

THE LIGHT OF RESURRECTION AT THE PERIPHERIES OF THE WORLD

FR. COSTANTINO RUGGERI'S ART



Padre Costantino Ruggeri nello studio del Convento di Canepanova - 2006

credits

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Frate Sole Foundation Archives, via Paratici 21, Pavia (Italy)

Translation:

In the peripheries of the world

The invitation not to abandon the peripheries of the world - and especially the existential peripheries - that Pope Francis has repeatedly directed to everyone, and in particular to Christians, is rooted in the certainty of a fulfilled promise: the light of the resurrection brought by Jesus Christ has entered the world forever. Even today it can be brought everywhere. People are awaiting it, because it responds to the desire present in every human being to be given new life after every sorrow, to find again the energy to live after every defeat.

The Pope's invitation doesn't refer primarily to the geography of the planet with its many centers and peripheries. In fact, there would be no center without a periphery and vice versa. The former would not exist without the latter, but whoever sees the former as a basis for a self-centered power and possession will degrade and marginalize the periphery. Therefore, the individual person forgets that he is - first and foremost - God's creature. Communities of human beings don't live in peace and nations cannot conceive of the possibility of interacting with reciprocal solidarity. The Pope urges us to change our mindset.

The art of Fr. Costantino Ruggeri proposed in this exhibit draws the viewer into an experience of beauty that is also an experience of fraternal friendship. The work of this Italian artist, a Franciscan Fr. who was active in various parts of the world, is very much in tune with Pope Francis' invitation, and helps us to understand the strong bond that Pope Francis has with St. Francis of Assisi, the saint of the Canticle of Creatures.

The renowned biographer, Fr. Bonaventure, recounted that the Saint of Assisi "used to contemplate the Most Beautiful One in all beautiful things and, through the footprints impressed in things he was following his Beloved everywhere, seeing all things as a ladder that helped him to ascend and grasp the One who is all desirable." The beauty, simplicity, and essentiality of Fr. Ruggeri's artistic work lead us today to the footprints that God - the Most Beautiful - leaves in all things. Ruggeri accomplishes it with poor mediums; his art is humble, uncomplicated. It is Franciscan art. It is born of a link between art and faith that weaves precious threads to connect the centers and peripheries of the world.



Autoritratto - tempera su cartone, 1964

The artist seeks the light

There is something in the experience of art that resembles, is similar to, the light shining in the darkness that St. John mentions at the beginning of his Gospel; a light that surrenders and entrusts itself only to love. The artist is looking for that light, he hungers for it; he imagines it resplendent, radiating and dazzling, a light that is strength, movement and life.” – Fr. C. Ruggeri



Light is the source of life and energy. In many different ways, artists have molded it as if it were matter, intangible, but no less concrete than a stone. Paintings, sculptures and architectural structures benefit from light and shadow. Those who look at them enjoy their fluid vitality and sense that they are endowed with the greatest awareness of all in the created world. For these reasons, over the centuries light has become the symbol of God in the works of artists and in the thoughts of philosophers and poets. Fr. Ruggeri's exceptional ability at capturing and modulating light through his stained-glass windows - most of them built for churches, and made of ancient mouth-blown glass - was recognized early on.



Padre Costantino Ruggeri nello studio del Convento di Canepanova, 1960



Padre Costantino Ruggeri nel chiostro del Convento di Canepanova, 1962



Padre Costantino Ruggeri incontra Le Corbusier a Parigi, 1965

Biography

Constantino Ruggeri was born in 1925 in Adro (Brescia), a small town in the Lombardy Region. At age 13 he entered the Order of the Friars minor, where he began his religious and artistic formation. He made his simple profession of vows in 1944, at the end of the Second World War. The year 1951 was significant, as he was ordained a priest in the Milan Cathedral and exhibited his paintings for the first time. Mario Sironi, a well-known artist, presented and hosted Fr. Ruggeri's artwork at the San Fedele Gallery which was run by Jesuit Fathers.

In Milan, Fr. Ruggeri interacted with such artists as Carrà, Tosi, Sironi, Fontana, Crippa, Dova, Melotti and others. It was at this time that he began painting on a continual basis. He developed quick gestures and used various techniques on canvas, wood, and cardboard. He painted frescos on public buildings and on buildings that belonged to his Order, and also displayed his works in public and personal exhibits. After a first experimental phase, his paintings became full of color and space; fluid, and flowing from the impulse of his inspiration. For him painting was an activity of his entire life, both public and private, and therefore he left us an immense collection.

Fr. Ruggeri was already a mature and renowned artist when he received a diploma in sculpture at the Academy of Brera in 1962. Several architects had already asked him to create liturgical objects and furnishings, as well as stained-glass windows, for their churches. In particular, he became friends with the architects Luigi Figini and Giovanni Michelucci. In 1954, two of his masterpieces were exhibited at the Tenth "Triennale" of Milan. By then, his work had been displayed in many exhibits of sacred furnishings and liturgical vestments. He became part of a group - founded by Cardinal Lercaro in Bologna - that supported the renewal of sacred art.

In 1959, he asked to be transferred from the Convent in Milan to the Convent of St. Mary of Canepanova, near Pavia. There, until his death in 2007, he worked in an extraordinary studio located in the attic that extended over the convent, presbytery, and choir loft of the Church. It was here that Fr. Ruggeri began his architectural projects with architect Luigi Leoni. His church projects, where the stained glass windows were always the protagonists, were sought after in many places in Italy, Japan, Africa and the Holy Land. He admired both Le Corbusier and Matisse and their influence became part of his creative work. He wanted his churches to be simple, organic in their structure and in relationship with their surroundings – places of mystery, grace and poetry – always a mystical space and a coming together of all arts. Among the many works of these years, it is worth mentioning the decoration and furnishings of the weekday Chapel in the Milan Cathedral in 1986. On October 4th, 1995 he introduced the Frate Sole Foundation at the Triennale of Milan. Since 1993 the Foundation has continued to offer every four years the Frate Sole International Prize of Sacred Architecture – a prize Fr. Ruggeri created – that to date has been awarded to Ando, Siza, Meier, Pawson and Undurraga for their churches.



