

Santa Monica dei Agostini



Santa Monica dei Agostini is a 20th century convent church at Piazza del Sant'Uffizio, just south of the colonnade of St Peter's in the rione Borgo. The dedication is to St Monica, the mother of St. Augustine.

This is the church of the Curia Generalizia Agostiana or the Generalate of the Augustinian Friars (Order of St Augustine, OSA).

History

The Augustinian friars used to have their headquarters at Sant'Agostino with another large convent at Santa Maria del Popolo, but both were sequestered in 1873. In 1882 a new Generalate and house of studies was established on the present site. At the time this occupied by the Villa Cesi, which was built in 1550 by Guido Guidetti and which had famous gardens.

Unfortunately, there was only a narrow street between the Villa and the southern colonnade of Bernini's Piazza di San Pietro, and this doomed the Renaissance edifice when the Fascists began the Via della Conciliazione project. The street was widened (it is now the Via Paolo VI), and the Villa

mostly demolished before the construction of the enormous new convent slightly to the south. If you go to the Via Paolo VI now, you will see a row of ugly single-storey shops but if you look above this at the block on the corner with the Piazza del Sant'Uffizio you will see an old stone arcade embedded in the modern red brick fabric. This odd arrangement was the result of an architectural project carried out by the friars themselves.

From the outside, the church looks much older than it is. In fact, it was only built in 1940 to a design by **Giuseppe Momo** as part of the rebuilding of the convent. Unfortunately he died in the same year, and the project had to be completed by **Silvio Galizia** in 1941.

The complex now contains several institutions. The Generalate of the Order is based here, as is the Collegio Internazionale Santa Monica which is the training college for the Order. Further, here also is the Augustinianum which is a center of tertiary education devoted to patristics. Finally, at the north end there is now an hotel, the Residenza Paolo VI.

Exterior

Structurally, the church is part of the convent. The church is on the ground floor of the south wing, with its entrance in the south-west corner. To the right of the façade is an iron railing gate, and if you look through this you will see that there is an upper storey on top of the church. Up there is a separate, private choir chapel for the friars. Accessed through this gate is the main entrance of the convent, behind the church. The gabled protrusion from the right hand side of the church contains a side chapel.

Façade

In dull pink rendering with white detailing, the actual façade is in a neo-Baroque style which looks early 18th century.

It has two Doric pilasters supporting an entablature and a triangular pediment, with the frieze of the former bearing the inscription Cappella Santa Monica. The doorway has a traditional molded Baroque doorcase. It also has a triangular pediment, intruding into a semi-circular window bounded by an archivolt which is curved slightly more than semi-circular. This archivolt springs from a pair of block corbels flanking the blank frieze below the pediment.

Interior

Church nave

In contrast to the traditional façade, the interior of the church is modern. It has mosaics in a naturalistic Classical style, using themes from Byzantine iconography. These are by the Centro Aletti.

The church itself is on a rectangular plan, of four bays with a little shallow rectangular apse. The overall decoration is in white. Wide slab pilasters in grey granite separate the bays, and support narrower transverse ceiling beams in the same material. Each bay except the second has a window in each side wall in the form of an irregular hexagon, and these contain semi-figurative stained glass alternately in blues and browns.

Chapel of St Rita

The right hand side of the second bay is occupied by a little side-chapel with a gabled concrete vault. This is a more interesting architectural space than the main church. The vault floats, as is proved by the thin strip of stained glass between it and the back wall of the chapel.

The dedication to St Rita of Cascia, an Augustinian nun, and the wooden statue on a little bracket above the altar is of her. She is popular in Rome as the patron saint of those with impossible problems, especially abused wives.

Behind the statue there is a mosaic with a greyish-blue speckled background, featuring *Christ the King of the Universe* at the top. To the left of St Rita is depicted St Augustine, and to the right St John the Baptist and St Nicholas of Tolentino standing together. These three saints are actually not venerating Christ above them, and this is a fault in the composition (the Byzantine tradition requires such veneration to be shown by saints represented with Christ).

Sanctuary

The sanctuary is a little shallow rectangular apse, with a shallow gabled vault. The back wall is occupied by a mosaic in the same style as that in the side chapel, which features a Calvary. The crucified Christ is accompanied by Our Lady and St John the Evangelist. The cross is over a yellow elliptical sunburst.

Artists and Architects:

Giuseppe [Momo](#) (1875-1940), Italian engineer and architect from Vercelli

Silvio [Galizia](#) (1925-1989), Swiss architect

Location:

Addr: Piazza del Sant'Uffizio 8

Coord: [41° 54' 2"N 12° 27' 25"E](#)

Links and References:

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Info Roma web site](#)

Personal communication with Fr. Bob Guessetto, staff of Augustinian school