'The Feast of the Rose Garlands': What Remains of Dürer?
Author(s): Olga Kotková
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‘The Feast of the Rose Garlands’: what remains of Dürer?

PAINTED by Albrecht Dürer in 1506 in Venice, The Feast of the Rose Garlands (Fig.1) is, despite its fragmentary state of preservation, one of the most important paintings in the artist’s œuvre. It is also a very significant work of the European renaissance— not least because it was born of the conjunction of two different artistic traditions: those of Germany (or rather Nuremberg) and of Venice. Thanks to the felicitous symbiosis of these two worlds, Dürer created a work which won high regard in Europe and was acquired by the famous patron and collector Emperor Rudolf II in 1606.

On the occasion of the exhibition Renaissance Venice and the North in 1999, the painting could not be lent, but its problematic state of conservation came under renewed discussion, the result of which was a call for restorative action to take place in the near future. But what precisely should such action entail? Mere conservation, which would unobtrusively remove the most glaring defects, or thorough-going restoration which would alter the painting’s appearance? Or should we settle for a compromise between the two alternatives? A prerequisite for finding the best solution to such a problem is an in-depth study of the work in question. The present article therefore focuses on the painting itself— on its technique, troubled history and current state. Collation of the findings and evaluation of the facts give an indication as to how the intended restoration work should best proceed; they also shed light on the question posed in the title of this study: how much of Dürer’s original actually survives today?

The basic data concerning the painting (inv. no. O 1552) were summed up by the restorer Mojmir Hamsik in an article of 1992. The dimensions of the support are 162 by 192 by approximately 1 cm. The panel is composed of thirteen vertical planks of poplar wood, 12.5–18.5 cm. wide and glued together. On the reverse side the planks are covered by strips of linen canvas. The whole panel was re-covered with linen canvas and fixed with three horizontal planks at a later date, probably during the years 1839–41 (Fig.2). The ground layer is composed of gypsum (gesso) bound in glue; the presence of coccoliths has enabled the identification of an admixture—less than one per cent—of natural chalk, and a small amount of yellow ochre was also detected. The priming layer contains colourless oil. The binding medium in the paint layer is also demonstrably oil. An analysis of the detected pigments was included in Hamsik’s article, and it should be pointed out here that chemical analysis confirmed that natural ultramarine is present in considerable quantities. The use of ultramarine instead of the azurite preferred by German artists at that time is a clear indication of the influence of the Venetian milieu on the work.

In 1998 the Feast of the Rose Garlands was examined at the gallery using infra-red reflectography. The analysis of course revealed extensive losses. In the places where the painting was most damaged (i.e. where both paint and ground were lost and were replaced during the restoration of 1839–41 to be discussed below) no underdrawing survives (Fig.3). In other parts affected by restoration the underdrawing is indistinct and hard to trace. The underdrawing is clear; on the other hand, in areas where there has been no later interference—i.e. at the edges and in the background. It is mainly executed in a black liquid medium applied with a brush, although the architecture may have been sketched with a pen, possibly a quill, as proposed by Hamsik, who studied infra-red photographs in 1992. In places, parallel hatching is evident, and in some of the faces there seem to be washed areas of brushwork. Minor corrections and shifting may be observed in the figures’ faces—for instance, in the face of the man holding the set-square (generally identified as the architect of Fondaco dei Tedeschi, Hieronymus of Augsburg), the positioning of the right eye and nose has shifted and the position of the head has also been slightly adjusted (Fig.4). Corrections are also evident in the faces of the man holding the rosary (usually identified as a member of the Fugger family; Fig.5), and of the man standing towards the left edge of the painting (who might be a dignitary of the church of San Bartolomeo; Fig.6). There are several such minor modifications, none of

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1 This text is an expanded version of the paper presented by the author at the informal scholarly conference ‘Venice and the North’ held at The National Gallery, London, on 19th January 2000; the conference took place thanks to the support of the Matthiesen Foundation.

2 Hamsik, loc. cit. at note 4 above, pp.129 and 131.

3 Von Lübbere in aikema and Brown, op. cit. at note 2 above, p.100.

4 During infra-red examination the whole surface of the painting was scanned and some twenty details were photographed as a provisional measure; in the future the painting will be scanned again and the data digitalised. Katharine Crawford Laber (Philadelphia Museum of Art) examined the picture by infra-red reflectography in 1989, but the findings of this examination have not been sent to the National Gallery in Prague.

