

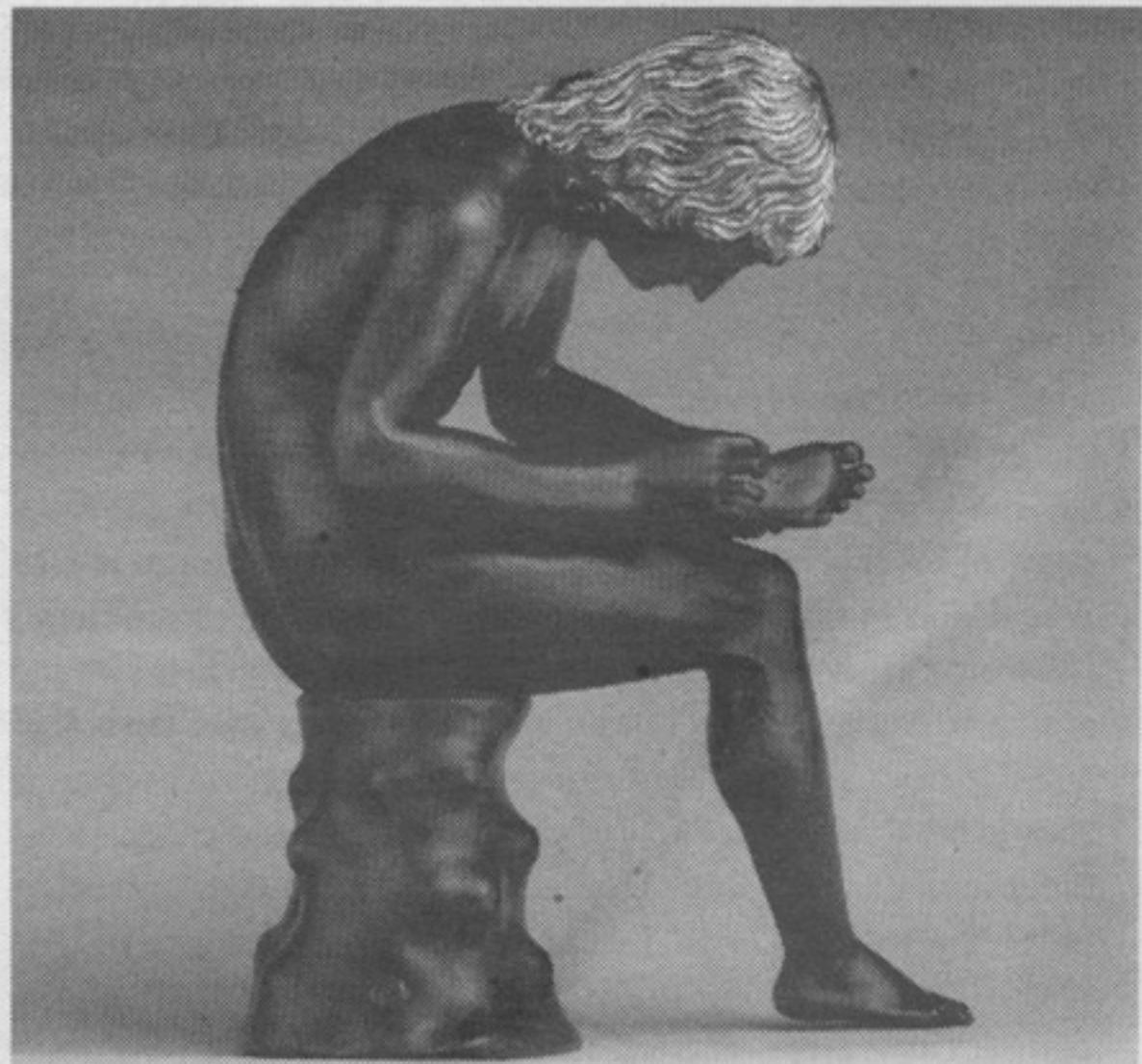
## CHARLES RAY WITH ALEXANDER NAGEL

Michelangelo's *David* (1504), Antico's (Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi) *Spinario* (ca. 1500), and the *Spinario* (ca. 50 BCE)

