

THE NEW INTESA SANPAOLO MUSEUM AT VIA TOLEDO 177, NAPLES

Gallerie d'Italia – Naples, Museum of Intesa Sanpaolo

The building of the Banco di Napoli, designed by Marcello Piacentini, was inaugurated on 9 May 1940, as the modern headquarters of the ancient institution. The building stands on part of the lot formerly occupied by the large complex of San Giacomo which saw, from the 1530s, the construction of a church and a hospital dedicated to the patron saint of Spain, under the initiative of the viceroy Pedro de Toledo, as a religious and welfare institution of reference for the Spaniards residing in the city. The presence since 1597 of the ancient Banco di San Giacomo e Vittoria, which during the French decade became part of the Banco delle Due Sicilie and, in the post-unification period, of the Banco di Napoli, has been a distinctive and permanent feature. Today this feature is renewed in Intesa Sanpaolo's desire to locate the Neapolitan branch of the Gallerie d'Italia there.

During the 19th century the area was affected by the settlement of the headquarters of the financial offices, and later by that of the Bourbon State Ministries designed by Stefano Gasse. In the 1930s the partial demolition of this imposing building provided the occasion for the construction of a grandiose and modern headquarters for the Neapolitan banking institution, through the involvement of the architect of reference of the time.

Towards the end of 1938, Piacentini undertook the project for the building, designing the exterior and the architectural layout, the details of the interior rooms, the decorations, the coverings, the lighting fixtures made by Fontana Arte, and the furnishing elements. The design of the main façade shows the monumentality typical of public buildings by Piacentini, with a clear reworking in a modernist key of classical and Michelangelo-style elements, such as the giant order, the imposing basement with large windows—which seem to emerge from the stone—and the massive central block with five arches, where the alternation between the arched and architraved system recalls formal solutions referable to the great Renaissance palaces. In addition, within this same figurative experience we can see the insertion of the traditional tripartition of the façade, with the austere basement in Billiemi stone, the intermediate band in travertine and the closing attic. The front of the building is set back from the property line of the other buildings on via Toledo, giving a greater sense of grandeur to the façade. The austerity of the main façade is mitigated in the inner courtyards, where the use of brick refers to contemporary German and American experiments.

A distinctive aspect of the entire project is the great attention paid to the choice of materials. The grey Billiemi stone and the travertine, already mentioned, contribute to give solemnity to the façade. The red granite of the columns of the vestibule prelude to the green Issorie marble of the floor and to the pink Vallestrona marble of the walls of the great hypostyle hall of the caskets, the largest among those developed at that time. The monumental staircase, with stained glass windows by Luigi Parisio, leads to the second floor, where the Ethiopian marble of the Salone delle Assemblee enjoys the warm light diffused through the refined large windows shielded by alabaster slabs. A grand double-height space with a coffered vault and flat lunettes that recalls the basilicas of the Roman era.

Every detail of the building appears to be under the full control of the designer, from the design of the marble floor and wall coverings, the wooden double doors, the lamps and chandeliers, to the tiles used in lesser rooms and the use of concrete and glass cement in the garage.

Worth noting also is Nicola Pagliara's 1986 intervention on the façade of Via Toledo, which enriches Piacentini's austere façade through precious furnishing elements such as tubs, flower boxes and seats.