

| The Story of Jan Matejko's *The Battle of Grunwald* in 1999–2012

This article resumes the story told in 2012 in the first issue of the *Journal*, about the conservation of *The Battle of Grunwald* up to 1999.¹ The years 2009–10 saw more than just a struggle over the preservation of one of the greatest paintings in Poland through conservation. A vital dispute of the fundamental nature arose about the very role of the museum, waged not against an outside opponent but internally, against a – seemingly – lost cause.

The last time *Grunwald* was loaned out was in 1999, to the National Museum of Lithuania in the Old Arsenal of the Lower Castle in Vilnius, for what became an important political event. The Lithuanians “prepared for the arrival of the eminent work very seriously [...] Director [...] Budrys estimated the expense of renovating the museum at 800,000 litas. On 2 April, the Kilimai carpet factory in Lentvaris finished weaving the special mat that would be placed in front of the painting. The weavers romantically named the 300-sq. m. rug the ‘Little Grunwald Meadow.’”² “The rug will also play a more practical role, of reducing the noise made by visitors and the vibrations from street traffic.”³ The museum put on a number of related cultural and educational events, including meetings with art historians. “The embassy of Austria invited [...] Dr Arnold Wieland, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order.”⁴

This was the first time the painting was shown in Lithuania and, as it later turned out, the last outside the National Museum in Warsaw. On 30 March 2011, the Chief Conservator, Dorota Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska sent Director Agnieszka Morawińska a memorandum stating that because of the exceptionally poor condition of the canvas support due to its very advanced and irreversible process of degradation, the painting should not be loaned out again.⁵

A short time after the painting returned from Vilnius, the conservators noticed escalating changes occurring at first on its surface, then in the structure itself. The key challenge was to stabilize the canvas. In 2005 deformations of its surface appeared, resembling the buckling of sheet metal. The doubling had detached in places, and damage to the original canvas began to show through. Local interventions, which consisted of ironing new wax mass into the areas

¹ See Dorota Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska, “Jan Matejko’s *The Battle of Grunwald*: The Story of the Painting’s Peregrinations and Conservation Up to 1999,” *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie. Nowa Seria / Journal of the National Museum in Warsaw. New Series*, 1 (37) (2012), pp. 71–81.

² Krystyna Marczyk, “Matejko przyjechał,” *Gazeta Wileńska*, no. 77 (78) (1999).

³ Jadwiga Baranowicz, “Życie”, *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem w wileńskim arsenale*, *Nasza Gazeta. Tygodnik Związku Polaków na Litwie*, no. 16 (402) (1999).

⁴ Halina Jotkiało, “Od 14 kwietnia do 15 lipca – w Starym Arsenale,” *Kurier Wileński*, no. 64 (13609) (1999).

⁵ Dorota Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska, “Oświadczenie”, addressed to Director Agnieszka Morawińska, 30 March 2011. A copy of the letter can be found in the documentation of the Office of the Chief Conservator of the National Museum in Warsaw (unless otherwise noted, this citation applies to all the documents mentioned in this text).

that had come unglued, proved short-lived as old glue had lost its elasticity and adhesiveness and failed to combine with the new. Conservators come across this problem frequently, and unfortunately the only solution in this situation is to remove the entire support together with its adhesive and to make a new one. Furthermore, cracks in the original canvas appeared on the right and bottom edges, and combined with the separation of the canvas from the doubling. Also visible was the crumbling of the paint layers and grounding, and the cracking and chipping of the putty.⁶

Over time, the condition of the painting continued to worsen, but this natural process was gradual and the conservators watched it carefully.⁷ In retrospect, the decision to allow it to travel in 1999 harmed the painting, and all the stopgap repairs were not durable. Already before the loan to Lithuania, plans had been made to conduct major conservation and restoration work that would take over a dozen years after the painting's return from Vilnius.⁸ Attempts to acquire funding for this operation were halted, however, by the years of financial difficulties at the museum.⁹

The 600th anniversary of the battle, in 2010, created an excellent opportunity for other institutions to renew their efforts to include the painting in their own exhibitions. Deputy Director of the Wawel Royal Castle Jerzy T. Petrus,¹⁰ “evoking the established tradition of celebrating the anniversaries of this event at Wawel,” asked the National Museum in Warsaw for a loan of exhibits, to include *Grunwald*, for an exhibition “Na znak świetnego zwycięstwa” (To mark this excellent victory). A committee of conservators and art historians discussed the issue exhaustively. The National Museum in Warsaw Director Andrzej Maciejewski¹¹ denied the request, justifying his decision with the need to protect the priceless work. In October the request was reiterated.¹² The National Museum in Warsaw refused again, for conservation reasons, but also informed Wawel that “[...] a nearly half-year absence of *The Battle of Grunwald* from the Matejko Room, where this painting is the principal exhibit, would create an enormous gap in our gallery, which would lead us to ask [Wawel] to offer in exchange an equally valuable painting by Matejko from the collections of the Royal Castle in Wawel or from another collection (such as *The Prussian Homage* [...]).”¹³ At the same time, there were discussions about loaning *Grunwald* to the exhibition “Door to Door. Poland-Germany: 1,000 Years of Art and History,” whose opening was being planned for September 2011 in Berlin. According to its

⁶ *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem Jana Matejki*, conservator's documents archived in the Conservation Workshop of Canvas Painting of the NMW.

