



Via Veneto, 119
ROME



BNL

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The bank for a changing world

VIA VENETO, 119

Opened in 1937, the head office of BNL on the Via Veneto in Rome stands between the Trevi fountain and the Villa Borghese gardens. It occupies the block bounded by Via Bissolati, Via Versilia and Via San Basilio. An outstanding example of Italy's monumental architecture of the 1930s, the building, dubbed *Palazzo BNL*, was designed by the illustrious Italian architect and urban planner Marcello Piacentini. The latter considered to be the standard bearer of Constructive Realism - *Realismo Costruttivo* - was awarded some of the grandiose program of public works in Rome such as the restoration of the Opera House and the construction of the Via della Conciliazione for a new approach to St Peter's basilica.



The facade on Via Bissolati by the 1980s.

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Preliminary plans for a new headquarters for the then called *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro e della Cooperazione* were discussed as early as 1927 by Ugo Scalori, President of the financial institution, and his General Manager Arturo Osio. The intention was to provide the bank with its own premises suitable for its future development contemplated by the two men. However, it was not until October 1930 that the first proposal was submitted to the Board of Directors for resolution. At the same time, the newly named *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro* acquired a controlling interest in the real estate company which held title to a building site on the Via Veneto in the Termini district which was then undergoing radical transformation.

Commencement of construction on the new building was postponed from time to time. One of the obstacles hindering the beginning of work was the uncertainty the council expressed about the reshaping of the urban landscape of the city ordered for the anniversary of the founding of Rome, planned for 21 April 1935. Eventually, Marcello Piacentini was entrusted with the preparation of a new scheme for the building in November 1931. Nonetheless, in June 1933, the bank was forced to cede to the city of Rome land for a new street. Work could begin at last but under these circumstances the completion date timed for the 1935 celebrations proved unrealistic.



The lobby.

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Arturo Osio, acknowledged the person most responsible for launching and achieving brilliantly this architectural project, chose as a prototype for the bank the *Ministero delle Corporazioni*, which had just been completed. As it was close to the bank office, Osio walked past every day and moreover visited the building regularly since the ministry acted as Italy's banking supervisory authority. The style of architecture for the new BNL headquarters thus **sports a large rectangular building characterized by a severe linear quality combining harmoniously classical and modern forms**. The elegant uniformity of the brick facades together with the travertine surrounds of many of the windows, enhance the monumental stir of the whole edifice. From **its inauguration in 1937**, this building, which symbolised **the strength and sobriety of a modern bank serving to finance the real economy**, became the distinctive emblem of the innovative and profitable *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro* which Osio had conceived. The Via Veneto facade was subsequently reproduced on both newly-opened and refurbished branches.

The interior aims at combining **functionalism and aestheticism**. A second-century Roman statue in Carrara marble, representing a hunter, a copy of a bronze attributed to the Greek sculptor Scopas, adorns the huge entrance hall which boasts a Prato green stone floor. From there, the grand staircase soars through the multi-storey building. Piacentini was directly involved in the choice of the decorative features such as the lighting. Those in the President's office can still be seen today.



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The boardroom.

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It is likely that, on Piacentini's advice, Osio chose to commission two artists, **Achille Funi** to paint the panels for the Committee Room – *Sala del Comitato* - and **Amerigo Bartoli Natinguerra** to paint those for the President's office – *Sala del Presidente* -. These frescoes were discovered quite fortuitously in 1995 during renovation works. They had been hidden behind wall-hangings for several decades.

At the end of the 1950s, the boardroom was endowed with a **large polychrome stained-glass window** featuring abstract designs, which was typical at the time. It exhibits **the '50 painters for Rome' collection** honouring the capital city. The paintings were commissioned between 1946 and 1948 by the Italian screenwriter Cesare Zavattini from a number of famous artists such as De Chirico, Donghi, Mafai and Guttuso as well as several young talented painters.

The main gallery contains exceptional works of art such as an elegant English George III wooden longcase clock signed 'Adam Costen, Kirkham' dating back to the 18th century and several paintings by Canaletto, Lotto and Corot. These landmark artworks are an overview of **BNL's iconic collection of fine arts**.

The office spaces house the General Management and a total of staff slightly above 500 performing key functions such as Finance, Development, Risk, Organisation and Communications.

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The main gallery.



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