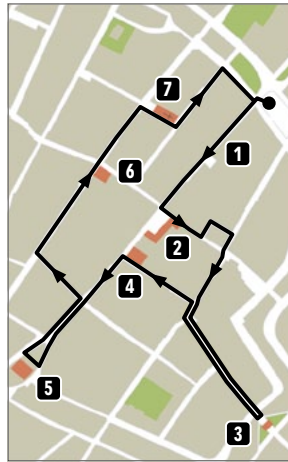


CENTO

The tour starts from **Piazzale Bonzagni**. From here, take **Corso Guercino 1**, Cento's main thoroughfare along the right hand side of which is a long row of arcades. Some of the older houses feature wooden arcades and among these, the house at number 74, **Casa Pannini**, (15th century) has a splendid façade with double ogive windows.

Almost facing number 49 is the offices of the **Partecipanza Agraria**, a very old, local, savings institution.



More than once during mediaeval times, the Bishop of Bologna and the Abbot of Nonantola gave land to the city to administer collectively. Rich and powerful landowners frequently tried to take possession of these properties but in the end, the poor won and the communal system prevailed. Still today, these properties belong to the Partecipanza that every twenty years redistributes them amongst its members by means of an ancient criterion system.

A little further along is the superb **Piazza del Guercino**, dominated by the imposing **Palazzo del Governatore 2** (16th century), that was the residence of the ruling Este family and then Papal delegates that governed the city. The beautiful façade has been refurbished numerous times over the ages whereas the central tower has retained its original 16th century lines.



Ownership of Cento (along with neighbouring Pieve) was hotly disputed with adjacent provinces and was formally placed under the care of the Bishops of Bologna. Their control however was so ineffective as to allow the local community a great deal of freedom of action. This rather nice little arrangement came to an abrupt end in 1502 when Lucrezia Borgia, the daughter of Pope Alessandro VI, married Alfonso d'Este, the Duke of Ferrara. Part of her amazingly rich dowry (chroniclers of the time

labelled it a "gold mine") was Cento and Pieve. And so the **Palazzo del Governatore** was built - a symbol of no longer "formal" control on behalf of the new ruling family. In 1598, Cento, along with all the Este properties passed to direct Papal rule whom replaced the Duke's governors with Papal delegates but without restoring the freedoms once enjoyed.

GALLERIA D'ARTE MODERNA "A. BONZAGNI"

Piazza Guercino, 39 • tel. 051 6843390



The **Modern Art Gallery Aroldo Bonzagni**, dedicated to one of the most important Italian artists of the 1900's (Cento 1887 – Milan 1918), is now housed in the palazzo. The gallery exhibits other works by artists such as Giacomo Balla, Mario Sironi, Achille Funi, Aligi Sassu, Salvatore Fiume, Lucio Fontana, Arnaldo Pomodoro and many others.

The 17th century **Town Hall** building is also situated along the piazza. There is an Eclectic/Liberty-style building at the corner of Via Matteotti. Take **Via Provenzali** and on the left, between numbers 3b and 3c you will find an alleyway that leads to the small **Ghetto** area that has been recently restored. The short right-angled street of the Jewish Quarter opens out into **Via Malagodi** where you turn right.

You will soon see the **Church of San Pietro**, that was built in the 14th century but greatly restored in the 1900's. The interior houses 19th century frescoes and some canvases by Benedetto Zallone and Matteo Loves. A little further along stands a small, abandoned 18th century church (at number 19) and the unpretentious arcaded house (number 13) where **Guercino** and his brother Paolo Antonio lived for many years.

Giovan Francesco Barbieri was born in Cento in 1591. The nickname "Guercino", with which he became famous, was given him because of the way he squinted after a fright in his childhood. Son of simple countryfolk, he showed his talent at a very early age. During his apprenticeship he was influenced by Scarsellino from Ferrara and through him by Veneto colourism. Later in life Guercino saw this style at first hand whilst visiting Venice (1618). His meeting in Bologna with the Carraccis was of great significance, especially that with Ludovico who widened the Cento artist's horizons on the most up to date painting techniques in use at that time. Even as a youth he achieved considerable note and was given a number of commissions particularly in Bologna, Ferrara and Cento. Some of his most famous frescoes



must be those at the Casa Pannini. He had a number of patrons during those times and one of them was the Papal Legate to Bologna, Cardinal Ludovisi who bought a number of his works and the Papal Legate to Ferrara, Cardinal Serra who not only bought his works but also made him a Knight of the Order of the Golden Spur (Cavaliere dell'Aurata Milizia). In 1621, Ludovisi became Pope Gregory XV and immediately had the young man that had become his favourite painter brought to Rome. During the three-year period with the Pope as his patron, Guercino met many new people and carried out numerous commissions for the church and Roman aristocratic families. After Pope Gregory's death, Barbieri returned to Cento where he lived for many years in an unassuming house, receiving commissions and distinguished guests alike. After the death of Guido Reni in 1642, he moved to Bologna where he was very soon considered the new leader of local art. He died in Bologna in 1666.

