

## **LES MAINS DE MICHEL-ANGE**

### **How eighteenth-century connoisseurs made sense of the artist's hand**

Joachim REES\*

**ABSTRACT:** This article focuses on a drawing, regarded by 18<sup>th</sup>-century amateurs as a masterpiece by Michelangelo, and serves as a point of departure to illuminate the amateur's fascination with the artist's hand. This self-referential representation of the artistic process attracted much comment among connoisseurs. As virtually all amateurs had their say on the meaning of « *les mains de Michel-Ange* » the drawing sheds further light on the objects of desire which informed the amateur's discourse and the mediality such discourse needed in order to join word and image.

**KEYWORDS:** amateurism, collectors, drawing, facsimile.

### **LES MAINS DE MICHEL-ANGE**

#### **L'art des connaisseurs et la main de l'artiste au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle**

**RÉSUMÉ:** Cet article porte sur un dessin, considéré au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle comme un chef-d'œuvre de Michel-Ange, et qui sert ici de point de départ pour éclairer la fascination de l'amateur pour la main de l'artiste. Cette représentation autoréférentielle d'un procédé artistique attira de nombreux commentaires parmi les connaisseurs. Comme tous avaient leur mot à dire sur la signification des « *mains de Michel-Ange* », ce dessin permet de mettre en lumière les objets du désir qui informent le discours de l'amateur et son médium spécifique, entre texte et image.

**MOTS-CLÉS:** amateurisme, collectionneurs, dessin, facsimilé.

يد مايكل أنجلو  
فن المعرفة ويد الفنان في القرن الثامن عشر  
يواكيم ريس

ملخص : تركز هذه المقالة على رسم، كان قد اعتبر في القرن الثامن عشر تحفة للفنان مايكل أنجلو، وهنا يخدم كنقطة انطلاق ويلقي الضوء كذلك مدى سحر الهواة بيد الفنان المحترف. إن هذا المرجع الذاتي المنطلق من مفهوم فني بحث اجتذب العديد من التعليقات من بين الضالعين في هذا المجال. هذا التمثيل من عملية فنية الذاتي المرجعي تعليقات كثيرة بين خبراء. وكما كان للكثيرين حق في قول كلمة على مفهوم "يد مايكل أنجلو"، فإن هذا الرسم يتيح أيضا تسليط الضوء على بعض المعاني والتي مفادها إيصال معنى الخطاب المحدد بين النص الصورة إلى الهواة.

كلمات البحث : الهواية، مصممون، رسم، نظام مراقبة الأصول الميدانية.

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## MICHELANGELOS HÄNDE Künstlerhand und Kennerschaft im 18. Jh.

*ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Dieser Artikel handelt von einer Zeichnung, die im 18. Jh. als ein Meisterwerk des jungen Michelangelo galt und die hier als Ausgangspunkt dient, um die Faszination der Kunstkenner mit den symbolischen Bedeutungen der „Künstlerhand“ näher zu bestimmen. Die selbstreferentielle Darstellung einer Hand, die eine Hand zeichnet, forderte zahlreiche Sammler, Kenner und Amateure zu Kommentaren heraus. Die mehrsinnige Repräsentation von „Michelangelos Händen“ wird hier als ein Objekt des Begehrens zwischen Text und Bild analysiert, das den Diskurs der Kunstliebhaber ebenso prägte wie die dabei eingesetzten Medien.*

*SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER: Kunstkennerschaft, Sammler, Zeichnung, Faksimile.*

## LAS MANOS DE MIGUEL ÁNGEL Cómo los entendidos del siglo XVIII interpretaban la mano del artista

*RESUMEN: Este artículo es acerca de un dibujo, considerado en el siglo XVIII como un obra maestra de Miguel Ángel y que sirve aquí de punto de partida para esclarecer la fascinación del amateur por la mano del artista. Esta representación auto-referencial de un proceso artístico suscitó numerosos comentarios por parte de los entendidos. Todos tenían algo que decir sobre el significado de las « manos de Miguel Ángel », por lo que este dibujo permite sacar a la luz los objetos del deseo que informan el discurso del amateur y su medio específico, entre texto e imagen.*

*PALABRAS CLAVE: amateurismo, coleccionistas, dibujo, facsimil.*

米開朗基羅之手：18世紀的鑒賞家  
賦予藝術家之手以意義  
喬亞欽·李斯

摘要：本文以一幅在18世紀時被認為是米開朗基羅作品的素描作為出發點，來揭示業餘愛好者對藝術家之手的熱愛。畫家通過描繪自己的手來表達他的藝術創作手段，這在鑒賞家中引起了很多評論。正因為所有的人對“米開朗基羅之手”的含義皆有所見解，這張素描使我們得以更加清晰地瞭解業餘愛好者所向往的事物，也使我們理解他們的言論及其介於文字和圖像之間的特殊媒介。

關鍵詞：業餘創作，收藏家，素描，贗品。

ミケランジェロの手  
18世紀における、玄人の芸術と  
芸術家の手  
ジャオキン・レス

要約：本文は、18世紀になって、ミケランジェロの作品の中でも傑作とみなされ、芸術家の手としてアマチュアたちを魅了した絵図について取り上げる。芸術的方法において自己参照的表象であるこの絵図は鑑定人たちの間で、多くの解説を呼び起こした。それぞれが「ミケランジェロの手」の意味について各自の表現を持っていたので、アマチュアがこの絵図の何に対して魅惑されたのか、彼らのテキストと作品を通して、垣間見ることができる。

キーワード：アマチュア主義、コレクター、絵図、複製。

« *L'art c'est moi, la science c'est nous*<sup>1</sup>. »

In 1987 two pioneering studies appeared which both exerted a lasting impact on their respective fields. In this year Bruno Latour published a book with the programmatic title « Science in action » and Krzysztof Pomian his equally influential study on « Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux »<sup>2</sup>. The benefit of hindsight allows us to detect the complementary qualities of these two publications which reach far beyond the fact of sheer chronological coincidence. Latour's study provided a widely acknowledged contribution to what was become known in the history of science as the actor-network-theory. Pomian's collection of case-studies testified to a stimulating re-assessment of early modern practices of accumulating natural and artificial objects. It soon gained an undisputed status as a primer in the new cultural history with far reaching ramifications into the history of science and art history alike. Both studies favoured a non-hierarchical approach as far as the validity and relevance of certain practices and modes of discourse are concerned, thus avoiding a teleological concept of knowledge and normative notions about culture, art, science, profession and authority. It were rather the various procedures of accumulating objects and pieces of information in urban « centres of calculation », such as Paris or Venice, and the social process of investing objects with meaning which were put into focus<sup>3</sup>. Although dealing with different contexts and places in various periods of time, both studies paid particular attention to the material dimension of cultural practices and the communicative channels by which knowledge about local objects, observations or inventions was made available in topographically dispersed communities of like-minded participants. The process of collecting objects and observational data in local repositories and diffusing authoritative « facts » about them in verbal and visual form accounts for the unprecedented mobilization of resources, persons and media which has become inextricably linked to our modern notion of expertise in any given field of knowledge.

As Latour has highlighted elsewhere, the mobilization of verbal or visual « facts » should not be confounded with disinterested diffusion of information for its own sake<sup>4</sup>. Usually it takes place in a contested, or at least a competitive field. The process of forging observations or judgements into facts requires corroboration from outside, potential supporters or « allies » have to be addressed, authority has to be gained. All these operations depend heavily on a certain type of objects which may act as substitutes for precious, fragile or locally limited bodies of evidence which cannot physically participate in the circulation of knowledge. For this type of evidence-by-proxy Latour has coined the term

1. The French physiologist Claude Bernard in 1865, quoted in DASTON, 2003, p. 110.

2. LATOUR, 1987 ; POMIAN, 1987.

3. For a comparative evaluation of Latourian actor-network theory and new cultural history studies in the history of early modern and modern science see JARDINE, 2001.

