

Did Michelangelo Include a Brain Stem in the Sistine Chapel?

June 22 2010, by Miranda Marquit

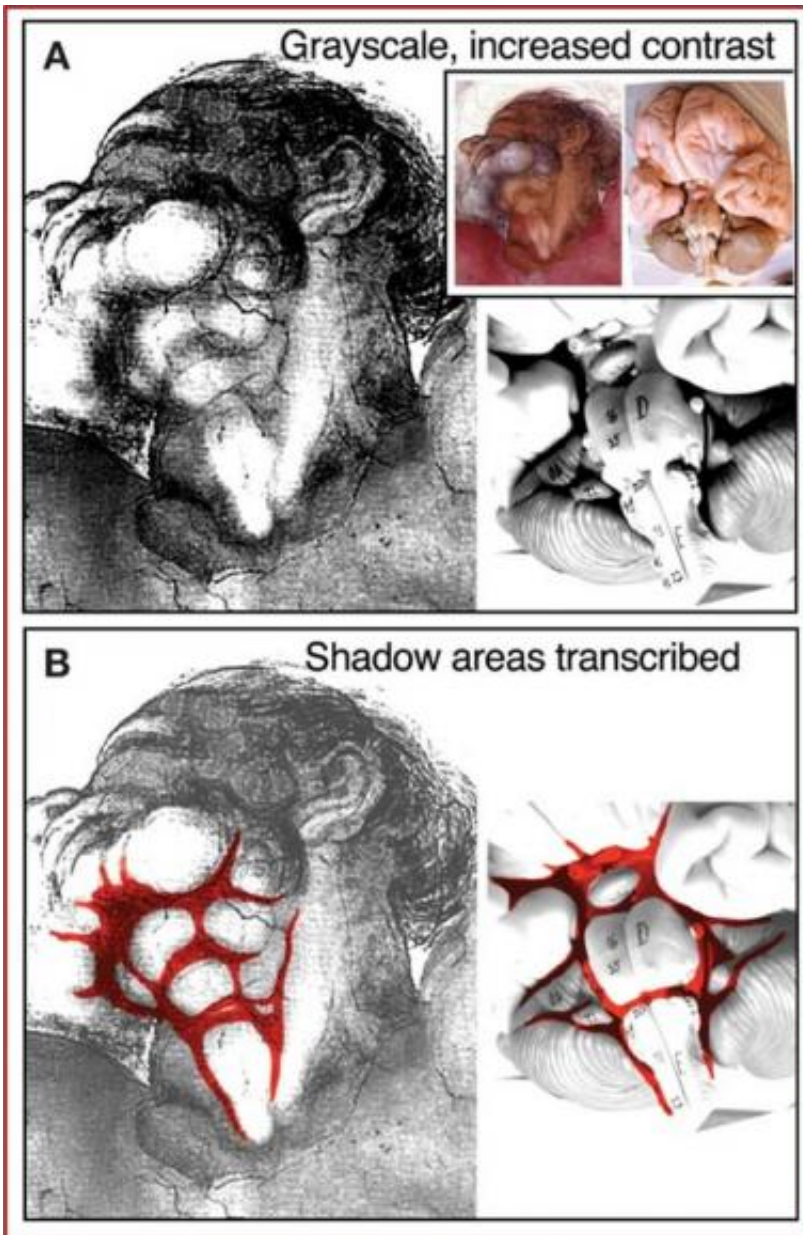


Image source: Wikipedia.org

Da Vinci Code author Dan Brown has yet to write a book on the hidden pictures in Michelangelo's artwork, but maybe he can start working on a thriller that takes Robert Langdon on a journey through the Renaissance master's alleged diagrams of human anatomy. Hidden in plain sight, in Sistine Chapel frescoes, assert some medical personnel, are pictures of human anatomy. The latest assertion appears in the journal *Neurosurgery*, where Ian Suk and Dr. Rafael J. Tamargo claim that Michelangelo included a rendering of the human brain stem in the fresco titled "The Separation of Light from Darkness".

The New York Times [reports](#) on one of the reasons that Tamargo thinks that the resemblance was intentional:

To Dr. Tamargo's eye, God's neck in the fresco is distinctly different from those of other figures depicted in more or less the same posture. Usually, the neck looks smooth, but in "The Separation of Light From Darkness" there are lines and shapes quite different from the normal external anatomy of the neck, irregularities that he believes cannot be accidental. "The anatomy of the neck is very, very unusual," he said, and if it were not intentionally drawn that way, "you would have to postulate that Michelangelo had a very bad day, which is very unlikely because he was very meticulous."



Digital “shadow analysis.” A, close-up of God's neck (gray scale, increased contrast) is compared with a photograph of a plastic brain model (SOMSO-plast Brain model BS20, 2001) in similar oblique, ventral views. Inset shows original color photo for context. B, shadow areas are transcribed in red using a digital paintbrush in Adobe Photoshop (CS2, 2005). Image credit: Neurosurgery: doi: 10.1227/01.NEU.0000368101.34523.E1

Some are skeptical, though. For years physicians and others have been looking for evidence that Michelangelo, well known for his interest in the human form and his forays into corpse dissection, included clues to his scientific interest in his art. Some claim that different frescoes in the Sistine Chapel feature a kidney and the outline of the human [brain](#). Skeptics think that doctors and others may be looking too hard to find something that may not be there. The New York Times article continues:

...Joanna Woods-Marsden, a professor of art history at the University of California, Los Angeles, was outraged as much by the authors' hypothesis as by their audacity in presenting it. "My initial reaction on looking at the illustrations is that this is complete nonsense, to put it politely," she wrote in an e-mail message. "To draw arbitrary lines all over Renaissance paintings and expect to be taken seriously by the scholarly community!"

We have few of Michelangelo's anatomical drawings today. Perhaps it isn't very surprising that scientists, professors and physicians want to find anatomical diagrams in his art. It provides evidence that [Michelangelo](#) truly was a well-rounded Renaissance man, interested in science as well as being an artistic luminary.

More information: Concealed Neuroanatomy in Michelangelo's Separation of Light From Darkness in the Sistine Chapel, Neurosurgery: May 2010 - Volume 66 - Issue 5 - p 851-861. [doi: 10.1227/01.NEU.0000368101.34523.E1](#)

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