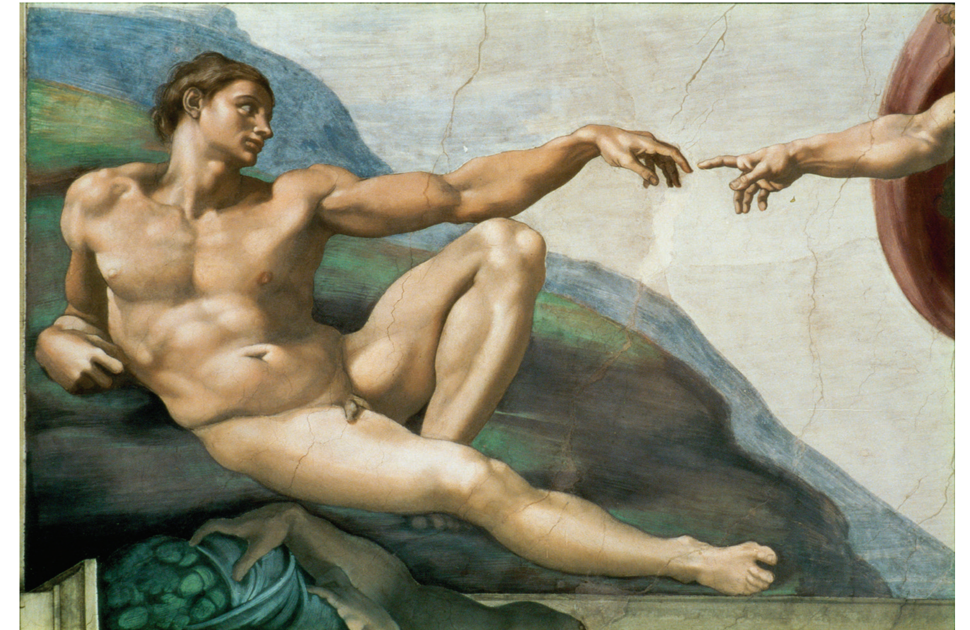
FIGURE 1.2
Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Saint Lawrence*, 1617. Marble. Uffizi, Florence.

But there is more. As a visual signifier of motion—and, thus, of animation—serpentine figuration in Bernini's sculpture is the touchstone for multiple, often intertwined strands of Michelangelo's critical reception. Bernini's early and late *imitatio Buonarroti* enters into dialogue with poetry about Michelangelo's life-giving chisel and animate stone, participates in polemics regarding the vitality of Michelangelo's figures in comparison to the antique, and reconsiders Raphael's reputation both as Michelangelo's greatest rival and as the artist whose figural œuvre furnishes the unsurpassed canon for all modern artists.

LIFE-GIVING POSE

Bernini first imitated Michelangelo in his *Saint Lawrence* (fig. 1.2), a sculpture he began at eighteen years of age in 1617, after carving various small-scale figures and portraits while still working in his father's studio. The sculpture represents an unusual moment in Lawrence's martyrdom, one popularized by contemporary painters who portrayed the saint's appeal to God and beatific vision in the instant before dying.[15] But rather than echo period paintings of the subject, the recumbent martyr—from the sweeping curve of his muscular torso, supported on a bent arm, to his extended leg and splayed toes—mirrors Michelangelo's Adam from the *Creation* scene on the Sistine Chapel ceiling (fig. 1.3).[16] Yet Bernini remade the rhetoric of Adam's pose. He transformed Adam's relaxed rotation and impassive receptivity to the divine touch that granted him mortality into Lawrence's gentle pulling against his physical restraints in ardent yearning for the gift of eternity.[17]

FIGURE 1.3
Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Creation of Adam*, detail, 1508–12. Fresco. Ceiling, Sistine Chapel, Vatican.



This subtle shift in animating force resulted from Bernini's relocating Adam's upraised and resting knee to Lawrence's suspended and tense one, and repositioning Adam's outstretched arm to Lawrence's resisting limb struggling in manacles behind his back. Even though Lawrence's limbs are all lashed by fire and locked in chains, the martyr's whole being is disposed heavenward as he twists away from his fetters, propelled by the promise of salvation.[18] The figure's torsion is justified by the specific moment of martyrdom that Bernini chose to represent. Given the criticism that Michelangelo's spiraling *Last Judgment* figures lacked narrative purpose, it is possible to see Bernini's emulation of the Adam from the master's much earlier work on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel as an attempt to circumscribe the artifice of forceful torsion within the realm of verisimilitude—as if the ceiling fresco supplied figural models of greater probity than those on the altar wall. Bernini's *Saint Lawrence* thus preserves, and perhaps even makes more decisive, the rhetoric of reaching and receiving in relation to (an unseen) God the Father that was expressed in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*.