4. See LATOUR, 1990, p. 24 : « We need [...] to look at the way in which someone convinces someone else to take up a statement, to pass it along, to make it more of a fact, and to recognize the first author's ownership and originality. »

« immutable mobiles<sup>5</sup> ». In form of reproductions, charts, graphs or specimen they have become the secret agents in various branches of scientific activity and communication. They do not only transmit specific qualities of the object which is under examination, they provide also a type of epistemological framework in which the object should be seen. It will be argued in this paper that a particular class of immutable mobiles, the facsimile reproduction of master-drawings, played also a decisive role in shaping a specific kind of artistic expertise which relied both on discursive knowledge and on practical skill.

In focussing on a single item – a Renaissance drawing, its appearance and consecutive itinerary through various collections in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Paris – this paper tries to illustrate how significance is invested into a work of art by a whole range of activities : travelling, exchange of letters, mounting and reordering collections, preparing facsimile-reproductions, re-editing historical texts and, last but not least, adding new frames and inscriptions to the original. None of these activities can be claimed to be intrinsic to the field of artistic expertise, on the contrary : all these practices do equally apply to philological erudition or the natural sciences. But it was this very syncretism or fusion of practices and discursive tools which brought about a new type of expertise in the visual arts. In presenting this case study this article may contribute to a historical reconstruction of certain manual operations which may be called the craftsmanship of artistic expertise. Theories of connoisseurship, which have been studied carefully in recent years<sup>6</sup>, remain necessarily incomplete if one ignores what kind of manuality helped to create this type of expertise. Thus, it is not so much the gaze of the expert, the often mystified connoisseur's eye, which constitutes the topic of this paper but rather the – ostentatious or more concealed – manoeuvres of his hands. In order to understand the specific types of expertise in any given period of history one has to focus on the way how experts handle things.

#### A COLLECTOR'S ITEM TRANSFORMED

The drawing in question does not impress by its material dimensions or sophisticated subject-matter (see the following page, fig. 1). It shows a left hand, slightly larger than its natural size, which rests on a soft, yet materially undetermined surface. A right hand, considerably smaller and given in a more sketchy manner, approaches its counterpart from below and holds a drawing device. It may well be a reed pen of a similar sort which had been used to produce the drawing<sup>7</sup>. In several parts, the pen had been applied with considerable pressure, bringing substantial amounts of brown ink onto the paper. Where pressure and the supply of ink were high, the paper has corroded thus making doubling from behind necessary. The drawing is not signed.

5. The compounds of inscriptions and images which Latour defines as immutable mobiles are characterized by certain assumptions about their general properties : the information once inscribed remains stable (optical consistency), the objects can easily circulate, they are presentable, readable and combinable with one another, their main function is to « present absent things », see LATOUR, 1990, p. 26-27.

6. As useful survey provides GIBSON-WOOD, 1988.

7. For an identification of the drawing device as a reed pen (*plume de roseau*), see CHENNEVIÈRES and MONTAIGLON in MARIETTE, 1851, p. 213.



*Fig. 1 – Study of left hand drawn by a right hand, attributed to Bartolomeo PASSAROTTI. Paris, Musée du Louvre, département des arts graphiques, inv. 717. Pen, brown ink on paper, 180 x 268 mm.*

*Photo : Michèle Bellot, © Réunion des musées nationaux*

Reliable traces of this drawing emerged in late 17<sup>th</sup> century in Paris<sup>8</sup>. Shortly after 1700 it was to be found in the collection of Claude Bourdaloue, who claimed to have it acquired from the famous collector Everard Jabach, but this is not corroborated by any other evidence. The collectors mentioned so far left no personal records about their acquisitions. Apart from the act of possession it seems impossible to determine the motives which led them to acquire this particular item or the rank it held in their respective collections. When the drawing entered into the collection of Pierre Crozat, probably around 1715, this status of muted anonymity was about to change<sup>9</sup>. Crozat's share in transforming both the collector's role and the functions of a superb private art-collection can hardly be overestimated. As his collection grew and Crozat's lodgings in Paris and Montmorency became ever more sumptuous, these repositories of art treasures were forged into a sphere of discourse. This transformation was not brought about by the collector alone. It was rather a collective act performed by a whole range of persons

8. For a detailed account of the drawing's provenance, see JOANNIDES, GOARIN, SCHECK, 2003, p. 387-389, with an attribution to Bartolomeo Passarotti.

9. On the formation of Crozat's collection of drawings, see HATTORI, 2003, and 2007 ; on Crozat's acquisition of various drawings from the Bourdaloue collection in 1715, see HATTORI, 2003, p. 176.

from various social and professional backgrounds. Crozat's circle had a strong cosmopolitan stance and was well connected within the European art-world<sup>10</sup>. It was here, were *savants* like the Italian-born abbé Jean-Antoine de Marouille<sup>11</sup>, who worked for the Regent on the first French edition of Vasari's *Vite*, bourgeois *gens de métier* like Pierre-Jean Mariette<sup>12</sup> and noble *amateurs* like the Comte de Caylus<sup>13</sup> met and gathered first-hand experience in close contact with paintings, prints, drawings and sculptures. Straddling the declining years of Louis XIV, the Regency and major parts of the Fleury-era, the Crozat circle offered an unprecedented opportunity for the fusion of different fields of knowledge and practical skills connected with the fine arts. The otherwise firmly established borders between collectors, art-dealers, connoisseurs and professional artists were partly re-arranged and still existing common ground was enlarged<sup>14</sup>. This becomes evident if one takes a close look on the role which drawings played in the material and discursive culture of the Crozat circle. Mariette, arguably the most eminent connoisseur of master-drawings for the rest of the century, stated more than once that his initiation in this particular field of artistic expertise was fostered by the frequent reunions of the Crozat circle<sup>15</sup>. These reunions served not only the purpose to accumulate discursive knowledge, but they created also a space for practical exercise. Mariette for instance used the informal gatherings on Crozat's country seat at Montmorency for *plein-air* sketching<sup>16</sup>. The same fusion of theory and practice can be stated for Caylus, who used Crozat's superb collection primarily as a training ground to adapt his hand to the various schools and styles of drawing. It was this technique that established a practical bond with the professional artists of the Crozat circle like Charles de la Fosse or Antoine Watteau.

The most significant indicator for this high esteem for the art of drawing is to be seen in the deliberate inclusion of master-drawings in Crozat's most ambition project, the publication of reproductions after eminent works from various historical schools of painting<sup>17</sup>. This selection, which became known as the *Recueil Crozat*, remained a fragmentary one and when its second and last volume appeared in 1740 only works from the Roman school with some notable additions from Venetian masters were included. But even then it had become obvious that the envisaged rendering of a genealogy of painting necessarily had to remain incomplete if it had to rely only on the collections

10. The Crozat circle has been studied in various aspects. Its formation was closely linked to Crozat's collecting activities, see STUFFMANN, 1968, and more recently HATTORI, 1999, 2003 and 2007. The international relations have been highlighted by HASKELL, 1987, p. 25-24, for the role of the Crozat circle in the context of cultural politics during the transition from the reign of Louis XIV to the Regency and Crozat's close relations to the d'Orléans family, see CROW, 1985, p. 39-44.

