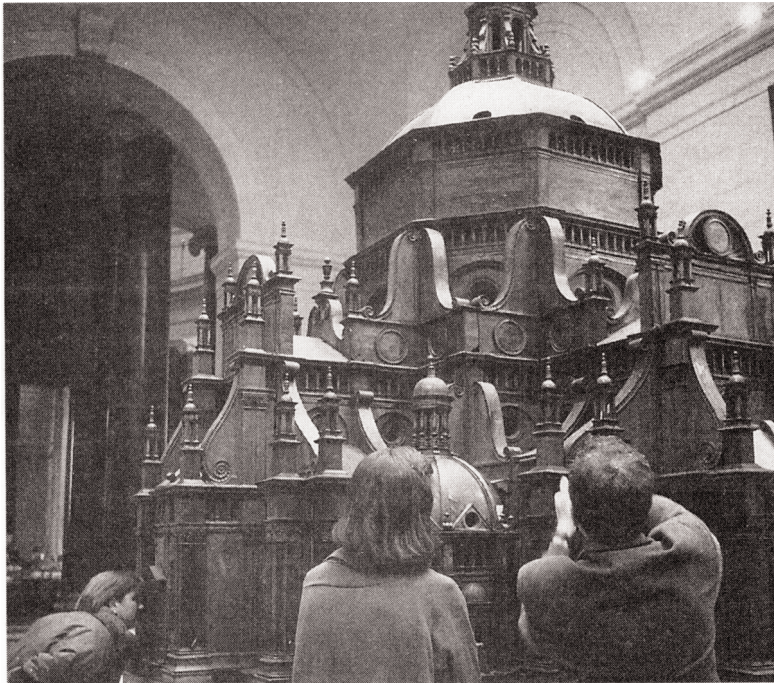
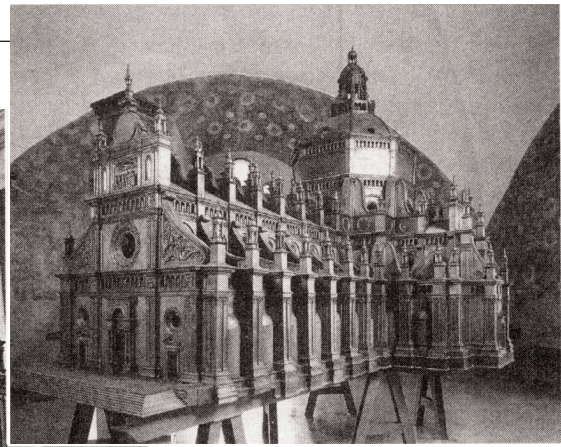


EXHIBITS



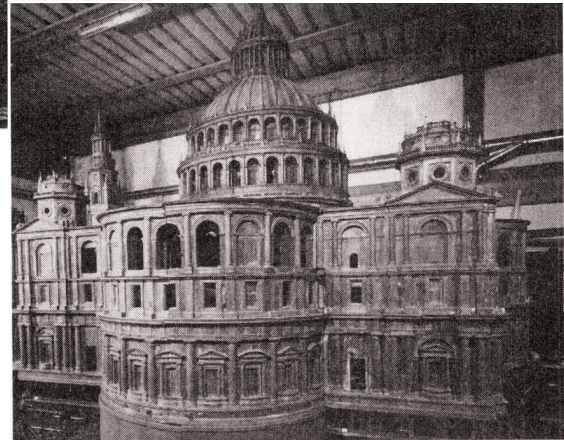
EIRNS/Stuart Lewis



Musei Civici del Castello Visconteo, Pavia

Top: Wooden model, Pavia Cathedral.
Bottom: Wooden model, Project for St. Peter's, apse detail. **Left:** Visitors inspect model of Pavia Cathedral.

Fabbrica di San Pietro, Vatican



Renaissance Models Reflect 'A New Era for Mankind'

Exhibitions on architecture represent a unique challenge. The subject—the buildings—cannot be physically moved. But this past winter, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. did the next best thing, by assembling scale models made by Italian Renaissance architects to illustrate their projects, and displaying these together with engravings, medals, and paintings related to three of the greatest building projects ever undertaken: the Cathedral of Florence (S. Maria del Fiore), the Cathedral of Pavia, and the Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome.

