# Churches and Chapels: Projects of Carlo Marchionni

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Carlo Marchionni, 'Roman architect, draughtsman, sculptor, most excellent engineer',[1] descended from a family originally from the Marche region, and after an initial training as a sculptor, studied architecture with the Roman master Filippo Barigioni (1672–1753) at the Accademia di San Luca, where in 1728 he won the first prize in the First Class.[2] That same year he became house architect to the Albani family, in the service of Cardinals Alessandro and Annibale, to whose family he would remain bound for his entire life.

Between 1730 and 1748, Marchionni was active as an architect, but above all as a sculptor and designer of decorative apparatus for festivals. It was only in 1752, after the death of Nicola Salvi and the departure for Naples of Luigi Vanvitelli and Ferdinando Fuga, that Marchionni was able to become one of the most renowned architects in Rome. Thanks to the mediation of the Albani cardinals, in 1752 he succeeded Vanvitelli in the camerale administration, and in 1754 succeeded his teacher Filippo Barigioni at the fabric of St. Peter's, whose direction he assumed after the death of Vanvitelli himself (1773). Since the latter had by then taken up residence in Naples, Marchionni had in practice become responsible for all works at St. Peter's from 1754 onwards, and it was precisely thanks to his position as camerale architect that in 1756 he was entrusted with the design of the port of Ancona. Marchionni was a highly esteemed artist: in 1740 he became an honorary member of the Accademia di San Luca, and in 1775 he was elected its Prince. His career reflects the Roman patronage system, based on connections and the protection of fellow countrymen by their patrons.[3] When, on 29 August 1786, in Via della Croce in Rome, the inventory of the architect Carlo Marchionni—who had died the previous day—was drawn up and assessed, alongside 'more than four hundred and seventy paintings, various sculptures in marble, plaster and terracotta, some architectural-decorative models, a collection of antique cameos, drawings [...], and a very rich library,' there were also found 'Tomi n.□ 9 legati alla francese pensieri, e studij d'architettura del defonto Carlo Marchionni alla rag(ion)e di scudi 5 il tomo = scudi 45' [Nine volumes, French-bound, of thoughts and studies of architecture by the late Carlo Marchionni, valued at 5 scudi per volume = 45 scudi].[4] Also mentioned are four volumes of landscape drawings by Marchionni and five containing caricatures,[5] one preserved at the Vatican Library and another at the Biblioteca Palatina of Parma, [6] which also holds an album of landscape drawings.[7]

The fact that Marchionni collected as many as nine albums of architectural drawings by his own hand reflects a very particular disposition. Of these volumes—many of which relate to Villa Albani—only three have been preserved in Rome, in the possession of the Torlonia princes, and contain over three hundred sheets with architectural designs, though unfortunately they are not accessible for consultation. In 1967, Joachim Gaus published a provisional inventory in which two of the albums were dated to 1763 and 1778 respectively.[8] The Martin-von-Wagner Museum at the University of Würzburg holds approximately one hundred and eighty drawings by Marchionni, which Wagner himself—an artistic agent of King Ludwig I of Bavaria—had purchased in Rome in the early nineteenth century. These are believed to derive from two albums from Marchionni's estate that were subsequently unbound.[9] Another eighty drawings by Marchionni from the Roman Piancastelli collection came to the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York, and here too the material is thought to have been extracted from dismembered albums.[10] A small group of drawings is held at the Civic Library of Jesi,[11] while a series of Marchionni drawings depicting Roman bridges, from the estate of the English architect James Gibbs (1682–1755), are now in the possession of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Individual sheets, finally, are found in both public and private international collections, and quite recently the Princeton University Art Museum and the National Gallery of Ottawa have been able to acquire previously unknown sheets by Carlo Marchionni.

