

# Discovering the **Accademia Gallery**: A Visitor's Treasure Guide

Unveiling Michelangelo's David and Renaissance Wonders



# INTRODUCTION

Hello, art enthusiasts! If you're holding this guide, you're about to enter into the magnificent world of the Accademia Gallery, a treasure trove of Renaissance art and home to the legendary Michelangelo's David. We Florence With Locals Group Tours & Tickets crafted this friendly guide to enhance your experience and make every step in this historic gallery an unforgettable journey. So, lace up your comfiest shoes, charge your camera, and let's dive into the heart of artistic brilliance together!

## Navigating the Accademia Gallery

Walking through the halls of the Accademia is like travelling through time. To help you on your journey, we've included a detailed map in this e-Book guide. Don't miss the Hall of the Colossus, where you'll find grand paintings and sculptures setting the stage for the masterpieces that await. And for a truly seamless experience, remember to book your priority tickets through our service – we ensure that your entry is as timely as the strokes of a Renaissance painter!

## Services & Amenities

- Small book shop in the Hall of the Anticolosso (next to the metal detector)
- Large book shop by the exit of the museum after the Byzantine Halls
- No cloakroom
- Umbrella-holder before entering the Hall of the Colossus (remember to pick up your umbrella when exiting the museum)
- Restrooms on lower level (near exit)
- Multimedia room (on the first floor)
- All the necessary equipment is installed to make the museum entirely



## HISTORY OF THE ACCADEMIA GALLERY

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The Accademia Gallery, one of the symbols of Florence, is second only to the Uffizi for the highest number of visitors annually. It has a complex evolution reflects the events of Italian history through the centuries. The collection is housed on the premises formerly occupied by the late mediaeval convent of San Niccolò di Cafaggio and the 15th-century hospital of San Matteo. In 1784, Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo of Lorraine, the successor to the Medici line after the death of Gian Gastone de' Medici in 1737, decided to allocate these spaces for the creation of an Academy of Fine Arts and the Galleria dell'Accademia, intended as an atelier for aesthetic and intellectual training.

The first nucleus of works has developed over the centuries into an ever-growing collection of statues, plaster casts, and paintings of secular and religious subjects, resulting from bequests made by Florentine museums and acquisitions from religious buildings suppressed by the Leopoldine and Napoleonic reforms.