11. On Marouille, see HATTORI, 2004.

12. On Mariette's participation in the gatherings of the Crozat circle, see BACOU, 1981, and more recently SMENTEK, 2008, his close cooperation with Caylus has been highlighted by POMIAN, 2002.

13. On Caylus's activities in the Crozat circle and his voyage to Holland and England in 1722 connected with Crozat's acquisitions, see REES, 2006, p. 94-101 and 263-274.

14. A still very useful survey on the various branches of laymanship in the fine arts and their denominations in eighteenth century-France provides OLIVIER, 1976.

15. During Mariette's apprenticeship in the paternal print shop and still on his *grand tour* in 1717-1719 drawings had only played a minor part as he was primarily concerned with books and prints, see BACOU, 1981, p. 15-16.

16. For an example of Mariette's views of Montmorency, a pen drawing executed in 1724, see BACOU, 1981, p. 11, fig. 4.

17. On the *Recueil Crozat*, see HASKELL, 1987 ; LECA, 2005 ; REES, 2006, p. 263-274 ; HATTORI, 2007 ; SMENTEK, 2008, p. 37.

of one nation, however sumptuous they may be. The ordering and the increase of knowledge in the history of the arts required transnational co-operation<sup>18</sup>.

If one regards the Crozat circle as a small-scale « centre of calculation » in Latour's sense, in which joint competencies and skills were involved to establish facts about works of art, it can hardly be overlooked that the drawings posed greater challenges than any other branch of the collection. Crozat's holding in this particular genre grew rapidly over the years and finally reached the impressive number of 19 201 items, which were kept in 202 portfolios<sup>19</sup>. Given this quantity and the fact that a vast proportion of these items were unsigned, special criteria for establishing a taxonomic order for this variety had to be developed. In amassing such a quantity Crozat may have been guided by encyclopaedic ideas of completeness<sup>20</sup>, but it was not helpful to establish a reputation as a connoisseur. The period when the sheer accumulation of cultural commodities invariably entailed an increase in social reputation drew to its end. The prevailing distinguishing feature between the *curieux-cum-collectionneur* on the one hand and the connoisseur on the other was to be defined by the latter's capacity to make a choice and to name criteria for certain preferences or rejections. As far as drawings are concerned, Crozat's scope was extensive ; the connoisseurs who gathered in house were to cultivate a new intensity of the gaze<sup>21</sup>.

In this respect it seems to be significant that the first evidence for a sustained occupation with the drawing concerned was being produced independently from its owner and that it was a visual one. An etching produced by Caylus gives an inverted but otherwise facsimile-like image of the drawing to which three lines of text have been added (see the following page, fig. 2). With regard to the original they pronounce an unequivocal attribution (« Michel Ange B. In. ») and its present location is given (« Cabinet de M. Crozat. »). Caylus as the author of the reproduction is named in an abbreviated yet easy recognizable form (« C. Sculp »). The date and the purpose of the reproduction are not easy to determine. Caylus, as is well known, contributed substantially to chiaroscuro prints of drawings for the *Recueil Crozat*. In these cases he had to co-operate with professional engravers and wood-cutters. But the drawing which he reproduced on his own was not meant to be included in the *Recueil* in which a strong preference for highly finished *dessins de présentation* with a tableau-like quality prevailed. Signs of a sustained interest on the part of Caylus in Michelangelo as a draughtsman significantly increased in the mid 1720s when he, parallel to his activities in the Crozat circle, skimmed through the Royal Collection with its rich holdings of Michelangelo drawings. In close co-operation with his personal friend Charles Coypel, who was in charge of the drawings in the *cabinet du roi*, Caylus reproduced several sheets, thus obtaining visual material which would allow comparative studies on works of art dispersed in various collections<sup>22</sup>.

18. HASKELL, 1987, p. 24.

19. HATTORI, 2003, p. 175.

20. Testimony on Crozat's guiding principles as an art collector is scarce. But the fact that he wherever possible tried to acquire whole collections seemed to imply that he was eager to avoid a careful selection beforehand, thus leaving the act of close examination to competent viewers in his circle.

21. Mariette stated quite frankly that it was not his intention as collector to accumulate, but to select carefully, see BACOU, 1981, p. 21-22. In contrast to Crozat he never bought entire collections or whole albums and criticized Vasari and even his personal friend Niccolò Maria Gaburri to have buried masterpieces under heaps of mediocre material.

22. On Caylus's and Coypel's copies after Michelangelo drawings, see LEFRANÇOIS, 1994, p. 481-483, n° G 17 (Mercury/Apollo), n° G. 18 (study of a nude), n° G. 19 (tomb of Giuliano de' Medici), n° G. 20 (tomb of Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici) ; REES, 2006, p. 290-292.

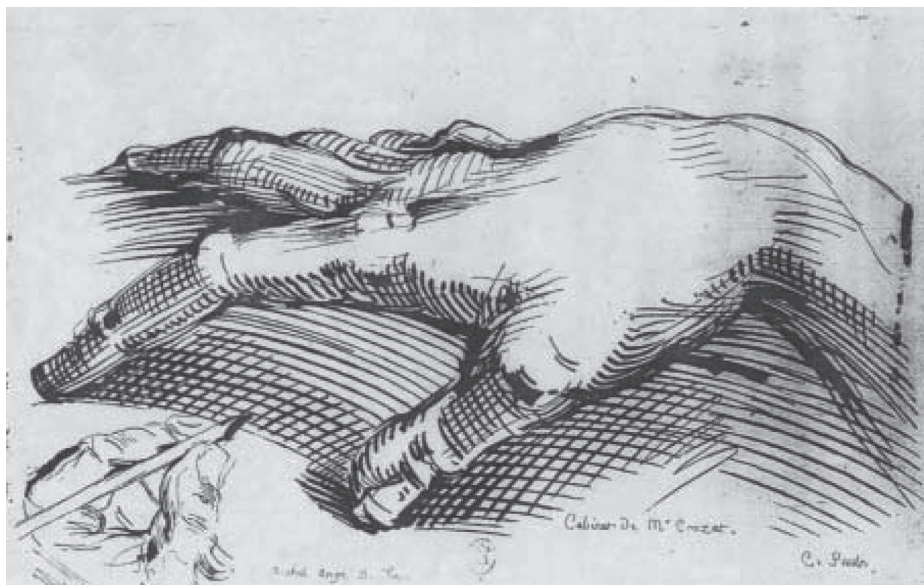


Fig. 2 – Comte de CAYLUS, « Les Mains de Michel-Ange », etching, 130x270 mm. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. A 59436 (in A 590). Source : Staatliche Museen Dresden, Kupferstichkabinett ; photo : R. Richter ; © Sächsische Landesbibliothek Abt. Deutsche Fotothek

Caylus's facsimile reproductions of drawings in the medium of etching carried the index of being truthful to the original without raising any suspicion about forgery<sup>23</sup>. At the same time they multiplied the opportunity to look at images regardless of the present whereabouts of the precious original. Although Caylus's facsimile prints were produced only in comparatively small numbers they helped to publicise visual information about works of art which were otherwise difficult to access. Despite of a raising predilection for drawings this type of artistic production was still a secretive genre. Even those who had regular access to Crozat's collection of drawings would have found it difficult to obtain a general survey, let alone an intimate knowledge of more than 19 000 items. Not even the collector himself had a guiding catalogue at hand<sup>24</sup>. In this state of affairs the reproduction was, paradoxically enough, the most efficient means to single out special items, bringing to light what was otherwise covered in densely packed portfolios, almost on the brink of oblivion<sup>25</sup>.

