



# RESTORATION OF 4 METAL CEMETERY WREATHS

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**Klopenes cemetery**  
Photo: A.Grinberg, 2014. Petroglif Center



**Leaf bundles where the leaves are arranged**  
Photo: S.Kuple



**Detail before restoration**  
Photo: S.Kuple

## HISTORY

Four polychrome painted metal cemetery wreaths were received for restoration. They were obtained from the Veleni cemetery in Tervete municipality and belong to Dobeles Local History Museum, Latvia.

Looking after graveyards is an old Latvian tradition, that continues to this day. Every summer a Graveyard Festival is held in every Latvian parish. The Graveyard Festival's goal is to gather distant family members together so that they can visit family cemeteries and participate in various events organized as part of the Graveyard Festival. Only starting in 2008, some art scholars started showing interest in one of the elements of ancient funeral traditions - metal cemetery wreaths. The production of metal cemetery wreaths and the tradition of decorating graves with them appeared in the first decades of the 19th century. Initially, they were polychrome painted metal wreaths, but later, around the beginning of the 20th century, "wreath baths" were constructed for them. Wreath baths are metal boxes with a glass lid. The items were quite expensive, so only the wealthier part of society could afford them.

## EXAMINATION OF THE STRUCTURE

Five mm thick iron wire is used for the base of the wreaths it is bent in to an oval shape with two legs. The base is held together with thinner iron wire. Metal flowers (roses, daisy flowers and narcissus) and leaves (oak, ferns, palms, ivy) are soldered to the iron wire that is wrapped around the base.

## POLYCHROMY

- Leaves - leaves are painted in different shades of green
- The color of the roses is uniform - white,
- Forget-me-nots - light blue petals with a yellow center,
- Daisy flower - white petals, yellow center,
- Narcissus - white petals with a yellow/orange center.