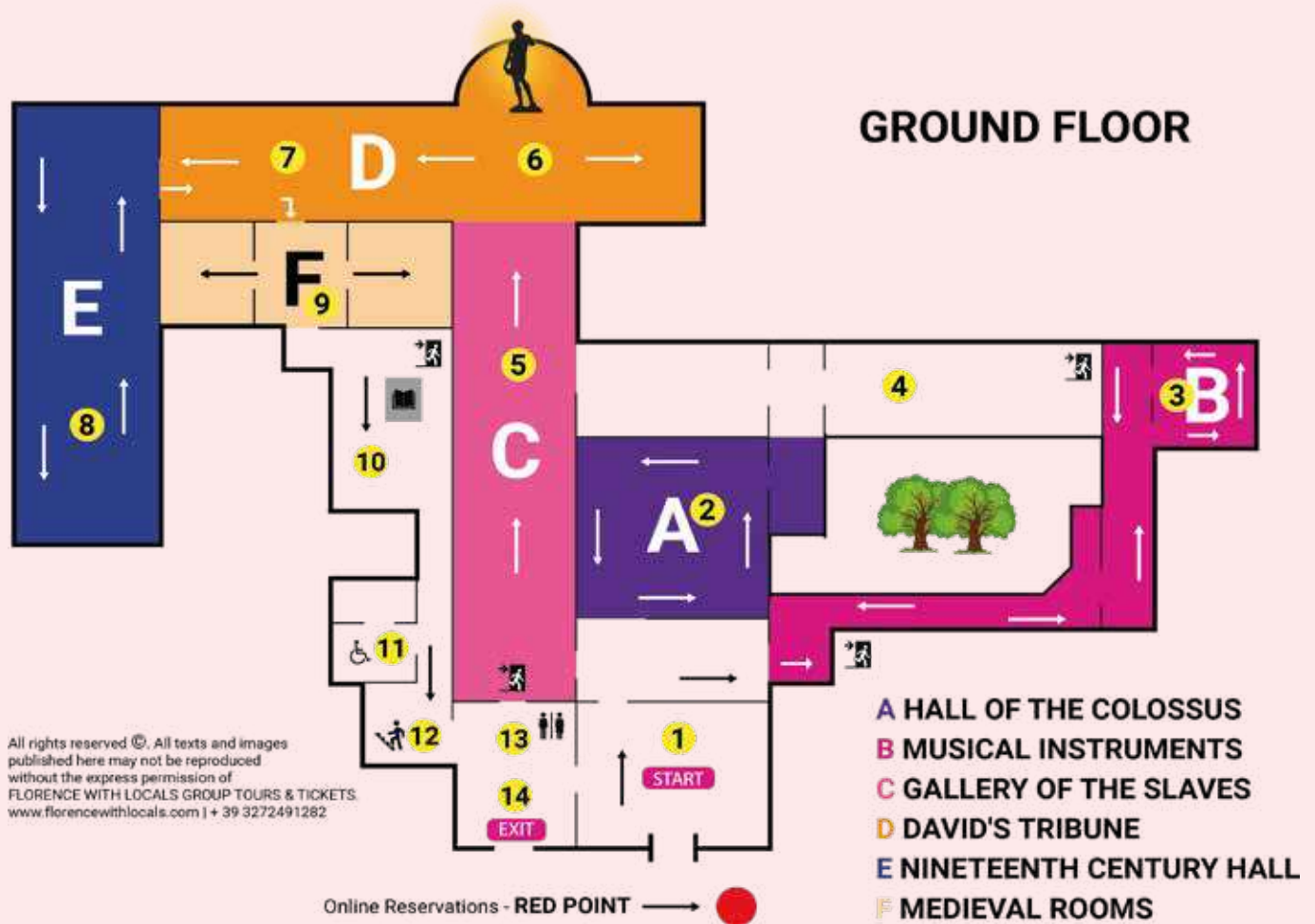


The Accademia is world-famous for preserving Michelangelo's David, placed there in 1873 as part of a national programme to revalue the artistic heritage by the Kingdom of Italy, of which Florence was the second capital from 1865 to 1871. The works on display, without following a strict chronological order, celebrate Florentine and Tuscan artistic excellence from the Middle Ages to the late 18th century.

The museum's collection has been further enriched since 1996, with a section devoted to musical instruments from the Medici and Lorraine collections, thanks to a request from the Luigi Cherubini Conservatory.



# THE VISIT



01 Entrance Hall

02 Hall of the Colossus

03 Musical Instruments

04 Temporary Exhibitions

05 Hall of the Prisoners

06 The David

07 The Tribune

08 Plaster Cast Gallery

09 Medieval Painting

10 Bookshop

11 Accessible Restroom and Elevator

12 Staircase to Upper Floor

13 Staircase to the lower Floor of the restrooms

14 Exit

## 02 HALL OF THE COLOSSUS



The Accademia Gallery welcomes visitors to the Hall of the Colossus, the hall completely restyled in December 2013. The hall earned its name during the XIXth century, when it welcomed the plaster cast of an ancient statue, one of the Montecavallo Dioskouri, now no longer present in the Gallery. Today, the hall hosts an equally famous sculpture, the plaster cast of the Rape of the Sabine women by Giambologna, whose marble version is still located under the Loggia dei Lanzi in Piazza della Signoria in Florence.

Around the statue, on the walls, are a series of masterpieces from the early XVth century, fully representative of the Florentine cultural scenario of the time. In this same hall, visitors can observe a series of astonishing masterpieces, such as the Cassone Adimari or the Madonna of the Sea by Botticelli. The hall also features examples of day-to-day productions by some of the most active workshops in Renaissance Florence, such as the ones led by Domenico Ghirlandaio or Cosimo Rosselli.



Sandro Botticelli (attr.) (1445-1510), Madonna with Child known as the Madonna of the Sea, 1475-1480

These realities were thoroughly organized workshops where the masters would work alongside groups of collaborators and pupils to complete the numerous painting commissions to decorate the altars of the city's churches.



Giovanni di ser Giovanni Guidi (known as Lo Scheggia) (1406-1486), Cassone Adimari, ca. 1440-1450

## 02 MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The Accademia Gallery in Florence hosts a whole section dedicated to antique musical instruments, including those created by the luthier Antonio Stradivari and Bartolomeo Cristofori, the piano inventor. It is a real gem to explore for opera, theater, and classical music lovers.



