Rome Strolling - Around Navona

Let’s explore the heritage around Piazza Navona. You will find that it pays to explore the heritage that is otherwise bypassed when heading to the more touristy spots. You will find eager and adventurous visitors in these spots. You will fill 2-3 hours with an array of art and architecture - in this case of the Baroque period of the city, when Rome is again a economic and political powerhouse developing since 1500 (This blooming artistic and architectural setting starts with the Renaissance Neo-Classical style).

Sant’Andrea della Valle (A) [http://g.co/maps/t7cbh](http://g.co/maps/t7cbh)
This is a very important church in Rome, built and decorated in the 17th century by most important architects and painters. As is common, it took a few decades to complete the building, so the architecture is responsibility of a couple of architects: Giacomo della Porta at its beginning in 1590, and then with a new patron and fresh funds by a Pope-related cardinal, with more grandiose plan by Carlo Maderno. The interior layout is very special: it has only one wide, single nave, creating a very scenic setting (theatrical you might say). Usually, the decoration in the interior is completed in shorter times as in this
case between 1630 and 1650. You can imagine how important the commission was for its decoration. Two of Carracci’s pupils, Giovanni Lanfranco and Domenichino were bidding to be in charge (a very common scenario in the art world). Lanfranco had been chosen by Cardinal Alessandro, but much later the Ludovisi papacy of Pope Gregory XV favored the Bolognese, Domenichino. In the end, both artists were employed: Lanfranco was in charge of the important dome with the scene of Glory of Paradise; Domenichino in charge of painting the evangelists on the sides (and also the scenes of Saint Andrew’s life, including the altar crucifixion. The last thing to be built is the facade by Rinaldi in 1665.

The dome at Sant’Andrea is the second tallest in the city, after Saint Peter’s (But only third largest). And it has a special place in one of the most important Italian musical traditions: one of its chapels (the first one to the left) is the setting for the first act of the opera Tosca by Giaccomo Puccini (Acts 2 and 3 will take place in Palazzo Farnese and Castel Sant’Angelo, respectively. Tosca is a very Roman tragedy premiered in 1900 at the Roman Opera House! (This venue is located near the train station and has now a Fascist style façade, while the interior is the original lavish 19th century decoration.)

Piazza de Massimi (B) http://g.co/maps/vjunm
In this trapezoidal piazza you will find an important Renaissance style house Palazzo Massimo Istoriato that belonged to a wealthy member of the Roman community (I would guess a Northern Italian Florentine fellow). The façade is decorated with the sgraffito technique made by two Florentine artists: a layer of white plaster is covered with a layer of black or darker plaster and then case scratching the upper layer so as to produce an outline drawing in the color of the lower layer. (Do not confuse with graffiti, which you can probably admire, alas, also in this piazza. This “technique” was a vivacious in the past of Rome as it is today). A lone Roman column is what remains of the temple of …..

Take the nice medieval Via de la Piccola Cuccagna (sometimes a bit smelly) and circumvent the large Palazzo Braschi (or pass through its courtyard), that houses the Museum of Rome (It often has interesting exhibits, as is the case, as I write this, on French Vedutisti (landscapers). You cannot go wrong with Roman landscapes.

Pasquino (C) http://g.co/maps/9kv6w
The Northwest corner of the trapezoidal Palazzo Braschi has an altar to the Pasquino, a 2nd century statue of which the torso remains (It is of Hellenistic style and was part of a larger scene related to the warriors of Troy). Corner altars or sanctuaries like these are a reminiscence of Classical Rome. Today you will find Christian Madonna altars around the city. Note the pamphlets under the statue: poems, declamations, denunciations satiric discourse or simply lampoons. One Roman cardinal in the 16th century placed the statue close to where it was unearthed and draped the marble torso in a toga pinning it with Latin epigrams on the occasion of Saint Mark’s Day. The word pasquinade refers to this tradition of public satirical texts. Pasquino is therefore known as a
“talking statue”, where the popular dissatisfaction with the Church government and its injustices were vented, until today as you can see and, perhaps, read.

Pass Piazza Navona at its Southern side: [http://g.co/maps/75w9z](http://g.co/maps/75w9z)

(K) Fancy a good coffee? [http://goo.gl/maps/LhpF](http://goo.gl/maps/LhpF) (Perhaps one of the best in Rome?). Take a right on Via dei Sediari (and then a left) and you arrive at Piazza Sant’Eustachio. Note the many artisanal basketry shops that work with reed and cane! When you get to the piazza turn around to admire the very unique dome in Salomonic style! and slender cupola crowning the church of Sant’Ivo.

Remember! The easiest way to have a coffee in Italy is to have it al banco (at the bar). The price sitting is double or more. Pay first at the cashier and present at the bar. Don't forget to pay for the cornetto (a sweet croissant) or the tramezzino (a small sandwich in a triangular shape). Know more about the rich variety of coffee: [http://goitaly.about.com/od/foodandwineofitaly/a/italian_coffee.htm](http://goitaly.about.com/od/foodandwineofitaly/a/italian_coffee.htm)

Retrace your steps back to Corso Rinascimento.

Sant’Ivo in Sapienza (Archivio di Stato, D, [http://g.co/maps/atkps](http://g.co/maps/atkps)).

Find the small door on Corso Rinascimento and enter the courtyard. This is a jewel of Roman Baroque architecture by Carlo Borromini, a real innovator and explorer of new architectural shapes and volumes. (You will be able to see other of his works close by: St Agnese in Agone on Piazza Navona).

