

Mysterium Magnum: Michelangelo's Tondo Doni

This study presents the Tondo Doni to the new Florentine republic as a model of the 'great sacrament' of marriage from the New Testament book of Ephesians. Following fifteenth-century theology, Michelangelo portrayed Mary as a humble wife dominated and possessed by a virile guardian Joseph, the couple united as if 'two in one flesh'. To compensate for their symbolic propinquity, the painter cast her as a paragon of virginity, a muscular mulier fortis. In order to keep this virago in her place, Michelangelo coupled the Virgin in spiritual union with Christ, maenad-Psyche to bacchic Eros, attempting to mystify her social subordination into self-sacrificing love via Ficinian commentary and Saint Paul. Then, firing the Doni infant's vehemence with a distinctly violent strain of Christian love, the painter turned to Dante's rime petrose to continue the implied action and authorize a new painterly style, a sculptural stile aspro. Brill's Studies on Art, Art History, and Intellectual History, vol. 1

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