

## Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

### Michelangelo the colorist

Vasari emphasized the naturalness with which Michelangelo represented human figures, praising his skillful handling of perspective and spiritual intensity. But the discovery of Michelangelo's talent as a colorist is a recent one (apart from some comments made by Montégut in 1870) owing to the grime that has obscured our view of his frescoes. Their restoration has revealed such a wealth of color and such a free and varied orchestration of these tints that it has become necessary to revise all the earlier references to his having taken a sculptural approach to these frescoes. Indeed, Michelangelo has now to be placed alongside the most extreme of the Mannerists, the painters who made use of sharp and iridescent colors and indulged in abstract chromatic contrasts. This explains, after the decoration of the Sistine Chapel, the bright tints of Rosso, the extravagance of color of Beccafumi, and the abstractions of Pontormo, all artists whose style was influenced by that work.

### Restorations

As early as 1543, an official «cleaner» of the ceiling was appointed. In 1565, following the loss of some pieces of plaster, the first restorations were carried out by Carnevale. These were followed by others in 1625, around 1710, in 1903-05, and in 1935-06. During these interventions, the paintings were «freshened» with a glue-based varnish that gave them a temporary luster but then absorbed dust and smoke. There were also numerous infiltrations of water. All this has been put right by the recent restoration work, completed in 1994, which has given the magnificent work back its original splendor.