

The 'Architectural' Projects for the Church of St. Ignatius by Andrea Pozzo

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Abstract

Andrea Pozzo –a painter, scenographer, and master of perspective– should always be fully recognized as an architect in the cultural panorama of the baroque period. This artist from Trento created his works in the church of St. Ignatius in Rome between 1685 and 1694, where he depicted St. Ignatius protector of afflicted people in the apse semi-dome (1685–1688), the Glory of St. Ignatius on the vault of the central nave (1687–1693), and the false dome (1685) to replace the one that had been designed but never built. For the works mentioned, Pozzo aimed to 'construct' a building that, while being illusory, did not exist in reality, lives amid the space of the physical architecture of the church.

The documentation, which evidences the various sequential phases of creation, was studied to recompose the design path he followed [Salviucci Insolera 2015]. The goal of this paper is therefore to define and verify the design process that Pozzo used to create these works. From the committee's request to the drafting of the first sketches, to the drawings that aim to represent the building as it is and as it appears. Everything can be found in his work and is supported by graphical and textual documents for the designs of the dome and vault. Finally, an analysis of the relationships between his three designs for the church of St. Ignatius poses further questions regarding the existence of an unifying intent formulated by Pozzo.

Keywords: Andrea Pozzo, church of St. Ignazius, architectural perspectives, project drawing, *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum*.

Introduction

Very synthetically we define rhetoric, in the noble, ancient sense of the word, as the art of elegantly speaking and writing following precise codified rules. We also consider one of the more consolidated definitions of drawing that identifies it as a language used by architects to conceive and communicate their ideas based on universally recognized principles. By associating these two definitions we can therefore, by extension, also include drawing among the arts of rhetoric.

Well, considering that rhetoric was one of the classes that characterized the teaching of the Jesuits' scholastic tradition together with grammar, humanity, and philosophy, it is not a stretch to consider Andrea Pozzo, an able drawer and brother of the Society of Jesus, as an emblematic ex-

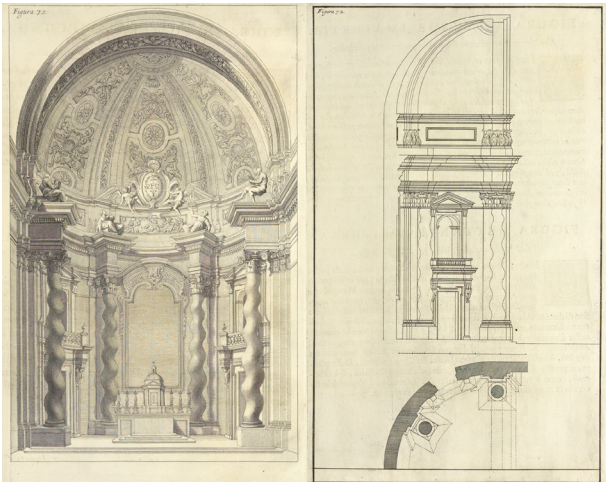
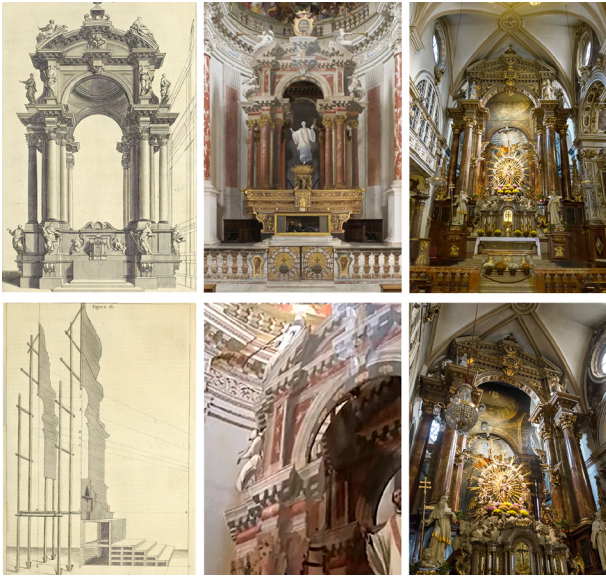
ample of the finest and highest-ranking expression of the rhetoric of drawing.

Thus, the three essential qualities that Cicero, in his *Orator* [Scaffidi Abbate 2017], identifies in the figure of an orator –*docere* or *probare*, *delectare*, *movere* or *flectere*– can be found with suitable perspicacity in Pozzo's conduct.

The *docere* in Pozzo can be easily identified in his role as a teacher at the school-academy in a vast loft at the *Collegio del Gesù*: "in which, entering, you would have seen with utmost delight a variety of students from different nations: some of them studying architecture, some drawing, these engraving copper and those painting with oils and these with tempera; and others are intent on placing under the press those prints that were –and are still– seen in the

Fig. 1. Square construction, from the treatise, I, 64 (top left); Way of constructing the apparatus made up of multiple orders of panels, from the treatise, I, 61 (bottom left); church of St. Francis Xavier (centre); Franciscan church in Vienna (right).

Fig. 2. Main Altar for the Jesus in Rome, from the treatise, II, 71 and 72.



beautiful, rare books of his *Prospettiva*" [Baldinucci 1975, p. 333]. It is precisely his treatise that represents the epilogue and culmination of the transmission of his knowledge.

