

## *Smoking chimneys* - Yadegar Asisi -

I began drawing as a child. Perspective, and the way it sets everything into order, is something that particularly fascinates me. I believe that drawing is the best way of understanding the world. - Later on, I became an architect and studied art. Until recently, I was a Professor of Architectural Graphics in Berlin. Here it was the anamorphoses and panoramas – the exceptions and special cases as far as perspective is concerned – that especially attracted my attention.

I had already made a couple of anamorphoses, but a panorama, a giant circular picture, is not something you “just do” – the expense, the sheer size of it, mean that it is a major undertaking. And so it was one of those happy coincidences (of which my whole life is made up!) that, whilst working as an architect for the exhibition “Sehsucht” (Yearning to See, Bonn Art Gallery, 1995), it was one of my tasks to reconstruct a historical walk-in panorama. A relatively easy task, or so it seemed at the time. And so it was (of course, it was not!)

The panorama to be reconstructed was “Rome with the Entry of the Emperor Constantine”, created by the architects Bühlmann & Wagner in 1888 and exhibited in Munich and then in Berlin. Apart from a detailed description and a printed outline drawing, all that remained of it was a small folding leaflet, showing the circular view of the panorama in eight black-and-white photographs. I scanned these photos into my computer and corrected the perspective distortion, especially at the adjoining edges. I blew up the resulting picture and printed it out at 60:430 cm, then drew in all the details and added colour. After being newly scanned and processed by computer once again, this preliminary drawing formed the data basis for the printing out of the panorama on an enormous plotter. The picture, now blown up to 6 x 43 metres, was displayed around a pavilion-like platform in a small rotunda resembling a temple. Due to the limited amount of space the reconstruction of the picture, and indeed the whole installation, was too small to work properly. Of course, the computers in those days were only capable of a very low resolution, and the plotters had nowhere near the capacity of today’s technology. Nonetheless, the effect of the city of Rome I had managed to bring back to life in this way was just as I had envisaged it – at any rate the visitors of the “Sehsucht” exhibition were impressed by the possibilities of media technology over 100 years ago – and of course even more so by *today’s* possibilities!

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That was the beginning of my career as a panoramic artist. Even though “Rome” was not really “my” panorama, as it was only a reconstruction of Bühlmann & Wagner’s model, it pointed me in the right direction in many ways. Since then, I have been developing a finer antenna for my own themes, I have known more or less what is important as far as the initial idea and planning are concerned, what can go wrong, what the computers and plotters are capable of (and what they are likely to achieve in the future). Since then I have also come to realise that there can only be one person in charge when it comes to creating a panorama, but also that a panorama can only be created with the help of countless partners and employees, all working together towards a common goal. As Robert Baker put it: “The smoke from every chimney must be blowing in the same direction!” This is the art of the panorama-maker – in all senses of the word.

Since that time, since “Rome”, I have created many panoramas – smaller ones, larger ones, commissioned works and my own projects; landscape panoramas, town panoramas, historical panoramas, architectural potpourris and fantasies (see panoramagraphy).

The wide range of experience I have gathered along the way has led me to develop my own methods, working procedures and (as I am told) finally my own unmistakable “style”. Of course I work with the largest and fastest computers, the best and most advanced image processing programmes and have my work printed out on the largest plotters in the world! But the more perfect the technological methods become, the more similar the creative input is to the individual working steps of classical panorama painting. My panoramas are developed on the basis of an “image idea” (which does not exist in reality); my panoramas are not based on a series of photographs taken all around me – although they sometimes may give that impression – but (just like the old panoramas) they consist of thousands and thousands of single brushstrokes, supported by a solid framework of perspective. The only difference is that the “brush” is taken from the Photoshop toolbox and the colours come from photographs of the real world.

One part of the process I use to produce a panorama can be seen as a kind of photo collage, just like when children cut things out from magazines and catalogues and stick them together to create a far more interesting picture. – But of course a little more complicated and on a larger scale. For example: in order to find the right tiles for the roofs of baroque Dresden, we went on

several photographic expeditions to Rumania, where two-hundred-year-old roofs can still be found. We now have a collection of over 5000 photographs, showing a complete range of tile and roof forms in all possible lights, seasons and perspectives. A similar catalogue of Brazilian rainforest trees, plants, leaves, blossoms, fruits, creepers, animals, quadrupeds, fishes, amphibians, insects and so on helped us to put the “Amazonia” picture together. As I said – as a panorama-maker I work in a classical way, using the traditional methods of Robert Barker and later panoramic artists. However, I do grant myself two or three “inventions” and innovations that have helped to advance panoramic art and its aesthetics.

