

Paul McRay

The Hand of God

For more than a month Michelangelo has been thinking of nothing but God's hand. And Adam's, the way it must convey acceptance of a transcendent gift. And thanks.

Rome's weather's been dazzling
and he needs to get out into the countryside,
perhaps to Florence. There's this boy

who works in a cafe there, the boy whose had
started him thinking of hands in the first place.
Adam's hand, he's sure. Julius's note said,

in part, "Buonarroti. Was over to the chapel yesterday
and you weren't there. Work on the ceiling appears
stalled, and it must be completed by next year."

It went on about gatherings, what people will think,
the political situation. Bla Bla Bla.
Hands are even in his dreams, this way and that.

The whole work depends on them. His whole life.
About to touch. he knows that. And the finger,
the finger of God, almost pointing — but not quite.

He would be over first thing in the morning
the note went on, "and I'd better find you on your back
and up in the air."

So Michelangelo eats lightly and retires
at nine. Sleep is the way he deals with the Pope.
Maybe tomorrow, he thinks. It never occurs to him that God

will come to him in his dream, tell him how to do the hands.
 And, no, God does not come. Unable to sleep, Michelangelo
 wakes and rises in the unsettling night, dresses hurriedly,

tosses some things into an old bag, saddles the fastest horse
 he can find, and heads for Florence. When he arrives the sun is up,
 and so is the boy from the cafe. Just then the Pontiff is arriving at
 the chapel.

The guard has still not seen Michelangelo.
 Three days, he says, four. Beside himself, His Holiness
 explodes: *God damn him! Who does he think he is!*

But the hands are settled. Over eggs
 Michelangelo sees that the other hand is his own,
 though more veined, more wrinkled, as the hand of God must be.