

Paper, Profile, Petrarch: Michelangelo's poetry on architecture

Following definitive publications in Italian (Girardi, 1960) and English (Saslow, 1991), Michelangelo's poetic oeuvre has remained largely uncontested, particularly among architectural historians, for whom the poems are largely cited, if at all, as static support for the artist's otherwise muted commentary on his own creative process. A curious clue emerges, however, where poetic verse appears on three of Michelangelo's 1:1 scaled template drawings, known generally as *modani*. The tantalizing image of the artist reaching for a left-over architectural template while scratching lines of poetry begs the question of what might be discovered by looking closer at these three paper *modani* (*Corpus* 536, 538, 539).

The verses on the *modani* are merely fragments and revisions, part of a lineage of multiple and incomplete sources. At the same time, as 1:1 scaled templates, the *modani* empowered in a unique way Michelangelo's well-known propensity toward the fragmentation and re-assembly of the profile line. What emerges is how the paper enabled parallel processes of iteration, cutting and substitution, each operating within rather strict formal boundaries (for the poem, the Petrarchan sonnet; for the architecture, the antique lexicon). By working them out together on the same sheet, the boundaries erode between whittling lines of poetry and carving blocks of stone.

Unlike previous attempts to connect Michelangelo's architecture and poetry, this paper focuses on the materiality of the paper as a meeting point between the written word and the architectural imagination. Building on recent scholarship that has exposed the non-arbitrary role of paper in connecting Michelangelo's drawing and writing, it introduces the three *modani* as unique cases of this crossover. Being products of *disegno* as well as direct translations for construction, the *modani* already offered a singular connection between drawing and building. Now, by composing verse on the *modani*, he was, by extension, sketching poetry on the architecture itself.

Submitted to:

SAH International Conference, St. Paul, April 2018

Session - "Michelangelo Architect"

Session Chairs - Fabio Barry and Alexandria Brown, Stanford University

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