



JĀNIS KUGA, RESTORATION OF THE ALTARPIECE "GIVE ME BLESSING, JESUS" (1933, 503 X 230 CM, CANVAS, MIXED MEDIA)

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J. Kuga's altarpiece, "Give Me Blessing, Jesus," belongs to the Ikšķile Evangelical Lutheran congregation and is located in the St. Meinard's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Ikšķile.

Jānis Kuga (1878–1969) was a Latvian scenographer and painter and is regarded as one of the founders of Latvian scenography. He created stage designs for productions in several theatres in Latvia and abroad and designed sets for the first Latvian motion pictures. In 1905, he graduated from the Stieglitz School of Drawing in St. Petersburg, where he completed his higher education, earned an artist's degree, and was awarded a two-year foreign scholarship to study in Paris. In 1908, Kuga began working as a drawing teacher in Latvian schools, and in 1922 he became head of the Decorative Painting Master Workshop at the Art Academy of Latvia. From 1934 to 1940, he was Rector of the Art Academy of Latvia. The Art Academy of Latvia owns J. Kuga's house in Ikšķile, which is being developed as a creative cooperation platform for the implementation of modernized study programmes.

The building of Ikšķile Church (consecrated in 1933) was confiscated from the congregation in 1968 and converted into a library under state administration. The building underwent extensive reconstruction to meet the library's needs: the parish room was divided into several floors, and a book repository was installed. The altarpiece and other sacred objects were removed and stored in various locations. When the church resumed its activities in 1999, the altarpiece was unrolled for Sunday worship services and then rolled up again, with the paint layer facing inward.

The iconography of the altarpiece is conceived as the artist's interpretation of Christ's blessing, linking the subject to a site significant to Latvia. In the upper part of the painting, Christ is depicted blessing, slightly elevated above the ground, with his



Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ikšķile



Jānis Kuga (1878–1969)



Overall view photograph of the painting from the 1930s

arms outstretched. In the lower part, a multi-figure composition depicts groups of people on the banks of the Daugava River near Nāves sala; in the background, the Daugava River and St. Meinard's Church are visible.

The painting had long been stored rolled up with the paint layer facing inward, which resulted in wave-like deformations of the canvas and minor fractures in the ground and paint layers. The original stretcher has not been preserved. The format of the painting tapers toward the top. It should be noted that the artist originally stretched the canvas on a rectangular frame and, after completing the painting, trimmed it to create a stepped narrowing in the upper part.



Before restoration



Before restoration, fixing the format dimensions



Surface cleaning

RESTORATION PROCESSES

The dust on the back of the painting was cleaned. Bronze-coloured stains caused by the painting of the decorative frame were removed from the surface, and the surface was cleaned of accumulated dirt. The ground and paint layers were consolidated, and deformations were flattened. The lining was done to the edges of the painting, because the original edges were narrow and with paint. A custom-made, expandable stretcher of appropriate construction and configuration was commissioned. The painting was stretched onto the new stretcher, following the original fold lines. The areas of loss in the ground and paint layers were filled with restoration ground, and retouching was begun.



Overall view of the surface before restoration



Overall view of the surface in raking light



Relocation of the painting



Preparation of the stretcher



The painting is stretched onto a stretcher frame

Stretcher preparation, professor emeritus Andris Začests



Overall view of the stretcher



Mounting a painting on a stretcher



The painting is stretched onto a stretcher frame



Overall view of the painting



Application of the ground layer