

## Santa Maria di Grottapinta

(deconsecrated)



The church of **Santa Maria in Grottapinta** is a desecrated church of Rome, in the neighborhood Parione. It was built on the foundations of the corridor inside the theater of Pompey.

### History:

The church is of obscure early mediaeval origin, and has its first documentary reference in 1182 in a list of churches dependent on San Lorenzo in Damaso (this list is also the first mention of several of the little former parish churches hereabouts).

The street it is on, the Via di Grotta Pinta, follows the inner curve of the ancient theatre, and the church may well have been established in the late Dark Ages when the theatre was being occupied by squatters. The name Grottapinta is a mystery. It means "painted cave", and may refer to a now lost decorated underground chamber of the theatre complex. An alternative suggestion is that it derived from a covered ground-level passageway next to the church with frescoes on its walls. Nobody is now sure. The later tradition is that the icon formerly venerated in the church was found in a cistern nearby which was then called the Grotta del Dipinto ("cave of the painting").

In 1343, the church was entrusted to a Marian confraternity attached to the parish of San Lorenzo in Damaso, and retained the status of a confraternity church until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There were several recorded restorations before the church was rebuilt in 1599 by the Orsini family, who reversed the orientation and put their coat of arms in the pediment of the new façade. There

was another restoration in 1725, when the interior was re-ordered. The Nolli map of 1748 lists it as a parish church.

In 1887 it became the church of the John Tata Hospice for street boys, which had been moved to the nearby Piazza del Biscione (at the other end of the passageway just mentioned). The interior was restored again in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in 1926 the hospice was moved again. The church failed to find another role, fell into disrepair and was simply abandoned. It almost had to be demolished as the walls began to crack, but in 1986 it was deconsecrated and turned into an innovative school for the decorative arts called the Accademia del Superfluo. This involved inserting two floors to create three stories. However, the painted barrel ceiling vault was preserved and can be examined. In 2005 the founder of the academy, Roberto Lucifero, turned the ground floor into the Cappella Orsini Cultural Centre.

The academy is open from 10:00 to 18:00, and serious visitors should find a welcome.

### **Exterior:**

The small 19<sup>th</sup> century facade is divided into two orders from a ledge. Both the lower end who are the top of the pilasters with Corinthian capitals. To the right of the front is the small bell gable. At the center of the top there is a lunette window.

The academy has not restored the derelict appearance of the façade. It used to be rendered in orange with the architectural details in white, but the rendering has peeled in places and is filthy in others. The first story has its central section brought forward slightly, with a pair of swagged Ionic pilasters on the corners. Another pair occupy the outer corners of the story. These pilasters support an entablature with a projecting cornice. The doorway, with a projecting overintel, has a fine but cracked Baroque marble doorcase with a strip of moulding having a little bend through two right angles near the top on each side.

The first story has four corresponding pilasters, but these are thinner and have peculiar derivative Doric capitals with stylized tassels. These support a cornice only, and above that is the triangular pediment with its coat-of-arms. There is a large lunette window placed directly on the entablature of the first story, with a horizontal rectangular tablet above it.

### **Interior:**

The interior was divided into two rooms of equal size overlapping. In the upper room you can still notice the massive barrel vault and the tops of the pilasters-pillars that support it.

### **Location:**

Addr: Via di Grottapinta 21

Coord: [41° 53' 43.1"N 12° 28' 23.8"](#)

**Links:**

[http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santa\\_Maria\\_di\\_Grottpinta](http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santa_Maria_di_Grottpinta)

[http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti\\_dettaglio.asp?ID\\_schede=1150](http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=1150)

[http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa\\_di\\_Santa\\_Maria\\_in\\_Grottpinta](http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa_di_Santa_Maria_in_Grottpinta)

<http://www.romeartlover.it/Vasi75.htm#S.%20Maria%20di%20Grottpinta>