Croce in ceramica, 1964

Homeland



Unfading Toil, tempera on Masonite, 1953, Frate Sole Foundation

The artist teaches us to see; he proposes us a path that, if we wish, will lead us to penetrate our everyday life, in search of its most genuine meaning. Thus, he does not forget his childhood and the world where he grew up. Fr. Ruggeri represents that world in the farmers at work, in the animals that cooperate, in the mysterious prehistoric petroglyphs carved in the stones of Lombard Valcamonica by the ancient people of Camuni.

Camuna Rose, tempera on board, 1953, Private collection



In the monastery

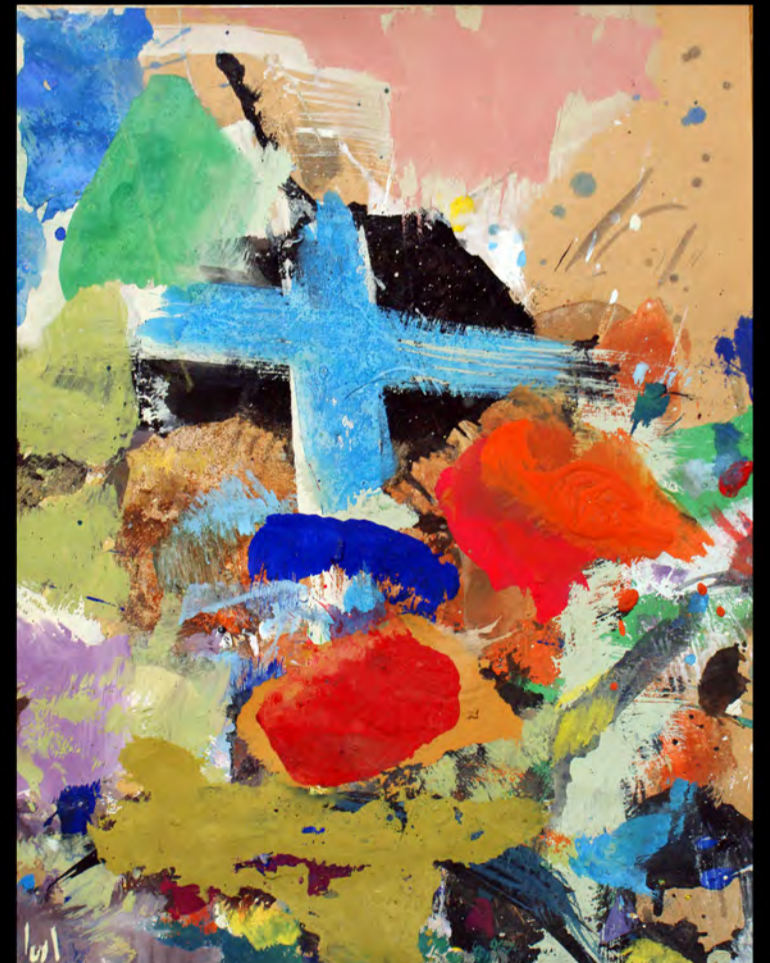


Night of Prayer, tempera on board, 1955, Frate Sole Foundation



At Matins, tempera on board, 1955, Frate Sole Foundation

The painter, a Franciscan friar, represents by plain strokes his love for the life of the convent: its silence, peace, the atmosphere of meditation radiating from his brothers' faces and gestures. He conveys his brothers' inner life and serenity, discovering in that place a beauty that evokes a brotherly friendship.



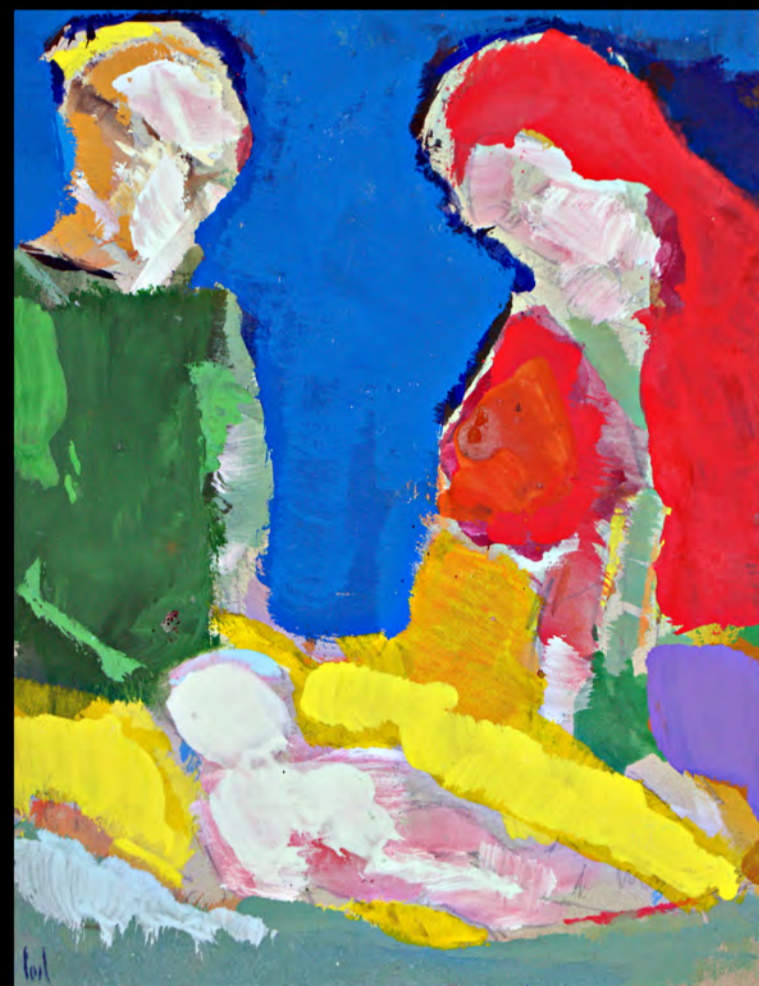
Humanity in the Divinity, tempera on board, 1971, Frate Sole Foundation

Looking at man



A Maze of Thoughts, tempera on board, 1958, Frate Sole Foundation

Contemplating humanity, the painter shows to be each time loving, ironical, sorrowful, disillusioned, admired, moved, yet never estranged or hostile. His quick stokes always captures with awe and caring his feelings and the secret moves of humanity in the others - friends, brothers, or persons he occasionally met.



