

| Jan Matejko's *The Battle of Grunwald*:¹ The Story of the Painting's Peregrinations and Conservation Up to 1999

Jan Matejko began his first sketches for *The Battle of Grunwald* in 1872, studying historical objects such as armour and dress and spending long hours drawing horses in motion. To observe horses he travelled to landed estates with large stud farms, including Krasiczyn, Gumniska and Krzeszowice, and to his own grange in Krzesławice near Krakow. In the autumn of 1877, the painting almost done, Matejko visited the battlefield itself. On 7 September 1878 the finished panorama was taken to the third floor of the Krakow city hall and mounted on stretcher bars. On 17 September Matejko signed and dated it. On 28 September the room was opened to the public, and in November the painting began to travel.² It would make thirty-two journeys, including sixteen in Matejko's lifetime.

The Battle of Grunwald spent most of the First World War in Moscow, where it had been sent for safekeeping by Aleksander Lednicki.³ Six years later, on 17 December 1921, thanks to the efforts of the Polish Delegation for Claims who signed the Riga Treaty, it returned to Warsaw to the Zachęta Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts.⁴ The painter Franciszek Ejsmond participated in bringing it back. It was then that the painting underwent its first major conservation, guided by Professor Tadeusz Pruszkowski. The vertical sides of the damaged canvas were reinforced with patches bonded with glue-paste about 10 cm from its edges. The canvas had been harmed by nails, which the artist had used to affix it to the stretcher bars when loaning it for several exhibitions (figs 1-2). It was then that a tempest broke out among conservators over the need for a very serious operation to cover the paint-

¹ It is signed at bottom centre "Jan Matejko rp. 1878," painted in oil on canvas, dimensions 426 × 987 cm (ca. 42 m²), inventory no. MP 443 MNW. It comes from the collection of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, and was inventoried in 1940. See *Gallery of Polish Painting. Guide*, Ewa Micke-Broniarek, ed. (Warsaw: National Museum in Warsaw, 2006), p. 127 (Ewa Micke-Broniarek). See Bohdan Marconi, "II. Opis techniczny. Stan zachowania w r. 1944-45. Konserwacja" [Technical report. Condition in 1944-45], National Heritage Board of Poland, Teki Marconiego [Marconi Files], T.M. 80-6. I would like to thank Mrs Marta Michałowska, director of the Archives Team of the National Heritage Board of Poland for helping me to collect materials for this publication.

² Bohdan Marconi, "Bitwa pod Grunwaldem" [The Battle of Grunwald], *Kamena*, no. 4(90), R. XII (XX) (1953), p. 40.

³ Before the First World War he had served as a Duma deputy and later worked for the Department of Monument Protection of the Polish Committee in Moscow. See Ewa Micke-Broniarek, "Battle of Grunwald - history and myth," in *Jan Matejko's Battle of Grunwald: New Approaches*, Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, ed. (Warsaw: The National Museum in Warsaw, 2010), p. 47.

⁴ Ibid., p. 47. See also B. Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji* [On the art of conservation] (Warsaw: Arkady, 1982), p. 148.

ing's back with oil paint and white lead, then with varnish.⁵ Was the varnish necessary, since this experiment might be irreversible, outright harmful, if later the paint could not be removed?⁶ But Pruszkowski was of the opinion that, because canvas is less resistant to climatic variations than the layer of paint and base on top of it, it disintegrates sooner. He stressed that Zachęta's humid building was a bad environment for *Grunwald*, since fluctuations in moisture were making its canvas shrink and sag, which in turn caused visible detachments of the paint layers. He rejected other suggestions for conserving the painting, such as covering it with varnish or with flakes of tin foil (because of the increased moisture in the painting's support) or using a double canvas – both because of its size and the possibility that, were the humidity to increase, microorganisms would infect the painting, and because of the risk that the impasto would be flattened by pressing.⁷ In the end, the canvas was not doubled and its back was painted.⁸

Conserved this way, *Grunwald* survived at Zachęta until the outbreak of the Second World War. Its wartime adventures are the stuff of thrillers. Since the Germans could still not come to terms with the defeat they had suffered in 1410 at Grunwald, capturing this painting became the special mission of German army operations groups. Military intelligence, the occupation authorities, criminal police and the Gestapo searched for it. Had it not been for the actions of a group of Polish patriots set on saving it at any price, it would have been destroyed.

In the first days of September 1939, a scheme was hatched to hide *The Battle of Grunwald*.⁹ Zachęta's management was not well prepared, having made no plans to evacuate its collection. On 7 September¹⁰ *Grunwald* and another work by Matejko, *Skarga's Sermon*, were packed in a crate and transported to Lublin.¹¹ As it travelled in the next two days, the transport was repeatedly fired at, and, according to a newspaper account, four pairs of horses were killed by bullets.¹² A mere two and a half hours after they had reached Lublin, after the paintings were

⁵ This paint was made from lead carbonate and a very high-quality cold-pressed four-year-old oil made from the best seeds. See *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, file no. 72, source materials from the Society for the Protection of Monuments of the Past, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences (henceforth *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, file no. 72). I would like to thank Mrs Anna M. Manikowska-Sajdak for helping me to find these materials.

