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Quarterly Magazine
4th Quarter 2011
USA / Canada edition
$11.25

No. 40 - Quarterly Magazine - 4th Quarter 2011 - USA / Canada edition - $11.25

Figure INTERNATIONAL

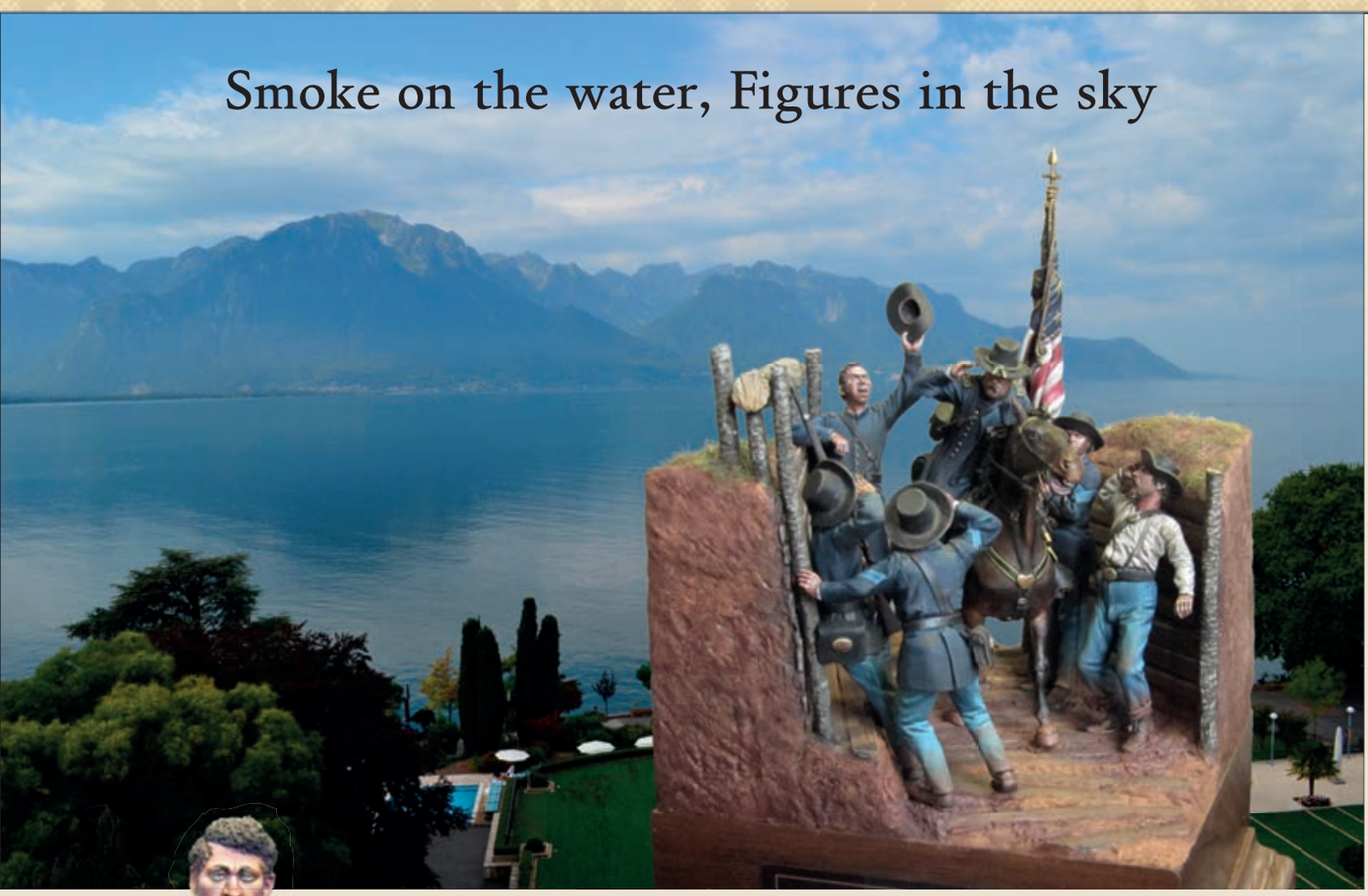
LAWRENCE OF ARABIA
By Julio Cabos

WORLD EXPO
Switzerland 2011

VERLINDEN
Exclusive interview



Smoke on the water, Figures in the sky





Jim DeRogatis Jim DeRogatis, Albert Gros Mascarilla

Since its conception in 1992, the triennial World Expo has become for our beloved hobby of figure modeling what the Olympics are for the world of sport.

