

Prisoners

Dying Slave, Rebellious Slave

HISTORICAL NOTES: The two statues are believed to have been carved around 1513 for the second design for Julius II's tomb. In fact, Michelangelo referred to them in a letter recounting a visit paid to him by Luca Signorelli at his house on via Macel dei Corvi, while he was working on a statue «with its hands behind its back.» They were to be placed against the pillars in the lower part of Julius II's tomb. Eliminated from the design in 1542, they were given by the artist to Roberto Strozzi as a mark of appreciation for having taken care of him during his illness in 1544. When Strozzi was sent into exile in Lyons in 1550, he had the statues taken to France. After spending some time in the Constable of Montmorency's collection, they ended up in that of Cardinal Richelieu and his heirs. In the nineteenth century, they were acquired by the French government and placed in the Louvre.

ICONOGRAPHY AND STYLE: Vasari attributes a historical significance to the iconography of the *Prisoners*, claiming that they represented the provinces subjugated by Julius II. Condivi, on the other hand, sees them as an allegory of the arts connected with the pope's death. More recently, it has been suggested that they represent the human soul struggling against the chains of the body. Just as in the *Saint Matthew*, Michelangelo adopted a fluid sensitivity of design, giving the forms a more pictorial character. Through the «unfinished» technique he conveyed two contrasting attitudes: the *Rebellious Slave* as an expression of heroism and the rebellion of the soul against matter; the *Dying Slave* as an exaltation of a disquieting and spiritual beauty.