⁶ Minutes of the Commission of the Conservation Department of the Society for the Protection of the Monuments of the Past created on 25 April 1922 in *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, file no. 72.

⁷ *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, file no. 72.

⁸ The lining operation would have been done with glue-paste, and not wax-resin adhesive.

⁹ The authors of the plan were the administrative director of Zachęta, Stanisław Mikulicz-Radecki, chairman of the Zachęta council, the painter Stanisław Ejsmond, conservator from the State Conservation Studio, Marian Słonecki, specialist from the technical group Stanisław Garbarczyk and the painter Bolesław Sturałło-Gajduczeni. See Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 148.

¹⁰ B. Marconi, *Notatka na Konferencję Prasową* [Note for a press conference], National Heritage Board of Poland, Teki Marconiego, T.M. 80-7.

¹¹ An enormous platform was procured at the request of Warsaw vice-mayor Jan Pohoski. The transport left Warsaw at 5.20 a.m. and reached the museum on 9 September at 5 a.m. See Marconi, *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, op. cit., p. 41.

¹² Zbigniew Stolarek, "Bitwa pod Grunwaldem" wygrana po raz drugi. Śmiertelne niebezpieczeństwo i ocalenie arcydzieła Matejki, artykuł prasowy [The Battle of Grunwald won, again. The deadly dangers and saving of Matejko's masterpiece, an article from the press] [source unknown], National Heritage Board of Poland, Marconi Files, T.M. 80-1.

unloaded and placed in the City Museum,¹³ a bomb hit the building's left wing. Another shell struck the magistrate's office, burying and killing two of the plotters, Stanisław Ejsmond and Bolesław Sturałło-Gajduczeni. Luckily, *Grunwald* was already inside. Władysław Woyda of the museum¹⁴ pledged to keep the secret. If anyone asked for the painting, he was to hand it over only if the person showed one of the three calling cards with Director Stanisław Mikulicz-Radecki's signature. The first card stayed with Woyda, the second with Mikulicz-Radecki and the third was given to a representative of the Polish government. The situation was already extremely challenging, and the size of the hidden painting (its surface was ca. 42 m²) further complicated things. Obviously, only a handful of people could know about its whereabouts.¹⁵ With *Grunwald* temporarily in the museum's conference room, the men tried desperately to find a long-term hiding place. They decided to use the Polish government's escape to London to start a rumour that the masterpiece had been evacuated. An enormous roll was constructed and plain canvas was wrapped around it. The roll was placed inside a wooden container and given to the commander of a government transport column, and the word was spread. The threat was averted, for the time being. But as the German offensive reached Lublin, the painting was still in the conference room, which was being transformed into a temporary dormitory for refugees. The conspirators placed the canvas on the floor and covered it with massive quantities of bedding made of cut-up eiderdowns and mattresses. This happened literally at the last minute, since the very next morning Nazis cordoned off the building to search for the government officials who had stayed there a few days earlier. Two weeks later, the new authorities closed the museum altogether and requested the keys to it. With his flat destroyed by bombs, Woyda pleaded for permission to stay in the conference room. He later reminisced that he "would never have expected that he and his wife and sons would be sleeping on *The Battle of Grunwald*."¹⁶ German intelligence continued to suspect that the painting remained somewhere in Lublin, refusing to believe that it had been evacuated. Dr Ludwig, a specialist in so-called delicate affairs relating to art, arrived from Berlin. He began with entreaties and pleas, but then moved on to threats. He then promised two, and eventually ten, million marks and personal protection and foreign passports with visas of choice to anyone who would indicate where the painting had been hidden. Such a high reward was offered for none of the Third Reich's human enemies. This story smacked of a murder mystery. "While the hunt was going on, a veiled lady came to see Woyda. [...] She did not identify herself and proceeded to bombard him with questions about the whereabouts of the painting. In despair and fearing a provocation, Woyda responded: 'I don't know what you are asking about, Madam. I've had enough. Everyone is tormenting me about some painting, yesterday the Germans, now you!' The stranger [...] smiled and said: 'You do not trust me! It is unfortunate that I don't know how to win your trust. But we will help you!'" A short time later, the Polish service of London radio, at the time commanded by General Władysław Sikorski, broadcast a brief news item: "The local

¹³ With permission from the Lublin conservator and director of the Lublin Institute, Dr Józef Dutkiewicz. See Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 148.

¹⁴ According to Bohdan Marconi, Władysław Woyda was the steward (see Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 148) and according to newspapers, a professor (see Stolarek, "Bitwa pod Grunwaldem"..., op. cit.).

