

A journey back in time to ancient Jerusalem

Altötting's Jerusalem Panorama Crucifixion of Christ is a unique example of an unusual art form combining architecture, painting and stage design in a magic synthesis. It invites the visitor to travel back in time to the origins of Christianity. It was created in 1902-03 by the artist Gebhard Fugel and his colleagues.

The word 'panorama' means 'all-embracing view'. It was introduced as a special term for an art and exhibition form that was invented in 1787. A panorama is installed in a monumental free-standing rotunda built for the purpose. In Altötting the spectator, from an elevated standpoint in the centre of the building, has a 360-degree view of the ancient city of Jerusalem and its surroundings which culminates in the dramatic scene of the Crucifixion on Golgota. The huge cylindrically shaped painting measuring 1,200 square metres is part of an artistic spatial arrangement which includes stage elements and a complex lighting system. Thus an imaginative space is being created in which there is no clear dividing line between the painting and the spectator. In the panorama the visitors have the feeling of being 'in the picture'. They become witnesses of the biblical story that is being depicted on the gigantic canvas.

In Germany the Jerusalem Panorama Crucifixion of Christ in Altötting is the only panorama that survives from the classical period of panorama painting. In the nineteenth century the art form of the panorama was spread world-wide. It equally attracts and fascinates visitors today. Altötting's panorama is historically listed. It is under the protection of the Bavarian Law for the Protection and Preservation of Monuments and also of UNESCO. Ever since its creation it has fulfilled a living function in the service of the pilgrimage, as a museum, a work of art and a religious memorial.

Gebhard Fugel (1863 - 1939), the artist responsible for the panorama in Altötting, was at the forefront in the renewal of Christian art at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1893 he co-founded the art society Deutsche Gesellschaft für Christliche Kunst. In 1905 he was awarded the title of professor. Fugel began his career with large-sized history paintings of religious subjects. After 1890 he painted numerous murals and altar pieces for churches in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria and the United States. He was renowned for a series of over 100 Bible story paintings which were widely disseminated in print. Today the Jerusalem Panorama Crucifixion of Christ is regarded as his most important work.