



Casina Pio IV



The Academy's headquarters are in the Casina Pio IV, in the Vatican City. Completed in 1561 as a summer residence for Pope Pius IV and surrounded by the trees and lawns of the Vatican gardens, the Casina is a well-preserved treasury of 16th century frescoes, stucco reliefs, mosaics and fountains.

The Casina's first floor plan and the first part of the building, designed by Pirro Ligorio, began under Pope Paul IV Carafa. This one-storey building featured a courtyard and a fountain. Pirro Ligorio was probably chosen by Pope Carafa because he was a keen scholar of antiquities who had already worked on Tivoli's Villa d'Este under Pope Julius III, and because he shared the same Neapolitan origins.

Surviving documents tell us that when Paul IV died, on 18 August 1559, the Casina comprised only the ground floor without the corner tower. It appears to have been Pius IV who commissioned the extension consisting in a loggia, galleria, chapel, three more rooms and a second storey and the addition of the stucco, mosaic and fresco decoration throughout the whole complex.

The Oval Courtyard

The centre of the Casina Pio IV's complex is the oval courtyard, which formally connects the four buildings that make up the villa. Its centrepiece is a marble fountain with two cherubs riding dolphins, sculpted by Jacopo da Casignola and Giovanni da Sant'Agata (1560-64). Overlooking the courtyard is a loggia called "Museum", or home of the *Muses*, where Ligorio reinterprets the iconography of the Muses with *Apollo* and *Bacchus* portrayed on ancient sarcophagi. The left panel of the façade features *Thalia* (muse of comedy), *Urania* (astronomy), *Terpsichore* (the epic muse), *Mnemosyne* (memory), *Polyhymnia* (agriculture). In the centre Ligorio places *Calliope*, the muse of epic poetry or music. In the right panel we find *Clio* (muse of history), *Erato* (love poetry), *Melpomene* (tragedy), and *Euterpe* (lyric song). The triangular pediment is completed by a round medallion containing *Aurora*, surrounded by the signs of the zodiac and the four mythical horses of the Sun (*Helios*): *Pyrois*, *Aeos*, *Aethon* and *Phlegon*. This medallion is flanked by two female figures: *Flora*, the ancient Italic goddess of Spring, and *Pomona*, the Roman nymph. Above them is the statue of *Salus*, personifying health and conservation. She holds a cup with a snake wrapped around her arm drinking from it.

The Museum

The Museum's interior features a barrel vault with frescoes from the life of Moses: the *Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt*, the *Crossing of the Red Sea* and *Israel's Salvation from the Egyptian Army*. The iconography of the Red Sea has always been interpreted as a symbol of baptism, one of the most important themes of the Counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

The Façade

The rich decoration of the Academy's façade, with its rectangles, friezes and reliefs, derives from Ligorio's experience in the ornamentation of tabernacles and tombs and his passion as an antiquarian and as a scholar and collector of ancient coins. It was a typical trend in the Medici circles at the time of Leo X (1513-21). The

figures that populate the façade are *Fame*, *Victory*, *Tiber*, *Ticino*, *Pan*, *Solis*, *Aegle* and *Apollo*, the Hours *Eirene* (Peace), *Dike* (Justice) and *Eunomia* (Good Governance), *Cyparissus*, and a shield emblazoned with the head of *Medusa*. At the centre of the façade is Pius IV's coat of arms. Inside the vestibule, but visible from the exterior, is a bas relief of *Artemis of the Ephesians*.

The Vestibule

The vault of the vestibule features frescoes from the Genesis such as the *Creator*, the *Creation of Sky and Earth*, *Creation of Day and Night*, *Creation of Adam*, *Creation of Eve*, *Original Sin*, *Expulsion from Paradise*, *God's Reprimand of Adam and Eve*, *Presentation of Eve*, *Moses Striking the Rock*, *Gathering of Manna*, *The Offerings of Cain and Abel*, *Abel pastor ovium*, *Eve spinning*, *Adam chopping wood*, and the bas reliefs of *Charity*, *Faith*, *Religion* and *Hope*. The vestibule's walls are covered in polychrome mosaic and its floor in antique coloured marble.

The Hall of the Sacred Conversation

The vestibule leads into the Hall of the Sacred Conversation, decorated entirely by Federico Barocci between October 1561 and June 1563. It is named after the fresco in the central panel of the barrel vault, which features the *Sacred Conversation* that took place between the Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus, the Infant St John, St Elizabeth and St Zachariah. The rest of the vault is richly decorated with grotesques and frescoes representing the *Samaritan Woman at the Well*, *Jesus and the Adulteress*, *Jesus and Peter Walking on Water* and the *Baptism of Christ*.

The Hall of the Annunciation

The last of the halls of the Academy's lower level is called the Hall of the Annunciation. Its vault shows a remarkable stucco decoration alternated with grotesques surrounded by eight panels with scenes from the life of Joseph the Jew: *Joseph and Potifar's Wife*, *Joseph Reunited with his Brothers*, *Joseph Describing his Dreams to his Brothers*, and *Joseph Meeting his Brothers in Dothan*, which define and highlight the centrepiece of the vault: the *Annunciation*. The moment of *conturbatio* is portrayed with ethereal gracefulness, with Mary startled by the sudden arrival of the Archangel Gabriel, a mainstay of the Annunciation scene.

The Chapel

The Chapel, which can be accessed from the Hall of the Annunciation, is described for the first time only in 1767 and little is known about it. Its original decoration remained incomplete and only eight Apostles are still visible today: *St Peter*, *St Paul*, *St Andrew*, *St John*, *St Matthew*, *St Thomas*, *St James*, *St Simon* and two female figures representing the *Church* and *Peace*.

The Stairwell

The stairwell leading to the upper level of the Academy was built between November 1561 and June 1563 and has remained incomplete. It is one of the first, most significant works of Santi di Tito and its vault features panels showing the four most significant monuments completed by Pius IV Medici: *Villa Pia*, the *Belvedere Courtyard*, *Via Flaminia* and the *Porta del Popolo*, and *Via Pia* and the *Quirinale Sculptures*.

The Hall of the Gethsemane

The first room of the upper floor leads into the Hall of the Gethsemane, completed by Federico Zuccari at the end of 1563. The vault features five important episodes of the life of Jesus Christ: *Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane*, the *Last Supper*, the *Temptation in the Desert*, the *Transfiguration* and *Christ on the Way to the Calvary*.

Zuccari Hall

Last but not least is the Zuccari Hall, with Federico Zuccari's famous fresco of the *Mystic Marriage of St Catherine* at the centre of its vaulted ceiling, surrounded by a frieze portraying several important episodes from the Bible and from Jesus' life: *St John the Baptist in the Wilderness*, *Jonah and the Whale*, *Penitence of St Jerome*, *Christ and Peter Walking on Water*, the *Miraculous Draught of Fish*, *Jesus Calming the Storm*, the *Great Flood*, *David Restraining Abishai from Killing Saul*, the *Crossing of the Red Sea* and *Judith and Holofernes*.

The New Premises

On 20 December 1931, the then President of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Giuseppe Gianfranceschi, announced the plans for the enlargement of the Casina. Architect Giuseppe Momo, to whom the project was commissioned, brilliantly solved the problem of building a new wing on the sloping plot without disrupting the shape of Ligorio's original Casina. Pope Pius XI was able to inaugurate the new extension, comprising a gallery and the great hall where the Plenary Sessions of the Academy are held, on 17 December 1933.