If you take *Via Malagodi* and then *Via Donati* you will arrive at the turreted **Porta Pieve 3** that marks the exit from the city going towards Pieve di Cento. This village, already in the Bologna territory is very near-by (easily reached on foot) and its history is closely tied to that of Cento.

This itinerary however, continues by turning into **Via Campagnoli**, a short street that leads to the second part of Corso Guercino to where the **Teatro Borgatti 4** stands. The building stands out with its striped, two-tone, terracotta façade. It was designed by Antonio Giordani and opened in 1861. The theatre houses two small museums dedicated to local musicians who became famous on the international scene.

Continuing down the street you will see the former **Church of San Filippo Neri** on the left that features a main altar by Ferdinando Bibiena (18th century) and the **Sanctuary of Beata Vergine della Rocca 5**, built in 1884 over an older church. The Sanctuary is situated at the entrance to an enormous square that houses the exquisite **Rocca 5**, built in 1378 and modified towards the end of the 15th century by the bishops of Bologna.

Heading back towards the centre, turn left into **Via Accarisio** that will lead you to **Via Ugo Bassi**. Turn right and this will take you to the **Collegiate Church of San Biagio** that has an incomplete façade. The interior is characterised by 18th century Bolognese architecture and was designed by Alfonso Torreggiani. Among the altar canvases are 17th century works by Domenico Mona, Ercole and Benedetto Gennari, but above all stands out the *San Carlo Borromeo in prayer* by Guercino (1614).



PINACOTECA CIVICA “IL GUERCINO”

Via Matteotti, 16 • tel. 051 6843390



A little after the church at the corner with Via Matteotti (number 16) is the former Pawnshop, that now houses the **Civic Picture Gallery 6**. A rich and varied collection of paintings from the period between the 1500 and 1800's is on display in the gallery. Many of the works are by Guercino including *St. Peter's Chair* (1618), *The Risen Christ appears to the Virgin* (1628-29), *Madonna with Child* (1629), *The Baptist in the desert* (1650) and many sketches. Another painting of great significance is the *Madonna with Child* and the *Saints Giuseppe and Francesco* (1591) by Ludovico Carracci. There are also works by Gennari, di Benedetto Zallone, Ubaldo Gandolfi, Denis Calvaert and Domenico Panetti.

In front of the gallery stands the War Memorial, an imposing classical-style archway. Beside the museum is the bell tower of the *Collegiate Church of San Biagio*. A little further along on the right you will see a small churchyard that lies in front of the colourful **Chiesa del Rosario 7**. The church was designed by Guercino for the Brotherhood of the Rosary of which he was Prior. Many of his works of art are kept here including the *Crucifixion* and the *Our Lady of the Assumption*. The main altar by Bibiena (1727) stands out amidst the ornate furnishings. A short walk along **Via San Salvatore** up the side of the church will take you to **Via Baruffaldi**. If you turn right here, you will find the **birthplace of Ugo Bassi** at number 7.

Ugo Bassi was born in Cento in 1801 and took up a vocation for the church by entering the Barnabite Order. He was a noted orator but his fiery sermons on the rights of the poor and concepts of an Italy that was equal for all gained him the animosity and, on occasion, outright censorship by his superiors. The year 1848 was crucial to his life: at the outbreak of popular uprisings he was sent along with the Pope's army as chaplain but he very soon crossed over to the side of the insurrectionists. In Rome he actively participated in the birth of the Republic and her defence against enemies from abroad. When the Republic fell, he followed Garibaldi's retreat towards the north to defend Venice that was the last of the Italian cities still offering resistance to the Austrian army. He never arrived- he was captured at Comacchio then brought to Bologna where he was executed.

Turning now to the right, you will arrive at the gardens alongside *Piazzale Bonzagni*, where the tour began.