

The Fabriano Diocesan Museum



History and collection



The fourteenth-century
Fabriano art school



The fourteenth-century
Fabriano wooden sculpture



*The processional Cross of Castelletta
of XIII century*



*Allegretto Nuzi,
St. John Baptist and St. Venantius*



*Maestro dei Magi,
St. James the Apostle*



The Fabriano-Matelica Diocesan Museum, inaugurated on 8 September 2015 on the ground floor of the Bishop's Palace, is an important testimony of the history of Fabriano church through the centuries.

The life of the museum starts in the tenth and eleventh centuries, when Fabriano began to have its own cultural and social identity thanks to the numerous Benedictine settlements, and reaches 1785, the year in which Fabriano is elevated to City and Diocese, united to Matelica (the first bishop was Mons. Nicola Zoppetti).

The museum houses paintings, sculptures, prints, sacred vases, furnishings, reliquaries, liturgical wallpapers that reveal the ability of local and non-local artists, artisans and workers who were able to impress the religious sense and devotion of the Christian community in their works.

The museum's itinerary winds through six rooms in chronological order. Among the oldest documents we can note the presence of two parchments dated 1003 and 1046, in the second of which reference is made to the cathedral of St. Venanzio, which was being erected. Finally, the most recent work, a colorful contemporary sculpture in molten glass from 1980, by Guelfo, depicts the Angel of the Artists.



The symbol of the museum is a rare example of medieval goldsmith's art, the processional cross from the parish church of Santa Maria Sopraminerva in Castelletta (an ancient village in the municipality of Fabriano). The small Romanesque cross, which dates back to the first half of the 13th century, probably came from a specialized Umbrian or Tuscan workshop and represents a remarkable example of the spread of symbols of devotional taste (if not barbaric) in the Apennine area, due to the long presence of the Lombards in these territories. The cross is made of engraved and gilded copper, has arms with inward-pointing ends and is adorned, along the entire perimeter, by a waving and dotted border.

The crucified Christ is attached to the front by three nails: it is a cast-bronze micro-sculpture with gilding traces; the Christ meets the iconography of *Christus triumphans*, that is represented alive and victorious over death. Around Jesus, in addition to the cross fixed on the allusive rock to Golgotha and surmounted by the title in Gothic characters, the three winged symbols of the evangelists Luke, Matthew and Mark are engraved. On the back the cross is also engraved, fixed on the Golgotha and surmounted by the title, with the Christ represented dead, his head reclined to the right and his body slightly curved and covered by a long draped loincloth. At the ends, the Virgin and St. John the Evangelist are depicted half-length, while at the top an angel with spread wings holds up the book of the Gospels.



Between '300 and '400, the city's art school experienced a period of great splendor, with outstanding personalities, up to the triumph of Gentile da Fabriano, the greatest exponent of the International Gothic age. In the second half of the fourteenth century Fabriano shone as an important center of artistic production both in the field of painting and in that of sculpture. In fact, along with the flourishing pictorial school, centered on the charismatic figure of Allegretto Nuzi, the city cultivated and developed a wooden sculpture trend of great vitality and creative autonomy with the so-called Master of the Magi of Fabriano. The second room of the museum houses two paintings by Allegretto that constituted the side compartments of a large triptych, whose central part with the Madonna and Child Enthroned is preserved today at the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche in Urbino. The paintings depict St. Anthony the Abbot, St. John the Evangelist, St. John the Baptist and St. Venanzio on a gold background, from left to right. St. Venanzio's rich and precious look shows an elegant weave of vegetable racemes, turtles and parrots, testifying to Allegretto's care in the processing of clothes surfaces, variously painted and worked (engraved, dotted, punched). The excellence of the coeval plastic school is testified by James son of Zebedee by the Master of the Magi, recently identified with Fra' Giovanni di Bartolomeo, a sculptor monk who had a workshop in Fabriano at the convent of Santa Caterina. The polychrome wood work is characterized by its high quality and noble workmanship. Particularly striking is its profound expressiveness, given by the pensive and good-natured face. The book he holds in his hand symbolizes the preaching of the Gospel, while the stick and the shells he carries express his pilgrimage.

