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Ludolfs Liberts (1895–1959), Latvia
Stage design sketch, paper, cardboard,
gouache, tempera, 49.8 × 65.5 cm, PK-2539
Collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art

In 2024, the Latvian National Museum of Art hosted a large-scale exhibition “Ludolfs Liberts (1895–1959). *The Hypnotic Brilliance of Art Deco.*” Ludolfs Liberts is one of the most outstanding representatives of Art Deco in Latvia, and this is most vividly demonstrated by his scenography and costume sketches. The artist created stage and costume designs for more than 43 productions. Without exaggeration, it can be stated that the 1920s–1930s at the Latvian National Opera were the era of Liberts. He set the stylistic direction, influenced his colleagues, and was at the centre of attention of critics and audiences alike. This exhibition was the first retrospective of the artist on such a scale. Most of the works were exhibited publicly for the first time. Sixty-one works from the LNMM collection were transferred to the Museum’s Graphics Conservation workshop. They were executed in various techniques, and their state of preservation as well as the required conservation treatments differed significantly. Conservation and restoration of the costume sketches and scenographic works were carried out by three LNMM paper conservators.

One of the most interesting and complex works from a conservation perspective was a stage design sketch for Act III of Giuseppe Verdi’s opera *Aida*, created by the artist for the Kaunas State Theatre. The premiere took place in 1927, directed by Nikolajs Tihomirovs.

CONDITION OF THE ARTWORK BEFORE RESTORATION

The artwork was dusty and soiled.

The adhesion of the paint layer to the support was very unstable in several areas; paint losses had occurred in multiple locations, and in some areas dangerous paint layer lifting had developed, posing a serious risk of further flaking. In some areas, it is visible that there may have been another drawing beneath the image. Along the edges, there were two large losses of the cardboard support. In some areas, the cardboard edges were abraded and delaminated; the corners were worn with small losses. Structural breaks had developed within the cardboard mass along the edges. Several small tears were present on the right edge.

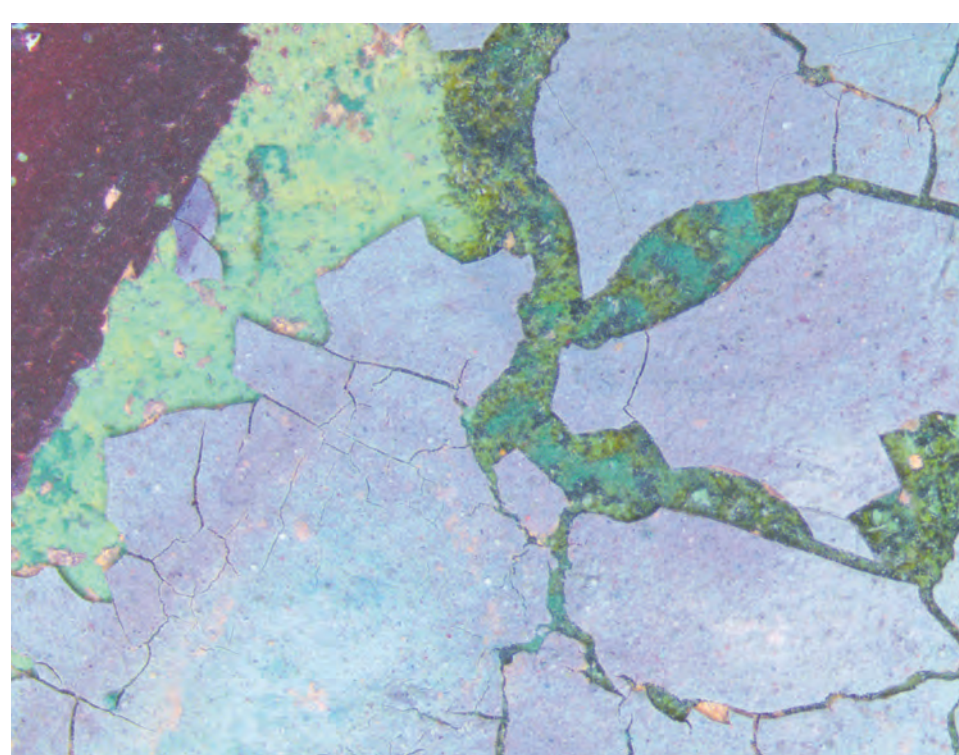
On the reverse, the paper was heavily dusted, with ingrained dirt in some areas. Various paint stains of different origin were present across the entire surface.



