



THE ACCADEMICA NAZIONALE DI SAN LUCA
ANNOUNCES THE REOPENING TO THE PUBLIC OF THE

CHIESA DEI SS. LUCA E MARTINA

OPENING HOURS:
FROM OCTOBER TO APRIL, SATURDAYS FROM 9AM TO 6PM
FROM MAY TO SEPTEMBER, SATURDAYS FROM 9AM TO 8PM

via della Curia 4 (Foro Romano)



Standing at the heart of the Roman Forum, the academy church of SS. Luca e Martina has a complex architectural history. The foundation of a little church dedicated to the Roman martyr St. Martina and dating from the seventh century can probably be ascribed to Pope Honorius I (625-38), who was also responsible for the transformation of the adjacent Curia Senatus into the Church of Sant' Adriano *in Tribus Fatibus* through the simple addition of an apse on the far wall. There is evidence that the two churches of S. Martina and S. Adriano continued to be used for civic functions at least as far as the twelfth century, and this is echoed in Sangallo the Younger's drawing of the area between the two churches envisaging a complex in which the memory of the senatorial buildings of late antiquity lives on. Restored and reconsecrated in the thirteenth century by Pope Alexander IV, in 1588, under the pontificate of Sixtus V, the church of S. Martina was donated to the Accademia di San Luca with a papal bull, in exchange for the church of St. Luke (the patron saint of painters) which was demolished following work to transform Piazza S. Maria Maggiore. The dedication-name of that church was therefore transferred to the new seat of the Academy, amalgamating the title of St. Luke with that of St. Martina.

From that point onwards a series of projects for the reconstruction of the building were proposed: from the wooden model attributed to Giovanni Battista Montano (1592) to Ottaviano Mascherino's proposals (ca. 1592) and the projects put forward by Federico Zuccari (1593) and Giovanni Baglione (1618), all eventually reduced, for lack of funds, to interventions of strict necessity. These included the building of a new floor on a higher level to protect the church from damp, the consequent creation of a lower church to be used for the burial of academicians, the construction of rooms on the first floor which were to serve as quarters for the academy (1593-95), and a partial heightening of the walls of the church in order to restore

harmony to the spatial proportions that had been altered by the elevation of the church floor, together with the construction of a new, unvaulted, wooden ceiling (1618).

That the church was not in the best of conditions is also documented by the *Sacra Visita* of 1625 (*Muri Ecclesiae sunt rudes, et fenestrae sine telariis, ac tecta revisione indigent* = The walls of the church are rough, and the windows lack frames, the roof needs repairing) decrying the poor state of the building just a decade before Pietro da Cortona's intervention, which began in 1634.

Cortona's project for the restoration of the building began with the lower church, the work initiated at his own expense with the intention of realizing his own funerary chapel, but with the possibility in mind of a successive intervention in the upper church – perhaps already in the hope of finding the relics of St. Martina which, as had been the case with St. Bibiana, might have aroused the interest of Cardinal Barberini or his uncle Pope Urban VIII. In fact in 1634, with work on the walls of the crypt just beginning, the holy relics were discovered near the old altar in the lower church, stirring the hoped for interest of both pope and cardinal.

The first phase of work (1635-39) proceeded rapidly. In the upper church work began immediately on the chancel, the high altar, the statue of St. Martina and the lower storey of the façade, and by the summer of 1635 the essential outlines of the work were already well-defined. By the June of 1637 the lower storey of the façade was complete as far as the cornice, and work on the upper storey had begun by the January of 1639. Among the sculptors working on the church a position of note was held by Luca Berrettini – nephew of Pietro da Cortona – who was responsible for the colossal travertine capitals in the chancel, the sculptures and the marbles of the high altar and the decorative work in intaglio ornamenting the façade. In this period work also began on the lower church, the project for which had evolved from the funerary chapel of Cortona in memory of St. Martina and other saints.

From 1640 to 1647 work effectively came to a halt because of Cortona's professional commitments in Florence and the flight to Paris of Francesco Barberini (1646-48) who had been accused by Pope Innocent X of illegal appropriation of funds. Only in 1648, once both architect and cardinal had returned to Rome and Gian Battista Soria had been elected prince of the Academy, did work take up again, the following decade seeing the completion of the upper storey of the façade, the walls of the apse and the stuccowork decoration of the vault of the nave towards the façade (supervised by Pietro da Cortona in person), along with initial work on the piers to support the dome and the foundations for the transepts. During the 1660s work continued on the dome, the cupola and their decorations as well as the stuccowork in the transepts (again directly overseen by the architect). In the lower church the work undertaken in this period reveals a partial deviation from the initial project: the chapel of St. Martina is moved to the far end of the short arm facing the *confessio* and new rectilinear steps and vestibules are added in correspondence with the “new underground corridor”. Once again it is Luca Berrettini who is responsible for the columns in Bardiglio marble, the bases and capitals of the columns and the pilasters.

On the death of Pietro da Cortona on 16th May 1669 the essential parts of the building were already complete. Over the following years the decoration of the structure was finished under the supervision of his faithful pupil Ciro Ferri, work including the elements that crown the façade (the insignia of Urban VIII, ornamental vases and the angels holding up the papal escutcheon) and the stuccowork decoration of the cupola. Ten years on from the death of the artist and architect, in a letter to Ciro Ferri dated 24 March 1679, Luca Berrettini describes the decoration of the church interior as complete with the exception of the lateral altars, and he also attributes the completion of the high altar to Ferri himself.