⁷ The Conservation Workshop of Canvas Painting of the National Museum in Warsaw keeps reports on the regular inspections of the painting.

⁸ This was noted in the inventory record of the painting archived in the Collection of Polish Art Pre-1914 of the National Museum in Warsaw.

⁹ In 2007–11, Ferdynand B. Ruszczyc, Dr Hab, Dorota Folga-Januszewska, Andrzej Maciejewski and Prof. Dr Hab. Piotr Piotrowski (to 31 October 2010) served as museum Directors.

¹⁰ Jerzy T. Petrus, Deputy Director for museum collections of the Wawel Royal Castle, letter of 15 May 2009 to Andrzej Maciejewski, Acting Director of the National Museum in Warsaw.

¹¹ Andrzej Maciejewski, Acting Director of the National Museum in Warsaw, letter of 15 June 2009 to Prof. Dr Hab. Jan Ostrowski, Director of the Wawel Royal Castle.

¹² Prof. Dr Hab. Jan Ostrowski, Director of the Wawel Royal Castle, letter of 2 October 2009 to Prof. Dr Hab. Piotr Piotrowski, Director of the National Museum in Warsaw.

¹³ Dr Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, Deputy Director for Research and Education of the National Museum in Warsaw, letter of 21 October 2009 to Prof. Dr Hab. Jan Ostrowski, Director of the Wawel Royal Castle.

curator, Anda Rottenberg, the Polish national interest required the presence of *The Battle of Grunwald*.¹⁴ It was to be one of two focal works at the show. In a letter dated 9 December, Anda Rottenberg and Director of the Royal Castle in Warsaw Prof. Dr Hab. Andrzej Rottermund promised to provide conservation care and total safety during its transportation and throughout the duration of the exhibition.¹⁵ On the same day, the leadership of the National Museum in Warsaw, including its Director, Prof. Dr Hab. Piotr Piotrowski, decided to loan the painting and informed a Curators' Meeting about his decision.¹⁶ The National Museum in Krakow also obtained permission to borrow it. Six days later, the management of the Wawel Royal Castle thanked the National Museum in Warsaw for its offer to loan *Grunwald*. According to the initial agreement, after the Wawel exhibition ("Na znak świętego zwycięstwa") ended, *Grunwald* would spend nearly a year in the Gallery of Nineteenth-Century Polish Art in the Sukiennice Museum of the National Museum in Krakow, replacing Matejko's *The Prussian Homage*. But after weighing this idea, the management of the National Museum in Krakow instead suggested leaving *Grunwald* at Wawel until it was scheduled to travel to Berlin, which "would certainly help to limit the risk of damaging this eminent work during rolling and unrolling."¹⁷ The Wawel Royal Castle decided not to return *The Prussian Homage* to Sukiennice after the building's renovation.¹⁸ It is noteworthy that the management of the National Museum in Warsaw made its decisions without consulting conservators and art historians. The Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum in Warsaw, Professor Jack Lohman, learnt about the whole issue on 13 January 2010.¹⁹

These events led to an acute disagreement within the National Museum in Warsaw. Even before 9 December 2009, in a conversation with Director Piotrowski, Chief Conservator Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska refused to take the painting down and have it rolled up. She justified this decision with her belief in acting according to her conscience and professional responsibility. She emphasized that the preservation of national heritage lies at the heart of the profession of art conservator. Significantly, none of the Conservation Department's decisions questioned the sense of organizing any of the exhibitions mentioned above.

The Chief Conservator put her position on paper as asked by the Director.²⁰ In her memorandum, she emphasized that the painting's condition did not allow it to be moved, and exhaustively explained her thinking. The management learnt about the chronology of the painting's loans and conservation, which included – unprecedented in the history of large works of art in Poland – three and a half years underground in hiding during the Second World War. The Chief Conservator was not granting permission to loan the painting to these exhibitions because of its condition stemming from both its wartime history and the negative outcomes of earlier

¹⁴ Agnieszka Kowalska, "Bitwa o Grunwald," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 14 January 2010.

¹⁵ Anda Rottenberg, Prof. Dr Hab. Andrzej Rottermund, letter of 9 December 2009.

¹⁶ Monika Ochnio on behalf of Elżbieta Charazińska, Curator of the Department of Early Modern Polish Art, letter of 4 January 2010 to Director of the National Museum in Warsaw Piotr Piotrowski about a loan of Jan Matejko's *The Battle of Grunwald*.

¹⁷ Marek Świca, Deputy Director of the National Museum in Krakow, letter of 15 December 2009.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Dorota Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska, e-mail of 13 January 2010 to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum in Warsaw, Prof. Jack Lohman.

