



The Church of
St. Anthony the Abbot
in Gallarate

HISTORY AND ART



The present day church of St. Anthony the Abbot, today facing onto the small Ponti Square on the south and on the Corso Italia on the north, can consider itself both one of the examples and one of the works that are evidence of the influence of the Baroque style of the town of the Due Galli. The building rises on the area where, already in the 14th century, there was a very old Oratory, the “Oratorio” of St Anthony.

Over the centuries, many transformations and alterations to this Church have taken place, but as a whole the architectural characteristics, the decorations and the dimensions of the temple before the XVIII century are unknown. During that century, many radical works of modernization were undertaken, following which the Church took on its present day Baroque lines.

Important was the contribution of the artist Biagio Bellotti, who was in charge not only of the realization of the frescoes, but also of the part regarding the project of the altars together with the Gallarate sculptor Giuseppe Rusnati.

Other interventions followed over the years: above all the reconstruction carried out at the beginning of the 1960's, and the more recent modernization which started in 2011 and finished at the beginning of 2013.

Entrance

The main facade, with its single door, through which you enter from the Ponti Square, is decorated with pilasters and stuccoes, above all in its upper part. Such elements are delimited lower down by decorative motives, the refinement of working of which make the prospectus very pleasant for the observer. In correspondence with the wide entrance door, only slightly bigger than the jamb, a stucco frame once used to adorn a fresco painted by Biagio Bellotti, completely effaced over the years.

Above this, there is a recent magnificent stained glass window designed by Silvio Zanella, a Gallarate citizen, in which we can see St Anthony in the act of giving a Blessing.

Presbytery and Chorus

In the Church we can distinguish three principal parts; the Presbytery, in fact, in the centre of the layout, creates a sort of division between the area destined for the congregation in an elliptical shape, and the area of the Chorus, with its spacious Choir, rectangular in shape.

At the sides of the area reserved for the congregation, there are two minor altars, where can be seen four refined works by Bellotti, scenes of the life of the Saint, respectively, in anti-clockwise direction

- the meeting between St Paul and St Anthony Hermit before his death;
- the handing over to St Anthony, on behalf of the Bishop, of a cloak to wrap the body of St Paul in;
- the return journey escorted by an angel;
- the discovery of St Paul's body, for which lions are digging a grave.

In the upper part of the vault, in the congregation area, there is a fresco where St Anthony appears in glory, borne up to Heaven by a Host of angels.

The Chorus, more regular in shape and quite spacious in comparison to the size of the Church itself, got people to think that the entire building may have been for use by a nunnery of Sisters collocated in the now demolished building near the temple.

The large Chorus is dominated by a refined baroque choir partly covered in polychrome wood and completed, not only by the 18th century organ of the Maroni Biroldi workshop, but by a statue of St Anthony higher up.

The area reserved for the congregation and that of the Chorus are enriched by stained glass polychrome glass windows carried out in 1962 from a project of Silvio Zanella's, following the restoration of the works of that time.

Right-side Altar

Along the right side wall, in the area reserved for the congregation, there is one of the most important works of this church. A statue representing St. Marta, modelled by the Sculptor Rusnati, is placed in the chapel, the laying out of which was designed by Biagio Berlotti.

Chapel on the left

In front of the chapel of St Marta, along the side wall on the left, there is the work that once was the high altar of the Church, subsequently substituted by the present one during the works of modernization of the church which took place in the 18th century.

The altar has a fresco figuring Maria Vergine Addolorata (Our Lady of Sorrows) supported by two women. In the altar piece, today completely bare, in the past there was a statue carried out in papier-maché of a Christ on the Cross, today visible in the Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta of Gallarate, on the altar of the Crucifixion.

High Altar

Once again attributed to the art of Biagio Bellotti is the High Altar carried out in polychrome marble, with such forms as to model a small temple in the upper part where, in the centre of same, today there is a Portrayal of St Anthony which has taken the place of another statue dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

The previous High Altar, the main part of which constituted by the structure which today is part of the altar on the left, was probably decorated by a polyptych in wood and polychrome which later became broken up into four or more parts.

The facade overlooking Corso Italia

Overlooking Corso Italy, the facade of the building, in the past bare and without an opening, following restoration works in 1961, is today characterised by a sheathing consisting of sheets of strain mezzano.

Here today there is a 16th century entrance door from the parish of Lonate Pozzolo and, in a nook in the wall, there is 17th century statue of St Carlo from the parish of Ferno.

Completing the facade of the Church there is a modern, modest-size belfry where can be the ancient bells that were part of the original bell tower demolished in 1961.