

Believed Lost: Why This Model May Actually Be by Michelangelo

A previously unknown, limewood model of Pope Julius II is stirring the art history world—ironically just before the 550th anniversary of Michelangelo's birth.

FRANKFURT, GERMANY, February 25, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A previously unknown, limewood model of [Pope Julius II](#) is currently stirring the art history world—ironically just before the 550th anniversary of [Michelangelo Buonarroti's](#) birth. It could well be the long-lost model Michelangelo used as a reference for his monumental bronze statue of Pope Julius II, which once stood above the main portal of the Basilica of San Petronio in Bologna. That statue was violently destroyed in 1511 and considered irretrievably lost ever since.



Sculpture of Pope Julius II, may actually be by Michelangelo (photo: Robert Schittko, <https://michelangelo-lost-masterpiece.com>)

Recently appearing on the art market, this newly discovered sculpture displays several characteristic features suggesting it was created in Michelangelo's immediate circle. A key figure in this attribution is the English art historian Linda Murray, who, in her work *Michelangelo, His Life, Work and Times*, presented a reconstruction of the San Petronio portal. In her depiction, the Michelangelo bronze statue of Pope Julius II is shown in precisely the same seated pose—with legs apart and the drapery arranged in a manner now strikingly echoed in the rediscovered wooden model.

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“There seems to be little doubt that this newly found sculpture can be traced back to the statue once installed at the Basilica in Bologna,” says Frankfurt-based art historian Dr. Robert Bock.

Of special note are the figure's hands, which are covered by red gloves—“Chirothecae”—part of a

pope's liturgical insignia. Additionally, a signet ring on the figure's left hand was observed. "Even though Julius II is known as the 'Warrior Pope,' it's plausible he might have worn such a ring to highlight his commitment to humanist ideals, his patronage of the arts, and his close ties to Rome," Bock speculates.

The finely modeled face, featuring a slightly open mouth framed by a trimmed mustache distinct from the mildly curling beard, shows Michelangelo's unmistakable stylistic touch despite the sketch-like nature of the piece.

"Initial dendrochronological tests date the limewood to around 1500," explains Klaus Rössler on behalf of the current owners—precisely the era in which the sculpture would have been created. Further technical examinations are pending and may yield more clues about authorship. If the piece can indeed be attributed to Michelangelo, it would be one of the master's few known works in wood—an extraordinary milestone for Michelangelo scholarship.

Nonetheless, experts remain divided: while some art historians find a direct attribution to Michelangelo plausible, others argue for an origin "within his circle" or a reproduction of the lost original bronze. Most connoisseurs reject the idea that it was crafted by just any contemporary, finding the artistic quality too exceptional. As Victoria Avery noted in her studies (*Michelangelo: Sculptor in Bronze*, 2018, pp. 49–79), the original statue was once considered the largest single bronze figure since antiquity and attracted considerable attention during Michelangelo's lifetime. Yet it never garnered the same level of scholarly focus as his celebrated marble sculptures, partly due to the political sensitivities surrounding Pope Julius II's portrayal and the statue's eventual destruction.

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