As you face the church note the contrasting curved shapes of the facade. (The courtyard itself is nothing special. Borromini would make more interesting arches as in Palazzo Barberini). Overall, Borromini did not like straight or flat volumes: the facade is concave, escaping away from us, amplifying the space.

(Indeed, Borromini was very good at building in constrained spaces yet providing strikingly large volumes - an optical effect no doubt results of his combination of concave and convex segments as in San Carlo - Barberini and Carlino will be the topic of another stroll). The church dome is not circular but shaped with lobes. The dome surface is not smooth but with a staircase. The cupola is tall crowned by a campanile with a spiral ramp. This is altogether an intricate conception that embodies the character of Borromini’s Baroque architecture.
Short detour! Water! Via dei Staderari http://g.co/maps/vp5b3

There is a water mountain where you can replenish your bottles. Remember that you can drink this water fountains which you find often around. Be green! Reuse your bottles. Further down the street is a remarkable Roman stone basin that serves as a pool, no doubt obtained from one of the numerous baths in the city. Do not drink this water!

**Palazzo Madama** (Senate, E, http://g.co/maps/dgkd5)

This palace houses the Italian Senate since the formation of the Italian state, so it has had happier times. At the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries it was the residence of Cardinal Del Monte, who would have the famous painter, Michelangelo Merisi, *Caravaggio*, living in its upper quarters (the servant quarters with very small windows). Del Monte was for a short time, in the very beginning of his turbulent life as an artist, *Caravaggio’s* Maecenas. To see what Caravaggio achieved follow to next stop.

**San Luigi dei Francesi** (F, http://g.co/maps/7yajv)

This, the official French church in Rome, houses Caravaggio *Cycle of Saint Mathew* funded by the will of Cardinal Contarelli with specific instructions for the content of the commission supervised by Del Monte. The cycle of three painting for the chapel comprised the Calling, the Inspiration, and the Martyrdom of Saint Matthew. It is a novelty in the art world that paintings of this size are made on canvas and framed rather than executed as a fresco directly on the chapel walls.

What are the these innovations that Caravaggio introduces at the turn of the 17th century in the technique and content of his work? (An artist only rediscovered in the 20th century). In technique, the artificial use of light to enhance where the action happens is remarkable (it is like in the theatre!). This was known as the technique of *chiaroscuro* (the juxtaposition of lighter and darker shades) but Caravaggio takes it to the limit. There is no way that artificial light can concentrate so intensely of very small parts of faces and bodies (were Caravaggio is indicating to us where the real action is). You might also come across the concept of *Tenebrism*, to mean the shift from light to dark with little intermediate value. But In Caravaggio’s case it is more about realism: he does not want to inject his paints with tenebrous, dark situations, but rather convey everyday, real-life situations.

In content, the familiarity and sensuousness in which he portrays saintly figures was controversial from the very start (for some). Indeed, the first version of the Inspiration, presented Matthew in a paupers clothing with dirty feet and the angel much closer to Matthew as they touch each other. The painting was altogether rejected: a clean Matthew and the angel way above him were essential in the final version wee see today. (One of the rejections -the Inspiration- was in a Berlin museum but was destroyed in the war.)
So there is a radical naturalism which included mostly a rich and detail representation of human expressions and moods. He breaks with the understated exploration of character in human portrayals (or, put in another way, expands greatly on the strides made decades earlier by his namesake). His portraits and representation emphasize the drama in human faces (much like his namesake's Moses) but includes a new array of sentiments and situations (with the same old actors, as in the case of Bacchus: pubescent, sensual, sleepish).

Do not forget to turn on those lights! It is worth it!

The last stop in this stroll is an important one to continue with the thread on Caravaggio... Remember to reach these churches before 12pm. They will close for lunch. You may always start with spot G and walk your way back. If you do so, after your visit to spot A at Sant'Andrea della Valle, take the street to the right and follow it for about five blocks until you reach Forno Roscioli, one of the best bakeries in Rome, with a fantastic pizza al taglio (See the note on pizza).

San Agostino (G, http://g.co/maps/gbw9q)
Did Caravaggio dare represent the Virgin Mary as a poor woman? Worst yet, as a destitute, asking for charity in a street corner? Judge for yourself in the Church of San Agostino, in paint that you will find in the first chapel to the left of the entrance. It was not that daring really, as Caravaggio understood saintly people of the church as people like any other. In this case the Virgin Mary as a street dweller, with her child on her arms. Two pilgrims recognize her and kneel in reverence. Caravaggio is saying that the aura and sanctity of the Virgin surpasses her poor state, barefoot and soiled clothing and the believers do recognize her. This painting survived despite the revolution Caravaggio starts in the representation of the most important representatives of the catholic Church.

Restaurants (R, http://g.co/maps/tbrgr)
As you finish (or start from G to A) this stroll you will be interested in a good place to sit down for a good meal. A small viccolo off Via delle Copelle lead to a small piazza where there is a morning market. Three restaurants on the viccolo are a good place to relax with a good meal. They are, in the order I prefer them: Da Mario, Macheronni, Casa Copelle. Check their menus first...they vary in price... and find your preferred Roman dish (for me it is Carbonara). They might not serve pizza for lunch.

Pantheon (P) & Gelato http://goo.gl/maps/PZcc
Finally, after lunch, stroll down to Piazza della Rotonda, where you find the best Classic building in Rome, the Pantheon. As you face the Pantheon, on the right side of it is Cremeria Monteforte, and excellent gelato place. It is a bit expensive, but excellent quality. http://goo.gl/maps/kMWB