23. Caylus tried to reach utmost proximity to the original in producing *contre-épreuves* from his print in brown ink ; the Kupferstichkabinett in Dresden holds one of these very rare copies, inv. (A 590) A 59432. But even in this case the print-character was all too obvious.

24. The first inventory of Crozat's drawings was drawn up after his death in 1740 by Pierre-Jean Mariette, see HATTORI, 2003, p. 177. It gives only the number of drawings and prints of each portofolio with the name of the principal artist.

25. Crozat's portfolios would contain up to 400 sheets, the number increasing in portfolios with sheets of anonymous artists, see HATTORI, 2003, p. 177.



## THE MORAL CHARACTER OF THE HAND

Ever since Roger de Piles, in his declining years supported by a generous pension from Pierre Crozat, had voiced in his influential treatise *L'Idée du peintre parfait* (1699 and 1707), that it is only in their drawings that artists let themselves be seen how they are, this conviction had been constantly iterated to justify the preeminence of this medium in the field of the visual arts<sup>26</sup>. It was this notion of revelation that gave the eighteenth century-discourse on artistic draughtsmanship its moral overtone. But, it may be argued, drawings not only revealed the artist, his genius as well as his shortcomings, they also disclosed the aspirations of those, who acted as interpreters of these precious visual documents. When, for instance, in July 1732 the Comte de Caylus devoted his inaugural lecture at the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* as one of its newly elected *amateurs-honoraires*, to the subject of drawings, these aspirations sounded humble enough<sup>27</sup>. In rather general terms the artists – there were only fifteen of them present<sup>28</sup> – were recommended to associate themselves with various schools of drawing in order to become aware of the ever lingering danger of falling into mannerisms. By then the count's authority in the arts which enabled him to address himself to a body of artists, rested on his widely known activity as a faithful copyist of drawings by ancient and modern masters. Even in his programmatic conférence « De l'amateur » some sixteen years later Caylus made only a slight reference to his immense graphic output. In this lecture he compared the amateur's visual skills to a kind of passive literacy which enables him to read all existing texts, that is drawings, but when it comes to producing texts on his own the amateur is entirely dependent on templates provided by a master's hand<sup>29</sup>.

One should not be misled by this seemingly self-abasing rhetoric. In fact, the semantics of legibility applied to drawings provided a powerful discursive device in the hands of amateur draughtsmen and connoisseurs like Caylus or Mariette<sup>30</sup>. Encoding visual perception as reading invariably strengthened the hold of the well-educated, literate and multilingual *homme de lettres* over the medium of drawing, still regarded to be the common basis of the visual arts. Consequently temptations were high to redefine the artist's manual operations as acts of reading and writing whose messages were exclusively addressed to visually literate recipients<sup>31</sup>. Given the fact that the aesthetic

26. DE PILES, 1707, here 1970, p. 51-52 : « [...] en faisant un Dessain, il [le Peintre] s'abandonne à son Génie, & se fait voir tel qu'il est. » For the further development of this trope, see MICHEL, 2004 ; SMENTEK, 2008, p. 36.

27. CAYLUS, 1883.

28. REES, 2006, p. 175.

29. « Un homme peut-il écrire sous la dictée d'un autre, si toutes les lettres et leur valeur ne lui sont pas assez familières pour que le son dont son oreille est frappé lui indique sans erreur les lettres convenues pour l'imprimer ? On sent très bien qu'une prodigieuse habitude peut seule conduire à une opération. Celui qui n'aurait pas une connaissance profonde des lettres vous donne une idée de l'amateur : il sait lire, mais il n'a pas assez écrit, c'est-à-dire dessiné, pour avoir les formes et les exemples généraux et particuliers présents à l'esprit », « De l'amateur », conférence presented at the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture*, 7 September 1748, quoted in CAYLUS, 1910, p. 126-127.

30. For the concept of legibility, see also SMENTEK, 2008, p. 40.

31. Caylus maintained that the artist's perception of nature is likewise encoded as an act of reading which can be recapitulated in his drawings : « L'on voit à découvert et sans aucune illusion dans les dessins la façon dont le peintre a su lire la nature, et celle dont il a su quelquefois prendre une licence heureuse », « L'étude du dessin », quoted in CAYLUS, 1883, p. 373.

appreciation of drawings was still largely overshadowed by more ostentatious displays of artistic excellence and that any allusion to literacy among artists, even if only meant metaphorically, was a precarious stratagem, it was all important to present eminent historical examples for a concept of draughtsmanship which was based on sympathetic author-reader-relations.

It was in the course of establishing a valid genealogy for this concept of visual literacy that the connoisseurs in Crozat's circle were drawn to the conspicuous sheet depicting a hand as being drawn by another hand. Not only was the overtly self-referential character of the image apt to attract attention, but also its execution in pen and ink. More than any other drawing instrument the pen established a common bond between the sphere of drawing mastered by the artist and the sphere of writing mastered by the *homme de lettres*. It was the pen which allowed a homogeneous transition between drawing and writing. Accomplishment in the art of drawing could only be reached by means of the pen. That at least was the message of numerous handbooks on drawing which had appeared in the course of the seventeenth century<sup>32</sup>. By its sheer technicality the pen drawing supported the concept that images are legible like handwritten texts. On the part of the connoisseurs the fascination with this technique must have been enhanced by its overtly antiquarian connotation<sup>33</sup>. As a drawing device the reed pen was rarely used by contemporary artists in the first half of the eighteenth century who favoured instead the swift and sensual effects of the crayon. It was foremost the audacious, if not violent use of the « manly » *plume de roseau* which was at odds with the gracious calligraphy of the *goût rocaille*<sup>34</sup>. Turning to pen drawings (here to be understood as linear graphs without the use of the painterly wash) meant to look back to an age when drawing itself was still in an age of pristine purity. The evolving discussion about the intrinsic values of the line as a form-defining agent and its imminent dangers of being corrupted was inextricably linked to the question of old and modern drawing devices<sup>35</sup>.

Seen in such a historic perspective, it does not come as a surprise that the drawing in Crozat's collection was linked to the works by Michelangelo in the *cabinet du roi* which show a similar dexterity in using the pen both as a drawing and writing

32. On the « intellectualization » of the artist's hand as developed in art theoretical discourse since the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the efforts to assimilate the artist's manuality to those of earned professions, see WARNKE, 1987.

33. Walter Koschatzky remarks that the use of the reed pen or *canna* was foremost promoted by humanist scholars of the Renaissance as it was associated with Antiquity whereas the more subtle quill was regarded to be a post-antique invention, see KOSCHATZKY, 2003, p. 114.

34. In a letter to his Florentine correspondent Niccolò Maria Gaburri Mariette complained about « *il cattivo gusto del secolo* » which had turned artists and amateurs away from the masterly models provided by Raffael and Michelangelo. The ruling taste for the gracious had undermined the appreciation for the productions of the *artiste savant*, whose qualities are only recognized by the true connoisseurs : « *[il gusto dominante], che regna al presente, è il grazioso. Non si desidera altro, che de' soggetti vaghi, e che piacciono piuttosto per quello, che rappresenanto, che per un fondo di sapere, che non appartiene, se non à veri conoscitori* », Mariette to Gaburri, 1 mai 1731, quoted in BOTTARI, ed., 1757, p. 216. To adopt criteria which may be at odds with current standards of taste or preconceived ideas of artistic excellence was of course a mark of distinction in the habitus of the connoisseur and this *à rebours*-attitude had to be constantly reaffirmed within the connoisseurs' peer-group.