It is almost certain that the album in question, entitled Disegni di Carlo Marchionni Architetto, e Scultore Romano [Drawings by Carlo Marchionni, Architect and Roman Sculptor], is one of the volumes from the versatile artist's estate. The date of 1759 should correspond to the year in which the album was begun. The designs contained therein were executed between 1752 and 1764 and add new works to Marchionni's catalogue. Until now, his work on the modernisation of the Chapel of Relics in the old Sacristy of St. Peter's was unknown, as was the design for a church for Prince Ruspoli near Riano, and the designs for the choir lofts of San Pietro in Bologna. The album contains the only known designs by Marchionni for the construction of the new San Domenico in Ancona, documents the—now destroyed—altar in the cathedral of Spoleto, and a series of over twenty sheets demonstrating the design process for the Trionfi Chapel in the church of San Nicola in Ancona, likewise destroyed. Also previously unknown was the fact that Marchionni had apparently submitted designs for altars intended for abroad, specifically for Germany and Spain. The name Piero Pieri inscribed on the cover identifies the antique dealer who evidently owned this album at the end of the nineteenth century and who had specialised in the

field of graphic arts.[12] He also had other drawings by Marchionni for the new sacristy of St. Peter's,[13] and in 1898 acted as intermediary in the sale of drawings by Carlo Labruzzi purchased by the director of the British School at Rome, Thomas Ashby.[14] For Marchionni, these albums served to document the commissions assigned to him but also, or above all, those designs that had remained unrealised, thus constituting a reservoir of ideas from which he could draw. To this end he also preserved the early sketches of various design processes. The volume has a French binding with a cardboard cover. Both the sheets in this album and those in the various national and international collections document the intense creative and design activity of Marchionni for reliefs, funerary monuments, ceiling decorations, villas, churches, and above all for decorative installations and also ephemeral decorations for celebrations of both religious and private character. There are, however, also landscape sketches, caricatures—including of a self-mocking nature—and visiting cards. About fifty years ago, Rudolf Berliner was the first to draw attention to the importance of Marchionni's graphic output and to gain access to it.[15]

It seems that Marchionni found drawing very easy—an activity he pursued willingly—to the extent that it appears he himself collected his sheets, systematically pasting them into notebooks. Already the prize-winning drawing from the Concorso Clementino of 1728 demonstrates the artist's extraordinary graphic ability, which would always remain superior to his capacity for architectural invention.[16] The multifaceted artistic talent of Marchionni is best evidenced in his drawings, of which nearly eight hundred have survived. Cardinal Alessandro Albani had already involved Marchionni in the construction of his villa at Anzio in 1728, and in 1734, on commission from the cardinal, Marchionni designed the façade of the church at Nettuno.[17] His fame as an architect is owed above all, however, to the construction of the casino of Villa Albani (1755–1761), which arose as a collective project in which patron, advisor and architect played roles that have not yet been clearly identified.[18] All these buildings are good works, but conventional ones, of a clear academic stamp, which—given the use of traditional seventeenth-century motifs—makes clear the retrospective tendency of official training.[19]

In contrast to his decorative designs, Marchionni's buildings display a certain uniformity of architectural repertoire. His façades are treated in a rather flat manner and, like membranes, serve as backdrops for the decorative elements that articulate the building. The almost serial and undifferentiated arrangement of motifs—such as the sequence of windows with rusticated surrounds

and the interlocking pediments on the upper floor of the casino of Villa Albani—is a distinguishing characteristic of Marchionni that gives his buildings a clear vision but also a certain sterility. By contrast, he was able to express in the sumptuous interior ornamentation of the casino his refined decorative talent. The incorporation of antique reliefs into door surrounds, chimneypieces and wall decoration was achieved by Marchionni in a particularly grand and innovative manner. It is in the design drawing and the ornamental detail that his great creativity lies concealed, as Joachim Gaus has rightly observed. The scholar maintains that if one wishes to demonstrate the creative fantasy in Marchionni's work, one must analyse the drawings in which the artist engages with ornament. Yet this literal impulse to design "without an object" does not concern only the creation of abstract-ornamental forms, but their transposition into the corporeality of something of a higher order. In this sense, ornament occupies an important position alongside constructive architectural thought; there even seems to be a direct connection between architecture and ornament.[20] After Filippo Juvarra, Marchionni may be regarded as the most creative architectural draughtsman in eighteenth-century Rome. His designs are illustrated compositions of strong aesthetic suggestion, which almost lose their connection to the real object: the drawing becomes a work of art sui generis. It is therefore worth examining them more closely.