Thus, when Pozzo designs and constructs his works realized in many churches of his order, always intervening with his ability and sensibility as a painter, scenographer, and master of perspective, evoking positive emotions and feelings in the spectator, this way of working represents his *delectare* [Portoghesi 1966, p. 7].

In addition, with his perspective 'deceptions', Andrea Pozzo manages to *movere* the observer, to involve him or her emotionally in viewing a space or architectural elements that only apparently exist in three dimensions [Kemp 1999, pp. 105–123]. We recall, however, that in addition to the visitors of the churches, Pozzo also directs this gift of persuasion at his students, as Baldinucci reminds us: "the same scholars always increasingly and assiduously applied themselves to the study of the art that each of them wanted to profess; so much so that they usually said that the school of father Pozzo gave those who had neither the desire nor pleasure for studying and learning the joy of it" [Baldinucci, 1975, p. 333].

All of these qualities have, as we will see, a common denominator, a common thread that ties and connects each to the others. This connecting line is architecture.

Andrea Pozzo, architect designer

Andrea Pozzo (Trento 1642 –Vienna 1709) has been called a painter; scenographer; master of perspective, and architect, but while critics have written a lot regarding the first three professions, the last has often been overlooked, not fully recognizing his role in the architectural panorama of his time. In fact, after the timid hints about his importance as an artist made by Antonio Gurlitt [Gurlitt 1887, pp. 459–473] and Antonio Muñoz [Muñoz 1919, pp. 318, 393], it would only be with the first studies made by Nino Carboneri starting from 1961 [Carboneri 1961, Carboneri 1962] that Pozzo would begin to be recognized as an architect.

Through an analysis of his drawings, this study [1] instead aims to contribute in conferring on Pozzo the trait of architect that only in a recent past has become widely recognized.

It is also true that Pozzo approaches architecture by steps, his sacred theatres, his interventions for apses, altars, façades, and fresco cycles ooze with architecture, with his

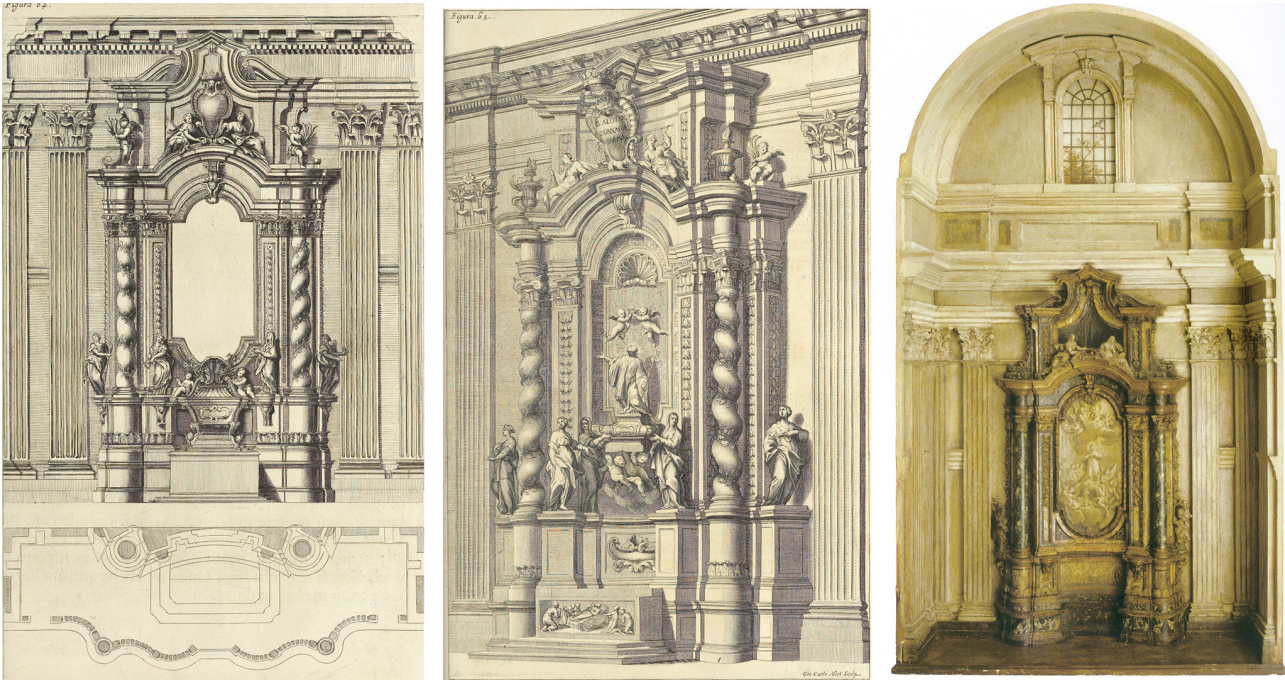


Fig. 3. Other Altar for the Blessed Luigi, with two columns, from the treatise, II, 64 (left); Another Altar for the same effect but changed enough, from the treatise, II, 65 (centre); Model in wood and wax for the altar of St. Luigi Gonzaga (right).

vision of architecture that he would express completely in his designs for works that were realized or only remained on paper.

