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| 5 fun facts about Michelangelo’s tomb   1. **The stolen body of a political dissident**   Even though Michelangelo was Florentine and loved his town, he spent the last three decades of his life in Rome. This self-imposed exile started when Alessandro de’ Medici was made the first duke of Florence. Michelangelo considered him a tyrant and from the 1530s, even after Alessandro’s death, preferred living under the rule of the popes in Rome. When Michelangelo died on 18th February 1564, he was quickly buried in the SS. Apostoli church in Rome. When Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici heard about it, he declared that since he wasn’t able to employ Michelangelo and honour him alive, he wanted at least to celebrate him with a state funeral and a proper tomb in Florence. Thereby, Lionardo Buonarroti, his nephew and heir, managed to “steal” the body and had it sent secretly in a bale, disguised as a merchandise. In this way, nobody in Rome, from the Pope to the last citizen could avoid or stop “Michelangelo’s move”.   1. **Michelangelo like a Saint**   Ancient chronicles often report that saints remained in good shape and smelled nicely even after many years from their death. The fact was regarded as a concrete proof of their unique nature. When Michelangelo was brought back in Florence 20 days after his death, the coffin, still sealed, was opened in front of many witnesses who were all surprised as the body was incorrupt and emanated a good scent.   1. **A political statement**   Michelangelo’s monumental tomb was design by Giorgio Vasari, the artist who best understood Cosimo I’s cultural agenda and was able to put it in practise. On the monument, next to Michelangelo’s bust, there are three bay laurel wreaths intertwined representing the union of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. It is also the “logo” of the Accademia del Disegno, the very first art academy ever created in 1563, under the will of Cosimo I. This emblem was inspired by the three circles Michelangelo used to mark the marble he had personally chosen for the tomb of pope Julius II.  Also the epitaph, written on the purple marble on the base of the tomb, states the important role played by Cosimo I in keeping Michelangelo’s memory and artistic legacy, even though the duke was never able to have the great artist glorifying him through his work.   1. **Very “old school”**   On Michelangelo’s tomb (1564-1578), Painting, Sculpture and Architecture are presented as three muses mourning for the loss of such an artist.  Each art holds the typical tools of her trade, the very same that still painters and sculptors use. On the tomb, the statue of Sculpture has a foot over a small brick of marble, chisels and hammer. This ancient gesture shows the power and the control over something: it can be David over Goliath’s head, Christ over the tomb that he’s just leaving or, more often nowadays, a football player standing proudly with his foot holding in place the ball. Only Architecture looks obsolete with her compass, square set and rulers, since the massive adoption of Computer-aided design (CAD).   1. **Costs more than a house!**   Lionardo Buonarroti, who commissioned the works to Vasari and his team, spent for the whole Michelangelo’s monument 770 scudi. Originally, Lionardo expected to pay around five or six hundreds scudi for it, and brought a contestation before the court, but lost. The value of the project equals to the price of 7 farmhouses in Montalto and some houses in Siena.  Marbles and other expenses were paid by Cosimo I. It was not a quick project, but more like a post office nightmare: starting in 1564, it took 14 years to complete Michelangelo’s grave due to several delays. Among them, in 1566 new marbles were extracted from Carrara and Serravezza, which were then stored in Pisa awaiting to be shipped to Florence. When, in 1567, this material was requested, the storage manager had to admit that he couldn’t find those huge marble blocks. A new extraction was then required and the marbles arrived eventually in 1568. | 5 Fun Facts about Michelangelo’s Tomb   1. **The Stolen Body of a Political Dissident**   Michelangelo was a proud Florentine, but he spent the last three decades of his life in self-imposed exile in Rome. The exile started when Alessandro de’ Medici became the first duke of Florence. Michelangelo considered Alessandro de’ Medici a tyrant, so he lived in Vatican-controlled Rome from the 1530s until the end of his life in 1564. Upon Michelangelo’s death on February 18th, 1564, he was initially laid to rest in the SS. Apostoli church in Rome. However, when Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici heard about this development, he declared that since he was not able to employ Michelangelo and honor him in Florence during his life, he would honor him in death with a state funeral and a proper tomb in Florence. Leonardo Buonarroti, Cosimo’s nephew and heir, was assigned the task of ‘stealing’ the corpse. He had it sent secretly in a bale of hay, disguising it as a piece of merchandise. This way, no one in Rome, including the Pope, would be able to prevent the movement of Michelangelo’s body back to Florence.   