Marchionni designs in a serial manner, placing variations of the decorative object side by side or one above the other—be they window surrounds, portal frames, gutters, door knockers, sideboards or table utensils such as salt cellars, cruets or vinegar dispensers. Sometimes executed on a large scale in the foreground, sometimes smaller in the background, his exuberant ideas unfold as if in a scenic sequence. His design process is based, according to Berliner, on the principle of variation.[21] Here, then, enters into play a genuine delight in the richness of alternatives. Marchionni composes his designs with ornamental details that appear to be freely available for selection and that can be arranged in ever-new ways, with style. His sketches do not lead—despite the quantity of alternatives for a given motif—to a single definitive solution; rather, each variant seems to be accorded equal weight. The final choice appears almost arbitrary. In the designs for architectural decorative forms, both sixteenth- and seventeenth-century motifs are mixed together, collage-like, and interwoven into complex structures. From the assembly of individual fragmented motifs—particularly for pediment surrounds and portals—there results a figurative composition that plays with the quotational character of the details. Thus Marchionni interlocks pediment forms—a conscious allusion to Michelangelo and Giacomo della

Porta—linking them with tendrils, masks and trophies of Borrominesque and Cortonesque character. The result is an additive sequence of elements but not a fusion of the individual parts. This refined eclectic treatment of the Roman formal repertoire also served as a source of inspiration for Giovanni Battista Piranesi. The ephemeral decoration that Carlo Marchionni devised on the occasion of the canonisation of Caterina de' Ricci, in November 1746 for Santa Maria sopra Minerva,[22] finds its echo in 1763–1764 in Piranesi's intervention aimed at the Borrominesque renewal of the interior of Santa Maria del Priorato on the Aventine.[23] The mutual influence exerted by the two artists in the ornamental-decorative sphere still requires clarification. It is telling that the question of a possible influence of Marchionni on Piranesi's designs has not yet been addressed: thus the fascinating elaboration of the gallery of the casino of Villa Albani, with its careful interweaving of ancient and modern motifs, is rather viewed as a stimulus that reached the artist through Piranesi; but it is precisely at this point that Marchionni's creativity and virtuosity should not be underestimated.[24] When one observes certain decorative details in Piranesian engravings and designs—such as the bizarre carriage inserted in the engraving of Piazza San Pietro, or his designs for chimneypieces, mirrors or console tables—one might well see an influence exerted upon him by Marchionni's drawings.[25]

In his architectural compositions, Marchionni always includes small figures that are not merely elements for establishing scale, but a means of suggesting the interaction between the building or object and its user, sketched with a light touch. Here too, the depicted place becomes a stage—unless the aim is to document foundation works for hydraulic engineering by the design authority for a confessional in the sacristy of St. Peter's.[26] [27] Marchionni's activity as a designer of decorations and ephemeral apparatus has to date been little studied, despite the fact that this was the field in which he possessed the greatest ability. The most lavish decorations in Rome were those devised for the canonisation of Caterina de' Ricci at Santa Maria sopra Minerva (November 1746),[28] which involved all three naves and the choir of the church, transformed for the occasion, as documented by a printed description: 'Entering the aforementioned Sacred Temple, one finds it sumptuously decorated, and in a form that no longer resembles the ancient, gothic structure that it is.' What is particularly emphasised is the fact that Marchionni succeeded in concealing the odiosità [unpleasantness] conveyed by the gothic image of the church and in its place managed to reveal its interior 'nobilmente in vaga e moderna maniera' [nobly in an elegant and modern style]. On this occasion a new ephemeral altar was also

created: ‘It is truly marvellous to observe that this entire Altar was constructed not only in relief, but also with all diligence and perfection in every, even the smallest, part worked and moulded, and in a manner as if it were to remain in this place for ever. [...] The described apparatus was the invention and design of the Architect Signor Carlo Marchionni, who conducted himself so well as to have earned, and continues to earn, the general applause.’[29]

