

# ADVANTAGES OF RECONSTRUCTION IN THE CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF CONTEMPORARY ART, CASE STUDY

**IEVA SOPRĀNE, M.A., M.Chem.**  
 Private practice  
 ievasoprane@gmail.com

## INTRODUCTION

In cases where the original element of the work of art has been permanently damaged, lost or absent, reconstruction can provide an opportunity to correct the intrinsic deficiencies strategically and prolong its lifetime.

## CASE STUDY

Juris Putrāms is known as a graphic installation artist. "Overall, a combination of the intellect and emotion in alienated postmodern images, and a synthesis of conceptualist and surrealist methods in a complex contextual system, characterize his creative work. Various modes of art and combinations of contrasts, searches for archetypes, and a perfect architectonic composition are characteristic of his installations." [1]

Putrāms' work *Veltījums visiem maniem mīļajiem*, with its use of a graphically painted image of an embryo, text, and symbols, can be found in the LNMA's collection. A black opaque glass ashtray has been fixed to the painting with wax and forms the focus point of the composition. It fell and shattered into pieces during its unpacking after the work was transported to the repository.

The greatest challenges were associated with the preservation of the fragile wax layer which had lost its adhesive capacity, the reconstruction of the ashtray, and its re-adhesion options.

### CATALOGUE DATA:

**JURIS PUTRĀMS**  
 "VELTĪJUMS VISIEM MANIEM MĪĻAJIEM"  
 [HOMAGE TO ALL THOSE THAT I LOVE],  
 2000  
 CANVAS, MIXED TECHNIQUE  
 150 X 150 CM  
 LNMA COLLECTION



Fig. 1. Juris Putrāms artwork "Homage to All Those That I Love" (2000) before the damage. Photo: Mārtiņš Straupeņiks-Brancis



Fig. 2. Artwork before conservation-restoration



Fig. 3. Artwork after conservation-restoration



Fig. 4. Fragment with damage in the wax layer before conservation-restoration



Fig. 5. Detached fragments of the original wax layer

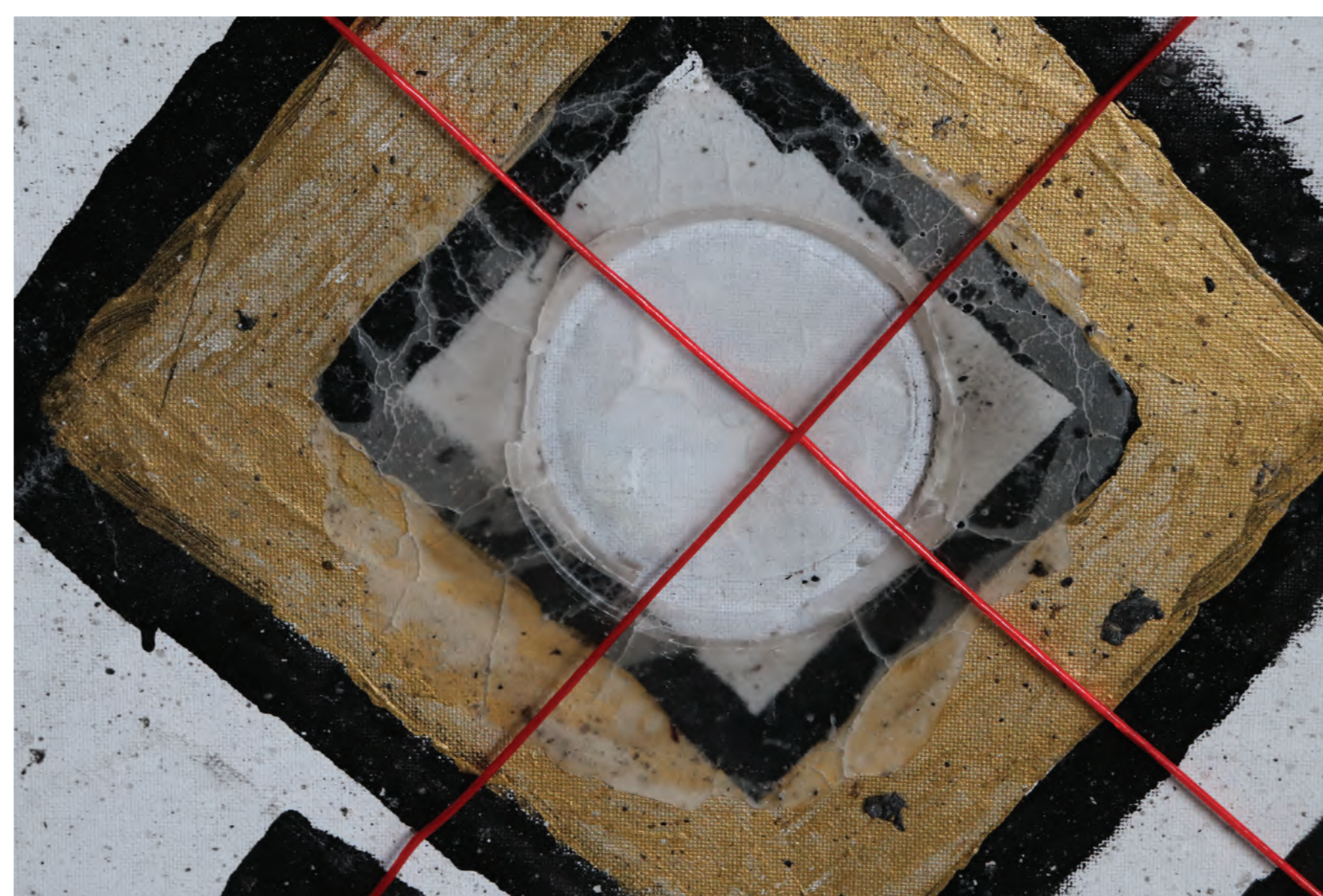


Fig. 6. Fragment with wax layer after conservation-restoration



Fig. 7. Fragment with reconstructed and mounted ashtray after conservation-restoration front view



