

RESTORATION OF BIRUTA DELLE'S PAINTING "LATVIA IS FLYING"

1980, OIL ON CANVAS, 185 × 150 CM, VMM AG-4932

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Biruta Delle (1944–2025) was a highly regarded Latvian painter who devoted herself to Latvian art for more than sixty years. Biruta Delle was extremely prolific, carrying out bold projects. Her work fell into two main categories: fanatical studies of natural landscapes, with a particular focus on the relationship between warm and cool tones, and large-scale compositions with multiple figures that expressed her vivid imagination. Art historians also discern elements of surrealism in her work; however, her connection to this movement lies more in the practice of automatic sketching than in the formal characteristics of the style. The painting "Latvia Flies" entered the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art as a donation, and its state of preservation was very poor. The canvas was severely

deformed, with pronounced mechanical folds and creases. The stretcher was rigid and made of inadequately thin wooden slats, which were unable to support the painting properly. The paint layer is impasto and opaque, with a very thick paint texture in the central figure.

An examination of the areas of loss in the artist's paint layer indicates that beneath the original painting there is another, older painting. Given the pronounced canvas deformations and numerous mechanical damages, many changes are visible in the ground and paint layers: large cracks, craquelure, as well as paint separation and losses. The situation is further complicated by the combination of two paintings, which has made the support of the painting overall rigid and inelastic.



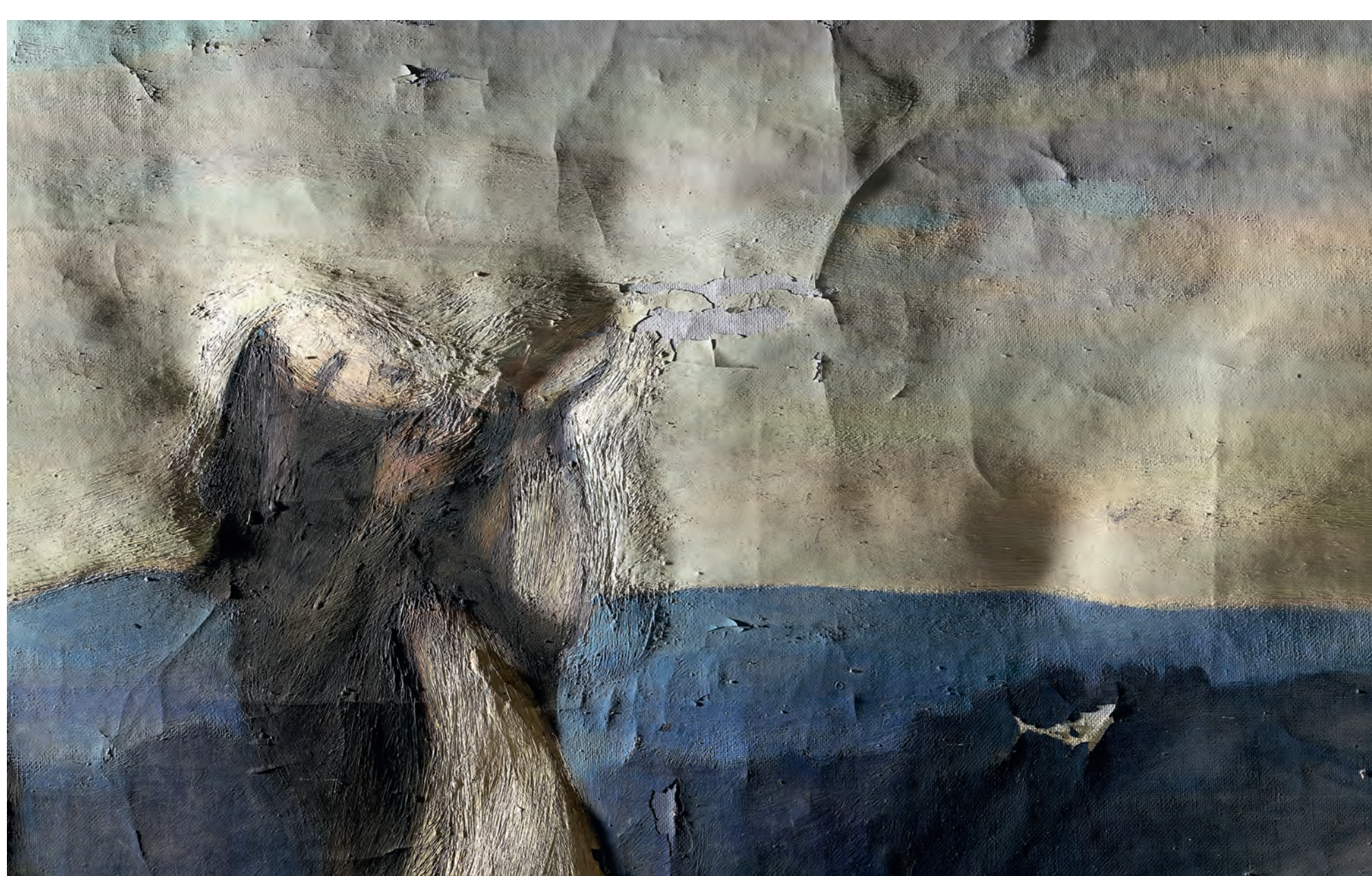
1. General view of the painting before restoration.