## CONDITION

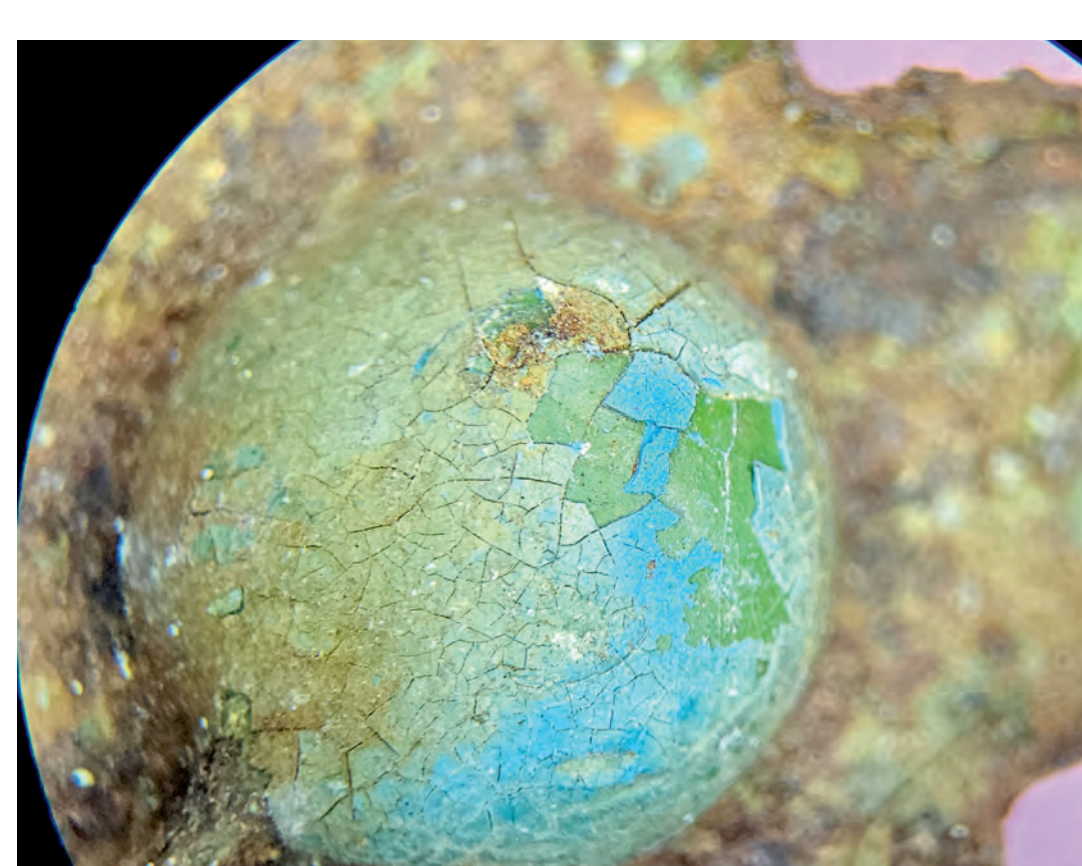
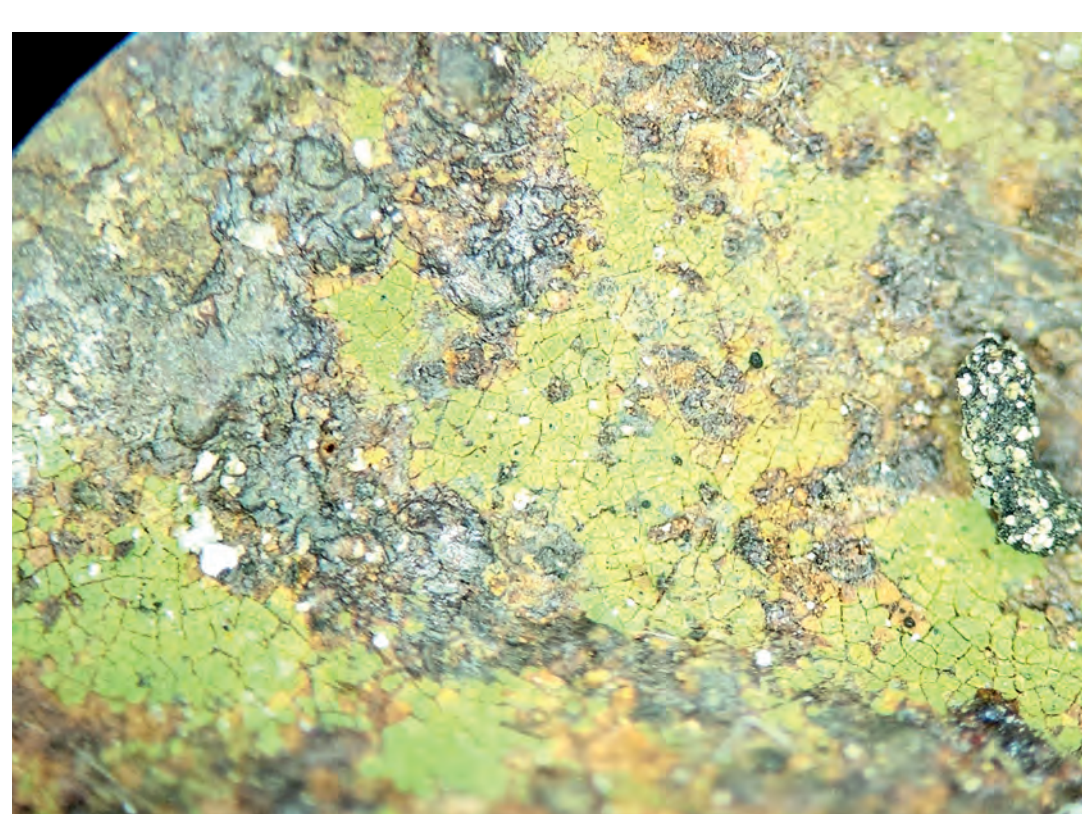
All the wreaths have the same preservation problems - the metal is rusty, individual parts are missing or have lost volume, some parts are deformed/flattened, individual parts are bent, others are broken. All elements are brittle, due to corrosion damage, the metal is splitting in places. The solder has oxidized. Polychromy has been preserved to the extent of 1%.