Marchionni’s preparatory sketch for the interior anticipates the event itself and visually incorporates—through the depiction of musicians—this absolutely indispensable moment for such ceremonies, rendering into a unified whole the space thus transformed by ornaments and the invisible sonic dimension. At that time Marchionni was undoubtedly an artist held in high regard. As mentioned, in 1740 he was appointed Academician of merit within the Accademia di San Luca, and in 1775 he was elected its Prince. His output demonstrates the high standard prevailing at the Roman academy and at the same time also the indifference of an established Roman artist towards new tendencies. Marchionni’s activity as a sculptor was concentrated above all in the period between 1730 and 1748. His most interesting work in this domain is the funerary monument for Pope Benedict XIII in the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva (completed in 1739), a commission from Cardinal Alessandro Albani. Marchionni submitted the complete design but executed only the relief on the sarcophagus depicting the Lateran Council of 1725. [30] As a sculptor too he revealed himself to be indebted to the traditional late Roman Baroque in the manner of Camillo Rusconi. An honorary statue of Pope Clement XII Corsini (1730–1740) for the Capitoline, presumably conceived around 1735 in competition with Pietro Bracci, was never realised.[31]

Marchionni contributed to the sculptural decoration of the façades of Santa Maria Maggiore (1741), Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (1743), Sant’Apollinare (1748) and the Collegio di Propaganda Fide (c. 1745); he also produced several reliefs for the Chapel of St. John the Baptist in the church of São Roque in Lisbon (1747) as well as for the Chapel of the Madonna del Voto in the Cathedral of Siena (1748).[32] In the ephemeral designs of the ‘celebrated draughtsman,’ which in part present asymmetrical compositions and figures in movement, the erupting fantasy and graphic virtuosity of Marchionni are fully apparent.[33] His drawings play a determining role in the process of ‘aestheticisation’ and acquisition of independent value of architectural drawings that begins in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1787, the critic Francesco Milizia—whose judgment in the field of architecture carried great weight—published, following his Principi di architettura

civile of 1781, the volume Roma delle Belle Arti del Disegno Parte Prima: Dell'Architettura civile, which presented Roman buildings from antiquity to the present in chronological order as a kind of architectural guide: 'This description of Roman buildings runs from the Cloaca Maxima to the Sacristy of St. Peter's: from the finest to the worst'.[34] This devastating judgment was directed at the most important architectural work that Carlo Marchionni realised at the end of his career—between 1778 and 1786—thereby attracting the hostility of an entire generation of younger architects: the sacristy of St. Peter's. Milizia had no qualms, going so far as not even to include Marchionni's biography in his Memorie degli architetti (1785). Neither the architect nor the building deserves such discredit, however, for Marchionni, in addition to mastering the imposing volumetric mass of St. Peter's, had above all succeeded in inserting—with a sensitivity to proportion—the building of the new sacristy: a task that was almost impossible to resolve. This late work, thoroughly respectable but not quite in step with the times, has conditioned the judgment on Marchionni to this day and led to a 'non-perception' of this multifaceted artist, who over the course of his long career was active as sculptor, decorator, architect, and engineer, taking a determining part in the artistic life of eighteenth-century Rome.

Notes

1. Pietro Zani, Enciclopedia metodica critico-ragionata delle belle arti, 19 vols. (Parma: 1817–1824), XIII (1823), p. 22.

2. J. Garms, "Die Architekturthemen des Concorso Clementino der Accademia di San Luca von 1732," Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte 22 (1969), pp. 194–200; Marconi, Cipriani, Valeriani 1974, passim; W. F. Cousins, The Ideal Port and the Concorsi Clementini of 1728, 1732, and 1738 at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, PhD diss. (Pennsylvania State University, 1982), passim.

3. S. Ceccarelli, "Carlo Marchionni e la Sagrestia Vaticana," in Carlo Marchionni: architettura, decorazione e scenografia contemporanea, ed. E. Debenedetti (Rome, 1988), pp. 57–134; E. Debenedetti, "Marchionni, Carlo," in Architetti e ingegneri a confronto, II. L'immagine di Roma fra Clemente XIII e Pio VII, ed. E. Debenedetti (Rome, 2007), pp. 149–156, with previous bibliography; S. Ceccarelli, "Gli Ingegneri dell'Acqua Paola: documenti e disegni inediti di Carlo Fontana e Carlo Marchionni," Storia dell'arte 120 (2008), pp. 117–144; S. Ceccarelli, "Carlo Marchionni 'Ingegnere della Sagra Congregazione dell'Acque'," in Architetti e ingegneri a confronto, III. L'immagine di Roma fra Clemente XIII e Pio VII, ed. E. Debenedetti (Rome, 2008), pp. 377–382.

