

THE CIVIC MUSEUMS OF COMO



Donna Lisa

**P. Giovinetti Archaeological Museum**  *Partial disabled access*

Housed in a beautiful 16th-century building, renovated at the end of the 18th century, its artefacts and collections narrate the history of Como from its origins to the 6th century AD. The Prehistoric and Proto-historic sections are extremely beautiful, in particular the artefacts that refer to the Culture of Galasecca, and the Roman section.

**G. Garibaldi History Museum (piazza Medaglie d'Oro)**  *Partial disabled access*

The beautiful rooms in this building owned by the Olginati, a noble local family, house arms, paintings, uniforms and other items that narrate the history of Como and the Italian Risorgimento (anti-Austrian insurgence in 1848, Battle of San Fermo in 1859 and Giuseppe Garibaldi's stay). Another section bears witness to the products and quality of life on the lake over the last three centuries through the clothes, accessories and artisan artefacts, such as lace and bobbin lace, on display.

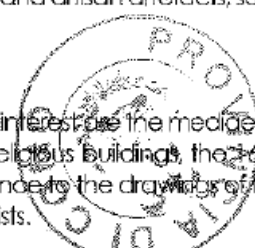
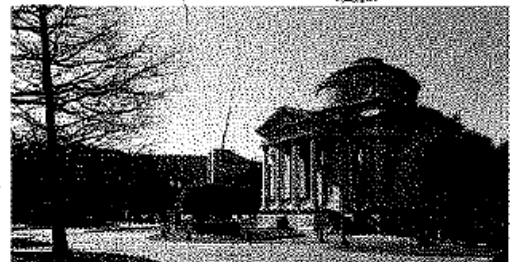
**Palazzo Volpi Civic Art Gallery (via Diaz)**  *Partial disabled access*

The museum houses works of art dating from the 7th to the 21st century. Of particular interest are the medieval section with its precious sculptural and pictorial artefacts from several of the city's religious buildings, the 19th-century art gallery and the floor dedicated to the 20th century, with particular reference to the drawings of the Futurist Antonio Sant'Elia and the abstract works of the "Gruppo Como" group of artists.

**Volta Temple (viale Marconi)** 



This beautiful neoclassical building, constructed in 1927 to commemorate the centenary of the death of Alessandro Volta, is entirely dedicated to the illustrious Como-born physicist who was famous above all for having invented the battery, although he made numerous other contributions to the field of science. It houses many appliances, machines and instruments, as well as personal items belonging to the scientist.



Between the two buildings is mediaeval Via Balestra that makes it possible to glimpse the Roman section of the Archaeological Museum and leads to the south-eastern corner of the town walls where one of the three surviving mediaeval towers, **San Vitale Tower** (14th cent.), stands.

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Turning back along Via Vittorio Emanuele, turn left onto Via Indipendenza and Via Pantera, as far as **Piazza San Fedele**. The square is one of the most charming parts of Como. Until the 19th century it was where the town's food market was held and is now a popular meeting place. What stands out here are some 15th and 16th century Renaissance houses with an exposed wood cantilever structure filled in with terracotta bricks laid out in a herringbone pattern. Continue by turning right and then left onto Via Adamo del Pero, Via Rovelli and **Via Cesare Cantù**. On this road, at no. 52, there is a building with beautiful graffiti decorations by a very young Antonio Sant'Elia, a Futurist architect who lived here. Worthy of note on the left are the façade of the **Liceo Volta** (Volta high school), preceded by a beautiful portico with eight late Roman cipollino marble columns (from the lost baptistery of San Giovanni in the atrium). Today, all that exists of the ancient Augustinian monastery (13th cent.) is the **Church of Saint Cecilia**, a Baroque jewel incorporated in the building. In the 19th century the remaining part of the complex was transformed by the neoclassical architect Simone Cantoni, to house a high school.


The avenue ends in the imposing mass of **Porta Torre** (1192) (photo 5). These are the best preserved remains of the mediaeval town wall commissioned by the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa to protect Como after the destruction by the Milanese of the Roman walls in 1127.

The tower, which is in Moltrasio stone, is 40 metres tall and has a large access arch topped by eight smaller arches on the northern side.

On the southern side, the side exposed to enemy incursions, it has two smaller arches.

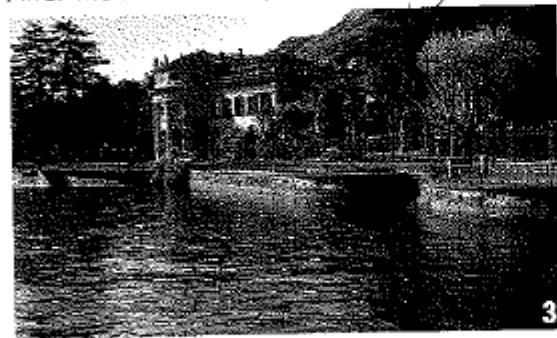


At the end of Via Puecher, after Sinigaglia stadium and the **Aero Club**, is the start of the promenade of Villa Olmo, a pedestrian strip of about 500 metres that opened in 1957 and is dotted with beautiful late 18th - early 19th century villas and gardens (not open to the public) that overlook the lake creating a magnificent landscape and architectural setting.