²⁰ Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska, letter of 5 January 2010 to the Director of the National Museum in Warsaw Piotr Piotrowski concerning *The Battle of Grunwald*.

conservations; she emphasized that any actions involved in moving the painting would be extremely dangerous and might result in tears in the canvas of this priceless work of art. Because some of the painting's layers are rigid, the very procedure of wrapping it around a roll in its current condition and turning it over increased the risk of further damage. This risk would increase exponentially with every sequence of these actions. Therefore, the painting needed major conservation. It would take several years and be costly, requiring most importantly a change of its doubling and a replacement of its canvas stretcher with a self-tensioning one.²¹ The Chief Conservator repeatedly asked the Director to reverse his decision. The Department of Early Modern Polish Art also "expressed the great hope that the substantive arguments and, most importantly, the enclosed assessment of the Chief Conservator, [...] will contribute to a reversal of the decision so as to continue to protect this work best for future generations."²²

In the world of museum practices, approving these loans with the awareness of the threats and unavoidable changes to the painting represents a violation of the institutional statute, which requires the museum to safeguard its holdings. Demanding that the Chief Conservator make a decision that can potentially seriously damage a work of art is unprecedented in the history of Polish museums. Nearly a year after these events, tests of the durability of the canvas conducted at the Textile Institute in Łódź corroborated the conservators' judgement, demonstrating that its average maximum stretching was below one per cent, in other words, that the canvas had lost all its mechanical properties and behaved like glass.²³ The experts emphasized that they had studied selvages without the paint layer. They did not test the canvas together with the paint layer, since there it is invariably much weaker, brittle, more acidic and more rigid from the paint left over from the conservation conducted in the 1920s. The key factors that had had a decisive impact on the state of the canvas were the paints and acidifying substances used in previous conservations, and destruction by filamentous fungi (figs 1-2).

In the words of Director Piotrowski, "museum people and conservators do not like to loan out paintings [...]. Very often, the argument used to hold on to a work and not to loan it is the conservation argument [...]. It was used in this case, too. Because it appeared in an atmosphere of existing programmatic conflict, its credibility was limited. In my opinion, political and substantive considerations were definitely more important than those entailing conservation."²⁴ He argued furthermore that "the conflict between management and the conservation service [...] was [...] that of litmus paper for both the programmatic conflict and the staff conflict and, primarily, organizational. Its motto is 'the battle over the *Battle*.' It focuses the extensive problems faced by the museum I direct as if on a lens [...]. The conservation arguments in reality were a mask for arguments of an employee nature and a programmatic nature, a cover for a much deeper conflict about the way the museum is managed, the real distribution of responsibilities, and even of the museum as such."²⁵ With the changes being

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ochnio, op. cit.

²³ Textile Research Institute, Laboratory of Testing Textile Raw Materials and Fabrics, "Badania wytrzymałościowe płótna z Grunwaldu," Łódź, 22 February and 15 December 2011. The second test was performed after the canvas had been impregnated. Zofia Mokwińska, MA (Engineering), conducted the tests, while the laboratory's technical manager, Dr (Engineering) Beata Witkowska, authorized the report. The report is archived in the Laboratory of the National Museum in Warsaw.

²⁴ Piotr Piotrowski, *Muzeum krytyczne* (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, 2011), p. 121.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 120.

planned by management, the atmosphere at the National Museum in Warsaw continued to grow increasingly strained.²⁶

The Chief Conservator's refusal to sign off on the loan of the *Battle* became the first reason for terminating her contract, for reason of insubordination stemming from her refusal to follow orders at work.²⁷ It is noteworthy that the Director's actions blatantly contravened the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*,²⁸ which states that "The governing body should never require museum personnel to act in a way that could be considered to conflict with the provisions of this Code of Ethics, or any national law or specialist code of ethics."²⁹ Also: "Members of the museum profession have an obligation to follow the policies and procedures of their employing institution. However, they may properly object to practices that are perceived to be damaging to a museum, to the profession, or to matters of professional ethics."³⁰ And finally: "They should avoid situations that could be construed as improper conduct."³¹

Because the Chief Conservator did not agree to the loan of *The Battle of Grunwald* to Krakow and Berlin, the museum's management entertained the possibility of having the conservation work done at the Wawel Royal Castle, leaving out the National Museum in Warsaw staff. The controversy won widespread publicity in newspapers, on television and radio. The public, demonstrating a lively interest in the developments, reacted vocally.