5 Hamsik, loc. cit. at note 4 above, pp.129 and 130.


8 Anzelewska, op. cit. at note 11 above, p.199.
them significantly altering the composition for which Dürer had made a number of preparatory drawings. The underdrawing appears to have been made in Dürer’s own idiosyncratic style.\textsuperscript{13}

In technique the painting was, as one might expect, very much influenced by the Venetian milieu (particularly in the use of poplar wood, the gypsum ground mixed with animal-skin glue and the abundance of ultramarine). On the other hand, the use of oil as the binding agent in the paint layer may be found in Dürer’s earlier works made on German soil.\textsuperscript{14}

Once the painting left Venice in 1606, fate was not kind to it, and we can only speculate whether its current state was the result of frequent travelling or storage in unsuitable conditions. Hamsik has suggested that the poor quality of the support and an excessive admixture of glue in the ground might also have been responsible.\textsuperscript{15} However, the 1621 Prague Castle Inventory, which refers to the painting as ‘Ein gar schön Marienbild’ does not yet mention any damage.\textsuperscript{16} It is often pointed out in the literature that, during the invasion of Saxon forces in 1631, works of art housed in Prague Castle had to be hastily removed from the city and were transported to Vienna and later to České Budějovice (Budweis).\textsuperscript{17} Documentation exists for some of the works sent to Vienna, but unfortunately the \textit{Feast of the Rose Garlands} does not figure on the list of items of which the imperial custodian Karl Hans König took possession there.\textsuperscript{18} If it was indeed taken away, then we may conclude, as most scholars have, that it was in all probability damaged during its hurried transportation. The part of the Castle collection that was removed was returned to Prague most probably in 1633, but once again there is no reference in the known sources to the painting in question.\textsuperscript{19} Its subsequent fate is also obscure. Joseph Neuwirth and other scholars apparently reliant on his work

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13}W.L.Straus: \textit{The Complete Drawings of Albrecht Dürer}, II, 1500-09, New York [1974], pp.914-44.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} C. Baumer, L. Friedländer and J. Koller: ‘Die Bindemittel auf Dürers Tafelgemälden’, in Goldberg, Heinberg, Schanzl et al., \textit{op. cit.} at note 15 above, pp.102-19.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Hamsik, \textit{loc. cit.} at note 5 above, p.128.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} E.R. von Engerth: \textit{Kunsthistorische Sammlungen der allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses. Gemälde, Beschreibendes Verzeichnis. I. Band. Italienische, spanische und französische Schulen}, Vienna [1882], pp.XVII-XVIII; III. Band. Deutsche Schulen, Vienna [1886], pp.259-74. The author here refers to archival documents at that time in the Kaiserlich Küniglichen Staatlichen-Archiv, Prague, today the State Central Archives in Prague (Staats- undfranzösisch archiv, Prague). At the present time, however, no sources relating to this event are stored there, according to Věra Beránková of the State Central Archives – see SM file, S 21. The event is similarly described in other literature; see esp. J. Neuwirth, \textit{Albrecht Dürer Raumkunst}, Leipzig and Prague [1885], p.25, cited by later authors as their source.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Zimmermann, \textit{loc. cit.} at note 18 above, reg. 19429, pp.LIII-LIV.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Von Engerth, \textit{I}, p.XVIII; Neuwirth, p.25 (both cited at note 19 above). According to Anzelenský (\textit{op. cit.} at note 11 above, p.194) the paintings did not return until 1835. On the sources, see Zimmermann, \textit{loc. cit.} at note 18 above, reg. 19431, pp.LV-LVI.
\end{itemize}
The first reference to what may be restoration of Dürr’s painting dates from 1663. This is in a letter from the painter Karel Skřeta requesting that the imperial chamber pay his fee of fifty thaler for restoring two paintings, one by Dürr and the other by Tintoretto; they had apparently been ‘greatly violated by the joiners’ in 1661. The sum was fairly considerable: Skřeta, the most prominent Prague painter of the period, could charge about two thaler for a day’s work at this time. It is unfortunately impossible to ascertain exactly what Skřeta did to Dürr’s painting at this time. (In point of fact it is not completely certain — although probable — that the painting referred to is the Feast of the Rose Garlands since, according to the inventory of 1685, Prague Castle possessed three other paintings thought to be by Dürr.) In 1839 Johann Gruss detected traces of an older, well-executed restoration, but to identify this with Skřeta’s work would be rash, to say the least.

