

# Santo Volto di Gesù

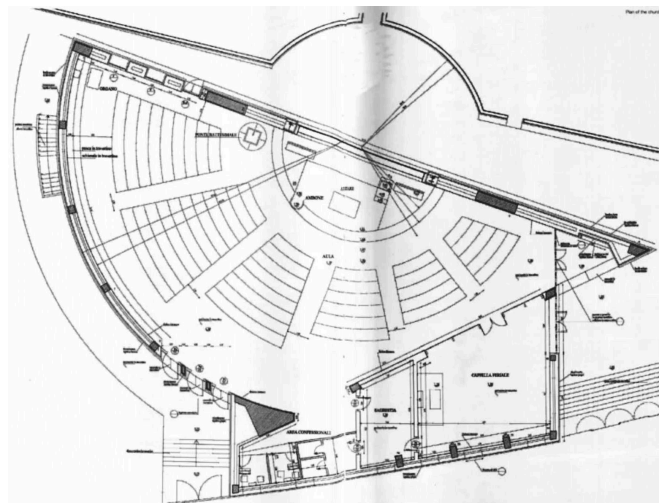


**Santo Volto di Gesù** (The Holy Face of Jesus) is a modern parish church in the suburb of Nuova Magliana in the Portuense district.

The parish was erected in 1985, and was at first dedicated to San Massimiliano Kolbe, but was re-dedicated to the Holy Face of Jesus when the new church was completed in 2006. It was designed by a partnership of **Piero Sartogo** and **Nathalie Grenon**, and is considered one of the most successful and important modern churches in Rome.

## Plan

The plan is rather complex. The basic unit is an isosceles right-angled triangle, with the hypotenuse forming the wall behind the altar. Facing the altar, the left-hand side of the triangle has a segmental curve except for a short section just before the right angle. An extension at a lower elevation, to the plan of one end of a parallelogram, is attached to the right hand side of the triangle, but does not take up the entire side. The 45-degree angle to the right (north) protrudes beyond this, and the entrance is in the extension by this angle.



## **Exterior**

The post-modern edifice utilizes travertine stone and concrete, with the result that it is mostly white, but the extension is in light grey brick. The roofs are flat, except for a large and unadorned semi-dome above the altar, the bisection of which is a continuation of the hypotenuse wall.

There are few windows. Six of them are small portholes in a row on the wall facing the street (the diagonal side of the parallelogram mentioned) and one is tucked away to the right of the main entrance, but the main one is an enormous and spectacular round clear glass window behind the altar, the bottom half being part of the hypotenuse wall and the top half entirely occupying the bisection of the dome. The fenestration of this is inspired by the sun with its rays (although it ends up looking like a spider's web). To the left of this (facing the altar) is a set of two vertical rectangular windows and one square one, mimicking the design of the entrance doors.

The main entrance has doors in verdigris bronze, formed of 48 square panels arranged twelve by four and each with a clear glass panel in its center. The rear entrance, in the curved wall by the right angle, has three separate doors in a row, each with identical bronze panels in six by two.

The sets of railings enclosing the precinct, made out of welded steel rods, is by **Giuseppe Uncini**.

The priest's house is part of the overall design, and parallels the hypotenuse walls leaving only a narrow and atmospheric alleyway between it and the church. The street frontage of the house is shaped like a grey slab with triangular buttresses (although the plan is much more complex), but has a concave curve opposite the large church window in the alleyway so as to let in the light. The alleyway ends with a monumental free-standing cross by **Eliseo Mattiacci**. Unusually, the bells are housed in the top corner of the north end of the priest's house.

## **Interior**

### Main church

The main interior, which is not large, is almost entirely in white but with a floor in very pale brown marble slabs. It is dominated by the enormous sun wheel window, in clear glass. The central circular pane of this used to be blank, but now has a crucifix formed of a cross with a cut-out outline of Christ's body. The architects originally seemed to wish to avoid having any figurative art in the church, but obviously this would not appeal to ordinary parishioners.