In response to the now public dispute between the Director and the team of conservators, Director Piotrowski assembled an independent committee of conservators to advise him on lending *Grunwald* to the exhibitions in Krakow and Berlin. Opening its first meeting, he expressed the opinion that "the Director of a national institution ought to weigh the museum's particular interests against the public interest [...] and [therefore] an event such as the exhibition in Krakow about the Polish-Teutonic wars cannot take place without *The Battle*, the Berlin exhibition may become an exceptional event, and it addresses a thousand years of Polish-German relations as seen through art. Putting paintings [including *The Prussian Homage*] on display is in the interest of our national culture. The last time these two paintings

²⁶ The professional staff of the National Museum in Warsaw pointed out that the reform proposed by Director Piotrowski lay primarily in politicizing and ideologizing the museum's programme. It included contradictions in some aspects of internal reform, such as increasingly digitizing the collections, and at the same time making radical staff cuts. Conservation departments was to be dramatically reformed, even eliminated. The existing systematic conservation care of the collections was to be reduced primarily to short-term technical service of its own exhibitions and loans to other museums, while conservation of items was to be drastically cut. The reform made light of basic research and research studies of the collections for collection catalogues. Museum education was also limited. The staff emphasized the Director's style, which replaced dialogue with conflict and confrontation, impeding discussion and understanding with the employees. See Antoni Ziemia, Chairman of the Curators' Committee of the National Museum in Warsaw, *Pracownicy merytoryczni Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie w sporze z jego dyrektorem, główne punkty kontrowersji* [The professional staff of the National Museum in Warsaw in dispute with its Director, main points in the controversy] letter of 7 June 2010.

²⁷ The other reasons for her planned dismissal had to do with letters and open letters to the highest state authorities, written jointly with staff of the professional departments of the National Museum in Warsaw, about the dispute underway at the museum. Copies of all the letters are archived in the Office of the Chief Conservator of the National Museum in Warsaw. I would like to take this opportunity to thank National Museum in Warsaw staff, conservators from other museums and the Polish National Committee of the ICOM, at that time chaired by Prof. Dr Hab. Andrzej Tomaszewski, for their friendship and support.

²⁸ *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* [online], [retrieved: 7 October 2013], at: <http://icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Codes/code_ethics2013_eng.pdf>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.16.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 8.1.

were shown together was in 1882.”³² Piotrowski deferred the final decision about the loan to the conservators, in order to ascertain “the actual condition of the painting of *The Battle of Grunwald* and also what needed to be done and what work needed to be conducted to allow the painting to travel to Krakow and to Berlin, and also what would be the initial estimate of the cost of conserving the painting.”³³

The committee published its findings on 27 January 2010. It “unanimously corroborated the accuracy of the diagnosis of the state of the exhibit issued by the conservation team of the N[ational] M[useum in] W[arsaw] and resolved that the conservation plan for *The Battle of Grunwald* requires a review of exhibition plans and a new approach in museology. The painting [...] will be able to play the role assigned to it in the upcoming exhibitions, which are publicly very significant. As part of the project with the working name *Matejko XXI*, the committee recommends that immediate steps be taken in the areas of conservation-guardianship and the most modern exhibition solutions. The committee states that Jan Matejko’s work is priceless to Polish culture and may not be exposed to damage by being transported in its current condition. Contributing to the painting’s poor state have been its 3.5 years in hiding underground from the Nazis and the 32 trips this colossus has taken, including 17 in Matejko’s lifetime. The sixty years since its last conservation are an important reason to launch an urgent, complex conservation in accordance with current knowledge. This unavoidable conservation-curatorial project will require about 18 months of work. The National Museum in Warsaw conservation team, which continues the project designed by Professor Bohdan Marconi in 1945–49, is able to undertake this complex challenge and has already prepared a plan for its indispensable conservation and restoration work [...]. The opening date of the Berlin exhibition will allow [the team] to perform the conservation and research as well as conservation and restoration procedures with the appropriate care [...] and to prepare the original for [...] the Berlin exhibition. The image of *The Battle of Grunwald* also plays the role of collective memory, is a visible sign of historical and symbolic content. Because of this humanistic aspect and the short time until the opening of the Wawel exhibition, which makes it impossible to take appropriate care to keep the precious painting safe, the committee suggests a modern solution. This is to create a faithful reproduction of the painting, a so-called simulacrum (a digital high-quality print on canvas), of the highest quality, in accordance with the texture and potential aesthetic unity of the painting, under the supervision of conservators and artists. Similar works, which agree with modern tendencies promoted by the museum profession, are implemented in prestigious locations, such as the prehistoric cave paintings in Lascaux or the reconstructed paintings in Arthus’s Court in Gdańsk. The proposed solution will visualize and preserve the most broadly defined memory of heritage, is subordinated to its public goals and to the message from its substance. It makes it possible to exhibit and position the original alternately with the copy. The idea of this two-track care of *The Battle of Grunwald* makes it possible to act much more broadly in protecting this national heritage and creates possibilities for taking care of the work in a very responsible manner. It opens up new exhibition possibilities, allows for the

³² The committee was made up of representatives of the Wawel Royal Castle (Chief Conservator Dr Ewa Wiłkojc and Deputy Chief Conservator Beata Nowak), the Royal Castle in Warsaw (Chief Conservator Tomasz Buźniak, Deputy Chief Conservator Maria Szczypek, Conservator Regina Dmowska), Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (Prof. Iwona Szmelter), National Museum in Warsaw (Chief Conservator Dorota Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska; conservators from the Conservation Workshop of Canvas Painting, Head Dorota Pliś, Senior Conservator Anna Lewandowska). See *Protokół z Komisji Konserwatorskiej dotyczącej wypożyczenia obrazu Bitwa pod Grunwaldem Jana Matejki na wystawę do Krakowa i Berlina*, of 27 January 2010.

