

Panoramic Rome, before and after Google

Judith Harris (November 17, 2008)



Bernard Fisher, historian at the University of Virginia, has finally assisted to the concretization of his project: Google Earth made it possible to realize a virtual ancient Rome

It is thrilling news that University of Virginia's art historian Bernard Frischer's long-standing project to create a virtual ancient Rome is now reality, thanks to Google Earth. "It's another step toward creating a virtual time machine," Frischer said, "a continuation of five centuries of research by scholars, architects and artists since the Renaissance."

Frischer had been working for years on the project with Past Perfect Productions, when he was



approached by Google administrators. Viewers not only see the topography of ancient Rome, but can tour the inside of some of the buildings as well. It is a first and a genuine accomplishment. But what about before Google? In the 18th and 19th centuries creating panoramic views of Rome—some of them a 360 degree circuit on pasted sheets up to 30 feet long—was a vogue. Buildings were constructed specifically so that viewers could see the amazingly detailed circular views by Italian and foreign artists like Pierre Prévost and Ludovico Caracciolo, and fabulous cityscapes like those of John Newbolt, Thomas Shew, Carl Ferdinand Sprosse and Ippolito Caffi.

A few of these specially built viewing houses exist in North Europe, but all have been lost in Italy. Some of the pictures survive, however, and in a sophisticated and unusual exhibition, Rome's history museum in Palazzo Braschi has put on view, through April 19, thirty-five of these extremely rare works in steelpoint, engraving, aquatint and oils.

Italian history buffs will be interested in the two views from the Janiculum showing the French siege of Rome in 1849, which brought about the fall of the short-lived Roman Republic.

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