¹⁵ See a detailed account of the events and their actors in Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., pp. 148–52. The chief justice of the regional court, Stanisław Bryła, chairman of the Lublin Museum Society, the attorney Stanisław Kalinowski and the museum curator Maria Zawirska also knew that the painting was being deposited at the museum. See also Marconi, *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁶ Stolarek, "Bitwa pod Grunwaldem"..., op. cit.

Polish community is very happy that Jan Matejko's famous painting *The Battle of Grunwald* has reached London via Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia and France."¹⁷

Some of the tension lifted, but the conspirators nonetheless decided to move the Education Authority Library from the left wing of the old museum building to the conference room and to construct a more permanent hiding place for both paintings inside the library counter.¹⁸ They survived there until April 1941.¹⁹ Then, unfortunately, the governor ordered the library liquidated within three days, as the rooms were to be converted into an NSDAP library. In response, Władysław Woyda and Roman Pieczyrak²⁰ ostentatiously threw the useless library counter into the trash room, and then, together with Henryk Krzesiński,²¹ hauled the paintings away. Again, a handful of people were risking their lives for this dangerous mission. Taking advantage of the mass resettlement of Poles, they pretended to repair a fence and took it apart to make it easy to take out such a large object and broke nearby street lamps to make the area dark. The paintings, concealed in a horse-drawn cart under a pile of furniture, were moved two kilometres away to the city train depot.²² They were wrapped around a column and placed inside a wooden chest covered on all sides with tar paper and wrapped with wire. The chest was put in a pit inside a shed and sealed with fresh cement.²³ To reduce moisture in the pit, ditches were dug for run-off water. Straw and hay stored on the dirt floor remained there until the German police brought their horses into the shed on Good Friday. The paintings survived in the pit until Lublin's liberation on 18 October 1944, when Pieczyrak and Krzesiński presented them to representatives of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, head of the Department of Culture and Art, Wincenty Rzymowski, and head of its Arts Section, Captain Aleksander Rafałowski (fig. 3).²⁴

The paintings were taken out of their hiding place and stored first in the former Agricultural Bank building and then in a warehouse of the Fermentation Works of the Polish Tobacco Monopoly. Regrettably, despite all their protective layers, they had been gravely damaged. Professor Alexey Rybnikov of the Tretyakov State Gallery in Moscow was invited to assess their condition.²⁵ He performed an initial examination, twice disinfected their backs²⁶ and attempted to clean their fronts. On 8 August 1945 they travelled to Warsaw by lorry²⁷ (fig. 4). Because of their size, they were placed in the former Zachęta Society for the Encouragement

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 149.

²⁰ Roman Pieczyrak was the head of the economic section of the Lublin city council. See Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 149.

²¹ Henryk Krzesiński was the deputy head of the economic section of the Lublin city council. Ibid.

²² Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 149.

²³ The Ignacy and Władysław Drewnowski construction company performed the work. See Marconi, *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, op. cit., p. 42.

²⁴ Akt przekazania P.K.W.N, Resort Kultury i Sztuki [Act of handover, Polish Committee of National Liberation, Ministry of Culture and the Arts] L.p1740/N, Dyr. Muz. z dnia 13 listopada 1944 [of 13 November 1944], National Heritage Board of Poland, Marconi Files, T.M. 80-1.

²⁵ Professor Rybnikov spent two and a half weeks on this work. See Marconi, *II. Opis techniczny...*, op. cit.

²⁶ A 10-percent solution of thymol and alcohol was used. Ibid.

²⁷ Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 156.

of Fine Arts, which now housed the State Conservation Studios.²⁸ In May 1946²⁹ a team led by Professor Bohdan Marconi, head of the Painting Conservation Studio of the National Museum in Warsaw,³⁰ began their conservation and restoration.³¹ They were subsequently submitted for assessment to Professor Gerasimov and Director Zamoshkin of the Tretyakov Gallery.³² The necessary scientific analysis equipment that was brought in included a quartz analytical lamp, an X-ray machine and microscopes. Funding the conservation were the Ministry of Culture and the Arts, the Main Directorate of Museums and Relic Protection and the Chief Conservator's Office.

The poor condition of the Zachęta building made the conservators' work very difficult. The makeshift glass roof leaked incessantly, keeping the staff busy moving buckets under the holes to prevent the painting from getting wet. The uneven linoleum-covered concrete floor became a hatchery for mould and fungi, so that the linoleum needed to be replaced and the whole room to be disinfected. According to a newspaper account: "All this stems from the dramatic disparity between the enormity of the ministry's work and the care being taken by the conservators and by the museum's management, and the negligence of those responsible for the renovations. This raises the question: who is responsible for tolerating this state of affairs? The public is demanding that immediate order be restored in Zachęta's rooms. This priceless document of national culture belongs to the whole society, which is protesting against this scandalous sloppiness, just as it has protested against the petrol storage in Zachęta's immediate vicinity. The collection of art masterpieces that survived the destruction of war must not fall victim to thoughtless bureaucratism. *Grunwald* must be resurrected."³³ The conservation was to be completed by the end of 1946, but this did not happen until June 1949. It was shown to the public on 15 July, the anniversary of the battle.³⁴