35. See MICHEL, 1989.

device<sup>36</sup>. One may even wonder if in this particular instance the representation of drawing as a performative act was bound to nurture further speculations about a specific context in which the drawing might have been generated as a message as legible as a written text<sup>37</sup>.

By the beginning of 1732 this message had been deciphered and it was up to Pierre-Jean Mariette to communicate it to Florence where this message, so it was believed, had originated centuries ago. In January 1732 Mariette sent a letter to the Florentine scholar and collector Niccolò Maria Gaburri, with whom he had been in touch ever since his Italian sojourn in 1719. The dispatch contained a recent discovery about Crozat's drawing and, since Gaburri had no idea about this sheet which had been in France for at least 50 years, Mariette sent one of Caylus's facsimile prints too<sup>38</sup>. What the Parisian connoisseurs had found out about the drawing must have been pleasing news to the Florentine erudite. In his letter Mariette pointed to an episode in Ascanio Condivi's *Life of Michelangelo* published in 1553. Here Condivi relates that the artist, then about 21 years of age, was persuaded by one of his patrons from the Medici-family to send a just finished marble cupid to Rome and in order to achieve a higher prize, he was advised to give his work the appearance of being antique. In Rome, we are told, the cupid was acquired by Raffaele Riario, cardinal of San Giorgio a Velabro, as an antique master-piece. When the Cardinal finally found out that he actually had bought a young sculptor's work from Florence he sent one of his noblemen to Michelangelo to make further enquiries. When the envoy wished to see examples of Michelangelo's œuvre, the artist took a pen and with utmost easiness he drew a hand, a demonstration which left the visitor stupefied. He informed his master about Michelangelo's extraordinary talent who in consequence was invited to come to Rome and was to live in the cardinal's household<sup>39</sup>.

To find this episode was not as easy as it seems today. By the early eighteenth century Condivi's *Vite* had become a very rare book. In contrast to Vasari's biography on Michelangelo it never went through any re-editing until 1746, when the Florentine scholar Antonio Gori made the text available again<sup>40</sup>. Much to Mariette's chagrin Vasari had omitted the anecdote of the hand in the authoritative second

36. JOANNIDES, GOARIN, SCHECK, 2003, n° 1 (St. John, copy after Giotto), n° 13 (Mercury/Apollo), n° 29 (head of a faune).

37. For a more elaborated discussion of *Les Mains de Michel-Ange* as an emblem of the connoisseur's writing culture, see REES, 2006, p. 293-304.

38. « *Voi vi troverete una ventina di ritratti di Nantevil, die Masson e d'altri, che ho potuto trovare : un grand numero di stampe intagliate dal conte di Caylus, ricavate da' disegni di buoni maestri, ch'io ho raccolte con molta cura ; tra le quali ve n'è une, che vi piacerà molto, e viene da Michelagnolo, che egli fece in un'occasione quasi simile a quella, in cui Giotto fece il suo famoso O, voglio dire per far vedere di quel ch'egli era capace. Voi ne troverete l'istoria nella vita di questo grand'uomo scritta dal Condivi suo scolare a cart. 10* », Mariette to Gaburri, 28 January 1732, quoted in BOTTARI, ed., 1757, p. 265.

39. CONDIVI, 1553, § 18.

40. CONDIVI, 1746. Mariette's personal copy, sent to him by Gori, is kept in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Réserve des livres rares, RES-K. 118. His handwritten notes added to this text have been published in the *Abeceario*, see MARIETTE, 1851, p. 208-234. Gori undertook it to write the first *catalogue raisonné* on Michelangelo, but this immense task did not come to fruition, see JOANNIDES, 2003, p. 47.

edition of his *Vite* and so it never had become widely known amongst connoisseurs. As has been mentioned before, one of Crozat's *habitués*, the abbé de Marouille, had been working on a French translation of Vasari's *Vite* up to his death in 1726 and it was possibly in the course of such textual studies that adjacent sources were consulted again. In Florence, the theatre of Michelangelo's early fame, Condivi's narrative was still much alive but here the crucial drawing as the visual counterpart of the episode was missing. By means of Caylus' facsimile, a unique masterpiece which by the vicissitudes of the art market had migrated to Paris finally returned to Florence, where it was believed to have originated some 235 years earlier. In Mariette's view this carefully planned *ritorno in patria* would have been accomplished by depositing the facsimile in the Casa Buonarroti, at that time still owned by the artist's relatives<sup>41</sup>.

Thus firmly embedded in a narrative, which was beyond doubt as it was already published in the artist's lifetime, word and image were fused into a tale which helped to define the self-image of the cosmopolitan community of connoisseurs. What the episode had to tell about the conduct of patrons and self-appointed artistic advisers to the young artist hardly could serve as an *exemplum virtutis* for the enlightened connoisseur. Far from being inflamed by a true love for the arts their Renaissance forerunners were guided by mundane material interests and seduced the unsuspecting artist to commit a blatant fraud. Amidst this entanglement of manipulations and moral misconduct the artist finally prevailed as his geniality was revealed by his own hand. Reuniting the verbal and the visual testimony of this trial amounted not only to a vindication of the artist. It entailed also a substantial self-enhancement on the part of the modern connoisseur who wished his interventions in the arts to be seen as disinterested promotion of true artistic genius.

Pursuing this vindication further meant to add visual counterevidence to a commanding textual tradition, in this case Vasari's narrative of Michelangelo's life. When the Roman scholar Giovanni Gaetano Bottari prepared a new edition of the *Vite* one purpose of this undertaking was to wipe out Vasari's « *molti errori* » and to fill the lacunae of his narrative with illustrations of those works which the historiographer had omitted<sup>42</sup>. Mariette took special care that his long-standing correspondent Bottari would receive one of the rare copies of Caylus's facsimile<sup>43</sup>. In 1760 the third volume with Vasari's *Life of Michelangelo* appeared, and now the deficiency of the text was publicly exposed by the image of young Michelangelo's bold hand,

41. Referring to Caylus' facsimile of *Les Mains de Michel-Ange* Mariette took it for granted that the influential Buonarroti family would get notice of it : « *Il Senator [Filippo] Bonarroti, che ha cotanto giustamente in sì grande ammirazione tutto ciò, che è partito dalle mani di Michelagnolo, vedrà senza fallo questa meravigliosa opera, che non cede punto a tutto ciò, che l'antichità ha di più fiero* ». Mariette to Gaburri, 28 January 1732, quoted in BOTTARI, 1757, p. 265. Until the end of the eighteenth century the Casa Buonarroti held most of Michelangelo's drawings ; the house had already been converted into a sanctuary under direction of the artist's nephew, see JOANNIDES, GOARIN, SCHECK, 2003, p. 46.

42. On Bottari's ambitious project which marks the beginning of a critical reassessment of Vasari's work as a historiographer, see now VERMEULEN, 2007.

43. See Mariette's letter to Bottari from 1758, quoted in MARIETTE, 1851, p. 213, n. 1.

transmitted by the assisting hand of the amateur (see below, fig. 3). For the publication Caylus's print had to be copied again in Rome and that not only because his plate had become unsuitable for printing. By then, the indication that the original was kept in Crozat's cabinet was outdated, as Mariette himself had acquired the precious item in 1741 when Crozat's collection was finally dissolved. The new owner insisted further that an important discovery of his had to be added to the facsimile in order to make it complete. Careful observation had convinced him that a graphic element in the upper right quarter of the drawing should be read as an abbreviation of the Latin words « *et cetera* »<sup>44</sup>.