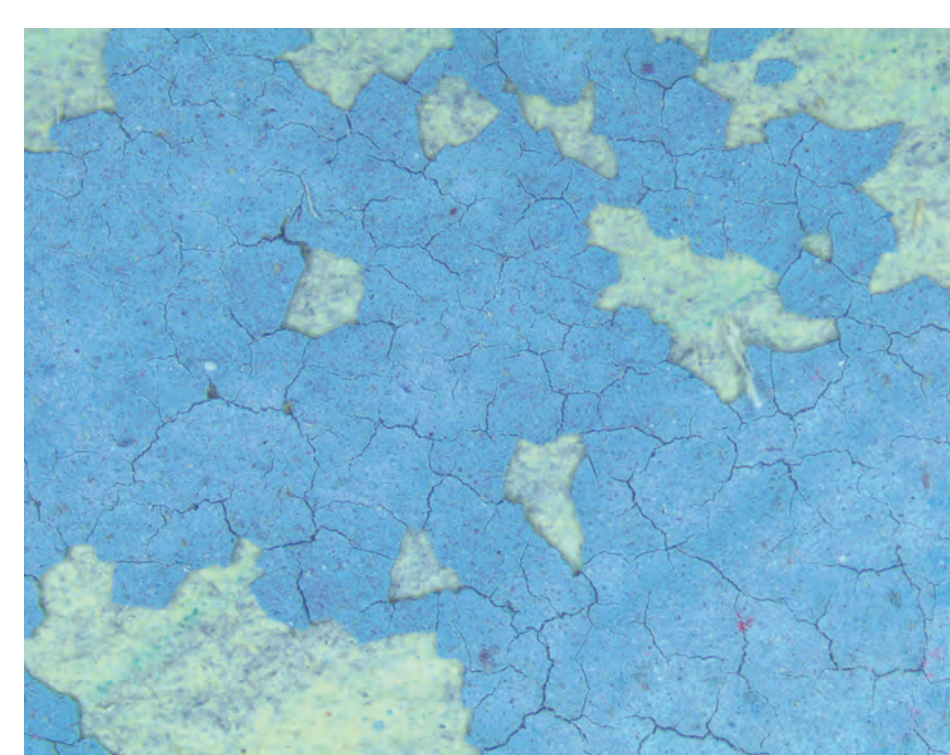
Before restoration



The reverse side before restoration



Examination of the color layer under the microscope



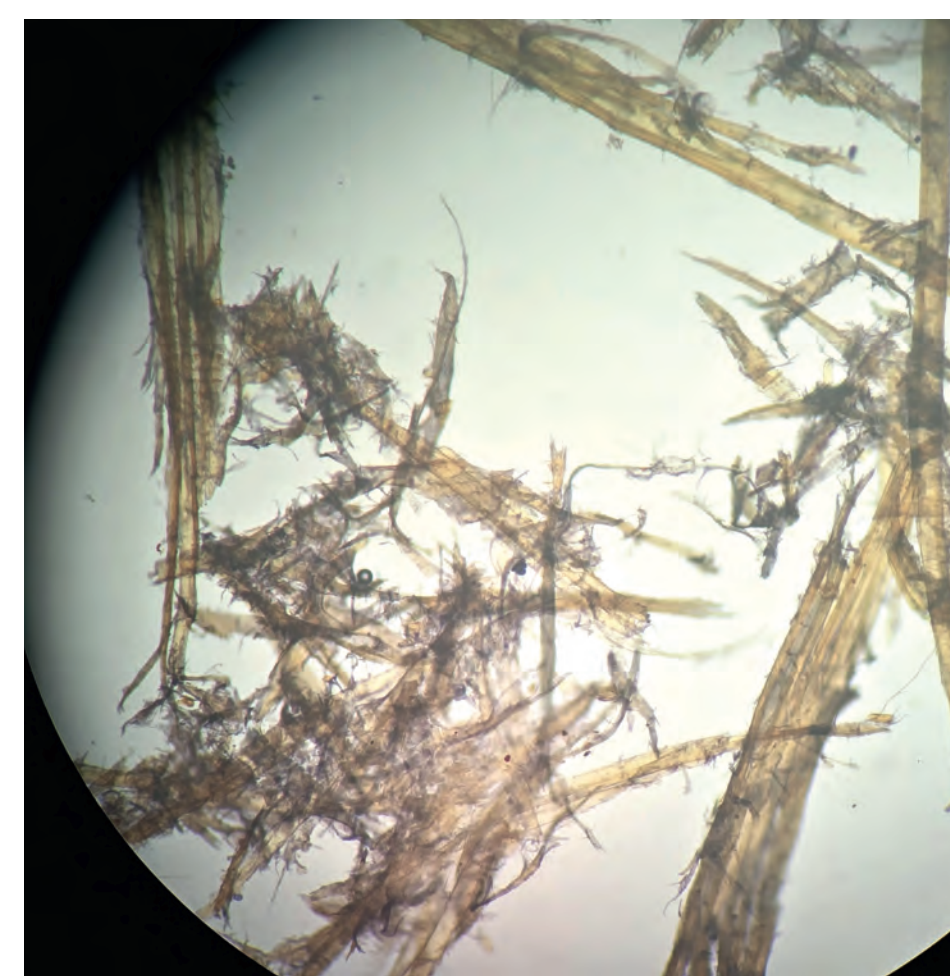
Examination of the color layer under the microscope



Fragment before restoration



Paper drawing support.
Examples of fibre types.



Cardboard support.
Examples of fibre types.

PAPER COMPOSITION ANALYSIS

The paper composition analysis was carried out by **Inga Šteingolde Meng.Chem.**, Latvian National Archives.