To understand Pozzo's architecture, one cannot help recalling, on the one hand, his belonging to the order of Jesuits, an order characterized by a severe, authoritarian environment; and on the other, the historical artistic moment in which baroque culture reached its apex. In his architectural thought, Pozzo basically had to satisfy these two orientations: "convention and experimentation, observance of tradition and ideational spontaneity constitute extreme opposites, within which he had to orient his view of sacred building and address the problem of typological choices on which his poetic discourse would be based" [Bösel, Salviucci Insolera 2010, p. 37].

Even if Pozzo began his artistic activities practicing figurative painting, especially his perspective paintings as well as

his staging of ephemeral devices led him to quickly work on architecture. In addition to its recognition for its intent to teach: "the quickest way of putting all architecture drawings in perspective", his treatise *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* [2] [Pozzo 1693, Pozzo 1700] gathers drawings made by the author which show both his ideal designs and reference designs for his constructed works. But it also assumes another teaching value: that of being a repertoire of architectural ideas from which architects could draw inspiration to create their works.

In the pages of the treatise we find drawings related to the realization of sacred theatres then present in many churches where Pozzo worked. These constructions were based on the concept of scenography and were realized with "multiple orders of panels", as Pozzo himself illustrates in figure 61 in the first part of his treatise. An important example of one of Pozzo's sacred theatres can be found

in the Church of San Francesco Saverio in Mondovì, which the Jesuit brother made during his fruitful training in northern Italy. In addition to the frescoes painted on the vault and the intervention in the interior spaces, Pozzo created the altar apparatus composed of wooden frames to support painted canvases –the only remaining exemplar of these kind of compositions– which directly refers to the “square construction” presented in the treatise (fig. 1).

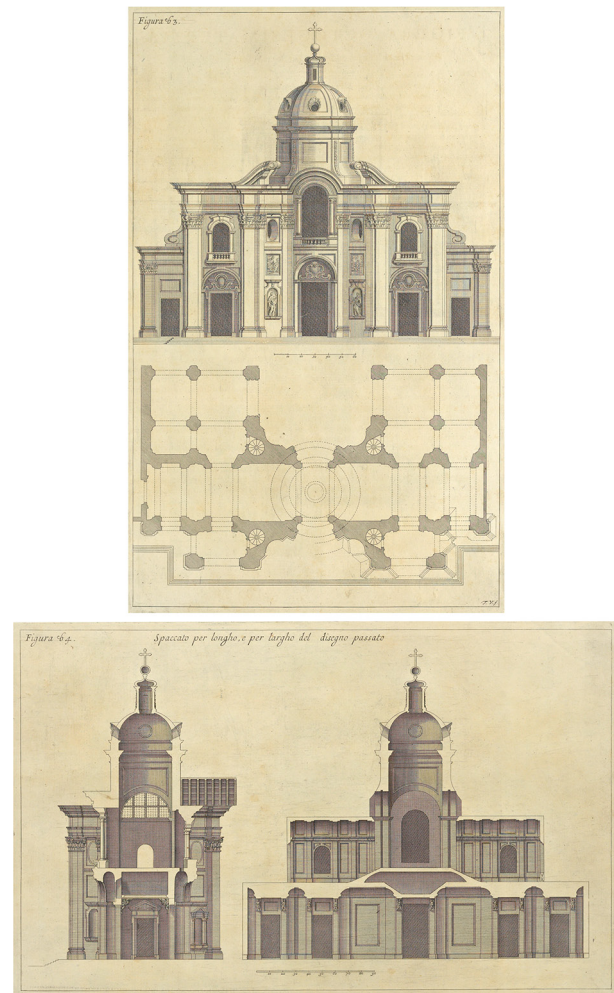
Similar in some way to this scenographic genre are the drawings provided in the treatise, which, as Pozzo himself explains, have two purposes: one to create the apparatus for the Devotion of Forty Hours and one as a model for the main altar, both destined for the church of the Gesù in Rome. The engravings illustrated in figures 71 and 72 represent the project through a straight-on perspective and half plan, with the related section rigorously associated between them (fig. 2). Within the apses, the Jesuit brother designed altars that are included in and conditioned by the apses in a relation that Pozzo always addressed with the due spatial attention and perspective sensitivity. One such example is the altar of the *Franziskanerkirche* in Vienna, which again recalls the project for a “square construction” present in the treatise: here Andrea Pozzo combines the real architecture of the altar with a painted altar that, with great refinement, creates a potent illusion of unitarity that is revealed only from an off-centre point of view as seen in figure 1.

We also recall the two proposals for the altar of Saint Aloysius de Gonzaga in the church of St. Ignatius, the first represented in plan and elevation, the second in perspective view (fig. 3). We also mention the altar of St. Ignatius in the church of the Gesù, described and shown in figure 60 through an angle perspective and in the following figure drawn in plan and elevation “with a simple contour”. This project would be particularly important for Pozzo’s fame in that it was also lauded by Carlo Fontana.

The Trento master’s opportunity to deal with architecture as a whole came in 1699, when, appointed by Cardinal Benedetto Pamphili, he developed two projects for the façade of St. John Lateran in Rome. The projects, which are echoed in the pages of the treatise, once again testify Pozzo’s complete graphical control in associating plan and perspective drawings, transverse and longitudinal sections, and a perspective view that is scenographic in its nature (fig. 4).