Family Candor, tempera on board, 1961, Frate Sole Foundation



Little Man, tempera on board, 1962, Frate Sole Foundation

Moments of vision and communion

You need to enter the vision [...] everything is given us as a blessing.” – Fr. C. Ruggeri



On the Edge of Night, tempera on Masonite, 1967, Frate Sole Foundation

The quick and gestural strokes evoke visions of communion between the artist and the whole reality. The painting matter is quick and flowing; the colors are bright; the contrasts both strong and soft.

The artist is not afraid of life complexity, shadows and suffering: he knows that everything is fulfilled in “perfect happiness”.



Depth Without Echoes, tempera on board, 1967, Frate Sole Foundation

Landscapes



Easter Morning, tempera on Masonite, 1967, Frate Sole Foundation



Hour of Grace, tempera on Masonite, 1960, Frate Sole Foundation

In his concisely sketched landscapes, both in his representations of countryside and towns, the painter's gaze widens out to capture the harmony of color, the essence of trees and houses, the sky appearing on the line of distant horizons. The heart is widening out, along with the eye, evoking the "Canticle of Creatures," by St. Francis of Assisi.

Everyday a painting, always



A Flying Dove, tempera on Masonite, 1968, Frate Sole Foundation



Our Lady with the Child, 1968, Frate Sole Foundation

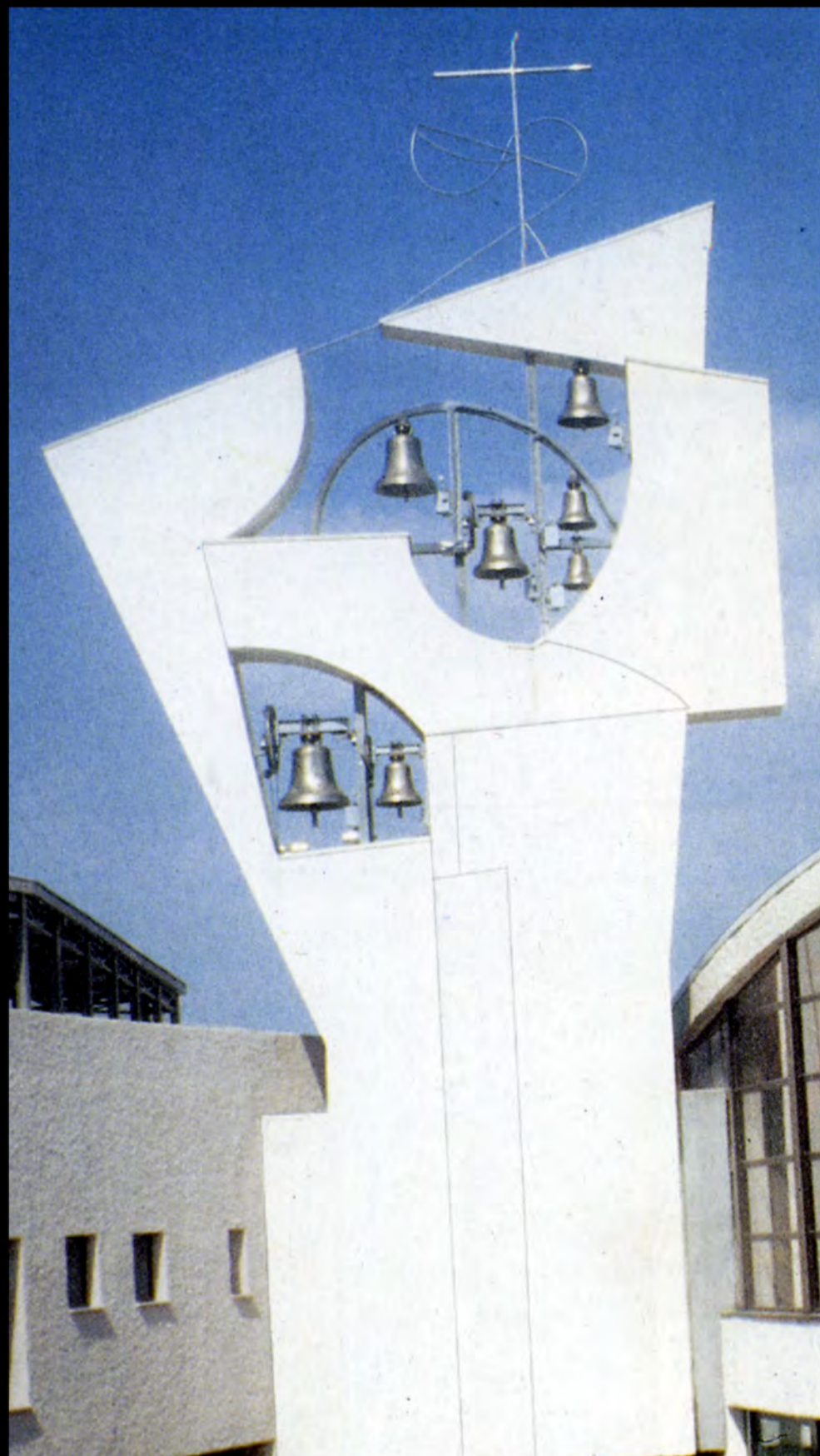
The whole of reality speaks to the artist: he hears its message and its echoes of harmony that we, busy people, cannot perceive. Fr. Ruggeri captured images of this reality every day; his hand reproduced them in painting, going from concise realism to abstraction: he wished "to have dove's eyes in order to see God's quivering face."

