

Sistine's restored frescoes exhibited

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican's sometimes-controversial restoration of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes has given artists and historians volumes of new information about the 15th-century artist, said the prefect of the Vatican Library.

The information provides a view of Michelangelo "that might not have been possible had this great and courageous work not been undertaken," said Canadian Dominican Father F. Leonard Boyle, head of the Vatican Library.

In conjunction with completion of work on the chapel ceiling, the Vatican Museums and the library have organized an exhibition to document the restoration and to illustrate Michelangelo's technique and

his influence on other artists.

Journalists were given a preview of the exhibit March 23 at the Vatican's Braccio di Carlo Magno gallery.

Pope John Paul II formally opened the exhibit March 24 during a special showing for Vatican and civic dignitaries.

After touring the exhibit, he said it offers an opportunity "to evaluate the restoration of a work of art of universal significance and value."

The pope said he hoped the exhibit would bring "illumination and, at the same time, a greater understanding both of the art of Michelangelo the painter and of his human and religious message."

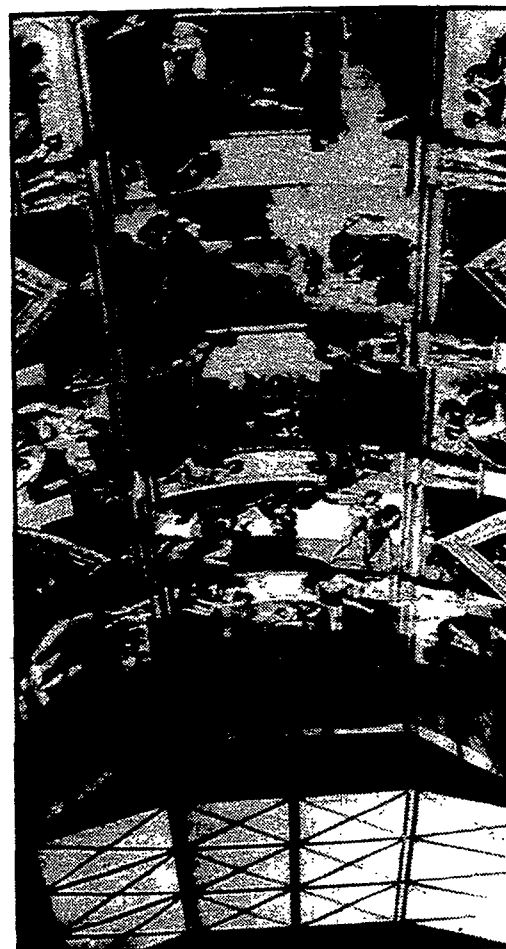
Michelangelo's work in the Sistine Chapel is "an intense artistic meditation on the themes of revelation from the story of

salvation proclaimed in the Bible to the expectation of the Parousia (Christ's second coming), depicted and evoked in a unique way in the fresco of 'The Last Judgment,'" the pope said.

The exhibit should be seen as a reaffirmation of the Vatican's continuing desire to "nurture" art, especially sacred art, he said, because its highest purpose is "to turn people's minds devoutly toward God."

The exhibit will be open daily, except Wednesdays, through July 10 at the gallery in St. Peter's Square.

With drawings, paintings and letters from collections at the Vatican and in the United States, England, France and Italy, Father Boyle said, the Vatican exhibit provides "a view of Michelangelo, his work



AP/Wide World Photos
The newly restored ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is shown above.

and his influence which has not been possible before."

The exhibit includes a scale model of the chapel and of the scaffolding Michelangelo designed so that his work on the ceiling and walls would not obstruct the liturgical functions taking place in the chapel each day.

More than 40 of Michelangelo's preliminary drawings and plans for the chapel frescoes are also on display.

Drawings by Raphael, Rubens, Annibale Carracci and other artists show Michelangelo's influence on his contemporaries and those who came after the Renaissance.

Another section of the exhibit, using videotapes and computers, gives a step-by-step illustration of the process used to study, clean and restore the frescoes.

Restoration of the 10,345 square feet of Sistine Chapel wall and ceiling frescoes began in 1980 with funding from a Japanese television company. Nippon Television Network filmed the restoration work and has been given exclusive rights to reproduce the fresco images.

The last touches on the ceiling restoration were made in early March, and the massive altarpiece, "The Last Judgment," is the only part of the chapel left to be restored.

Work will begin in early April after a March 26-31 Vatican symposium for art historians, conservators and scientists.

The symposium will include the Vatican's formal presentation of its final report on the ceiling restoration.