After *Grunwald* had been brought to Warsaw from Lublin, Professor Dr Stanisław Lorentz, director of Museums and Relic Protection and director of the National Museum in Warsaw, and Professor Bohdan Marconi were the first to inspect the painting. The photographic documentation was done in Zachęta, where the painting was spread out on the ksyololit floor. It was photographed with a camera set up on a specially built support close up

²⁸ The enormity of the wartime destruction of art works in Poland required a state institution for the preservation of the surviving works to be created. This job was given to the State Studios of Monuments Conservation, part of the Chief Conservator Professor Dr Jan Zachwatowicz's office in the Main Directorate of Museums and Monuments Conservation of the Ministry of Culture and the Arts. Prior to 1939, the State Conservator's Studio, in the Arts Department of the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment, which was located in Marcello Bacciarelli's former studio in the Royal Castle in Warsaw, was responsible for this. See National Heritage Board of Poland, Marconi Files, T.M. 80-7.

²⁹ Marconi, *II. Opis techniczny*..., op. cit.

³⁰ The team was made up of team leader Professor Bohdan Marconi, assistant Zofia Blizińska, conservators Cecylia Kowalska, Aldona Romanowicz, Jadwiga Tereszczenko, Stanisława Majewska, Maria Orthwein, Gustaw Pilecki, Władysław Kowalski, senior technician Stanisław Garbarczyk and master carpenter Maksymilian Sobiczewski. See Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 152.

³¹ They were to begin on the anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald, 15 July 1945. See Marconi, *Notatka na Konferencję*..., op. cit.

³² Bohdan Marconi, *Faktura: technika i stan zachowania obrazów Jana Matejki* [Texture: The techniques and state of preservation of Jan Matejko's paintings], National Heritage Board of Poland, Marconi Files, T.M. 80-11.

³³ *Wieczór*, 15 July 1947, National Heritage Board of Poland, Marconi Files, T.M. 80-1.

³⁴ The restoration of the building was completed in the summer of 1948. See Marconi, *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, op. cit., p. 42.

to the glass ceiling. Yet because of poor lighting, the camera did not capture the condition of the painting precisely.³⁵

Because it had been buried underground, *Grunwald* was in a pitiful state. The 90-cm thick wooden post onto which it had been rolled fourfold³⁶ had rotted throughout from moisture and lack of ventilation, and the damaged frame had torn the painting's support (**fig. 5**). But as would be learnt decades later, this damage did not occur all by itself. In 2010 a man visiting the Gallery of Polish Painting told a guard that in 1944 he had taken part in unearthing the painting. Someone had accidentally slipped and fallen into the ditch, right onto the decayed roll, and broken it,³⁷ causing four 70-cm horizontal tears in the canvas (about 1 m from the bottom), as well as smaller vertical rips leading from them, some as long as 40 cm. The mouldy canvas at the bottom of the painting had disintegrated, and now its bottom edge was about 10 cm shorter than its top edge. Folds formed, some as high as 5 cm. The canvas threads would pulverize at the lightest touch. The painting had greyed and was unintelligible in places, presumably from the activity of the mould, which had produced acids and self-digested. The wax-oil seal had disintegrated. It is clear now that had the whole back of the canvas not been painted and varnished in 1921, the painting would probably have survived in much worse condition, if at all.

The conservators removed all the backing from the back of the canvas, patches and strips, as well as the oil paint.³⁸ They secured the tears and, after reinforcing the edges with 30-cm strips of wax mass, they attached the canvas to auxiliary stretcher bars in order to straighten it. The necessary decatization was challenging since, with the back painted, the front could not be protected³⁹ (**fig. 6**). It also entailed placing compresses of moist cardboard and weighing the canvas down with glass panels. This operation lasted five months. Next, the support was reinforced with lining fixed with wax-resin adhesive,⁴⁰ which took another month. To prevent the impastos from being flattened, it was pressed through woollen felt measuring 5 × 13 m × 0.5 cm.⁴¹ It took half a year to find a single piece of canvas of the right dimensions for lining. The felt and lining canvas had to be specially woven on a Żyrardów loom at Lüdert & Müller in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. The new canvas was nailed to the floor, and then impregnated with glue water.⁴² This lasted as a support for the painting until 2010.

Next, the painting was nailed to wooden stretcher bars with a cross bar,⁴³ and its front was cleaned with conservator's soap.⁴⁴ Restoring the paint layers proved to be an exceptionally

³⁵ Marconi, *II. Opis techniczny...*, op. cit.

³⁶ Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 157.

³⁷ His identity is, unfortunately, unknown.

³⁸ This was removed mechanically by polishing and scraping without solvents. Assisting in this operation were students from the Conservation Department of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. See Marconi, *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*, op. cit., p. 43. According to Marconi, the back had been painted with zinc white. See also Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 156.

³⁹ Gluing paper onto the front of the painting would not have permitted the folds to be flattened out.