4. F. Petrucci, "Pittura barocca romana: la collezione

Marchionni," Studi sul Settecento III ("Antologia di Belle Arti," 63/66) (2003), pp. 79, 88.

5. Carlo Pietrangeli, Il Museo di Roma, documenti e iconografia (Rome, 1971).

6. H. Tietze, Die illuminierten Handschriften der Rossiana in Wien-Lainz (Leipzig, 1911).

7. G. Cirillo and G. Godi, I disegni della biblioteca palatina di Parma (Parma, 1991).

8. J. Gaus, Carlo Marchionni. Ein Beitrag zur Architektur des Settecento (Cologne, 1967), pp. 171–187.

9. R. Berliner, "Zeichnungen von Carlo und Filippo Marchionni," Münchner Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst IX/X (1958–1959), pp. 267–396; , exhibition catalogue (Würzburg, 2007–2008), ed. S. Kummer and U. Sinn (Würzburg, 2007). Johann Martin von Wagner: Künstler, Sammler und Mäzen, exhibition catalogue (Würzburg, 2007–2008), ed. S. Kummer and U. Sinn (Würzburg, 2007).

10. R. Berliner, "Zeichnungen von Carlo und Filippo Marchionni," Münchner Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst IX/X (1958–1959), pp. 267–396.

11. L. Arcangeli, "Una 'Deliziosa' per gli Albani ed altri progetti di Carlo Marchionni nella Biblioteca Civica di Jesi," in Committenze della famiglia Albani. Note sulla Villa Albani Torlonia, ed. E. Debenedetti (Rome, 1985), pp. 129–145.

12. Below the title and the name of the intermediary, a pencilled inscription reads "Chiese e cappelle" [Churches and Chapels]; this is an addition in an unknown nineteenth-century hand.

13. Private collection; cf. E. Kieven, Von Bernini bis Piranesi. Römische Architekturzeichnungen (Stuttgart, 1993), cat. nos. 122–129.

14. Sulla via Appia da Roma a Brindisi: le fotografie di Thomas Ashby 1891–1925, ed. S. Le Pera Buranelli and R. Turchetti (Rome, 2003), p. 21.

15. R. Berliner, "Zeichnungen von Carlo und Filippo Marchionni," Münchner Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst IX/X (1958–1959), passim. Berliner clearly had access to the Villa Albani drawings but was unable to publish them.

16. Cousins 1981, passim; W. F. Cousins, The Ideal Port and the Concorsi Clementini of 1728, 1732, and 1738 at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, PhD diss. (Pennsylvania

State University, 1982), passim.

17. J. Gaus, Carlo Marchionni. Ein Beitrag zur Architektur des Settecento (Cologne, 1967); A. Blunt, review of J. Gaus, Carlo Marchionni. Ein Beitrag zur römischen Architektur des Settecento, Cologne 1967, in The Burlington Magazine 111 (1969), pp. 162–165.

18. The most comprehensive treatment of the architecture and decoration is S. Röttgen, "Die Villa Albani und ihre Bauten," in Forschungen zur Villa Albani: antike Kunst und die Epoche der Aufklärung, ed. H. Beck (Berlin, 1982) (Neue Frankfurter Forschungen zur Kunst, 10), pp. 59–122; S. Röttgen, "Dokumentation zur Villa Albani," in Forschungen zur Villa Albani: antike Kunst und die Epoche der Aufklärung, ed. H. Beck (Berlin, 1982) (Neue Frankfurter Forschungen zur Kunst, 10), pp. 153–165; S. Röttgen, "Eine unbekannte Beschreibung der Villa Albani von Giulio Cesare Cordara," in Forschungen zur Villa Albani: antike Kunst und die Epoche der Aufklärung, ed. H. Beck (Berlin, 1982) (Neue Frankfurter Forschungen zur Kunst, 10), pp. 166–184; further important contributions are found in S. Röttgen, "La Villa Albani e le sue costruzioni," in Contributi su Carlo Marchionni (Rome, 1987), pp. 17–83, and in the collective volumes Committenze della famiglia Albani. Note sulla Villa Albani Torlonia, ed. E. Debenedetti (Rome, 1985), and Carlo Marchionni: architettura, decorazione e scenografia contemporanea, ed. E. Debenedetti (Rome, 1988).