The sanctuary furniture is in smoothed limestone, rectangular or cylindrical in form. To the left is the cubical font, accompanied by the simple cylindrical Paschal candlestick. The actual semi-circular sanctuary area is approached by two steps, and has a free-standing altar which is a simple stone block balanced on a smaller one showing a cubical cross-section in front. This pedestal is about one-sixth of the width of the entire altar. The two benches for servers at the back are of a similar design, each being a long L-shaped piece of stone on a pedestal. The priest's chair is cubical, with two steps and a backrest sloping diagonally. The cylindrical lectern is inserted into the two steps.

Near the font is now an icon of the Holy Face, executed on blue glass by **Pietro Ruffo**. This used to be kept in the confessional area.

The pews are (unusually for churches of any period) an integral part of the overall design, in what looks like beechwood and having an individual rectangular back for each person.

The holy water stoups are in the form of hollow spheres set into the wall, with a quarter-segment cut out.

To the right of the side entrance, which is opposite the altar, is a large rectangular recess with a door to one side leading to the confessionals. The recess is painted in royal blue, and has a fresco depicting a white sphere on a black circular background. This abstract work is by **Marco Tirelli**.

### Stations of the Cross

There is a set of Stations of the Cross, comprising glazed ceramic tiles by **Mimmo Paladino**. The

colors are dominated by brown, black, blue and white. There are fifteen tiles in all, including one for the Resurrection, plus an extra introductory tile. The subject of each Station is represented in a semi-abstract way, allusive sometimes to the point of obscurity.

There are also artistic contributions by painters Chiara Dynys and Jannis Kounellis.

#### Ferial chapel

The parallelogram extension houses a so-called ferial chapel (for use during the week, when Mass attendance is expected to be small), which has an engraved glass screen separating it from the main church. This work is by **Carla Accardi**.

The chapel walls are in royal blue, with three round windows on the left hand side, and the ceiling is in white. The pews are in the same style as those in the main church, in very pale brown. The sanctuary furniture is also similar to the main set, except that the priest's chair has only one step and the altar has a smaller main block. The lectern is more traditional in form, in the form of an inverted L with a vertical slab supporting a sloping bookrest.

This is the Blessed Sacrament Chapel as well. The free-standing tabernacle is a sphere set on a round column branching off in a Y with short branches. It has a circular bronze door.

Popular devotion has ensured the presence of an entirely traditional polychrome statue of Our Lady, on a little shelf at the back of the chapel. There is also a traditional crucifix in the sanctuary here.

#### **Artists and Architects:**

Carla [Accardi](#) (1924-2014), Italian sculptor  
Chiara Dynys (b. 1959), Italian painter  
Eliseo [Mattiacci](#) (1940-2019), Italian sculptor  
Giuseppe [Uncini](#) (1929-2008), Italian sculptor and painter  
Jannis [Kounellis](#) (1936-2017), Greek painter  
Nathalie Grenon (20<sup>th</sup> cent), Canadian architect  
Piero Sartogo (20<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian architect  
Marco [Tirelli](#) (b. 1956), Italian Painter  
Mimmo [Paladino](#) (b. 1948), Italian sculptor  
Pietro [Ruffo](#) (b. 1978), Italian sculptor

#### **Location:**

Addr: Via Caprese 1, 00146 Rome (just by the Via della Magliana.)  
Coord: [41° 51' 7" N, 12° 27' 32" E](#)

#### **Info:**

Open 07:30am-08:30pm  
**Masses:**  
Weekdays: 8.00am-6.30pm  
Holidays: 8.00am-10.30am-12.00pm-6.30pm  
**Telephone:** 0039 06 55263816 - 06 5501063  
**Fax:** 0039 06 5501063  
**Web site:** [www.parrocchie.it/roma/santovolto/](http://www.parrocchie.it/roma/santovolto/)  
**Email:** [s.voltodigesu@tiscalinet.it](mailto:s.voltodigesu@tiscalinet.it)

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