⁴⁰ It is made of wax, colophony, Venetian turpentine (1 : 1 : 0.1). See Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 160.

⁴¹ The painting was insulated with a double layer of paper. See Marconi, *II. Opis techniczny...*, op. cit.

⁴² Marconi's term. Ibid.

⁴³ The painting was hung on the wall on 20 December 1948. Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ingredients: Venetian turpentine, balsamic turpentine, 1 : 3, ammonia. See Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 161.

difficult and time-consuming process, with Professor Marconi declaring it a new problem in the history of conservation.⁴⁵ It took between four and five hours to restore every dm sq.⁴⁶ The ultraviolet examination⁴⁷ showed that only some places on the front were covered with varnish.⁴⁸ After bare spots in the base layer were filled with gesso,⁴⁹ the painting was varnished⁵⁰ in an upright position.⁵¹ Bare spots were stippled with paints made of English pigments on damar medium, “facsimile,” to make the retouching legible from a distance. But the signature’s letters were not redrawn. Some of the conservation materials needed to be imported. Special towers were also constructed to give the conservators access to the upper part of the painting as they cleaned its front, filled in putty in places where the paint layers and the base had been damaged and did other work. The old frame, which had been in use since 1900, was conserved by filling in pieces that had chipped and cleaned, with the participation of carpenters from the State Workshops of Decorative Conservation⁵² (fig. 7).

Ten years later, in 1959, *Grunwald* was loaned for the exhibition “Polské malířství od Canaletta k Wyspiańskému. Ze sbírek Národního Muzea ve Varšavě” [Polish painting from Canaletto to Wyspiański from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw] organized by the National Gallery in Prague at Valdštejnská jízdárna.⁵³ In 1962, as the exhibition rooms of the National Museum in Warsaw were being reorganized for the 100th anniversary of the museum, the painting was covered with planks.⁵⁴ It was shown again in 1966,⁵⁵ in an exhibition of “Polskie malarstwo historyczne” [Polish historical painting] at the National Museum in Poznań, an event in the national celebrations of the 1000th anniversary of Polish statehood. In 1974 *Grunwald* travelled again, this time to Moscow for the exhibition “Arcydzieła malarstwa polskiego XIX i początków XX wieku” [Masterpieces of Polish painting of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries], on the 30th anniversary of the creation of the People’s Republic of Poland.⁵⁶ This was the largest show to date of Polish art in the USSR, and also the

⁴⁵ Marconi, *II. Opis techniczny*..., op. cit.

⁴⁶ Ingredients: hydrogen peroxide, ammonia and chloroform purissimum. See Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 161.

⁴⁷ Professor Marconi’s Polish term “promienie pozafioletowe” is a poetic term he created, something like “rays beyond violets.”

⁴⁸ Marconi, *II. Opis techniczny*..., op. cit.

⁴⁹ Ingredients: whiting, carpenter’s glue, Venetian turpentine. See Marconi, *O sztuce konserwacji*, op. cit., p. 161.

⁵⁰ Ingredients: varnish, balsamic turpentine, mastic, 3 : 1. Ibid.

⁵¹ Marconi, *II. Opis techniczny*..., op. cit.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *Polské malířství od Canaletta k Wyspiańskému. Ze sbírek Národního Muzea ve Varšavě* [Polish painting from Canaletto to Wyspiański, from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw], Krystyna Sroczyńska, ed., exh. cat., Národní galerie v Praze, Valdštejnská jízdárna [former Waldstein Riding School, one of the gallery’s divisions], Prague, 12 May – 12 July 1959 (Prague: Ministerstvo Školství a Kultury, Národní galerie v Praze, 1959).

⁵⁴ “Co z galerią malarstwa? – list Zofii Petrkowskiej z Bielska-Białej do redakcji” [What’s with the painting gallery? – a letter from Zofia Petrkowska of Bielsko-Biała], *Argumenty*, 44, 4 November 1962. Anna Maślowska, *Kronika wystaw Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie 1862–2002*, vol. 2: 1963–1982 (Warsaw: Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, 2006), p. 10.

⁵⁵ In the period 16 May – 17 September 1966.

⁵⁶ In the period 16 March – 10 May 1974.

