

A Model Marriage

Timothy Richards re-creates architectural wonders as small-scale models from his workshop in Bath, England.

BY Allison Malafronte

Nearly 30 years ago, British artist Timothy Richards found himself in the unusual position of creating a building for the second time. His small-scale architectural models—made primarily of plaster or bronze—have since become treasured collectibles among private collectors and public institutions worldwide. Through these models, Richards and his team, located in an old schoolhouse in Bath, England, re-create both iconic and lesser-known buildings, using time-honored techniques and materials, as well as occasional modern approaches for contemporary projects.

These models speak to more than just the external structure of a building. They are sculptures that contain power and presence. “I’m not interested in mimicry in model-making,” says Richards. “I want to get to the core of what the building represents, its fundamental language. Buildings are like humans; they contain the physical scars of life, and they carry incredible memories from generations past.”



SMALL IMPACTS
The finished model of the Pantheon in Rome

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—TIMOTHY RICHARDS



FORMING A STRUCTURE

A member of Richards’ team implements the final stages of making the mould.

ALL HANDS ON DECK

The team assembles plaster on the exhibition model for the Bath Preservation Trust.

Through this process I get closer to that history and to the craft and minds of the genius architects and builders who made that possible. I then give the structure a voice through a new medium, in this case, plaster, to help people see the building from a new perspective.”

Creating these scale models takes significant time and planning. The preliminary stage involves visiting the building for research and investigation, locating the original architectural plans (when possible) and creating a master model from which to work. When it comes to actually building the structures, Richards has a deep reverence for his materials and says that the material is always in control, especially plaster. He talks enthusiastically about the properties and patination of British gypsum plaster and the unyielding alchemy of lost-wax bronze casting. As much as he respects his media, however, the materials are in service to the subject. The artist describes plaster as having natural empathy with the architecture, allowing the viewer’s eye to move past the surface material directly to the deeper meaning beneath. Put simply, plaster is the perfect medium to express architecture.

Richards’ models fall into two categories: commissions from major institutions and universities, and personal projects. As the artist explains, great buildings make great models. “It has to have incredible design and engineering,”





A ROYAL HONOR

His Royal Highness [one "n"] Charles, Prince of Wales (right), received the 2012 Richard H. Driehaus Prize, a bronze model of the Tower of Winds, created by the Timothy Richards workshop. Also pictured are Driehaus (middle) and Dean Michael Lykoudis of the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture (left).



A CLOSER LOOK

Whether it's big or small, the Pazzi Chapel in Florence is a feast for the eyes.

he says. "What makes a building great? In the history of architecture, there are iconic buildings and there are pivotal buildings. An iconic building, such as the Chrysler building, is a bright, shining star of one. But a pivotal building—the Pantheon in Rome, as one example—is a game changer. The world of architecture was never the same after that building was created. Why are these buildings so pivotal? It's an interesting question to investigate."

Richards and his team have completed numerous models of classical structures, such as the Palais Royale in Paris and the Pazzi Chapel in Florence. They also work on more contemporary projects. One such example is a model Richards produced last year for real-estate developer Alchemy Properties, in New York City, in partnership with Robert A.M. Stern Architects. These models were used to help sell the plan for a multimillion dollar apartment complex, and they included state-of-the-art technology, such as touch-screen lighting inside the structure. "Tradition and the technology of the digital age are working together," Richards says. "We need both living in the same space, and this project proved that. Here we are with our centuries-old medium of plaster, and it's holding



DOUBLE TAKE

The interior of Richard's model of the Pantheon is as meticulously detailed as the outside.

its own with contemporary media. In fact, it's often preferred because of the humanity of the material."

With numerous awards, honors and achievements to his credit, Richards is showing no sign of slowing down. He is, however, shifting gears as he moves into the most important years of his career. "I spent the last 30 years being all things to all people, but now I'm putting the shutters up," he says. "Instead of just responding to commissions, I'm going to create the models that I really need to create and that no one else will make." Richards explains that the reason companies are commissioning him and his workshop is because they realize the need to retell their own stories, both to their staff and to a changing world. The models allow them to negotiate change. Richards puts it simply: "If you know where you've been, you know where you are. And if you know where you are, you know where you're going. And that's our story." ♣

Allison Malafronte is an arts and design writer, editor and curator based in the greater New York City area.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON TIMOTHY RICHARDS AND HIS WORKSHOP, VISIT TIMOTHYRICHARDSCOMMISSIONS.COM.