1. **Michelangelo Seen as a Saint**   According to a number of ancient historical chronicles, after saints die, their bodies remain in very good condition and they still smell good. This phenomenon could last for years after a saint’s death. The people saw this as concrete proof of the unique, divine nature of a saint. When Michelangelo was brought back to Florence, it had been 20 days since his death. The still-sealed coffin was opened in front of a large group of witnesses, who were all surprised that the body had not decayed or decomposed, and that it had a good smell.   1. **A Political Statement**   Cosimo I hired the artist Giorgio Vasari for this project because he trusted him to understand and implement his vision for Michelangelo’s monumental tomb. On the monument next to the tomb, there are three intertwined laurel wreaths. These laureal wreaths represent the union of the artistic domains of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, all of which were profoundly impacted by Michelangelo’s work. This union of three laurel wreaths for Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture also serves as the logo of the Academy of Design. This was the very first arts academy, which was created in 1563 at the behest of Cosimo I de’ Medici. The symbol was inspired by the three circles that Michelangelo had crafted to mark the marble he would use for the tomb of Pope Julius II. The epitaph on the base of Michelangelo’s purple marble tomb states the crucial role that Cosimo I de’ Medici played in preserving Michelangelo’s memory and artistic legacy, despite never having been able to benefit personally from Michelangelo’s art.   1. **‘Old-School:’ Ancient Traditions Displayed in the Renaissance Monument**   During this construction project, the builders decided to include traditional ancient symbols and imagery relevant to Michelangelo. The artistic domains of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture are depicted as three muses mourning the loss of this great artist. Each of these muses holds the typical tools from that era of the artistic trade she represents, and many of these tools are still used by painters and sculptors today. On the tomb, the statue of Sculpture rests one of its feet on top of a marble brick with chisels and a hammer. This is a pose demonstrating power and control over something, and it dates back to antiquity. For example, David could take this pose, putting his foot over the defeated Goliath’s head. Christ could put his foot over the tomb that he will leave to re-ascend to Heaven. More often in modern society, we see soccer players proudly taking this stance, with one foot over the soccer ball, holding it in place. However, the tools shown in the statue of the muse of Architecture appear obsolete. The compass, square set, and rulers used in Michelangelo’s time have been increasingly replaced by a popular computer software package called C.A.D., Computer-Aided Design.   1. **This Tomb Cost More Than a House!**   Leonardo Buonarroti, the commissioner for Vasari and his team, spent the massive sum of 770 scudi on Michelangelo’s monumental tomb. Originally, Buonarroti had expected to pay 500-600 scudi for this project, but in the end, the project was costlier than anticipated. Buonarroti contested this high final price in court, but he lost. The project ended up costing the same amount of money as 7 farmhouses in Montalto combined, or a group of houses in the city of Siena. Material expenses, including marble, were paid by Cosimo I de’ Medici. The work itself took a very long time as well. It became a nightmare project for its artists and builders, taking 14 years to complete, from 1564 to 1578, due to several delays. One of the major complications was the marble, because the material had been extracted from Carrara and Serravezza in 1566, and was stored in Pisa, where it was waiting to be shipped to Florence. In 1567, when this new marble was requested, the storage manager was unable to find it. Therefore, another extraction was required, and this extraction of marble finally arrived at the project site in Florence in 1568. |