



# Grünes Gewölbe

How art  
conservation  
can restore  
identity

## Short interview

to the key players



# HOW ART CONSERVATION CAN RESTORE IDENTITY

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAINER RICHTER AND  
ULRIKE WEINHOLD

**Bombed and razed to the ground during World War II, Dresden soon after started a long and careful reconstruction work. After the reunification of Germany in 1990 it received further impetus. Some important buildings have been reconstructed as they were and art collections were recovered and relocated to their original locations.**

One of the most interesting examples of this reconstruction process is the Grünes Gewölbe, the museum that contains one of the largest collection of treasures made of such materials as silver, gold, rock crystal and precious stones.

The museum was originally located in eight rooms of the ground floor in the west wing of the Dresden Residenzschloss (residential palace). It was gradually established by August der Starke between 1723 and 1729 to hold the extensive collection of treasures as well as the Saxon crown jewels. The name of the museum is due to some green architectural

elements of the largest room, called Pretiosensaal (Hall of the Precious Objects).

On February 13, 1945, the Residenzschloss was almost completely destroyed during the bombing of Dresden, and yet the Grünes Gewölbe remained mostly intact: only three of the rooms were destroyed by fire. Fortunately, the collection was rescued, but it was taken away as war booty by the Soviet army. Returned in 1958 to the German Democratic Republic, the collection found its place in the Albertinum. In 2006 one part of the collection returned into its original place (Historisches Grünes Gewölbe), another part moved into the Neues Grünes Gewölbe, a new, large modern exhibition area, opened in 2004.

Directed by Dirk Syndram, today the Grünes Gewölbe is again one of the most important German museums.

We interviewed Rainer Richter and Ulrike Weinhold who followed and are following the Grünes Gewölbe project with great passion.

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**Could you tell us more about how the Grünes Gewölbe project, that dealt with paints on silver, originated?**

In addition to locations such as in Florence, Vienna and Munich, the Grünes Gewölbe at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen (State Art Collections) in Dresden holds one of the most outstanding princely collections of 16th to 18th century goldsmiths' works. Since January 2014 a large-scale project entitled "Goldsmith's Art from the 16th to the 18th century at the Dresden Court as an Instrument of courtly Prestige" has been dealing with several aspects of courtly silver. It has been possible by the generous support of the Fritz Thyssen Foundation. A central topic is the embellishing polychrome paint, which is preserved on many silver objects in the Grünes Gewölbe. For the first time, this topic has been the subject of extensive research. With an interdisciplinary approach in cooperation with art historians, conservators and chemists, the different aspects of this fascinating topic has been outlined.

**What was one of the most unexpected discoveries of the project?**

With the help of written documents and historical images (inventories, invoices, goldsmith's drawings), it was possible to find some hints or even to provide evidence, that many objects, which have a monochrome silver or silver gilt surface today, originally showed a colourful appearance.

**It is quite curious that Dresden is known as the Florence of Elbe: the two European cities have much in common from a cultural heritage point of view. Thanks to the IPERION CH project the scientists of the two cities met to face together the problems related to polychrome paint on silver objects. Could you tell us about the cultural exchange with the scientists at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure (OPD) in Florence and what results did you achieve?**

The focus of the exchange was to compare the possibilities and limits of the analytical methods (such as non-invasive methods or micro-invasive techniques when cross sections are analyzed, such as SEM-EDX, Raman, R-FTIR, FTIR-ATR). Due to similar methods of investigating samples in Dresden and Florence, the results were comparable very well. For example a detail was found in Dresden with sparingly dispersed red particles of vermilion detected within the varnish and the paint layer. A closer look at the cross-sections in the OPD uncovered that this phenomenon was traced in the Florence samples as well. The archival filings of embedded cross-sections of samples are comparable and have stood the test of time in both laboratories. Any of the samples stored, even those dating back to the 1960's, can be easily traced for re-investigation with modern methods. We learned about an improved FTIR-spectrometer of the OPD which was specifically designed by our Italian colleagues. This improvement will be of great benefit for Dresden, because we can implement it on our spectrometer and it will be a great help for us to be able to perform analyses on a wider range of samples.

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Dresden after war - Deutsche Fotothek





Could you express in less than 10 words your  
scientific opinion about..

**IPERION CH?**

Important promotion of  
inter-European cultural research

*R. Richter and U. Weinhold*

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## What is IPERION CH?