The ancient Greeks used architectural scale models, called *paradeigmata*—from which we derive our word “paradigm.” Although models were used for religious buildings from the Carolingian era onward (A.D. 800), in the Fifteenth Century a new function developed for them, that of instruments for reflection and experimentation.

Although thousands of such models

were originally made in the period from the 1420's to 1600—either as part of the design process, to convince a patron, or to assist engineers and workers in carrying out the architect's intentions—only thirty survive. The Washington show, a scaled-down version of one held in Venice in 1994, displayed fourteen of the models, including the largest (Antonio da Sangallo's walk-in model of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome) and the most exquisitely finished (the model begun in 1488 for the Cathedral of Pavia). Those two models, displayed in the barrel-vaulted corridor of the National Gallery adjoining the Italian Renaissance art galleries, rewarded hours of avid attention for tens of thousands of visitors this winter, who showed their hunger for beauty despite the prevailing wilderness of shopping-mall architecture that mars the American landscape.

The show also included, among numerous models related to parts of

Florence Cathedral, the only ones that take us back to the technological breakthrough that can rightly be said to have launched the Renaissance—Filippo Brunelleschi's dome (1420-36).

Brunelleschi's genius marked the first time in modern history that a single guiding mind shaped a building project and even an entire city—Florence, which remained forever imprinted with his great dome and the other church projects designed to complement it. The show brought out clearly how the ideas of Brunelleschi himself and his admirer, the architect and art theorist Leon Battista Alberti, worked to shape entire new cities as the framework of a new and less-imperfect society, based on the notion of man imitating the Creator God in whose image each human individual is made.

Brunelleschi was present in the show

through the only two extant models believed made under his direction, one showing the structure of the dome itself, and a second for the marble lantern, for which Brunelleschi won a separate competition in 1432, and which he considered crucial to the static equilibrium of the dome.

Also displayed was a parchment from the Florence State Archive which captures a unique moment in western history. Around 1426, just a few years after Brunelleschi was awarded the first monopoly patent in history for an invention, and while he was in the midst of directing construction work on the dome, a rival architect, Giovanni di Gherardo Gherardi, tried to prove that the Brunelleschian project was unsound.

The parchment is a bitter and provocative polemic against Brunelleschi. (Brunelleschi answered in kind, taking advantage of the fact that Florentine republican “*libertas*” turned private conflicts to the advantage of the

common good.) Gherardi simply did not grasp that Brunelleschi was constructing the two shells of his double-shelled dome with different curves, using a single center of curvature, contrary to medieval practice.

Hung on the wall next to Florentine dome models was a picture from c.1420-30, which offers a scriptural resonance to the debate in Florence during the 1420’s, when the outcome of Brunelleschi’s proposal to erect the dome was uncertain, and when his achievement was seen exclusively as a problem in engineering—the lifting and moving of weights. The painting, an anonymous panel in the Johnson Collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, depicts the “Christ Healing a Possessed Boy,” and “Judas Recovering the Blood Money,” in a cutaway view of a church. In the Gospel verses recounting the disciples’ failure to heal the possessed boy, Jesus said, “If your faith were the size of a mustard seed you could say to this

mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it would move; nothing would be impossible for you.”

Although the painted church interior where the two scenes take place bears little relation to the actual structure, over the roof rises a dome which is clearly a visualization of how Brunelleschi’s dome would appear when completed. According to the exhibition catalog, “the painter must have been guided, as were the men at work on the dome, by Brunelleschi’s large brick model which stood next to the cathedral itself.”

A New Era for Mankind

The start of the European Renaissance is marked by the Council of Ferrara/Florence



Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art

(1439-1441), which reunified the various eastern Christian churches with the Catholic Church in Rome, healing doctrinal rifts going back four centuries and more. Out of that union, and the impassioned debates that prepared it, came not only modern science as exemplified in the voyages of discovery, the invention of printed books, and the overthrow of Aristotle’s geocentric cosmology, but also the basis of modern statecraft, through the founding of the nation-state, which fosters and defends individuals’ creative discoveries as the basis for progress.

