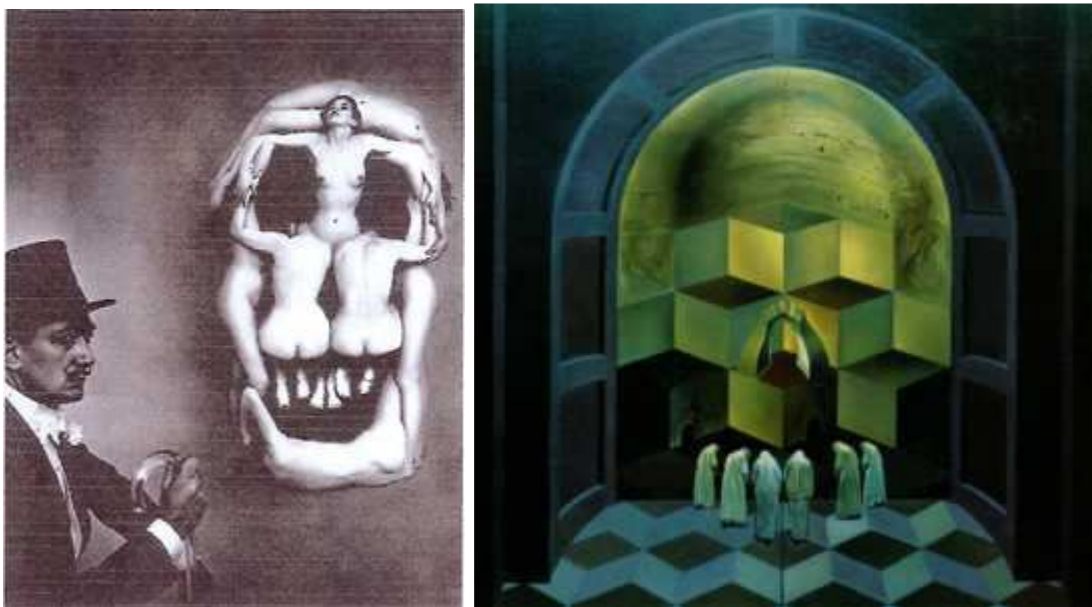
(2007, www.youtube.com)

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ER-DqEwLolw>



There's a double image of a human skull in the fresco of the Last Judgement. The context here supports perfectly this double image because the bottom right corner represents hell in this fresco. Undoubtedly the artist knows what he is doing here by creating this double image at this place. That is a double insult to Cardinal Biagio da Cesena.

This double image in the last judgement reminds us the art of Dali many centuries later.