White Sculpture



Signs and spaces to celebrate the sacraments

We live in a world of signs, but we have lost the reality they point towards [...]. Say that, what importance do we attach to words like: "God", "Christ", "Grace"? What does making the sign of the Cross mean to us? Going down on our knees? Revelation of a supernatural reality? Or a shadowy figure? Or an ascent to the sky? Or rather carrying out formalities? [...]. Just here, we have to start changing. The great words, the great forms of the Church flow from essential depths." --Romano Guardini



Sacred furnishing

Also holy furnishings must attest that the temple is neither an escape nor a sacred separation from man's home, but it is its fulfillment, its liberation, its glory." --Fr. C. Ruggeri



Collaborations with church architects

Cross in concrete and glass fragments; Church of Our Lady of the Poor in Milan, Italy; Architects: Luigi Pollini and Gino Figini, 1954



Procession of the Hospital Saints; Chapel of the Hospital of St. Charles, Milan, Italy; Architect: Giò Ponti, 1964-69



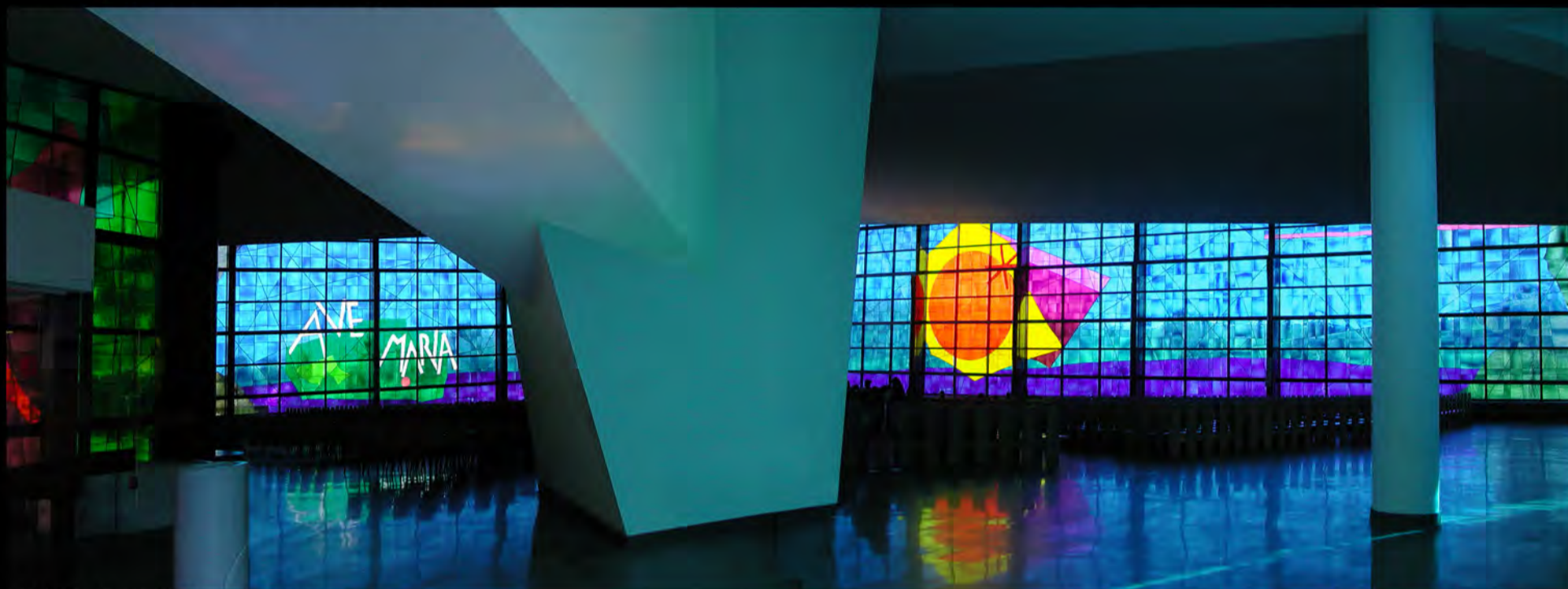
Weekday Chapel in Milan Cathedral, Lombardy, Italy ¹⁶



Either in central urban places, or in marginalized suburbs, through the mass and sacraments celebrations, every small or large Christian community lives its unity on earth, with the Bishop of its own diocese, with the Pope and with the whole Christian community in Heaven, with the angels, the saints, and the Virgin Mary, along with the Trinity. Through these connections, the churches which are symbolic of the unique Church and anticipation of the heavenly Jerusalem, are steps in everyone's path to faith. For this reason, over the centuries, the Christians have wanted churches and beautiful liturgical objects.

Architecture, mystical space

The *mystical space* is in fact the reason and the ferment of my present experience [...] It is, just to give you an idea, an absolute space, not a relative one, it is an open space, not a closed one. It can be a sun ray on a wall, a stretched rope between two trees, a flower, a stone. Looking for its evidence is the most exciting and difficult aesthetic experience for an artist, an architect, a painter and a sculptor, because first of all it is a man's adventure, and for me it is also a seeker's adventure of God's *shadow* in the light of evidence, or of God's *light* in the shadow within the limits of the creation." -- Fr. C. Ruggeri



Picture of the Sanctuary of the Divine Love in Rome



Picture of a Cell

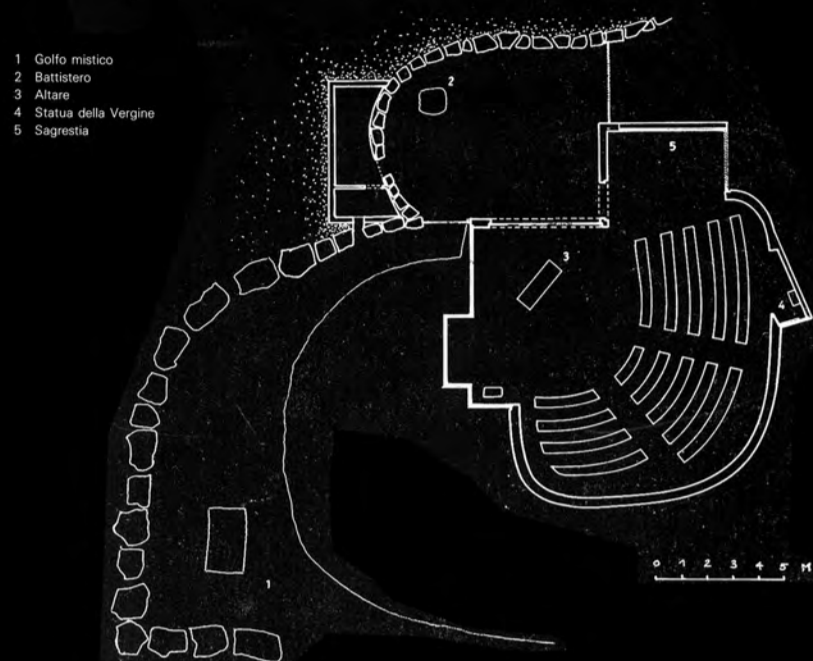
The Church is the place of the "feast of faith" (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI), a feast that brings closer to one another those who attend and frees them from the separation from others that today's man experiences. Art inside the Church is the sign of the feast of man meeting God and enjoying His company: this is the meaning of Fr. Ruggeri's art, of his stained glasses, his churches, his love for the sun and the sky, the fields, the rocks, the earth.