largest in the history of contemporary Polish exhibitions in terms of museum science and protection of monuments.⁵⁷ During the planning meeting of museum directors, Professor Dr Stanisław Lorentz emphasized the prestige of this exhibition, “which will propagate Polish art in Soviet society on a large scale with examples of the best paintings from museums across Poland.”⁵⁸ Appreciating the importance of this show, the National Museum in Warsaw loaned some 200 works, mostly from its permanent exhibition, temporarily closing the Gallery of Polish Painting. Dr Bohdan Rymaszewski announced that the minister of culture and art had asked the National Museum in Warsaw to organize the show, emphasizing that it was being put on in the Soviet capital’s largest exhibition hall and that it “represents an exceptionally weighty event in both artistic and political terms,”⁵⁹ and therefore that it must to be brought together on “unusually short notice.”⁶⁰ He asked the other museums to prepare and restore their exhibits. He also informed the gathering that the National Museum in Warsaw would be responsible for transporting the crated paintings from Krakow to Warsaw by a “separate furniture lorry of the International PKS, [which] would join the convoy from Warsaw and be escorted to Moscow.”⁶¹ He reminded his colleagues about the “possibility that the Cooperative [Spółdzielnia Pracy Artystów Plastyków – Artists’ Cooperative] would contract the preparations of the proper conservation of the paintings for the exhibition using funds appropriated for major renovations.”⁶² The meeting also discussed how to design the Hall of Honour to display *Grunwald*. “After a long discussion, the suggestion came up to hang Weiss’s ‘Manifesto’ and Lentz’s ‘Strike’ on the side walls and to place Alina Szapocznikow’s ‘Polish-Soviet Friendship’ sculpture against the back wall [...]”⁶³

A close inspection of *Grunwald* revealed that it required conservation.⁶⁴ The properties of the adhesive used for lining had changed. Blisters had appeared between the original canvas and the second layer, and the edges had become delaminated (**fig. 8**). Contributing significantly

⁵⁷ Masłowska, *Kronika wystaw...*, op. cit., p. 153.

⁵⁸ *Protokół narady Dyrektorów muzeów zwołanej przez Dyrektora Zarządu Muzeów dr. Bohdana Rymaszewskiego, z dnia 29 stycznia 1974 r.* [Minutes of the meeting of museum Directors organized by the director of the Museum Council, Dr Bohdan Rymaszewski, of 29 January 1974]. Taking part in the meeting were Dr Bohdan Rymaszewski, director of the Museum Council; Professor Dr Stanisław Lorentz, director of the National Museum in Warsaw; Wojciech Fijałkowski, MA, vice-director of the National Museum in Krakow; Tadeusz Chruścicki, MA, vice-director of the National Museum in Krakow; Professor Dr Kazimierz Malinowski, director of the National Museum in Poznań; Dr Władysław Filipowiak, director of the National Museum in Szczecin; Piotr Łukaszewicz, MA, representative of the National Museum in Wrocław; Ryszard Stanisławski, MA, director of the Museum of Art in Łódź; Zdzisław Ciara, MA, director of the District Museum in Toruń; Alojzy Oborny, MA, director of the Świętokrzyskie Museum in Kielce; Dr Krystyna Sroczyńska, curator of the exhibition; curator of the Gallery of Polish Art of the National Museum in Warsaw, Gabriela Lipkova, MA, chief conservator of the National Museum in Warsaw; Joachim Bieńkowski, administrative director of the National Museum in Warsaw; Lija Skalska, MA, secretary of the exhibition, assistant in the Gallery of Polish Art of the National Museum in Warsaw. The minutes can be found in the conservation documentation maintained by the Chief Conservator’s Office of the National Museum in Warsaw (folder: prace konserwatorskie przy obrazie „Bitwa pod Grunwaldem” i obrazach B. Bellotto zw. Canaletto [conservation work on *The Battle of Grunwald* painting and paintings by B. Bellotto, known as Canaletto]; contractor: Sp. Pracy Artystów Plastyków “Plastyka,” Warsaw, ul. Długa 36).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Dokumentacja konserwatorska [Conservation documentation], no. 60/21, Archive of the National Museum in Warsaw.

to this condition was the leftover oil paint that had been used to saturate the whole back of the painting in the 1920s. Some of the tears were as long as 0.5 cm, which confirmed that they were not fixed together. Changes in colour were also discovered, as was the chipping and abrasion of paint, especially along its edges.

The Artists' Cooperative launched the conservation,⁶⁵ and the cost of its work was estimated at 427,047.50 zlotys.⁶⁶ Serving as experts were Professor Bohdan Marconi, Maria Orthwein and Gustaw Pilecki.⁶⁷ They began with an initial assessment. Next, they secured the paint layers in places with blotting paper and carbon paper and straightened the supports. The edges were reinforced with 75-cm strips,⁶⁸ whose overhang was doubly folded over to support the original margins (**fig. 9**). Wax mass was injected into the gaps between the two layers of canvas, successfully consolidating them. The whole front was cleaned with conservator's soap to remove the layer of dirt and, in places, where retouching had changed and darkened. Next, wax putty was used to fill in gaps, which were then stippled with watercolour. Finally, the whole front was safeguarded with wax with some varnish added.⁶⁹ In the course of the project the painting was rolled and re-rolled four times (**fig. 10**). It was attached to new wooden stretcher bars. The frame was also conserved.⁷⁰

The transports left for Moscow on 18 March 1974 accompanied by Chief Conservator Gabriela Lipkowa and administrative manager Joachim Bieńkowski. At the Polish-Soviet border, a Soviet militia escort took over from the Polish militia. In Moscow, staff of the National Museum in Warsaw and one conservator from Krakow unpacked, hung and repacked the paintings.⁷¹ After the exhibition was over and the paintings had travelled back to Warsaw, *Grunwald* was re-attached to new, rigid aluminium, three-module stretcher bars, which could only be adjusted mechanically with a wrench, one module at a time.⁷² They held it up until 2012.

