

Ages Late, Bronze Horse By Leonardo Comes to Life

By ANDREW C. REVKIN

BEACON, N.Y., June 25 — Five hundred years ago, Leonardo da Vinci's long-held plan to cast a 24-foot-tall bronze horse for his patron, Duke Ludovico Sforza of Milan, crumbled when invading French troops used the full-size clay model for crossbow practice.

Leonardo never completed the piece. Some biographical accounts have him crying on his death bed over the unfulfilled vision — to create the largest equestrian sculpture in the world.

Today, Leonardo's dream, that he first articulated in a postage-stamp-size sketch, was revealed in three jaw-dropping dimensions, in the form of a proudly prancing 15-ton bronze stallion, exactly to his proportions. It was cast and assembled at a foundry here, 60 miles north of New York City.

The transformation of the horse from dusty red sketches to burnished bronze was the result of another man's dreams. After reading about Leonardo's unfinished project in an issue of *National Geographic* in 1978, Charles C. Dent, a United Airlines pilot, art collector and amateur sculptor from Allentown, Pa., began crafting a preliminary clay model and raising money to cast the statue as a gift for Milan.

Mr. Dent died in 1994, but in his will endowed a foundation to see the project to its end. Today, \$6 million and five years later, the result towered over a crowd of several hundred visitors from as near as around the block and as far away as Milan's City Hall.

"This is an homage to the Renaissance," said Mr. Dent's nephew, Peter C. Dent, who is a trustee of Leonardo da Vinci's Horse, Inc., the private group created to build the statue. "He loved Leonardo and he loved that era."

The public showing here is the last step



Photographs by Joyce Dopkeen/The New York Times

before the sculpture's seven pieces are dismantled next week and flown in an Alitalia cargo jet to Milan, where it will be erected on a pedestal in a new cultural park at the edge of the Hippodrome. The pieces will be welded together and unveiled on September 10, the 500th anniversary of the day the French army occupied the ducal palace and disfigured Leonardo's prototype.

While children, retirees and passing commuters snapped photographs of the horse outside, inside the cavernous main building at the Tallix Foundry, which cast the sculpture, workers busily smoothed the weld marks on pieces of the

only other full-size casting. The second horse is scheduled to be shipped this fall to Grand Rapids, Mich., where it will be displayed in a new sculpture park.

The foundry air held a mix of the dank smell of clay and the tang from the winered wax that burns away when the molten bronze is poured, the final step of making the casting. Dozens of other works in every conceivable style and at various stages of completion crowded the five-story-tall room. A life-size clay model of a nurse destined for the site of a former nursing school in Hartford, Conn.,



Leonardo da Vinci had a vision 500 years ago, and the public got a glimpse of it yesterday in Beacon, N.Y., as they viewed a 24-foot-tall, 15-ton bronze horse based on da Vinci's sketch.

Continued on Page B5