

ROME

An Illustrated Guide to Its Monuments & Art

Piazza della Repubblica

From Rome with Love

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Photographed on site · Notes compiled for viewing

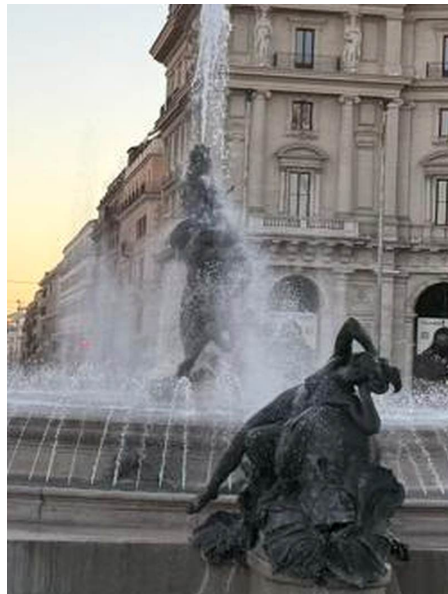
Plate 07

Fontana delle Naiadi (Fountain of the Naiads)

Location: Centre of Piazza della Repubblica, Rome



The whole fountain at dusk, set in the curved Esedra colonnades of Piazza della Repubblica.



Detail (zoomed) — the central Glaucus group: the sea-god wrestling a dolphin, source of the tall jet.



Detail (zoomed) — a Naiad reclining on her aquatic creature on the left of the basin.



Detail (zoomed) — a Naiad astride a sea-horse on the right of the basin.



The setting — Piazza della Repubblica at first light, ringed by Gaetano Koch's porticoes.

Description

A grand turn-of-the-century fountain in a wide circular basin at the heart of Piazza della Repubblica. Four sensuous bronze Naiads (water-nymphs) recline around the rim, each on a different aquatic creature — a swan for the lakes, a water-monster for the rivers, a sea-horse for the oceans, and a dragon for the underground waters. At the centre, the sea-god Glaucus wrestles a dolphin, from whose mouth the tall jet springs. Because the fountain was photographed from across the square, several of these views are zoomed-in crops to bring out the figures. Behind curve the porticoed Esedra palaces that trace the line of the ancient Baths of Diocletian.

Inscription & Translation

The fountain bears no inscription. The sweeping colonnaded buildings framing it are the Palazzi dell'Esedra, by the architect Gaetano Koch (1887–98), built on the curve of the Baths of Diocletian.

There is no text to translate on the monument itself. Worth noting in the setting: at dusk, down the Via Nazionale, the distant monuments of central Rome catch the last light, and the square — once called Piazza dell'Esedra — takes its curved shape directly from the great hall of the 3rd-century Baths of Diocletian.

Date & Age

The fountain basin was laid out by the architect Alessandro Guerrieri in 1888 (replacing an earlier arrangement first planned under Pope Pius IX around 1870 to celebrate the restored Acqua Marcia aqueduct). The four bronze Naiads were added and unveiled in 1901, and the central Glaucus group in 1912, with a re-inauguration in 1914 — so the sculpture is about 110–125 years old.

Artist / Creators

The bronze sculptures — the four Naiads and the central Glaucus — are by Mario Rutelli (1859–1941), a sculptor from Palermo and great-grandfather of a future mayor of Rome. The fountain's architecture is by Alessandro Guerrieri; the surrounding Esedra palaces are by Gaetano Koch.

Significance

One of Rome's finest monuments in the Art Nouveau or 'Liberty' style, and a symbol of the secular, modern capital of newly unified Italy. The frank sensuality of the nude bronze Naiads caused a public scandal when they were unveiled in 1901 — for a time the figures were even hidden behind a wooden fence — before the city embraced them. The central Glaucus, mastering the dolphin, stands for humankind's dominion over the forces of water.