Unfortunately, little remains of the drawings Andrea Pozzo made for the design and construction of his mainly archi-

Fig. 4. *Facades of St. John Lateran, from the treatise, II, 83.*



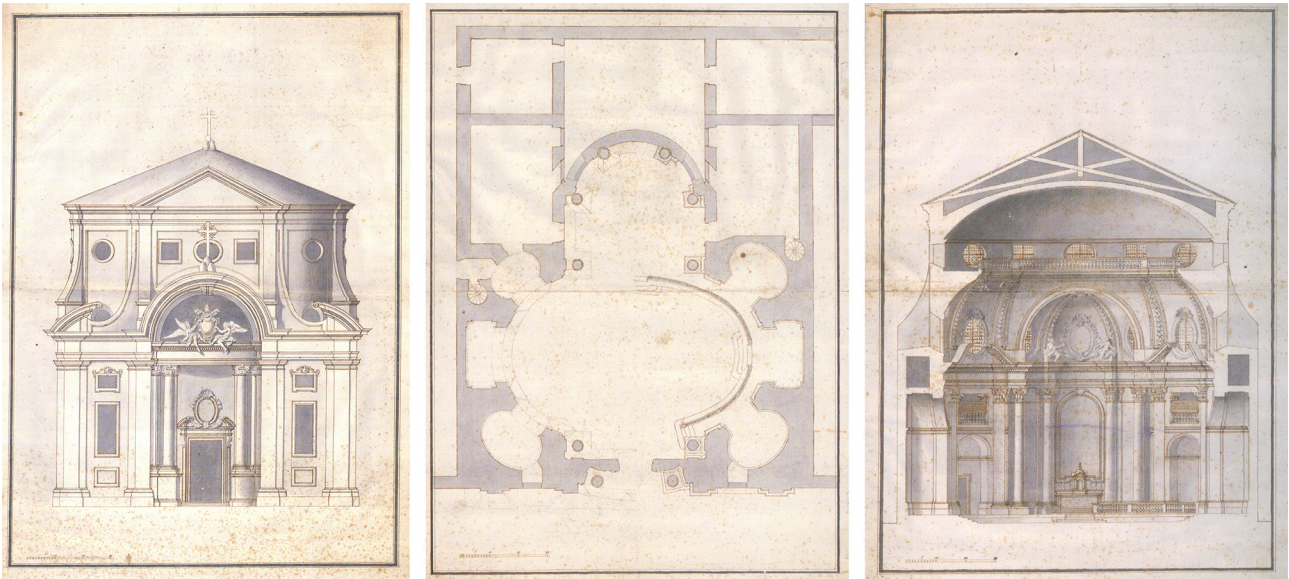


Fig. 5. Design for the churches of St. Thomas of Canterbury in Rome.

tectural works in Ragusa, Ljubljana, Trieste, Montepulciano, Belluno [Dal Mas 1992, p. 61], Trento and again Rome. The few drawings rediscovered and attributed to Pozzo include the ones he produces for the projects of the churches of St. Thomas of Canterbury in Rome, St. Ignatius in Ragusa (now Dubrovnik), and St. Apollinaris at the collegium Germanicum et Hungaricum in Rome.

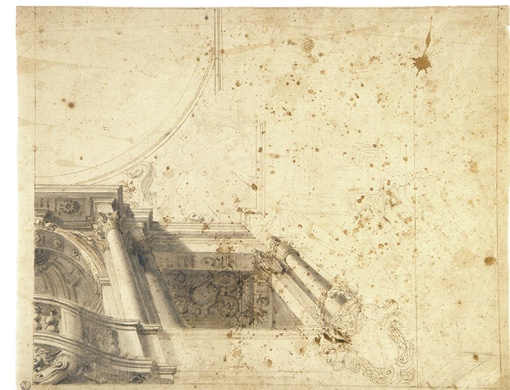
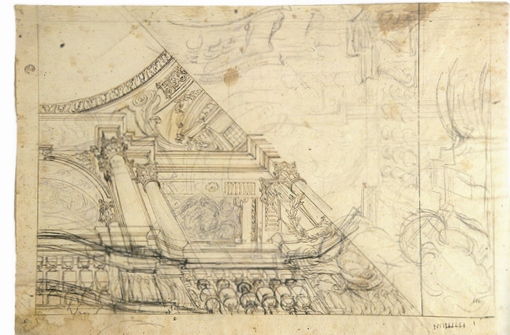
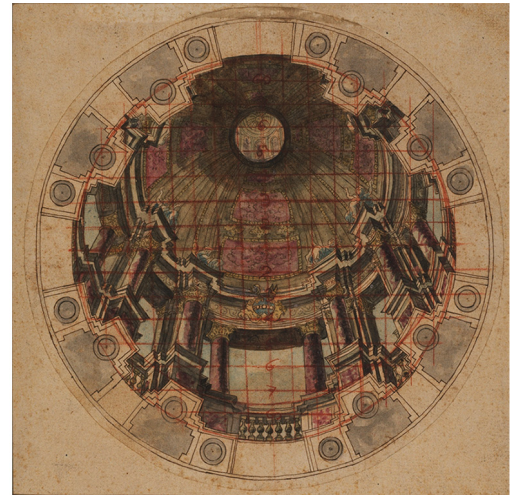
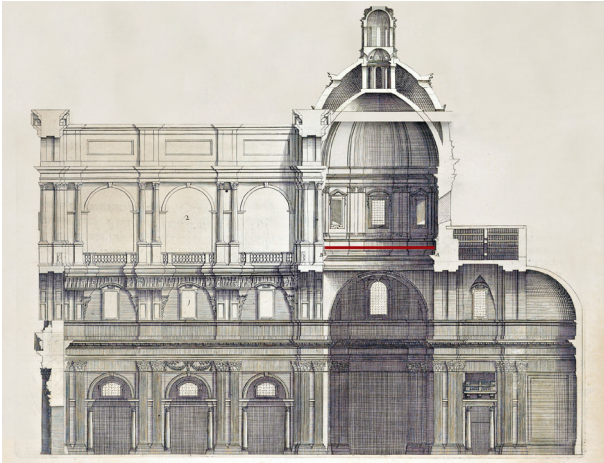
The project for the church of St. Thomas of Canterbury in the English College in Rome possibly represents one of the most important works with Pozzo's stylistic hallmark. The church, presumably conceived between 1697 and 1702, was never realized, but three remarkable authentic drawings of it remain: an elevation, a transverse section, and a plan. The first two graphics were made by applying a light chiaroscuro that tends to highlight the sculptural quality of the construction. The plan communicates a twofold message simultaneously: on the right, the building is sectioned, using the rules of geometry, with a horizontal plane; the left instead shows the projection of the elements situated above the plane of the section. The graphical scale expressed in palms is shown in all three drawings at the lower left (fig. 5).