The Musical Instruments Museum was opened in 2001 and exhibits about fifty instruments from the private collections of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany, Medici, and Lorraine, collected between the second half of the XVII century and the first half of the XIX century and later passed to the Cherubini Conservatory in Florence.





The collection shows how music has played a leading role at the Medici court. The piano was, for example, an invention created precisely for the Medici by Bartolomeo Cristofori, who was called to the court by Grand Prince Ferdinando as a manufacturer of musical instruments in 1688. He devoted himself to experimenting with new materials and creating innovative sounds. He invented a new keyboard instrument in which the strings, instead of being plucked as with the harpsichord, were beaten by hammers to produce a softer sound: the piano.

Among ancient harpsichord, wind instruments, and percussion, we find a unique piece by the master Antonio Stradivari (1644 - 1737), a viola perfectly preserved in its original state. It was made of spruce pine wood for the Medici quintet, consisting of two violins, two violas, and a cello. The villa is perfect in its extreme elegance and sophistication with delicate mother-of-pearl inlay, ivory and ebony, and details of the Medici coat of arms. But this is not the only Stradivari piece on display; there's also a violin from 1716 and a cello from 1690. Furthermore, there is a violin and a cello from 1650 by Niccolò Amati, an important lutist who taught to S t r a d i v a r i .



# 05 HALL OF THE PRISONERS

Walking into this hall from the hall of the Colossus, immediately to the right of the entrance stands a bronze portrait bust of Michelangelo by Daniele da Volterra (1509-1566), pupil and close friend of Michelangelo.



The Prison Gallery, (Gallery of the Prisoners) is located in the former ward of the 15th-century San Matteo Hospital dedicated to male patients. The Prisoners (slave) Gallery owes its name to the four famous sculptures by Michelangelo. Initially destined for the Mausoleum, Pope Julius II intended to build the church of Saint Peter in the Vatican; following various vicissitudes and the death of Michelangelo, the statues ended up in the Cosimo I de' Medici collection.

The Grand Duke had them placed in the grotto of Buontalenti in the Boboli Gardens, where they remained until 1909 when they were transferred to the Accademia. The Gallery also hosts the statue of Saint Matthew, sculpted by Michelangelo for the Florence Cathedral in 1505-1506. The Palestrina Pietà completes the collection of works by Michelangelo, but the attribution of this artwork to the artist remains uncertain.



Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), Prigione known as lo Schiavo giovane (the Young Slave), ca. 1525-1530



Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), Prigione known as St Matthew, 1505-1506



Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), Prigione known as Atlante (Atlas), ca. 1525-1530



Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), Prigione known as Schiavo che si ridesta (the Awakening Slave), ca. 1525-1530