St. Mary of Joy's church, Varese, Lombardy, Italy



Understanding contemporary art is difficult to those who are not initiated to high aesthetical appreciation. Yet, as the famous philosopher and pedagogist John Dewey stated last century, art is born from experience; it lives on and it is communicated as an experience, therefore it reveals essential human features, it discloses something of the deep elementary original human evidences, it reveals something of the sense of mystery that all of us perceive at the very core of our being. That is why peoples have their particular forms of art; for this reason any artist is totally involved in his artistic production. It is very important to acknowledge how valuable art in churches is, just as an experience offered to anyone, since they have to be useful, stable and beautiful, able to welcome and comfort, they have to be ready to link together those who gather there and are united by the experience of praising God.

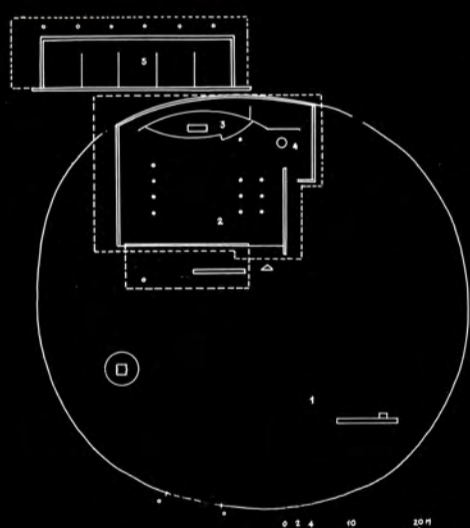
St. Mary of Joy's church, Varese, Lombardy, Italy



The first church by Fr. Ruggeri was St. Mary of Joy in Varese. The project started in 1974 and the construction, with the help of the Architect Luigi Leoni was brought forward in between 1975 and 1977. The structure is built in concrete on two levels with a basement for meeting halls and a mezzanine. The churchyard is covered, there is a celebration hall that can hold more than 100 people, and there is the baptismal font.

St. Francis's Church, Kayongozi, Burundi, Africa

If Christ became incarnate, why cannot the artist do the same [...]. I went to Africa, not just to get rid of Western culture, but to be one with the Africans' eyes and heart [...] We have certainly set off, we have gone into a problem, but it will be worked out only when the people of that continent will manage to dream of and build by themselves, not only their houses but also their churches, without the instructors', the advisors, the overqualified technicians' help."
-- Fr. C. Ruggeri

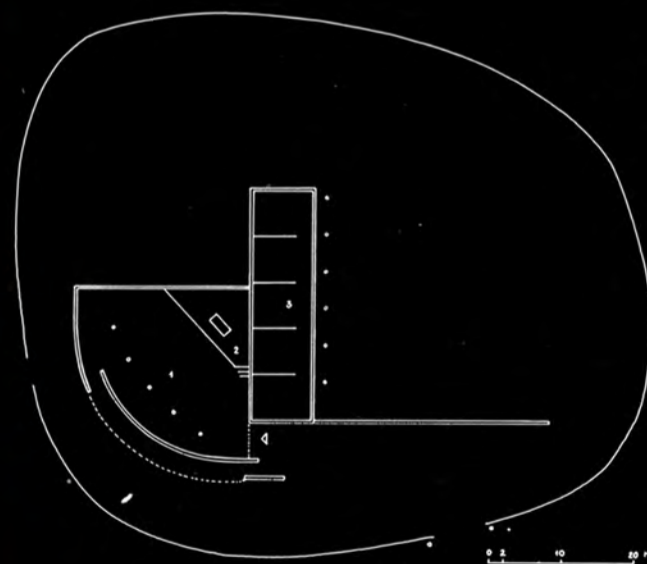


- 1 Rugo
- 2 Aula ecclesiale
- 3 Presbiterio
- 4 Battistero
- 5 Spazi per la catechesi



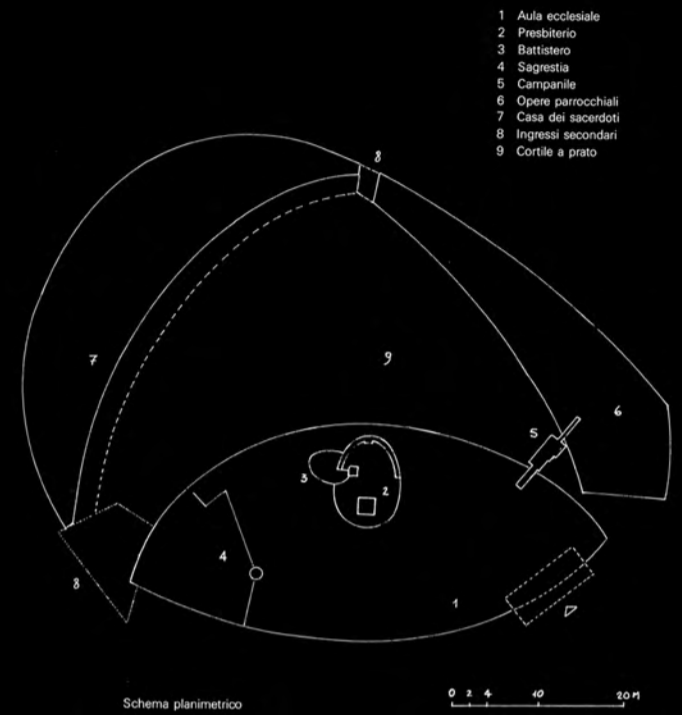
The churches in Kayongozi, built between 1979 and 1983 and in Nyamugari (1978-1980) and Nyakayi, all in Burundi, Africa, have been conceived like a "wild tree [springing] from the earth to be clothed with its colors and smell its perfumes". They are simple and noble like the indigenous houses that surrounds them.