A particularly well done intervention from an architectural point of view is the work in the *Universitätskirche* in Vienna in which Pozzo shows his architectural maturity, transforming the simple, single nave and pouring into this project a large part of his architectural heritage composed of his experiences in sacred theatres. Here he inserts tribunes, transforms the chapel, choir, and the main altar and, bringing his mastery of perspective to his elevations, creates a false dome in the vault. The church thereby had a new vault, which Andrea Pozzo wanted to design and realize.

Therefore, in perspective, Pozzo, a man of art in painting, can and should also be recognized as an architect. The criticism in this respect cannot overlook Milizia, who stated referring to the Jesuit father's work: "who wants to be an architect in the inverse way have to study brother Pozzo's architecture" [Milizia 1781, p. 275]. Regarding his incapacity to do architecture, we recall how Pozzo himself responded: "never let this stupid argument come out your lips again: he is a painter and therefore cannot be a good architect; rather, infer the opposite: he is a good painter and good perspective drawer; therefore he will be a good architect" [3].

Fig. 6. A composition of figures 94 and 96 from the treatise, I. The image shows the relationship between real space and the space designed by Pozzo.

Fig. 7. Pencil sketch for the false dome (top). Two sketches attributed to the school of Andrea Pozzo (bottom).



It was with the spirit of an architect that Pozzo addressed the cycles of paintings that had brought him so much fame. We have purposefully omitted from this framework the many architectural perspectives that Pozzo created over the course of his activities, reserving for them a specific investigation into the works for the church of St. Ignatius in Rome: the vault, false dome, and apse.

The design process for the works for the church of St. Ignatius

Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum was for Pozzo both a tool to spread his techniques and an architectural tool. By reading the treatise, it is possible to identify both the references that inspired Pozzo and his architectural ideas. Particularly important is the case of the "square construction", whose design was used by Pozzo to create at least two works that still survive: the scenic apparatus of wooden frames for the apse of the church of St. Francis Xavier in Mondovì (1676–1677) and the altar of the *Franziskanerkirche* in Vienna that the author created as a com-

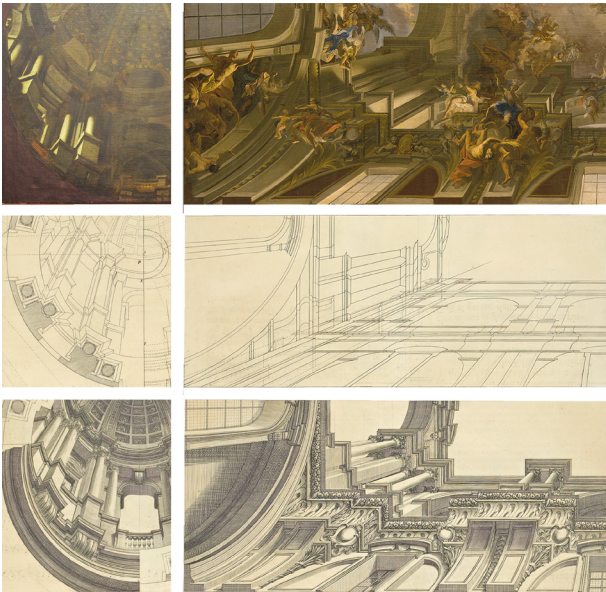


Fig. 8. Oil sketch for the dome and figures 90 and 91 from the treatise I (left). Oil sketch for the vault and figures 97-99 from the treatise I (right).