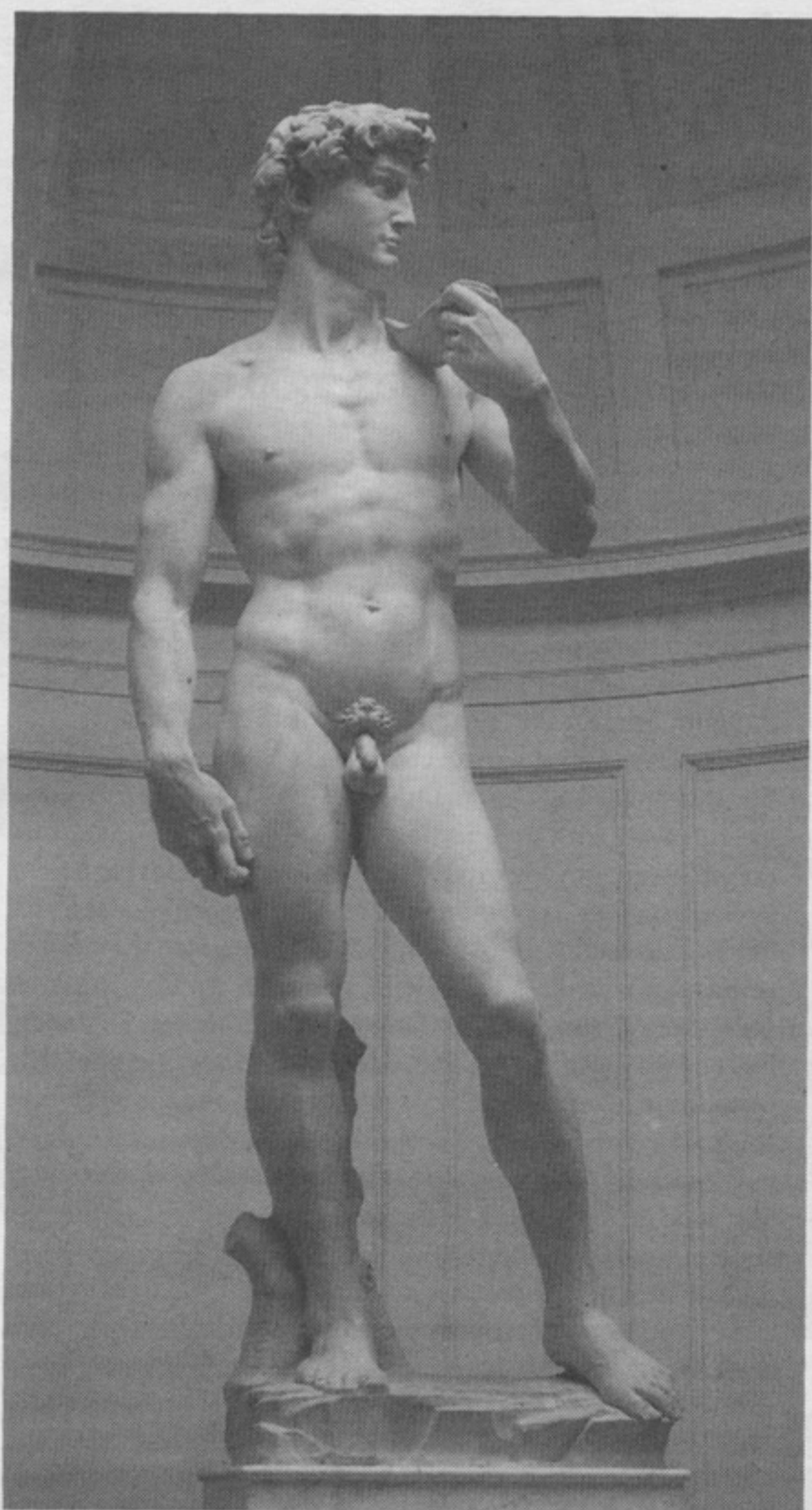
**ALEXANDER NAGEL (RAIL):** Recently I was reading a book about Michelangelo's *David* where the scholar wonders why Michelangelo showed him as a fully grown young man, rather than as a prepubescent boy, the way Donatello and Verrocchio represent the figure. And my thought was: Really? What would a prepubescent boy look like as a fourteen-foot-tall statue? I thought, I must ask Charley what he thinks about this.

