



NATIONAL MEMORIAL AT VÍTKOV

U PAMÁTNÍKU 1900, 130 00, PRAHA 3-ŽIŽKOV

EXTERIOR BUILDING WORK – TREATMENT AND REPAIR OF EXTERNAL WALLS, AND DRAINAGE OF THE COURTYARD OF HONOUR, UNDERPINNING OF THE FOUNDATIONS, DAMP- AND WATERPROOFING OF THE LOWER PART OF THE BUILDING

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE INTERIOR – INSTALLATION OF INNER FIRE, HEAT AND SOUND PROOF DOORS

RESTORATION WORK – RESTORATION OF THE MOSAIC ORNAMENTATION, OF DOORS, WINDOWS, FLOORS, CEILINGS, STONE SARCOPHAGI, PICTURES, ELECTRIC LIGHTING, STONE CARVING AND OTHER STONE COMPONENTS OF BOTH THE INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR

INVESTOR/CLIENT: NATIONAL MUSEUM

CONTRACTOR: GEMA ART GROUP A.S.,
HOCHTIEF CZ A.S.

IMPLEMENTATION: 05/2007 – 10/2009



The history of the building commenced on 8th November 1928 when president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk laid the foundation stone. The overall responsibility for the project was given to architect Jan Zázvorka. Apart from commemorating the Hussite battle in 1421, the monument's other purpose was to serve as a memorial to honour the memory of Czechoslovak legionnaires who perished in the First World War.

After 1945 a new part was added to the building as a memorial to soldiers killed in World War II. The communist putsch of February 1948 meant an altogether different approach. It was decided to turn the Vítkov Hill site into a sort of Pantheon of the proletariat.

Among the most valuable parts of the memorial are the mosaics in the Hall of the Fallen from the years 1937 and 1938, the work of the Max Švabinský, and the bas-reliefs of Czechoslovak legionnaires by Karel Pokorný, František Bílek and Otakar Velínský in the Central Hall. The art of socialist realism can be seen in the Red Army Hall.

The work undertaken included the complete renovation of the outer casing of the building and its immediate surroundings, such as the staircase, the Courtyard of Honour, the site of the Greek torches and the fountains. All premises inside the building including windows, doors, floors, ceilings, furnishings and light fittings were also restored. A new interconnected exhibition space has been created at the first floor above ground level and above it a new glass walled coffee house with views of Prague has been built. Since 2001 the National Memorial at Vítkov has been under the administration of the National Museum. The aim of the renovation was the establishment of a cultural and civic centre while preserving the function of the Memorial as a representation of Czech nationhood to which purpose a permanent exhibition "Crossroads of Czech and Czechoslovak Nationhood" has been installed. In view of the materials and techniques used, the work which was carried out was, in many respects, unique. This made it a prestigious project for GEMA ART GROUP a.s., both in the extent and in the variety of the required building, restoration and artisan and craft work.



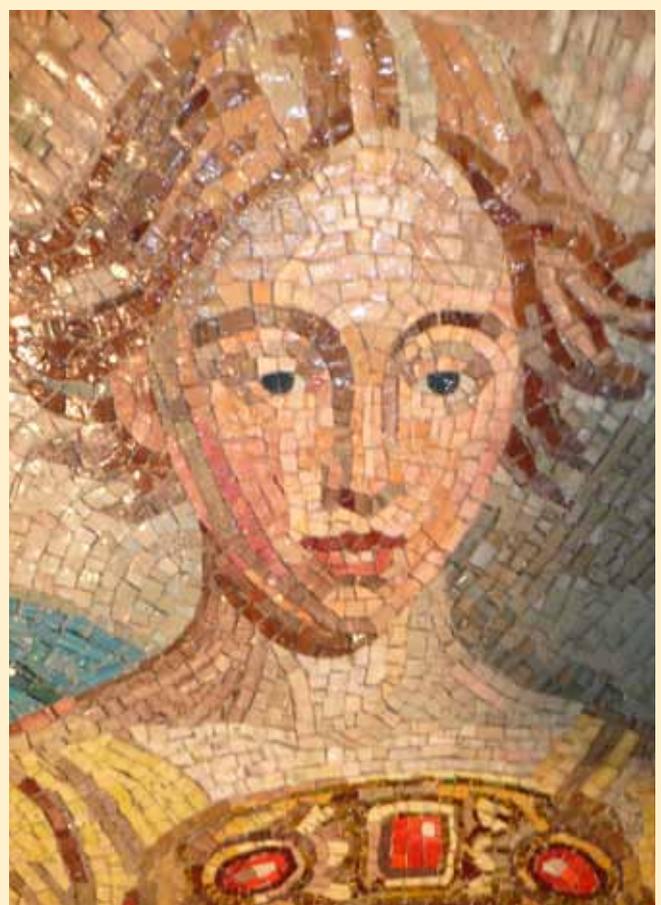
The National emblem (1997) - after restoration



