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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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ART HISTORY

Emory exhibit recovers 'lost Rome'

Visual program allows guests to view streets of 17th-century city.

Art professor helped to spearhead project.

By Andrew Alexander
For the AJC

Now and then, if we're lucky, we get the chance to travel to the beautiful, far-off places we've always longed to see. For Emory University art history professor Sarah McPhee, who wanted to walk the streets of 17th-century Rome depicted in a map on her office wall, things obviously weren't that simple.

With the help of an innovative architectural firm and modern technology, she figured out a way to get there and to bring along visitors in a new exhibit that opens Saturday on the Emory campus.

"I had been strolling those streets with my eyes for a long time," says McPhee of her inspiration, a 1676 bird's-eye view of the city by artist Giovanni Battista Falda. Although many of Rome's famous historic buildings are obviously still standing, the city has seen enormous changes over the centuries, with many buildings and even entire neighborhoods visible in the map now lost to time.

"It seemed to me if I could just jump into that map and look at the views, I would be able to see Rome in 3-D as it was in the 17th century. I wanted to recover lost Rome," she said.

Recovering lost Rome may sound like a bit of a pipe dream, but when McPhee mentioned the desire to her husband, an architect, he immediately thought of computer interfaces that allow users to visualize architectural plans in 3-D. McPhee ended up spending most of her sabbatical last year working with Jordan Williams and Erik Lewitt of the Atlanta-based architectural firm plexus r + d to create a visual program that allows users to wander through the streets and piazzas of Rome as it would have looked in the 17th century.

A team of academics, architects and 3-D modelers documented Falda's Rome in maps and views, checking the images against Rome today, a map of 1748 by Giovanni Battista Nolli, and 17th-century views and surveyed maps that survive in the Roman archives. The composite images show the city in great visual detail, allowing the viewer to wander the streets, count the windows in facades and even distinguish deciduous trees from evergreens.

Rome continued on D5

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To see more photos from 'Antichità, Teatro, Magnificenza: Renaissance and Baroque Images of Rome,' go to MyAJC.com/goguide.

Virtual exhibit impresses

Rome

continued from D1

The new program, "Virtual Rome," is part of the exhibition of 16th-, 17th- and 18th-century views and maps of Rome at Emory's Carlos Museum titled "Antichità, Teatro, Magnificenza: Renaissance and Baroque Images of Rome" through Nov. 17.

In one of the rooms of the new exhibition, near a print of Falda's map and surrounded by his famous etchings of Rome, two Apple monitors with joysticks will allow visitors to "hop in" to the Baroque city. Users can click on a scrapbook to see the images that were the raw material for building the virtual 17th-century city.

"It's a black-and-white world with blue skies," says McPhee. "We take the etchings apart and then rebuild from the textures of his lines. It's by no means totally done. But I anticipate because we can build it out, that it has potential for understanding the 17th-century city."

Although visitors will no doubt enjoy losing themselves in the streets of "Virtual Rome," the focus of the exhibition remains on the collection of 130 stunning prints. The exhibit is divided into three parts, with three major themes that developed in the presentation of images of Rome.

The first section, Antichità, consists primarily of prints from the 16th century and examines antiquarians' approach to the city, with images characterized by views



The intricate engraving of Rome by Giovanni Batista Falda (right) is the basis for the virtual Rome experience, part of the new exhibit "Renaissance and Baroque Image of Rome" at the Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University. PHIL SKINNER PHOTOS / PSKINNER@AJC.COM



Roma Antica is one of the many items on display to show the transition of Rome from the 16th through the 18th century at the Michael C. Carlos Museum. The exhibit runs through Nov. 17.

of ancient monuments such as the Baths of Caracalla, the Pantheon and the Coliseum. The second section, Teatro, focuses on the 17th century when the papacy found itself in a newly threatened position in the wake of the Reformation and sought to disseminate images of the power and modernity of Rome.

The final section, Magnificenza, examines how 18th-century enlightenment ideas brought new scientific means of surveying and production,

allowing for spectacular, large-scale maps and etchings such as those by Nolli and Giovanni Battista Piranesi. All of the prints, many of them new or recent additions to Emory's growing collection in this area, have an intricacy and beauty that will astound those who stop to take a close look. Magnifying lenses in the galleries will allow viewers to closely examine all the details.

Ultimately, says McPhee, both "Virtual Rome" and the prints

EXHIBIT PREVIEW

"Antichità, Teatro, Magnificenza: Renaissance and Baroque Images of Rome"

Saturday–Nov. 17. Tuesday through Friday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday noon to 5 p.m. \$6–8. The Carlos Museum, 571 South Kilgo Cir N.E., Atlanta. 404-727-4282, www.carlos.emory.edu

will allow Atlantans to track and contemplate the changes in a rapidly evolving city, one that, in the end, is not so very different from our own.

"If visitors take the time to track the evolution through the rooms, of individual piazze for example, they'll see how the city has changed," says McPhee. "It requires you to study and look. It would be like standing at the intersection of 14th and Peachtree. When I first moved to the city, there was a Gorin's hamburger stand on the corner. Now it's a 25-story skyscraper. Cities change."