

Brutus

Michelangelo made this bust for Cardinal Niccolò Ridolfi at the suggestion of the Florentine historian Donato Giannotti. Both members of the anti-Medici faction, they wanted to celebrate republican freedom through the example of Brutus, the man who killed that symbol of tyranny Julius Caesar. The choice of subject alluded implicitly to the murder in 1536 of Duke Alessandro de Medici, the ruler of Florence, by Lorenzo de Medici, known as Lorenzino, who was thus considered as a tyrannicide, just like Brutus. In 1574, the bust was acquired by the Medici, who appear to have forgotten all about its inspiration. In the seventeenth century, the Grand Dukes hypocritically sought to justify the technique of *non finito*, or «unfinished,» with which the marble statue was sculpted by claiming (as is stated in the inscription that they had carved on the base) that Michelangelo's decision not to finish the work was intended to show his revulsion for such a cruel deed. The work was seen very differently in the eighteenth century and the Romantic era, when it became a symbol of republican virtues and of the moral and civil greatness of the man who goes against his own feelings for a common cause. The bust, whose drapery was completed by his assistant Tiberio Calcagni, reveals a significant contrast between the vibrant and rough surfaces of the face, carved by Michelangelo with cross hatching to which he gave no finish, and the flat and conventional modeling of his disciple. The sources tell us that the model was a bust carved in an ancient carnelian: in any case, it is clear that it was directly derived from the Roman busts of the time of Caracalla. The tunic is fixed at the shoulder by a clasp that bears, as if in a cameo, the profile of Donato Giannotti.