

Head of Michelangelo's David

One of the most recognizable sculptures in the world, *David*, was created by legendary artist Michelangelo at the very start of the 16th century. Carved from solid marble, the sculpture stands 17ft (517cm) high and is located in the Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, Italy.

The piece was originally commissioned as part of a series of statues that were to be installed on the roofline of Florence Cathedral. However, due to its colossal size and weight, it was eventually installed in a square outside the Palazzo Vecchio, the seat of Florentine civic government. It was moved to its current location in 1873.

How the statue came into being

Though it's famously known as Michelangelo's *David*, the famous sculptor wasn't the first artists to work on this enormous slab of marble. In fact, the piece of stone that was to become *David* was first shaped by Florentine sculptor Agostino di Duccio in 1464 before he ceased work on the project in 1466.

Ten years later, Antonio Rossellino was commissioned to continue the sculpture, though he too was removed from the project within a short period of time.

In 1500, another attempt was made to complete the work. A number of famous artists, including Leonardo da Vinci were consulted, however it was 26-year-old Michelangelo who eventually won the commission. He started work on the piece in August 1501 and the statue was finally complete just over 2 years later in January 1504.

David's head

One of the most striking parts of Michelangelo's *David* is the sculpture's head. Most other depictions of David show him standing victorious over the defeated Goliath or in the midst of his famous battle.

Michelangelo however chose to show David before his confrontation with Goliath. His tense, anxious expression gives us a glimpse into his mindset, while his furrowed brow shows quiet determination.

David's gaze

Thanks to its subject matter – the smaller David attacking and defeating the enormous goliath - the statue soon came to represent the defense of civil liberties and the independence of Florence. The small city-state was surrounded on all sides by more powerful neighbors, and so the story of David held an especially important place in the city's conscience.

In particular, Florentines saw *David* as a symbol of the city's struggle with the Medici Family. When the Medicis were exiled from Florence in 1494, the family's bronze *David*, which had been made by Donatello around 1440, was taken from them and put on display in the courtyard of the Palazzo della Signoria.

The subject already had strong political overtones. And, when Michelangelo's *David* was installed in the Palazzo Vecchio, it was orientated so that its gaze was directed straight towards Rome, the city that was now home to the Medicis.