The Feast of the Rose Garlands is not clearly identifiable in the inventory of 1685, but it does figure in those of 1718, 1737, 1763 and 1782 — all of which carry more or less the same comment, that it is ‘so ganz ruiniert’. This is further supported by the minimal price the painting fetched when the remnants of the Rudolfine gallery were auctioned off on 13th May 1782: the Dürr was sold to Franz Lothar Eheharn for one florin and eighteen kreutzers. In the same year the painting was acquired by Philipp Fillbaum, whose heirs sold it in 1793 to the Premonstratensian monastery at Strahov, Prague: the painting fetched twenty-two ducats and the frame (apparently not the original) was acquired later for one hundred Rheinsh florins, an approximately equivalent sum.
The Feast of the Rose Garlands remained at Strahov for 141 years, during which time it underwent a thorough-going restoration in 1839–41 and acquired substantially the appearance it has today. Thanks largely to Joseph Neuwirth and the monastery librarian Cyril Straka who both had access to archive material which is now either lost or unavailable, we are able to reconstruct, partially at least, the unhappy fate of this one-time Venetian jewel.27

At Strahov the painting was initially all but hidden from view in the abbot’s chambers.28 A renewal of interest in it in the early nineteenth century is attested by a drawing by Václav Mánes from 1823 (Fig.7; Akademie výtvarného umění, Prague)29 and several prints of 1835–36, including an engraving of 1835,30 and a lithograph reversing this from the same year.31 Of these, the most faithful reproduction is the Mánes drawing, which has gone completely unmentioned in the Dürer literature; the prints are more informative about contemporary perception of Dürer’s work than about the painting itself. Václav Mánes (1793–1858) was a member of a well-known family of Czech painters who was notable for his diligence rather than for outstanding individual talent,32 and his drawing is admirably precise and faithful to the Dürer original, accurately rendering the figures’ faces and clothing, as well as the master’s signature. He also transcribed Dürer’s celebrated trompe l’œil fly on the Madonna’s knee (Fig.8), which is absent in the prints, either owing to the bad state of the original or to over-zealous academicism on the printmakers’ part.33 The fly was also suppressed by Johann Gruss, when he repaints the figure of the Madonna in the 1839–41 restoration, but it is present in all the painted copies that were

32 Neuwirth (op. cit. at note 19 above, pp.29–38) describes the acquisition of the painting and what happened to it while in the Strahov Monastery collection; see also Straka, loc. cit. at note 22 above, pp.248–49 and 328–32.
33 Straka, ibid., p.249.
34 Academy of Arts, Prague, inv. no.206. My attention was kindly drawn to this drawing by Roman Prahin of the Institute of Art History at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University in Prague. See also R. Prášil et al.: Poudřité kresby. Polášek, Akademie výtvarného umění v Praze, 1800–1835, Prague (1998), pp.30, 114 and 129.
35 Drawn by Leopold August Friese, engraved by Joseph Bătmann, 16.7 by 20 cm. (National Gallery in Prague, inv. no. DR 1207). This steel engraving is often mentioned in the literature; see, e.g., Neuwirth, op. cit. at note 19 above, pp.31 and 74, ill.
36 Drawn by Leopold August Friese, lithographed by Karel August Henning, 27.6 by 33.4 cm. (National Gallery in Prague, inv. no.R 88639). Another lithograph of 1836 (drawn by Simon Jakub Arkoles, lithographed by Karel August Henning) is of little significance as close comparison reveals that it was made from the preceding one, not from the painting.
38 On the fly on Mary’s knee, see H. Neuwirth et al.: Dürer: Schrifftlicher Nachlass, III, Berlin [1969], p.461; and recently Humphrey, loc. cit. at note 12 above, pp.27, 33, note 22, with further literature.
made of the *Feast of the Rose Garlands* in the seventeenth century—it appears, for instance, in both copies in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, in the painting in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, as well as in the copy that was recorded in Richmond. As will be evident from the text below, however, Gruss did not know a single one of these copies. A comparison with Dürer’s preparatory drawing in Berlin shows that Mânes’s drawing quite faithfully reproduces the physiognomy of the Pope, which was substantially altered during restoration. Thanks to the fidelity with which Mânes reproduced the original, it is possible to be sure that the pre-restoration wording of Dürer’s signature on the card that he himself holds in the painting corresponded with what is there now: *Exegit quinque/ msturi spatio Albertus/Durer Germanus/MDVII/AD* (Figs.9 and 10).43

