

## Madonnella di San Marco



**Madonnella di San Marco** is a small late 17<sup>th</sup> century devotional chapel which was dismantled and inserted into the ground floor of the Palazzo Venezia, a 16<sup>th</sup> century edifice, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The separate entrance doorway is on the right hand side of the façade of the palazzo on the west side of the Piazza Venezia.

### History

The icon venerated in the chapel used to be in a nearby street known as Via dell'Arco di San Marco, under the archway which gave the street its name. Before the massive alterations to the Piazza Venezia beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the piazza was much smaller than it is now. (1)

In 1654, the canons of San Marco commissioned **Bernardino Gagliardi** to paint a street icon of *Our Lady*, and installed it under the archway. The icon attracted serious devotion after a miracle was reported in 1668. A young nobleman was mugged by an assailant who tried to stab him with a dagger, but the dagger bent as if it were made of plastic and the attacker fled. (1)

Thirty years after this, funds had been collected to furnish a chapel for the icon. The project had been sponsored by the ambassador from Venice, one of the great Barbarigo clan of Venice, and much of the money came from the local Ruspoli family. The location chosen was in the Palazzetto, which was arcaded on four sides around a central formal garden. The little chapel was in the north-west corner of the arcade, and was accessed from a doorway in the frontage on the south side of the Piazza Venezia. (1)

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was decided to improve the layout of the area around the new Il Vittoriano and to enlarge the Piazza Venezia as a traffic hub. One major intervention was the

demolition of the Palazzetto and its re-building on the west side of the Piazza di San Marco. However, the chapel was not moved there with it. Its interior was dismantled, and re-erected in a little room in the north-east corner of the Palazzo Venezia. It was then accessed by its own door from the piazza. (1)

The chapel has been accessible to devotional visits ever since. However its profile was raised in 1957 when Mother Maria Oliva Bonaldo, foundress of the congregation of the Daughters of the Church, established a small convent attached to San Marco. This is the Casa Speculum Iustitiae ("House of the Mirror of Righteousness"), and the sisters resident there have made the chapel a centre of Eucharistic devotion. Another adjacent room in the Palazzo was taken over, and used as a chapel for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. (1) (3)

## Exterior

The doorcase is marble, with simple linear molding and with a coat of arms affixed to the wall above. This is the only indication that there is a chapel here. (1)

## Interior

### Icon chapel

On entering, you find yourself in the tiny original chapel. (1)

To the left is the ornate Baroque altar by **Giovan Battista Contini**, in polychrome marble dominated by red, yellow and green. This has an unusual form, since it is not an aedicule but more resembles a funerary monument. A coved (concave) entablature in verde antico is on top of the actual altar, and at the ends of this are two angels in white marble who are adoring the icon after which the chapel is named. The icon itself is enshrined in a coved trapezoidal slab with incurved sides, which is in red marble with a verde antico border. On top is an omega cornice ( $\Omega$ ), on which a pair of putti are holding a large bronze crown. The sides of the panel have swags and curlicues in yellow Siena marble, and the same stone is used for the omega cornice and the cornice of the entablature below. (1)

The sculptures of the angels, putti and the winged putto's heads on the face of the slab are by **Filippo Carcani**. (1)

*Our Lady* in the icon is shown suckling the Christ-Child, and above is a plaque giving the title (1)

**Maria Mater Gratiarum**  
(Mary, Mother of Graces).

A fresco of the Holy Family travelling to Egypt is to the right of the altar. (1)

Above, the cross-vaulted ceiling of the chapel is almost completely covered in gilded stucco decoration containing tondi with reliefs, and is very impressive. (1)

### Exposition chapel

The exposition chapel is through the doorway opposite the entrance. It is very plain, with whitewashed walls and ceiling. The only remnants of the former decoration of this palazzo room are narrow marble Corinthian pilasters embedded in the side walls, looking rather lost. (1)

## Access and liturgy

The chapel is a popular centre of Eucharistic adoration, which has rather taken attention away from the icon. Also it has become the ferial chapel for the parish of San Marco, which now celebrates its weekday Masses here.

Mass is celebrated at 7:30 and 19:30, weekdays (including Saturdays).

The Blessed Sacrament is exposed for veneration after the 7:30 Mass to 12:30, then 16:00 to 19:00, Monday to Saturday. There is Rosary at 18:30.

On Sundays, Exposition is at 17:00.

The sisters celebrate the Divine Office here, with Lauds on weekdays (only) at 7:00. Vespers on weekdays is at 19:00, with Benediction. On Sundays, Vespers (only) is at 18:00.

Visitors are asked to show respect, and not to take photos.

**Artists and Architects:**

Bernardino [Gagliardi](#) (1609-1660), Italian painter of the Baroque period

Giovanni Battista [Contini](#) (1641-1723), Italian architect of the Late Baroque period

Filippo [Carcani](#) aka *Filippone* (17<sup>th</sup> century), Italian sculptor

**Location:**

Palazzo Venezia, Piazza Venezia

Coord: [41° 53' 46.8" N, 12° 28' 54.8" E](#)

**Links:**

1. [http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Madonnella\\_di\\_San\\_Marco](http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Madonnella_di_San_Marco)
2. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dealvariis/sets/72157629541458350/>
3. <http://www.romasette.it/modules/news/article.php?storyid=1204&keywords=miner>