Oratory of Charity



Historical information



Gotich portal of the XIV century



Architectural information



F. Bellini, Cycle of frescoes



Artistic information



F. Bellini, Deposition of Christ from the cross



Set up in Fabriano by the Camaldolese monk Benedetto da Firenze in 1573, the Company of the Charity was aggregated to the Roman Archconfraternity of the Trinity of the Pilgrims. At the beginning it was housed in the headquarters of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament at St. Venantius, but it was later decided to assign a specific place to it and, in 1587, thanks to the help of wealthy local lords, a building was built on a communal land that previously belonged to the convent of St. Francis (whose church stood almost opposite the new oratory).

The architectural structure was completed in ten years, in 1597. Then, plastic decoration works were commissioned by Pietro Ricci from St. Archangel and pictorial decoration ones were carried out by Filippo Bellini from Urbino, assisted by Fedele Palazzini from Ancona. The paintings were executed between 1598 and 1602, with a small interruption due to a further economic request by Bellini over the agreed price. In the end, the artist got 50 more scudi, for a total of 575.

The Confraternity of the Charity was dissolved in 1798 and the building became the property of the Municipality of Fabriano. After the 1997 earthquake important restoration works were carried out, which brought the interior of the oratory back to its ancient splendor.



The outside of the building does not present details of architectural interest, with the exception of the stone portal dating back to the 14th century and transferred to the oratory from the Sant'Antonio Fuori Le Mura church, which no longer exists today. The portal has a trilobed-shaped opening and an outer supporting beam with a slightly pointed arch and a decorative motif with alternate palmette leaves. Once through this entrance, access to the oratory is on the right.

The room, rectangular in shape, is accompanied along the entire perimeter by a wooden ornamental coating, above which the walls are majestically adorned with 14 panels divided by pilasters, decorated with stucco and gilding and murals. The barrel vault, frescoed by Fedele Palazzini, collapsed completely due to the 1741 earthquake and was therefore rebuilt. The ceiling has now wooden trusses.



The interior of the oratory is characterized by its high artistic value. Mannerist painter Filippo Bellini, a pupil of great Federico Barocci, influenced by Zuccari as well as by the Flemish art, created a wonderful cycle of frescoes in which themes from the Holy Scriptures are depicted. The 14 scenes show the Seven Works of Spiritual Mercy and the Seven Works of Corporal Mercy. The themes were indicated by P. Filippo Gesualdi, Minister General of the Friars Minor Conventual. The works of mercy, in line with the dictates of the Counter-Reformation, were *exempla*, aimed to indicate the faithful concrete commitments of charity and solidarity.

These easy-to-understand and immediate paintings were realized by Bellini with descriptive minuteness, effective anecdotal vein, light and rapid touches and delicate lighting effects. In each frame the artist inserted a plurality of episodes: the main event in the foreground and the background or subsequent episodes in the background. Another work by Filippo Bellini is the altarpiece, a canvas depicting the Deposition of Christ, whose intensity of faces, changing color and background scene rich in figures and movement are striking. Above the entrance door there is the choir and the organ exhibition, with the monochrome representation of biblical musical characters on canvas.

Saint Venantius Cathedral



Historical information



Polygonal apse of the '300



Architectural information



Interior with a single nave



Artistic information



Allegretto Nuzi,
Gothic Chapel of St. Lorenz



The original structure, which most likely dates back to 1046, was commissioned by the Bishop and the Chapter of Camerino back when the diocese of Fabriano was a member. The building was expanded with radical interventions in 1260, followed approximately 100 years later by modifications to its apse and tribune. What we see today is the result of a 1607 reconstruction and expansion project by the Urbino architect Muzio Oddi.

