

# THE ST BAVO VISITOR EXPERIENCE (BY ALFAVISION)

## **IMPORTANCE**

In March 2021, a new visitor centre will open at St. Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent. Using an innovative and ground-breaking concept in the field of museological experience, this concept will take the experience of heritage, to a new era.

Starting in the crypt, a personal virtual digital assistant will guide visitors from chapel to chapel. In each of these chapels, Augmented Reality (AR) glasses or an AR tablet will allow the viewing of a scene with the additional layer of a superimposed virtual experience, further enhanced through powerful and evocative storytelling. Guests can look forward to following the evolution of the building's construction, as well as being transported back through time to the period when the Ghent Altarpiece was painted. An evocative background of this great masterpiece's dramatic history through the centuries, completes the end of the sensory tour. After engaging in the past chronicles surrounding the Altarpiece via AR, visitors can proceed to enjoy the magnificence of the authentic Ghent Altarpiece in the cathedral itself.

Its aim is to be the ultimate visionary innovation with an unforgettable experience.

## **THE DECISION TO CHOOSE AR TECHNOLOGY**

Because the cathedral is a liturgical setting, and also because it is a protected heritage site, it decided to make exclusive use of AR technology, accessed through easy-to-operate glasses and tablets. This ensures that the religious functions of St. Bavo's can continue to be quietly enjoyed, without the disturbance of multimedia installations. It also means that this historic building is free of cables, screens, consoles and other digital intrusions.

## **WHAT IS AR?**

The use of Augmented Reality is a revolutionary innovation for museums and heritage sites. With the help of AR glasses and/or tablets, virtual 3D-holographic layers can be superimposed over a user's view of the real world, to provide a life-like blended reality and computer-generated visual scene.

AR is ideal for providing visitors with context and allowing them to experience heritage sites, exhibitions of historical artefacts and the visual arts, in an entirely new way. With AR, physical or budgetary restrictions no longer define the limits of an exhibition: the only limit is the extent of the viewer's own creativity.

By creating an additional world and integrating it into the existing (heritage) environment, Augmented Reality offers a spectacular visitor experience. Moreover, Augmented Reality requires no external hardware, except for a pair of comfortable AR-glasses, worn by the visitor or an easily portable tablet that can be carried. No intrusive installations, electronics and cables are required.

## **ALFAVISION – Manufacturer's of the AR technology**

AlfaVision are experts in the creation of innovative solutions for visitors' centres and museums, wishing to reach a new public and further generations. It has already developed some of the most ground-breaking, successful and highly praised museum concepts in the world.

Their speciality is the conceptual development and full implementation of tailor-made solutions for visitor centres, museums and heritage sites. The company helps to build next generation museums. with a clear focus on experience, learning and the stimulation of all the senses.

AlfaVision is a Flemish company with its headquarters in Bruges and regional offices in London, Bucharest, Istanbul and Baku. Their international team includes scenographers and storytellers, as well as experienced experts in conceptual design for museums and engineers.

[www.alfavision.be](http://www.alfavision.be)

### **WHICH TASKS DID ALFAVISION UNDERTAKE?**

Design and development of the visitors' centre from A to Z: • Preparations for target group research, capacity study and flow management; • Developing an innovative and visionary museum concept; • Designing the scenography for the visitor centre; • Creating AR-content based on future-proof software; • Creating the educational content with appropriate storytelling and music for different versions and language groups, based on accurate historical research; • Developing a navigation system for the AR-glasses, complete with a digital assistant to guide the visitors through the AR-experience; • Developing a software platform for the smooth and efficient operation of the hardware (= the AR-glasses); • Complete installation of new museological concept on site; • In addition to made-to-measure AR-experiences, tangible models of the Cathedral and of the central panel of the painting were provided to further assist the visually challenged; Specifically for the children's version of the tour, highlighted art treasures in the display cases have been brought to life using AR-technology; • Provision of high-end display cases for the Cathedral's art treasures.