**IPERION CH** is a project funded by the European Commission under GA 654028. It aims at establishing a distributed RI with a sustainable plan of activities, including offering access to a wide range of high-level scientific instruments, methodologies, data and tools for advancing knowledge and innovation in the preservation of Cultural Heritage. IPERION CH connects researchers in the Humanities and Natural Sciences and fosters a trans-disciplinary culture of exchange and cooperation for the growth of the European Research Area.

IPERION CH offers Transnational Access (TNA) to its world-class laboratories and knowledge distributed in 11 countries with the submission of single or multi-technique proposals. IPERION CH selects the best proposals and covers the costs of this activity.

The TNA program offers a vast portfolio of services and activities centred on the needs of the heritage science community in Europe and Associated Countries. The combined activity promotes the development of advanced research in the examination and conservation of works of art, offering users the access to unique European resources for in situ and laboratory investigations on artwork materials through three TNA platforms: FIXLAB, ARCHLAB and MOLAB. Through the three programs of access, the project aims to deliver to the users (from experienced practitioners to primary users) not only experimental resources but also methodological approaches, compliant best practices, tools and technologies to permit them to carry out their projects in conditions otherwise impossible for them.

The access is offered to:

1. Archives in European museums or conservation institutes (**ARCHLAB**);
  2. Advanced mobile analytical instrumentations for in-situ non-invasive measurements (**MOLAB**);
  3. Integrated platforms where large scale facilities are coupled with medium scale installations (**FIXLAB**).
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The Integrated Platform for the European Research Infrastructure ON Culture Heritage IPERION CH launches calls for proposals twice a year. Discover how to participate in the IPERION CH website.





