

The damage caused to Michelangelo's Pietà

statue by Laszlo Toth

Date

1972-1972

Medium

gelatin silver print

Description

Laszlo Toth was a Hungarian-born Australian geologist. He achieved worldwide notoriety when he vandalised Michelangelo's Pietà statue on 21 May 1972. Toth was not charged with any criminal offence after the incident. He was hospitalized in Italy for two years. On his release, he was immediately deported to Australia. In June 1971 he moved to Rome, Italy, knowing no Italian, and aiming to become recognized as Christ. He sent letters to Pope Paul VI and unsuccessfully attempted to meet him. On 21 May 1972, at 33 years of age (Jesus's traditional age at death), during the Pentecost, Toth, wielding a geologist's hammer and shouting, "I am Jesus Christ — risen from the dead", attacked the Michelangelo's Pietà statue in St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City. With fifteen blows he removed Mary's arm at the elbow, knocked off a chunk of her nose, and chipped one of her eyelids. Toth was subdued by bystanders, including American sculptor Bob Cassilly, who was the first person to pull him away from the Pietà. In view of his apparent insanity Toth was never charged with the crime. On 29 January 1973, he was committed to an Italian psychiatric hospital.

Dimensions

Overall: 24.3 x 36.5 cm (9 4/8 x 14 3/8 in.)

