

San Giuseppe a Capo le Case



San Giuseppe a Capo le Case is a 17th century former convent church just north of the Largo di Tritone in the rione Colonna. The dedication is to St Joseph.

History

The name Capo le Case is the mediaeval one for the locality, and basically means "Where the houses end". It was still appropriate at the start of the church's history. The area was open countryside when Pope Sixtus V had the Via Sistina built, but the new road attracted several religious foundations from the late 16th century as well as private country villas of rich people. (1)

The convent and church were founded in 1598 by a Spanish Oratorian and early disciple of St Philip Neri named [Francesco Soto](#), with the financial assistance of a Roman noblewoman named Fulvia Sforza. His special interest was in helping destitute young women in danger of making a living from prostitution, and he had several of these living under his protection. He was also a fervent admirer of the recently deceased St Teresa of Avila, translating her writings into Italian, and had the idea of founding a nunnery on her principles for his poverelle fanciulle. Pope Clement VIII approved the project. (1)

The first convent buildings were unsatisfactory, being converted from some houses, and so a rebuilding programme was entered into at the end of the 16th century under the supervision of Cardinal [Marcello Lante della Rovere](#). This resulted in the present church, which was completed in 1628 and contained several important works of art. (1)

The Franciscan lay-brother mystic St [Charles of Sezze](#) received the stigmata while attending Mass in this church in 1648. (1)

The church served as the convent chapel for over three hundred years. In 1717 the architect Tommaso Mattei left a bequest to provide a copy of the Scala Sancta at the Lateran. There was a restoration of the church in 1863. (1)

However, the nuns were dispossessed by the Italian government in 1873. They were allowed to occupy a very small part of the original convent, but moved away in 1932 and are now at San Giuseppe del Monastero di Clausura. The rest of the convent was given over to the Museo Artistico Industriale in 1880, which demolished most of it but renovated the block to the right of the church in 1888. The church itself was deconsecrated, and its fittings and artworks dispersed. (1)

The church received a new lease of life when it was taken over by the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood of the parish of Sant'Andrea delle Fratte in 1936. This arranged a restoration and re-dedication. Since then it has functioned as a dependent church of that parish, although it has its own priest. (1)

The museum became the Municipal Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art in 1980. (1)

Exterior

The church is a simple three-bay single nave, with a separate rectangular apse. The fabric is in red brick. None of the exterior is visible from the street except the façade. There is a small campanile or bellcote on the roof at the apse end, but this seems to be invisible from anywhere on the ground. (1)

The trapezoidally shaped convent cloister was to the south-east of the church, with the apse of the latter near its north-east corner. There were arcades only on the west and south sides, with no building next to the latter. Instead, the nuns' large garden was here, reaching to the street to the west. This is now taken up by car parking for the art gallery; the smaller garden in the cloister garth has been preserved. (1)

Façade

The simple and rather grim two-storey gabled façade bears witness that the nuns had little money when they first settled on this site. It is mostly of red brick, of two storeys with some architectural details in limestone. (1)

The first storey has four brick pilasters with stone Ionic capitals, embellished with swags and winged heads of putti. These support an entablature with a strongly projecting cornice and a blank frieze. The doorcase has a raised triangular pediment, and above it is a panel containing a mosaic of *St Joseph with the Child Jesus*. This is by Cleto Luzi, 1938. An interesting detail is that the doorcase is carved so as to look as if the tops of the jambs have been sliced through diagonally and displaced. In between the pilasters is a pair of empty round-headed niches. The entrance is accessed by a pair of transverse staircases with a solid balustrade. (1)

In the second storey is a central rectangular window flanked by four pilasters also with a pair of niches in between. All of these are in brick. The entablature has Doric capitals for the pilasters superimposed, and above is a blank triangular pediment. (1)

The architect seems to be unknown. (1)

Interior

Nave

Since the interior was gutted when the nunnery was suppressed, the present decoration and furnishings are entirely modern and date from 1936. Most of the paintings are by **Cleto Luzi**, 1938. He made an effort to allude to lost artworks in certain of them. (1)

The three-bay nave has large arched niches on either side, separated by Doric pilasters supporting an entablature which runs round the entire nave. The arches of these niches have Doric impostes, each pair of which is joined so as to form a string course. The two further bays have side altars in these niches, two on each side. (1)

The ceiling is a simple and undecorated barrel vault. The overall decor is in creamy white, with the pilasters and entablature in yellow ochre. (1)

On the counterfaçade are memorial plaques for Cardinal [Marcello Lante della Rovere](#) (d. 1652), benefactor of the convent and church, and for [Francesco Soto de Langa](#) (d. 1619), priest of the Congregation of the Oratory where he was affiliated with St. Fillippo Neri, who originally established the convent and church.

