



THE AUDITORIUM (AULA)
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ





A



The Auditorium around 1910

The Auditorium is located inside the main building of the Karl-Franzens-University Graz and was constructed by the Viennese architect Karl Stattler. The banqueting hall is the University's largest hall and offers room for up to 600 people. It is a place for gatherings, but also provides the setting for graduation celebrations, Ph.D. and other academic award ceremonies, concerts and numerous other events.

On the one hand, the 25 metre long, almost 14 metre wide and 12 metre high Auditorium conveys the air of late historical forms of expression, on the other hand, the elegant gold and white tones of the walls already anticipate a new era overcoming the Fin de siècle.

THE EMPEROR'S STATUE

The south-eastern, short side is dominated by a marble statue of the Emperor Franz Joseph I, created by Hans Brandstetter on the occasion of the inauguration ceremony for the main building in 1895. In 1930, the cartouche carrying the Hapsburg coat of arms, crowning this statue, was removed and the paintings (not frescos!) were hung to both forward sides. On the right-hand side, a commemorative plaque informs about the laying of the keystone by the Emperor Franz Joseph I on June 4th, 1895. With this ceremonial act the new University campus, that had started to develop in the so-called Geidorf district from the 1870s, was finally inaugurated.



B

THE PAINTINGS

“Human ambition striving for perfection” – this is how the painter of historic events and theatre settings, Alexander Demetrius Goltz (1857–1944) titled his work. In 1907, Goltz had officially been commissioned to create this paintings which was finished about three years later. However, a commission of art critics found fault with his work. They criticised, as they put it, “the figures’ absence of physicalness“ and depictions of human beings that “do have clothes but neither flesh nor bones and are, in addition, highly misdrawn, partially to the point of tastelessness”. Time passed and criticism became more acerbic. In 1912, critics even went so far as to castigate the paintings as “a non-artistic hotchpotch”. Finally, Goltz’s sketches were shelved. In 1924, the Styrian artist Daniel Pauluzzi presented his ideas to the ministry on how to decorate the Auditorium with murals. However, these plans could not be implemented due to lack of money. In 1930, Goltz, who was already 73 years old at that time, was informed that he should complete his paintings after all. Since 1999, the chalk drawn sketches of the works grouped into six episodes have been exhibited under the arcades on the north-side of the Auditorium.

A At the very front above the Emperor’s statue, Goltz depicts the “physical” aspect of the program for the Auditorium’s paintings: Parables embodying medicine and jurisprudence. The central figure shows ‘perfection’ as an honourable old man, carrying the juvenile Alma Mater Graecensis in his arms. It is assumed that Austria and Styria are shown, as they wave with twigs. On the left-hand side, ‘medicine’ is shown as a parable with men bathing in the sea. In the background of the right-hand third of the painting a fictitious cityscape creates a reference to the City of Graz. The workers might symbolise a relation to the foundation of the new University. In front, the Faculty of Jurisprudence is depicted allegorically.

B At the back, the “spiritual” aspect of the program is symbolised: allegories on studying, research, theology and philosophy are embedded in a Mediterranean landscape. In the middle, a female character rises; holding a fire bowl in her hands, symbolising a brilliant idea leading to scientific findings, or symbolising the burning fire of truth. Left of this figure, the legend of Prometheus is depicted; archaeology is shown in between antique items. The scene to the right displays philosophy and the process of studying.

PROMINENT PERSONALITIES

Six busts lined up on the entrance façade, serve as reminders of some renowned personalities in the University's history:

ALEXANDER ROLLETT (1834–1903): Physiologist and Rector from 1873 until 1884, and again from 1895 until 1903.

HANS GROSS (1847–1915): from 1905 Professor at Graz University, founder of criminology; his criminological collection laid the foundation for today's Museum of Criminology.

FRITZ PREGL (1869–1930): mostly in Graz, pioneer of micro-chemical research, Nobel prize winner for chemistry in 1923.

OTTO LOEWI (1873–1961): in Graz from 1909 until 1938; discovered the chemical transmission of nerve impulses; Nobel prize winner for medicine 1936.

LUDWIG BOLTZMANN (1844–1906): in Graz from 1869 until 1873 as well as from 1876 until 1890; one of the scientists paving the way for modern physics; his most important achievement was the original explanation of the "Law of Thermodynamics" based on the movement of molecules and atoms, respectively.

ALFRED WEGENER (1880–1930): Professor in Graz from 1924; developed the theory of continental drift; name giver for the Wegener Centre of Climate and Global Change, founded in 2004.

GALLERY OF RECTORS

All Rectors have portraits after completion of their term of office. The relevant artist is selected by the person to be portrayed. The collection in the Auditorium features 33 paintings. More works are exhibited in the adjacent Senate Hall. Some portraits of the most recent Rectors should be highlighted here (placed to the right above the front podium):

LOTHAR ZECHLIN, Rector 1999–2003, painted by Christof Kohlhöfer

WOLF RAUCH, Rector 1997–1999, painted by Hubert Schmalix

HELMUT KONRAD, Rector 1993–1997, painted by Richard Kriesche

FRANZ ZEILINGER, Rector 1991–1993, painted by Johannes Rauchenberger

THOMAS KENNER, Rector 1989–1991, painted by Hans Szyszkowitz

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Sources and more information: Alois Kernbauer, *Die Symbolik des Hauptgebäudes der Karl-Franzens-Universität*, published in: *Blätter für Heimatkunde* 74 (2000) 32-38. Astrid Wentner, „Die Aulagemälde“, in: „Der Grazer Campus“, published by Alois Kernbauer, Graz 1995. Martin Behr, „Verzögerte Vollendung“, published in: *UNIZEIT* 1/1998, research magazine of the University of Graz, Graz 1998. Walter Höflechner, *Geschichte der Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz. Von den Anfängen bis in das Jahr 2005*, Graz 2006. © 2010; Design Roman Klug, University of Graz; Publisher: Press+Communication; Photo credits: cp-pictures, University of Graz