Several art experts have criticized, or at least expressed concern about, the methods used for restoration. The vibrant colors of the cleaned ceiling surprised many artists and historians and led to debates about Michelangelo's original work.

Another debate connected with the study of "The Last Judgment" was what to do about changes made by other artists after Michelangelo finished painting in 1541.

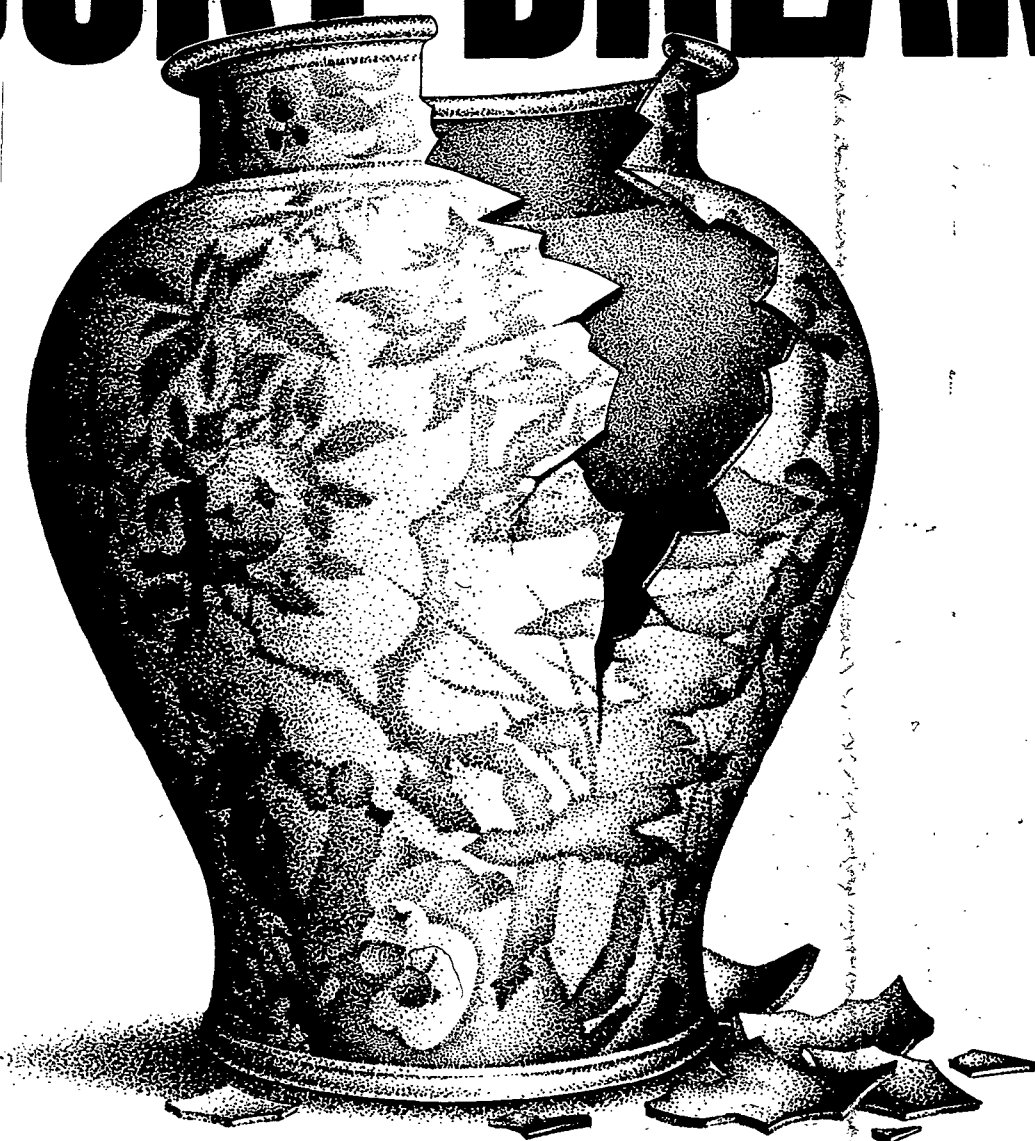
The change receiving the most attention since the restoration began was the veiling in 1564 of many of the fresco's nude figures.

Fabrizio Mancinelli, director of the department of Byzantine, medieval and Renaissance art at the Vatican Museums, said the cover-up will continue.

Tests on the wall have shown that Daniel of Volterra, widely known as "The Breeches-Maker," made his additions "affresco," painting freshly applied wet plaster.

Even if the Vatican did not think the addition was part of the historical record — reflecting the morality of the times and done under orders by Pope Pius IV — restorers could not simply scrape off the additions, Mancinelli said.

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