Entrance to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier



Celebration hall



Detail of mosaic - after restoration



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RESTORATION OF DOORS AND WINDOWS

Interior doors were showing signs of cracking, surface warping and other material defects. During the work on the doors the wrought iron ornamentation was removed and restored. The doors were sanded, warping treated with under-surface glue, deep grooves in-filled and retouched for colour matching. In some cases the whole doors had to be replaced for reasons of fire resistance, in which case the original wrought iron fittings were transferred to the new doors.

Also restored were the metal doors with twelve bas-reliefs, leading from the upper terrace to the antechamber of the Central Hall. The doors had to be dismantled, cleaned and painted with anticorrosive paint. The doors were then heat-treated using heat insulation technology.

The steel windows of the building were in places in a state of significant disrepair and did not fulfil insulation criteria required for the preservation of valuable exhibits. During the work broken window panes were replaced, window frames re-polished and damaged areas treated.



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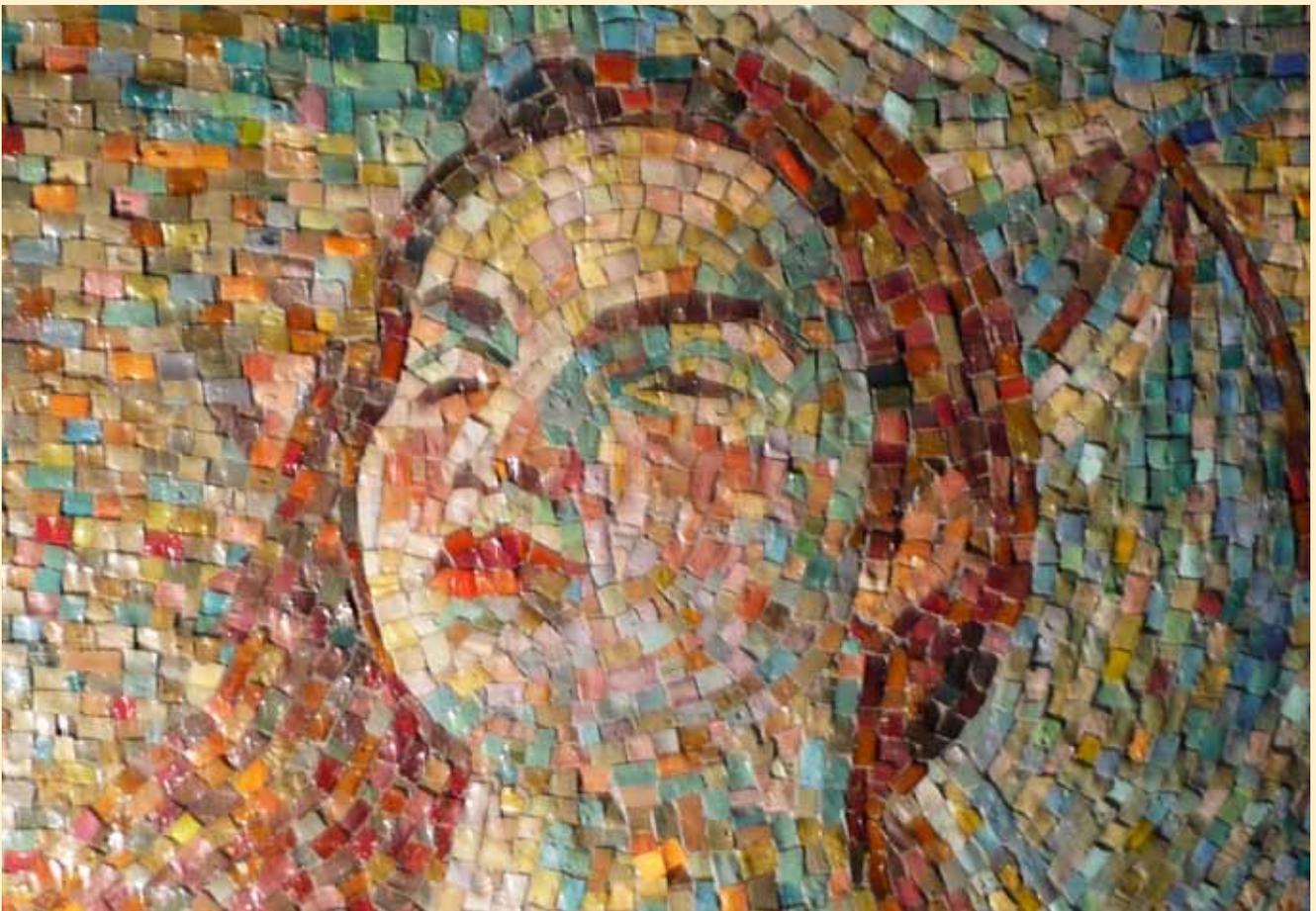
RESTORATION OF THE MOSAIC DECORATIONS