Double image effect in Lincoln painting by Dali



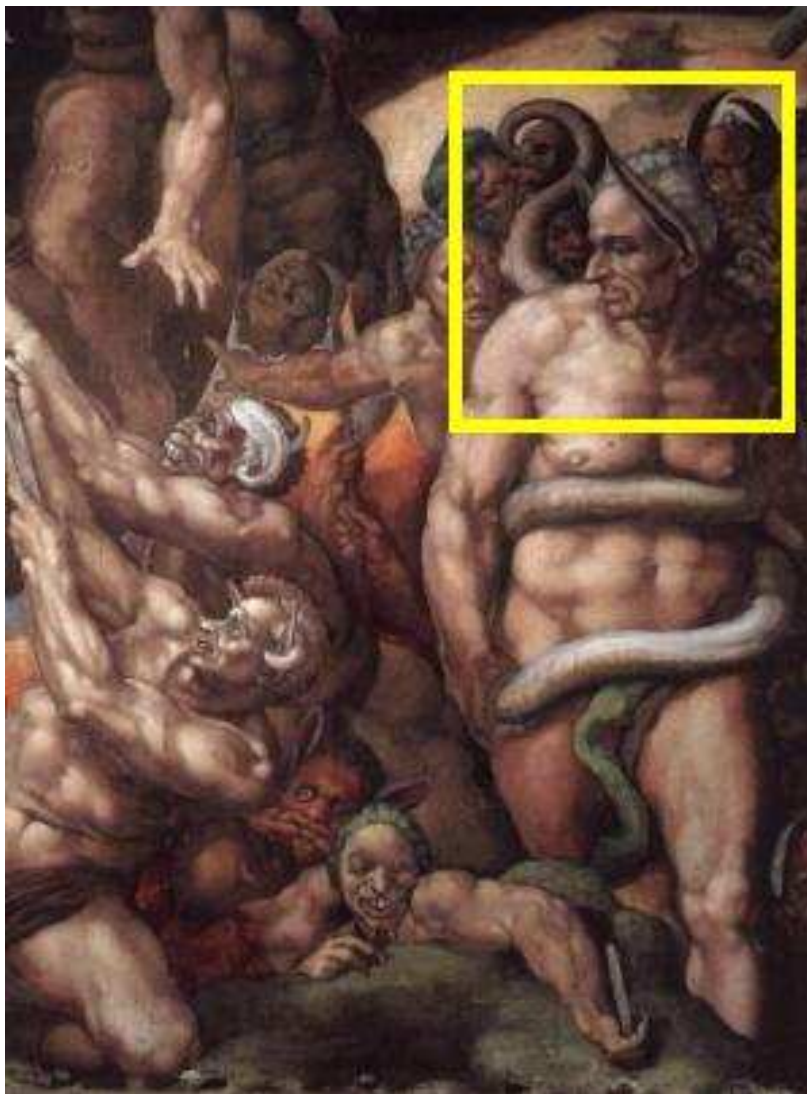
F) Personification of figures

It's interesting to note that there are several personifications in this religious fresco. This is something not very common at that time. I think that Michelangelo thought that the portrait of Biago da Cesena (Minos) would pass undetected like all his anatomical double images, but it wasn't the case. He was lucky not having trouble with it. A critic of the work of Michelangelo, Biagio da Cesena, is represented in the character of Minos. The pope refuses to remove the portrait claiming that he does not have any authority in hell.