Nyakayi's Church of St. Bernardine, Burundi, Africa



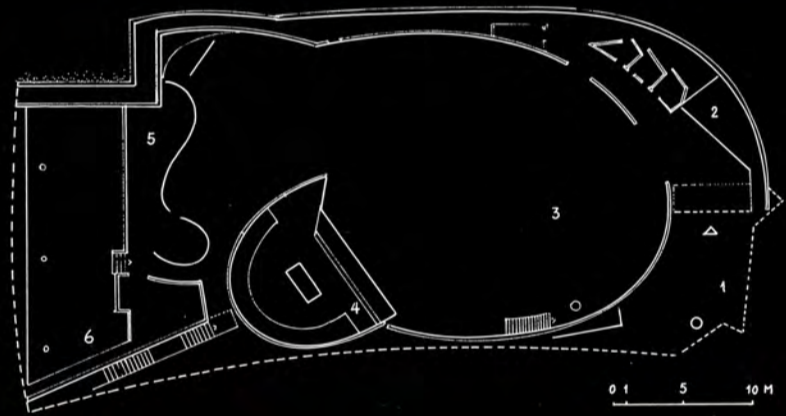
- 1 Aula ecclesiale
- 2 Presbiterio
- 3 Spazi per la catechesi

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux Church, Rome, Lazio, Italy



The parish complex with parish buildings and church dedicated to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux in Centocelle, Rome, was designed in 1988 and built between 1989 and 1999. It is a single structure developed around a grassy courtyard. The inside of the church is bathed in colorful light filtering through the glass windows covering all of the walls.

Church of the Tabernacle, Genoa, Liguria, Italy

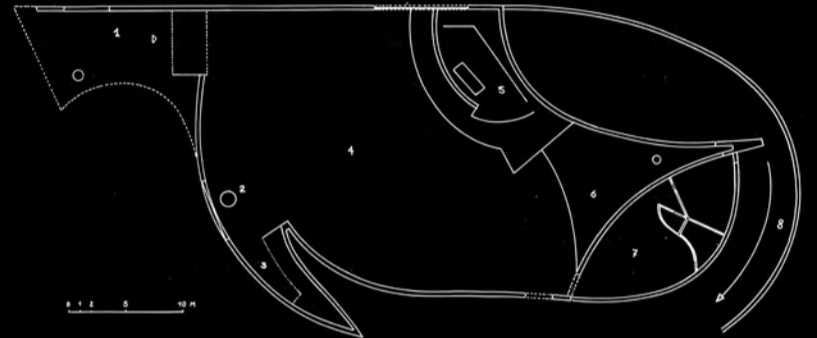


The important parish complex, dominated by the Church of The Tabernacle, was designed in 1978 and finished in 1982. It is built of reinforced concrete and it flows over four floors. There is a garage on the ground floor, while the church hall, seating seven hundred people, with its innovative liturgical furnishings suffused by the predominantly bluish light from the large windows, occupies a floor that is set between the other two that are intended for parish activities.

Saint Paul's Church, Rho, Lombardy, Italy



The parish church of Saint Paul in Rho (Milan), designed in 1987 and finished in 1991, stands out with its large curvilinear outer wall that rises to a pointed top. The internal space is dominated by the huge window where the large disk of the sun is enthroned.



- 1 Sagrato coperto
- 2 Battistero
- 3 Penitenzieria
- 4 Aula ecclesiale
- 5 Presbiterio
- 6 Cappella eucaristica
- 7 Sagrestia
- 8 Rampa al garage

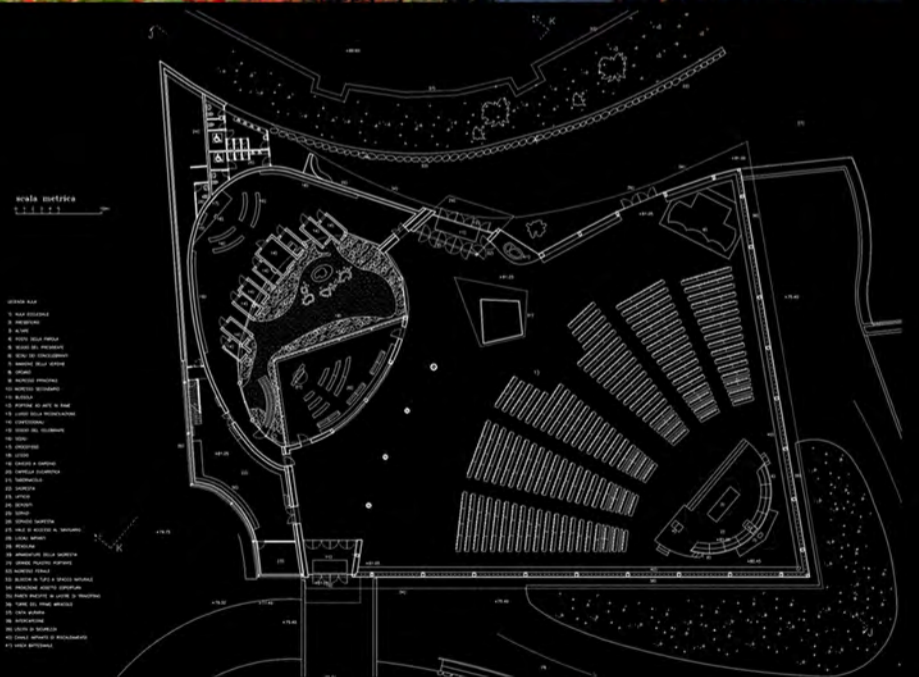


New Shrine of Divine Love, Rome, Lazio, Italy



The New Shrine of Divine Love complex in Rome, designed in 1987 and finished in 1999, is made of several buildings, to create convivial spaces and the priests' residence. In addition to the Shrine there is a wide 'blue grotto' dedicated to the Virgin Mary that seats fifteen hundred people and also has a standing room that holds five hundred people.

