

UCI Program in Jewish Studies

The 'Jewish' Michelangelo:

German Jews, the Love of Statues, and the Dream of Italy

Presented by Asher D. Biemann

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Center for German Studies (University of Virginia)

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Humanities Gateway 1010

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Why did Michelangelo matter to Jewish writers? What explains the cultural affinity of German Jews to Italy and the period of the Renaissance? In his lecture, Asher Biemann will reflect on modern Jewish imagination and statue love. Michelangelo's sculptures will literally come to life in the eyes of Jewish pilgrims, not seldom addressing them, as the Moses statue would, as fellow Jews. But even the Sistine Chapel "spoke" to Jewish visitors revealing itself as a manifesto of prophetic socialism devoid of its Christian elements. To German Jews, this lecture argues, the identification with Italy and the self-recognition in Michelangelo's work offered an alternative to the failed promises of the Enlightenment. That the Jewish fascination with Michelangelo continues to this very day in popular culture and even in contemporary Israeli art, only confirms that Michelangelo matters.



ASHER D. BIEMANN is Professor of Religious Studies and Director of the Center for German Studies at the **University of Virginia**, where he teaches modern Jewish thought and intellectual history. He studied at the Universities of Graz, Vienna, and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and has taught at Harvard University, the Goethe Universität in Frankfurt, the Ludwig Maximilians Universität in Munich, and the University of Vienna. He is the author of a critical edition of Martin Buber's *Sprachphilosophische Schriften* (2003), *The Martin Buber Reader* (2001), as well as of *Inventing New Beginnings: On the Idea of Renaissance in Modern Judaism* (2009) and *Dreaming of Michelangelo: Jewish Variations on a Modern Theme* (2012), both of which appeared with Stanford University Press.

