

The Park of La Villette in Paris : A Site of Cultural Democracy

Leonardo da Vinci's flying machine hangs in the air. The cranes and winches invented by Filippo Brunelleschi to build the dome of Florence cathedral operate blithely. The mill for recycling hydraulic energy and the paddle-boat invented by engineers in Sienna function. These are the marvellous machines of the engineer artists of the Italian Renaissance presented at the Cite des Sciences et de l'Industrie at La Villette in Paris which celebrates its tenth anniversary in March

By Claudine Canetti

ALMOST simultaneously, the opening of the Museum of Music at the Cite de la Musique, which is also at La Villette, in the first half of 1996, is to mark the completion of this vast cultural area which has gradually been created over fifteen years on a site in the north-east of the French capital where, just a quarter of a century before, the Paris slaughterhouses stood.

The exhibition, which is presented at Paris's Science complex and was created by the head of the museum of the History of Sciences in Florence, Paolo Galuzzi, is later to be shown in New York and in other large cities throughout the world. It enables visitors to discover a "Renaissance of machines," which is certainly less well-known than the Renaissance of Art and Literature but is just as fascinating since these engineers who built basilicas of extraordinary dimensions in Italy or innovative irrigation systems were very

bold. The drawings made not only by Leonardo da Vinci but also by other "engineers" (that is to say those who built "ingegneria" devices) made it possible to create fifty or so animated wooden models, recreating these astonishing machines many of which were never used but which prefigured techniques of the future. Each model is accompanied by reproductions of the original drawings (350 of them in all) and by multimedia stations explaining how they worked, with the help of computerized images.

The first part of the exhibition is devoted to Brunelleschi and the great achievement of building the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore cathedral in

Florence, whose originality lay in its not having required the use of wooden arches to support the masonry while it was being built, thereby making it possible to avoid having to have enormous scaffolding. One can, in particular, see a model of a three-speed reversible winch which made it possible to reverse the direction of rotation to carry loads up or down without having to unharness the animals which drove it as well as a model of a counterweighted crane twenty metres high. The exhibition then reveals the terrific technological advance of engineers in Sienna (Taccola and Francesco di Giorgio) in areas such as mastering water (in particular with the creation of

the astonishing network of underwater aqueducts and fountains), measuring techniques and military engineering. They presented machines and mechanisms in illustrated manuscripts thereby inaugurating a new literary genre, the technical treatise. A computer programme enables visitors to look through these manuscripts, facsimiles of which are exhibited.

The last stage of the exhibition is devoted to Leonardo da Vinci and his extraordinary technical drawings, which, in a way, show the "anatomy of machines" with their different "organs" (springs, connecting roads, pulleys, gears, cog-

wheels etc) and the infinite combinations between them. This brilliant artist would later apply his theories on the functioning of machines to the human body (in particular for the articulations).

The Last Museum in La Villette : 4,500 Musical Instruments

On the other side of the La Villette site (55 hectares including 35 hectares of parks and gardens), the Museum of Music, which is the latest creation in this vast complex, is housed in the Cite de la Musique, which was designed by the French architect

Christian Portzamparc and inaugurated in January 1995. It contains a collection of 4,500 instruments from the 16th century to today and includes hurdy-gurdies, harpsichords decorated with pastoral scenes, ivory-incrusted lutes and theorbos, pianos concealed in octagonal tables, curved African harps, Giraffe-pianos from the Art Deco period, baroque or ordinary flutes, an enormous 19th century octobass with its foot-rest, an ondes Martenot, modular synthesizers, electric guitars, etc. The permanent exhibition, which covers 2,800 m² and five sound-proofed floors, will also enable the visitor to immerse himself in the period corresponding to the instruments exhibited and to the musical works presented, for instance with an evocation of the room in the Duke's Palace in Mantua where Monteverdi's "Orfeo" was first performed. A technical laboratory for restoring instruments, a documentation centre on contemporary music, a music and choreography pedagogical institute and an amphitheatre to hear rare instruments in the collection playing together, complete the whole. The new museum joins the Paris Higher National Conservatoire of Music and of Dance, which

was built by the same architect and has already been at La Villette for 5 years. The Conservatoire, which moved from the centre of Paris, celebrates the bicentenary of its creation in the French Revolution.

With the opening of this museum, the projects for the La Villette site have nearly been completed. This original adventure has made it possible to create a cultural complex of a completely new kind, in a site hinging on a culturally under-equipped working-class district in Paris and the suburbs, for a public which is unused to this kind of activity. La Villette has its logo which humorously recalls the picturesque history of the place. It is a very elongated cow crossing a red square for the Science and Industry complex, a blue circle for the Music complex and a green triangle for the park and the Great Hall (former cattle hall which was renovated and transformed in 1982 into a huge glass and steel exhibition area).