In the 1830s the painting must have been in a very poor state of preservation, although this is not evident from any of the reproductions mentioned above. Fortunately, its state was recorded in 1837 in a sketch with a detailed description made by the director of the Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Gustav Friedrich Waagen, during talks (held in 1836–37) on the possibility of purchasing the work for the Berlin museums. When working on his sketch, Waagen made use of the steel engraving of 1835. Waagen’s sketch and description, as well as highly important correspondence containing exceptionally interesting facts concerning the history of the painting were all published in 1937 by P.O. Rave.44 Waagen’s position was not entirely impartial, because he was disinclined to buy a painting in such a poor state of repair at the high price asked by the monastery (16,000 florins); the museum followed his advice to decline the purchase. According to Waagen, approximately one half of the work had been overpainted, the greatest damage being to the central part of the painting showing the Madonna and the Infant Christ, the head of the Pope (whom Waagen took to be a bishop) and an angel playing a lute. In this part of the picture, he reported, it was difficult to detect original painting; and in many places (such as the Child’s head) even the ground was missing. Unprofessional restoration was responsible in his view for the monstrous appearance of the Child’s right leg. Other figures were considerably damaged too, whereas the landscape and background were better preserved.45

Waagen’s report establishes one more important fact: there had been a recent extreme deterioration in the painting’s condition since he had last seen the work four years earlier, in 1833, at which time its state of repair had not been so critical.46 It appears that in around 1836, Abbot Hieronymus Joseph Zeiller had lent the *Feast of the Rose Garlands* to Count Franz Sternberg who wanted to have a copy of it made. The original was hung on a damp wall, with the result that in places the paint layer and ground fell off. Before being returned to Strahov, the painting was repaired by an unknown painter of questionable competence, who was apparently responsible for the repaintings mentioned by Waagen.47

After the talks with the Berlin museum, the abbot, acting on the advice of the newly instituted director of the monastery’s gallery, Rudolf Burde, decided to have the painting restored, even though many in Prague believed it would be best to leave it untouched and lying horizontally so that no more paint would drop off.48 In the end the abbot engaged as the restorer a former fellow-student of philosophy and theology—Johann Gruss (1790–1855) of north Bohemia, a painter of merely local significance, who was to be assisted by

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4See, for instance, Straus, *ibid.* at note 14 above, pp.942–43, ill.

4However, this opinion is not held by, for instance, Lübkeke, in *Aikema and Brown*, *ibid.* at note 2 above, pp.306–09, no.57. The author points out that the text of Dürer’s signature might be inspired by Horace (Od. III, 30). I am grateful to Rudi T. van der Paauw (University of Leiden) for helping with the analysis of this ode.


4Ibid., p.283.


4Ibid., p.282.

4Ibid., p.282; see also Neuwirth, *ibid.* at note 19 above, p.32; Straka, *loc. cit.* at note 22 above, p.249.

his son, also named Johann (1820–1901). Gruss’s restoration was so extensive that one might almost describe him as co-author of the painting in its present form.

Very little has been published on Johann Gruss the elder, and there is virtually no photographic documentation of his work. An unpublished seminar thesis by Marie Kašparová reports that Gruss abandoned his studies of theology and philosophy at Litoměřice (Litomeritz) in 1806 in order to study painting at the Academy of Arts in Prague. He then returned to north Bohemia and lived in Vansdorf and Litoměřice, where he held a teaching post at the art school; he died in the latter city in 1855 in the cholera epidemic. At the Prague Academy he had studied under Josef Bergler, but artistically was more influenced by František Tkadlík (who was director of the Academy in the years 1836–40, when Gruss was working on the Feast of the Rose Garlands) and Josef Führich. He shared with these artists a strong religious feeling, and through them became acquainted with the art of the Nazarenes, although he never travelled to Rome, or visited Italy. Indeed, there is no surviving evidence to suggest that he undertook a study journey: we know only that he exhibited his pictures in Dresden in 1828. Gruss’s study of theology and his profound Catholic faith, reflected in his activity as a painter of altar-pieces for churches in northern Bohemia, were no doubt further inducements for the abbot of Strahov to give him what was undoubtedly his most important commission – to restore the most famous and valuable painting in the monastery collection. An illustration of Gruss’s own style is afforded by his Head of Christ (Fig.11; Severočeská galerie výtvarného umění Litoměřice). Restoration constituted a not inconsiderable part of his practice and he restored other works for Strahov Monastery at the same time as the Feast of the Rose Garlands. In the 1840s he was engaged by the bishop of Litoměřice Augustin Bartoloměj Hille to restore some paintings by Karel Škréta from the cathedral church of St Stephen, for which he also painted four not particularly successful panels of the four Evangelists, still in place today.

