

INFORMATION ABOUT THE PANORAMA BY MARQUARD WOCHER

ENGLISH

THE STORY OF THE THUN PANORAMA

Marquard Wocher was born in Mimmenshausen in 1760, the son of painter Tiberius Wocher. His father encouraged him from an early age to devote himself to art. Wocher apprenticed in Bern with Johann Ludwig Aeberli, a painter who specialised in *vedute* and even developed his own technique for painting them faster (the Aeberlian manner). While in Bern, Wocher met Goethe, who was travelling through Switzerland. Wocher then settled in Basel, working as a minor master. He painted a number of vedute as well as portraits (including one of Napoleon Bonaparte) and was also active as an inventor.

In 1808 Wocher visited the Unspunnenfest shepherd's festival near Interlaken, one of the organisers of which was his friend Franz Niklaus König. Anyone travelling to the Bernese Oberland back then had to pass through Thun. Wocher was so enamoured of the small town on Lake Thun that he decided to venture a huge project: to paint a panorama of the town and its environs. He spent two summers making sketches in Thun while having a building erected especially for the panorama in Basel. The building was to serve first as a studio and then as a setting for presenting the panorama. Upon returning to Basel, Wocher worked for five years on the painting, from 1809 to 1814, without any assistance. He did not let himself be deterred by initial problems. For example, the 38 × 7.5-metre canvas could not be affixed in the rotunda without creases, and the coarse weave of the fabric made painting difficult. Wocher finally solved the problem with the help of book-binder friends: he glued handmade (linen) paper onto the canvas, which provided the ideal surface for his detailed painting. The artist took many notes recording the materials and colours he used for the painting. During the five years he worked on the panorama, Thun was changing. Buildings were going up, the trees were growing ... In order to keep the painting as up-to-date as possible, Wocher asked two friends who were living in Thun to report any changes to him. For example, the clock tower atop the Freienhof building was constructed during these years. Thanks to sketches by his friends and questionnaires Wocher sent to Thun, the painting precisely captures what the town looked like in 1814.

1814 is the year Wocher completed the panorama and opened the rotunda on Sternengasse in Basel to the public. König produced a visitors' guide with an orientation plan, available for 6 batzen, while the entrance fee was 15 batzen. Visitors came from around the world to admire the picturesque town of Thun "virtually" – from Rio de Janeiro, Washington DC, Edinburgh, Lenzburg, Bern and of course from Basel. Some famous names are entered in the guestbook: Empress Marie Louise, second wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, and the Grand Dukes Nicholas and Michael of Russia.

THUN PANORAMA

A LONG ODYSSEY WITH A HAPPY END

Wocher was unfortunately not as good at marketing as he was at painting, and the panorama project turned into a financial fiasco for him because he was unable to sell his work. After two unsuccessful attempts (price: 120 Louis d'Or), the painting embarked on a long adventure.

The panorama was auctioned off, sold, bequeathed, resold, and finally, in 1899, donated by the Basel architect Leonard Friedrich to the Thun Civic Improvement Society. The condition for the gift was that the painting could only be shown as a complete work. Unfortunately, the Improvement Society (today Thun Tourism) did not have a suitable place to exhibit the huge picture, so it was stowed away under the floor of the gymnasium of the Aarefeld School, where it was only rediscovered in 1920 when the school was demolished. Despite all the time that had passed, it was still not possible to find a suitable place to exhibit the painting, so it was now stored on the former premises of the town building office. Karl Keller, who was Thun's town architect in the 1950s, remembered at some point a picture that had been gathering dust at that office and brought it to light again.

Keller's efforts to exhibit the painting again were successful: a restorer repaired the severe damage left by storage and transport, and the difficult search for a location ended at Schadaupark in Thun, where Keller was able to erect a modern building using simple materials. The painting was then completely restored in 1958/59 by Hans Fischer and his team. They first cut it into 16 pieces (in a schoolyard due to its size) and glued them onto Pavatex panels so that they could work on them at the Thunerhof and Hotel Bellevue. Thanks to the purchase of the painting in 1960 by the Gottfried Keller Foundation, the painting could then finally be installed in the new rotunda, which opened to the public in 1961.

In 2009, 50 years after the first restoration, the decision was made to upgrade the Thun Panorama, formerly known as the Wocher Panorama, and raise its public profile. Karl Keller's rotunda was renovated and earthquake-proofed. The Lucerne architecture firm Graber & Steiger won a competition to design an extension to the rotunda. In addition, the panorama was completely restored by Michael Fischer and his team, thanks in part to the support of the Society of Friends of the Kunstmuseum Thun. Since then, the Thun Panorama has been open to the public in all its renewed splendour, and exhibitions on the subject of panoramas are held in the annex every year.

THE PANORAMA AS PAINTING GENRE

It comes as no surprise that the panorama was invented at the end of the eighteenth century, a period marked by a mood of radical change and the search for new horizons – political, scientific and touristic. Alpinism was a pursuit launched at the time, while ascending towers and rides in hot air balloons were popular new leisure pastimes. As early as 1787, the Irishman Robert Barker (1739–1806) applied for a patent on his newly invented “painting without borders”, or “nature at a glance”, as he called it. The word “panorama” was then coined for this type of round painting, made up of the Greek words “pan” (all) and “horama” (view): the “all-round view”. Since then, panorama has referred to a separate painting genre: not just a picture showing a detail that goes beyond the usual 60-degree viewing angle but complex image machinery that is geared towards providing the viewer with a special visual experience, an illusion. In this regard, we must remember that the way we see things today is quite different from visual habits 200 years ago, when photography and film had not yet been invented. The panorama was the first medium in history to convey this type of comprehensive visual information to a mass audience.