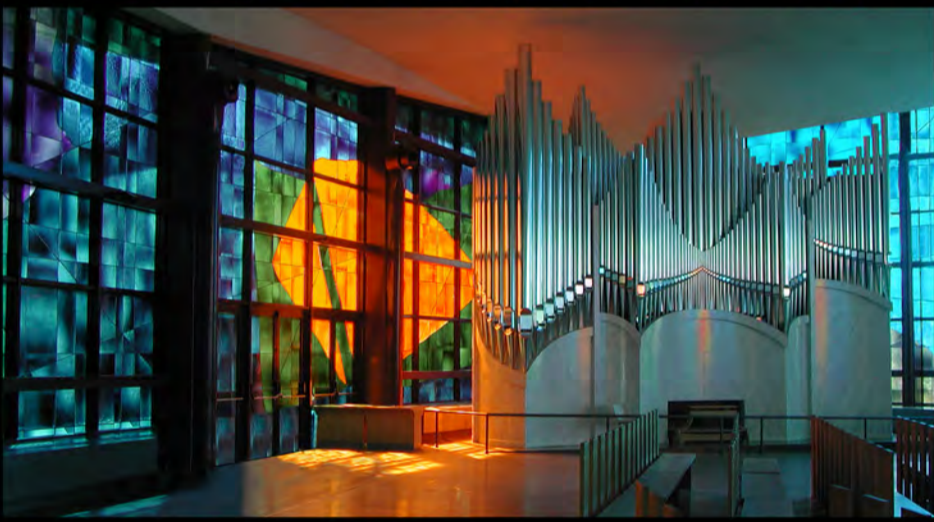
The wide top is made of reinforced concrete and is supported by a single, large, molded pillar. The outer walls are colored glass, with large signs and writings, and the molded white ceiling defines an internal space that is meant to embrace and bless people's lives not just at sacramental times, but in each moment.



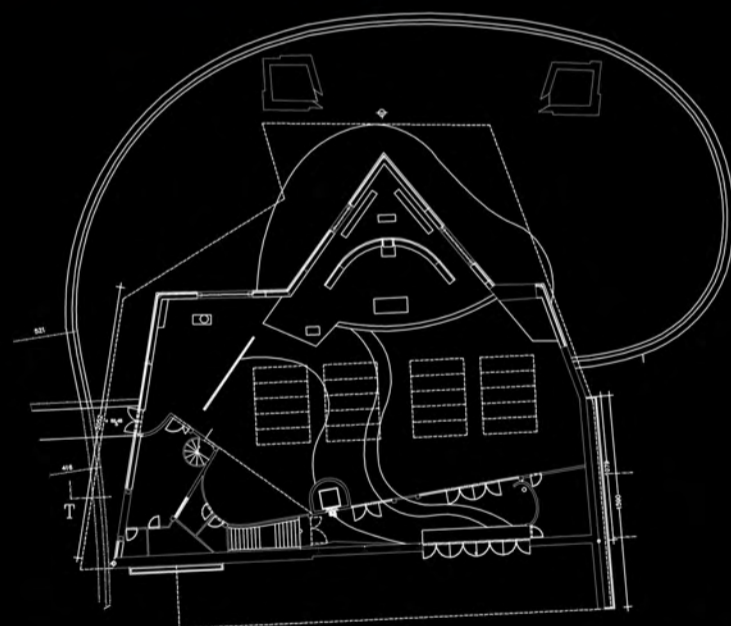
New Shrine of Divine Love, Rome, Lazio, Italy



New Shrine of Divine Love, Rome, Lazio, Italy



Saint Francis Xavier's Church, Yamaguchi, Japan



La chiesa di San Francesco Saverio della missione dei Gesuiti è stata progettata nel 1993-4 e costruita sulla collina a nord della città di Yamaguchi, in Giappone. Movimentata dalle interessanti forme triangolari, che si ripetono in pianta e in alzato, ha due torri, alte circa 40 metri, una delle quali conclusa da un sistema campanario in ferro, piegato in eleganti e aerei riccioli.

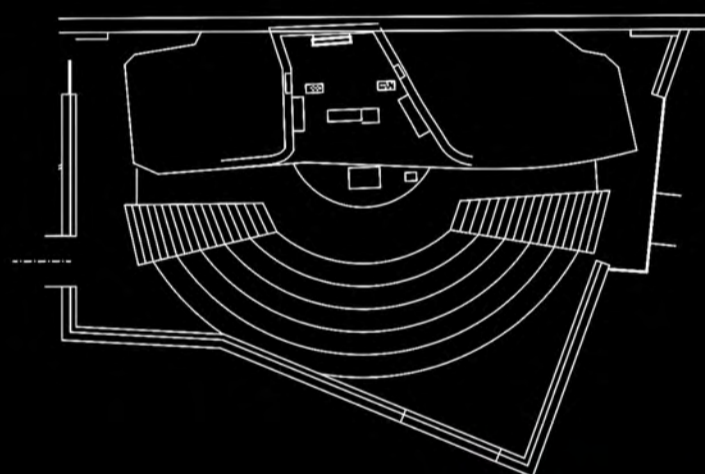
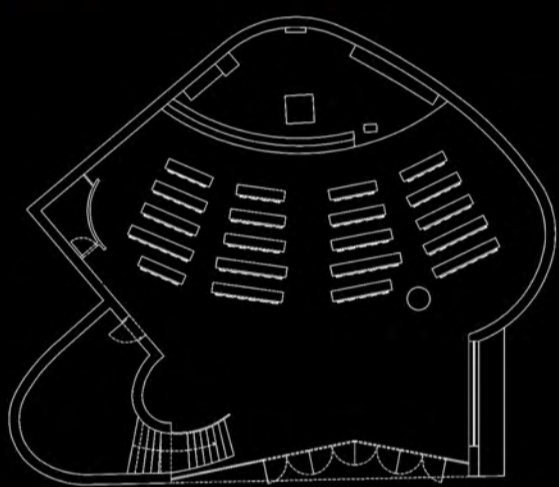
Saint Francis Xavier's Church, Yamaguchi, Japan



Shrine of Our Lady of Milk and Theotokos Chapel, Bethlehem Memorial of Saint Paul's conversion, Damascus, Holy Land



Fr. Ruggeri gave general instructions for building the complexes in the Holy Land. The architects Luigi Leoni and Chiara Rovati provided the final design and work supervision in the years 2002-2008.