All figurative mosaic ornamentation in the Main entrance hall, the Hall of the Fallen, the Hall of the Red Army and the Hall of Traditions underwent restoration. The mosaic decorations in the Hall of the Fallen from the years 1937 and 1938 by Max Švabinský is considered to be of the greatest artistic value. The mosaics depict allegories of the Czech Lands from the era of World War I. The mosaics “Song of Freedom” in the Main Hall originate from the same years. Mosaics in the Hall of the Red Army depicting Soviet soldiers were created in the 1950s. The mosaics are made from either glass or stone. All the mosaics were very dirty, most had cracked edges and some pieces were missing. The surfaces were mechanically cleaned, and missing parts replaced using appropriate material. The stone mosaics were treated with an anti-damp agent and dust repellent.

The stone mosaic in the Hall of Traditions from 1961–1963, which portrays historic events from the Czech Lands, was in the least satisfactory state. The mosaic was contaminated by dirt and damaged by water leakage. The section depicting peasant uprisings had damage even to its sandstone backing. The whole area was cleaned, in-filled using the same material and treated with anti-damp and anti-pollution agents.



Mosaic in Hall of the Fallen



Hall of the Fallen – detail of the mosaic



Hall of the Red Army – mosaic



Hall of the Red Army – detail of the crack



Hall of the Red Army – after restoration



Hall of Traditions – mosaic



Hall of Traditions – Victorious February 1948



Hall of Traditions – detail of mosaic



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RESTORATION OF FURNITURE

Restoration concerned mostly the furniture in the Celebration Hall and some other premises. Tables, benches, chairs and armchairs were damaged and cracked and the upholstery torn. The wooden parts were first cleaned, veneers re-attached and damaged areas fixed. Armchairs were re-upholstered in the style of the originals.

Other work pertained mostly of the floor in the presidential salon made of square panels with walnut or oak veneer, which due to water leakage had become partially unstuck. The floor was cracked, worn out, scratched and the surface varnish almost entirely lost. During the work the floor boards were dismantled and loose parts of the veneer glued back with a dispersion wood adhesive. The whole surface was sanded, cracks cleaned and in-filled and finally the wood impregnated with a special oil.

Similar work was carried out on the oak panelling. The whole panelling was dismantled, its components restored and missing parts replaced. The surface was treated with a special oil.





Upholstered furniture in Celebration hall



Furniture in the Presidential lounge



Detail of the chair - after restoration



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RESTORATION OF PAINTINGS

Restoration work concerned two paintings: "National memorial at Žižkov" by A. Procházka and "Tábor" by V. Beneš. The paintings were covered by a layer of dirt and in some areas the paint exhibited signs of mechanical damage and cracking. During the restoration the paintings were mechanically cleaned and small fissures removed using chalk based fillers. Consequently the paintings were retouched using acrylic paints and finally surface coated with Damar varnish with the addition of beeswax.



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RESTORATION OF STONE AND CERAMIC PARTS

The most valuable stone sculptures in the interior of the memorial are the marble bas-reliefs of the soldiers from the Czechoslovak Legions from 1936 to 1938 and the two tall argillite bas-reliefs of soldiers with sub-machine guns from 1958 at the corner of the military columbarium. The surfaces of the sculptures were heavily contaminated by dust and covered in old wax but apart from small cracks there was no significant damage. The impurities were removed using a water steam jet and then the repair of small cracks and fissures was carried out. The surface of the stone was consolidated and finally colour retouching and chemical treatment of the stone carried out. In addition, restoration work was undertaken on the stone sarcophagi. Minor restoration work was carried out on the plaque engraved with verses by poet V. Nezval. The ceramic tile panelling in the upper part of the Celebration Hall walls also underwent restoration. The ceramics are decorated with emblems of the constituent parts of the first Czechoslovak republic. The surface of the ceramics was covered in dust deposits, which were removed using a vacuum cleaner and brushes. Various minor damage and chipped corners were repaired using mineral fillers of a suitable colour.