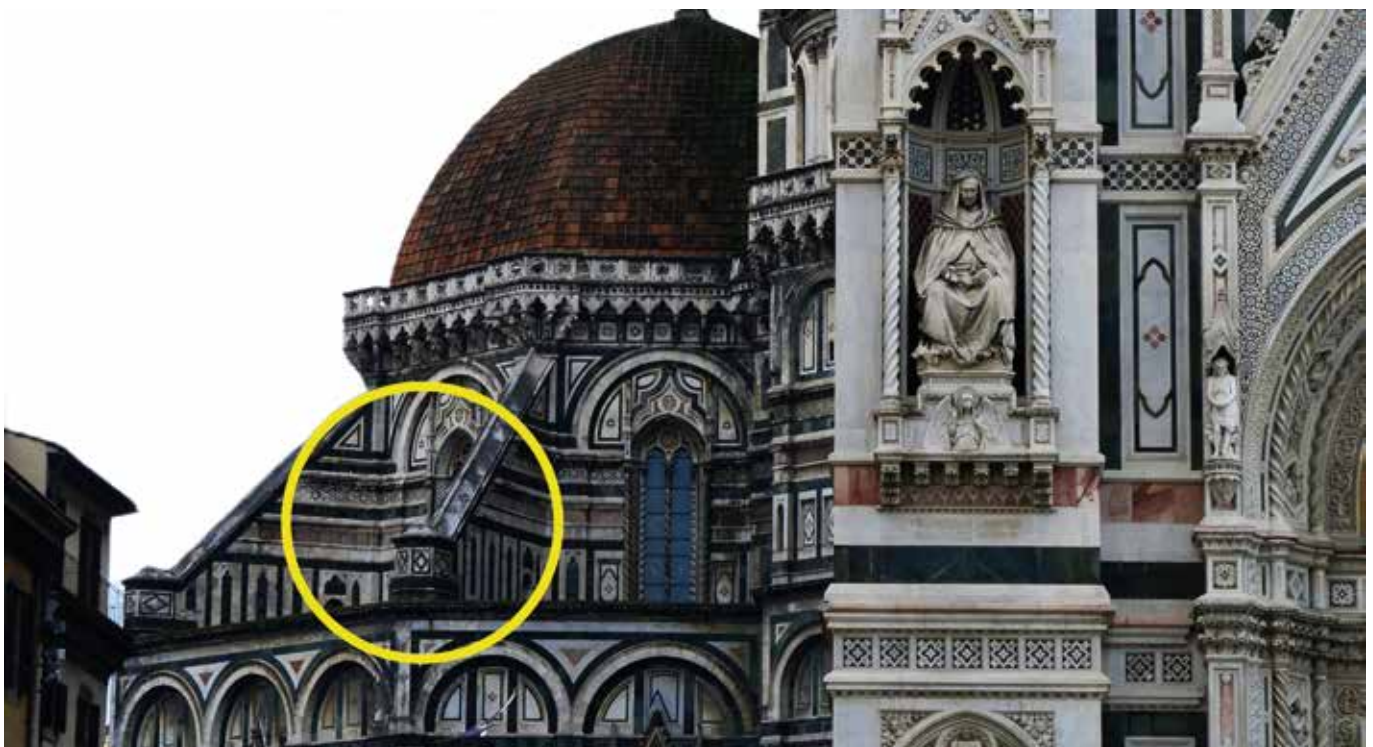
## 07 THE TRIBUNE OF THE DAVID

During the 1850s, there was an intense debate about the conservation of Michelangelo's magnificent David, which had stood outdoors in Piazza della Signoria since 1504. The architect Emilio de Fabris was entrusted to design a square-shaped Tribune within the Accademia at the end of the so-called "Gallery of Ancient Paintings," corresponding to today's Hall of the Prisoners. The David should have been placed in the center of the Tribune under a bright skylight, a halo-like dome, in 1873. In August of that year, the David, transported within a wooden frame, was removed from Piazza della Signoria and moved toward the Accademia on rails especially built for the move. But it wasn't moved into the Accademia... since the Tribune wasn't complete! Documents from the archive narrate that the statue remained inside the wooden cart just outside until 1882, when the Tribune was completed and opened to the public. This means David stood inside a wooden crate for 9 years!

At first, the side wings of the Tribune were used to exhibit copies of Michelangelo's works and, later on, tapestries. Today, we can admire David, ideally framed by artworks by other 16th-century artists, including Carlo Portelli (1510-1574), Cecchino Salviati(1510-1562), Stefano Pieri (1542-1629), Angolo Bronzino(1503-1572), and Alessandro Allori(1535-1607), along these two wings of the Tribune. The choice of these artists is to emphasize their relationship with Michelangelo's life, works, and the cultural influence his works had on these artists.

# 06 MICHELANGELO'S DAVID

The story of the statue of David begins with a stone block brought to Florence by boat across the Mediterranean and Arno from the Fantiscritti quarry in Carrara. This block was stored for years waiting to be carved. In the middle of the 15th century, the managers of the Opera del Duomo and the leaders of the Union of the Knitters of Florence promoted an ambitious project that consisted of sculpting twelve figures to decorate the exterior of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore today known as the Duomo of Florence.



The Original plan was to place David on one of the 12 pedestals at the base of the buttresses around the Cathedral ( yellow circle on the picture) of Florence (Duomo).

This block of marble of 5.50 meters was called "the giant." after that, in 1460, Agostino di Duccio and Antonio Rossellino tried to sculpt it without success, leaving it impracticable to be part of the project and falling back into oblivion in some warehouse. At the beginning of the 16th century, the project resumed evaluating the names of the artists of the moment, such as Andrea Sansovino, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo Buonarroti.



After the original David was moved to Accademia Gallery from its location at Palazzo Vecchio or Piazza Della Signoria, It was replaced with a copy of David.

In 1501, the Opera del Duomo of Florence officially commissioned this project to Michelangelo, provoking an interest such that this genius isolated himself to make the sculpture. Michelangelo sculpted the David from September of 1501 until May of 1504, resulting in this icon of the Renaissance with a size and proportions of enormous dimensions. The David is just over 5 meters high and exceeds five tons.

