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**Lost Michelangelo Found in Buffalo**

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The great artist Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) gave the world such masterpieces as the Sistine Chapel, the Pietá, and David. Born in 1475, he died in 1564, 446 years ago. So no one ever thought they’d see a new Michelangelo, until Italian art historian and restorer Antonio a Forcellino laid eyes on the painting in Buffalo, New York.

When owner, 53-year old Martin Kober showed the painting to Forcellino, the unfinished painting of Jesus and Mary, he couldn’t believe his eyes. Similar to other paintings by the great master, Forcellino said, "This painting was even more beautiful than the versions hanging in Rome and Florence.”

The painting had hung on the living-room wall of the Kober family for years.

Everyone just referred to it as "The Mike." Then, one of the kids knocked it off the wall with a tennis ball, and as a result, the Kobers wrapped it up and put behind the sofa for safe keeping, and there it stayed for the next 27 years.

When Air Force Lt. Col. Martin Kober retired in 2003, his father said, “Now, with your newfound free time, do something with this!" And he took on the job of researching the family story surrounding the painting.

Kober, now 53, took on the task and researched the history of the painting. He contacted auction houses, Renaissance art scholars, European archives, and even met with museum directors in Italy. He eventually found Antonio Forcellino and told him the story of the painting.

Forcellino said, "It wasn't the story that had scared me, but that it had been exposed to heating commonly found inside a middle-class home,” wrote in his new book, La Pieta Perduta, The Lost Pietá. Besides, he didn’t really believe in the existence of another rendition of a painting that already hung in museums. "I had assumed it was going to be a copy.

"In reality, this painting was even more beautiful than the versions hanging in Rome and Florence. The truth was this painting was much better than the ones they had. I had visions of telling them that there was this crazy guy in America telling everyone he had a Michelangelo at home," Forcellino said.

A scientific analysis of the painting, believed to have been painted in 1545, proved the Michelangelo was real. "The evidence of unfinished portions demonstrate that this painting never, never, never could be a copy of another painting," Forcellino said. "No patron pays in the Renaissance for an unfinished copy."

Additionally, the ownership history, points to the work being done by Michelangelo around 1545 for his friend Vittoria Colonna, about 45 years after Michelangelo sculpted his famous Pietá that now stands in St. Peter's Basilica.

The Pietá painting then passed to two Catholic cardinals and eventually ended with a German baroness named Villani. Villani then willed it to her lady-in-waiting, Gertrude Young, the sister-in-law of Kober’s great-grandfather. In 1883, she then sent the work to America.

Forcellino said Herman Grimm, a noted Michelangelo biographer, saw the Pietá painting in 1868 and attributed it to the master. Additional evidence includes a letter in the Vatican library discussing a Pietá painting for Colonna. "I'm absolutely convinced that is a Michelangelo painting," Forcellino said.

However, the jury is still out, according to Michelangelo expert William Wallace, a professor of architecture and art history at Washington University in St. Louis. Wallace said he saw the painting before Kober had it privately restored to remove 500 years of wear and tear, and maintains there is no definitive scientific way to attribute such a painting. Instead, experts will, over time determine the authorship of the painting.

However, Wallace agrees to the painting's potential worth. Now in a bank vault, the painting that hung on a wall in Buffalo, New York, could be worth as much as $300 million.