- 1) Portrait of Dante
- 2) Self-portrait of Michelangelo

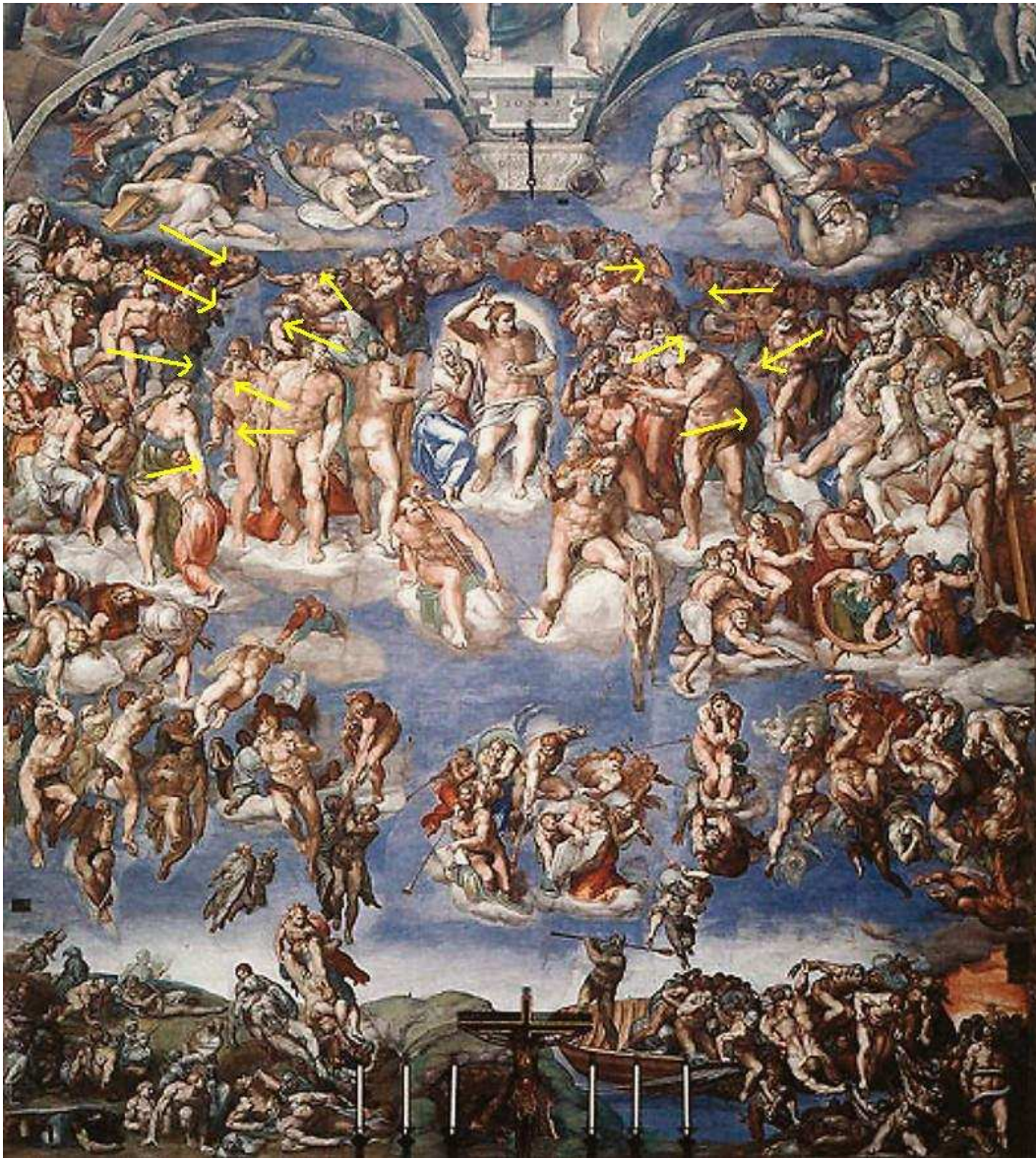


- 3) Cardinal Biagio da Cesena



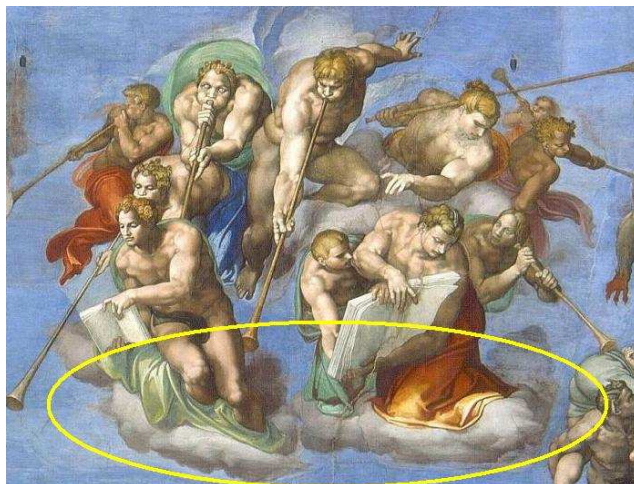
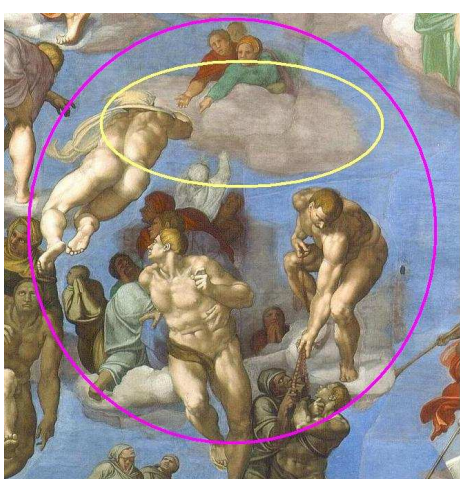
G) Two blue symmetrical demarcations

There are two symmetrical demarcations in the upper fresco. The final position of the figures depends of the Dante portrait in this fresco. These two demarcations are the way Michelangelo used to demarcate the upper head of Dante. The lower boundaries are made with figures. There is no margin for error here; a too obvious homogeneous contour could be catastrophic if he is caught by the church. If he is too unclear the "surrealist" effort is useless.



