

## Pietà

According to Condivi, Michelangelo made this sculptural group with the intention of donating it to some church in Rome (perhaps Santa Maria Maggiore) and having himself buried at the foot of the altar on which it would have been set. Dissatisfied with his work, he tried to destroy the sculpture before it was finished (breaking off Christ's left arm) and then gave it to his faithful assistant Urbino. Clumsily restored by Tiberio Calcagni, who carved the inexpressive figure of Mary Magdalen, it was then acquired by his Florentine friend Francesco Bandini, who set it up in his Roman gardens at Montecavallo. Finally it was taken to Florence by Grand Duke Cosimo III sometime before 1674. The sculpture, which combines the motif of the *Deposition from the Cross* with that of the *Pietà*, represents the lifeless body of Christ twisted into a «serpentine» pose that is characteristic of many of Michelangelo's figures and very similar to that of the *Dying Slave* in the Louvre. Christ is supported and embraced by the Madonna, who finally joins her Son once again, with the help of Mary Magdalen and Nicodemus. Vasari claims that the latter's face is an idealized self-portrait of the master. The verticality of the group is accentuated by the imposing figure of Nicodemus, who supports both Christ and the Madonna, uniting them in an ultimate spiritual marriage whose extremely moving effect is enhanced by the use of the unfinished technique, suggesting the interpenetration of the two bodies.