



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Griffith Observatory's Central Rotunda Ceiling Named One of the World's Top 10 Greatest

LOS ANGELES (May 28, 2009) – The ceiling of Griffith Observatory's W. M. Keck Foundation Central Rotunda, with images of Atlas holding the sphere of the sky on his shoulders, the planets as gods, and the 12 constellations of the zodiac, is one of the World's Top 10 Greatest Ceilings, according to the travel website www.virtualtourist.com.

Designed and painted by Hollywood producer and art director, and author-turned-muralist Hugo Ballin (1879-1956), the subtle, ethereal creation celebrates classical celestial mythology. Ballin was a sketch artist on the film *The Wizard of Oz*, which may explain the ceiling's whimsical look.

"We appreciate astronomically this recognition of Griffith Observatory's singular Ballin murals. They operate at the conjunction of astronomy and arts, and there is nothing like them anywhere else in the solar system," said Observatory Director Dr. Edwin C. Krupp.

In addition to the vaunted ceiling presentation, the upper walls of the rotunda are adorned with eight canvas murals comprising the "Advancement of Science," covering astronomy, aeronautics, time, navigation, civil engineering, metallurgy and electricity, geology and biology, mathematics and physics.

The observatory, which opened in 1935, underwent a \$93 million renovation and expansion starting in 2002; the building reopened in November 2006. Workers gently, meticulously, and completely restored the murals to appear as spectacular today as when first painted nearly 75 years ago.

In addition to Griffith Observatory, Ballin's murals beautify such noted locations as the Los Angeles City Hall Council Chambers, Los Angeles Times Building and the Wilshire Boulevard Temple.

The nine other ceilings that were selected are:

- The Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas.
- Debre Berhan Selassie Church in Gonder, Ethiopia.
- Grand Central Station in New York City.
- Galeries Lafayette department store in Paris, France.
- Khai Dinh Tomb in Hue, Vietnam.
- Sant' Ignazio Church in Rome, Italy.
- Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, Spain.
- Macy's department store in Chicago.
- Opera Garnier in Paris, France.

Images of all 10 can be seen at members.virtualtourist.com/vt/t/25b/, with descriptions and background information. According to VirtualTourist, the Michelangelo masterpiece ceiling at the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican isn't on the list because it is widely accepted and known as the greatest.

VirtualTourist, whose editors and members compiled the list, has over one million members who comprise a worldwide community where real travelers and locals share travel advice and experiences.