



Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel

By Andrew Graham-Dixon

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You cannot stand underneath the masterwork that is the Sistine Chapel without considering the genius and painstaking work that went into its creation.

Michelangelo Buonarroti never wanted to paint the Sistine Chapel, though.

Appointed by the temperamental Julius II, Michelangelo believed the suspiciously large-scale project to be a plot for failure conspired by his rivals and the "Warrior Pope." After all, Michelangelo was not a painter—he was a sculptor. The noble artist reluctantly took on the daunting task that would damage his neck, back, and eyes (if you have ever strained to admire the real thing, you know). Andrew Graham-Dixon tells the story behind the famous painted ceiling over which the great artist painfully toiled for four long years.

Linking Michelangelo's personal life to his work on the Sistine Chapel, Graham-Dixon describes Michelangelo's unique depiction of the Book of Genesis, tackles ambiguities in the work, and details the painstaking work that went into Michelangelo's magnificent creation. Complete with rich, full-color illustrations and Graham-Dixon's articulate narrative, *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel* is an indispensable and significant piece of art criticism. It humanizes this heavenly masterpiece in a way that every art enthusiast, student, and professional can understand and appreciate.

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Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel By Andrew Graham-Dixon **Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #466847 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Skyhorse Publishing
- Published on: 2009-02-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 6.40" w x 6.00" l, 1.03 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 240 pages

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Graham-Dixon, former art critic for the *Independent*, brings to the fore the greatest achievement of the genius who perhaps best deserves the designation Renaissance man. After a short biography of Michelangelo up to his reluctant acceptance of the pope's commission, Graham-Dixon analyzes the masterpiece itself. He excels at contextualization, appropriately calling the chapel "a simple rectangular building" and making plain how the artist strongly insisted he was a sculptor, not a painter of frescoes. The figures created in this hallowed space are nearly as sculptural as anything truly in the round, a fact the author emphasizes. Graham-Dixon is adept at analyzing the pictorial scheme in its entirety and interpreting the dozens of individual sections of the ceiling's barrel vault. He has managed to resurrect, in an attenuated scholarly nugget, the popular appeal of this great and beloved landmark of the Western world. A focused and instructive read, this refreshing look at a familiar topic should attract a wide readership.—Douglas F. Smith, Berkeley P.L., CA

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Review

Graham-Dixon depicts a wonderfully strange man and his strangely wonderful masterpiece OBSERVER

About the Author

Andrew Graham-Dixon has presented six landmark series on art for the BBC, including the acclaimed *A History of British Art*, *Renaissance* and *Art of Eternity*, as well as numerous individual documentaries on art and artists. For more than twenty years he has published a weekly column on art, first in the *Independent* and, more recently, in the *Sunday Telegraph*. He has written a number of acclaimed books, on subjects ranging from medieval painting and sculpture to the art of the present, including *Caravaggio: A Life Sacred and Profane*, *Art: The Definitive Visual Guide*, and *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel*.

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