

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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ITALIAN RENAISSANCE ARCHITECTURAL MODELS AND RELATED WORKS

ON VIEW AT NATIONAL GALLERY

DECEMBER 18, 1994 - MARCH 19, 1995

Washington, D. C. -- A grand display of fourteen of the most important wooden architectural models surviving from the Italian Renaissance will be presented along with more than seventy related paintings, drawings, prints, and medals at the National Gallery of Art. Italian Renaissance Architecture: Brunelleschi, Sangallo, Michelangelo -- The Cathedrals of Florence and Pavia, and St. Peter's, Rome, will be on view from December 18, 1994, through March 19, 1995, in the Gallery's West Garden Court and adjacent galleries. It is a modified version of the exhibition presented this year in Venice at the Palazzo Grassi. The exhibition was organized in collaboration with Fiat and the Palazzo Grassi.

The National Gallery of Art is most grateful to the Alitalia Cargo System for its support as the official carrier for the exhibition.

"This fascinating exhibition illuminates the design process behind three of the most significant buildings in the history of Western architecture -- St. Peter's in Rome,

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the Duomo in Florence, and the Cathedral of Pavia," said Earl A. Powell III, National Gallery of Art director. "The National Gallery is the only American venue for these remarkable works of imagination and artistry."

The centerpiece of this exhibition is a large, recently restored model of St. Peter's, Rome, built over the course of seven years (1539-1546) to the specifications of the architect Antonio da Sangallo. The largest extant model from the Renaissance, it measures nearly fifteen feet high and twenty-four feet long, and weighs more than six tons. Sangallo's model was not the first, or the last, to be built during the construction of St. Peter's. In all, seven architects worked on the church, including Bramante, Raphael, and Michelangelo, and all had models built from their designs, but Sangallo's is the only one to survive in its entirety.

Also on view will be two models for St. Peter's after designs by Michelangelo: one for the dome and supporting drum (1558-1561); and another, discovered in the 1960s inside Sangallo's model, a wooden model for the vault of the south apse of St. Peter's, the only architect's study model remaining from the Renaissance.

The exhibition also includes the second largest wooden model from the Renaissance, a design for the Cathedral of Pavia. This model is notable for the high quality of its sculptural decoration as well as for its craftsmanship. It includes portions of Bramante's earlier design as well as the work of the two architects who succeeded him, Cristoforo Rocchi and Giovan Pietro Fugazza.

Ten additional models represent the Duomo in Florence: two of the dome and

supporting drum by Filippo Brunelleschi, made between 1429 and 1436, along with later models that show the building's façade and the newly restored models for the *ballatoio* (the gallery that joins the dome and the drum).

To complement the models, approximately seventy-four other works of art by Michelangelo, Sangallo, Buontalenti, Giambologna, and their contemporaries will be on view. These works will allow visitors to see the role that models and drawings played in the realization of an architect's idea during the construction of St. Peter's and the cathedral in Florence.

The architects who designed the churches of Renaissance Italy relied on these detailed scale models to assess and improve their designs; to perfect details; to guide workmen during construction; to make accurate estimates of how much building material would be required; and to demonstrate for their patrons and clients the appearance of the finished work.

Sangallo worked on St. Peter's under Bramante and Raphael, and with Peruzzi, before assuming the role of chief architect in 1536 -- a total of more than 30 years. In 1539 he began work on his model, which was intended to be viewed from both the exterior and the interior. More than a thousand pieces of fir, elm, lime, and apricot wood were used; the structure was painted, inside and out, to simulate travertine and stone.

Sangallo died in 1546, before the model was complete. The commission was handed on to Michelangelo, who expressed some strong criticisms of Sangallo's work, saying that Sangallo had departed too far from Bramante's original design, and that

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there were too many "dark hiding places above and below -- perfect locations for criminals, forgers, rapists, and other such scoundrels."

Models and drawings for the Duomo of Florence will illustrate three periods in its history. The first group shows the design of some of the cathedral's principal features by Filippo Brunelleschi -- including some suggested corrections to Brunelleschi's profile of the dome made by a member of the governing board. The second group are models and drawings for the *ballatoio*. From these we can derive a hint of the heated arguments that went on over the design and what exactly Brunelleschi may have intended. The third group shows competing versions of the proposed façade of the cathedral and suggests the extent and nature of the rivalry between artists for the approval of their patron, Francesco de Medici.

Following its presentation here, the show will travel to the Musée national des monuments français, Paris, in the summer of 1995; the Neue Berliner Galerie, Altes Museum, Berlin, in the fall of 1995; and the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in the winter of 1996.

Curator of the exhibition at the National Gallery is Henry A. Millon, dean of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery. A fully illustrated catalogue, co-edited by Mr. Millon and Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, was published by the Palazzo Grassi and a brochure prepared by the National Gallery accompanies the exhibition.

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