

# RESTORATION OF THE WOODEN FIGURE OF SAINT PETER AT THE LESTENE CHURCH'S BAROQUE ALTAR RETABLE

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## INTRODUCTION

The figure of Saint Peter is only a small part of the unique, richly decorated baroque altar of the Lestene church. The splendid wood carved church furnishings were made from 1704 to 1709 by Nikolauss Sefrens Jr. with disciples. In 1754 the items of furnishings were gilded, finished with polychrome. In 1964 and 1965 the dismantled altar retable was stored at the Tukums Museum of Art; in 1974 the furnishings were transferred to the Rundale Palace Museum. Under the guidance of the restorers of the Rundale Palace Museum, in 1983, before the furnishing was exhibited at the Ventspils Woodcarvers exhibition, polychrome painting and gilding layers were consolidated. In 2016, return of the furnishings to the original environment where they were intended was initiated – the Lestene church.

The furnishings of the Lestene church suffered a lot, were demolished, and were in unsuitable storage conditions. Woodworms had settled in the wood. In 2005 an extensive chemical treatment against woodworms – gassing with methyl bromide – was carried out on all wooden objects by "Romer Bio Tec GmbH".



## CONDITION

The figure of Saint Peter was kept under the influence of humidity for a long period hence the wood at the bottom part of the figure started to rot, disintegrate and as a result the figure remained without support. The surface covered with a layer of dirt. The layer of paint was unstable in some areas. There were small lacunas in the layers of ground and paint. The right hand, both feet and the attributes (book, key) lost. Separate losses of wood in drapery, on hair, on nose. The gilding abraded, in some places completely lost.



Fig.1. Overview of the altar and the pulpit of the Lestene church. Photo taken in 1930. Location of the Saint Peter figure in the altar is marked.



Fig.2. Overview of the St. Peter figure before restoration.

## RESTORATION

Surface cleaned from the dust with a soft brush and a vacuum cleaner. Ethanol was used to remove dirt and stains. STORR solution (100ml distilled water, 5g diammonium citrate, 0,5ml triton XL-80N, TEA (triethanolamine) until pH reaches 8-8,5) used to remove hard stains.

To consolidate paint layers the Medium for Consolidation (Lascaux) was used.

The rotted wood was impregnated and consolidated. Damaged wood impregnated with a copolymer of ethyl methacrylate Paraloid B72 5% solution in ethanol. To ensure the stability of the figure, a wood reinforcement was embedded.

The wood support on which the figure stands was made by analogy. Lost parts in the area of legs were filled with two-component polyester. Plastic reconstruction of the legs was carried out.

The rest of the lost parts and details were made from a linden tree as it was originally. At first the surface of the lost areas was leveled to be able to glue a new wood, which was later carved in the necessary, missing form. Before gluing the new wood both surfaces were degreased, PVA D3 (Vincent's Polyline) used as adhesive.

After cutting the necessary form, a ground layer containing chalk (binder acrylic-based) was applied to the new woodcarving. Sanding and impregnation of the ground conducted.

Degreased oil colors used for the retouching and toning.

Gilding carried out using the oil lacquer Mixtion Original LeFranc (3h). The brand of gold leaf used was Wilhelm Wasner Blattgold Best Rosenoble Double Gold, 23,5-karat, size 8x8 cm. Patina oil and oil colors were used to age the gilding.

At the present by autumn 2019, the Lestenes Church pulpit and the first floor of the altar retable has been restored. Until the full restoration of the first floor, three lost figures have to be reconstructed all over again performing the wood carving works.



Fig.3. Overview of the St. Peter figure after restoration.



Fig.4. The support of the figure with embedded wood reinforcement.



Fig.5. The support of the figure during the restoration.



Fig.6. The support of the figure after restoration.