

New Life for a Lost Painting. Estonian Declaration of Independence in Viljandi, on February 24 1918, oil on plywood, painted by Juhan Kangilaski in 1939

Marika Mängel, Viljar Talimaa

marika.mangel@evm.ee, viljar.talimaa@evm.ee
SA EVM Conservation and Digitalisation Centre Kanut, Estonia.

How the painting was found

Juhan Kangilaski completed the painting (oil on plywood, 130 cm x 185 cm) in 1939. The work was in the painter's house at 5, Edela Street in Viljandi. The house was sold to Martin Kass in 1940 and as this year brought great political changes the new owner had to hide the painting and, its painted side hidden, it became a panel in the ceiling of a larder on the first floor. In 2007 the new owners of the house decided to carry out thorough redecoration. As the painting was not visible, the 'ceiling' was sawn out in fragments.

The condition of the painting before conservation

The picture painted on plywood was in pieces i.e. a 23-cm wide part on its left side was separated. During the conservation it turned out that some fragments were missing and the general format had changed, too. The painting was smaller than it had initially been – a 16-cm piece from the lower edge and a 3-cm piece from the right side were missing.

The surface of the painting was yellowed, extremely soiled with hardened dirt and stained with unidentified spots.

Conservation-restoration

The initial format was not restored. Three missing plywood pieces (the biggest – 11 cm x 21 cm) were added to present an idea of the whole. The main aim of the conservation was to restore the atmosphere and emotion of the painting and make it displayable. The connection between the surface and the grounding was satisfactory – losses in the paint layers coincided with those in the grounding. The added plywood pieces were primed with a mixture of fish-glue and chalk and were shaded first with watercolours, imitating the surface of plywood, and finally with the Maimier ready-made colours.



Fig. 1 Damages that occurred due to the redecoration. The 23-cm wide piece on the left side had been cut and sawn through twice.



Fig. 2 The initial format of the painting was not restored, only three missing plywood pieces were added.



Fig. 3 The connection between the surface and grounding was satisfactory, losses in the paint layer coincided with those in the grounding.



Fig. 4 Testing before cleaning the surface of the painting.



Fig. 5 The added pieces of plywood were primed with fish-glue and chalk mixture.



Fig. 6 a detail. Primed surfaces were first shaded with watercolours, imitating the plywood texture.



Fig. 7 a detail. The painting was restored with the Maimier ready-made colours



Fig. 8 - 9 The painting after conservation.



Summing up

The initial looks of the painting (that had meanwhile been reused as a secondary building material) have been restored. The conserved painting is displayed in the Viljandi Town Hall. This is a present to the Viljandi people from their municipality for the centenary of the Estonian Republic.

Materials used

Glue Franklin Tite bond (Kremer Pigmente, Germany), tri-Ammonium citrate (OÜ Kemasol, Estonia), ethyl alcohol, turpentine, sturgeon glue (Russia), chalk, watercolours (Winsor&Newton), MAIMER Ready-made colors, Kremer Pigmente, varnish (Lefranc&Bourgeois).