The most important of these “inventions” is based on the fact that the heavens are high! This means that my panoramas are far taller than those of my predecessors, around 30 metres high in fact! In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ratio between the height and length of a panorama rarely exceeded 1:10. I have increased this to a ratio of 3:10 in my panoramas... Any doubting Thomas is welcome to come along and be convinced of the overwhelming, breathtaking and captivating result.

The second invention is “only” a word. Whilst Robert Barker was the first to use the term “panorama”, I have invented the name “Panometer”, a mixture of “panorama” and “gasometer”. Not all of my panoramas have been or must be shown in “Panometers”, but wherever it is possible, the monumental industrial architecture with its raw brick walls and rusty framework do give the panoramic exhibition a special flair, reminding us of the common origins of light and medium – the beginnings of modernity.

The third invention has meanwhile become such an indispensable part of my projects that I sometimes wonder why I didn’t think of it first: the accompanying exhibition that runs around the panorama. It more or less arose by necessity as a result of inventions no. 1 and 2. Because the panoramas had to be high, whereas gasometers are rather wide, a ring of free space remains between the panorama canvas and the outer wall of the gasometer. We use this to house an introductory exhibition, presenting special features of the panorama theme. At first we were not sure whether the prior introduction of certain aspects of the theme might “water down” the effect of the panorama. However, we discovered that the opposite was true – the exhibition serves as a prelude to the main panoramic symphony. In

general, visitors are glad to have been mentally prepared for the great visual experience which is to follow.

Visitors are also put into the right mood by the music, which is especially composed for each of my panoramas and can already be heard from the outer exhibition area. Many natural sounds connected with the theme of the panorama, or rather emanating from it, are woven into the music. However I cannot claim that this is my invention. Many panoramic artists before me have had this idea, which serves to considerably heighten the assimilation of the giant pictures.

Other important experiences I have gathered in connection with my projects are not instantly visible, at least not in the panoramic painting. Making panoramas is an intensive creative process; however the efforts that go into marketing them demand at least just as much energy and creativity. Ever since it was invented, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the panorama has been a business enterprise –an important factor which often fails to be taken into consideration. However, “enterprise” does not only mean that a panorama has to earn enough money to cover its production costs and finance new projects. Panoramas are genuinely a popular medium, and if they become unpopular, they die out. The number of visitors it attracts each day is an important indicator for the value and esteem of a panorama. A large number of visitors not only keeps the banks happy and raises the financial credit of the panoramic entrepreneur, but is also an indicator of success for the panoramic artist, confirming the appeal of his ideas and broadening his creative scope in the future.

Meanwhile, everything is as it should be, and my perspectives are clear. I have given up my professorship to devote all of my time and energy to developing new panoramas and related projects. In the meantime, Asisi Visual Culture GmbH employs around 70 people (in three different locations, Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden). “Dresden 1756”, which shows baroque Dresden at the height of its glory, has been open in the Dresden Panometer for a couple of years now, enjoying continuing success. In the Panometer Leipzig, the Rainforest of “Amazonia” has been on display since the spring of 2009. Together these two panoramas, open from Tuesdays to Saturdays, attract around 2000 visitors; on a good day the number is considerably higher. The economic success of Asisi Visual Culture makes me independent as an entrepreneur; as an artist it puts me in the pleasant position of being able to

realise further ideas and dreams. But I don't want to talk about my panoramic plans and the panoramic future here. There is nowhere near enough space!

#### Panoramagraphy

1994	"Rome with the Entry of the Emperor Constantine in the Year CCCXII"; painted reconstruction of the panorama by Bühlmann & Wagner from the year 1888. Art Gallery Bonn
1995	"Berlin 2005 – Cityvision"; five panoramas with "previews" of the rebuilding of the centre of Berlin after the political changes following the fall of the Berlin Wall. – 5 interim rotundas in the centre of Berlin.
1996	"Europe Panoramas", historical Europe, modern Europe, and the Nature of Europe, panoramic visualisation for Expo 2000 in Hanover. – AAA Hanover (VW).
1999	"Homage to Daniel Buren", panorama segment. – Weimar.
2000	"Hanseatic Panorama". A panoramic potpourri of well-known buildings from Hanseatic towns. – Bremen and the Isle of Rügen.
2002	"World Trade Center New York", panorama for Daniel Libeskind, competition for the reconstruction after 9/11.
2002	"South Sea Dreams and Plant-hunters", panoramic pictures for the "Weimar Gartenlust" exhibition, Weimar.
2003-2005	"8848Everest360", Leipzig.
2005-2008	"Rome 312", Asisi-Panometer Leipzig.
Since 2006	"1756 Dresden", Asisi-Panometer Dresden.
Since 2009	"Amazonia", Asisi-Panometer Leipzig.