

Visitors Texts English

BOURBAKI

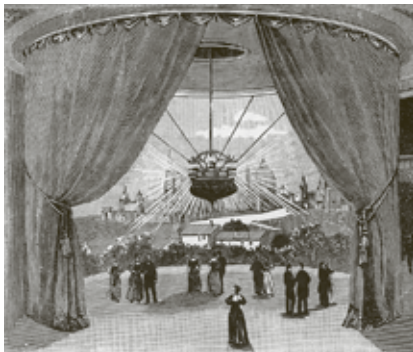
PANORAMA



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- 1 Irrespective of your location, the Bourbaki Panorama always offers a harmonious perspective.
- 2 A myriad of historical stories can be discovered on the Panorama, like in a hidden object game.
- 3 Precursor of the Panorama: In the stereopticon cyclorama, the audience enjoys a cinema-like slide show.

Bourbaki Panorama Luzern More than a museum

The Bourbaki Panorama is a first-class European cultural monument and commemorates the internment of 87,000 French soldiers who found refuge in the winter of 1871 in Switzerland. The Swiss humanitarian tradition has its roots in this compelling story, as told by the painter Edouard Castres in 1881 on the 112 x 14 metre panoramic painting. Not only is the medium of the panorama a precursor to the cinema, but also the inspiration for current trends in media and digital storytelling. As a museum, the Bourbaki Panorama forms the cultural heart of the historic listed building, which is also in great demand as a location for events due to its numerous uses and spaces.

The medium of panorama Paving the way for virtual reality

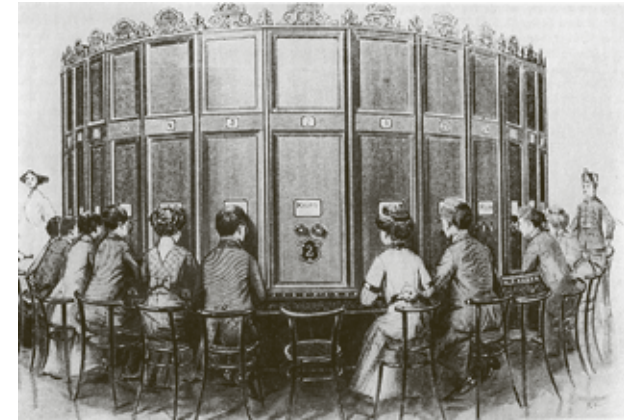
Before the first moving pictures filled the cinemas, with their representations of towns, landscapes and battles, panoramas were the major draw for public audiences. Their inventor was the British man Robert Barker, who patented this new medium in 1787, and himself painted a 360-degree picture of Edinburgh. Visual pleasure is a fundamental human need and has given rise to experimentation with optical illusions since time immemorial. The paintings are made as realistic as possible, given ingeniously-staged lighting, provided with installative elements (“faux terrain”), and viewed from a platform. This puts the viewer in the middle of the action. In this way, the panoramas became the visual mass medium of the 19th century. With their attempts to blur the boundaries between reality and simulation, panoramas paved the way for the 3D projections and virtual reality representations of today. Nevertheless, the medium of the panorama is currently experiencing a boom, since the demand for illusion and suggestion in all its forms is as strong as ever.

Speaking of visual pleasure Illusion technologies

The human desire to imitate reality and create illusions runs through all eras of art and media history. The basis for this is, on the one hand, the requirement to create a stronger emotional bond between the observer and a story using refined techniques. On the other hand, the joy of immersing oneself in ever new variations of pure visual pleasure has given rise to the search for new illusion techniques. Inventors, experimentalists and artists have succeeded in creating objects and mechanisms through a continuous development process, which fool the eye, simulate the three-dimensional world and produce illusions. This includes inventions such as the Trompe-l'Œil painting technique, camera obscura, laterna magica, the zoetrope, the stroboscope or the flip book. The so-called “grand panoramas” formed a milestone in the creation of illusory worlds, including the Bourbaki Panorama Luzern, as one of the world’s most important and best-preserved examples.

Edouard Castres A painter with a mission

The painter of the Bourbaki Panorama knew exactly what he wanted to put on the canvas. Edouard Castres (1838–1902) personally witnessed Les Verrières border crossing as a volunteer medic with the Red Cross. His realistic representation of the suffering of war, which concentrates on individual fates, is a wake-up call for peace. From a compositional point of view, Castres needed to master different challenges. It is impressive how he manages to present the lengthy Val de Travers on a circular canvas. Another decisive factor for the effect is the selection of the panorama’s “ideal centre.” He has constructed a location, from which the landscape and the events can be viewed as far away as right down into the valley. Castres completed the panoramic picture in 1881 in Geneva with a team of painters, some of whom were recruited from the ranks of Barthélemy Menn’s students, including the young Ferdinand Hodler.



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- 4 In public Kaiser Panoramas, far away destinations and landscapes can be explored.
- 5 The master painter instructs his assistants from the platform.
- 6 Portrait of the Geneva painter Edouard Castres (1838–1902), the creator of the Bourbaki Panorama.



Puisine des Internés français
au Château d'Heidegg
Chef S. Dolder.

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GENERAL BOURBAKI.

