



COURTESY OF THE MINT MUSEUM (CHARLOTTE, NC)
MUSEUM BOOK CLUB GUIDE

Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling ROSS KING

"In 1508, despite strong advice to the contrary, the powerful Pope Julius II commissioned Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the newly restored Sistine Chapel. With little experience as a painter (though famed for his sculpture David), Michelangelo was reluctant to begin the massive project. Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling recounts the four extraordinary years Michelangelo spent laboring over the vast ceiling while the power politics and personal rivalries that abounded in Rome swirled around him."

1. How does the book treat art?
2. How do you think Michelangelo's beginnings affected his life and his painting? Discuss Michelangelo's relationship with his father and brothers.
3. Besides Michelangelo, how do other artists explore the issue of creative expression?
4. In what ways, if any, did the book surprise you? Did anything in the book affect the way you had previously thought about Michelangelo?
5. Discuss the Rome of Michelangelo and the Rome we know today.
6. Discuss the relationship between Michelangelo and Pope Julius II. How is it different from the relationship of patron/artist today?
7. Did Michelangelo's temperament cause him to lose commissions? How was his temperament different than Raphael's?
8. Discuss painting vs. sculpture. Michelangelo kept insisting he was not a painter and even signed his letters "Michelangelo, sculptor." In your opinion, which was he better at?
9. Discuss the relationship of artist and assistants. Should credit be equally shared? What is the role of the artists' assistants today?
10. Is the Sistine Chapel ceiling the greatest accomplishment in the art world? Why or Why not? Are there artists today who, in a few hundred years, will be remembered with awe like Michelangelo?