2. General view of the painting during the restoration process.



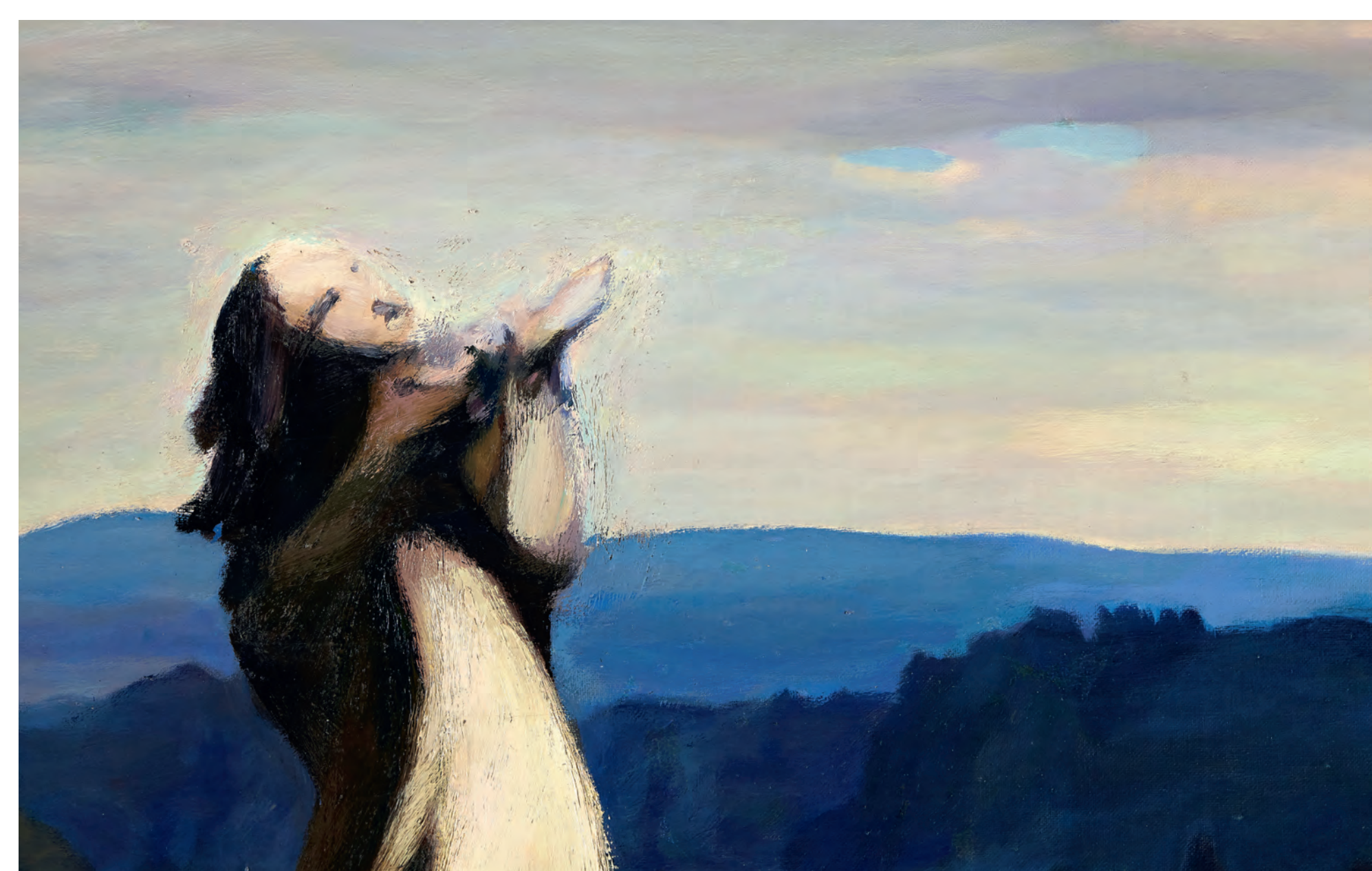
3. General view of the painting after restoration.



4. Fragment of the painting before restoration.



5. Fragment of the painting during the restoration process.



6. Fragment of the painting after restoration.

RESTAURATION

The painting was repeatedly consolidated across its entire surface, while the canvas deformations were simultaneously plasticized and flattened. Accumulated layers of dirt on the textured paint surface were removed. The painting was re-stretched onto a new professional keyed stretcher. In the areas where the artist's paint layer was lost, restoration ground was applied, and the varnish layer was regenerated using the Pettenkofer method. The painting was then varnished and retouched. A protective facing was applied to the front of the painting, and the reverse was dusted. The painting was then re-stretched onto a new professional keyed stretcher. Consolidation of the ground and paint layers was carried out using the enclosed steaming method, gradually plasticizing the thick and rigid paint layer. This process was repeated several times using a 5% rabbit-skin glue solution. The tissue paper and surface dirt were removed. In areas of loss in the artist's paint layer, restoration ground was applied and textured to match the original paint surface. This was followed by regeneration of the varnish layer using the Pettenkofer method; the painting was coated with Dammar varnish and toning was carried out.

Photo: Aigars Altenbergs



7. Back of the painting before restoration.



8. Back of the painting after restoration.