These works were completed in 1617, and the church was consecrated in 1663. In 1728 Pope Benedict XIII elevated the church of Saint Venantius to a cathedral. During the first two decades of the 20th century, the church underwent additional restoration under the direction of architect and engineer Icilio Bocci at the behest of Bishop Andrea Casullo.



The salient facade we see today is the result of the most recent renovations. The brick structure is punctuated with Doric lesenes in the lower band and Ionic ones in the upper. The central portion, which is wider than the two sides, has three portals, a large arched window, and is capped by an unadorned pediment.

The only remaining external element from the 1300s is the Gothic apse with its polygonal plan.

The lower section is made up of large blocks of white stone and an arcade of 11 gothic arches.

The upper section is rough-hewn stone. The interior has a single nave with a Latin cross plan.

There are also five richly ornamented chapels on each side. There is an elevated, apse-shaped tribune. Unfortunately, the ceiling is completely exposed due to severe damage from the 1741 earthquake.



Particularly noteworthy is the Chapel of Saint Lorenzo. Located on the right of the choir, it dates to the original 14th century church. Here you can admire frescoes narrating episodes from the Saint's life created by Fabriano painter Allegretto Nuzi. Given what is known of the artist's distinct style, the simplicity of the shapes and elegant use of colour place this series of paintings in the 1370s.

The story is told quietly and with exquisite sweetness, with close attention paid to the soft skin tones and rich garment details. The fourth chapel on the left contains the extraordinary Crucifixion by Orazio Gentileschi, an important representative of Caravaggism. The first chapel on the right contains two canvasses by Salvator Rosa depicting Saint Nicholas of Tolentino and Saint Gerolamo. Rosa, a painter, engraver, and poet, was one of the most eclectic artists of 17th century Italy. The chapels of the transept, belonging to the Arte della Lana Guild and the Company of the Blessed Sacrament (to the right and to the left, respectively) were decorated during the second decade of the 17th century by Giuseppe Bastiani of Macerata, a great promoter of figurative art in Marche from Late Mannerism to the Baroque. The Cathedral also contains magnificent examples of contemporary religious art, such as the stained-glass windows by Guelfo, a multifaceted artist and sensitive poet of visionary imagery.

Saint Nicolaus Church



Historical information



Front facade



Architectural information



Interior with a single nave



Artistic information



Il Guercino, *St. Michael the Archangel*



The church was probably founded prior to the 13th century by the Benedictine monks of Santa Croce in Sassoferrato. It had wide parish jurisdiction and papal privileges, which increased over time as a result of bequests and donations. The church gained full parish rights in 1289 when the baptismal font was transferred there from Santa Maria of Civita. In 1459 Pope Pius II revoked the administration from the monks of Santa Croce and established a collegiate formed by a prior and six canons.

After a period of prosperity, the church entered a phase of decline, culminating in the closing of the Chapter in 1860. At this point, while retaining the collegiate title, it basically reverted to a parish church.



The present-day Church of Saint Nicolaus is the result of an extensive renovation from the ground up, with considerable alterations to its dimensions and orientation.

The brick façade dominates the markedly sloped piazza out front. The composition of openings and the double order of pilasters that support the entablature and cornice serve to energize the façade and add a dynamic verticality. The upper loggia has three semicircular arches, with a deep interplay of light and dark. The church has a classic basilica plan, with a single nave, barrel vault, transept, and circular apse.

An atrium leads to the nave via several steps and three arches. The walls are ornamented with pairs of Doric pilasters supporting a richly painted entablature. A triumphal arch divides the presbytery from the apse area, which features a vault and walls completely covered in frescoes.



The fresco by Francescuccio Di Cecco Ghissi and the wooden sculpture of St. Nicholas of Bari by the Fabriano artist known as the Master of the Magi both date to the Middle Ages. There are also Mannerist and Baroque paintings by Filippino Bellini, Andrea Sacchi, and Gregorio Preti. Particularly noteworthy is the painting of St. Michael the Archangel, located in the third chapel on the right. The work was painted in 1644 by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, better known as Guercino.

