

Lives of the artists

[Design](#), [Architecture](#)



The Number 26 March Brunelleschi Brunelleschi, the first Renaissance architect, lived and worked in Florence. Vasari calls him a sculptor and an architect, and provides the following date of his life and death: 1377-1446. In Vasari's view, Brunelleschi was the man of great spirit and with "a heart of boundless courage" that managed to complete the task which was almost impossible to complete (Vasari, Bondanella, and Bondanella 110). In his "Lives of the Artists", Vasari discusses the biography of Brunelleschi and his contribution into the sphere of architecture and art. My goal in this essay is to explore, on the basis of Vasari's work, how exactly Brunelleschi fathered the Renaissance style of architecture. Specifically, I will discuss what distinguished Brunelleschi's work from that of his predecessors.

Before he expounds on the biography of Brunelleschi, Vasari provides his own evaluation of the great architect's work. Vasari says that Brunelleschi had a truly lofty genius and credits him with building the most beautiful, the tallest and the most remarkable structure among those that have ever been built either in his time or in the times of antiquity. His role as a father of the Renaissance style of architecture is explained in the following way: "he gave a new form to architecture which had been going astray for hundreds of years" (Vasari 110). In Vasari's opinion, before Brunelleschi, men had spent fortunes in vain attempting to construct desirable buildings. Their efforts resulted in having buildings devoid of any sense of order since they were constructed using bad methods. Those buildings lacked grace in a shameful way and displayed poor design and "the worst kind of decoration" along with weird inventions. Brunelleschi managed to create new forms on the basis of Classical Roman architecture which he combined with the

achievements of Tuscan and late Gothic architecture.

Unlike his predecessors, Brunelleschi introduced the concept of order to the art of construction. In his view, based on multiyear observations of the remains of Roman architecture, proportion was the ground for beautiful constructions. It allowed constructing buildings with clear space and mass, which were easily comprehended, contrary to the complexity of the Gothic form. Building symmetrical and proportional buildings became possible due to the introduction of the linear perspective by Brunelleschi. These geometrical calculations helped to erect buildings that followed mathematical order.

The method of perspective, according to Vasari, was demonstrated by Brunelleschi around 1413. At that time, Brunelleschi was painting various outlines of buildings in Florence onto the mirror. Just as he continued working on the building's outline, the architect spotted that the lines coming from different directions met at the same point, which was the horizon line. Vasari narrates how Brunelleschi arranged a demonstration of his Baptistery painting in the place which he had deliberately chosen. It was the incomplete doorway of Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore. The viewers were supposed to look through a hole on the painting's back, facing the Baptistery. Then Brunelleschi was said to place a mirror so that it faced the viewer and reflected the painting. According to his expectations, to the viewer, the Baptistery painting and the Baptistery itself could hardly be distinguished (Vasari, "The Lives of the Artists").

Brunelleschi introduced to the art of architecture the forgotten forms used by ancient Romans. These were the dome, the column, the tunnel vault, and the

round arch. His method of building the egg-shaped dome was highly appreciated by his fellow architects and has been used since that time. The angles of the walls were calculated so exactly that they could rise to one point in a precise way, so that the construction of the largest dome in Europe at that time was done without a single engineered keystone. Instead, Brunelleschi used a number of ribs to hold a shell. The bricks of the shell were placed in a herringbone way. A big opening was made at the top. It is also because Brunelleschi managed to share his knowledge with many architects that were his contemporaries that he is thought to have been the father of architecture. For instance, his close friend and student Donatello effectively used the method of linear perspective, as well as lots of other architects. Vasari says those that Brunelleschi taught “ developed excellent procedures and useful techniques from his teaching” (Vasari 113). By the way, the method of linear perspective has been used till our time. All in all, Vasari’s chapter on Brunelleschi exposes him as a man of unprecedented intellect and genius in the sphere of architecture. His contribution into the domain of architecture is crucial if one considers the disproportionate and often unsuccessful Gothic projects. Based on the newly introduced achievements of ancient Roman architecture, Brunelleschi’s talent and his hard work lifted the architecture on a qualitatively new level of development.

Works Cited

Vasari, Giorgio, Bondanella, Julia Conaway, and Peter Bondanella. *The Lives of the Artists*. Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.

“ Giorgio Vasari’s Lives of the Artists: Filippo di ser Brunellesco”. N. d. Web. 26 March 2012. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/vasari/vasari5.htm>