Friedrich Meyer, *The Wocher Panorama in Basel (Rotunda)*, n.d., lithograph, 33 × 46.5 cm



BIOGRAPHY OF MARQUARD WOCHER

1760

Born in Mimmensehen in South Baden (D) as Marquard Fidel Domenicus Wocher. First art lessons with his father, Tiberius Domenicus Wocher (1728–1799), court painter to the Prince Bishop of Constance.

1779

Works as a limner in the workshop of Johann Ludwig Aeberli (1723–1786) in Bern.

1782

Moves to Basel.

from 1795

Paints portraits in the form of ivory miniatures.

1800

Marriage to Anna Maria Fatio, widow of the master builder, architect and draughtsman Johann Ulrich Büchel (1753–1792). Wocher achieves a modest degree of affluence through the match.

1803

Preliminary drawings for the illustrations for Johann Martin Usteri's (1763–1827) *Vater Unser eines Unterwaldners*.

1804

Trip to the Bernese Oberland, visits Thun and paints *La vue prise du cimetière de Thoune* (View from the Old Cemetery of the Freienhof, Aare and the Alps).

1807

Founding member of the Swiss Artists' Society. In 1812 Wocher is also a founding member of the Basel Artists' Society.

1808

Visit to the shepherd's festival in Unspunnen near Interlaken with organiser Franz Niklaus König (1765–1832). Wocher does watercolours and sketches of Thun during the summers of 1808 and 1809. Construction of a rotunda on Sternengasse in Basel.

1809–1814

Wocher paints the panorama of Thun in Basel without the help of assistants, on canvas covered with handmade paper. The panorama opens to the public in 1814.

1829

Failed attempt to auction the panorama due to financial difficulties.

1830

Death of Marquard Wocher in Basel.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE THUN PANORAMA

1808–09

Marquard Wocher does sketches and watercolours of the town of Thun during the two summers, from a vantage point on the roof of a house on Obere Hauptgasse (formerly Kreuzgasse). In addition to three large-format, very detailed watercolours, he also does numerous figure sketches.

1809–14

Over five years, Wocher paints his panorama in oils on handmade paper mounted on canvas, working in a specially built 9.5-metre-high wooden rotunda on Sternengasse in Basel, without the help of any assistants. He is kept abreast of changes in Thun by his artist friends there, Johann Rudolf Follenweider (1774–1847) and Johann Jakob Biedermann (1763–1830). The panorama opens to the public in the Basel rotunda in 1814.

1829

Struggling financially, Wocher tries to sell the panorama painting and the building in Basel's *Avis-Blatt* newspaper, without success.

1830

Wocher dies and the building is auctioned off to the estate agent Benedict de Anton Maeglin, who sells it 12 days later to Rudolf Hauser-Oser.

1884

Hanna-Maria and Rudolf Heinrich Götz-Hauser inherit the painting and its rotunda.

1887

The architect Leonhard Friedrich acquires the painting. It is removed from the rotunda and rolled up onto a custom-made wooden cylinder.

1894

Demolition of the rotunda on Sternengasse.

1899–1920

Friedrich donates the panorama to the Thun Civic Improvement Association. The painting is stored under the floor of the Aarefeld School gymnasium, then at the Thun city building office.

1949

During preparations for the first cantonal exhibition, KABA, the panorama is rolled out on a football pitch. Efforts to mount it over the entrance to KABA fail.

1953

Town architect Karl Keller (1920–2003) makes the first sketches for a new rotunda.

1955

On the occasion of an exhibition of works by Marquard Wocher and his father at the Thun Art Collection at Thunerhof, the panorama is unfurled across the schoolyard at the Dürrenast School on 23 June.

1956

The Thun City Council approves a loan of CHF 93,000 for the construction of a panorama building.

1957

Schadaupark Thun is chosen as location for the building.

1958

The picture is unrolled a third time, this time on the schoolyard of the Aarefeld School, and cut into 16 strips measuring 2.4 metres each.

1958/59

Restoration of the painting by Hans A. Fischer (1916–2000) in the dining room of Hotel Bellevue. The SEVA lottery donates CHF 20,000 for the restoration, and CHF 6,000 comes from private donors. The paper strips are mounted onto a new image carrier (Pavatex panels).

1960

The panorama is purchased by the Swiss Gottfried Keller Foundation for CHF 45,000. Construction starts on the panorama building, with SEVA subsequently donating CHF 10,000. The restoration of the painting is completed inside the building, financed by the new owner.

1961

Opening of the rotunda in Schadaupark on 10 June.

1986–88

Retouching by Hans A. and Michael Fischer.

2002/05

Flooding in Schadaupark: the rotunda is flooded and the relative humidity rises above 90%. In 2005/06, the joints in the painting have to be repaired and more retouching done.

2009

The Wocher Panorama is renamed Thun Panorama. The Society of Friends of the Kunstmuseum Thun launches a fundraising campaign for the restoration of the panorama, collecting a total of CHF 495,000 by 2014. The architects Graber & Steiger win the competition for an extension with their "Hiroba" project.

2013

Ground is broken for the annex on 2 July. Karl Keller's rotunda is modernised and earthquake-proofed. Since 2014, the annex has regularly hosted panorama-related exhibitions.

2014

Restoration of the painting by Fischer & Partner AG from May to August. The panorama reopens in early September.

2015

On 28 March, opening in the rotunda of "360°", a permanent exhibition on Marquard Wocher's panorama. The exhibition traces the Wocher's life and his work on the panorama and shows how the painting finally made its way via various detours from Basel to the Schadaupark in Thun.

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