The Emilia artist is one of the greatest of the 17th century, whose work is known for its luminosity, atmospheric rendering, and lively brushwork.

The archangel is dressed in shiny battle armour. He is depicted, wings spread, in the act of drawing his sword to defeat the Devil crushed beneath his feet. The strapping Saint Michael is marvellous for his powerful physicality and masterfully shaped face. The chromatism is also extraordinary, with the striking blue of the sky and the bold (albeit blurry) red of the fluttering cloak. It is possible that artist assistants were also involved in the execution of this painting.

Saints Blaise and Romuald Church



Historical information



Architectural information



Artistic information



Front facade



Central nave



Crypt and tomb of St. Romuald



A church dedicated to Saint Blaise was already in existence prior to the 13th century. Founded by the abbey of Saint Vittore delle Chiuse, it was invested with parochial functions starting in 1218. Destroyed by an earthquake in 1282, it was rebuilt a few years later. It was then renovated in 1427 by the Camaldolese monks after the merging of the abbey of Saint Vittore delle Chiuse with the Monastery of Saint Catherine (1406), at which time the church of Saint Blaise was incorporated into the Abbey of Valdicastro.

Additional construction was carried out by the Como sculptor Taddeo Carlone in 1481 as part of the celebration of the transfer of the remains of Saint Romuald. Work continued on the church and adjacent monastery from approximately 1511 to 1660. The earthquake of 1741 severely damaged the structure. Starting in 1742, the rebuilding was entrusted to the Camaldolese architect Giuseppe Antonio Sorattini.



The façade, made of limestone and brick, was completed in 1688. It is divided into three parts by lesenes, corresponding to the locations of the nave and aisles. The Baroque renovation maintained the same number of openings as the 16th-century facade.

The central nave and two side aisles are divided by alternating pillars and columns spanned by a series of composite vaults: cloister vaults, barrel vaults, and groin vaults. Also noteworthy are the two domes on spherical pendentives: one is placed in the middle of the central nave, and the other in the middle of the transept, the oldest part of the building. What we see today is the result of the post-1741 earthquake reconstruction, apart from the presbytery, which survived the earthquake intact. This church is considered the best example of late Baroque architecture in Marche.



The church contains precious works by Pasquale Rossi, Giovanni Loreti and Francesco Mancini.

The high altar, which boasts 15 different types of marble, was fabricated in Venice in 1688. Also noteworthy is the crypt designed by Sorattini, built in 1748 to house the remains of Saint Romuald and later expanded in 1793. Paintings by the Pesaro artists Placido Lazzarini and Carlo Paolucci relate episodes from the life of Saint Romuald.

The Renaissance-style marble sarcophagus was carved by Taddeo Carlone in 1481. The dazzling golden bronze and lapis lazuli exterior was carried out by the Roman artist Bartolomeo Baroni in 1754. The marble statue of the Saint is the work of the young Fabriano sculptor Francesco Fabi Altini, signed and dated 1855. The silver bust was completed in 1601 by the Florence sculptor Fabio Cafaggi.

Saint Benedict Church



Historical information



Front facade



Architectural information



Apse



Artistic information



O. Gentileschi, *St. Charles Borromeo*



The church was built by Saint Sylvester Guzzolini of Osimo, the founder of the Sylvestrine Congregation. In 1224 a small church-oratory was built on land donated to Sylvester by the municipality of Fabriano. This initial place of worship grew over the next several decades and in 1290 a large church dedicated to Saint Benedict was completed. In the 1580s the structure was completely rebuilt according to designs by the Sylvestrine monk Lorenzo Rinalducci from Serra San Quirico with the help of Mariano Lombardo and Baldo of Gubbio. The work was completed in 1590, culminating in consecration of the church by Cardinal Innocenzo del Bufalo, Bishop of Camerino, in 1605.



