

Leon battista alberti's treatise on architecture



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Discuss Alberti's treatise on Architecture in relation to San Andrea in Mantua. In particular, discuss the role of humanistic philosophy in his work giving careful attention to the question of proportion

Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72) was a true 'Renaissance' man. He was a gifted playwright, mathematician and sportsman trained in Law. As the person in charge of the constructions commanded by the Pope, he had the occasion to write one of the greatest works of the theory of architecture *De Re Aedificatoria* (On Building). Most of it was completed in 1452 and printed in 1485.

In the Ten books of the Art of Building Alberti has explained the usefulness of a roof and wall for human. He said that it helps us to come close to one another and also grow together. Therefore we should be grateful to architects not only because they provides us a safe and welcome place but also for its many innovations, which are useful to both individuals and the public and the also provide our daily needs (page 3).

Commissioned by Ludovico II Gonzaga, the church was begun in 1462 according to designs by Leon Battista Alberti on a site occupied by a Benedictine monastery, of which the bell tower (1414) remains. The building, however, was finished only 328 years later. Though later changes and expansions altered Alberti's design, the church is still considered to be one of Alberti's most complete works.

The purpose of the renaissance building was to contain the pilgrims who visited it during the feast of Ascension when a vial, that the faithful argue contains the Blood of Christ, is brought up from the crypt below through a

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hole in the floor directly under the dome. According to tradition the “ Most Precious Blood” was brought to Mantua by the Roman centurion Longinus and is preserved in the Sacred Vessels. It was held with high respect during the Renaissance which is only display on Holy Friday.

Humanism is the studying of the classics (Greek and Latin) and incorporating their ideas into ones own. It is the cultural movement of the Renaissance architecture. Most renaissance classical architecture shows more “ clarity” than the older ones, because it emphasizes clean lines, geometric shapes, symmetry. It argues whether that is more “ enlightened” than medieval architecture. It was more thought out, perhaps; more consistent, more systematic.

Alberti had many philosophies when designing for buildings, and like the works of Vitruvius, created text that gave instruction on how to build, but saved main emphasis on the decoration and the exterior aesthetics of the structure. One principle that Alberti made use of was a system of Proportionality that he developed using systematic harmony of musical ratio, to make his buildings appealing. Defined as “ the precise and correct outline, conceived in the mind, made up of lines and angles, and perfected in the learned intellect and imagination”, this theory and “ lineamenta” were fundamental in Alberti’s process of design. Alberti believed that the “ Lineamenta” stood as an outline and allowed proportions to be perceived in the design , where ” The very same numbers that cause sound to have that concinnitas, pleasing to the ears, can also fill the eyes and mind with wondrous delight. Reapplying emphasis on the “ humanistic approach to design”

The tie with the humanistic style of design is a constant theme throughout Alberti's ten books, and the " beauty of Buildings" also features heavily. Albert's definition, Beauty resides in a reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away, or altered, but for the worse. It is a great and holy matter, all our resources of skill and ingenuity will be taxed in achieving it; and rarely is it granted even to Nature herself, to produce anything that is entirely complete and perfect in every respect. (VI, ii, 156).

Alberti's view of what Beauty is has connection to the analogy of anthropomorphism, seeing " Man" as a component that uses energy to serve and do well. This philosophy maintains that Alberti believed that men were made in God's image and likeness, creator of the universe, and through this thought, understood that what qualities make a building " beautiful" opens the path to the route of all Knowledge and the original source of beauty to draw from, God himself.

In his treatise nature is used as inspiration, where " the reason of Nature" permits an architect to investigate into the features of the natural world, including man's influence, to become better equipped to perceive and make use of " Concinnitas", (which Alberti refers to as " the spouse and soul of reason") to link presenting nature as the source of art in architecture and the nature based laws embedded in the outside world. As in the San Andrea, Mantua the façade of the church is exquisitely decorated with curves and flowing patterns on the ordered columns, drawing from Alberti's treatise and its guidance on how to not only create a building, but how to make its beauty reflect that of God's love and Nature

References:

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- Marvin Trachtenberg and Isabelle Hyman. Architecture: from Prehistory to Post-Modernism. p295-6

References

Title: On the Art of Building in Ten Books

Author: Leon Battista Alberti

Translator: Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, Robert Tavernor

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