³³ Ibid.

planning of future exhibitions in Poland and abroad. Furthermore, exhibition staffage may complement this faithful, modern image of the painting as simulacrum, allowing visitors to take part more fully in feeling and experiencing the many aspects of art, and at the same time to continue the Matejko tradition.”³⁴

In the spring of 2010, the decision was made to begin the conservation and restoration work, to be fully funded by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage,³⁵ and the National Museum in Warsaw launched preparations for this major undertaking. The museum also received permission to conduct a public collection in Poland from 15 May 2010 do 15 May 2011, to include voluntary donations to a bank account, street collections into sealed cans and sales of postcards and CDs with images of the painting,³⁶ and of pieces of the original doubling canvas used in 1948–2010.³⁷ These monies would help to purchase testing and conservation equipment. Unfortunately, the idea of the simulacrum did not win the support of the museum’s management.³⁸ Shame, since this image would have reflected the state of preservation and the colours of the painting prior to conservation. The management also did not take up an offer by Janusz Sporek³⁹ to organize concerts in the United States to raise funds in the Polish-American community to buy this equipment. The Chief Conservator suggested displaying the simulacrum during Sporek’s concerts, an idea the musician liked.

The conservation project required an enormous, multifaceted effort.⁴⁰ The team from the Conservation Workshop of Canvas Painting of the National Museum in Warsaw, supervised by the Chief Conservator, would be working on the largest piece of art in the museum’s collection.⁴¹ The work site was open to the public, and the many public talks and meetings were

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Appropriation from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of 905,544 zlotys (76.92% of all expenses entailed in the project), of 15 April and 10 August 2010. Decision of Minister of Culture and National Heritage Bogdan Zdrojewski. This sum covered the cost of preparing and equipping the exhibition room, photographic documentation, research, construction of transportation equipment and a special canvas stretcher and the hiring of additional conservators. The work of the museum’s conservators was covered by their existing contracts.

³⁶ Office of Permissions and Concessions, Ministry of the Interior, *Decyzja nr 78/2010*, of 28 April 2010.

³⁷ Office of Permissions and Concessions, Ministry of the Interior, *Decyzja nr 317/2010*, of 23 December 2010.

³⁸ The simulacrum would have cost c. 170,000–190,000 zlotys, depending on its supporting structure.

³⁹ Sporek is an orchestra conductor, musician, social activist and the founder of the Music Education Center and the Hejnał and Paderewski Festival Singers choirs and the Esprit de Chorus international vocal group, Director of singing-and-dancing groups, instructor and journalist, President of the New York division of Chopin Foundation Council and General Choral Director of the Polish Singers Alliance of America and Canada. He has received numerous prestigious prizes, especially for promoting Polish culture.

⁴⁰ The Chief Conservator and his team would like to express their appreciation to all those who contributed to the realization of this undertaking: the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage for financing the conservation and restoration, PKO BP for funding three microscopes and the materials to make a new frame for the painting, Amitech Poland Ltd. and its Gdańsk office and Fin Pol Rohl for making the roll free of charge and for adjusting it to the mobile equipment in order to remove the painting for the duration of the renovation of the Matejko Room, Renesans Trans for assistance with moving the roll, the Battle of Grunwald Museum in Stębark for its donation of 8,541.98 zlotys collected by Scouts, donors in the public collection of 4,360.97 zlotys, 10.01 euro, 5 Lithuanian cents and 25 Ukrainian kopeks and all National Museum in Warsaw staff, who supported and assisted the conservators. I would like to thank PKN ORLEN SA, the Patron of the Commemoration of the 600th Anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald in 2010.

⁴¹ Dorota Plis (Head of the Workshop), Piotr Lisowski (Manager in charge of the technical aspects of the conservation of the *Battle*), Magdalena Wesołowska, Katarzyna Jastrzębska, Anna Lewandowska, Małgorzata Pawłowska and Barbara Kurzyk-Soudah, and outside conservators Ksenia Zdzieszńska-Demolin, Barbara Drobińska-Sowula and Zofia Datko, as well as four students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

coordinated closely with the museum's Education Department, and Promotion and Marketing Department, which were preparing events focussing on the 600th anniversary of the battle. The media covered the stages of the project as they occurred.⁴²

