

Within the Labyrinth

Chiesa di San Canciano

Shun Kanda 150728

Venturing into Venice is akin to an intravenous journey through meandering passages of a city conceived upon virtual ground. Our eyes and feet scan the topography of this haptic vascular maze, soon finding ourselves moving sideways in sync with the interlaced cadence of calli, campielli and canali. In time, we succumb to the city's seductive breathing labyrinth.

How unsurprising then that on one spring day, I found myself unceremoniously sliding into Chiesa di San Canciano, without ever having viewed its façade nor its edificial presence. I was like a child drawn into a mother's beckoning arms. Not a frontal arresting embrace but a gentle "come this way, inside".

Entering the side portal, I could see another opposite. It was a passage transecting the narthex, paralleling the street outside, an interlude offering temporary detour - a momentary choice crisscrossing the world of the sacred and the profane.

The architectural genius of this spatial disruption lies in the uninterrupted slice of urban passage suddenly interiorized – held as it were, in a protective bosom within the labyrinth.

The paired side doors invite the community in, pulling the once bustling canalside activities at Rio di S. Apostoli, from Campo S. Maria Nova at the other end. In true Venetian form, this church exquisitely unites the city's *acqua e terra* duality. The church, presumably founded in the 9th-century by fugitives from Aquileia, demonstrates a critical lesson of organic urbanism, which I have repeatedly essayed.

Chiesa di San Canciano proffers a disruptive joy - a quintessentially mischievous exemplar defying normative Euclidean logic, as is all of Venice. In the end, anxious passages embedded in the Venetian labyrinth and liberated insights within it, become one. For this, I find myself returning to this non-rule abiding city.