The Academy undertook yet further work towards the end of the 1600s and in the century that followed: the rich paving of the lower church designed by Carlo Fontana (1694); the collocation on the altar of the *confessio* of Algardi's terracotta relief (1698) donated to the Academy by Ercole Ferrata; above all, the work undertaken to restore the roofs and in particular the dome following a 1706 survey that the Academy had commissioned from Francesco and Carlo Fontana after its stability was feared compromised by a lightning strike. The lateral altars were completed at different points: Lazzaro Baldi, a pupil of Pietro da Cortona, realized the decoration of the altar in the right transept, dedicated to St. Lazarus, adorning it with precious marbles and painting the altarpiece of the martyrdom of the saint (1680-82). The altar in the left transept was first the subject of a project by Carlo Fontana (1696) and then that of Carlo Buratti (1722), eventually being consecrated in 1728 (together with the other two) while still incomplete; it was only finished in 1731 when Sebastiano Conca, the prince of the Academy, was given the authorisation to decorate it at his own expense, and painted the great altarpiece of the Assumption, unveiled in 1740 (despite the fact that the main work on the altar had been finished since 1737).

In 1718-19 important work was again done on the dome and the stuccoes which had been damaged by leaking water. Buratti, who had received the Academy's authorisation only for “payment for the Dome, its Drum and Roofs”, instead made substantial structural modifications to the architecture and the internal and external decorations (arbitrarily, according to the Academy), altering the door surrounds and the galleries over the four doors of the nave according to what was by this time essentially eighteenth-century taste. The enlargement of the balconies near the high altar dates, instead, from 1739, followed in 1740 by the erection of the balustrade around the chancel in a style very different from that of Cortona.

Finally in 1730 the stucco decoration of the dome's pendentives was completed. The then prince Camillo Rusconi designed the four stuccowork reliefs with the figures of the Evangelists, and funded that dedicated to St. Matthew (1727-28) which was entrusted, following his death, to his pupil Giuseppe Rusconi.

Sebastiano Conca paid for the execution of the remaining three models based on Camillo Rusconi's designs: St. Mark (sculpted by Filippo della Valle), St. Luke and St. John (executed by Giovanni Battista Maini) mounted in 1730 and at the base of which the insignia of the Academy can be seen.

Over the following centuries the area surrounding the church also underwent considerable transformations, first with the excavations of the Forum (in the early 1800s) which took the surrounding area down to the archaeological level, altering the perception of the church's perspective, and then during the 1930s with the further lowering of the paving in front of the building (and the consequent lengthening of the flight of stairs leading up to the church) as well as the intervention to "free up" the monument which was one of the transformations connected with the creation of the Via dell'Impero under the artistic supervision of Gustavo Giovannoni and the technical supervision of the *Governatorato* (the city administration of the Fascist period). As part of this work the buildings to the sides of the church and behind it were demolished, including the seat of the Academy (which was transferred to its current location in Palazzo Carpegna), and the rooms around the perimeter of the church were reconstructed in brickwork.

The latest restoration of the upper church (2007-08) forms part of a wider programme of interventions initiated in recent decades and involving the exterior of the dome and its drum (work which started in 1985) and the crypt (1996-99), with work conducted by Rome City Council's Department for Architectural Heritage and Landscape (*Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici e per il Paesaggio*) and planned and supervised by the architect Pier Luigi Porzio. In the lower church in particular, with its stucco decorations and precious polychrome marbles, in addition to the cleaning of the surfaces in marble, the restoration work also brought to light a "stucco romano" (polished plaster) finish of very high quality conserved beneath the superimposed layers of whitewash and which has restored a rich chromatic and plastic intensity to the refined detail of the mouldings. Along with the installation of a new system of illumination, in the upper church work has involved the cleaning of all the surfaces in plaster and stucco, as well as the marble of the altars, and a detailed analysis has been made of the colours and materials adopted in the wall finishes of the fifteenth-century building and of the different colour schemes that have succeeded one another over the centuries. The research methodology applied consisted of a meticulous on-site survey with stratigraphic samples taken by the restorers, in combination with detailed historical research in the archives. Significant parallels emerged, permitting a new critical evaluation of Cortona's masterpiece, and the research done has allowed an accurate dating of each of the historical colour schemes in the church interior. Of particular note are the two schemes produced under the supervision of Pietro da Cortona and Carlo Buratti respectively, these having been followed by later interventions that largely consisted of maintenance work. Both reflect an inclination to favour light, delicate colours, but oriented towards warmer tones in the case of Cortona, and cooler tones in Buratti's scheme, suggesting two different approaches to materials, each an incarnation of its own historical period. Cortona's scheme simulates the roughness of travertine in its tonal variations; Buratti's tends towards the dematerialization of the planar surfaces (in airy colours) in contrast with the columns and pilasters (in the colours of marble) and is characterised by a tendency towards a greater fragmentation in the decoration. The new information regarding the scheme that the great master of the baroque conceived for his masterpiece-church seems to coincide with his conception of the wall surface as a point of encounter between the mass of the masonry and the modulation of the columns, the plasticity of which is entrusted to the play of light and shadow rather than the dichromatic treatment of columns and recessed surfaces typical of the eighteenth century. In this sense the treatment of the architectural order – monochromatic, richly suggestive of the physicality of materials and cleverly shaded – is well matched with what is a similar approach to the modelling of solids, rooted in the experience of Michelangelo. (*Ilaria Delsere*)



Contact details:

website: www.accademiasanluca.it
email: segretaria@accademiasanluca.it
tel. 06.6798850