



St. Bernard's Chapel

The history of the sacred aediculas dates back to the Roman times, when crossroads, bridges and streets were characterized by the presence of images of deities of that time, whose purpose was to protect the wayfarers.

With the advent of Christianity, the protector's effigy became the image of a Saint, or even of the Virgin Mary or Jesus.

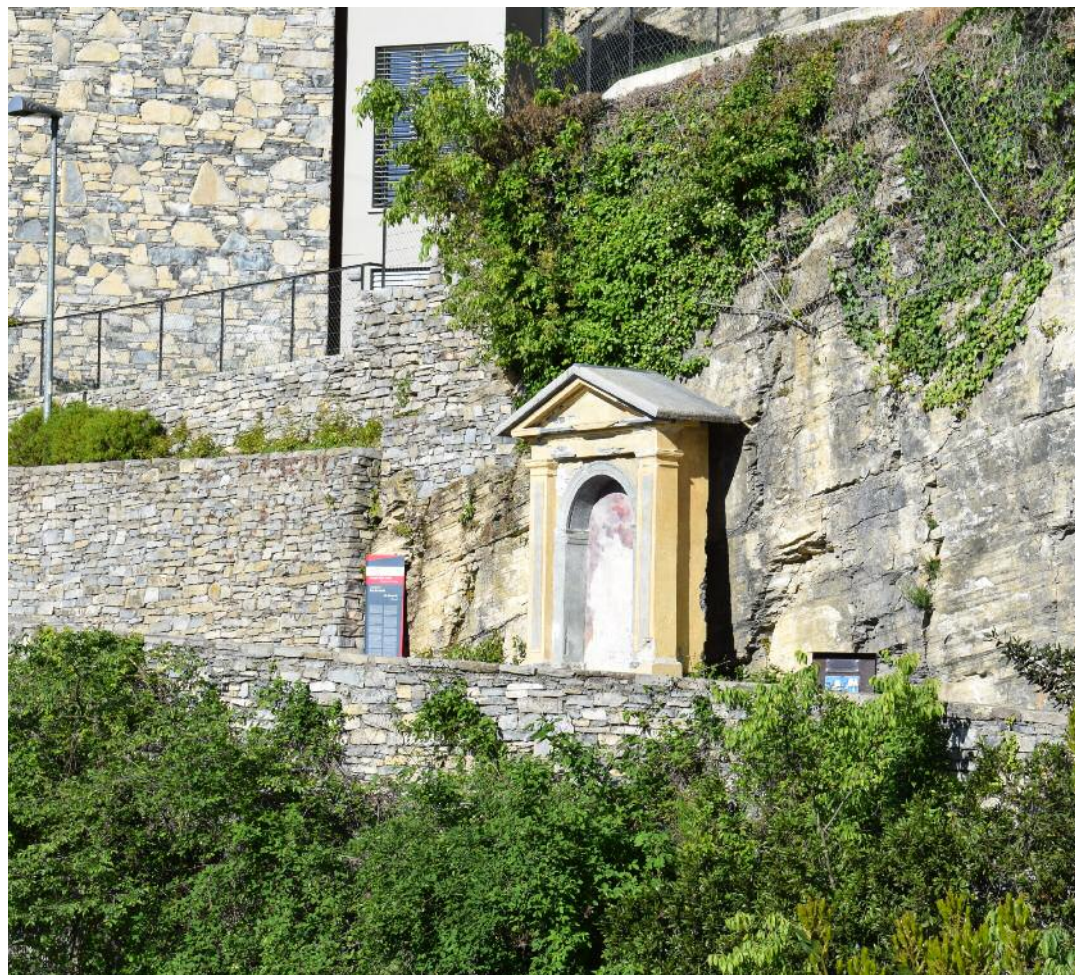
However, it was during the counter-reforms (16th century) that the production of these images was most noticeable. The effigies had two purposes: to counter Protestantism and, needed by worshippers, to commend to the Saints and to the Virgin Mary the protection of the harvest and of their own health.

During that time, the artists travelled to the

dioceses bringing with them images and pictorial styles learnt in the major centers. These images were reinterpreted by local artisans which gave popular and less refined variants of them. Consequently, as one might imagine, the set of effigies presents a very heterogeneous aspect.

