

# RESTORATION OF THE CRUCIFIX AT LĒNI HOLY TRINITY ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

## AIGARS PILENIEKS

Restorer of furniture and interior items  
info@3rstudija.lv  
www.3rstudija.lv  
Private workshop, Riga, Latvia

## SARMĪTE BALODE

Restorer of polychrome wood  
sb.rubenos@gmail.com  
Private workshop  
Smilšu Street 16, Rubeni, Mālpils Parish, Sigulda District, LV-2152

### INTRODUCTION

The Lēni Church's crucifix by an unknown artist can be dated back to about 1860 (?). The figure of Christ, an artistically high-quality wood carving, was made of oak, painted and gilded. The cross is of pine wood, with simple marbling which was made later. Size of the cross: 250 cm length vertically and 158 cm length horizontally.



Fig. 4. Head of figure before restoration.  
Photo: Aigars Pilenieks



Fig. 5. Figure head with partially detached repaint.  
Photo: Sarmīte Balode



Fig. 6. Figure head with detached repaint.  
Photo: Sarmīte Balode



Fig. 7. Head of figure after restoration.  
Photo: Aigars Pilenieks

### CONDITION BEFORE RESTORATION

The crucifix has spent a long time on the outside wall of the church. The base material of the figure of Christ has serious cracks due to damage from atmospheric precipitation. The wooden cracks had been filled, but the putty was crumbling. There was a lot of dirt and sand in the cracks. The wooden parts of the cross that were made later were also damaged.