Michelangelo worked all the smaller fragments before taking his decision for the final design. So he has a huge inventory of figures or group of figures in hand that he can adapt to forge the hidden Dante profile. He has also clouds that he can add to make a more detailed contour if he wants in some specific places.

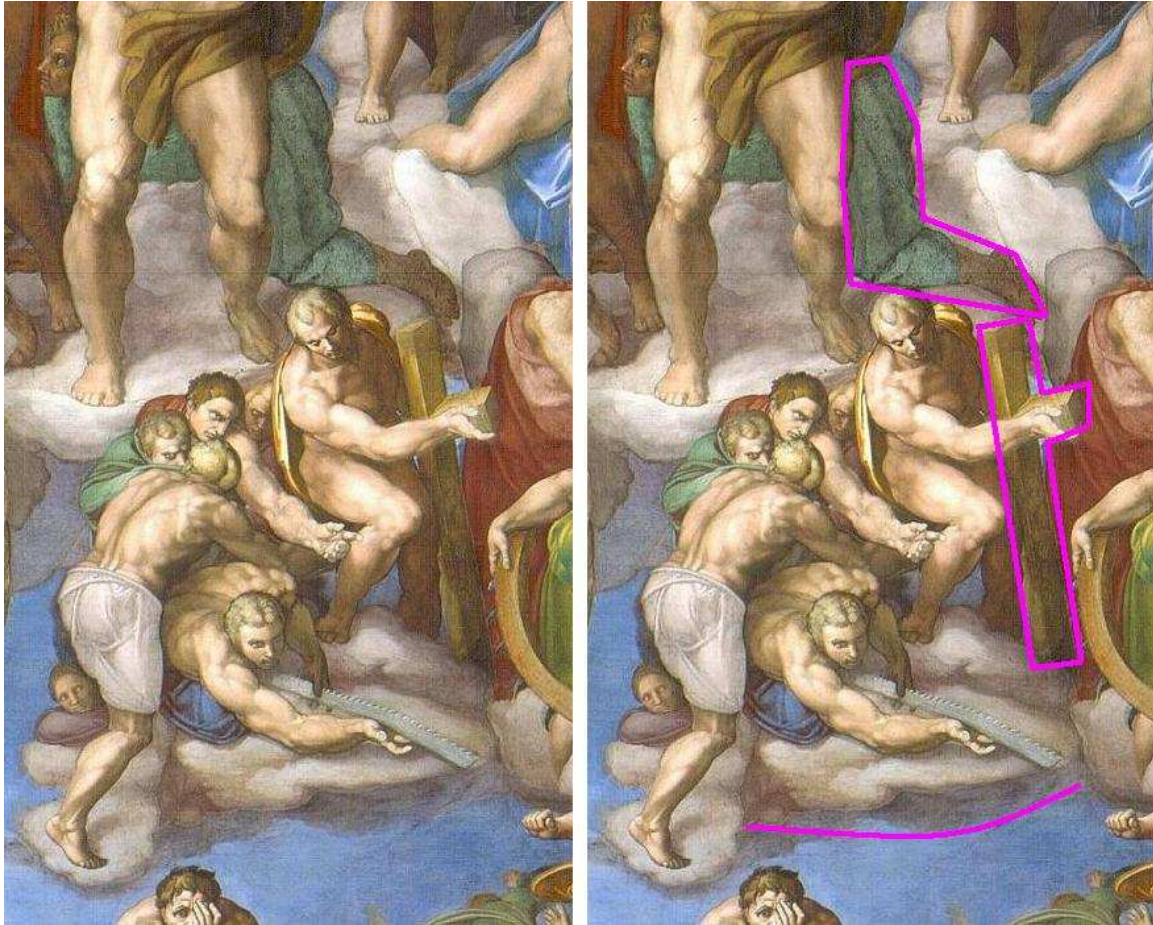
The round shape of the cerebellum has been more clearly define with a cloud. The base of the tongue has been also shaped perfectly with clouds.



