

Drunken Bacchus

In 1496, Michelangelo carved a *Sleeping Cupid* inspired by classical art that, without the sculptor's knowledge, was acquired as an antique by Cardinal Raffaello Sansoni Riario in Rome. Having discovered the deception and rejected the *Cupid*. The cardinal, who was an enthusiastic collector of ancient sculpture, wanted the young artist to try his hand at producing a sculpture that would be on a par with the works in his collection and commissioned from him a «life-size» statue of Bacchus. The sculpture was carved in 1497 but it, too, was rejected and never took its place in the Chancellery Palace. Instead, it was bought by the banker Jacopo Galli who kept it, together with other examples of ancient art, in the garden of his Roman house near San Lorenzo in Damaso. Its presence there, though with the right hand missing, is recorded in a drawing by Maerten van Heemskerck and in a print by Cornelis de Vos. In 1571 the statue was acquired by Francesco de Medici, perhaps because of the praise heaped on it by Vasari in the *Lives* and placed in the Galleria degli Uffizi. Bacchus, represented with his attributes (satyr, goblet, bunch of grapes, and vine leaves), is visibly in a drunken state, and its attitude is very different from the strong ones preferred by the artist over much of his career. So different, in fact, that had it been discovered today it is unlikely that it would have been attributed to Michelangelo. It shows that he was able to capture not just the form, but also the spirit of ancient works of sculpture. He achieved effects of sensuality and delicacy that had no parallel in the art of his time.