

## EXHIBITION REVIEW

---

### Palladio 500 anni

Curators: Howard Burns, Guido Beltramini

---

Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura “Andrea Palladio” (CISA), Vicenza  
20 September 2008 to 6 January 2009

*Palladio 500 anni* is a travelling exhibition that celebrates the five hundredth anniversary of Andrea Palladio’s birth. The first stop is in Palazzo Barbaran da Porto, the historical location of the Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura “Andrea Palladio” (CISA) in Vicenza, from where it will travel to the Royal Academy of Arts in London (31 January to 13 April 2009). Curated by Howard Burns, president of the scientific committee of the CISA, and Guido Beltramini, director of the CISA, with the collaboration of Charles Hind, associate director and H.J. Heinz Curator of Drawings of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and Mary Anne Stevens, director of academic affairs of the Royal Academy, the exhibition surveys the entire life and work of Palladio.

The curators chose to focus their attention chiefly on Palladio the architect rather than to explore the deeper historical context of the period as in the recent exhibition *Andrea Palladio e la villa veneta*, held at the CISA in 2005. The exhibition features over two hundred works—paintings, books, manuscripts, maps, bronze statuettes, coins, and architectural models—in order to present Palladio’s oeuvre and its background. The substantial amount of autograph drawings is particularly remarkable: fifty-four sheets lent from the RIBA, twelve from the Musei Civici di Vicenza, and eight from other collections in Oxford, Chatsworth, Vicenza and Venice, for a total of seventy-four sheets. The last time one could admire such a quantity of Palladio’s drawings was twenty-seven years ago, at the Palladio exhibition held in Washington in 1981 and curated by Douglas Lewis.

*Palladio 500 anni* is set out in ten rooms in the *piano nobile* of the Palazzo Barbaran da Porto, with each room dedicated to a different subject: Palladio’s youth as a stonemason in Padua and Vicenza; his study of the new architecture of the Renais-

Andrea Palladio, drawing for the Teatro Olimpico proscenium, 1579-80 (RIBA, vol. XIII, 4 and 5). Photograph: Royal Institute of British Architects, London



Andrea Palladio, Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza, 1579-80, view of proscenium  
Photograph: © Pino Guidolotti / CISA A. Palladio



sance; his drawings of ancient Roman ruins; his first projects as an architect; his villas; and his projects for Venice. Following this critical path, the visitor enters Palladio's workshop where his methods of design are revealed. The last room is dedicated to Palladio's legacy, from Inigo Jones to Thomas Jefferson.

A great number of models aid in making Palladio's projects immediately comprehensible, even to a vast general public. Some big wooden models, originally built for the CISA's 1972 exhibition curated by Renato Cevese, give a good general idea of the buildings' composition. Among these there are, for example, the models of Villa Emo and the Redentore, and the model of the unrealized project for Villa Trissino at Meledo. But there are also many new models of different dimensions created specifically for this exhibition, in order to draw the visitor deeper into Palladio's architectural process. A large model of San Giorgio Maggiore, for instance, helps one understand the original colors of its interior; several models of the Basilica in Vicenza show the complicated design sequence for this seemingly endless construction project; a section model of the Villa Poiana clarifies the sequence of its interior spaces; and finally, the numerous small models interspersed throughout the show near corresponding drawings assist the viewer in reading and understanding the drawings. The paintings and manuscripts exhibited are well integrated into the narration, further clarifying the context of Palladio's work.

The catalogue of the exhibition, written mainly by the curators, reflects their intention to provide a broad synthesis of Palladio's work, and it is divided into three main sections. The first section traces the architect's artistic development by reviewing his projects and buildings; the second explores Palladio's architectural theory and his intellectual production; and the third briefly outlines his profound impact on later generations. In general, the interpretation of Palladio's career presented here synthesizes the studies of the last forty years. The main themes regard Palladio's invention of a kind of grammar of architectural composition, his innovative functional solutions, and his quest for beauty through the imitation of ancient buildings.

The most important new discoveries and interpretations which emerged during the preparation of the exhibition concern the project for the Rialto Bridge, a drawing for low budget housing in Venice, and a design for some gardens. Further-



View of Basilica model in the *Palladio 500 anni* exhibition installation.  
Photograph: © Pino Guidolotti / CISA A. Palladio

more, the catalogue presents a partially new interpretation of Palladio's writings, from the guide to Rome, to the *Quattro Libri*, to an unfinished edition of Polybius's *Histories*. Last but not least, exceptionally high quality photographs make the catalogue a valuable resource for scholars. Many other new specialized studies on the architect are included in the related publication of the acts of the week-long Palladio symposium organized by the CISA in May 2008.

The installation, designed by the architectural office of Aldo Cibic, does not rise to the quality of the material on display, but a well-organized website explains the exhibition organization and also permits a virtual visit of the show ([www.palladio500anni.it](http://www.palladio500anni.it)).

Vittorio Pizzigoni  
Politecnico di Milano

#### Publications related to the exhibition:

Howard Burns, Guido Beltramini, eds., *Palladio*, Venice: Marsilio, 2008, 428 pp., many color illus., € 54 (€ 40 at the exhibition), ISBN 978-88-317-9522-7

Franco Barbieri, Donata Battilotti, Guido Beltramini, Arnaldo Bruschi, Howard Burns, Francesco Paolo Fiore, Christoph Luitpold Frommel, et al., eds., *Palladio 1508-2008. Il simposio del cinquecentenario*, Venice: Marsilio, 2008., 422 pp., ill., € 40, ISBN 978-88-317-9626-2

Canaletto, *Capriccio palladiano*  
Photograph: Galleria Nazionale, Parma



View of *Palladio 500 anni* exhibition installation  
Photograph: © Pino Guidolotti / CISA A. Palladio