⁶⁵ Contracted by the National Museum in Warsaw by letter Nr. XXVII-1-1/74 z dnia 3 stycznia 1974 r. [of 3 January 1974].

⁶⁶ *Protokół nr UK/2/74 z posiedzenia Komisji Konserwatorskiej działającej w oparciu o Zarządzenia Nr 64 Prez. Rady Ministrów z dnia 27 XI 1965 r./M.P. Nr 67 poz. 383/ dla ustalenia zakresu, stopnia trudności i zniszczenia oraz wartości prac konserwatorskich przy 26 obrazach sztalugowych [w tym 25 obrazów Canaletta] z Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie, odbytego w Warszawie dn. 16 stycznia 1974 r.* [Minutes no. UK/2/74 from a meeting of the Conservation Commission working according to Directive No. 64 from the chairman of the Council of Ministers of 27.11.1965, M.P. No. 67 poz. 383/ to determine the extent, degree of difficulty and damage and value of conservation work on 26 easel paintings (including 25 paintings by Canaletto) from the National Museum in Warsaw, taking place in Warsaw on 16 January 1974]. The minutes were signed by citizens representing the Ministry of Culture and the Arts Centre of Documentation of Monuments, Krystyna Sommer, MA; National Museum in Warsaw, vice-director Wojciech Fijałkowski, MA; Professor Stefan Kozakiewicz; Dr Krystyna Sroczyńska, curator of the Polish Painting Collection; Gabriela Lipkow, MA, Chief Conservator; and experts: Professor Bohdan Marconi, Maria Orthwein, MA; Gustaw Pilecki, MA; executors: Zbigniew Majchrowicz, MA; Lucjan Bilecki, MA; Maria Rawdanowicz, MA. These minutes can be found in the conservation documents archived by the Chief Conservator of the National Museum in Warsaw (see the already mentioned file no. 57).

⁶⁷ The conservation was done between 10 January and 16 December 1974 by a team led by Zbigniew Majchrowicz, MA, and made up of: Franciszek Kędzior, MA, Stanisława Majda, MA, and Stanisława Majewska, MA. See conservation documentation, no. 60/21, Archive of the National Museum in Warsaw.

⁶⁸ The adhesive used was a wax-resin mass, but this time damar was used instead of colophony. Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ingredients: natural wax, balsamic turpentine, mastic varnish. Ibid.

⁷⁰ The work consisted of treating with lead tetraoxide, varnishing, shellacking and gilding on a mordant. It was estimated at 47,207 zlotys. Faktura nr 2/UK/2/74/75/259, kosztorys z dnia 9 stycznia 1975 r. [Invoice, estimated budget of 9 January 1975]. Spółdzielnia Pracy Artystów Plastyków "Plastyka." Ibid.

⁷¹ Protokół [Minutes] no. MK/2/74]. Ibid.

⁷² Produced by the Gdańsk shipyard.

In 1976–1982, while the Polish Painting Gallery was being renovated, the *The Battle of Grunwald* was deposited in the Malbork Castle Museum.

In 1999 *The Battle of Grunwald* was loaned to the National Museum of Lithuania in the Old Arsenal of the Lower Castle in Vilnius.⁷³ This was the painting's first show in Lithuania, and it was a part of the ceremonies accompanying the visit to Lithuania by President of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski. The idea came from Poland's ambassador, Eufemia Tejchmann, whose letter to National Museum in Warsaw Director Ferdynand B. Ruszczyc emphasized that "to the Lithuanian mind, the Battle of Grunwald is the most important moment of fame and glory of the Lithuanian armed struggle [...] and testimony to the greatness of its nation [...], a reminder of the great military traditions of the Poles and the Lithuanians, which is especially important at a time when the Lithuanian-Polish Peace Force Battalion, LITPOLBAT, is being formed."⁷⁴

Some 170,000 people visited the exhibition. *Grunwald* was accompanied by 65 military objects from the Museum of the Polish Army, whose selection had been approved by its director, Dr Henryk Wielecki. They included a stone cannonball from the Grunwald battlefield.

The loan involved painstaking negotiations. It was a major undertaking, assessed at 203,415 zlotys. The Polish sponsors included BIG Bank S.A. and the PEKAES-Multi-Spedytor transportation firm. The painting's conservation lasted about two months, as numerous earlier procedures had to be repeated. Of the main team of fourteen people who restored it, ten also took part in organizing the exhibition in Vilnius.⁷⁵

The decision to allow *Grunwald* to travel was made with great caution. It was finally decided that the overall state of the painting would allow it to be rolled up. In 1999 its layers were still relatively well consolidated, and the previous conservations had strengthened the support with lining and very broad strips of canvas. But the responsible parties continued to consider the risks involved in a loan. The final decision to release the painting was based on the importance of the show, but this was to be the last time the painting would be loaned. The Polish side stressed the need for full conservation, which would need to be done within a dozen years of its trip to Vilnius. This was noted on the inventory record of the painting.

