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Edited by Marcia B. Hall
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MICHELANGELO'S *LAST JUDGMENT*

Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* was the most criticized and discussed painting of the sixteenth century. The subject of the *Last Judgment* has been a barometer throughout history of cultural mood. It can be interpreted, as Michelangelo did, as the moment when mortals attain eternal bliss or, in more unsettled times, as the terrifying moment when we face the justice of the Lord and are found wanting. Michelangelo created his fresco in the final flowering of Renaissance humanism. Four years after its unveiling, the Council of Trent began meeting and the Counter-Reformation was underway. Caught on the cusp of a major shift of values, Michelangelo and his fresco were praised by lovers of art and condemned by conservative churchmen who sought a tool with which to exhort the wavering faithful tempted to defect to Protestantism. This book explores the context, both historical and biographical, in which the fresco was created and the debates about the style and function of religious art that it generated.

Marcia B. Hall is Professor of Art History at Temple University in Philadelphia. A scholar of the Italian Renaissance, she is the author of numerous books and articles, most recently *After Raphael: Painting in Central Italy in the Sixteenth Century* and *Michelangelo: The Frescoes of the Sistine Chapel*.

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Temple University



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CONTRIBUTORS

MARCIA B. HALL (Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) is the author of several books including *After Raphael: Painting in Central Italy in the Sixteenth Century*; *Michelangelo: The Frescoes of the Sistine Chapel*; and *Color and Meaning: Practice and Theory in Renaissance Painting*. She has edited *Raphael's School of Athens* and *The Cambridge Companion to Raphael*, and she is the series editor of *Artistic Centers of the Italian Renaissance*, currently in preparation at Cambridge University Press.

MARGARET A. KUNTZ is currently Assistant Professor of Art History at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey. Her most recent publication on the design and function of the Cappella Paolina appeared in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. She has written articles on the Cappella Paolina, the Vatican Palace, and New Saint Peter's.

THOMAS F. MAYER (Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois) has written extensively on the religion and politics of sixteenth-century Europe, particularly Italy and England. Among his recent publications are *Reginald Pole, Prince and Prophet* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and the first two of five projected volumes of Pole's correspondence (Ashgate). He is editor of the monograph series "Catholic Christendom 1300–1700," also published by Ashgate.

MELINDA SCHLITT (Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania) is the author of several articles on Francesco Salviati and recently compiled and edited a collection of new essays with Joseph Marino, *Perspectives*

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on Early Modern and Modern Intellectual History – Essays in Honor of Nancy S. Struener (University of Rochester Press, 2001).

WILLIAM E. WALLACE (Washington University in Saint Louis) is the author and editor of four books on Michelangelo, including *Michelangelo at San Lorenzo: The Genius as Entrepreneur* (Cambridge University Press, 1994) and *Michelangelo: Complete Sculpture, Painting, Architecture* (Hugh Levin, 1998). In addition, he has published more than fifty articles and chapters on various aspects of Renaissance art.

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My part of this book has been a long time in the making. I first started thinking about the fresco in 1972. That research resulted in my 1976 *Art Bulletin* article, “Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*: Resurrection of the Body and Predestination.” A paper delivered at the conference in 1996 in Santa Barbara on the conservation of the Sistine frescoes and another the following year at the annual meeting of the College Art Association in New York brought my thinking to a new stage, which I presented in *Michelangelo, The Sistine Chapel Frescoes* (contracted by Ulteya Press in Milan and published in English by Abrams, 2002). Since then I have pursued the reception of the fresco in the context of the emerging Counter-Reformation and discovered some fascinating new material on the meaning that the *Last Judgment* would have had to the Church, challenged to staunch the hemorrhage of the faithful to the Lutheran and Reformed churches.

So many people have contributed to my research over this long trajectory that it would be difficult to catalogue them. Recently they include Nicholas Horsfall, who generously aided me in translating and interpreting Cajetan’s Latin. Dana Prescott and William Wallace read earlier versions of the text. I have continued to receive kind help from Sandro Chierici and Massimo Giacometti of Ulteya Press. Libraries from the University of Arizona to the American Academy in Rome have welcomed me and aided my research. Temple University has supported me with Study Leaves, Summer Research Grants, and Grants in Aid. Students in my graduate seminar in 2001 read the papers

and commented on them from the perspective of those for whom the book is intended.

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