# 10 SECRETS OF STATUE OF DAVID BY MICHELANGELO

1. Michelangelo's David is massive at 17 feet tall and over 12,000 pounds, yet it is sculpted from a single block of white marble.
2. The block of marble that Michelangelo used to carve "David" had been worked on more than 50 years earlier by Donatello. At that time, the marble was said to have flaws, and the project was abandoned.
3. Michelangelo broke with artistic tradition by portraying David before his battle with Goliath rather than afterward, as seen in representations by Caravaggio and Donatello.
4. Unruly protesters flung a chair that broke the statue's left arm in three spots during an uprising in 1527.
5. In 1857, reigning Queen Victoria was so taken aback by the nudity of a replica David statue that she ordered a plaster fig leaf to be cast to cover his genitals before he went on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.
6. Although it has remained in Florence for over 500 years, the Italian government recently asked the courts to decide whether the city or the country owns the David.
7. Michelangelo exaggerated the size of David's right hand. Some believe it refers to a nickname for the biblical David, which means "strong of hand."
8. That David's eyes are flawed went unnoticed for centuries, perhaps due to the statue's extreme height. However, the 20th-century Digital Michelangelo Project at Stanford University rendered complete images of the figure, which revealed that David's left eye gazes forward. In contrast, the right eye is focused on some distant spot.
9. In 1873, officials moved the David indoors to the Galleria dell'Accademia to protect it from the weather. However, the statue is now suffering from stress fractures caused by the vibrations of scores of tourists filing past.
10. Moving the statue from Michelangelo's studio to the Palazzo Vecchio took forty men and four days, even though the distance was less than a mile.

# OTHER DAVIDS IN FLORENCE

Replicas form a vital component of Michelangelo's legacy, as they have helped transform him into a global cultural icon. The well-known Italian Renaissance artist achieved unprecedented levels of fame during his lifetime. Since the nineteenth century, his work has been copied and displayed in prominent locations worldwide. In 1856, the Grand Duke of Tuscany sent a plaster cast of Michelangelo's colossal David to London as a gift for Queen Victoria.

In 1875, the city of Florence placed a bronze replica of David in Piazzale Michelangelo, a public space created to honor the artist, while in 1910, a marble copy was installed in front of the Palazzo Vecchio (Florence's town hall) to replace the original David, which had been moved from this location into the Galleria dell'Accademia several decades



This copy was placed in the original location of Michelangelo's David in 1910, after the original was moved indoors to the Accademia Gallery.



The bronze copy of Michelangelo's David in Piazzale Michelangelo, Florence, is one of the most popular tourist attractions in the city. It is located on a hilltop overlooking the city and offers stunning views of the Duomo, the Ponte Vecchio, and the Arno River.



## 08 PLASTER CAST GALLERY

This majestic hall was once the Hospital of Saint Matthew's women's ward. A small fresco by Pontormo realized at the beginning of the XVIth century and still conserved in the hall, testifies to its original layout and function. The former ward now welcomes an essential collection of sculptures and paintings from the XIXth century and is chosen as tributes to the bond between the museum and the adjacent Fine Arts Academy. The most important body of works in the hall is Lorenzo Bartolini's plaster casts gallery, a collection of casts and models proving the Tuscan sculptor's intense artistic activity. The paintings, instead, are a selection of works exhibited during painting competitions organized by the Fine Arts Academy between 1794 and 1868.



# 09 THE MEDIAEVAL PAINTINGS

Three rooms in the museum are dedicated to late medieval paintings from the 13th and 14th centuries: numerous works with sacred subjects for didactic instructional and devotional purposes. The pictures were intended as *Biblia Pauperum*, the Poor Man's Bible, for the majority of the faithful, who were often illiterate, could approach religion by looking at the painted images without having to directly interpret the Holy Scriptures by reading and reflecting on them.



A common feature of most of the works presented is the radiance the 'gold background' gives, achieved by applying a very thin sheet of pure gold to the wooden surface. The gold served to increase the economic value of the painting, becoming a veritable status symbol to be flaunted by the client, according to precise instructions given to the artist. At the same time, the luminous glitter, derived from Byzantine icons and Orthodox art, symbolizes divine light, predisposing the faithful to mystical contemplation and spiritual reflection.