Like the Olympics, the Expo is subject to hints of nationalism, a whiff of politics, and minor grumblings about the expense of it all.

But, also like the Olympics, the prevailing vibe is one of uniting a vibrant worldwide community, with modelers from around the globe coming together to celebrate their shared passions in the spirit of friendship and camaraderie while spotlighting the absolute highest levels of artistic achievement in the field.

Following on the heels of the first global exhibition in Washington, D.C. in 1993, and those in Paris (1996), Toronto (1998), Glasgow (2000), Rome (2002), Boston (2005), and Girona (2008), the eighth World Expo took place in Montreux on the beautiful banks of Lake Geneva, Switzerland, from August 19 to 21, 2011.

For this music fan and professional critic, the town of 25,000 previously was known for three things: the renowned Montreux Jazz Festival; Mountain Studios, where Led Zeppelin and Queen recorded (Freddie Mercury loved the town, and it has erected a lakefront statue in his honor), and the incident immortalized in Deep Purple's most famous song (the British heavy-metal pioneers wrote the tune about the night in 1971 when a Frank Zappa fan with a flare gun burned down the Montreux Casino, resulting in "smoke on the water, a fire in the sky"). But there is much more to these 13 square miles.

For one thing, the climate was more Mediterranean than Alpine, with temperatures in the 90s. The heat wave was said to be unseasonable, but Montreux also boasted as many palm trees as towns I've visited on the Riviera and the Italian coast. For another thing, Montreux truly is a global resort, albeit with a European accent. Though French was the dominant language, many people spoke some English, and the large contingents from Italy and Spain also seemed right at home.





With Mayor Laurent Wehrli greeting visiting modelers and the Alps reflecting off Lake Geneva just outside the hall's panoramic windows whenever the haze of humidity dissipated, it was hard to imagine how any other Expo site could match Montreux for its welcoming attitude or its natural beauty—though, of course, the thousands of modelers and spectators came for the displays inside the large but inviting hall, and they weren't disappointed.

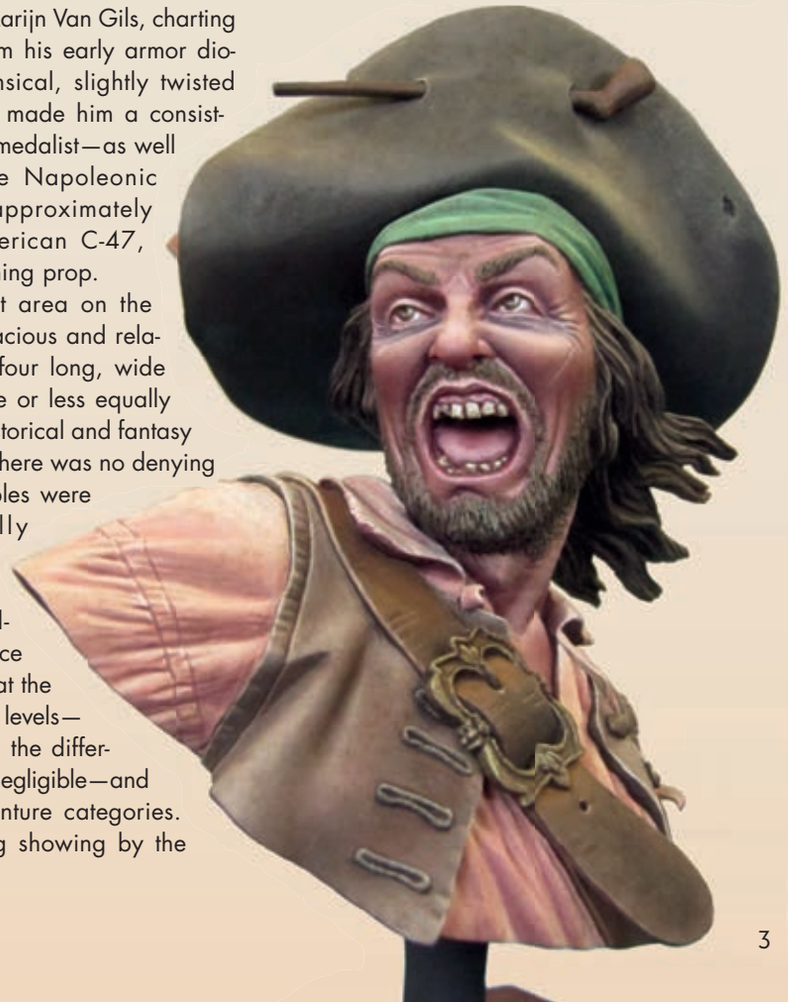
Located on the main floor, the vendors' area offered plenty of reasons to spend your Euros or Francs. Tremendous stands were hosted by the French manufacturers Metal-Modeles and Historex and the Italian company Pegaso, which produced the official commemorative figure given to every exhibitor, a fine casting of William Tell holding his son and a crossbow. Pegaso and Historex also provided special prizes to modelers working with their figures, with the latter going to American Tom Holtz for his stunning trio of mounted Historex mamelukes.

