

Rondanini Pietà

The *Rondanini Pietà*, so-called after the Roman palace in which it stood for almost four hundred years, was executed in two distinct phases: around the middle of the 1550s Michelangelo was working on a *Pietà* of larger than life size, which remained for a long time in his studio in an incomplete state. The parts of this version that are still visible are the mutilated arm and a few traces on the head of the Madonna, who was originally looking upward. A fragment of this first version, comprising the head and shoulders of the dead Christ, was found as recently as 1972 and is now in Florence. Reflections of Michelangelo's original idea can be seen in the *Deposition* by Taddeo Zuccari in the Galleria Borghese in Rome (ca. 1560) and Bronzino's *Pietà* in Santa Croce in Florence. The master went back to the marble shortly before his death, making considerable changes to it by reducing it slightly in size and making the proportions of the figures longer and slimmer to meet the demands of his inner self, impalpable and enervated vision, interpreted by some as a mystical return to Gothic art. The certainty of his imminent death certainly influenced the conception of this last work on which we know Michelangelo was still working a week before he died, at the age of eighty-nine.