By resembling Michelangelo's Adam, a figure whose artistry had been likened to divine facture, the *Saint Lawrence* also invites comparison between Bernini's talent and God's forming of man as the paradigmatic creative act. Vasari characterizes the Adam as "a figure whose beauty, pose, and contours are such that it seems to have been fashioned that very moment by the first and supreme creator rather than by the drawing and brush of a mortal man."[19] Bernini's statue not only meets the challenge implicit in this praise but also restores the creation of man to the three-dimensional realm. Nearer to God, who modeled

life nonetheless reveals how beholders—including artists—understood and responded to sculpture as if anticipating an encounter with an animate object.[56] Entering into dialogue with the poetry on Michelangelo's sculpture as much as the poetics of Michelangelo's Christ figures, Bernini's *Saint Sebastian* plays on the sculptor's capacity to give life to stone. We might even imagine Bernini and Barberini anticipating that an erudite viewer, steeped in the poetic trope of living sculpture, would look at the Michelangelesque stone martyr and imagine hearing the quiescent figure breathe.

In his next sculpture, Bernini imitated a Christ that Michelangelo represented as fully restored to (eternal) life. His *Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius* group of 1618–19 openly and repeatedly evokes the torsion, unsteadiness, and imminent movement of the Minerva *Christ* (figs. 1.12 and 1.13).[57] While Michelangelo's resurrected Christ is unsteadied by his resurgent vitality as he embraces the cross, Bernini's Aeneas strides forward with a tenuous balance as he bears his father, Anchises. As Hans Kauffmann and Preimesberger observe, Bernini's Trojan hero lends new meaning to the functional physicality of Michelangelo's twisting Christ by turning Aeneas's torso more acutely, dropping his shoulder more sharply, and curving his spine more dramatically in order to convey the stress of the father's weight.[58] Yet Bernini's adaptation of the Minerva *Christ*'s torsion is not limited to Aeneas's pose. He modeled all three generations of men on Michelangelo's statue, each moving according to the norms of his respective age: Ascanius clings to his father's garments while stepping tenderly forward; Aeneas strides vigorously as he grasps his own father; and Anchises, though sitting stiffly on his son's shoulder, counterbalances Aeneas's stance, holding the family gods in one hand and stabilizing himself with the other.[59] Each figure operates in an inextricable bond of mutual support derived from Michelangelo's vital structural and symbolic intertwining of Christ and his cross.[60] Just as the Christ visualizes the promise of Christian salvation that is ensured through his death and sacrifice on the cross, the Aeneas, interlinked with his kin, likewise represents the passage to Rome and into renewed life after the destruction of Troy. Indeed, through its resemblance to Michelangelo's figure, Bernini's *Aeneas* evokes the Christian tradition of interpreting the Trojan hero as a precursor of Christ, the divinely sanctioned founding of Rome akin to building a New Jerusalem.[61]

From young to old, Bernini's figures are as differentiated in the character of their serpentine poses—tender, forceful, stiff—as they are in their physiognomies—pudgy, athletic, gaunt. Reflecting nature's diversity, these figures can be read as yet another response to the charge of monotony Dolce leveled at Michelangelo for his ubiquitously muscled and forcefully posed figures:

> He is supreme, however, in one mode—supreme, that is, in making the nude body muscular and elaborated, with foreshortenings and bold movements, which show off in detail every artistic problem. . . . In the other modes, however, he fails to measure up not just to himself, but to others as well—the reason being that he either does

FIGURE 1.12
Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius*, 1618–19. Marble. Galleria Borghese, Rome.

