



Press release

THE “PANORAMA DU CAIRE” BY EMILE WAUTERS

In the 19th and early 20th century, the popularity of panoramic paintings offered the European public the opportunity to immerse themselves in images of distant lands, at a time when travel was reserved for a wealthy minority. Numerous panoramas were created during this period, meant to satisfy the public’s taste for distant places and important historical events (such as the Panorama of the Battle of Waterloo, which was created in 1912 and is still on site).

The “Panorama du Caire” by Emile Wauters (1846-1933) was created to commemorate the visit by Archduke Rudolf of Austria (1858-1889) to Egypt in 1881. This monumental 114 x 14 metre canvas offered a panoramic view of the surroundings of Cairo, with the Nile, the villages and the fields, and the carriage of the Archduke with his Egyptian escort driving through.

After a preview in Brussels, the Panorama was first exhibited in Vienna (1882), then in Munich (1885), then again in Brussels (1886) and in The Hague (1887), before finally being purchased for the Belgian State by Baron Louis Cavens in 1896. It was then exhibited in a Moorish pavilion designed by Ernest Van Humbeeck for the Parc du Cinquantenaire in Brussels on the occasion of the International Exhibition of 1897.

The “Panorama du Caire” remained visible to the public in this pavilion, administered by the Royal Museums of Art and History, until 1967, when the building was handed over to Saudi Arabia to become a mosque. The painting was taken down (in 1970-71) and transferred to the RMAH, where it soon disappeared without a trace. The last documents mentioning the presence of the painting in the museum date from the early 1980s...

In December 2020, a significant fragment of the “Panorama”, the main scene with Archduke Rudolf in his carriage, turned up at an antique dealer’s in the south of France, who identified it and contacted the RMAH to return the work to the Belgian State.

Thanks to this restitution, we can now appreciate the richness of the colours of this gigantic canvas, and better understand why these works elicited such fascination at the time.

Thanks to the Friends of the RMAH the fragment can be seen at the Museum until Sunday 9th January 2022.

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ILLUSTRATIONS FOR THE PRESS

Pictures can be downloaded here: <http://www.kmkg-mrah.be/press>

Pictures of IRPA (Institut royal du Patrimoine artistique) can be seen on their online catalogue: <http://balat.kikirpa.be/photo.php?path=B146740&objnr=20054065&nr=2>