

# Santa Rita da Cascia alle Vergini



The **church of Santa Rita da Cascia alle Vergini** is a 17<sup>th</sup> century Baroque confraternity church, formerly conventual, south of the Trevi Fountain in the rione Trevi.

## History

It was built in 1615 under the title of *Santa Maria delle Vergini* in place of an existing small church named Santa Maria in Cannella and entrusted to the care of the Augustinian nuns of the nearby College of Our Lady of Refuge.

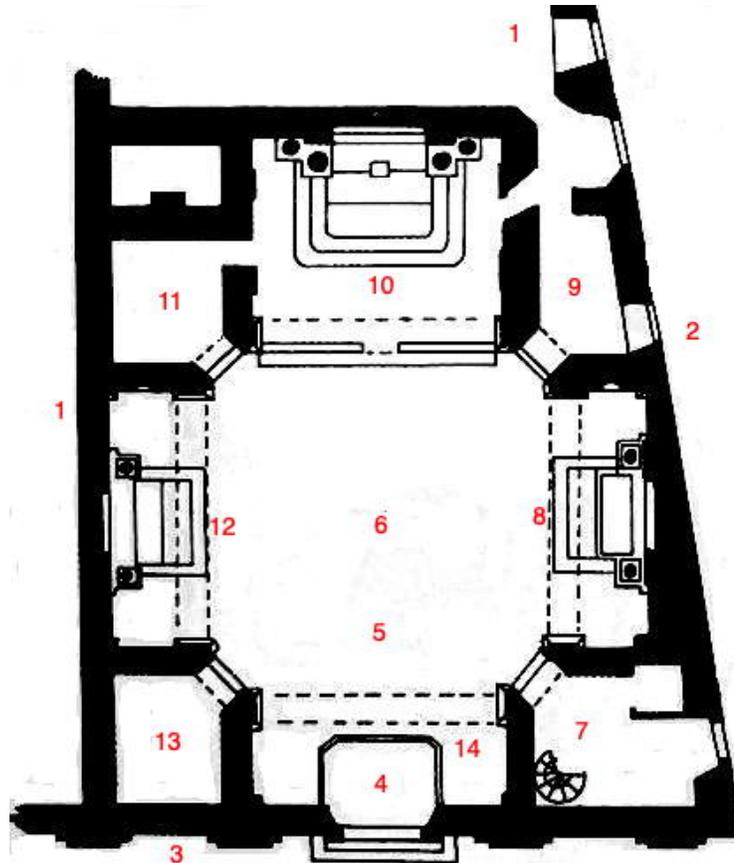
The church was then rebuilt (1634-1636) because it was too small to the needs of the college. Architect on the project was **Francesco Peperelli** and on 8 June 1636 the new Church inaugurated.

In 1660 the convent of the nuns was finally completed, under the direction of architect **Domenico Castelli**. At this time, the architect curator **Mattia de' Rossi** was responsible for work on the church, including the high altar, which was built in 1681 and decorated in 1691-1693, and the facade, but was only completed in 1696, while the decoration of the dome began in 1695. The bell tower was added in 1689.

The church and the monastery was Augustinians until 1871, when it was confiscated by the Italian State, together with the convent, and desecrated.

In 1904, when the Church of St. Rita of Cascia in Campitelli, at the foot of the Capitol, it was dismantled for the construction of the monument to Vittorio Emanuele II, the church was reconsecrated to host the *Confraternity of the Holy Spina Crown of Our Lord Jesus Christ and St. Rita of Cascia* in place of their old church, so the church was dedicated to Saint [Rita of Cascia](#).

## Plan:



## Exterior

The church is located on a street corner and right onto Via dell'Umiltà, which also has two side entrances. The church is surrounded on two sides by the former monastery (1).

Side wall (2) is quite simple in ochre colored plaster with rear bricked and front grated windows with simple, square frames in travertine. The rear door has a little more elaborate frame and the door of a curved area that once housed a fresco. The front door, located close to the street corner, just a simple rectangular frame.

The façade (3) is situated on the Via delle Vergini which as mentioned was built in the period 1605-1621. And while the church was completed in 1636, the facade was first built in 1696 by architect curator **Mattia de' Rossi** requested by the Prioress Suor Florida Paracciani.

It is two-storey, with two pairs of gigantic recessed-bordered Corinthian pilasters flanking the doorway. One pair flanks the window above the architrave and supports the little triangular pediment; the outer pairs of the upper storey are stumps supporting two halves of a broken semi-circular pediment. These halves are stoppered by volutes at the ends of curves from the pediment. The wall between the pilasters is painted in the same ochre color as the side wall.

In the middle field is the grand entrance portal with wide travertine frame under a triangular tympanum, from which peeks a little angel's head. An inscription over the door reads: "Ecclesia S. Ritae".

The small bell tower was erected in the 1689.

## Interior

The church (5) is in the form of a Greek cross with two side altars in the right and left transept and a deeper apse opposite the entrance door (4) located in the lower wing. In the cross corners are entrances to some smaller chapels and sacristy, where there is access to the old monastery building (1) that "embraces" the Church both on Via delle Vergini and Via dell'Umiltà, located on the Church's right.

### Nave

The floor area under the dome (6) is in the shape of a chamfered square, and the doors into the four corner rooms are on the chamfers. These have frames in red marble, and above them on the piers are large panels with grotesquery.