No restoration reports or study material by Gruss for his restoration of the Feast of the Rose Garlands appear to have survived. The broad outlines of the restoration process were recorded, however, by Neuwirth and Straka. Neuwirth obtained some of his information about the restoration directly from Johann Gruss the younger, then working as imperial conservator in Vienna; Straka enriched his account with information from the monastery records. From these accounts we learn that Gruss (assisted by his son) started work on the painting on 23rd July 1839. He noted at the outset two instances of repair already undertaken: one that was fairly appropriate, and another that was completely inappropriate (possibly made by the forgotten painter of questionable competence mentioned by Waagen), which Gruss removed.

During the restoration he made an exact drawing indicating where the paint had fallen off which unfortunately is lost. A second, surviving, drawing records the state after restoration

9. Detail of Fig.7, showing the signature of Albrecht Dürer.

10. Detail of Fig.1, showing the signature of Albrecht Dürer.

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For basic information on Gruss, see THEME and BRUCKER, XV, p.153; TOMAN, p.278 (both cited at note 37 above); see also O. DOŠKOČÍN: MALÍŘ LITOMĚŘICKÁ, Krajiná Litoměřická a českaho středoho v promilech malířských století 19. a 20. století, Litoměřice [2000], pp.22–23.

A short romanticising article in the contemporary press focused chiefly on a fire at the artist’s house in Vansdorh, north Bohemia (Unterhaltungsblätter, no.29 [10th April 1829], pp.1–2).

M. KAPŠPOVÁ: Malíř Jan Gruss starší, unpublished seminar thesis, Masarykova University, Brno, s.a. For his death, see Litoměřice Regional State Archives, burials register, 1855. I thank Oldřich Doskočil of the Litoměřice District History Museum for making the paper available to me and for providing valuable information about Johann Gruss the elder. An exhibition about the Gruss family of painters may be held in Litoměřice soon.

For the above details, see KAŠPAŠPOVÁ, MS cited at note 52 above.

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For basic information on Dürer, see IDEM, O.1417.

STRAKA, loc. cit. at note 22 above, p.333.

KAŠPAŠPOVÁ, MS cited at note 52 above.

Pavel R. Pokorný of the Premonstratensian Monastery at Strahov informed me in 1999 that no documents were to be found in the monastery archives relating to Gruss’s restoration.

NEUWIRTH, op. cit. at note 19 above, p.35; STRAKA, loc. cit. at note 22 above, pp.248 and 333 (drawing also on Neuwirth).

For the above details, see NEUWIRTH, ibid., pp.35–36; STRAKA, ibid., pp.332–33. The drawing was already missing in the 1930s; see V. KRAMÁŘ: ALBRECHT DÜER, Různověkil slovo ve svob hudebních práci, exh. cat. Obrazární Společnosti vlasteneckých příatel umění, Prague [1935], p.12; RAVNÉ, loc. cit. at note 44 above, pp.35–36, note 2. It is not clear from Neuwirth’s text whether he had actually seen Gruss’s drawing himself.
of the angels in the background and in a number of other minor areas.64

The restored painting and Gruss’s copy were placed on show to the public on 31st October 1841 for ten days.65 Gruss was criticised for not using the Vienna copy which would have helped him reconstruct the original [Fig 16].66 The question remains whether Gruss actually knew of the existence of the copy. Members of the Berlin purchasing committee certainly did,67 and Waagen cited it as a possible source for completing missing sections of the painting,68 but there is no evidence to indicate that he informed Abbot Zeidler about it, or, if he did, that Zeidler took any interest. Neuwirth and Straka write that Waagen followed the course of the restoration and that he even spoke to Gruss; apparently he raised no objections to the restoration procedure.69 However, Neuwirth’s information came from the restorer’s son and was therefore not impartial. Certainly Gruss cannot be blamed for not knowing Dürer’s Madonna of the Siskin,70 also painted in Venice in 1506 and now in the Berlin gallery, which was acquired only in 1892, having been in private collections throughout the nineteenth century. Another work that might have been of some help in the restoration was Mânes’s drawing of 1823, but even though this was kept in the Prague Academy of Arts, Gruss did not know of its existence.

