

Arrivederci



Looking through Galileo's telescope, held by Italian museum curator Giorgio Strano, is Steve Snyder, a Franklin Institute vice president. Watching were (standing, from left) Italian scholar Andrea Bernardoni, author Andrew Chaikin, and chief astronomer Derrick Pitts. TOM GRALUSH / Staff Photographer

Galileo's telescope is a major star here

By Sam Wood
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

For five months, the telescope built by the master himself served as the centerpiece of the Franklin Institute's summer exhibition "Galileo, the Medici and the Age of Astronomy."

In that span — which Derrick Pitts, the institute's chief astronomer, described as "a semi-religious experience" — the museum's attendance swelled beyond expectations. Though museum goers were not allowed to handle the priceless artifact, it did not take much imagination to put themselves in the 17th-century scientist's shoes.

"With it, he would have been able to see the phases of Venus, the craters of the moon, and Jupiter with its four largest and brightest moons," Pitts said.

Built in 1609, Galileo fashioned the instrument using two half-shells of carved wood bound together with copper wire, wrapped in paper, and varnished.

"It was the only telescope found among Galileo's personal belongings when he died," Pitts said.

But yesterday, its public summer sojourn in America — the first time the telescope had ever traveled outside Italy — came to an end.

Shortly before noon, Pitts and Andrew Chaikin, a visiting science writer, peered through the scope one last time.

Then Giorgio Strano, the exhibit's Italian curator, donned a pair of cotton gloves. With an assistant, he gently lifted the mahogany-colored tube, swaddled it with white archival paper, and gingerly placed it into

See **TELESCOPE** on B11

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TELESCOPE from B1

a foam-lined packing crate. With another piece of foam placed over top the instrument, Strano's assistant sealed the lid to the box with a gently whining power drill and 12 screws.

The telescope, insured for about \$3 million, will be flown under armed escort back to Florence, Strano said. It will go into temporary storage before its home, the Istituto e Museo della Storia di Scienza, reopens in the spring after renovations.

A Franklin Institute spokeswoman said attendance for the exhibit, which featured more than 100 items from the

Medici collection, had exceeded all expectations. Official numbers, however, were not immediately available.

Strano said the telescope was one of 100 that Galileo made.

"But with the exception of a second owned by my museum, the others have all disappeared," Strano said. "They were not considered beautiful objects in the mid-17th century. As more powerful telescopes were created, Galileo's were thrown away."

Chaikin, author of *A Man on the Moon, the Voyages of the Apollo Astronauts*, said he had been "thrilled" to briefly look through the telescope —



Packing up the telescope for its trip back to a museum in Florence are Italian museum scholar Andrea Bernardoni (left) and curator Giorgio Strano.

TOM GRALISH / Staff Photographer

even though he only saw some leaves out one of the Institute's third-floor windows.

"To think that Galileo saw the heavens through these same lenses," Chaikin said. "It represents the beginning

Contact staff writer Sam Wood at 215-654-2796 or at samwood@phillynews.com.