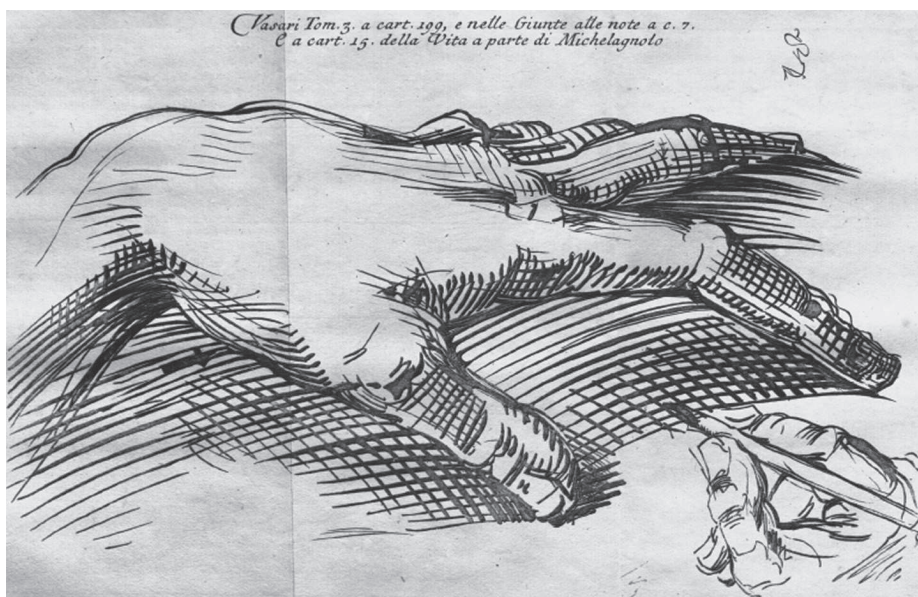


Fig. 3 – Tommaso PIROLI (?) after Comte de Caylus, « *Les Mains de Michel-Ange* », engraving, 130 x 270 mm, in VASARI, 1759-1760, here 1760, vol. 3, after p. 199.

Source : Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, München, Sig. D-Mi 53/9 R 8  
(published with the kind autorisation of this institute)

44. Although the facsimile which appeared in the 1759 edition showed already the ominous signs, they were not further explained in Bottari's notes. Tommaso Gentili as editor-in-chief of a new edition of Vasari's *Vite* which appeared in 1767-1772, was at pains to add these remarks to the illustration : « *Ho creduto non solo di fare cosa grata al Lettore di inserirci il disegno di essa mano, dove e da notare, che il Bonarroti alla fine della medesima ha fatto un etc, volendo dirci, credo io, che egli sapeva fare con quella profonda intelligenza, e con quella terribil bravura, quella mano, et cetera, cioe tutto il resto, a cui si stendeva il suo sapere. Questo terribile e stupendo disegno passo nelle mani del signor Bourdaloue, e poi in quello de sig. Crozat, e ora è posseduto dal sig. Mariette, per cortesia del quale n'è una stampa nella libreria Corsini intagliate dal sig. conte di Caylus, grande intelligente d'ogni erudita antichità e d'ogni bell'arte* », in VASARI, 1759-1760, here see the second edition 1767-1772, vol. 6, p. 69.

According to Mariette, this laconic autograph had to be understood as an assertion provided by the artist himself that he would have been able to draw the rest of the body in a similar impetuous manner. Thus Michelangelo appeared in this drawing not only as an accomplished draughtsman but also as a witty *homme de plume* who knew to defend himself by means of the image and the word. From all possible qualities of Michelangelo's versatile hand as a painter, sculptor and architect, it was this kind of visual and verbal literacy which animated the imagination of the connoisseurs most. Under Mariette's eyes the drawing had virtually turned into a legible text<sup>45</sup>. The connoisseur took particular pains to preserve the link between word and image he had so thoughtfully established. Having entered into his collection, the sheet was not only given the same meticulous mount as all of his drawings, the famous montage Mariette<sup>46</sup>. As a particular mark of distinction a Latin motto was added on the mat in a neat antique-type lettering : « *Suspicionem de sollertis sua malè conceptam, sic expungebat teste Asc. Condivio*<sup>47</sup>. » That this masterly demonstration of young Michelangelo's dexterity may never be regarded again with suspicion, was to be guaranteed by the connoisseur who acted in this instance as an ally and advocate on behalf of the artist.

One may argue that by the very act of framing Michelangelo's hand in this manner, all of the connoisseur's desires were finally fulfilled. The creator of the work, its date and place in history had been revealed, all its messages, the figurative and the verbal ones, had been deciphered. The art world had been informed about all this by publications. Facsimiles circulated all over Europe which conveyed a reliable image of this masterpiece. They even could act as substitutes, if, heaven forbid, the original would ever suffer any harm<sup>48</sup>. A connoisseur's dream had come true. Of course, it could not last forever.

#### HÄNDESCHIEDUNG<sup>49</sup>

In November 1775 the celebrated *Mains de Michel-Ange* were acquired for the *Cabinet du roi* when the collection of Pierre-Jean Mariette, who had deceased a

45. SMENTEK, 2008, p. 36 : « Securing the legibility of the artist's drawings was, I suggest, a goal that is manifest both in Mariette's distinctive mounts and in his interventions into the drawings themselves. »

46. On the *montage Mariette*, see LE MAROIS, 1982 ; SMENTEK, 2008, p. 39-41.

47. The text, almost certainly conceived by Mariette, can be roughly translated as « Thus he [*i. e.* Michelangelo] dispersed the evil-founded suspicion about his skilfulness, as testified by Ascanio Condivi. »

48. See William Gilpin's comment on the quality of Caylus's facsimiles which he believed to be truthful enough to the originals so that they might replace them without a substantial loss of information : « [...] if we had nothing remaining of those masters, but Count Caylus's works, we should not want a very sufficient idea of them », GILPIN, 1792, p. 79.

49. In the course of the nineteenth century the neologism « *Händescheidung* », literally « separation of hands », was being invented in German-speaking countries to characterize what was to become one of the essential operations of connoisseurship, that is attributing works of art, or specific parts of them, to distinctly recognizable « hands » or artists. This technical term is used here in a broader sense to allude to the fundamental separation between the « manuality » of the old-style connoisseur-cum-dilettante and the new culture of art-historical experts. Whereas the manual acts of the former were directed towards a performative and sensual adaptation of artistic skill, the latter painstakingly avoided any kind of manual involvement and conceived the field of artistic expertise as sheer visuality. Meaningful contributions to this body of knowledge were no longer dependent on manual skill but on discursive capacities.

year before, was dissolved. Regarded superficially, the transition from private ownership into the possession of the state did not alter the status of the work. On the contrary, its symbolic value increased significantly, since it was one of the very few of Mariette's Michelangelo drawings the crown deemed worth to possess<sup>50</sup>. During the Revolution and the Empire the drawing was presented at least five times to the general public<sup>51</sup>.