Napoleon 1st had created a canal and a gigantic reservoir at La Villette but it was Napoleon III who, in 1867, decided to build enormous slaughterhouses there and, everyday day, oxen, cows, pigs

and sheep arrived there from all the countryside in France. A century later, one billion francs (200 million dollars) was invested to modernize them, which did not stop them from declining. In 1974, they were closed down and a ten year period of reflection followed to decide what was to be done with this vast area scattered with interesting buildings the finest of which would finally be preserved. In 1979, the Establishment Public du la Villette was set up. Its mission was to create a national science and technology museum (the future Cite des Sciences et de l'Industrie), to build a centre devoted to music (Portzamparc's Cite de la Musique) and to link these two areas by a park open to everyone (the young French architect of Swiss origin Bernard Tschumi was entrusted with this task). This park, which receives more than four million visitors a year and which teems with activity, contains pavilions, gardens, theatres, rock concert-halls, exhibition rooms, an open-air cinema and a circus, and workshops and children's playgrounds. The events held there (such as the exhibition devoted to fairground arts) are very different from those organised in more traditional places. Today, for those in charge, La Villette represents an open door onto "cultural democracy" and is a place where "the elements of citizenship based on sharing and mutual respect" are instilled in visitors.

The Downcount for the 1998 World Cup in Football

Sitting on top of the hill, the works manager takes advantage of a break to light a cigarette. In the distance, one can make out the Sacre Coeur in Montmartre and the Basilica of Saint-Denis. But the real scene takes place fifteen metres lower down. An uninterrupted ballet of trucks reveals the ceaseless activity of a huge building site on which, from morning to night, an army of workers is busy.

by Stephen Garnier

THE place is Saint-Denis, a few kilometres north of Paris, on the site of the future Grand Stade de France (big French stadium). In this arena with 80,000 seats, the kick-off for the World Cup in football will be given on 10th June 1998. "World Cup '98 has already begun", comments Noel de Saint Fulgent, the interministerial delegate for the event. For those in charge of the World Cup, there is no doubt: this oval, costing two billion francs (400 million dollars), will already be ready for the '98 edition of the Five Nations rugby tournament. At the moment, concrete pillars rise up out of the ground, and the tiered seats are being built. The real technical feat of this huge construction, designed by four architects, Macary, Zublena, Costantini and Regembal, will be the installation of the roof, a glass saucer letting the light through and covering an area of six hectares. It will weigh 9,000 tonnes which is about as much as the Eiffel Tower.

The World Cup '98 is not only the Stade de France. The final tournament will also be held in nine French towns: Bordeaux, Lens, Lyons, Marseilles, Montpellier, Nantes, Paris (at the Parc des princes



Michel Platini, the former captain of the France football team is now the co-chairman of the organisation of the World Cup in football to be held in France in 1998. (photo: Diderot/Sipa)

stadium). Saint-Etienne and Toulouse. As the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has very strict standards, work will also be done on each of the sites (converting or building grandstands, refurbishing the changing-rooms, the press centres and the reception rooms, etc). The greatest transformations will be carried out in Marseilles. The renovation of the Velodrome stadium will alone swallow up more than a quarter of the budget allocated for the modernisation of all of the stadiums in the provinces, that is to say 273 million francs (54.6 million dollars) out of the total 888.5 million francs (for 177.7 million dollars) allotted.

From a sporting point of view, the official kick-off for World Cup '98 was given on Tuesday, 12th December 1995. From 6.30 pm to 8 pm, the French tennis-player Yannick Noah and the American footballer Alexis Lalas drew the 190 lots establishing the 639 meetings of the eliminatory phase of World Cup '98. "This World Cup, which is more universal than ever, will lead to some disappointments among the 172 nations registered. But for the thirty lucky countries which qualify, what a pleasure

it will be to find Brazil and France again", asserts Michel Platini, co-president of the organising committee of the World Cup. In "Guadalajara", a French monthly specialized in football.

From a technical and financial point of view, the hunt for sponsors is also on. Three new official partners for the project still have to be taken on. Already Electric Data System, France Telecom, Hewlett-Packard and the French Post-Office are supporting the organisation committee of the World Cup. The ticket issuing system is to be completely computerised and they are to be forgery-proof. Indeed, a maximum of precautions have to be taken when issuing 2.5 million tickets.

Within two years, building and renovation work on the stadiums will be completed. The Post-Office will have just issued its twelfth and latest stamp commemorating the event. The names of the players and the teams to have qualified will also be known. The sixteenth World Cup in Football will finally be able to begin.