The decoration is of the Baroque period, with stucco ornament and what looks like polychrome marble revetting on the walls. The stucco work is by **Filippo Carcani**, 1683.

An entablature with a wide frieze decorated with winged putto's heads, flowers and foliage runs all round the church, supported by ribbed Composite pilasters. The identically sized archivolts of the side arm arches spring from this, and are decorated on their intradoses with floral festoons in stucco. The roof space bounded by these four archivolts comprises the dome and its pendentives, which form one surface on which is a fresco depicting *The Glory of Heaven*. This work, attributed to **Michelangelo Ricciolini** 1695, is populated by many saints and angels. There is a central lantern.

Over the entrance (14) is a gallery or cantoria for the organ, with finely carved woodwork. The supporting brackets have nuns' heads, matching those on the doorcase outside.

### Chapel of the Lourdes grotto

To the left of the entrance is a side room (13), which in 1912 was converted into a chapel of Madonna di Lourdes. It is tradition for this type of chapels, built as a cave at the request of Carolina Fabbri, whose tomb is in the Cappella Florisante.

### Chapel of St Mary Magdalen

The left side altar (12) is also called "Cappella Florisante" because the decoration of the altar was paid for by Mercurio Florisante, who was buried here in 1639. Florisante's arms can be seen on either side of the altar.

The door to the right of the chapel leads to a spare storeroom (11).

### Sanctuary

The deep apse (10) has the elevated altarpiece between four columns of red and yellow Sicilian jasper, with Corinthian capitals, carrying a broken arched tympanum, on which stucco angels rest in front of the background field with the golden sunlight and the *Dove of the Holy Spirit* in a gilded glory in the middle. The construction was carried out by curator **Mattia de' Rossi** in 1681.

On each side of the altar are a stucco statue from 1863 by sculptor **Filippo Carcani**, who is also the master of stucco decorations above the altar. In the right niche is *Sant'Agostino*, and the left, *Saint Joseph with the Child Jesus*.

The altarpiece is *The Death of Santa Rita*, painted by **Arturo Ferretti** in 1911. The current altarpiece is the third in a row. The first one was *The Assumption of Mary*, by Andrea Camassei. During the renovation in 1681-1682 was replaced of another *Assumption* painted by Ludovico Gimignani. After the church was closed in 1873 this latter work had been taken to Santa Pudenziana, where it is to be found in the Chapel of St Augustine, replaced by the present altarpiece.

The vault above the altar has a fresco of *The Trinity in Glory* by **Ludovico Gimignani**. Actually it only shows the Father and the Son, since the Holy Spirit is in the glory below. There are two more lively stucco angels just inside the triumphal arch.

### Sacristy

To the left of the chapel is the door to the sacristy (9), in which hang two paintings from the 18<sup>th</sup>

century by an unknown artist:

- *Annunciation*
- *Crucifixion*

### Chapel of St Augustine

The right side altar (8), the altarpiece with the motif *Sant'Agostino e Santa Monica*. The painting is done by **Pietro Lucatelli** who was by Pietro da Cortona's school. Monica, St Augustine's mother, is shown as a nun, which she certainly was not. However, this oddity was indulged in by other artists from the late Middle Ages.

The marble altar has two red marble columns with Corinthian capitals that carry a wide and protruding gable on which each side sits a stucco angel.

The walls, corners and pillars are decorated with stucco and gold painted marble parts, all divided into smaller fields and friezes. The ceiling vault is frescoed by **Ricciolini** with angels and putti to match the dome, as is those of the chapel opposite and of the entrance bay. In the middle of the upper frieze seen to the left one of the grids through which the cloistered nuns could follow the Mass.

The altarpiece is a painting of *Christ and Mary Magdalene* (*Noli me tangere*/do not touch me), painted by **Giovanni Battista Mercati** and positioned between the two columns of black *Africano* marble and two pilasters in *rosso antic* marble, both with Corinthian capitals which carries a wide frieze. Above this is a cornice with a square end piece with an angel's head in the middle and two smaller finials above the columns. The middle box is crowned by a small, broken, curved gable box under a cross.

In a recess in the right wall is a statue of the *Sacred Heart*, and to the left of the altar tomb of Carolina Costa Fabbri, who died in 1918.

To the right of the entrance is a door to the first side room (7) with a staircase leading to the upper floor, and is used as the custodian's room.

### **Artists and Architects:**

Arturo Ferretti (20<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian painter  
Domenico [Castelli](#), aka Fontanino (1582-1657), Italian architect  
Filippo [Carcani](#) (d. 1691), Italian sculptor  
Francesco [Peparelli](#) (d. 1641), Italian architect  
Giovanni Battista [Mercati](#) (1591-1645), Italian painter and engraver  
Ludovico [Gimignani](#) (1643-1697), Italian painter during the Baroque period  
Mattia [de Rossi](#) (1637-1695), Italian architect of the Baroque period  
Michelangelo [Ricciolini](#) (1654-1715), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
Pietro [Lucatelli](#) (1630-1690), Italian Baroque painter

### **Location:**

Via dell'Umiltà 83/B, 00187 Roma  
Coordinates: [41° 53' 59"N 12° 28' 58"E](#)

### **Info:**

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### **Links and References:**

[Roman Churches Wiki](#)

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Anna's Guide](#) (Danish)

[Tourist info on 060608.it web page](#)

Descriptive plaques in church

Donovan, Jeremiah; ROME ANCIENT AND MODERN AND ITS ENVIRONS; 1842

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