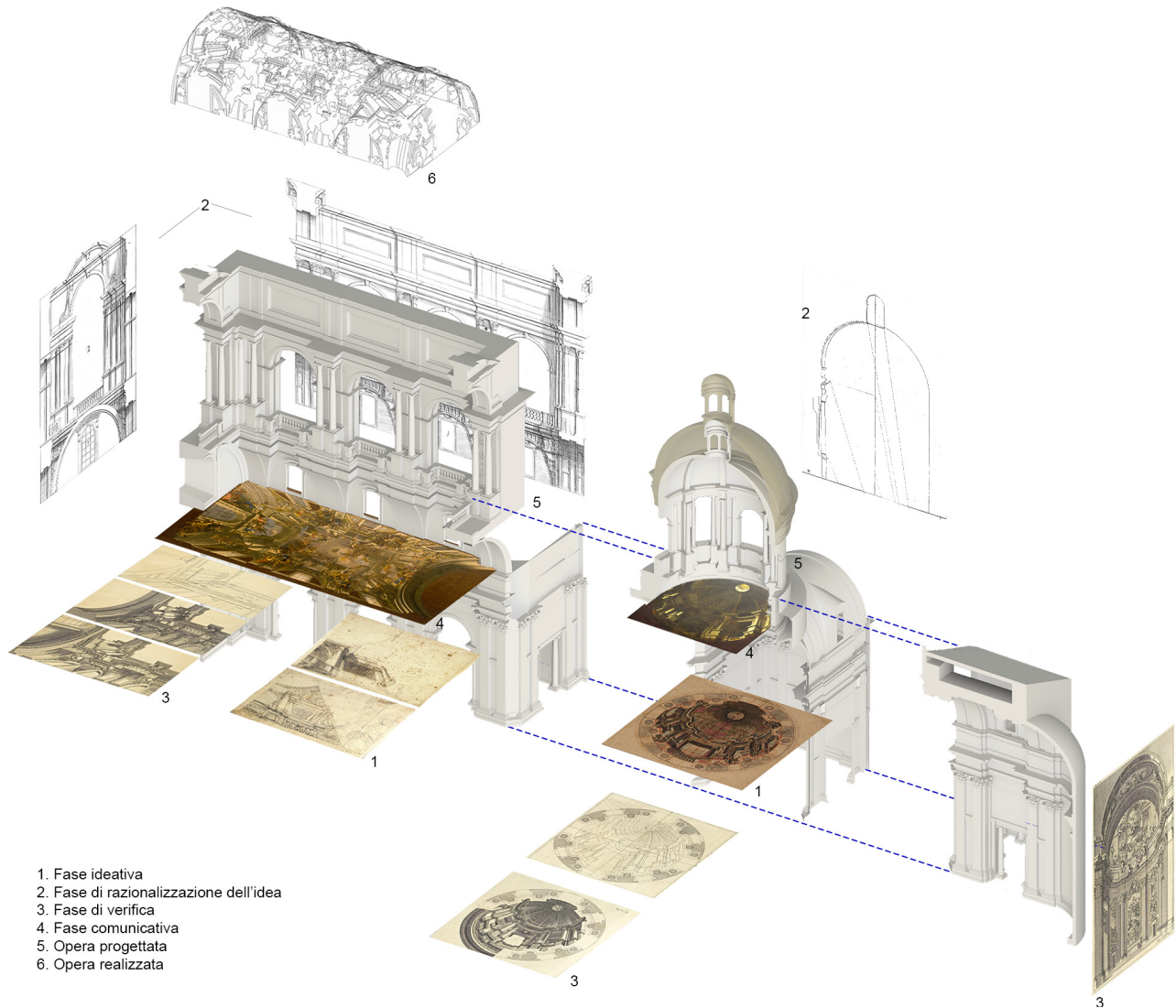
prehensive hybrid of parts and others in wooden frames (1706–1707). These two works are chronologically separated by about thirty years; the first preceded the publication of his celebrated treatise (1693), and the second was built few years after publication of the second part of the treatise (1700). In addition, in the text of figure 64 in the first part of the treatise, Pozzo himself states that he used the model to create some mechanisms for the Devotion of Forty Hours, structures in successively smaller wooden frames like the one in Mondovì, and he suggests to use it to construct the main altars like he would do years later in Vienna as the figure 1 shows. This case demonstrates how Pozzo conceived architectural projects that would accompany him throughout his career and how he was capable of activating them via different forms. Buildings, scenography, or perspective paintings are for Pozzo realizations of architectural ideas or, using the words of Vincenzo Fasolo: “every artistic idea for an architect painter (and also non-architects) is always architecture” [Fasolo 1969, p. 216]. We could therefore say that the cycle of works realized for the

church of St. Ignatius in Rome is the activation of precise architectural ideas through which Pozzo intended to expand the real space by constructing various illusory spaces. While episodic, when combined with reality, they bestow new three-dimensional life on the church (fig. 6).

Pozzo worked in the church of St. Ignatius for about ten years, a long period in which he intervened several times on the surfaces of the central nave, the transept, and apse. The first work to be realized was the large canvas of the false dome (1685); the frescoes of the semi-dome of the apse and the vault of the presbytery were the next (1685–1688); and, at the end, the decorations of the vault of the central nave (1687–1693) and the corbels of the dome (1694) were realized. The entire cycle was opened to the public on 31 July 1694 at the presence of Pope Innocent XII. Andrea Pozzo’s architectural work cannot be found only in the architectural models present in his treatise, but also reconstructing the steps that led him to the realization of the works themselves. In fact, historical documents and graphics testify almost every phase of the design process for the works in the church of St. Ignatius: from the assignment received from the committee to the first conceptual sketches, to the phase of rationalizing the form, to the drawings meant to communicate the work to committee and public, and to the techniques adopted to create the fresco of the vault.

