A Remarkable Space

One of Rochester’s signature spaces, the Fountain Court of the Memorial Art Gallery captivates visitors with its spacious elegance. Designed by renowned architectural firm McKim, Mead and White in 1926, the gallery originally showcased medieval and Renaissance works of art. Its marble flooring, richly colored ceiling panels and rows of arched clerestory windows created a magnificent backdrop for community performances of medieval and Renaissance music. The central fountain, a replica of Renaissance sculptor Andrea Verrochio’s Putto Fountain in Florence, Italy, was commissioned as part of the original architectural design.

The Eastman Rochester Organ Initiative (EROI)

The Eastman Rochester Organ Initiative (EROI) is the Eastman School of Music’s long tradition of excellence in the organ program inspired the Eastman Rochester Organ Initiative (EROI). This long-range plan aims to establish Rochester as a global center for organ performance, research, building and preservation, attracting talented young musicians and organ scholars from around the world. EROI’s first achievement, the installation of the Eastman Italian Baroque Organ at the Memorial Art Gallery, commences a diverse collection of new and historic organs at sites throughout the city.

Going for Baroque

The Eastman Italian Baroque Organ also represents a unique collaboration between the Eastman School of Music and the Memorial Art Gallery, both divisions of the University of Rochester. This ongoing relationship includes regularly scheduled public performances that bring this magnificent instrument to life. Sunday afternoons at the Gallery feature mini-recitals by Eastman organ students (free with Gallery admission). Ticketed showcase concerts by Eastman faculty and visiting organ scholars occur on a monthly basis.

For Eastman Italian Baroque Organ recital and concert information, and for more information on the works of art in the Memorial Art Gallery’s Fountain Court:

mag.rochester.edu/collections/organ

For information on the Eastman School of Music or The Eastman Rochester Organ Initiative:
estm.rochester.edu    or    esm.rochester.edu/EROI

The Joseph Rippey Trust Fund sponsored the installation of the Eastman Italian Baroque Organ.

A Visual Feast

Magnificent Italian and Italian-influenced works of art dating to the European Baroque period (1600-1750) unify the spacious Fountain Court in a dynamic period context. Portraits, landscapes, religious and mythological paintings and sculptures from the Gallery’s collections create a colorful and dramatic visual feast to accompany the authentic sounds of the antique Baroque organ.

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Combinations of stops, pipes, keys, and pedals allow the organ to produce a large variety of sounds.

The crown ornament (E) of the case features St. Andrew, the first of Jesus’ Twelve Apostles, identified by the saltire, or x-shaped cross, on which he was martyred. St. Andrew is an unusual choice for a musical instrument, so his presence may be a reference to the patron saint of the organ’s original church or chapel home.

This powerful and dramatic altarpiece by Luca Giordano is a superb example of Baroque religious art. In order to heighten the emotional impact of this scene following Jesus’ death, Giordano employed artistic techniques characteristic of Baroque art: chiaroscuro (bold, high-contrast lighting), careful attention to details of character and anatomy, and a tightly woven composition.

All four Christian Gospels relate the poignant scene of Jesus’ grief-stricken companions placing his dead body into the tomb, shown here as a classically-inspired stone sarcophagus. Joseph of Arimathea, donor of the tomb, appears at far right, holding Jesus and clasping him in his shroud; Nicodemus supports Jesus’ legs. St. John the Evangelist, in a red cloak, kneels with his back to the viewer. One of Jesus’ many followers comforts the Virgin Mary, robed in blue at the far left. Mary Magdalene, her long hair flowing over her shoulders, mourns nearby. Other grieving figures emerge from the deeply shadowed background to enhance the emotional, devotional and narrative character of the scene.

The Eastman Italian Baroque Organ, ca. 1670-1770

Luca Giordano’s The Entombment, ca. 1650-53