

Painted dome: suspended between reality and illusion

1

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Abstract: The study described here focuses on a unique and unconventional application of the art of quadratura. After the dome of Basilica di San Michele Arcangelo, located in Pianodi Sorrento (Province of Naples), collapsed in the aftermath of the earthquake of 1688, a massive, circular canvas was inserted above the intersection of the church's transept and was painted to depict the interior perspective of the original dome that had collapsed.

The illusion to Andrea Pozzo's work is clear and direct, both with regard to the graphic construction of the perspective, as well as in the architectural elements reproduced, with the main exception being the singular surface used to represent this perspective – the canvas. The false dome creates an illusionary space, making use of the painter's masterful technique. An expert on perspective, he was able to concentrate on that one single viewpoint that would be able to restore the rightful crown to this impressive, picturesque architectural space – which had been entirely constructed based on a linear perspective with an entrance-nave-altar sequence – after the original dome had been claimed by the earthquake.

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