Sanctuary

The rectangular sanctuary is entered through a triumphal arch beneath the main entablature, which is flanked by two pairs of pilasters the outer one of which is tucked into the corners. Above the entablature is a rectangular window, with simple stained glass having the motif of a yellow cross on a red background. (1)

The side walls of the sanctuary have grilles for the nuns to hear Mass (the church was outside their enclosure). The high altar is in polychrome marble work (at least, it looks it) and has a pair of Ionic columns in what looks like pink marble supporting a slightly oversized segmental pediment. The tabernacle in the form of a miniature polychrome marble aedicule is unusual, because it has a glass front and contains a miniature monstrance in front of a painting of the *Crucifixion*. (1)

The altarpiece features *The Dream of St Joseph*, and is by **Luzi**. He invoked the former altarpiece on the same theme, which was by **Andrea Sacchi**. It is known that this altar was designed by **Bartolomeo Breccioli** in 1628. (1)

Side altars

The first altar on the left is dedicated to St John the Baptist, and the altarpiece is an unusual work by **Luzi** depicting the saint and one other venerating an icon of the Madonna and Child held by putti, with a vista in the background. The picture on the altar is of the *Sacred Heart*. The former altarpiece was by a Flemish painter called Voo (allegedly), which replaced a Nativity by Sister Maria Eufrasia of the community which was noted with approbation by Filippo Titi. (1)

The second altar on the left is dedicated to the *Crucifixion*, with a large wooden crucifix in front of a fresco of *Our Lady and St John* forming a Calvary. A picture of *Our Lady of Sorrows* is on the little tabernacle. (1)

The second altar on the right is dedicated to St Melania, with an anonymous 19th century altarpiece showing her giving alms. The picture on the altar is of *St Rita of Cascia*. (1)

The first altar on the right is dedicated to the Holy Family, with an altarpiece by **Luzi** and a little copy of the icon of *Our Lady of Pompei* on the altar. The altar frontal, and that of the one opposite, is in alabaster. The altarpiece here used to be *The Vision of St Teresa of Avila*, by Giovanni Lanfranco, which the sisters managed to retain. It is now in their convent church at the Monastero di Clausura. (1)

Parlor

The nuns' parlour has frescoes of *Christ with the Samaritan Woman at the Well*, *The Annunciation* and *St Mary Magdalen*, the work of the Discalced Carmelite nun Sister Maria Eufrosia della Croce. (1) (3) (a)

Scala Sancta

The Scala Sancta is the best thing in the church. It consists of a staircase of twenty-eight marble steps, leading to a tiny but exquisite chapel having a saucer cupola on pendentives. The altar is in an arched recess facing the stairs. The cupola, pendentives, pilasters and apse vault are encrusted in intricate Baroque stucco work in white, featuring putti with the Instruments of the Passion (the cupola shows them with the Cross and the Veil of Veronica). (1)

Access and liturgy

The church is open from early morning until 10:00 weekdays (personal observation). Mass on Sunday is at 11:00. There seems to be a Mass at 9:00 on weekdays. (1)

Burial: (2)

Emmanuele Cardinal [DE GREGORIO](#), (1758-1839)

Tommaso [Mattei](#) (1680-1718), Italian architect

Location:

Address: **Via Francesco Crispi 37**

Coord: [41° 54' 14.4" N, 12° 29' 9" E](#)

Info:

Phone: 06-483423

Links and sources:

1. http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/San_Giuseppe_a_Capo_le_Case
 2. http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=255
 3. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dealvariis/sets/72157618039904299/>
("De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr)
 4. [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:San_Giuseppe_a_Capo_le_Case_\(Rome\)](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:San_Giuseppe_a_Capo_le_Case_(Rome))
- a. Gaze, DICTIONARY OF WOMEN ARTISTS: ARTISTS, J-Z; Pg. 26