The initial estimate of the duration of the project was eighteen months, but it eventually took close to twenty-five months (13 July 2010 – 6 August 2012). Serving as consultants in meetings of the conservation committee were specialists from other institutions, the National Museum in Krakow, the Royal Castle in Warsaw, the Wawel Royal Castle and the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. The delays were due to factors outside the control of the conservators. For example, work needed to slow down to observe regulations about the use of solvents.⁴³ Guidelines from the Sanepid state sanitary-epidemiological inspectorate and the National Labour Inspectorate about extracting the old doubling mass and impregnating individual layers allowed this work to be performed no more than once a week. The conservators realized that the technical procedures themselves would be very time-intensive and that they would need to be conducted in very difficult conditions, not in a laboratory but in the Matejko Room,⁴⁴ which lacked the appropriate ventilation. The work of filling in the losses in the ground was drawn out because of the elastic putty being used, which needed to be applied in over a dozen layers. The equipment for conducting infrared and RTG tests was not always available from rental firms. When their work began, the conservators did not know that plans had already been made for the works in the Gallery of Polish Painting to be rearranged. This required securing *Grunwald* for the duration of the renovations of the room, removing it on an enormous custom-made, 120-cm-diameter roll, on which the canvas could be wrapped threefold, and not fourfold as had been done earlier. Taking into account the safety of the workers and the interest of the painting, it was impossible to know the precise time the work would take to complete, and it was necessary to stretch it out. Professor Marconi had earlier faced similar problems.⁴⁵

The size of the painting (currently 42.7 sq. m.) made it necessary for the conservation to take place in the gallery itself, on a new, elevated wooden platform covered with PCV, which was more level than the floor. Two mobile scaffolds were custom-made to allow the conservators to move around and to work without pressing on the painting's surface. The museum purchased solvent vapour machines, specialized lamps and microscopes. The conservators wore Tyvek overalls to protect them from direct contact with solvents and dust. Their work, done in a half-reclining position, was exceptionally exhausting and required great physical effort.

In mid-June 2010 the team began comprehensive testing to make an initial assessment of the degradation of the organic materials and the painting's microbiological state.⁴⁶ This allowed

⁴² Between the completion of the conservation on 8 August and the end of December 2012, c. 45,000 visitors saw the painting. Between 1 June 2010 and 30 September 2012, 800 items about the painting appeared in the press (254), on the radio (283), television (170) and Internet (173). From May 2010 to May 2011 the museum's Education Department organized 10 lectures "Around Grunwald," with audiences totalling 750; 15 meetings with conservators in the Matejko Room with a total of 370 participants; 20 "Become a conservator" Sunday workshops, in which 680 persons (330 families) took place; Picnic at Grunwald for 500; and 50 "The secrets of conservation" lessons (1,250 participants). A total of 3,550 persons took part in these events. The museum put on four press conferences.

⁴³ Mostly trichloroethylene, lacquer petrol. About 150 litres of solvents were used in the stage of work to replace the doubling. The concentration of solvents in the air was tested continuously.

⁴⁴ The museum does not have the appropriate room to conserve such large objects.

⁴⁵ Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska, "Jan Matejko's *The Battle of Grunwald*...", op. cit., p. 60.

⁴⁶ The microorganisms that were discovered did not endanger the health of humans or the condition of the painting. Marcin Draniak, Head of the Laboratory of the National Museum in Warsaw, *Wyniki badań mikro-*

the team to test the newest infrared and X-ray testing equipment. The conservators planned to buy the highest-quality, specialized infrared testing equipment, but, unfortunately, the available funds were instead spent on a brief, 3D film by Tomasz Bagiński, *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*. They were also unable to buy an Israeli-made specialized X-ray machine, which had been brought to Warsaw upon the request of the Conservation Department for a free-of-charge demonstration at the museum before the painting was taken down.

On 13 July, *Grunwald*, whose front had been secured,⁴⁷ was taken down and placed on the platform face down (figs 3–4). Next, its frame and its metal stretcher bars were disassembled. The doubling canvas, which had been fused with the painting with a wax-resin adhesive, was removed. Beginning on 22 July, the mechanical and chemical removal of the doubling mass from the back of the painting⁴⁸ and of previous visible repairs of the damage in the canvas began (figs 5–6). After it was twice impregnated,⁴⁹ its tears were glued and patches were affixed to the damaged areas of the support, in accordance with the standards in force today.⁵⁰ The original top edge of the canvas, used earlier to attach it to the stretchers, which had no paint layers and ground on it, filled in the losses in the canvas (figs 7–8). This procedure revealed that the conservation conducted in the 1940s had not reconnected the tears in the original canvas, a usual practice at that time, and many losses were filled in with bits of canvas containing a strong putty, which was unusual for that period, when it was customary to fill them in with putty alone. Now the conservators decided to substitute these fillings, since the old conservation had used random pieces of canvas of different thicknesses and weaves from the original canvas. The cleansing and evening out of the painting's deformed edges enlarged the painting by 0.7 sq. m. (4 cm in height, 3 cm in width).⁵¹ Following the exchange of the doubling and the tests of the resilience of the canvas,⁵² the decision was made that the painting would be exhibited exclusively at the National Museum in Warsaw. Even though the conservators had hoped that *Grunwald* would be able to travel to Berlin, regrettably, its revealed state and the goal of making it survive for future generations forced the conservators to decide against it and to present their decision to the Director.⁵³

biologicznych obrazu Bitwa pod Grunwaldem, of 5 August 2010. The document is archived in the Laboratory of the National Museum in Warsaw.

