

ought not to believe that an outstanding sculptor chips off when he should not, because otherwise he would not do what his art requires, but he will make a complete model, where he can add and take off more easily than the painter, and then, transferring this model to the final work with exact measurements, he will not have to add anything for having taken too much away. But if, however, he should desire or need to add something, who is not aware how easily he can do it? Are not colossal statues made of many pieces? And how many statues have their busts, their arms, or whatever is missing remade? Not to mention the plugs that one sees in many statues that come out brand new from the hands of the artists with such patches. The art of sculpture does not consist in avoiding repairs, because when a statue should be made up of an infinite number of pieces, if it is still good, it does not mar the quality of the art.<sup>4</sup>

Answering the third argument, painters say that it is quite true that the purpose of both arts is the imitation of Nature, but which of the two comes closer to this end will be discussed later. Here we shall only say that sculptors do not imitate Nature more because they work in three dimensions, but that in fact they rather take over the object that was already made three-dimensional by Nature; so that rotundity, thickness, or anything else of that kind does not belong to art, because height and breadth and all the qualities of solids already existed in the material, but all that belongs to the art are the lines that outline such a body, which are on the surface; therefore, as we said, the three-dimensional existence does not appertain to art but to Nature, and the same objection also applies when they speak of touch, because, as it has already been said, to find that an object is three-dimensional is not a result of art.

## UNFINISHED

Michelangelo: Answer to Benedetto Varchi <sup>1</sup>

MESSER BENEDETTO,

So that it may be clear that I have received your little book, which duly reached me, I will make such a reply as I can to what you ask, although I am very ignorant on the subject. I believe that painting is

<sup>4</sup> The Medici used to have the ancient works of their collections restored. The colossus made up of many pieces which Bronzino is thinking of is probably the Laocoön. When it was discovered the joints were carefully studied.

<sup>1</sup> English translation from Robert W. Carden, *Michelangelo, A Record of His Life as Told in His Own Letters and Papers* (London: Constable & Company, Ltd., 1913). Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

considered excellent in proportion as it approaches the effect of relief, while relief is considered bad in proportion as it approaches the effect of painting.

I used to consider that sculpture was the lantern of painting and that between the two things there was the same difference as that between the sun and the moon. But now that I have read your book, in which, speaking as a philosopher, you say that things which have the same end are themselves the same, I have changed my opinion;<sup>2</sup> and I now consider that painting and sculpture are one and the same thing, unless greater nobility be imparted by the necessity for a better judgment, greater difficulties of execution, stricter limitations and harder work. And to have this admitted no painter ought to do less sculpture than painting and no sculptor less painting than sculpture. By sculpture I mean the sort that is executed by cutting away from the block: the sort that is executed by adding resembles painting.<sup>3</sup>

Suffice that, since one and the other (that is to say, both painting and sculpture) proceed from the same faculty, it would be an easy matter to establish harmony between them and to let such disputes alone, for they occupy more time than the execution of the figures themselves. As to that man who wrote saying that painting was more noble than sculpture,<sup>4</sup> if he had known as much about the other subjects on which he has written, why, my serving-maid would have written better!

I could add an infinite number of things which have not yet been pointed out and which might be said about these arts, but, as I have already said, they would take up too much time and I have very little to spare, seeing that I am old and almost fitted to be numbered among the dead. For this reason I beg of you to excuse me. And I recommend myself to you and send you all possible thanks of the excessive and undeserved honor you do me.

[ROME, 1549]

YOUR MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI IN ROME

### *Pino's Vindication of Painting*

*The Dialogo di pittura by the painter Paolo Pino was published in Venice in 1548, precisely between the date of Varchi's inquiry (1547)*

<sup>2</sup> It is quite obvious that Varchi's "philosophical" decision did not impress Michelangelo, who sticks to traditional criteria: the intellectual effort involved, the difficulties to be overcome, etc. This proves that Michelangelo was aware of the main lines of the discussion.

<sup>3</sup> Sculpture executed "by adding" is modeling (and consequently also the art of bronze), which is considered inferior to marble sculpture. The distinction between the two methods "by adding" and "by taking away" is classic and can be found in Pliny.

<sup>4</sup> Leonardo, of course.