 The walk can be covered in a wheelchair, but it does have some short stretches that are considerably steep.

The first we come across is **Villa Carninati Scacchi** built in neoclassical forms based on a design by Felice Soave (1787). The façade overlooking the lake has a beautiful double loggia crowned by putti statues and preceded by a small and charming Italian garden. At the end of the 1940s the villa was home to the Tessitura Scacchi weaving mill, founded by Giuseppe Scacchi, Cavaliere del Lavoro (Order of Merit for Labour) and Baron of the Holy Roman Church, father of the famous artist and contemporary art scout, Luca Gracco, and grandfather of the Hollywood actress Greta Scacchi.

After the 20th century Villa Musa stands **Villa Saporiti** (photo 3). Built between 1791 and 1793 for



The noblewoman Eleonora Donna Stora Visconti, it was designed by Leopold Pollack. The Vienna-born architect created a villa with a neoclassical layout to which he added elements of Austrian Rococo, such as a sumptuous elliptical room on two floors. The room, which is lavishly decorated, extends out toward the lake, giving the façade its characteristic shape and earning it the name "La Rotonda" ("the Rotunda"). Villa Saporiti is now the seat of the provincial administration of Como and houses offices.

Built by Abbot Marco Gallo around 1615, **Villa Gallia** is also owned by the provincial administration. The building centres on a large hall, now used for conferences and as a boardroom. Two floors high, it is entirely decorated with mythological and allegorical landscape scenes. The hall is flanked by two loggias with three arches that open onto the façade. Of the garden, which once extended to the slopes of the hill behind the villa, only the part overlooking the lake remains. It has an Italian-style parterre where, amid various ancient statues, a modern "Medusa" by Mimmo Paladino stands out. The piece comes from Gianni Versace's private art collection, which was once housed in Villa Fontanelle in Moltrasio.

## PALAZZO TERRAGNI - former Casa del Fascio

This building is a milestone in modern architecture. Giuseppe Terragni, commissioned to design the seat of the Fascist party in 1932, built a structure that perfectly reconciles functionalism and modernity with tradition and classicism. For example, its position next to the city's cultural pole (the theatre) and above all, its religious pole (the cathedral) is symbolic and traditional, whilst the external white marble covering and layout - a perfect parallelepiped - are classical. Terragni also borrowed from Italian Renaissance architecture the idea of an inner courtyard all around which the entire layout develops. All these elements are however reinterpreted in a Rationalist and very personal key.



The extensive use of glazing and the reinforced concrete of the supporting structure are modern, as is the fact that all 4 façades are different, something due also to their different exposure to sunlight. The main façade deserves a particular mention; it looks like an extremely modern "loggia" consisting of 20 empty rectangles that frame a series of openings, windows and balconies and underline the different depths of the four floors. The loggia contrasts with the full façade on the right, Terragni intended this space to be used for a propaganda decoration, thanks to the use of photomechanical panels (now housed in the Art Gallery) that in fact, were never displayed. Terragni left nothing to chance with regard to the interiors either and himself designed the walls, doors and handles, skirting boards, floors, fixtures and fittings, lamps, tables, desks, shelving and chairs.

The former Casa del Fascio now houses the Provincial Headquarters of the Financial Police, so can only be visited subject to obtaining authorization from the headquarters. For further information on Rationalism, see itinerary 2.

Turning back towards Piazza Duomo, turn left and take Via Vittorio Emanuele, Como's main shopping street and its beating heart. After the junction with via Indipendenza, on the left is 17th century **Palazzo Cernuzzi**, seat of Como's town hall since 1853. Inside it is possible to visit a beautiful colonnaded courtyard; indeed a central courtyard is a feature common to many buildings in the old town centre. In some cases, the large front doors conceal authentic treasures with marble columns, frescoes, stuccoes, gardens and nymphæums waiting to be discovered by tourists who aren't in too much of a hurry. Opposite the entrance to the town hall, visitors can admire the Romanesque apse of the **Basilica of Saint Fedele**, which is topped by an elegant loggia and flanked by a historical Romanesque portal.

## BASILICA OF SAINT FEDELE

Of ancient origin (6th century) and rebuilt in the



11th century in Romanesque style, the church has a very unusual layout with a short central nave and side aisles, three apsidal conches laid out as a three-leaf clover and an ambulatory that, from the side aisles, continues ideally to embrace the apses. The façade on Piazza San Fedele is a 1914 refurbishment that incorporates a Renaissance rose window. Particularly beautiful are the external apse (Via Vittorio Emanuele) with an upper loggia on small columns in onion stone and the annexed "Portale del Drago" (Dragon portal), a gable-topped portal that houses a Romanesque sculptural masterpiece. Two scenes are represented - "Daniel in the lion's den" and "The Angel bringing Habakkuk" - as well as zoomorphic, phytomorphic and symbolic motives such as a

Chimera, a mermaid, a dog pointing a hare and several dragons. Inside it is possible to admire traces of the ancient decorations, including a 13th century fresco of the Blessed Virgin Mary in a mandorla.

The basilica is open every day from 8:00 to 12:00 am and from 3:30 to 7:00 pm.

Access only from Via Vittorio Emanuele.