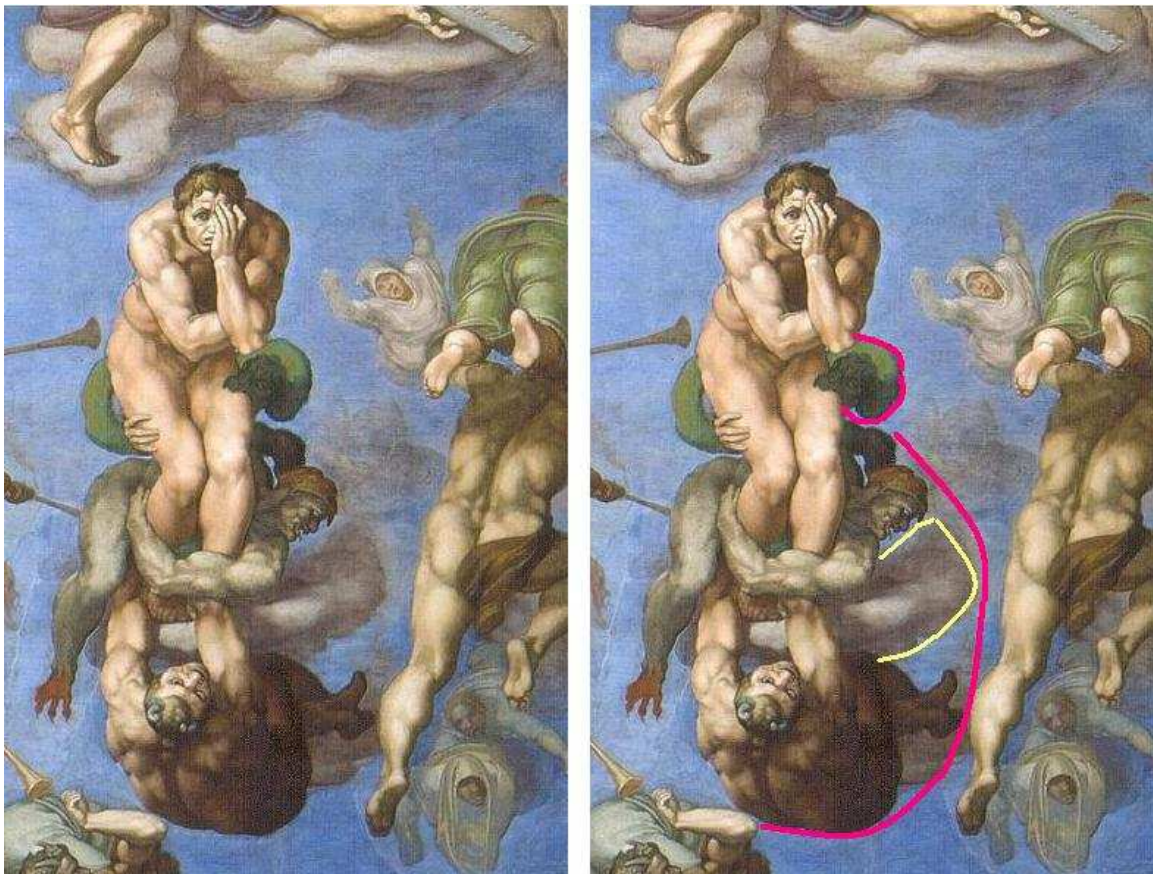
Here we see the nose:

- the lower part of the nose is made with a cloud
- the front section with a cross
- and the upper nose demarcation with a led

The 3 sections are perfectly aligned



A snake has been added to form the lower lip and a cloud to make the chin rounder.

