

# JAN MATEJKO

What does art mean for you?

What art currently represents for us is a weapon of sorts; art cannot be separated from the love of the homeland!

JAN MATEJKO'S SPEECH TO STUDENTS OF THE KRAKOW SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS, 1882

Your paintings are full of artistic errors: they feature too many figures, which additionally take on unnatural poses. The works lack a sense of spatial depth. This is not just my opinion.

I cannot paint as I wish. I do not compose and paint in line with what I understand as the prerequisites for the artistic perfection of a work. I am more concerned with more important matters than this – the expression of a figure or the evocativeness of a group rather than the purity of lines or the beauty of the composition.

S. TARNOWSKI, MATEJKO, KRAKOW, 1897

## JAN MATEJKO (1838–1893)

Krakow-based painter, married to Teodora, née Giebułtowska, with whom he had four children. The artist became famous for his depictions of scenes from the history of Poland, e.g., *Skarga's Sermon*, *Stańczyk* and *The Battle of Grunwald*. Matejko created at a time when the territory of Poland was partitioned between Prussia, Russia and Austria.



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empik

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National Museum in Warsaw

On the track of... The Battle of Grunwald



### THE FACTS

**1226** Duke Konrad I of Masovia invited the Teutonic Knights to Polish lands. He entrusted the Order with the mission to bring Christianity to Prussia. With time, this task began to serve as a pretext for the Order to conquer new lands.

**1386** Lithuanian Duke Jagiełło (Jogaila) was chosen to marry queen Jadwiga and become the king of Poland. He arrived in Krakow, was baptized and married Jadwiga. The two countries were joined in a personal union. Lithuania was ruled on behalf of Jagiełło by his cousin Vytautas.

**1398** Duke Vytautas signed away Samogitia to the Teutonic Order. He later strived to regain it.

**1409** An anti-Teutonic insurgence, supported by Vytautas, broke out in Samogitia. Thus began the war between Poland and Lithuania on the one side, and the Teutonic Order on the other.

**15.07.1410** The combined armies of Poland and Lithuania clashed with the Teutonic Knights on the fields of Grunwald. This was the climax of the war. The Polish-Lithuanian forces won. The battle was hailed as one of the greatest battles of medieval Europe.

**1411** A treaty ending the war was signed in Toruń.

**29.09.1878** JAN MATEJKO'S PAINTING *THE BATTLE OF GRUNWALD* IS SHOWN IN PUBLIC.

It is so crowded at Grunwald that one can hardly take out his purse in this crush, let alone fight.

The exhibition of "Grunwald" moved all of Krakow, people flocked to see it almost every day; [...] the painting made a great impression. [...]

BOLESŁAW PRUS, WRITER

MARIAN GORZKOWSKI, JAN MATEJKO'S FRIEND

STANISŁAW TARNOWSKI, HISTORIAN

There is an excess of both people and objects; there is hardly any space left, and where one would wish to have it, there he finds a head, an arm, a robe or an armour.

JAN MATEJKO

This painting is like a museum one should take at least eight days to visit. LE TEMPS A PARISIEN NEWSPAPER

It's a tapestry or a rug bursting with colour. LE XIX<sup>e</sup> SIÈCLE A PARISIEN NEWSPAPER

The work is painted with rage.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE HISTORY OF THE BATTLE OF GRUNWALD GO TO: BLOG-KONSERWACJA.NMW.ART.PL

The *Battle* is an ever-present element of Polish culture. It appears in various contexts, such as TV series, memes and works of contemporary Polish artists. There are even two new versions of the painting: one carved in wood, another embroidered in cross stitch.

#21STCENTURY  
#THEBATTLEISEVERYWHERE  
#ALTERNATYWY4  
#ZMIENNICY  
#WOODENBATTLE  
#CROSSSTITCH

The war took its toll on the "health" of the painting. Conservators devoted almost the entire war. hidden underground throughout transferred to Lublin. It was information on the painting's hideout, which renders Matejko's *Battle* the most sought-after work of the Third Reich. Since 1949, *The Battle of Grunwald* is shown at the NMW.

#BLOGCONSERVATION  
#ALOTOHARDWORK  
#DIET#NEWROBES

In 1939, the painting was transferred to Lublin. It was hidden underground throughout almost the entire war. The Nazis set a prize of 10 million German marks for information on the painting's hideout, which renders Matejko's *Battle* the most sought-after work of the Third Reich. Since 1949, *The Battle of Grunwald* is shown at the NMW.

#WAR#HIDEOUT#LUBLIN  
#SEARCH#HAPPENDING  
#NMW

Matejko sold the *Battle* to banker Rosenblum, who organized showcases of the work in such cities as Warsaw, Moscow, Paris and London. The painting was purchased to the national collection in 1902. It was presented at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw.

#FAME#JOURNEYS  
#TOURDEEUROPE#HOME  
#ZACHĘTA

dimensions: 426 x 987 cm  
surface area: 42 m<sup>2</sup>  
weight: ca. 290 kg  
owner: the Polish society

#IAMHUGE#MATEJKO  
#HOWITISDONE#OUROWN

ON THE PAINTING AND ITS HISTORY



## WHAT DOES GRUNWALD TELL US ABOUT?



### ST STANISLAUS (1030-1079)

#### AS A SYMBOL OF DIVINE INTERVENTION

According to the chronicles of Jan Długosz, the soldiers saw St Stanislaus, patron of Poland, praying for the Polish victory. The saint is surrounded by dark clouds representing the wind that kept blowing in the faces of the Teutonic Knights. Both phenomena described in Jan Długosz's chronicles are interpreted by Matejko as divine intervention in the battle and the lives of its participants.



### HEINRICH VON PLAUE (1370-1429) AS A SYMBOL OF A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

This figure is the proverbial blot on the landscape. Heinrich was not present at Grunwald. After the defeat suffered by the Teutonic Knights, due to the sluggishness of Jagiełło's army, he prepared the defence of the Teutonic capital of Malbork. Władysław Jagiełło was unable to conquer the city. Despite the great victory at Grunwald, the Teutonic Order was not broken. It evolved into Prussia, which was one of the states responsible for the partitions of Poland.



### ULRICH VON JUNGINGEN (1360-1410, DIED DURING THE BATTLE OF GRUNWALD) AS A SYMBOL OF THE FALSE CHRISTIANIZATION MISSION

The Grand Master of the Teutonic Order dies at the hands of a foot soldier armed with the lance of St Maurice. He is accompanied by a man with a typical executioner's headdress and pouch for "the coin of forgiveness" that a convicted man would give him as a token of not bearing a grudge against him. In Matejko's painting, Ulrich's death represents an execution, a carried out sentence.

### LANCE OF ST MAURICE

relic given in 1000 by Holy Roman Emperor Otto III as a symbol of his acceptance of Poland's sovereignty and entrusting Poland with the mission to disseminate Christianity in the East.

### DUKE VYTAUTAS (1354/55-1430) AS A SYMBOL OF TAKING OVER THE CHRISTIANIZATION MISSION

The Grand Duke of Lithuania initially opposed the Polish king and made alliances with the Teutonic Knights. He later sided with Władysław Jagiełło and they fought the Teutonic Order together. Matejko depicted the Duke's robe with a number of Oriental elements: a Persian sword, an Oriental shield and calpack. This was meant to emphasize his strong connection with the East.