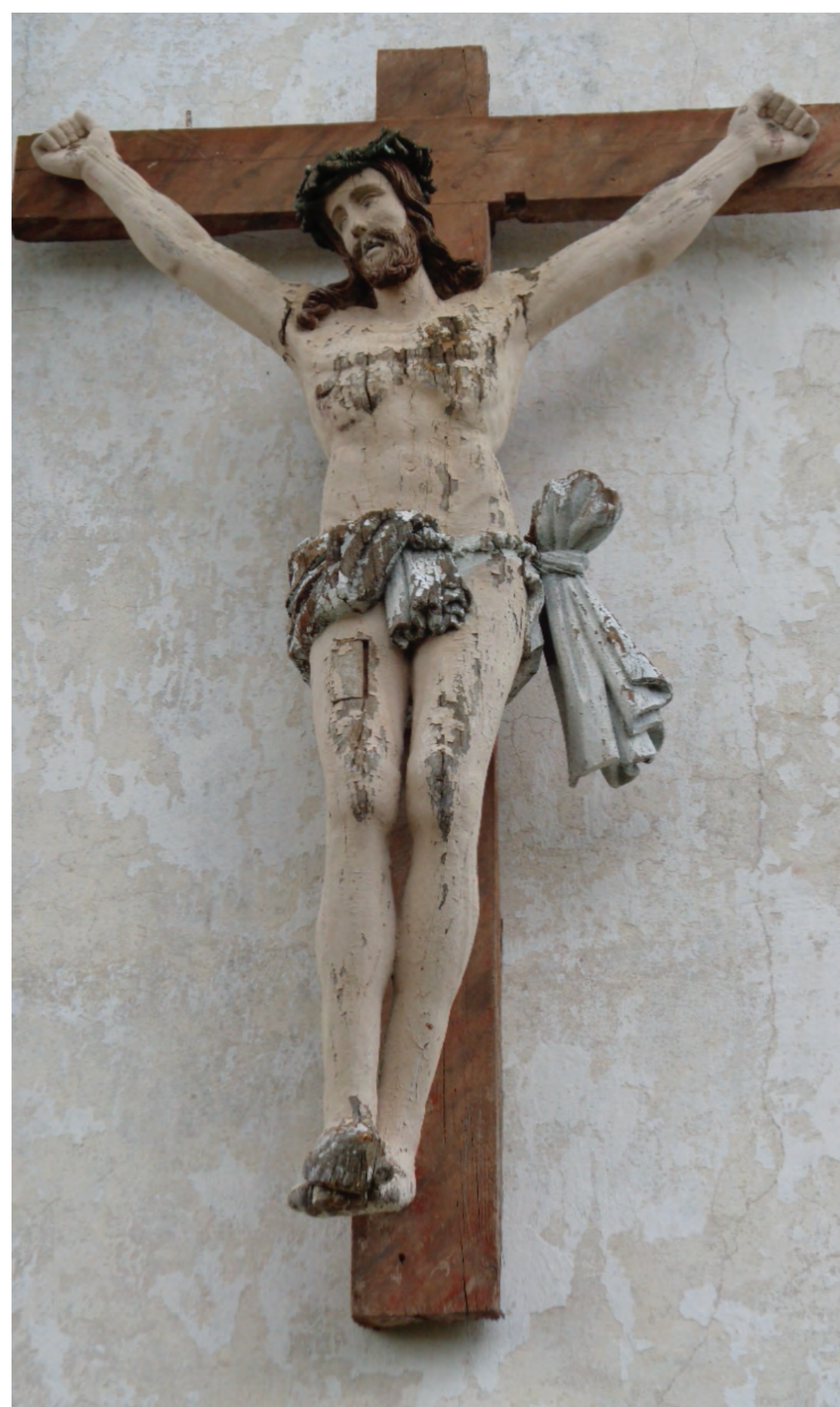


Fig. 1. Crucifix prior to restoration. Photo: Aigars Pilenieks



Fig. 8. Figure hand gluing process.  
Photo: Aigars Pilenieks



Fig. 9. Installation of hand attachment.  
Photo: Aigars Pilenieks



Fig. 10. Additional strengthening of hands with pins. Photo: Aigars Pilenieks

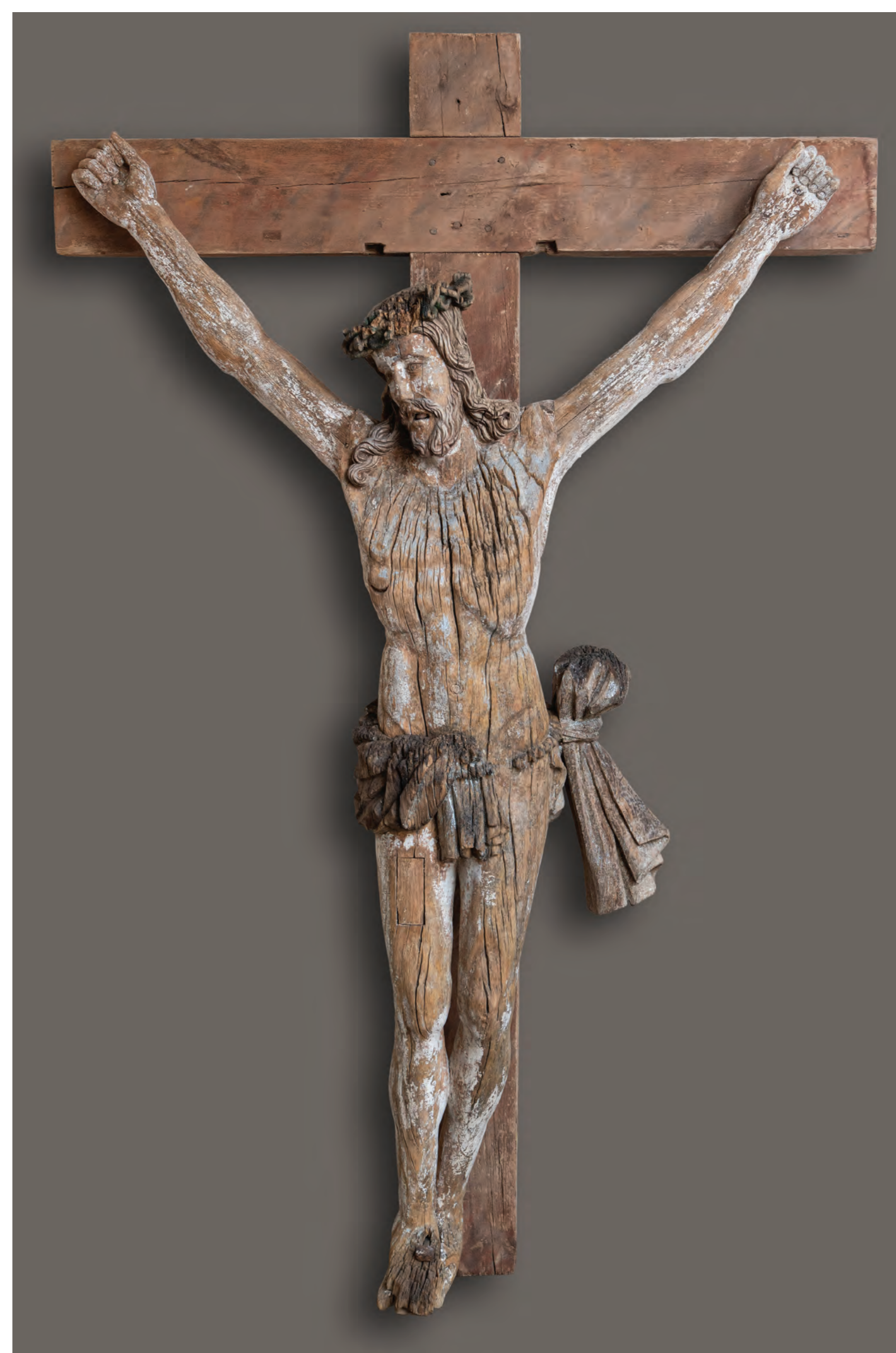


Fig. 13. Crucifix after restoration. Photo: Mārtiņš Ziders

### RESTORATION

About 35 % of the original paint on the figure of Christ has been preserved. The oak wood had been richly oiled. The body of the figure is covered by reddish brown paint (red ochre and vermilion red), above which, light white paint has been applied in an artistic manner. The loin cloth was gilded, and the crown of thorns was green. Three later paint layers were established. A chemical analysis was made of the paint layers.

The three repainted layers were separated during the restoration process. The first repainting was preserved in places where the original layer had disappeared and the first layer of repainting had been applied directly onto the wood. More cracks were found in the wood than had been earlier predicted after the separation of the repainted layers. The crumbling putty, dirt and sand were removed from the cracks. The wood was consolidated in the most seriously damaged places, which included the loin cloth, the crown of thorns and the top of the head, using a 5 % Paraloid B72 solution in ethanol.

A decision was made to preserve the existing base material to the maximum and to exhibit it without fixing the cracks or the losses in the base material that had arisen from the wood's deterioration due to the impact of atmospheric precipitation. So that the overall image of the figure of Christ would be visually homogeneous, the flesh in the figure was toned in the places where the layer of decoration had disappeared completely, revealing the base material. Water colours were used for the toning.

The chosen restoration solution requires explanation to the owners of the item as well as to the community about the preservation of the original material and its value!



Fig. 2. Figure loin cloth before restoration. Photo: Aigars Pilenieks



Fig. 3. Exposed sounding area. Photo: Sarmīte Balode



Fig. 11. Additional fastening of the loin cloth with the pins. Photo: Aigars Pilenieks



Fig. 12. Retouching of lost color areas. Photo: Sarmīte Balode