The Way of the Cross in Adro, Brescia, Italy

Deposition

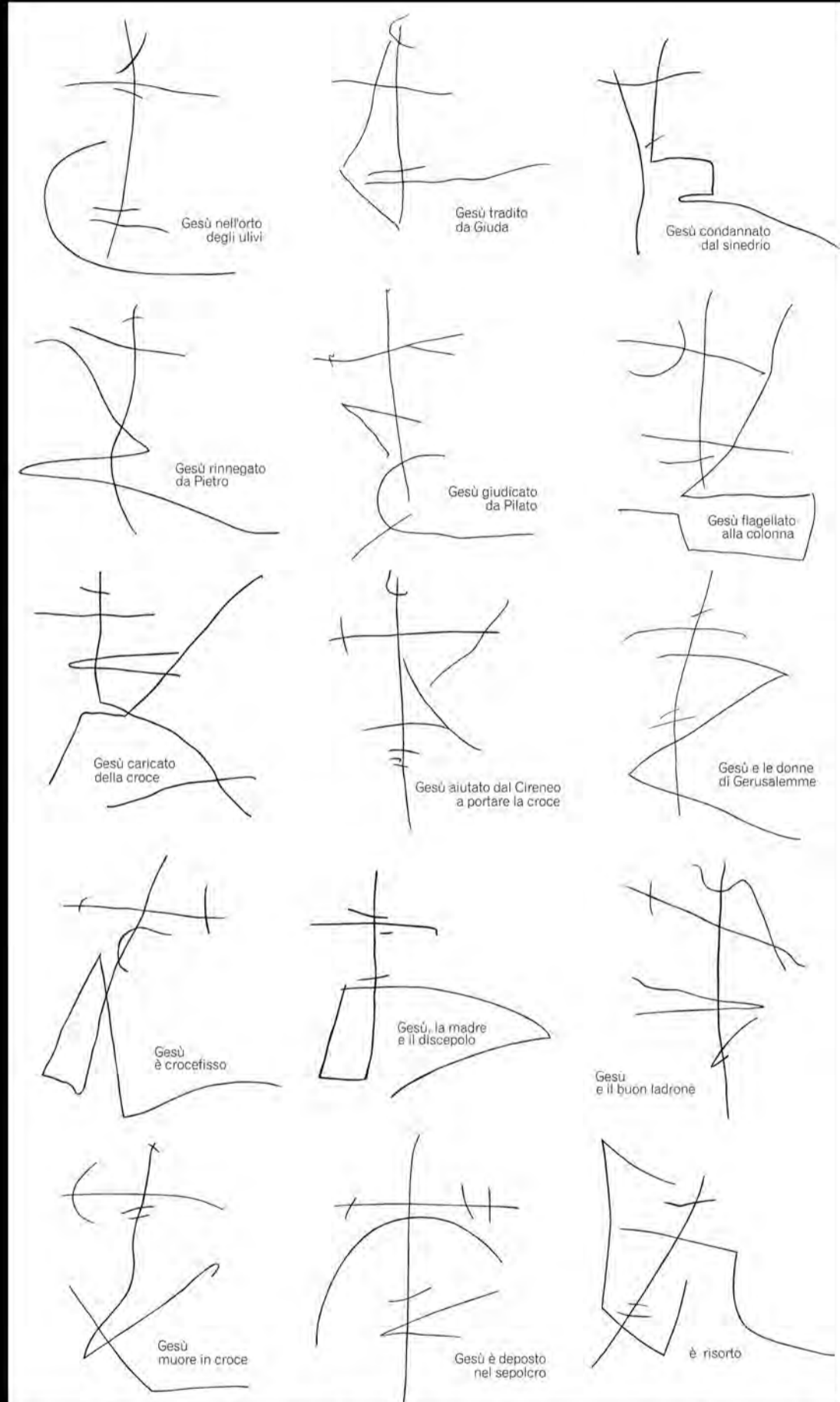


STAZIONE XIV

GESÙ DEPOSTO NEL SEPOLCRO

The Way of the Cross is a form of prayer and meditation which is still repeated today everywhere in the world to remember Jesus Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection: it is the memory of the central event of Christian faith, expressed through endless artistic variations over the centuries. Fr. Ruggeri came back to it over and over again to "recount" it through his art; he carried out his work totally aware of the destiny of salvation that Jesus Christ brought to man. For the 2004 Way of the Cross in Adro, his hometown, the stations were made of mosaics on stone blocks.

The Third Millennium Way of the Cross



Simple lines on a white sheet indicate Jesus' positions along the path that brought Him to Golgotha to be crucified. The Way of the Cross was made in 2003 with 10x10 inch tiles of white crystalline marble.

I	II	III
IV	V	VI
VII	VIII	IX
X	XI	XII
XIII	XIV	XV

The Way of the Cross

Resurrection

"...I always think, speak and work in terms of resurrection, or rather, in terms of our Lord Jesus's resurrection. That is the spoken or unspoken reason and goal of life's entire dynamics of." --Fr. C. Ruggeri



Panel with bronze Resurrection, Study for Research of Sacred Art

Here is perfect gladness



Preaching to the Birds, Frate Sole Foundation

Saint Francis "[...] He came to a place where a huge number of different kinds of birds had gathered. As soon as the Saint of God saw them, he eagerly ran there and greeted them as if they were endowed with reason. [...]. <Oh, my brother birds, you strongly have to praise your Creator who gave you feathers and wings to fly, He has granted you the purity of the air and takes care of you, so that you do not need to worry about anything>. While He uttered these words, and similar ones, the small birds, moving around in a beautiful way, started to crane their neck, to stretch their wings forward, to open their beaks, and to stare at Him [...], all of them stood still until the Saint made the sign of the cross and allowed them to fly away with the blessing of the man of God. This is all that Francis's brothers contemplated while waiting for Him on the way." -- Fr. Bonaventura , *Legenda major Sancti Francisci*

Here is perfect gladness



*Perfect Gladness, tempera on Masonite, 1980,
Private collection*

It is well known that Giotto made this event famous thanks to the fresco in the Basilica of Assisi. Together with the birds, the Saint's brothers - who are not only watching but also contemplating - rejoice in the harmony of creation.

**All arts are a prophecy of this harmony
if the artists do not distance themselves from God
their creator and work to praise His Glory.**