- 1. Paper drawing support** - grey, medium-weight paper composed of 50% textile fibres (cotton, linen), 40% hardwood pulp, and 10% non-wood (grasses) cellulose. Does not contain lignin.
- 2. Cardboard support** - yellow, thick cardboard composed of 100% mechanically processed wood pulp. High lignin content.

RESTORATION TREATMENT

Areas of dangerous paint layer lifting were consolidated using a 0.5% Junfunori (Lascaux) solution. This method did not produce the desired result, as it caused surface gloss and did not fully eliminate the risk of paint loss.

Therefore, alternative consolidation methods were sought. For consolidation of the paint layer, an ATG sprayer (Aerosol Generating System AGS 2000, Becker Preservotec)

and a 0.5% methylcellulose A15 solution were used.

The treatment was carried out several times. This method produced the desired result. Areas with thicker paint application were repeatedly treated with a 1% Junfunori solution.

Losses mending with appropriate quality paper and wheat starch paste. Tears and folding mending with Japanese paper and wheat starch paste. This was followed by localised pressing under marble weights. Areas of paint loss were retouched with gouache.

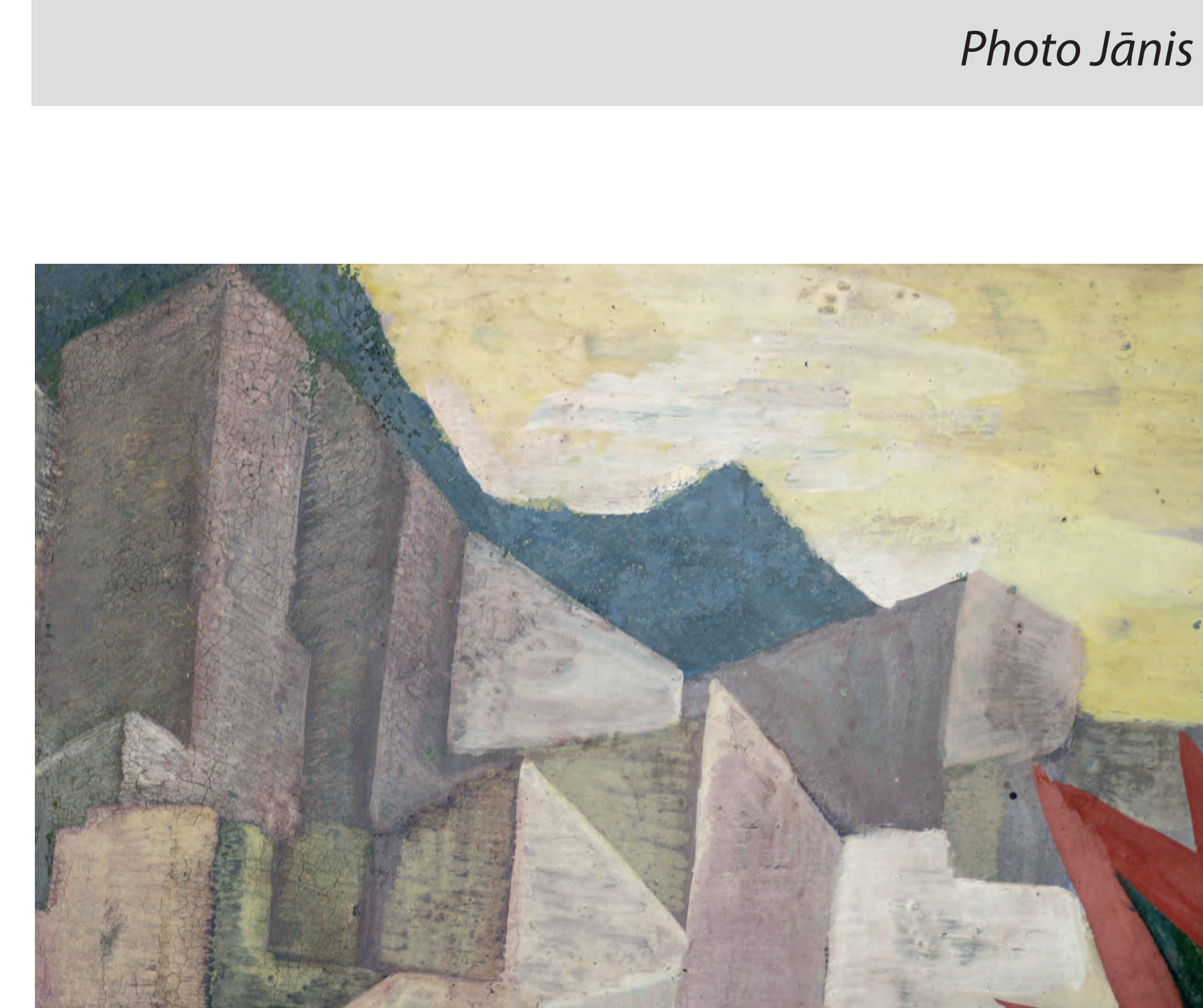
Photo Jānis Puķītis



After restoration



The reverse side after restoration



Fragment after restoration