Straka strongly objected that the restored Madonna (Fig 17) was not in Dürer’s style and claimed that Gruss had been inspired less by Dürer than by his own daughter.71 Here the Strahov librarian was evidently straying into the realms of gossip, since Gruss is recorded as having had two sons, but no daughter (or at least no legitimate one).72 Inspection of the parts painted in by Gruss – chiefly the faces of the Madonna and Child – reveals that he made no attempt to draw inspiration from Dürer’s art (e.g. his prints) or from renaissance sources. In repainting the missing parts he followed his own aesthetic, which was conditioned by the time, by his somewhat provincial milieu, his own artistic training and modest talent. According to surviving documentation he consulted the director of the Prague Academy, František Tkadlík,73 about methods of repair and repainting, but the whole undertaking seems to have been compromised by lack of time, and Gruss apparently did not make thorough preparations. Although the abbot, as we learn from surviving letters, was in a position to contact experts and have access to specialist information, he regretfully failed to make use of these opportunities.

Gruss’s restoration has always been controversial, and was already described in Neuwirth’s account as ‘eines der traurigsten

(Albertina, Vienna).60 as does a painted copy Gruss made at this time, 1840–41 (Strahovská obrazárna, Prague).61 Gruss pasted over the damaged areas – amounting to nearly one quarter of the surface of the painting – with filling and left it to dry. According to Neuwirth and Straka, the abbot wanted to speed up the restoration process so that the monastery gallery could be opened as quickly as possible, and he reportedly instructed Gruss to start painting in the missing sections even though the filling remained damp.62 We should be wary of the veracity of this information, and yet if it is only partly true it might help to explain why the sections repainted by Gruss are slightly elevated, forming a relief surface (Figs. 12 and 13).

In his restoration of the principal figures – in particular the Madonna, the Christ Child, the Pope’s face and most of the figure of the angel playing the lute (Fig 14)63 – Gruss remained true to his Nazarene allegiance. He also added the right eye of the old man behind the man presumed to be Antonio Soriano, the left cheek of the S. Bartolomeo dignitary, a thin strip on the face and trunk of the figure believed to be Duke Erich of Brunswick; furthermore, he made additions to the figures

61 Inv. no.17674, pencil on paper, 160 by 108 cm. I am grateful to Fritz Koreny of the Albertina for information on this drawing. Opinions differ on its attribution: Neuwirth attributed it to Johann Gruss the younger, while in the Albertina it is given to Gruss the elder. In addition, as Vincenc Kramář pointed out, the drawing bears a strange signature: ‘1840 J. TK./Prag/Strabk’. The initials evidently do not denote either Gruss, pêre ou fils, nor even František Tkadlík, who was present during the restoration – and who anyway died on 16th January 1840 (see the estate of Vincenc Kramář, Institute of Art History at the Academy of Sciences, Prague, documentation department, K VII/10).


63 Neuwirth, op. cit. at note 19 above, p.34; Straka, loc. cit. at note 22 above, p.333.

64 For the extent of damage, see Fig 18 and the X-radiograph in Fig.15. In Mojmir Hamšík’s view (see his restoration report of 14th April 1963 in the restorers’ archives of the National Gallery in Prague), the unevenness of the surface may have been caused by the use of too much glue by Gruss when fixing.

65 For an exact description of the damaged sections, see also o. benesch: ‘Zu Dürers Rosekransfest’, Belaizere, TX [1930], pp.81–85. On the identification of the figures, see note 11 above.

66 Neuwirth, op. cit. at note 19 above, p.35; Straka, loc. cit. at note 22 above, p.333.

67 See the judgment of the Berlin purchasing committee (signed by Waagen) in Rave, loc. cit. at note 44 above, p.271, and Waagen’s letter of 1837 to Count Brühl, ibid., p.280. In the correspondence gathered by Rave there are several references to the Vienna copy (ibid., pp.274 and 276).

68 This may be inferred primarily from a letter sent to the abbot by a member of the Strahov chapter, P. Theodor Quadirats, on 1st June 1836; see Straka, loc. cit. at note 22 above, pp.329–30; see also Rave, loc. cit. at note 44 above, p.273.

69 Neuwirth, op. cit. at note 19 above, pp.36–37; Straka, loc. cit. at note 22 above, p.333.

70 Poplar panel, 91 by 76 cm.; Gemäldegalerie Berlin, inv. 557F; see anzelewsky, op. cit. at note 11 above, Textband, pp.202–03, no.94, Tafelfand, figs.110–13.

71 Straka, loc. cit. at note 22 above, p.334. This is cautiously noted in Neuwirth also, op. cit. at note 19 above, p.37, note 1.