Preparations for the Vilnius exhibition lasted three months, from 12 January to 12 April. Two working meetings in Vilnius set the conditions for the loan.⁷⁶ They addressed the interior decoration of the exhibition space, the mounting of the painting and security, as well as temperature, humidity and lighting requirements.

The Vilnius museum needed to make major adaptations. These included building an access road for the transport after taking down some fencing and commissioning the Lithuanian

⁷³ On 6 April – 10 August 1999 by agreement signed on 11 January 1999 by Ferdynand B. Ruszczyc, director of the National Museum in Warsaw, and Romualdas Budrys, director of the Lithuanian National Museum in Vilnius.

⁷⁴ Letter of 22 December 1998.

⁷⁵ The director of the National Museum in Warsaw created a team, to be led by senior curator Elżbieta Charazińska and curator Ewa Micke-Broniarek of the Modern Polish Art Collection, and to include chief conservator Dorota Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska and senior renovator Bogusław Janczak from the Conservation Department. Responsible for the security measures was head specialist for public procurement Sławomir Adamczyk, and for finances, head of the Finance Department Wanda Korzeniewska. The conservation team, led by the chief conservator, was made up of: conservator Piotr Lisowski, assistant conservator Anna Lewandowska, renovator Anna Bogdańska, apprentice renovator Marek Święcki and senior renovator Bogdan Grygiel. The Technical Group consisted of assemblers Robert Tyc, Krzysztof Kołodziejczyk, Robert Błaszczuk and senior laboratory technician Tomasz Piórkowski.

⁷⁶ Taking part on the Polish side were Dorota Ignatowicz-Woźniakowska, Bogusław Janczak and Sławomir Adamczyk, and on the Lithuanian side, vice-director Laima Bialopetravičienė, technical director Aleksander Kulikauskas and chief conservator Loreta Meškelevičienė.

army to construct a special bridge. The museum's outside door was significantly enlarged, to allow the crate with the painting to be brought in (fig. 11). The museum took this opportunity to renovate its exhibition rooms.

All the materials and equipment needed to take the painting down were assembled at the National Museum in Warsaw. They included 400 m of climbing ropes, eight pulleys and a special single piece of five-metre-wide felt imported from Belgium.⁷⁷ Bogusław Janczak designed a special aluminium chest measuring 500 × 130 × 130 cm and a roll.⁷⁸ The chest was lined.

Dozens of people were involved in taking the painting off the wall in the Matejko Room, including 20 men holding the ropes. On 15 March at midday, the painting was taken down together with its frame. It was a very dangerous operation. To prevent the canvas from warping along the diagonal, the painting was placed on the floor. Next, it was turned face up onto twelve sawhorses, and its outer frame was taken off. After the back of the painting was secured with two two-metre-wide canvas bands, the painting was turned over again by the same method with ropes and snap hooks. After being taken off its stretcher bars, it was positioned on the floor on top of cardboard, felt and silicone paper (fig. 12).

The first stage of conservation involved cleaning dust off its back and twice pressing its edges on both sides. After it was again turned over face up, dirt was removed from the paint surface.⁷⁹ Next, a thin layer of retouching varnish was administered to secure the paint surface and to bring out and saturate its colours. Paint was applied in bare spots, and the colours used in some previous alterations were modified.⁸⁰ Preparations related directly to transporting the painting to Lithuania were done over Easter. On Easter Monday the painting was wrapped around the roll face up. After Easter, the painting was transported to Vilnius by lorry,⁸¹ where the following week, 5–12 April, was spent preparing it for display. Numerous procedures needed to be repeated, including the reconstruction of layers of gilding on the outer frame.

From the day the exhibition opened, *Grunwald* was the centre of public attention. To enable as many people as possible to see it and in response to the Museum Director, Romualdas Budrys's⁸² request, the exhibition was extended to 30 August. The exhibits returned to Warsaw on 16 September 1999.

On 17 May 2012, after another extensive conservation, *The Battle of Grunwald* was displayed in the Matejko Room of the Gallery of 19th-Century Art. The next instalment of the story of its restoration will appear in next year's issue of *Journal*.⁸³

⁷⁷ Janusz Osiński, sales assistant in the "Świat dywanów" shop in Janki helped to procure it.

⁷⁸ Conducted by COVPOL.

⁷⁹ Balsamic, extracted and Venetian turpentine, ammonia and Contrad 2000 were used to clean it.

⁸⁰ Restauro-Maimerii watercolours and resin paints were used to fill in the spots.

⁸¹ It was a Volvo with a 13.5-metre semi-trailer.

⁸² Letter of 15 June 1999.

⁸³ The author would like to thank Anna Kielczewska of the Publications Department of the National Museum in Warsaw for editing this text and for our very pleasant cooperation.