What we see today corresponds to this 16th century design. However, elements of the original structure are still clearly visible on the exterior, including remains of the original brick façade and the long wall on the right side in square white stone. In addition, we can see several fragments of the original ornament at the entrance portal that have fallen apart and been re-applied (grape bunches and vine tendrils, a two-tailed mermaid, and a quatrefoil rose). There is also a small rose window, and a series of single-lancet windows punctuates the side elevation. Begun in 1764-65 and unfinished at the top, the facade was designed by Filippo Martelli of L'Aquila or perhaps by the Sylvestrine monk Girolamo Mezzalancia of Jesi. The interior has a single nave, with five chapels on each side. A spectacular, slightly elevated apse is backed by three large semicircular arches that lead to the choir. The ceiling was rebuilt several years after the earthquake of 1741. There is the crypt under the presbytery, where the body of the Blessed John dal Bastone is kept.



Immediately upon entering the church of Saint Benedict, we are struck by the richness of ornament and Baroque elegance of the golden stucco, a truly spectacular and evocative combination. In the apse, the pillars and arches are covered with frescoes of saints, martyrs, and important religious figures. The side chapels contain precious works by Giovan Francesco Guerrieri, Avanzino Nucci, Pasqualino Rossi, Giuseppe Bastiani, and Giacinto Brandi. It should also be noted that the first chapel on the left was consecrated in 1620 by a brotherhood dedicated to Saint Charles Borromeo. It contains an altarpiece by Orazio Gentileschi portraying Saint Charles praying in front of the instruments of the Passion. The figure of the angel carrying the cross is extraordinarily expressive and realistic. Another valuable painting is in the second chapel on the left. It depicts a risen Christ revealing himself to the Madonna and Saint Sylvester. The artist is Francesco Vanni of Siena, one of the painters most representative of Counter-Reformation art. Also of great interest is the wooden choir. It dates to 1420 and was originally in Saint Venantius Church. In the choir room there is a fresco cycle depicting stories from the life of Saint Sylvester (unfortunately nine of the episodes have been lost). The work is by Simone de Magistris, a surprisingly inventive artist.

Oratory of Saint Mary of the Banner



Historical information



Front facade



Architectural information



Interior and the altar cloth by Viviani



Artistic information



Wooden coffered ceiling



The construction of the building began in 1610 by the will of the Company of the Virgin, of the Assumption set up around mid-sixteenth century at the church of St. Benedict and aggregated to the Archconfraternity of the Rome standard in 1586.

The Marian Confraternity, also due to the increase in the number of members, decided to build a new place of worship, which required substantial funds obtained to donations from benefactors. The work was completed in 1636.



The construction of the oratory caused some houses standing in the corner of the square in front of the church of St. Benedict to be demolished.

The architectural part was completed in 36 years (1610-1636). The outside of the building is characterized by extremely simple walls. The entrance was moved to the right side in 1645, leaving the facade undressed. The interior is of great artistic importance.



The interior is surprising for the majestic beauty of the wooden coffered ceiling, decorated with pure gold and silver. The author of this splendid Baroque decoration is the French master Leonard Chail-leau, known in Italy as Leonardo Scaglia, a versatile and eccentric artist, a sculptor, a decorator and a designer. Scaglia worked on this decoration from 1642 to 1645. The ceiling consists of 15 large lacunars, on the bottom of which decorations and various figures relating to the Assumption of the Virgin are carved in relief. The central part of the decoration represents the Eternal blessing father, the Assumption, 10 apostles around the uncovered and overflowing sarcophagus of flowers, and the two other apostles on the sides of this last scene. In the remaining sections, except the corner ones with rose windows and friezes, there are groups of putti playing or singing. The oratory also preserves the valuable altarpiece with the Annunciation of the Virgin, created by the urbanist Antonio Viviani, known as "il Sordo", a follower of Barocci.