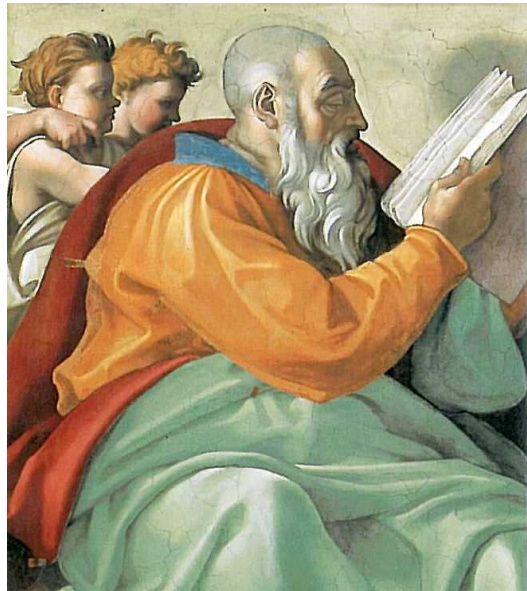
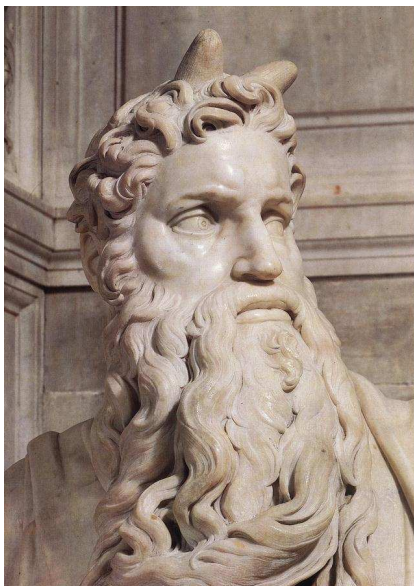


Conclusion

The "Michelangelo code"

There are 4 distinctive theories about hidden message or hidden images. The most recent one is about Jewish messages in the 2 big frescoes. I don't have read the book, but for me it's impossible because Michelangelo was very religious in the catholic religion. Artistically we can notice that he made horns to his Moses because of the mistranslation of the Vulgate bible. There is no evidence that he have extensive knowledge or interest in the Kabala.

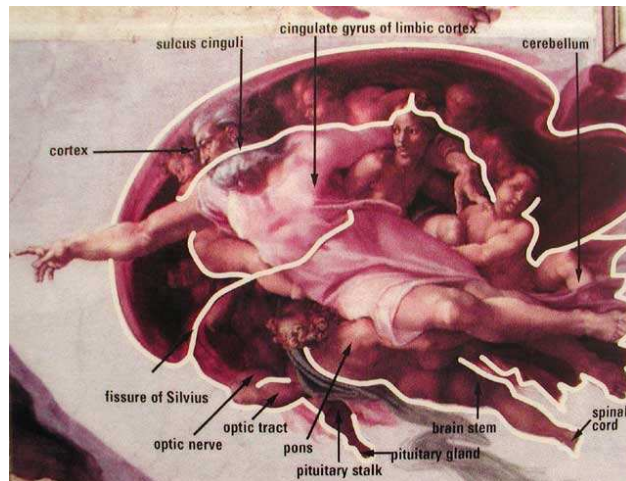
The art critic Waldemar Januszczak believes that the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is a kind of preparation for the end of the world similar to the beliefs of the Dravidians. There maybe some truth into that, but artistically this is not very important. The most important thing for art historian to know is the development of surrealism in those 2 frescoes. In my opinion, the real message we should understand in this "Michelangelo code" is that Michelangelo wants to tell us that he was able to do art differently. Anatomy lesson is useless for practical use and the tribute to Dante is just an interesting reminder of Michelangelo interest about the poet.



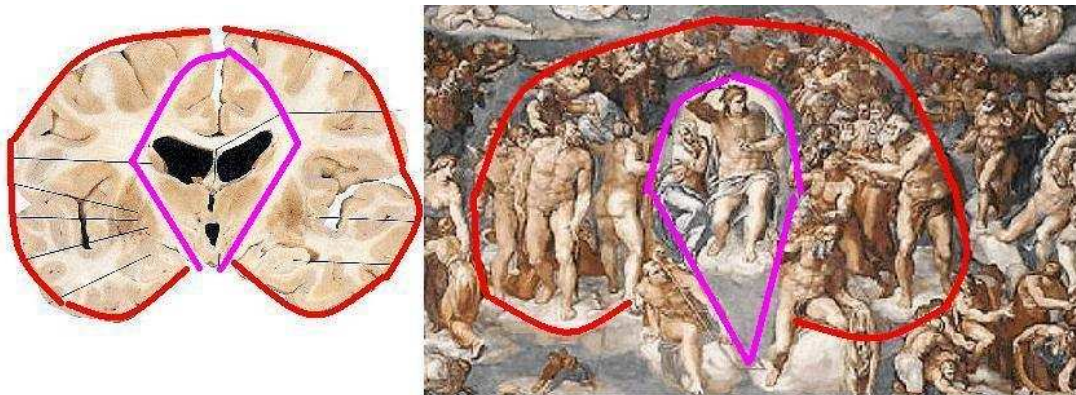
3D image of the human brain in the Sistine chapel