Pozzo was called to create decorations for the large church, that, up to then had remained rather bare [Wittkower 1995, pp. 5–7, 23], and also to solve two real architectural problems: the impossibility of creating a masonry dome and the proportions of the vault of the central nave. With regard to the vault, in a document dated back to 1688 entitled *Points to consider regarding painting of the vault of the church of St. Ignatius* [4] [Bösel, Salviucci Insolera 2010, p. 77], the Superior Fathers of the order express the reasons for the work and entrust the assignment to father Pozzo. The document contains indications regarding the approval process, which would have passed through the public exposition of a draft of the work on canvas. The most interesting aspect of this document is a passage specifying the reason for which the work was commissioned. The superior fathers wanted Pozzo to solve: “the only defect in this church [...] that is, the vault, which is too high and not arched enough” [Bösel, Salviucci Insolera 2010, p. 87]. This highlights the cultural refinement of the Jesuit committee and also explains Pozzo’s compositional choice. In contrast to other interventions for vaults, here he makes a true op-

Fig. 9. Synthetic image that describes the relationship between the graphic works concerning the project for the vault and dome of the church of St. Ignatius.



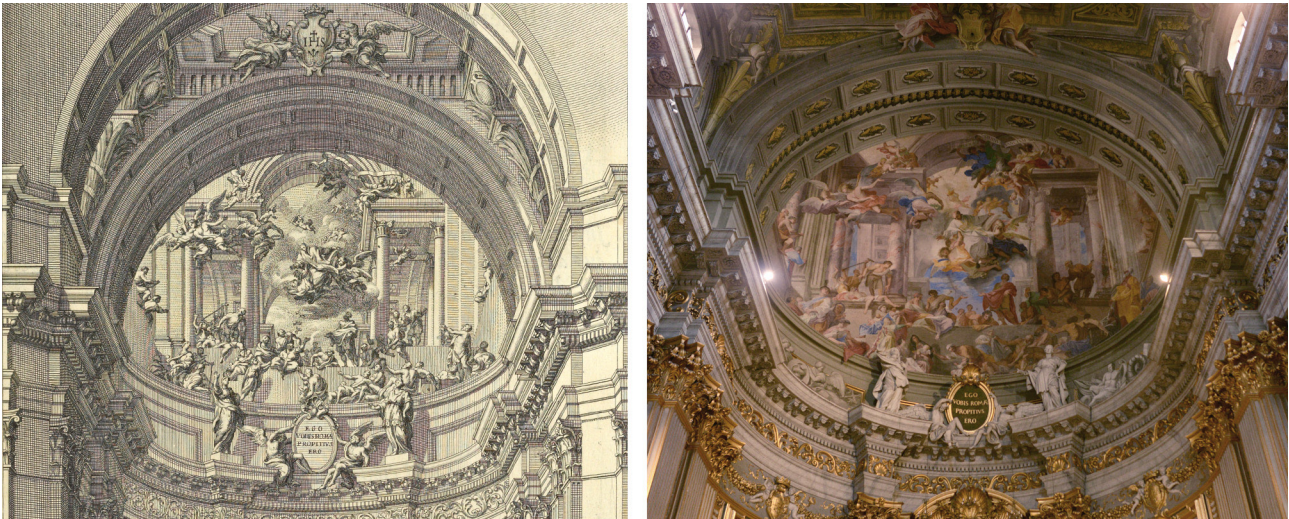


Fig. 10. Detail of the main altar for the church of St. Ignatius in the Roman Collegium, from the treatise, II, 81 (left), and photo of the frescoed basin of the apse (right).

eration to pierce the ceiling. In fact, the vault appears to be removed, slightly above the windows of the lunettes, and replaced by an imposing architecture.

The ideational moment of an architectural work cannot overlook the use of freehand sketches, drawings directly relate the designer's mind to the hand. This is presumably also true for Andrea Pozzo, as attested by a rough pencil sketch for the false dome [Baglioni, Salvatore 2018], of uncertain authorship, stored at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, and some drawings referring to vaults in perspective from below attributed to his school and housed in Florence in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Uffizi Galleries. The latter show two moments following the conceptual phase: a primordial one characterized by rethinking and marks that proceed by approximations to define the idea; and a more advanced one in which, in addition to a more definite idea, chiaroscuro is applied to better describe the three-dimensional nature of the forms (fig. 7). This phase was followed by the rationalization of the designed shape and the adoption of plan and elevation drawings through which the designer describes the form of the building as it is. This phase is well documented by the plates in *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* which, while following the works in Rome, demonstrate the need

for this phase to define the architectural idea. Figures 49, 50 and 52 in the second part of the treatise referring to the dome and figures 95 and 96 in the first part related to the vault illustrate this phase of the design process [5]. From these drawings, it is possible to rebuild the three-dimensional digital model [6] of the designed building and to understand how these interact with the real architecture through the circumference of the dome impost and the horizontal slice of the crown of the vault.