⁴⁷ Japanese tissue on Beva-371 film adhesive in naphtha.

⁴⁸ The procedures took seven months. The specialists used 2,500 scalpel blades, 60 litres of naphtha and 55 litres of acetone for the chemical cleaning of the back and 15 litres of trichloroethylene to extract the wax-resin mass from selected areas of the canvas.

⁴⁹ Paraloid B 68 soluble in white spirit. Nine litres of the solvent were used. To allow for deeper penetration, the back was covered with foil. It took three weeks for the solvents to lose their vapours. The conservation committee selected the impregnation substance. *Protokół z Komisji Konserwatorskiej dotyczącej Bitwy pod Grunwaldem*, z dnia 28 lutego 2011 r. The committee was made up of representatives of the Academy of the Fine Arts (Prof. Iwona Szmelter, Prof. Joanna Szpor), National Museum in Krakow (Chief Conservator Janusz Czop), National Museum in Warsaw (Elżbieta Sobiecka-Mindak – Deputy Director of Management; Elżbieta Charazińska – Curator of the Department of Early Modern Polish Art; Dorota Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska – Chief Conservator; conservators of the Conservation Workshop of Canvas Painting; Dorota Pliś – Head and Anna Lewandowska, Piotr Lisowski; Marcin Draniak – Head of the Laboratory).

⁵⁰ This stage lasted two months.

⁵¹ The painting currently measures 431 × 991 cm.

⁵² Instytut Włókiennictwa, *Badania wytrzymałościowe płótna z Grunwaldu*, op. cit.

⁵³ Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska, "Oświadczenie," of 30 March 2011, op. cit.

In 2011 a new doubling that used a technology based on synthetic resin⁵⁴ (figs 9–10) was applied. Guiding this choice was its greater adhesive force than wax-resin mass, lesser weight of the adhesive joining the two canvases, its low acidity and much greater elasticity. The doubling was done by hand, with an insert of polyester textile of low basis weight onto linen canvas.⁵⁵ In September the painting was turned over, face up. This concluded the first stage of work, which took 284 days.

The second stage of conservation began in October 2011 with the first step of cleaning the front of the painting. After the Japanese tissue was removed, the necessary physical-chemical tests were conducted to identify the original and secondary adhesives. The textile of the backing⁵⁶ and the pigments were tested.⁵⁷ Next, the conservators removed the secondary varnishes, the retouches and the putty used to fill losses. This work was conducted on two tracks, chemically with solvents⁵⁸ and mechanically with scalpels. The pieces of old putty were replaced with new ones that faithfully imitated the paint layer⁵⁹ (figs 11–13). The stiff three-module stretcher bars were replaced with new self-tensioning aluminium ones, which guarantee an even, stable tension. On 30 March 2012 *Grunwald* was mounted on a trestle, a mobile construction for both the painting and its heavy wooden frame. The trestle stands 70 cm away from the wall, which makes it possible to monitor the state of the painting's back continuously. Its innovative mechanism makes its removal and hanging more efficient and significantly limits the number of persons needed to take the painting down or to hang it. It makes it possible to take the painting down without removing its frame, by slipping off its bottom side and moving the left and right sides apart, making it safer to manipulate the painting (fig. 14). It is likely the only contraption of its kind in the world.⁶⁰ The final phase of the conservation and restoration was varnishing⁶¹ and retouching by the graphic method (with lines) to leave the damaged places visible⁶² (fig. 15). Then, the painting was mounted in a specially designed frame.⁶³ The conservation ended on 8 August 2012.

⁵⁴ Beva-Film, Beva 371.

⁵⁵ The search for new doubling canvas (5.1 m wide) took over six months. In the end, it was imported from France. The canvas was ironed and stretched out on the old stretcher bars and impregnated with Paraloid B-72 in toluene (43 litres of the solution were used).

⁵⁶ It was identified as linen canvas. Iwona Pannenko, *Badanie tkaniny podobrazia Bitwy pod Grunwaldem J. Matejki*, Warsaw, 31 December 2010. This experts' report is in the archive of the National Museum in Warsaw Laboratory.

⁵⁷ University of Warsaw, Department of Chemistry, *Raport z badania pigmentów metodami: SEM-EDS, LA-ICP-MS oraz spektroskopia Raman*, of 20 December 2010. The tests were conducted by Dr Barbara Wagner, Dr Beata Wrzosek, Dr Hab. Mikołaj Donten and Karolina Malinowska, MA. They identified white lead, white zinc, red oxide pigment, cinnabar, red ochre, Neapolitan yellow, ferrous aluminosilicate (ochre?), of iron, cadmium yellow, schweinfurt green, chrome green, ultramarine, smalta, cobalt blue and black of iron pigments. The stratigraphic cross-cuts were done by Elżbieta Rośloniec, Laboratory of the National Museum in Warsaw.