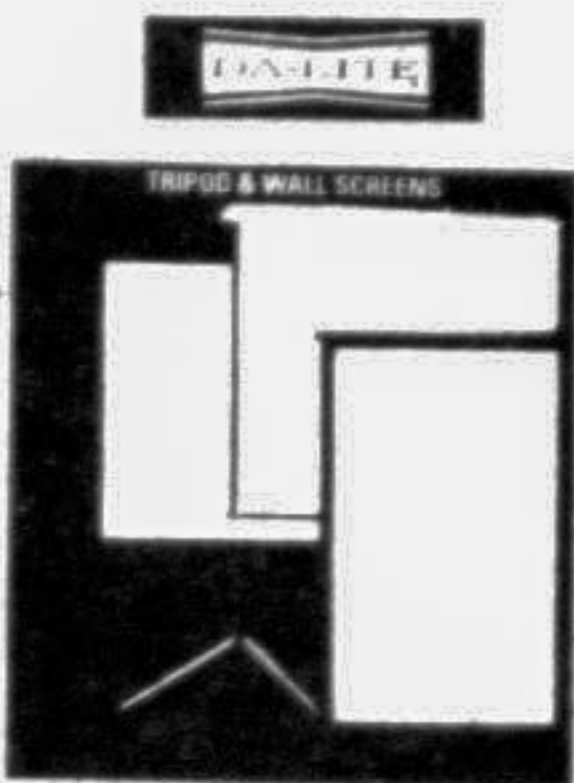
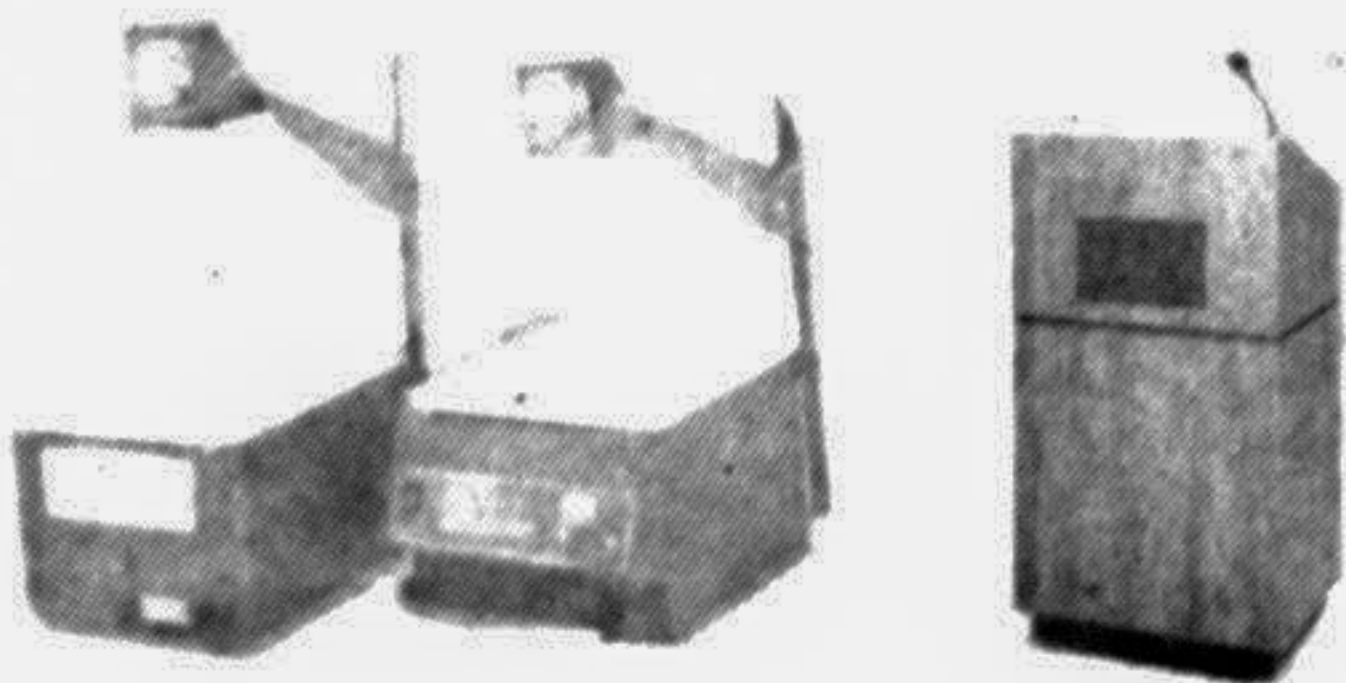
A scene from the traditional military parade of 14th of July held every year in Paris

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