72 Baptism register of Vandelof, anno 1820, 1826. I am grateful to Oldřich Doskočil of the Litoměřice District History Museum for making this source available to me. See also Kašpara, MS cited at note 52 above, pp.1 and 30, note 2.

73 Neuwirth, op. cit. at note 19 above, pp.36–37; Straka, loc. cit. at note 22 above, p.333. On Tkadlík, see E. Petrová: František Tkadlík, Prague [1960].
Beispiele von Verwüstung hingestellt, die je ein Werk des Genious durch Sorglosigkeit und Unfähigkeit erlitten hat.⁷⁴ The prevailing opinion in this, as in subsequent publications, is that the work had been made illegible through overpainting.⁷⁵

When the *Feast of the Rose Garlands* was lent to the monographic exhibition on Dürer in Nuremberg in 1928,⁷⁶ there was once again discussion about selling it to a German museum, this time Nuremberg’s Germanisches Museum.⁷⁷ Nothing came of the plan, but the loan of the painting meant that it was seen and studied by a large number of renowned scholars. It was widely felt that the repainting had been aesthetically naive, if well executed on the technical side;⁷⁸ the relief character of the painting’s surface noted above was observed. Opinions of the restorer and of the general state of the painting were overwhelmingly critical, but it still attracted more attention than any other work shown at the exhibition: ‘trotz seines Zustandes überstrahlte es alle anderen Kostbarkeiten der Nürnberger Ausstellung.’⁷⁹

Vincenc Krámal, the director of what was then the Picture Gallery of the Society of Patriotic Friends of the Arts (later the State Collection of Old Masters; today the National Gallery in Prague), opposed the sale of the Dürer to a foreign buyer in 1928, and now attempted to persuade the Czechoslovak State to purchase it.⁸⁰ He held that it was not adequate for this great work to hang in a male monastery which women were not permitted to enter;⁸¹ Strahov had refused to lend the painting to the Picture Gallery in Prague.⁸² Finally, after lengthy negotiations, the *Feast of the Rose Garlands* was purchased by the state in 1934.⁸³ The following year Krámal declared that he wanted to restore it to an ‘honourable condition’ — by which he meant reversing what he referred to as the ‘not very satisfactory work of nineteenth-century restorers.’⁸⁴ His radical stance was immediately criticised in art history journals and in the end, as a result of either disagreement among specialists,⁸⁵ or the approach of the Second World War, or because Krámal’s position gradually weakened, nothing came of the proposal. Nevertheless, Krámal’s preparatory efforts were admirable. He corresponded in depth with the Dutch art historian Frances van den Oudendijk Pieterse, author a few years later of a respected

⁷⁴Neuwirth, op. cit. at note 19 above, p.37.
⁷⁹Vlášek, op. cit. at note 64 above, p.85.
⁸¹See interview with Krámal in the newspaper *Lidové noviny* [24th October 1928], interview in *Lidový deník* [5th April 1928], and the text of an unpublished article by v. Krámal: ‘Byde se větší travé státní galerie?’ [Will a state gallery be built?], Prague, Art History Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, documentation department, estate of Vincenc Krámal, K 1/3, KV/1. I am grateful to Pavla Sadilková of the Art History Institute archive for her kind assistance in the archive.
⁸²Krámal, unpublished article cited above.
⁸³Vlášek, op. cit. at note 77 above, p.117.
⁸⁴Krámal, op. cit. at note 59 above, pp.11 and 13.
monograph on the *Feast of the Rose Garlands.* Letters kept in the National Gallery archive show that in 1935 Van den Oudendijk Pieterse sent Kramář a sketch that highlighted damage to the painting. Kramář thought the sketch to be only partly accurate and recommended she make another, which Pieterse said she did not have the time to do, the sketch published in her book is usually described as reliable in the literature, but does not correspond to the X-ray picture (Fig.15), although it gives a general idea of the damage. Hamsik has produced a diagram of the Madonna [Fig 18], which records patches of the original painting, Gruss’s contours, and the situation on the Vienna copy. In order to analyse the *Feast of the Rose Garlands* Kramář acquired an X-ray machine for the gallery in 1935. The same year, he organised a small exhibition around the work, for which he borrowed the Vienna copy and several facsimiles of the preparatory drawings, displaying photographs of the other copies. He did all of this with one aim in mind: to gather comparative material prior to undertaking a new restoration.