**CHARLES RAY:** Alex, I have been trying to respond to your question in a simple and clear manner, but the problem you mention has run away with the question of what would a fourteen-foot prepubescent boy look like. I think a fourteen-foot eleven- or twelve-year-old boy would look just like a normal-sized kid, but its size would bring a feeling of uncanniness to the viewer's mind. Scale has less to do with size than we first think. A sculpture can lack scale, yet have an enormous size. (It's really big! I heard that a bus once hit a di Suvero that was temporarily installed in Minneapolis. The sculpture won and the bus lost in this particular accident. But the large di Suvero is created and exists in a normal scale of I-beams and construction cranes.) The shoe on your foot has the same scale that the enormous shoe in the repair shop window has. Your shoe protects and gives style and support to your foot. The shoemaker's sign allows you to spot his or her store from across the street. Both sizes share our everyday functional scale. To change scale rather than size, the world and its space must change too. This, of course, does not happen with signage or the spooky uncanniness of Tom Thumb or a big kid squatting between the floor and ceiling of a perfectly normal museum space.

It took me a long time to win my battle with the surreal in making figures larger or smaller than life size. My first proposal for *Boy with Frog* mistook size for scale; it was a monument close to twenty-five or thirty feet tall. The boy was standing on the very edge of the Punta della Dogana in Venice, dangling the frog out over the water. I brought a foam mockup to Venice, and Mr. Pinault and his team were thrilled because the figure could be clearly seen from St. Mark's. I was happy but uneasy, and as I flew home from Venice, I had the thought, "If I made it at fifty feet, you could see it from the airport." I had proposed a giant boy, rather than a sculpture of a boy. I returned to Venice and reinvestigated the relationship of my figure to the surrounding city. To make a long story short, which perhaps I've talked about too much in the past, I made the figure of the boy just large enough to hold his ground on the Dogana. It was important that the sculpture not become the vista, but be embedded within the greater scene of the city. If he were to stay, he would need to become a citizen, rather than a tourist or a monument. His height is around nine feet, but while working on him, I never measured that precisely. The armature of the sculpture does not exist from the feet to the head, but is a trajectory from the boy's eyes to the frog. Packed along the trajectory of this invisible armature is boyhood in the real, rather than the depicted.



Antico (Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi), *Spinario* (*Boy Pulling a Thorn from His Foot*), cast ca. 1501. Bronze, partially gilt (hair) and silvered (eyes). 7  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 2  $\frac{15}{16}$  in. Courtesy the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 2012.



Michelangelo, *David*, 1501–4. Marble. 11 ft. Photo: Pierpao (CC BY-SA 3.0) / Desaturated from the original.

**RAIL:** A little while ago you said to me that you can feel the difference between scale and size when looking at the small Renaissance copy of the *Spinario*, the boy pulling the thorn from his foot, in the Metropolitan Museum. It may be small in terms of inches, you said, but it is not small in terms of scale.

**RAY:** The original in Rome is a beautiful work and has been looked at by so many great artists over the years as it has held its position in the Musei Capitolini. The Met's Renaissance copy is an absolutely wonderful sculpture. It's small and meant for a collector's shelf, perhaps for the collector to bring down and hold while looking at it. The label at the Met that describes this makes the beautiful point that the work holds two forms of concentration, one being the concentration of the boy pulling out the painful thorn and the other being the concentration of the artist sculpting the smaller copy. This superimposition of concentration can be seen as an issue of scale, not that a one-to-one copy or a bigger copy would be harder to create, but it somehow shows the condensing of the sculpture. This particular sculpture, known for its depiction of intentionality, finds meaning in the scale shift. Perhaps it finds an active event in its shift.

**RAIL:** I've always wondered whether some of the enchantment of the sculpture, in the original Roman version as well as in different ways in the different copies, is again to do with the boy's age. He is not fully grown and he is involved with himself. Once you get involved in his self-involvement, you lose track of objective size. His smallness is in some relation to the smallness of the sculpture—that relation animates the work—but it is ultimately unrecoverable. You can never quite figure it out.

**RAY:** The Roman *Spinario* is now on loan to the Getty for their show of bronzes. It's really a great show, and if you're in Los Angeles, it's well worth a look. The issues of scale in many of the works are complex and very subtle. The *Spinario* is strange at first because the boy's body is too old for its size. He is still smaller than an adult, but the sculpture feels smaller than it should be, so we see the size of child, yet the child depicted feels older than its scale. And perhaps like Michelangelo's somewhat older-than-usual *David*, we can somehow project into the life of the older boy rather than the younger one. Regardless, the complexity is alive, electric, and engaging when scale becomes psychological rather than practical. ☪

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**CHARLES RAY** is an artist. He lives in Los Angeles.