## RESTORATION

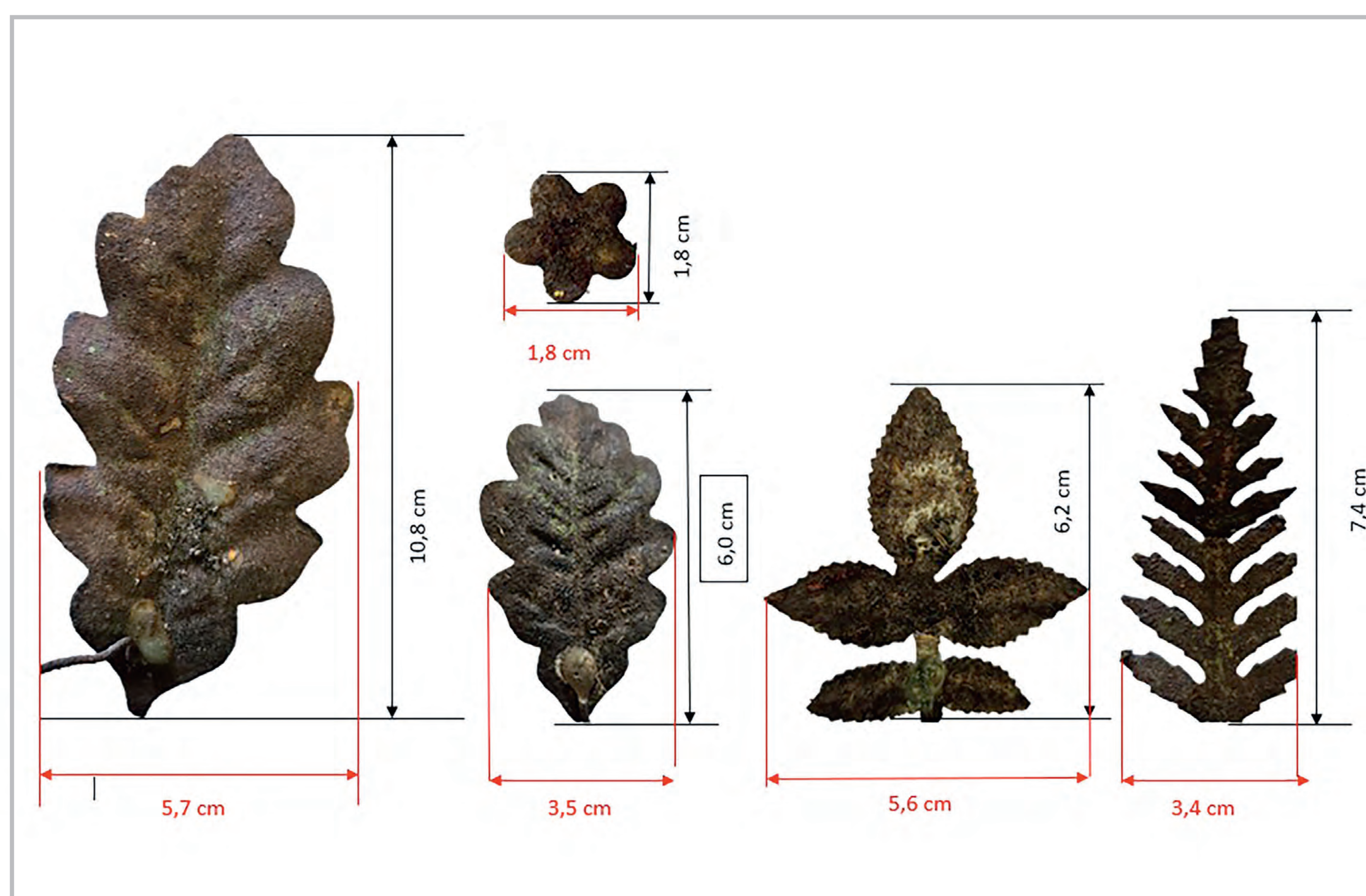
The conservation process began with cleaning the rust while trying to preserve the polychrome coating. Using a chemical solution the rust was softened, then it was removed using a soft plastic brush. This method allowed removing the rust and keeping the remainder of the original paint.

After this process was done, the parts that were broken off were soldered back in place. Next, the metal surface was passivated with a tannin solution and conserved using a special clear lacquer solution.

As a last touch, the owner requested to paint a part of one of the wreaths, which would give an idea of its original appearance.



