

Chiesa Parrocchiale di Santa Caterina di Alessandria

Category: Catholic Church

business description: Construction of the Church of Santa Caterina began in 1776, designed by architect Giuseppe Caselli of Alessandria, and was completed in 1790.

The church features exposed terracotta walls with a Capuchin style. The façade has a convex and slender front, marked by two rows of pilasters resting on a high Visone stone plinth and supporting two tympanums, the lower one with a segmental arch and the upper one triangular. In the central section, above a staircase, stands the classical portal with a tympanum supported by two corbels resting on molded jambs.

The interior's spatial organization, a single, slender nave with a raised presbytery, is based on a plan that dissolves the rectangular shape of the nave through the broad connections of the ends, which also extend into the fronts of the chapels. This creates a broader oval-shaped structural base with mixtilinear inserts, generated by the parallelism of two ellipses placed between a rectangle.

The nave is structured in a space of clear Baroque animation, punctuated by the curves at the end and the twin pilasters in the center that rise above the chapels, all punctuated by pilasters with Corinthian capitals.

In the lower tier, the receding curvature of the fronts of the chapels creates a free-standing arch above the entrance, the upper part of which is further marked by a cornice with an eccentric curvature.

The upper tier of the nave is interrupted by large window openings, while the presbytery is illuminated by thermal-style lunettes and the polylobed windows of the choir. The wide nave vault connects to the arch of the Holy of Holies and the corresponding arch at the back with a wide radius and is marked, at the windows, with rib vaults.

The presbytery, narrower than the nave and sandwiched between two chapels, is closed by a semicircular apse. The vault of this area is divided into various elements consisting of a small dome with a round base and a low cap supported by slender pendentives, a barrel vault, and rib vaults with radial ribs placed in the back conch. The parish church of Santa Caterina is a work of good architectural quality that expresses a language of late Baroque culture, with nuanced transitions from Rocaille to Neoclassicism, a culture that was experiencing its final phase in a province that was by then culturally conservative and proud of its traditions.

The nave features four chapels dedicated to the Virgin of the Girdle, to Saint Joseph, formerly dedicated to Saint Charles Borromeo, to Saint Anthony of Padua, formerly dedicated to Saint Anthony the Abbot, and to the Sacred Heart.

The slightly raised presbytery houses the high altar in the center, and the baptismal is located to the left of the entrance, as prescribed by the post-Tridentine Counter-Reformation rite.

The stucco decoration was begun on May 12, 1779, by Giuseppe Ossola of Varese and Giovanni Avagni, with the creation of the imposing apparatus known as the "choir icon." This was later home to the altarpiece with the Assumption and Saints Catherine and Stephen, painted in 1784 by the painter Carlo Gorzio of Moncalvo, who also painted the other altarpieces: one dedicated to Saint Charles Borromeo, another dedicated to Saint Anthony the Abbot, and another now lost canvas dedicated to Saint Nicholas of Myra.

The vaults of the chapels, decorated with stucco, the walls, and the upper altarpieces were executed by Ossola and Avagni in 1786, with the exception of the lower section of the altar of the Blessed Virgin of the Girdle, which was also made in marble in 1786.

It is interesting to note the early chronology of these stuccoes executed in the Louis XVI style.

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