19. J. Gaus, Carlo Marchionni. Ein Beitrag zur Architektur des Settecento (Cologne, 1967), passim.

20. Gaus, Carlo Marchionni, p. 146.

21. Berliner, "Zeichnungen von Carlo und Filippo Marchionni," p. 339.

22. For the surviving drawings relating to this ephemeral apparatus, cf. Johnston, Il Seicento e il Settecento a Bologna (Milan, 1971) (I disegni dei maestri, 12), p. 77, fig. 28 (here attributed to V. M. Bigari); M. L. Myers, Architectural and Ornamental Drawings: Juvarra, Vanvitelli, the Bibiena-Family and other Italian Draughtsmen (New York, 1975), no. 38.

23. , exhibition catalogue (Rome, 1998), ed. B. Jatta (Milan, 1998).

24. C. Gasparri, "Piranesi a Villa Albani," in Committenza della famiglia Albani. Note sulla Villa Albani Torlonia, ed. E. Debenedetti (Rome, 1985), pp. 211–223, esp. pp. 214f. The author draws on an antiquarian survey executed by Piranesi and sold to Cardinal Albani—the so-called "Pasticcio"—to

argue for further Piranesian influences on the decorative forms of the gallery. Cf. also S. Röttgen, "Die Villa Albani und ihre Bauten," in Forschungen zur Villa Albani: antike Kunst und die Epoche der Aufklärung, ed. H. Beck (Berlin, 1982), p. 120.

25. G. B. Piranesi, Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini ed ogni altra parte degli edifizii desunte dall'architettura egizia, etrusca e greca con un ragionamento apologetico in difesa dell'architettura egizia e toscana (Rome, 1769); S. Jakob, Italienische Zeichnungen der Kunstbibliothek Berlin (Berlin, 1975), s.v. Marchionni.

26. L'archivio di Stato di Roma, ed. L. Lume (Florence, 1992), p. 71 (Archivio di Stato di Roma, Presidenza degli acquedotti urbani, fasc. 26).

27. Sotheby Parke Bernet and Co., London, 17 June 1976, lot 35. Location unknown.

28. Chracas, Diario Ordinario Romano, no. 4578, 26 November 1746, p. 6f.

29. Distinta relazione della solenne Processione seguita per il trasporto dello Stendardo di S. Caterina de Ricci Domenicana... (Rome: Stamperia del Chracas, 1746), p. 4.
30. For a general overview see J. Gaus, Carlo Marchionni. Ein Beitrag zur Architektur des Settecento (Cologne, 1967), esp. pp. 10f.; see also G. Palmerio and G. Villetti, Storia edilizia di S. Maria sopra Minerva in Roma, 1275–1870 (Rome, 1989), pp. 171–174.

31. Berliner, "Zeichnungen von Carlo und Filippo Marchionni," pp. 267–396.

32. Gaus, Carlo Marchionni, pp. 8–18. The funerary monument for Cardinal Giacomo Millo at San Crisogono (1747), previously attributed to Marchionni, is now assigned to Pietro Pacilli. Cf. V. Hyde Minor, "An Early Neo-Classical Tomb by Pacilli," Apollo 113 (1981), pp. 44–45.

33. E. Kieven, "Kreative Phantasie: Carlo Marchionni (1702–1786) als Zeichner," in Architektur und Figur. Das Zusammenspiel der Künste, ed. N. Riegel and D. Dombrowski (Munich–Berlin, 2007).

34. F. Milizia, Roma delle Belle Arti del Disegno – Parte Prima: Dell'Architettura Civile (Bassano, 1787), p. 205.