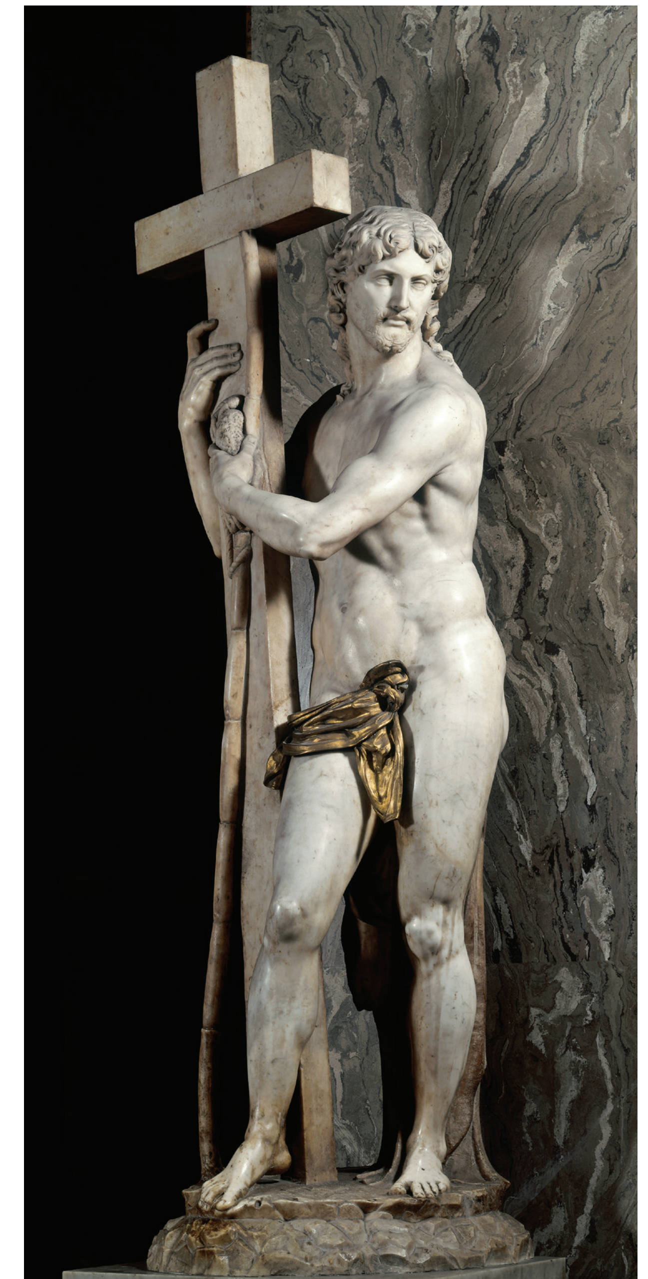


FIGURE 1.13
Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Risen Christ* (Minerva *Christ*), 1519–21. Marble. Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome.

OPPOSITE **FIGURE 1.19**
Gianlorenzo Bernini, *David,* 1623–24. Marble. Galleria Borghese, Rome.

In 1623–24, a few years after Bernini allegorized his dutiful obligation to Michelangelo, he carved the *David,* his first discordant expression of filiation (fig. 1.19). Bernini's *David* invites comparison with the Florentine legacy of *Davids,* particularly Michelangelo's colossal statue, entwined in its own agon with earlier *Davids* by Donatello and Andrea del Verrocchio. Michelangelo broke with the tradition of representing David after the battle, sword in hand and Goliath's severed head at his feet, by showing the young warrior in contemplation, sling at the ready, before the encounter. Bernini, in his turn, innovated by suggesting a different moment. Rather than show the warrior battle ready, he carved his hero engaged in battle and active thought; David twists forcefully, pulling his slingshot taut as he envisions launching the stone and triumphing over the looming Goliath.

Although rejecting the gentle contrapposto of the Renaissance examples, Bernini's figure recalls the complex torsion not of Michelangelo's *David* but of his *Victory,* with the poses of its two interlinked figures frequently reiterated by sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century sculptors in representations of secular and allegorical triumphs (fig. 1.20).[113] Statues such as Giambologna's corkscrew pairing of *Florence Triumphant over Pisa* not only privilege artifice over communication, but in applying forced poses to non-religious subjects, they also shrewdly sidestep the censure Giovanni Andrea Gilio directed at Michelangelo for his showy and indecorous *sforzi.*[114] Bernini's own *Neptune and Triton,* a secular fountain sculpture, falls into this category; the sea-god is astride his son so that their intercoiled bodies are actively summoning (and perhaps simultaneously quelling) a deluge.[115] Bernini's near-contemporary *David,* his cuirass collapsing between his legs, reimagines the crouching figure so characteristic of this intertwined two-figure type in a single-figure statue. By portraying a figure, albeit biblical, caught in a moment of such great consternation and effort, the artifice and *difficoltà* (difficulty) underlying its *sforzo* is justified. The polemic of Bernini's statue is perhaps best understood in light of a passage on pose from Borghini's Il riposo (1584) that qualifies Gilio's comments by condoning sforzi for representations of conflict (whether sacred or secular): "When wars and arguments are painted, then you are able to play with forceful, vigorous, and terrible poses."[116] The *David*'s rotary pose was wholly appropriate to the subject of a divinely appointed warrior, righteous in his fury, overcoming the fearsome Philistine. Reconciling artful torsion with sacred history, Bernini's *David* openly challenged critics who saw only indecorous artifice in Michelangelo's twisting religious figures and, in the process, extolled his predecessor's rhetoric for the attitude of sacred bodies.[117]