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- 7 Interned soldiers set up a field kitchen in the Heidegg castle in 1871.
- 8 General Charles Denis Bourbaki (1816–1897), commander of the French eastern army during the Franco-Prussian war.
- 9 Swiss Red Cross doctor treating one of the interned French soldiers. Painting by Edouard Castres.

War and internment

Generous acceptance of refugees

The background to the Bourbaki Panorama is a significant event from the Franco-Prussian War (1870/71): the internment of the French Bourbaki Army in Switzerland. France had lost the war, Napoleon III was imprisoned in 1870, France was declared a republic, and Wilhelm I proclaimed the birth of the German Empire. This drove the French Army of East to a last stand under General Bourbaki. The soldiers, however, were surrounded by German troops in the French Jura. On February 1st, 1871, an internment agreement was signed. This arrangement guaranteed the safe reception of the French soldiers in Switzerland. The prerequisite for this is that they surrender all their weapons. This resulted in the largest refugee influx Switzerland has ever faced. Within three days, more than 87,000 soldiers from the Bourbaki Army crossed the border at Les Verrières, Vallorbe and Jougne and entered Switzerland.

Humanitarian Switzerland

The message of the painting is remarkably current

Edouard Castres' Panorama does not portray a heroic battle, but instead presents the results of conflict. We see how people suffer and the medical support provided by civilian helpers and Red Cross members to the many injured. The internment was a Herculean effort. Around 5000 soldiers were transported directly to different infirmaries. The others were accommodated in 188 locations in different parts of the country. This gave rise to a large wave of solidarity among the Swiss population. Local people cared for the wounded for weeks on end, prepared meals, set up temporary hospitals and public accommodation, distributed food, clothes and firewood. The internment was the first emergency aid provided by the Swiss Red Cross and marks a milestone in the history of Swiss neutrality politics. The message presented to us by the Bourbaki Panorama is timeless: today, debates surrounding escape, migration and asylum occupy our society more than ever.



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Engaged communication

Knowledge and entertainment in touch with the times

Even in this age of continuous visual bombardment, Edouard Castres' Panorama has lost nothing in terms of its attractiveness and emotionality. Even visitors who have been spoiled by current digital offerings stare in wonder when they enter the Bourbaki Panorama for the first time. Thanks to well-founded communication efforts, this lively event location also brings current societal topics to life. Themed tours show how dynamically the past and the present are linked, and how historical learning demands that we seek identity, think critically and encourage understanding of our own and others' cultures. The newest and most modern component of communication work is the prize-winning "My Bourbaki Panorama" app. It allows playful and critical engagement with the Panorama in equal measure. Its interactive features invite you to dive into the history of the figures, thereby allowing you to better understand historical, social and political connections. The app is available in two multilingual versions for school pupils and visitors.



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- 10 All-round Panorama: A virtual reality experience is not a new invention.
- 11 The award-winning tablet app "My Bourbaki Panorama" represents a pioneering project within historical education.
- 12 Continuous maintenance and restoration work ensure that the Panorama is kept in the best possible condition.



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Restoration of the Panorama

1000 square metres of painting need to be cared for

Over the decades the Panorama created by Edouard Castres in 1881 has suffered significant damage. The Bourbaki Panorama Luzern association was founded in 1979 to rescue the unique Panorama from decay, and to finance the restoration work. The first preservation and rescue work on the painting, which is larger than one thousand square metres and weighs the same in kilograms, started in 1996. During the seven years that followed, further, and in some cases spectacular, interventions took place in several phases. The challenge was to remove large creases from the painting, and to clean the surface which had been significantly contaminated by soot deposits. Another complex job was the repair of more than a thousand holes and cracks in the canvas. A specially developed method was used for this.

In order to stabilise the condition of the picture in the long term, a climate control system is being installed and glass skylights are being replaced. It must also be ensured that the painting is given regular professional care to preserve it in the future.

A multifunctional building Encounter culture and entertainment

The Bourbaki Panorama lies on the edge of the old town of Lucerne, very close to the lion monument. The building, which is an historic monument now, was built in 1889 to present the Panorama, which had previously been on show in Geneva. In 1925, the Lucerne company Koch & Söhne acquired the property and set up the first mechanised car park in continental Europe on the ground floor. The wooden turntable still works to this day. After Koch & Söhne AG sold the property in the early 1980s, the garage areas were used by cultural institutions. The big change took place in 1996–2000 as part of a complete rebuild: The building was refurbished with a glass exterior and made accessible to the population as a multifunctional complex. Today the Bourbaki Panorama, together with the city library, cinemas and an art gallery, forms a cultural ensemble, including shops and eating places, without which it is impossible even to imagine Lucerne.



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13 The building during construction (1889), with the (at the time) state of the art self-supporting steel structure to create the 28 metre high dome.



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14 In 1926, the first mechanised car park in continental Europe is built in the basement of the Panorama building.



15 The round building structure was used optimally to house the cars.

16 The Panorama rotunda remains visible today at the heart of the building.

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Europäisches Kulturdenkmal
Monument culturel européen
European cultural monument

Open daily
April to October 10 am–6 pm November to March 10 am–5 pm

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