I think that is very important to underline that we can see the anatomy of the brain not in one angle but in three different angles.

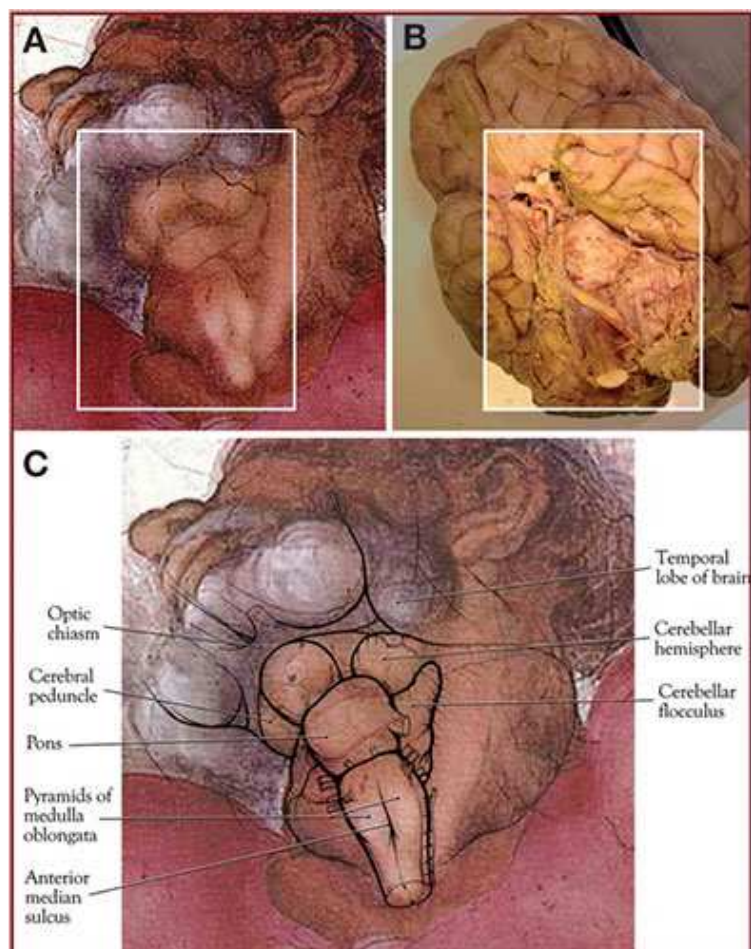
1) Cross section



2) Mid-sagittal cross-section



3) Spinal cord and brain stem



My conclusion on the 2 surrealist acts of the Sistine Chapel

It's very interesting to see a progression in the complexity of surrealism from the first to the second act. Some people have called me very ingenious to have found all these coincidences. I was somehow quite happy to be called ingenious, but the real truth lies elsewhere: Michelangelo is the real genius who had the imagination and artistic vision to do all that. I'm not much more than a good analyst or a good viewer.

To be honest, I am very puzzle when art historians look at all this and don't even have an open mind about the possibility that Michelangelo could have plan and create many hidden images. Personally I feel that they don't give much respect the creative genius of Michelangelo or they misunderstand completely his unbelievable talent. I just hope my document could help them to put many elements in relation and to have a better perspective of a more intangible side of Michelangelo's art.

Jean-François David
Quebec City, Canada
1-418-523-2348
jfdavid2006@hotmail.com