Ready to launch a stone from his slingshot, Bernini's *David* evokes Myron's Discobolus (discus thrower), an antique statue known only from ancient texts that describe its dramatically bent posture as a demonstration of difficulty.[118] The *Discobolus*'s pose provoked controversy in antiquity, separating its various critics, who preferred rigidly upright figures, from its supporters, such as Quintilian, who claimed that the very essence of sculpture—its novelty and difficulty—was expressed in the statue's dynamic and animating curve. Lucian, another supporter, split the difference by defending the statue's

FIGURE 2.1
Gianlorenzo Bernini, Tomb of Urban VIII, 1627–47. Marble, bronze, with gilding and polychromy. St. Peter's, Vatican.

FIGURE 2.2
Guglielmo della Porta, Tomb of Paul III, originally 1549–75, reassembled according to Bernini's 1628 alterations. Marble, bronze, and polychromy. St. Peter's, Vatican.

FIGURE 3.12
Gianlorenzo Bernini, Proposal for towers and façade of St. Peter's, 1645. Graphite and brown ink with brown and gray wash. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican.

structural modifications showcase his ingenuity in reducing the threat of the unstable tower foundations. We can read the recess between the towers of the first design as lightening the load on the least-stable areas of the foundations and the semidetached towers as attempts to forestall damage to the surrounding building. The shorter freestanding towers of Bernini's second design, by comparison, circumvent the site's instability by creating entirely new foundations.

However much Bernini's designs might owe to Rainaldi's drawings or even to those of his other competitors, his alterations are unparalleled in their emphasis on making newly visible significant portions of Michelangelo's church. By opening vantage points to the main and subsidiary domes from lateral angles through the reentrant and the wide

FIGURE 3.13
Gianlorenzo Bernini, Proposal for towers and façade of St. Peter's (flap closed), 1645. Black chalk, brown ink, and brown wash on white paper. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican.

apertures in his bell towers, and by breaking up the frontage into discrete forms that create a rhythmic play of projection and recession, Bernini sought greater visual and proportional connectivity among Michelangelo's, Maderno's, and his own contributions to the church ensemble. The persuasiveness and coherence of his proposed modifications relied on his mode of representation. Whereas nearly all of his other competitors communicated their ideas by drawing overtop massive sheets prepared with Mattheus Greuter's 1613 engraving of Maderno's façade elevation (see fig. 3.7), minus the little domes and towers, Bernini produced his own carefully wrought elevations that not only presented his changes within the context of the church as a whole but also enlivened the effect through shading that gave volume to the two-dimensional forms and better represented spatial

FIGURE 4.6
Gianlorenzo Bernini, Façade of Santa Bibiana, 1624–26. Santa Bibiana, Rome.

satisfying conclusion.[61] Bernini's two-story elevation emphasizes the pedimented central bay and includes a monumental attic extending the width of the building between the first and second stories (fig. 4.6). This design is typologically indebted to Michelangelo's Florentine precedent, though many times removed and reinterpreted through its Roman iterations.[62] Bernini was likely also looking specifically at Michelangelo's architecture in Rome, for his façade visibly echoes the principal wall of the inner courtyard at the Palazzo dei Conservatori—with its massive attic band, its second-story kneeling windows, and its first-story cluster of Ionic capitals—though radically simplified into sober Ionic and Doric details on the first and second floor, respectively (fig. 4.7).[63] Evidently, the mature Bernini's appreciation for Michelangelo's Capitoline ornament arose in his youth.

FIGURE 4.7
Michelangelo Buonarroti and Guglielmo della Porta, Courtyard, ca. 1560s–70s. Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome.

Contrasting with the subdued exterior of Santa Bibiana, perhaps a concession to decorum, is the unrestrained Michelangelism of the interior porch. Just within the portico, framing the primary church entrance, Bernini created a composite doorframe inspired by the licentious vocabulary of the Palazzo dei Conservatori (fig. 4.8). His take on Michelangelo's repertoire is most conspicuous in the two grimacing masks on the consoles flanking the doorframe. Supporting impost blocks and terminating in a fan pattern, these voluted grotesques recall those on the kneeling windows inside the Conservatori courtyard (fig. 4.9). Michelangelo's window and door surrounds also inform the graphic quality of the Santa Bibiana doorframe, on top of which Bernini placed a broken triangulated pediment framing his own grotesque escutcheon. And in its overall conception if not in its particulars,