Nevertheless, behind the scenes a major shift of attitudes with regard to the epistemological and material status of old master drawings was taking place. This mutation shows itself not so much on the level of discourse but in the way drawings were, quite literally, handled with. By the end of the eighteenth century a new type of « manuality » emerged which betrays a fundamental change in the mentality of artistic expertise. To come to terms with this process one has to recall the vast range of manual operations which old-style connoisseurs like Mariette had employed to adjust the items in their collections to prevailing standards of enhanced visibility and legibility. In an instructive study Kristel Smentek has analysed the various manual interventions which Mariette did apply to even the most prestigious sheets in his collection. They went far beyond the act of mounting and adding the occasional textual comment on the *montage* as in the case of the *Mains de Michel-Ange*. The collector intervened quite physically into the works by trimming or enlarging the paper, cutting sheets into pieces and even tried to split the paper in order to arrange the rectos and versos separately. Given the difficulty of the task it is hardly surprising that some of these manipulations resulted in severe mutilations of the drawings<sup>52</sup>. It is safe to say, that most of these practices would not comply with current curatorial standards, in many respects they betray an entirely different notion about an object of art as a tangible entity.

Accepting Smentek's argument that all these operations were adopted to foster optimized viewing conditions one should not ignore that they also allowed the connoisseur to assume the role of a second-hand artist. In taking up the master's drawing device in order to retouch the margins of a drawing<sup>53</sup> or to create a suitable background for it<sup>54</sup>, Mariette prolonged the act of drawing both temporally and spatially. In these tactile attempts to get in touch with various idioms of draughtsmanship Mariette participated in the same kind of artistic chiromancy which induced Caylus to let his reproductive hand be guided by a whole range of old and modern masters. What emerges here is a type of joint manuality which is not yet divided

50. See JOANNIDES, 2003, p. 45-46, commenting on this fact with hardly concealed incomprehension : « *Les collections royales profitèrent peu de la vente Mariette, du moins en ce qui concerne les dessins de Michel-Ange [...]. L'acquisition majeure, fut, étrangement, un dessin qui n'était pas de Michel-Ange et que Mariette, plus étrangement encore, avait évalué au dessus de tous les autres : l'Étude d'une main [...].* »

51. See JOANNIDES, GOARIN, SCHECK, 2003, p. 389.

52. On Mariette's not always successful attempts of paper-splitting, see SMENTEK, 2008, p. 48-54.

53. For examples where Mariette had enlarged existing drawings by prolonging contours over the margin of the original, see BACOU, 1981, n° 15 ; SMENTEK, 2008, p. 45, fig. 6 and 7.

54. See SMENTEK, 2008, p. 46, fig. 8, where Mariette had created an illusionistic niche for the study of a putto, probably by Giorgione.

by sharp divisions between production and reception, between visual competence and practical performance<sup>55</sup>. This manual approach implied long-standing exercise, patience and skill, it entailed a whole set of gestures by which the connoisseur tried to engage in an act of intimate communication not only with the original but also with the specific circumstances of its creation. One may argue that by the very act of intense and repeated perception of singular items the connoisseur changed into a modern day Pygmalion under whose eyes an immobile work of art was about to turn into a living agent of art history, as it was the case with the *Mains de Michel-Ange*. However, this theatrical transfiguration of the drawing into an agitated and animated scene, taking place in Renaissance Florence, was not only brought about by intense viewing but also by attentive reading and a whole array of manual operations which had helped to stage the scene in the first place.

Since the *Mains de Michel-Ange* allowed a perfect fusion of various types of performativity, that of the artist, that of the connoisseur and that of the talented amateur, they assumed an emblematic status in a period when the *cabinet des dessins* was still by and large a multifunctional agglomeration : it served as a studio for practical draughtsmanship, it was an area for historical erudition as well as for tasteful judgement, it was a laboratory for empirical observation as well as a nucleus in a personal network of cosmopolitan correspondence. It was in this epistemological arrangement that the *Mains de Michel-Ange* rose to almost mythical heights. It was not to endure in the prosaic and detached climate of a public collection.

In the era of the Restauration, when after various interruptions the transnational network of connoisseurship went back to normal, Mariette's framing, conceived as a kind of fortress to protect the *Mains de Michel-Ange* against further doubts, began to erode. Perhaps it was not coincidental that the first one who dared to oppose to Mariette's narrative was neither a French nor an Italian connoisseur, but an English one. After all, forging the celebrity of this drawing had been the result of a close Franco-Italian co-operation, underpinned by personal relations. In 1825 the eminent British painter Sir Thomas Lawrence, himself a keen collector of Italian master-drawings, wrote in a private letter after having visited the Louvre : « Michael Angelo's hand is not by him, but by an imitator of his pen, and not of his forms<sup>56</sup>. » And in his personal notes he ventured a new attribution, which in the long run would prevail : « The celebrated large hand, in pen and ink, is certainly not by Michelangelo ; but probably by

55. Another parallel between Mariette's and Caylus's approach to master drawings can be detected in the fact that both wanted their interventions to be clearly distinguishable from the original itself. Mariette, for instance, never placed a paraph within the graphic texture of a sheet which was still common practice throughout the eighteenth century. In the case of pen drawings these abbreviations, usually also written in ink, could easily be misunderstood as being part of the original drawing. What Mariette identified as a short version of *et cetera* in the *Mains de Michel-Ange* is probably nothing else than a paraph added by one former owner of the drawing. On similar paraphs by Claude Delamotte, applied between 1704-10, and Jean-Charles Garnier d'Isle, applied in 1752, on the rectos of pen drawings by Michelangelo, see JOANNIDES, GOARIN, SCHECK, 2003, p. 57 and n° 1, 13, 28.

56. Thomas Lawrence to Samuel Woodborn, 1 September 1825, quoted WILLIAMS, 1831, vol. 2, p. 415.



Passerotti<sup>57</sup>. » Mariette's reference to Condivi's Vita was not even mentioned any more. As a contrived textual footnote it might have illustrated the connoisseur's erudition but simply could not contribute anything meaningful to the analysis and comparison of form and style. Curiously enough, the first artist ever whose comments on the drawing have been preserved carried out a serious blow against the connoisseurs' *opinio communis*. In focussing on the form-style-dichotomy, Lawrence made use of a discursive tool which became indispensable for the new academic discipline of art history. In doing so, he deliberately had to suppress both : the *montage Mariette* with its suggestive inscriptions and the time-honoured status of celebrity which surrounded the drawing like an invisible aura. Henceforth, art history would treat any anecdotal reference with a kind of counterintuitive caution, in cases of doubt it would always put visual fact over verbal fiction<sup>58</sup>.

It is open to speculation whether Lawrence's suspicion had any impact on French experts when his notes were finally published in 1831<sup>59</sup>. If, for instance, Quatremère de Quincy had any knowledge of them, he evidently preferred to ignore them in his monograph on Michelangelo, published in 1835<sup>60</sup>. Here, the exceptional status of the drawing is once more corroborated by another facsimile reproduction, this time executed as a lithograph by (Antoine-Léon ?) Lemercier (see below, fig. 4). Although Quatremère de Quincy did not seem to have entertained doubts about the link between the drawing and Condivi's text, Mariette's congenial *etcetera* has been deleted again. In its place a new inscription appeared which underlined the impromptu-character of the representation<sup>61</sup>. Significantly enough, the only other facsimile in the book shows a letter by Michelangelo's aging hand<sup>62</sup>. Although rather mundane in content the autograph letter establishes a graphic link between the artist and the writer. Still both idioms of graphic articulation form a common discursive ground on which a close, if not intimate encounter with the artist becomes possible. Despite of all superhuman epithets of Michelangelo's *divinità*, the artist appears in these testimonies from his own hand as a tangible *homme de plume*.