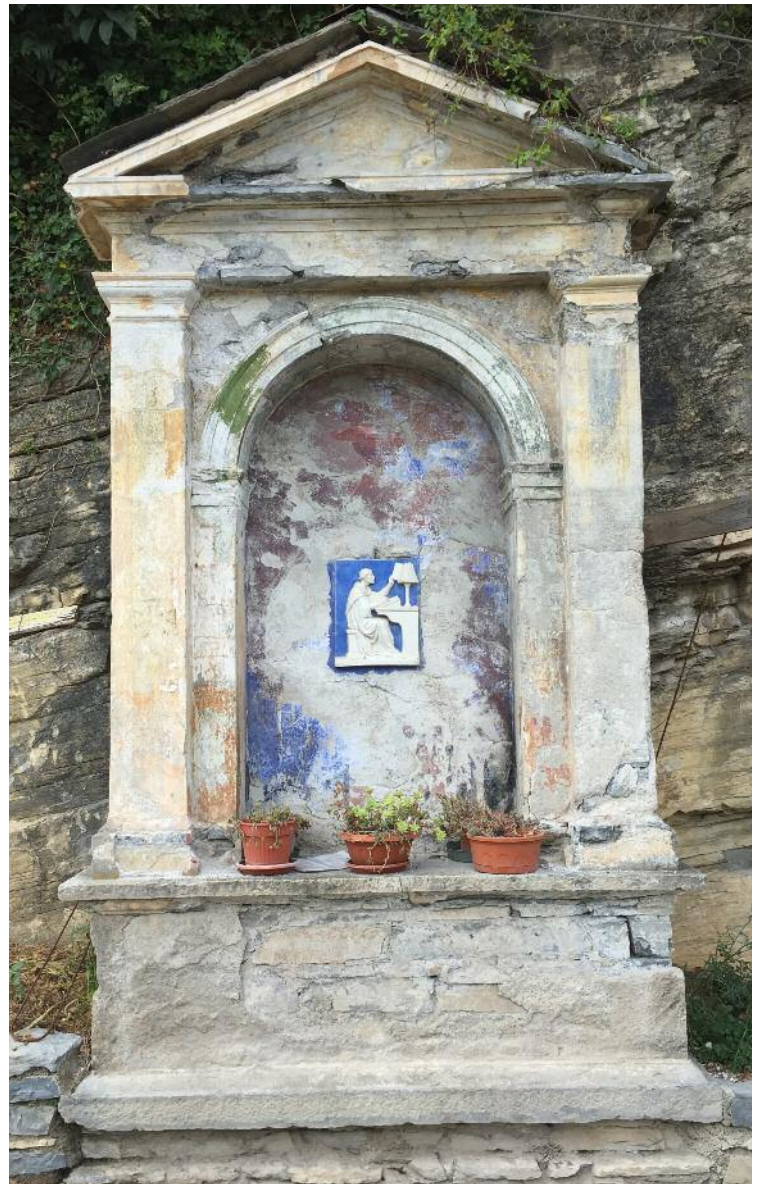
In Moltrasio there are actual works of art such as the images of St. Anne or the devotional chapel in Roma street, but also evidences of private worship in some areas of the village where the artist's hand was that of some local.

Today, in the absence of religious motivations, the effigies as well as the chapels containing them, are mostly abandoned.



The votive chapel situated in Mulino street is dedicated to St. Bernard. It dates back approximately to the end of the 17th century or the early 18th century. It had been abandoned until 2014, when its painting and structure were restored. The restoration was conducted by the **Accademia di Belle Arti Aldo Galli**, an Academy of Fine Arts in Como, part of the IED Istituto Europeo di Design.

The restoration made it possible to identify the different phases of the history of the chapel: the first phase dates back to the second half of the 18th century in which the chapel was built; in the second one, that took place at the end of the 19th century, it was done a notable structural change; the third one, during the first half of the 20th century, is characterized by a second structural change with maintenance purposes; the last phase, in 2014, was the state of the chapel before the restoration activities had begun that same year.



The core of the structure is constituted by squared blocks of stone of Moltrasio united with mortar. Slabs of the same material, obtained with a sledge-hammer, are used in

the flat surface and the covering. The crankcase presents an unbleached mortar finishing and the exterior of the chapel is covered with plaster.





The structure presented problems of a static nature. Also, the plasters and the painted surface were extremely degraded and uneven. In fact, the weathering had caused loss and detachment of plaster and had washed the layers of paint.

Moreover, there were three maintenance pictorial stratifications in degraded conditions. It was possible to appreciate the original aspect due to an accurate stratigraphic investigation that took into account the well conserved few parts.

The raking light projected on the plaster revealed part of the trace of a carving representing the shape of St. Bernard. The traditional iconography of this Saint usually

depicts him seated in front of a desk, instead depictions of him on his knees praying, like this one, are less common.

The paint was fragmented; it was just possible to recognize a little angel's leg. Nowadays, it is possible to admire the complete figure of the angel in a horizontal position encircled with a drapery, thanks to the trimming and the pictorial retouching; moreover, it is possible to see the shape of another angel in a vertical position. Unfortunately, the draft of St. Bernard is not present anymore and it was not replaced in order to respect the originality of the artwork.