The Zone Commerçante also included an exhibit area of participating modelers' older works set in glass cases—the highlight was a near-complete career overview of Belgium's brilliant Marijn Van Gils, charting the progression from his early armor dioramas to the whimsical, slightly twisted vignettes that have made him a consistently original gold medalist—as well as a quarter-scale Napoleonic cannon and an approximately 1/12th scale American C-47, complete with spinning prop.

The main exhibit area on the lower level was spacious and relatively well-lit, with four long, wide rows of tables more or less equally divided between historical and fantasy miniatures, though there was no denying that the fantasy tables were much more fully stocked than those at American shows. Hundreds of modelers chose in advance whether to register at the supérieur or général levels—and in some cases, the difference in quality was negligible—and in the open or peinture categories. There was a strong showing by the juniors as well, and additional tables held smaller but no less impressive displays of armor, aircraft, and automobile models or maquettes.

Just beyond the exhibit space, plentiful auditorium seating was provided for the awards ceremony and painting and sculpting seminars by the likes of Diego Ruina and Andrea Iotti, with video cameras projecting their work on a large screen behind the dais. Just beyond this was a bar where exhibitors got a welcome discount and an area of smaller tables for contests in "speed painting," which somehow became "stupid painting" in the French translation, and which essentially were inscrutable in any language. On the level below all of this, yet further underground, the Warhammer 40k Tournament took place, with rabid teams from different countries wearing matching soccer jerseys and cheering their fellow members on by shaking cowbells, not unlike soccer fans blasting their Bubuzelas.

Expo organizers initially expressed some concern that the Warhammer festivities might overshadow the modeling exhibit, but that was not the case. Many of the gamers turned out also to be very talented painters, and though they favor 30mm "mini's," they spent a lot of time at the modeling tables, marveling at the 54mm and 90mm figures.



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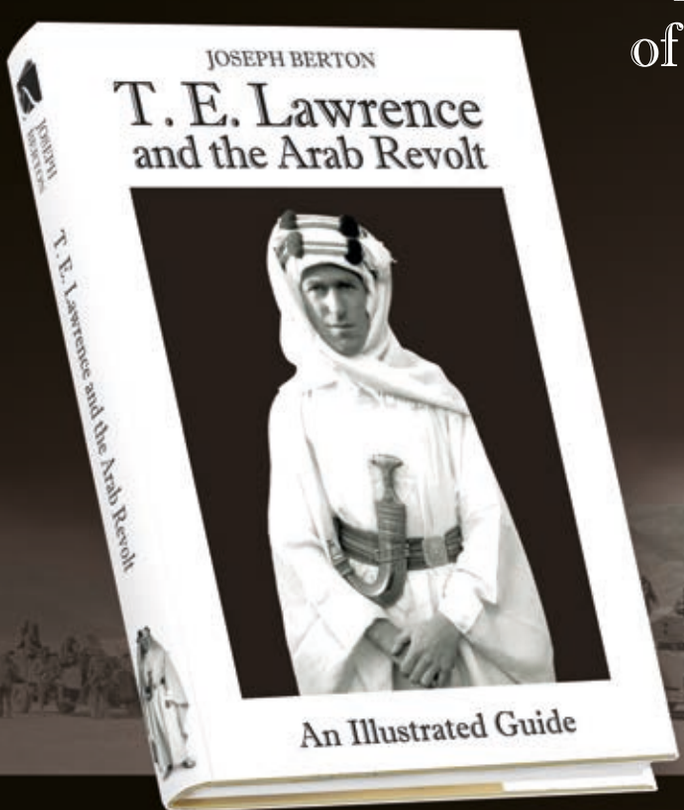
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