57. WILLIAMS, 1831, vol. 2, p. 423.

58. See the programmatic title of Carl Goldstein's study on the Carracci, *Visual Fact Over Verbal Fiction. A Study of the Carracci and the Criticism, Theory, and Practice of Art in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (GOLDSTEIN, 1988).

59. See the posthumous publication by WILLIAMS, 1831.

60. QUATREMÈRE DE QUINCY, 1835, p. 11 : « [*Michel-Ange*] improvisa cette main devenue célèbre, que le comte de Caylus a fait graver. C'est à ce train plein de savoir et de hardiesse qu'on peut appliquer le proverbe latin *ex ungue leonem*. Certainement il y avait là, pour un connoisseur, de quoi prendre une haute idée du talent de Michel-Ange. »

61. « *Main improvisée à la plume, page 18, par Michel Ange* ». The first line is given in italics like a handwritten note. The page number refers to Quatremère's text.

62. QUATREMÈRE DE QUINCY, 1835, facsimile of a letter by Michelangelo after p. 380.

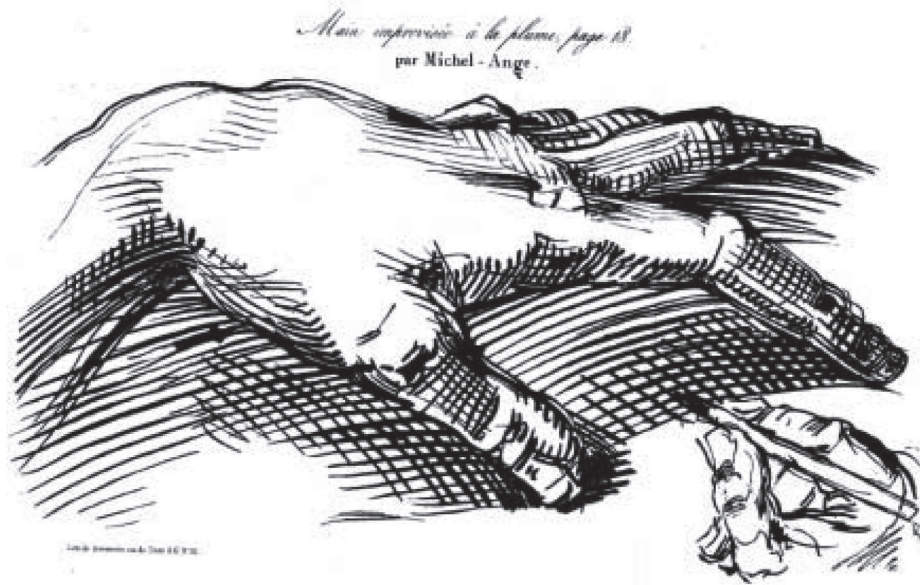


Fig. 4 – Antoine-Léon (?) LEMERCIER, « Les Mains de Michel-Ange », lithograph 0,133 x 272 mm, in QUATREMÈRE DE QUINCY, 1835, after p. 18. Source : Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, München, Sig. D-Mi 53/8 (published with the kind autorisation of this institute)

It took another twenty years before Mariette was publicly challenged on his own ground. No other than Philippe de Chennevières and Anatole de Montaiglon, Mariette's nineteenth century editors, entirely dismissed his carefully construed narrative and suggested a new attribution to Annibale Carracci<sup>63</sup>. By then the formidable connoisseur of the eighteenth century had become an object for historical study. The professional art-historians in the age of positivism, now institutionalized in academies and universities, had mixed attitudes towards the amateurs of the *Ancien Régime* : on the one hand they were hailed as venerable forerunners, if not grounding fathers of a discipline in the making, on the other hand they were suspected to have rendered all too willingly to fanciful idiosyncrasy<sup>64</sup>.

Thus the *fortuna critica* of the sheet in the Musée du Louvre reached an all-time low in Charles Blanc's essay on Michelangelo in his monumental *Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles*. Here the drawing is mentioned *en passant* only to be banned once and for all from the ranks of formidable master-pieces and was to be tossed back into mediocrity :

« [...] l'on ne retrouve pas précisément la griffe d'un si grand homme. Il y a quelque chose d'académique et de relativement froid dans ces hachures régulières et même

63. CHENNEVIÈRES and MONTAIGLON in MARIETTE, 1851, p. 213-14, n. 1.

64. A telling example for the difficulties to integrate figures like the Comte de Caylus into academic master narratives of disciplinary pioneers offers Samuel Rocheblave's doctoral thesis on Caylus (see ROCHEBLAVE, 1889).

*pesantes par laquelle sont indiquées les ombres. Cela semble appartenir à une époque plus moderne et de sortir d'une maison de graveur<sup>65</sup>. »*

One could hardly think of any judgement more opposed to Mariette's exultations. It almost seems as if the series of reproductions which had helped to spread the drawing's fame now had turned against it and evoked the suspicion, even the original might have been produced by an engraver's hand. Charles Blanc knew what he was talking about : he himself had emerged from an engraver's shop before he launched his career as an eminent art-critic. Quite possibly, the celebrated hand study in the Louvre had evoked in him an unsolicited reminiscence of the myriads of mechanically trained hands which had paved the way into an age of visual mass-production. Despite of this seemingly complete inversion of all the tenets which were dear the connoisseurs of the eighteenth century, even Charles Blanc is still acting under their spell. Albeit in a disillusioned perspective, he cannot refrain from projecting his notion of artistic greatness (« *la griffe d'un si grand homme* ») into the drawing, only to receive a disenchanting echo, which by now had taken on the *haut goût* of academism and commercial technicality.

The reason for such disenchantment has as little to do with the original drawing as Mariette's unshakeable enchantment had. Ever since its rediscovery in the early eighteenth century the drawing had been a contested area on which a tenacious struggle was staged about interferences from outside into the sphere of the artist's hand. It was not so much the majestic, well-defined hand resting in undisturbed dignity in the centre of the image, which was contested most. It was rather the small-scale, slightly blurred second hand, half in and half out of the picture plane, which became the focus of competing aspirations and competencies. Had this unobtrusive hand ever been more than an intriguing afterthought, smuggled into the picture when all its essential parts were already finished<sup>66</sup> ? The apparently redundant character of the performative hand had induced an impressive range of persons to identify their own operations with that of the second hand : It invited Caylus to follow the traces of the most audacious of all draughtsmen, it invited Mariette to provide the authoritative text for what he essentially had recognized as a writing hand, it invited countless other commentators to add further evidence in form of inscriptions and other visual and verbal supplements. The operations of artistic, or for that matter, art historical expertise are thus quite literally revealed as second-hand activities. The doings of the artist's hand may forever remain a mystique. Even more it is important to examine the manoeuvres of those hands which seldom enter into the picture but whose operations shape our perception of art with longstanding effects. The famous *étude de main gauche dessinée par une main droite* in the Musée du Louvre may have lost its mythical designation as *Les Mains de Michel-Ange* long ago. However, it preserves the traces of *Les Mains de Mariette* up to the present day.

65. Charles Blanc in BLANC, MANTZ, 1876, p. 11.

66. The contrast in scale and form, resulting in a clearly asymmetrical relation between the depicted and the performative hand is indeed difficult to account for. Hand studies by fifteenth and sixteenth century artists which depict the act of drawing in a self-referential mode usually show « naturalistic » arrangements of depicted and depicting hands, see on this topic SCHULZE ALTCAPEBERG, THIMANN, ed., 2007, p. 62-82 and n° 3 with reference to inv. 717 (département des arts graphiques, musée du Louvre).

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