**Fragments of polychromy**  
Photo: S. Kuple



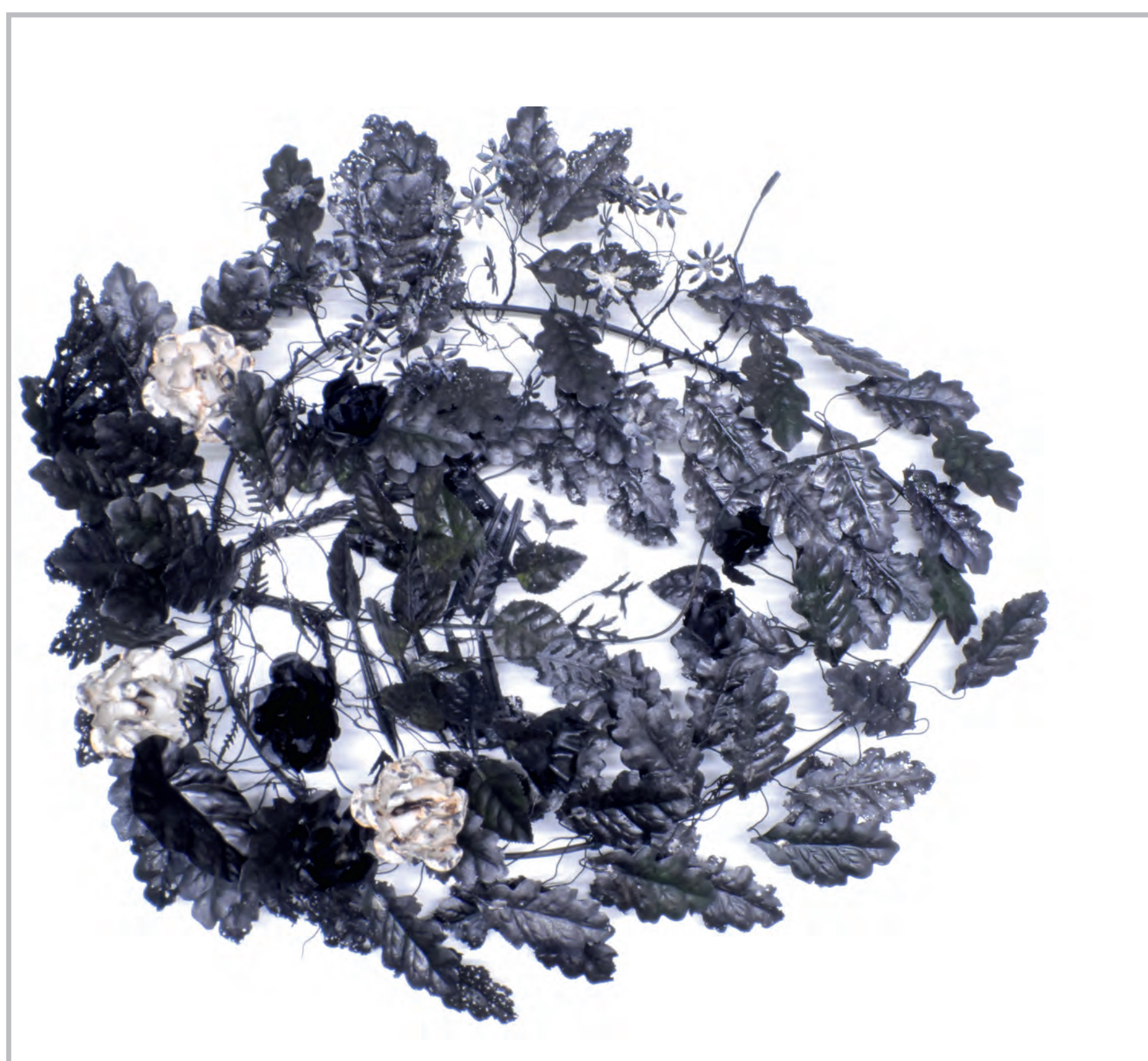
**Leaf size scheme**  
Photo: S. Kuple



**Wreath nr. 0391 Before the restoration process**  
Photo: Dobeles Local History Museum



**Wreath nr. 0392 After the restoration process**  
Photo: D.Gordijenko



**Wreath nr. 0391 After the restoration process.**  
Photo: D.Gordijenko



**After the restoration process**  
Photo: S. Kuple