Fig. 8. Fragment with magnet placement on the back of the canvas



Fig. 9. Fragment with reconstructed ashtray after conservation-restoration side view

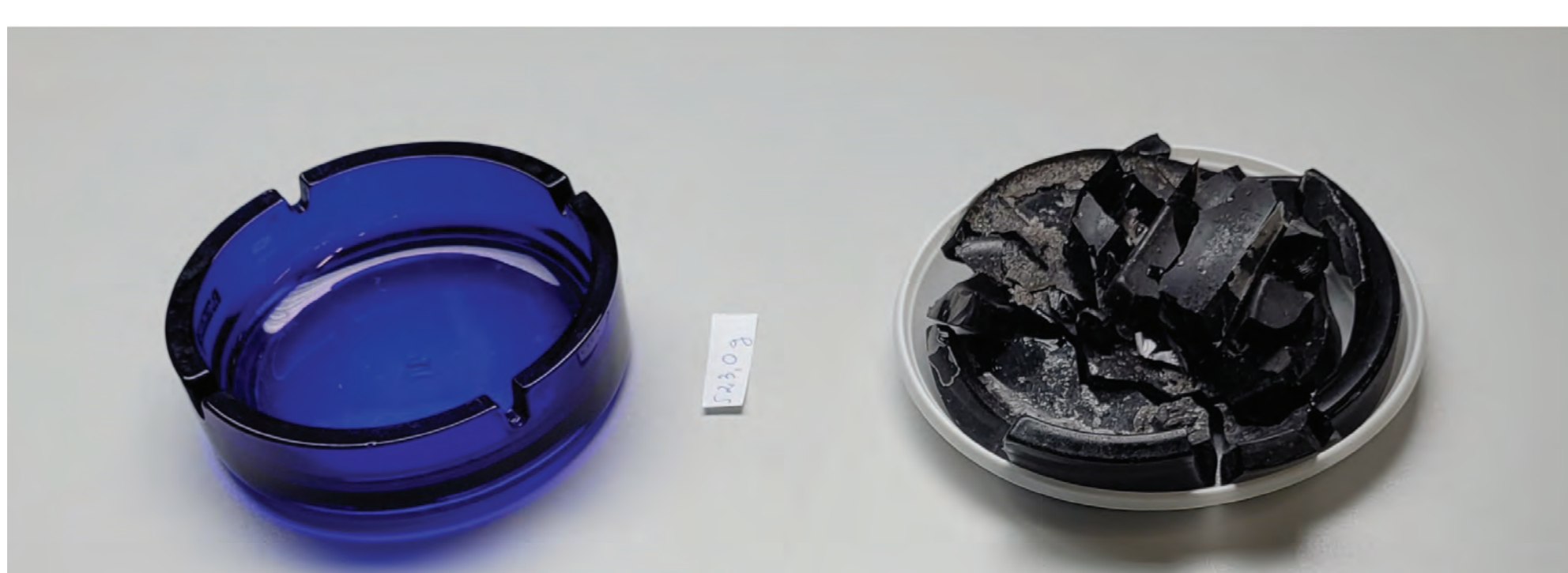


Fig. 10. Original shattered ashtray and its replacement options. Left to right: 1. Glass ashtray equivalent to the original in terms of shape and diameter, but in blue color (523 g); 2. The original ashtray shattered in pieces; 3. Glass ashtray equivalent to the original in terms of shape and color, but smaller in diameter (255,3 g); 4. Tests for the reconstruction of an ashtray, plaster cast with three different paint coatings (285,4 g)



## CONSERVATION RESTORATION

### 1. Wax layer

The fragments of the wax layer which had detached were reattached, by heating them through the back of the canvas. Losses were carefully filled in with microcrystalline wax.

### 2. Ashtray

**2.1. Replacement search.** A glass ashtray was sought to replace the original. Commercially available and visually appropriate variants were not of suitable diameter. However, the curator managed to obtain an ashtray equivalent to the original in terms of shape and diameter, which in turn did not correspond visually, being transparent, in a blue tone. Decision was made to use this ashtray to obtain a negative form and reconstruct the object in a different material to acquire a lighter weight, improve the mounting options, and visually imitate the original object.

**2.2. Reconstruction tests.** Two casting masses were tested for the reconstruction of the ashtray: gypsum and gypsum-paper fiber mix. As a result of the tests, gypsum casting was chosen as the most suitable material, which reduced the weight of the object by almost two times. Although the addition of paper fiber could further reduce weight, a pure gypsum plaster cast provided a smoother surface finish. Three coatings were tested: water-based glass paint, solvent-based glass paint, and acrylic paint with a layer of varnish. Solvent-based glass paint gave the best results matching the colour and gloss of the original glass ashtray.

Gypsum plaster reconstruction was sanded, primed, and covered with paint, visually imitating the original object.

**2.3. Fastening method.** Three neodymium magnets were glued into the reconstruction, another three being placed on the back of the canvas - permitting the ashtray to be stored and transferred separately, attaching it as necessary.

## CONCLUSIONS

The reconstruction of the ashtray in a gypsum casting with a coating of solvent-based glass paint and the placement of magnets provides almost two times lighter mass of the object (compared to the original object), reversible attachment method as well as visual imitation, thus prolonging the artwork's longevity and improving storage solution and mobility.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Una Kastanovska and Liene Visendorfa for the advice provided on the use of magnets.