**The Tree of Life**  
**PACINO di BUONAGUIDA**  
 • 1305-1310 ca.

The Tree of Life, by Pacino di Buonaguida, is an exceptional painting in tempera on panel technique, executed between 1305 and 1310 for the Poor Clare nuns of the Monticelli convent in Florence. Christ's crucified is at the center of the composition. The symbolic and spiritual tree gives the work its title, alluding to the tree of life mentioned in the book of Revelation; it represents the essence of Salvation, producing twelve harvests a year, offering God's gifts to humanity.



**Magdalene and eight stories of her life, ca. 1280-1285**



**The Shepherd's Head**  
**GIOTTO di BONDONE**  
 • 1320 ca.

# 12 PAINTING GALLERIES ON THE UPPER FLOOR

Beyond the bookshop (gift shop), and just before the exit hall, is a narrow corridor with a staircase leading to the upper floor. these four galleries display works from churches in the Florence area created from the second half of the 14th century(after the plague of 1348) to the early 15th century. this part of the collection features altarpieces with ornate gothic frames by Lorenzo Monaco (1370-1425) and other masters of the Gothic tradition.



# MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI



The Italian biographer Giorgio Vasari called Michelangelo the pinnacle of all artistic achievement since the beginning of the Renaissance. Vasari was an astute follower of Michelangelo, publishing a biography on the artist and including him in his classic work, *The Lives of the Artists*, in which Vasari coined the term Renaissance for the era.

While best remembered for painting, such as his frescos in the Sistine Chapel, and sculpture, such as his Statue of David, Michelangelo was a near-perfect archetype of the Renaissance man as an architect, poet, and engineer.

Born Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni in the village of Caprese in Tuscany, his earliest training was under Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449 – 1494), a Florentine painter and with the sculptor Bertoldo di Giovanni (1435 – 1491), who was a follower of Donatello (1386 – 1466). This eventually led Michelangelo to the influential court of Lorenzo de' Medici (1449 – 1492), a grand patron of the Renaissance. Throughout this period, in the 1490s, Michelangelo worked in Florence, Venice, and Bologna. There were several works of significance, but it was in 1498 that the French cardinal Jean de Billheres (1400 – 1499) commissioned Michelangelo in Rome for the marble masterpiece, the sculpture of Pietà.

Michelangelo then returned to Florence around 1500, and in 1504 executed his most famous sculpture, the statue of David. It originally rested in the Palazzo della Signoria, outside Florence's town hall, the Palazzo Vecchio. The figure is easily one of history's most recognizable pieces of Western artwork and now stands in the Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze ( Accademia Gallery). Also during this period, Michelangelo painted the Holy Family and St John, also known as the Doni Tondo or the Holy Family of the Tribune: it was commissioned for the marriage of the merchant Angelo Doni and Maddalena Strozzi and since the 17th Century, hung in the room known as the Tribune in the Uffizi Gallery.

Only four years later, Michelangelo was commissioned by Pope Julius II in Rome to execute frescos in the Sistine Chapel, which would become his masterpiece in painting. It took Julius II much persuasion to convince Michelangelo to do the job. The artist even fled the commission to focus on sculpting. However, Julius beckoned Michelangelo to return, thankfully so, as the fresco is one of the most profound paintings ever produced. On the chapel's wall is the famous depiction of the Last Judgment, and on the ceiling, an artistic feat of labor for Michelangelo, is the depiction of Genesis, with the iconic image of God's hand bestowing Adam with life.

In architecture, Michelangelo was commissioned by the Medici family for their tombs in the Basilica of San Lorenzo, and he began but did not complete the New Sacristy of the church in 1520. His other major work in Florence was the Laurentian Library in the cloister of the San Lorenzo, also commissioned by the Medici around 1530.

## Let's Keep in Touch!

We hope this guide becomes a valuable companion as you explore the artistic wonders of the Accademia Gallery. If you've enjoyed your time with us and shared your experience, we'd be thrilled to see your 5-star review on Google! Your feedback brightens our day and helps fellow art lovers find their way to an enriching visit.

If there were any hiccups during your museum visit, remember that while things like gallery operations are beyond our control, we are here to provide you with the most timely and priority access. We appreciate your understanding and look forward to hearing about all the positive moments you've had!

**Google Review link:** <https://g.page/r/CfFj5ARzAn1bEB0/review>

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