



CHURCH OF S. MARIA IN MARTINICO (St. Mary in Martinico)

You can find this point of interest in Dongo - Path 1 - Stage 1

INFORMATION

Location: the church of S. Maria stands, in a slightly elevated position, alongside the old road that runs through the hamlet of Martinico.

Paving: via Lamberzoni is asphalted; the churchyard is cobbled; the interior of the church is paved with stone slabs.

Architectural Barriers: the churchyard is in a raised position with respect to via Lamberzoni; our itinerary suggests to access the churchyard by climbing 7 + 3 stone steps, separated by a small landing. At the end of the visit, and having admired the façade, when leaving the churchyard area please be careful, as there are three concrete flower holders placed transversally.

To enter the church by the side entrance, one has to cross a small but wide threshold which leads into a small vestibule. From here, through a second wooden door, you can access the interior of the church.

Access: access is by the side entrance nearest to the façade, which is usually open.

Services: -

Leisure and food: -

Other information: the church is generally open for visits.

DESCRIPTION

(Silvia Fasana)

«The oldest document that mentions the church of S. Maria in Martinico (*St. Mary in Martinico*), housed in the State Archives of Milan, dates back to 1299, but the simple façade and the presence of some architectural elements similar to the ones which characterize the church of San Nicolò (*St. Nicholas*) in Piona suggest the church is of the same period, thus built not after the start of the 12th century.

Over time the building endured different changes, the most obvious of which took place in the 17th century, when new Baroque forms altered drastically the original Romanesque lines. Between 1903 and 1912 restoration work, supervised by arch. Federico Frigerio of Como, reintroduced the old Romanesque shapes by the rebuilding of the apse and belfry and the elimination of Baroque additions. The superintendent was surveyor Aldo Rumi, who designed, among other things, Dongo's schools». Several other interventions followed in the Fifties and Seventies of the past century.

«The left side of the church, made of beautiful local stone masonry, is the most visible and immediately strikes the visitor. Its main features are an oculus, three beautiful single-lancet windows and two portals, of which the monumental one, towards the apse, is characterized by a rounded arch, with a cylindrical strong course supported by columns with carved bases and capitals, and enriched by interesting anthropomorphic masks on the shelves of the architrave. A lion-like figure, leaning out from where the angle closes the left side towards the apse, seems to be guarding this ancient portal. The arches of the single-lancet windows and portal display the classical alternation of black and white stones; the wall culminates in a frieze of rounded hanging arches - these, too, dichromatic -, many corbels of which are carved to resemble anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures. Some sculptural decorations can also be found in the intrados of the hanging arches.

Above the frieze there is a fluted decoration, surmounted by a moulded cornice. The façade of the church is very simple, gabled, interrupted only by two slits, and, at the top, by a cross window; below is the simple portal, the architrave being decorated by a sculpted cross».

The single nave interior preserves but a few traces of «the fine old fresco decoration, visible in particular on the right wall. Only a few fragments remain of the oldest decoration, dating back to the second decade of the 14th century, among which a fragmentary *Our Lady of Mercy*, possibly one of the first to be painted in Lombardy, where some fine vestiges of angels who are apparently supporting the Virgin's mantle can still be identified. Some scholars found similarities between this fresco and the work of the anonymous "Master of St. Abundius", the undisputed protagonist of the

painting scene in Como in the early 14th century. On the other hand, the fragments of larger frescoes – which are still visible in the highest section of the right wall and the counter-façade –, greatly damaged by the vaults, later removed during the 20th century restoration work, can be dated back to the end of the 14th century. With regard to this cycle, we are left with a number of *Saints*, including a *Saint Peter* enthroned, and, albeit visible only in small fragments, a *Saint Anthony Abbot*. Their quality and Late Gothic taste would suggest that they were commissioned by refined local people and made by a painter close to the Visconti Court, if not for taste alone. The few surviving frescoes (*Saints? Prophets?*) still identifiable on the presbytery arch, particularly on the right, appear to have been of 15th century workmanship. The cycle of paintings by the Fiamminghino, probably completed in 1623, has been partly lost. There remain, on the right wall, three of the fifteen *Mysteries of the Rosary* (*the Nativity, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, the Dispute with the Doctors*), and two large figures, possibly *Prophets*, characterized by the fluent line of their clothes and pleasant chromatic effects. On the left, once again part of the Fiamminghino cycle, there are figures of little angels, possibly fragments of an altar frieze». The central single-lancet window of the apse preserves a delicate small 16th century stained-glass window depicting the *Virgin Mary*.

From the right side of the church it is possible to access the Baroque Oratory of the Brotherhood.

A monumental marble cornice above the altar hosts a statue of the *Virgin Mary*. The altar, enclosed by a beautiful balustrade with marble inlays from 1687, is embellished by a frontal made in scagliola stone with *Our Lady of the Rosary* at its centre.

(Drawn from Cooperativa Turistica Imago, *La chiesa di S. Maria in Martinico e Palazzo Manzi a Dongo*, Associazione Iubilantes, Como 2009)