⁵⁸ Acetone, petroleum and petroleum ether.

⁵⁹ With coloured putty on a base of acrylic resin with shellack insulation.

⁶⁰ Henryk Arendarski custom-designed the frame.

⁶¹ Damar varnish produced by Schminke, applied with tampons. As in the 1940s, the varnishing was done when the painting was placed vertically.

⁶² Maimeria-brand resin paints. The retouching done by Professor Bohdan Marconi's team was also visible.

⁶³ Design by Grzegorz Janczarski executed by: segments of the wooden skeleton frame, Stanisław Marchewka's firm MARCHEWKA; wooden profiles, National Museum in Warsaw carpentry shop headed by Wiesław Anuszewski; gilding and minor moulding, team of gilders of the Conservation Workshop of Sculpture and

The Battle of Grunwald has undergone numerous conservations and restorations. Two of them were conducted after the two world wars ended. The others, including the current one, were tied to various anniversaries.

In the end, the “Door to Door. Poland-Germany: 1,000 Years of Art and History” exhibition included a composition based on *The Battle of Grunwald* made to scale in cross-stitch.⁶⁴ Former Director Piotrowski wrote in *Muzeum krytyczne* [The critical museum] that both he and “a certain cultural politics based on the presence of key paintings in places and at times important to them” had lost the “battle of the *Battle*.”⁶⁵ And he continued: “I have frequently heard people argue that conservation is the most important platform for the functioning of a museum, that opinions and expert opinions of the conservation services are neutral, non-ideological, apolitical etc. Nothing could be further from the truth. This position hides the belief that ‘conserving’ not only objects but also the past is the most important role of a museum. [...] But if the stakes are decisions in the politics of institutions’ loans, the conservator’s decision is obviously political; furthermore, if a given institution declares a very specific ideological mission, as the N[ational] M[useum in] W[arsaw] did at that time, then the conservator’s decision obviously challenges this mission and juxtaposes it to another, conservative one, which consists of closing down the museum. This deneutralizing of the museum is the gist of the contribution of critical museum studies. They reveal the nature of the museum’s policy, which wants to use the conservative formula to present it as neutral in its world view and, in terms of the mechanics of management, natural.”⁶⁶

In this dispute, the position of the ideologue-director challenged the stand of the conservator, who was not interested in preserving a worldview or in interpreting history or the contemporary era. The Chief Conservator considered herself responsible primarily for preserving history’s material traces, in this case a national masterpiece.

Putting the restored *Battle of Grunwald* on view added splendour to the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the National Museum in Warsaw. On 19 September 2012, a solemn conference⁶⁷ was held, in which the Minister of Culture and National Heritage Bogdan Zdrojewski confirmed that “the conservation work on *The Battle of Grunwald* was indispensable. Renovating the painting required an enormous effort and immense expertise, and this work was done with exceptional professionalism.”⁶⁸ The museum’s Director, Agnieszka Morawińska, thanked the conservators and underscored that “[...] we are presenting the painting in the best possible condition [...]. This is all the more significant since Matejko’s work has particular importance to the Poles, to our history, to our perspective on the past and to

Painting on Wooden Supports led by Agnieszka Czubak: Anna Bielecka, Ewa Lechowska and Piotr Grochowski; other decorative elements, crew of the Conservation Workshop of Ancient Art and Stone Sculpture led by Zbigniew Godziejewski: Joanna Lis, Ewa Radziejowska-Paradowska and Andrzej Karolczak. The central part of the frame was covered in silk. The financing of the design and assembly of the frame was provided by PKO BP bank.

⁶⁴ Designed by Grzegorz Żochowski; authors Janina and Adam Panek from Działoszyn.

⁶⁵ Piotrowski, op. cit., p. 121.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 122.

⁶⁷ With the participation of Minister of Culture and National Heritage Bogdan Zdrojewski, Director of the National Museum in Warsaw Agnieszka Morawińska, Chairman of the Board of PKO BP Zbigniewa Jagiełło and Chief Conservator of the National Museum in Warsaw Dorota Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska.

⁶⁸ *Dzieło Matejki ocalone dla potomnych* [online] updated 21 September 2012, [retrieved: 23 March 2013], at: <<http://www.mkidn.gov.pl/pages/posts/dzieło-matejki-ocalone-dla-potomnych-3256.php?searchresult=1&string=Dzie%C5%82o+Matejki+ocalone+dla+potomnych>>.

our feeling of national identity.”⁶⁹ *A Picnic at Grunwald* was put on in the Stanisław Lorentz Courtyard, and guests came from all Poland to take part in it. The mass media reported on this special day, 22 September 2012.

The author is especially grateful to Anna Kiełczewska and Piotr Borusowski, whose valuable comments helped to shape the final version of this article.

⁶⁹ Ibid. Dr Agnieszka Morawińska was appointed Director of the National Museum in Warsaw on 1 November 2010.