

reviews

PALLADIAN REVIVAL

Five centuries on, the genius of Italian architect Andrea Palladio still enthalls.

Architecture exhibitions at London's Royal Academy of Arts are rare events: paintings and sculptures more readily draw sponsorship, publicity and blockbuster crowds. While infrequent, they have succeeded in engaging the attention of a diverse exhibition-going public and raising the profile and status of architecture as an art. These memorably include the 1986 exhibition *New Architecture*: Foster, Rogers, Stirling, which previewed the work of three already internationally renowned and either current or soon-to-be elected architect Academicians. The 1995 exhibition, *The*

Palladian Revival: Lord Burlington, His Villa and Garden at Chiswick, paid homage to the architect Carl whose extended townhouse the RA now occupies on Piccadilly; and in its 2000 exhibition an early RA Professor of Architecture was celebrated in John Soane, *Architect: Master of Space and Light*. They are underscored by Andrea Palladio: *His Life and Legacy*, both architecturally and as an exhibition experience.

While Foster and Rogers enjoy global fame now, the reputation of Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) has survived, even grown, across the 500 years since his birth. Countless classically inspired houses, churches and public buildings owe their existence and continuing popularity to him. He provided the spiritual and practical touchstone to Inigo Jones's classical revival in Britain 100 years after his birth and,

through Jones's example, inspired the Georgian creation of regular squares and linear, elegantly geometric palazzo-style terraces in London, Edinburgh and Bath, which remain at the core of their urban magnificence. Palladianism spread north to Britain, east to Russia, and west to America, promoted by Palladio's *The Four Books on Architecture*, which provided Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, with his architectural bible. This exceptional life and legacy is made wonderfully vivid at the RA exhibition.

Its distant forerunner, the 1975 South Bank exhibition on Palladio, subtitled *The Portico and the Farmyard*, displayed more wooden models than are on show here, but the RA exhibition is better balanced visually. Arranged principally across three large galleries, it establishes his



Portrait of Andrea Palladio, El Greco, c. 1575



Cover of Palladio's *The Four Books on Architecture*, 1570



Above: Project for an alternative entrance to the Rialto Bridge, Andrea Palladio, c. 1570. Although his design for the Venice bridge was not chosen, Palladio did build other icons in the city, including the church of San Giorgio Maggiore. Right: Model of the Church of the Redentore, 1972. The original Palladio building is in Venice. (Photo: Alberto Carolo)





Paolo Veronese's *Susanna and the Elders*, c. 1588, features a Palladian backdrop.



View of Pavlosk, c. 1786, Quarenghi. Palladio's influence is visible everywhere, including in this palace by Charles Cameron.



96 | 3 Model of the Villa Capra, known as the Villa Rotonda, 1970. The actual building, located outside Vicenza in Italy, was completed after Palladio's death in 1580. (Photo: Alberto Carolo)

beginnings in Padua and Vicenza, fame and fortune in Venice, and later years in Venice and Vicenza. A fourth, smaller gallery focuses on 'The Architect's Mind' – Palladio's having been well honed by patrons whose combined intellects aided his mastery of classical architecture, and with whom he collaborated effectively, with art, to produce the symmetrical, elegantly columned frontages, topped by triangular pediments, with which his architecture is synonymous. Superb models of his more influential buildings punctuate the larger galleries. On the surrounding walls, his drawings – sketches, measured drawings and published woodcuts – sit comfortably alongside paintings by Renaissance artist Veronese and Venetian landscape painter Canaletto.

This very successful display of drawing, painting, models and architecture is skilfully presented by architect Academician Eric Parry. His backdrop depictions of the ruins of ancient Rome in the first gallery rise dream-like beyond the perimeter screens, and capture the power and wonder that clearly impressed the young Andrea. The exhibition exits through his theatrically-painted interpretation of Palladio's Accademia Olimpica scene front, articulated by statues of Vicenza's own academicians, which fittingly – in the original – includes Palladio amongst them. Here, his successful pursuit of a timeless architecture can be experienced as an all-embracing art. ROBERT TAVERNOR

Andrea Palladio: His Life and Legacy runs until 13 April at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. www.royalacademy.org.uk

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