

Leonardo's 'Horse' unveiled in Milan -- 500 years after being commissioned

[MILAN, Italy](#) (AP) -- A towering bronze war-horse commissioned for Milan in the 15th century claimed its rightful place in the city on Friday, the gift of an American man who took up where artist Leonardo da Vinci left off five centuries ago.

Blue and white balloons lifted aloft the sheet covering the statue of "Il Cavallo," or "The Horse," drawing a standing ovation from the hundreds of Americans and Italians assembled for its dedication at a green, colonnaded park being created across from a Milan horse track.

"A dream realized, a friendship strengthened and a tribute to Leonardo da Vinci," Milan mayor Mayor Gabriele Albertini said, accepting the gift in the name of his city and the Italian people. U.S. Navy and Italian carabinieri bands played American and Italian anthems.

At 24-feet-high (seven meters), the \$6 million horse is said to be the largest bronze equine statue in the world.

Leonardo was to have cast such a horse for a duke of Milan but never got to -- the nobleman went to war with France, and decided he needed the bronze for cannons instead.

The dedication came 500 years to the day that the war forced Leonardo to abandon Milan, and his dream project.

A descendant of Duke Ludivico Sforza was among those in the audience Friday seeing the long-ago project realized.

The man responsible

The horse standing in Milan today was itself the life project of Charles Dent, an airline pilot and an amateur artist who loved Leonardo.

The Allentown, Pennsylvania man was captivated by a 1977 "National Geographic" article on Leonardo's horse that never was, and dedicated the last years of his life and much of his fortune to finally bringing the horse to bronze. He died in 1994.

"I'm sure Charlie is smiling down looking at the celebrations," nephew Charles W. Dent said Friday.

Milan's mayor welcomed the gift Thursday night in a tribute distributed at Milan's sumptuous La Scala opera house, which dedicated the evening's concert to Leonardo and "Il Cavallo."

The concert was one of days of festivities surrounding the dedication of the horse.

Coming days will bring firework displays, public concerts, skydiving exhibitions and balloon ascensions for aerial views of the sculpture.

"It's incredible to think something like this is a gift," said Fiammetta Roselli-Delturco, an Italian at Friday's dedication.

Grand Rapids to get its own copy

It was all also a little stunning to Nina Akamu, the sculptor who crafted the horse.

"I'm just sitting down and being in a bit of shock," Akamu said Thursday at intermission at the red-and-gilt La Scala, surrounded by Italian and American dignitaries.

"When you think of how many people have been involved in this -- sometimes I'm the focus of it, but really I feel like I'm just a spokesman for them," Akamu said.

Akamu oversaw creation of the horse at the Tallix Art Foundry in Beacon, New York.

Businessman Frederik Meijer bought a copy of the horse for display in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where it is to be a highlight of a garden dedicated to learning.

"I think we're going to be delighted we were a part of it," Meijer said Friday.

The purchase funded much of the Italian project, project overseers say.



(PAP PHOTO)