

Self-portrait

by [Kathleen L. Housley](#) in the [April 17, 2007](#) issue

After four years, Michelangelo has reached the end,
and now Jonah, whom he has reserved for last,
dangles his bare feet over the Sistine's void,
sharing his precarious aerie with a dead fish,
two cherubs and a vine. A marvel of foreshortening,
he reclines on his arm and eyes God, still arguing
petulantly that he is not the man to undertake
such a harebrained job, lacking both talent
and inclination. His fingers point in opposite
directions, one to the threat of Nineveh and Rome,
the other to the safety of Tarshish and Florence,
regarding his own death as a small price to pay
to make a point. Yet as the fresco dries to stone,
he gazes beyond the gap between his intractable
pique and God's intractable grace, dumbfounded
at the resplendent vault arching above a city at peace.