

# The Veiled Christ

## *Background*

The tissue-like shroud covering the sacred Body of Christ in this masterpiece was so realistically carved that the original viewers thought the patron of the project – who was an alchemist – had cast some kind of spell over the marble to create the illusion of transparency. In 1752, Prince Raimondo di Sangro of Naples commissioned Giuseppe Sanmartino (1720-1793) to create this sculpture of Christ after the original artist died leaving only a rough model. The Prince's stipulation was that the shroud covering the dead Body of the Lord should be sculpted from the same block of marble. The result is this amazing carving.



*Cristo velato (Giuseppe Sanmartino, 1753); Foto di Marco Ghidelli; © Archivio Museo Cappella Sansevero*

## *What to Look For*

In the Museo Sansevero in Naples, Italy, the sculpture rests alone on a plinth in the middle of a chapel, and the viewer can approach it from all sides, as if even in death the Lord is inviting us: “Come to me all you who labor and are heavy burdened...” (Mt 11:28).

The musculature and contours of Jesus' sacred Body are fully visible by the cleaving of the shroud to every inch of the supine figure. This shroud serves to reveal the sacrificial death rather than to just cover a lifeless corpse. One can even see the clear imprint of the nail marks in the hands and feet through the cloth as well as the gash of the spear between the ribs on His right side.

Notice the instruments of the Passion at His feet: the nails; the pliers used to extract them when taking Christ down from the Cross; and the Crown of Thorns.

Finally, the holy Face under the veil does not have the look of one who has just suffered hours of agonizing pain. It is entirely serene, with the slightest hint of a smile, anticipating the ultimate victory of life in the Resurrection, which is just hours away from the burial depicted in this remarkable work of art.



*David Stuyser; CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons*

## *Arti-Facts*

- Date: 1753
- Medium: Carrera marble
- Style: Italian Baroque
- Size: Length of entire sculpture approximately 5'11"