Once he had defined the design idea of the architecture as it is, the designer returned to perspective representation for two reasons: it allowed the design to be verified perceptually and allowed him to communicate to the committee how the final work would have appeared. The graphical documents left by Pozzo demonstrate both aspects: plates 90 and 91 of the first part and 50, 51, 52 and 53 for the dome, figure 81 of the second part for the apse, and figures 97, 98, 99 and 100 of the first part for the vault [7], represent perceptual verification of the works, the designer's personal verification, and technical publication for other artists. The oil drafts stored at the National Gallery of Ancient Art in Barberini Palace, were instead requested by the committee to be able to judge and have the project judged before approval (fig. 8). The



Fig. 11. Comparison between the work carried out (fresco) and the designed work.

Fig. 12. Perspective section with the two designed works: vault and dome.

cogent relationship that ties all the graphical drawings into a single design process is well represented through a synthetic vision of the whole. In addition to the real space of the church of St. Ignatius reconstructed starting from the designs in plates 93 and 94 of the first part of the treatise, this also includes the three-dimensional surveys of the final works on the surfaces of the church of St. Ignatius and the graphical documents that attest the architectural design process followed by Andrea Pozzo for each intervention. This process can clearly be seen with regard to the design of the false dome and the vault, while it is only partially true with respect to the semi-dome of the apse (fig. 9).

Conclusions

The frescoes on the vault and semi-dome and the canvas of the dome are just one of the possible realizations of Pozzo's projects for the church in Rome and, as for each realization, his comparison with the design idea highlights some differences. In the case of the vault, a comparison between the design presented in the treatise and the fi-

nal work –the fresco– highlights a rethinking with regard to an attic plane decorated with rectangular panels that should have connected the two arches present on the short opposite sides of the composition. If realized, it would certainly have rendered a more rigid, static image of the architecture since it would have reduced its interaction with the sky. On the other hand, the perspective shortening adopted is entirely consistent in all perspective drawings with what is realized both in the rough oil sketch and the final fresco. With regard to the dome, a comparison between the drawings in the treatise and the final canvas highlights the adoption of a different perspective shortening while the morphology of the structural and decorative elements appears to be consistent. A comparison of the design and realization for the fresco in the semi-dome of the apse shows a clear consistency with regard to perspective shortening and the compositional choices. A notable compositional expedient can be seen in the fresco on the semi-dome of the apse: the illusory architecture, a temple with four arches, appears to be cut by the presence of the large arch of the presbytery of the real church, thereby creating an occlusion that accentuates the sense of three-dimensionality and interaction between real and illusory buildings (fig. 10). The late baroque plasticity of Pozzo's architecture and his efficacy in solving the problems raised by the committee are particularly perceptible when exploring the digital reconstruction of Pozzo's project for the vault. Here the expansion of the

real space by piercing the ceiling and the addition of the illusory space creates the perception of an open space articulated by strong chiaroscuro (fig. 11). Finally, the summary model based on the real space of the church of St. Ignatius, integrated with the illusory architecture of the vault and dome [8], allows us to formulate some considerations. The two architectures have a difficult coexistence in the space immediately above the large arch that separates the nave from the transept, but they have comparable proportions. A comparison between the interior dome designed by Pozzo and Grassi's dome (ochre in the model) presented in plate 94 of the first part of the treatise, shows how Pozzo's project does not seem to consider the original approved project and is characterized by the presence of protruding columns on corbels, a very criticized element at Pozzo's time [Pascoli 1736, p. 255]. On the other hand, it is worthy to underline that it is precisely the presence of these protruding columns that represent typological continuity with the architecture of the vault (fig. 12). These initial considerations can be investigated and completed following the rendering of the third and less documented episode of the entire cycle, i.e., the illusory architecture of the apse. Indeed, the reconstruction of the entire cycle will enable a comparison between the three projects that highlight the elements of continuity and discontinuity clarifying the existence of a unifying design attempt or the independence of the three episodes created by Pozzo for the church of St. Ignatius.

Notes

[1] While sharing the contents of the contribution as the fruit of common reflections, the *Introduction* and *Andrea Pozzo, architect designer* section are by Marco Fasolo, the *The design process for the works for the church of St. Ignatius* section and *Conclusions* are by Matteo Flavio Mancini.

[2] *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum*, subtitled *In qua docetur modus expeditissimus delineandi opticè omnia que pertinent ad Architecturam* is composed in two volumes, the first published in 1693 and the second in 1700, both written in Latin and Italian.

[3] *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum*, text explaining figure 66 in the second part.

[4] The text of the document is reported in notes 33, 36, 37, 38 and 39 in the same essay, pp. 87-88.

[5] With reference to rationalizing the form, figure 9 shows plates 49, 50 and 52 of the second part of the treatise, in which a section of

the dome is represented, and plates 95 and 96 of the first part of the treatise, which show the longitudinal and transverse sections of the frescoed architecture on the dome of the central nave of the Church of Sant'Ignazio.

[6] The digital models were developed in collaboration with Flavia Camagni.

[7] Referring to the design idea checking, figure 9 shows plates 90 and 91 of the first part of the treatise and plates 50, 51, 52, and 53 of the second part, in which the perspective of the dome is drawn with different levels of detail and graphical treatment; Figure 81 of the second part of the treatise with the perspective of the apse and Figures 97, 98, 99 and 100 of the first part, in which the perspective of the architecture of the vault is drawn with different levels of detail and graphical treatment.

[8] The model of the dome was realized by Leonardo Baglioni and Marta Salvatore, whom we thank for having allowed its use in this essay.

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