No such major restoration has been effected; in 1963 and 1971, however, the painting was fixed, the sections of raised filling were reduced by grinding, and darkened retouchings were removed. Restorers’ reports typically conclude by stating that the painting needs to be attended to in the future, and so the problem has been passed on from one generation to the next. The problem of the painting’s gradually worsening condition was once more thrust into the foreground by the exhibition *Renaissance Venice and the North,* and there have been further calls for its restoration. The question is: should the *Madonna of the Rose Garlands* simply be conserved as it is, or should it undergo radical restoration — meaning, most probably, the removal of Gruss’s 161-year-old overpainting? The latter opinion, which Kramář held in the 1930s, appears to be out of favour now — partly because of the historical status of Gruss’s repainting, and partly because the repaints constitute virtually the entire central section of the panel, and form

14. Detail of Fig.1, showing the Pope.

15. Composite X-radiograph of Fig.1.

16. *The Feast of the Rose Garlands,* by an anonymous painter after Albrecht Dürer. c.1600. 160 by 193 cm. (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.)
an integral part of the composition. The vexed question of what to do with the painting derives, of course, from the great technical difficulty of the available options, and hence procrastination has always seemed the preferable course of action. The history of the restoration of the painting in 1839–41 demonstrates very clearly how essential it is to consult experts about any action on this highly problematic painting. The procedure for any such repair or restoration work should be selected, in our view, by an interdisciplinary colloquium or committee, in order to ensure that it is undertaken at the highest possible technical standard that can be achieved today. The fate of this sorely tried masterpiece rests in our hands.

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Appendix

The 1635 and 1644 Inventories

Joseph Neuwirth and other scholars apparently reliant on his work state that inventories drawn up in 1635 and 1644 record that the Dürer painting was already damaged (see note 22 above). The confusion surrounding these two sources was already noted in 1882 by Eduard R. von Engerth: according to him, orders for the drawing up of an inventory were indeed issued on 14th April 1635 by Emperor Ferdinand II and on 16th June 1644 by Emperor Ferdinand III, but it is not clear if these inventories were actually made or survived, or what kind of inventories they might have been (von Engerth, op. cit. at note 19 above, I, pp.XVIII-XX). It is possible that the inventory of 1635 is identical to the appendix to the inventory of 1621, which was drawn up between 16th and 26th April 1635 (Zimmermann, loc. cit. at note 18 above, reg. 19437, pp.LVIII-LXVI). This appendix, however, contains only items that were not included on the list of 1621 and the Feast of the Rose Garlands therefore does not figure in it. Von Engerth suggested that the lists of 1635 and 1644 might have been the inventories from Skokloster castle, which were published in 1867 by Beda Dudik (n. ord. 'Die rudolphinische Kunst- und Raritätenkammer in Prag', Mittellungen der k. k. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale, XII [1867], pp.XXIII-XLV). But the Feast of the Rose Garlands cannot be identified with any certainty in these inventories. The inventory Dudik named 'A' (drawn up in the years 1647–48) does mention a number of paintings of the Virgin, but it does not give any description of them, or indeed any information about authorship or state of repair. The only work that corresponds roughly to the painting in question is the painting listed as no.77: 'Maria mit dem Kind, darbei zwei Engel' (see Dudik, loc. cit. above, p.XXVIII, no.77. The Feast of the Rose Garlands was identified with this entry by Neuwirth, op. cit. at note 19 above, p.24). Nonetheless, no conclusions can be based on this record, not even with regard to the identification of the item, and the listing makes no mention of condition. The inventories of 1635 and 1644 are identified with Dudik's 'A' inventory by M. Kotrbová, among others (see M. Kotrbová: 'Obraz Ráděncově slavnosti Albrechta Durera', Umění, XIX [1971], pp.594 and 597, note 30). The author refers to p.XXXV of the Dudik inventory, but this page lists items of applied art: Kotrbová evidently mistook the painting for a rosary garland, i.e. Rosenkränz, which is listed among the small items of applied art inventorised in the bottom shelf of cabinet no.6. Thus, although it may well be the case that the Feast of the Rose Garlands was already damaged in the 1630s, documentary support for this in the inventories has not yet been found, contrary to what is often stated in the literature.

Hamsik, ibid., p.129, believes that any future restoration should be limited to removing the most disturbing defects; whereas the restorer Zora Grohmanová of the National Gallery in Prague inclines to Kramář's opinion. The latter proposal, however, has been rejected during subsequent discussion at the National Gallery in Prague.