The Washington show was set up in the West Building right next to the picture galleries celebrating the flowering of the Renaissance in painting in the Fifteenth Century. This setting helped to heighten the Socratic dialogue evoked in Italian art by the phenomenon of “architecture within painting,” “painting within sculpture,” and “sculpture within painting.” The models are really gloriously crafted sculptures. They also *contain* sculpture, as in the case of the model for Pavia Cathedral. In the adjoining galleries, the visitor’s sense of “architecture within painting” was heightened by the proximity of the models. In many of the Gallery’s Fifteenth Century pictures, saints perform their miracles in settings that call up church interiors of a bygone Byzantine past, or the very latest in the Renaissance style based on a radical revival of the classical architectural orders handed down from Greece and Rome.

One painter, the “Master of the Barberini Panels,” generally now identified

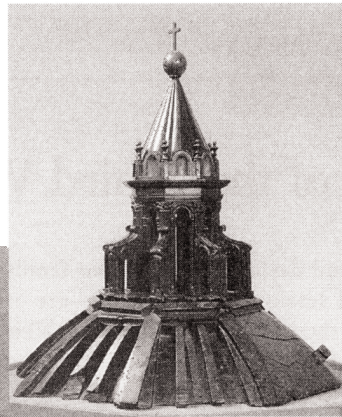


Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Master of the Barberini, “Presentation of the Virgin,” fifteenth century.

Below: *The Dome of Florence Cathedral, designed and constructed by Filippo Brunelleschi, was a technological breakthrough that helped launch the Renaissance. Insets: wooden models by Brunelleschi of the Lantern (top) and Dome and Apse Sections (bottom). Left: a contemporary painting shows Brunelleschi's Dome in the top, left background.*

EIRNS/Andrew Spannaus



Museo dell'Opera di S. Maria del Fiore, Florence



Museo dell'Opera di S. Maria del Fiore, Florence

as Fra Carnevale, was so enchanted with architecture that his religious subjects are dwarfed by the triumphal arches, the vaults, domes, arcades, and sculptured friezes all depicted in the typical grey Florentine stone called *pietra serena*. Besides his “Annunciation,” which belongs to the National Gallery, the show brought together Fra Carnevale’s “Birth of the Virgin” and “Presentation of the Virgin,” from the New York and Boston museums respectively.

St. Peter’s Basilica

In the wake of the Council of Florence, the first Pope to take up permanent residence in Rome was Nicholas V (1447-55), and he resolved to build a splendid city with Florence as the model. St. Peter’s, the center of western Christendom, was to be rebuilt as an even more magnificent version of S. Maria del Fiore. The vicissitudes of any great monument can be as complex as the construction of a nation-state, and the history of St. Peter’s serves as a metaphor for the evolution of the Vatican as a political/religious institution. The problems of translating an aesthetic born in the rough-and-tumble Floren-

tine republic, into the Roman context—the papacy was an absolute monarchy, bound both to ancient Roman traditions and the exigencies of the holy sites—caused numerous interruptions, and radical changes in design.

It took more than a century for the new basilica over the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles to be completed. In the early Sixteenth Century, the project was revived by Julius II—the Pope who

joined, but then withdrew from the League of Cambrai which was organized to crush the greatest threat to the Renaissance, oligarchist Venice. Julius entrusted a great architect, Donato Bramante, with the design. Bramante was close to both Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael. Raphael

immortalized the unfinished crossing of Bramante’s first St. Peter’s in his “School of Athens” fresco, and when Bramante died in 1514 he became the chief architect of St. Peter’s until he too, died in 1520.

Under Pope Paul III, Antonio da Sangallo, another Florentine who was a skilled builder, but not a painter like his predecessors, made sweeping changes in

the design, embodied in the wooden model for St. Peter’s which is some 23 feet long and 15 feet high, and took seven years to build. Sangallo’s stunning model, recently restored, was in many ways the dramatic highpoint of the show. Yet it was artistically put into the shade by Michelangelo’s intervention, in the 1550’s, commemorated in the part of the exhibit installed around the museum’s garden court [SEE inside back cover].

With its double-shell structure and its ribbed supporting skeleton, the dome model for St. Peter’s, despite several stages of alterations after Michelangelo’s death, clearly showed the sculptor’s

intention to return to the paradigm of Brunelleschi. In the turbulent climate of the Catholic Counter-Reformation—when he died in 1564, with the dome well under way, the Council of Trent was drawing to a close—Michelangelo reaffirmed the central role of individual genius in the image of God, which had been so boldly asserted by his Florentine antecessor Brunelleschi 150 years before.

—Nora Hamerman