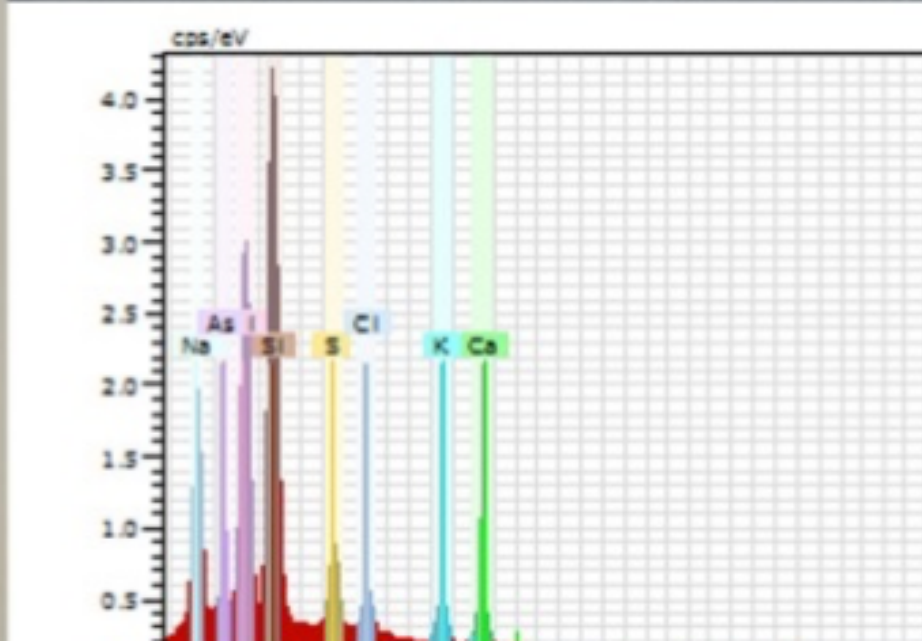
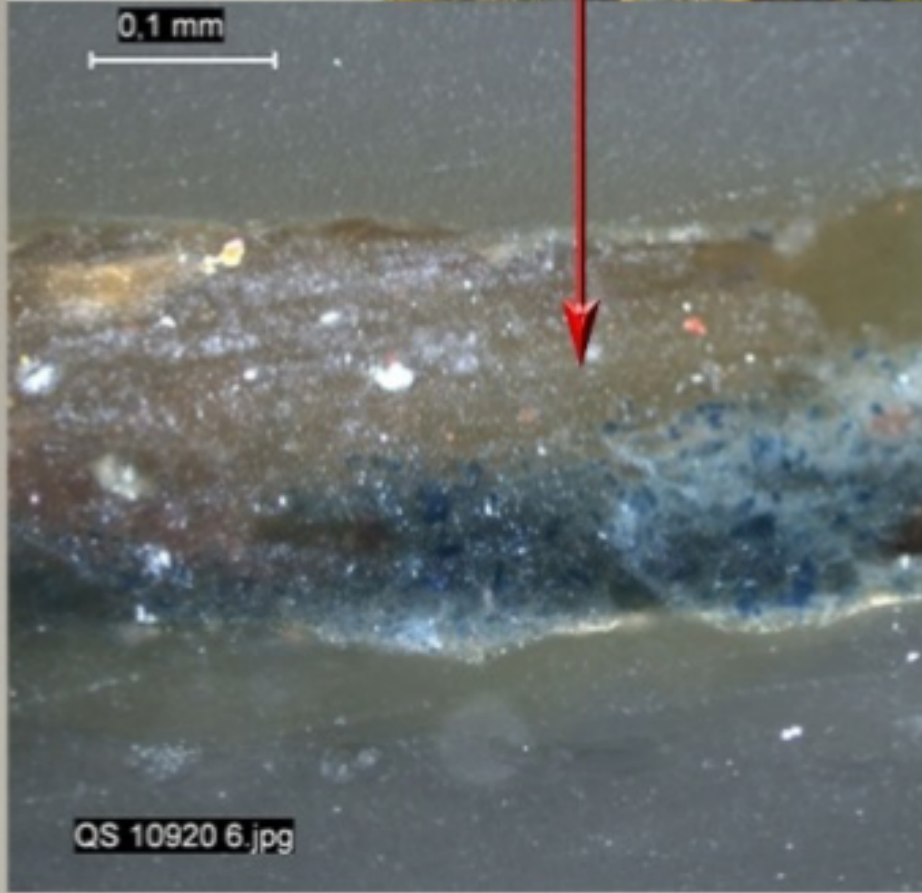
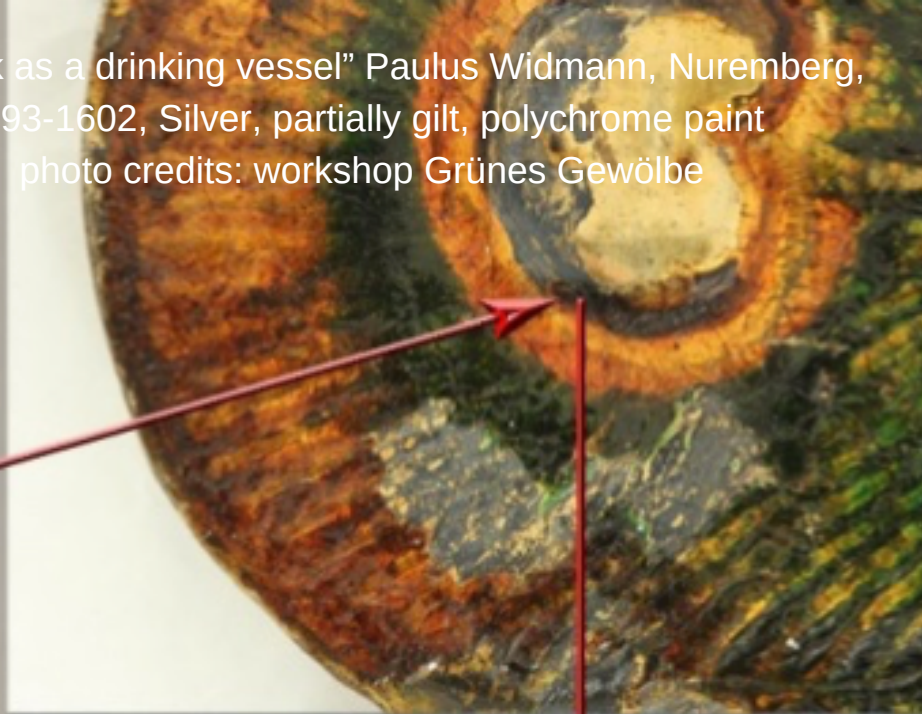


**ARCHLAB** Access to specialised knowledge and organized scientific information datasets largely unpublished from prestigious archives.

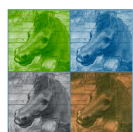
**Rainer Richter, Ulrike Weinhold** and their staff presented the proposal "Polychrome paint on European precious silver objects. A merging of two independent research studies of a scarcely noticed colouring technique" to IPERION CH and they had access to the OPD archives in 2017.

Read the ARCHLAB report in the IPERION CH website ([www.iperionch.eu](http://www.iperionch.eu))

“Peacock as a drinking vessel” Paulus Widmann, Nuremberg, 1593-1602, Silver, partially gilt, polychrome paint  
photo credits: workshop Grünes Gewölbe







IPERION CH

# keep in touch with us

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