

Forty Hours Devotion (Rome, 27-28 Mar 25)

Institut français Centre Saint-Louis, Rome, Mar 27–28, 2025

Deadline: Jan 12, 2025

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Forty Hours Devotion. Arts, Music, Spirituality.

The purpose of the conference is to explore the devotional, normative, artistic and musical aspects of the Forty Hours Devotion between the sixteenth and the nineteenth century. The idea of the conference sprouts from the recent discovery of a nineteenth-century Forty Hours Macchina in the attic of the church of S. Luigi dei Francesi in Rome. The Macchina will be restored and shown to the public during the 2025 Jubilee; a concert of the Ensemble Correspondance (dir. Sébatien Daucé) and an international conference are planned for the occasion.

Starting from the Middle Ages, the Forty Hours developed in Milan from 1527 as a reaction to the devastation caused by the wars of Charles V. The name “Forty Hours” itself refers to the period of time that Jesus spent in the tomb, from the moment of his burial to that of his resurrection. Although it does not belong to liturgical worship, the devotion draws on its elements, consisting of the adoration of the Eucharist exposed for forty consecutive hours. During the years following the Lutheran Reformation, the Forty Hours became a way to reaffirm the presence of Christ in the Eucharist on a popular level. The devotion spread throughout the Italian peninsula and in several European countries. Already in 1539, Pope Paul III had approved the practice of the Forty Hours for all the churches of Milan, while in 1577 it was the Archbishop of Milan Carlo Borromeo who drew up the *Avvertenze per l’oratione delle quarante hore*, which became the basis for the subsequent pontifical legislation. In 1592, Pope Clement VIII turned this devotion in a perpetual prayer to be celebrated in the churches of Rome with an uninterrupted chain of processions, hoping for harmony between Christian principles and peace between nations. Later, in 1692 and 1705, Innocent XII promulgated a decree, followed by an *Instructio* by Clement XI. The normative interest that has been found in just over a century reveals the enormous diffusion and ever-increasing importance allotted to the devotion. At the same time, the spectacularisation of the ceremony grew in scale, unfortunately leaving no concrete traces, both material and documentary.

Regarding the visual arts, the spectacular ephemeral apparatuses created on the occasion of the Forty Hours had their peak in the Baroque period, in particular thanks to the Jesuits. Sacred scenographies became a ground for experimentation, an opportunity to focus on new techniques, tests for future non-ephemeral works. Under the careful direction of architects and artists, responsible together with the religious patrons and clients of the iconographical program, architecture, paintings, lighting, perspective illusions filled these “figurative sermons” with wood, stucco, papier-mâché, and fabric. In seventeenth-century Rome, artists such as Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Pietro da Cortona and Carlo Rainaldi made a fundamental contribution to the artistic visualisation of devo-

tional practice. Built not to last, today it is possible to imagine what these incredible sets looked like thanks to engravings, drawings and reports.

Musicological studies have already highlighted, especially for the Modern period, several institutions and personalities who provided the Forty Hours with a significant musical component. For instance,

Cardinal Ottoboni famously organised the celebrations at the church of S. Lorenzo in Damaso, adjacent to his Palazzo della Cancelleria, for which there are payments to Arcangelo Corelli. Important ceremonies with music also took place at the church of S. Agnese in Agone in the month of August financed by Flavio Chigi and Camillo Filippo Pamphilj and in the national church of S. Luigi dei Francesi.

Far from being a phenomenon limited to the papal city, devotional, artistic and musicological studies have demonstrated the organisation of important Forty Hours Devotion ceremonies also in Naples, Florence and Sicily, as well as in France, Spain, Austria and Germany.

The theme of the Forty Hours Devotion aroused significant interest in various disciplinary fields. A transdisciplinary understanding that encompasses both the normative, artistic, musical and patronage

aspects is still missing. Furthermore, most of the work carried out so far has focused on the Baroque or late Baroque period. Therefore, it seems important to spark discussions that go beyond this limited

chronological period and include the nineteenth 19th century to a greater extent.

The sensory stimulation generated by the arts, combined with the “bel composto” (light, music, scenography, architecture) wrapped the faithful through the eyes of Faith to recognise the presence of Christ, real even if mediated by artifice. Fertile incubation ground for new artistic seeds, new techniques, different cultural moments, the apparatus and music of the Forty Hours constitute a precious starting point for delving deeper into the history of visual and sound culture for devotional purposes.

Contributions can take the form of presentations (15-20 min.) or posters (with a brief presentation, 3 min). The conference topics include but are not limited to:

1. Normative aspects related to Forty Hours Devotions
2. Devotional aspects
3. Differences and similarities in the devotion in different centres of Catholicism
4. Development of the devotion between the 16th and the 19th century
5. Religious orders and the Forty Hours Devotion
6. Celebrations of the devotion in specific institutions
7. Aspects of musical performances
8. Ephemeral apparatuses recorded in drawings, engravings, descriptions and treatises
9. The artists' involvement in staging the ceremony
10. Other aspects of Eucharistic devotion
11. The role of the client in staging and dramatising the ceremony

Official languages of the conference are Italian, English and French.

Keynote speakers

Marcello Fagiolo (Centro di Studi sulla Cultura e l'immagine di Roma)

Robert L. Kendrick (University of Chicago)

Calendar

- 12th of January 2025: deadline for submission of proposals, to be sent to archivio@pefr.it

The application must include:

-- Abstract, max. 1500 characters;

-- A brief CV of each applicant, max 500 characters;

-- List of technical needs, and contact informations (phone number, e-mail) of each applicant.

- 31st of January 2025: notification of acceptance from the Scientific Committee.

- 27-28th of March 2025: International Conference, exhibition of the Forty Hours Macchina in S. Luigi dei Francesi, concert by Ensemble Correspondance.

The selected communications will be published.

Reference:

CFP: Forty Hours Devotion (Rome, 27-28 Mar 25). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 4, 2024 (accessed Mar 14, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/43087>>.