Some stone elements situated in front of the memorial were also restored: the foundation stones on the north facing slope of the hill, the state emblem, the stone fountain and the memorial of the of the Battle of Vítkov. Surfaces of the stone were covered with a deep layer of dirt and dust deposits, some parts were broken off and some cracked. After cleaning with an aqueous solution containing biocides, the stone was in-filled and missing parts replaced. Afterwards, the stone was treated with a hydrophobic substance. The official foundation stones, after restoration, were placed among the exhibits. The state emblem from 1997 was the least damaged and was merely cleaned. When restoring the stone structure of the fountain, the stone foundations of its basin were also repaired and its distribution system rebuilt.

Apart from the bas-reliefs and other stone elements, both exterior and interior stone panelling and stone floor tiles were reconstructed. Cracks and other instances of damage were treated by fillers and dirt and other contaminants removed with steam and chemical cleaners. The surfaces were then stabilized.



Marble bas-reliefs of the soldiers from the Czechoslovak Legions from 1936 to 1938



Marble bas-reliefs of the soldiers from the Czechoslovak Legions from 1936 to 1938



Marble bas-reliefs of the soldiers from the Czechoslovak Legions from 1936 to 1938



Bas-relief of a soldier from World War II



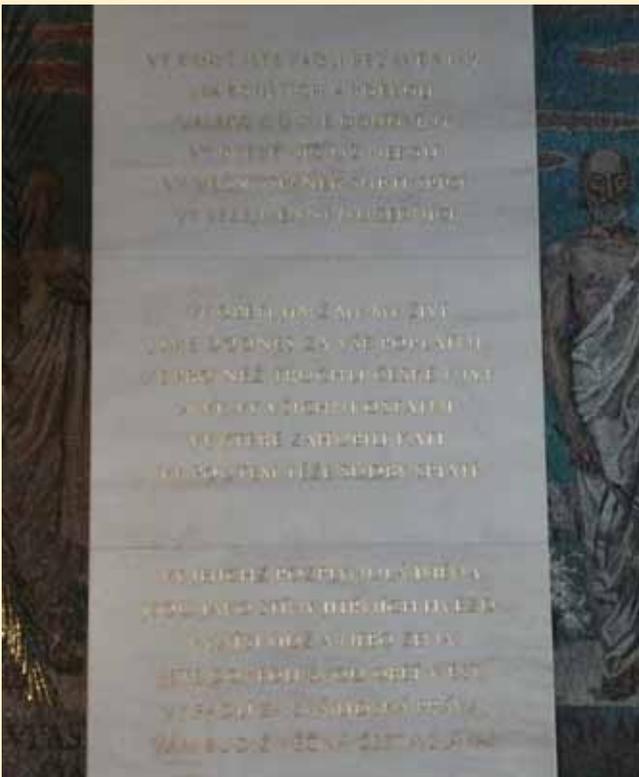
Marble staircase in the interior of the monument



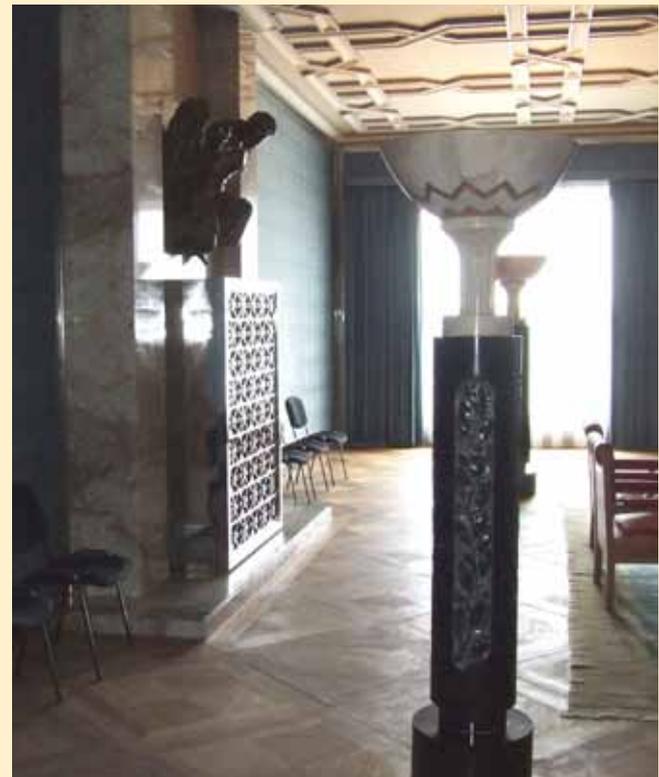
Marble sarcophagus in Hall of the Red Army



Marble sarcophagus in columbarium



Verses from the poet V. Nezval



Marble lamp in the Presidential Lounge



Stone fountain before restoration



Stone fountain after restoration



Monument Battle of Vítkov - before restoration



Monument Battle of Vítkov - after restoration



Monument Battle of Vítkov - before restoration



Monument Battle of Vítkov - after restoration



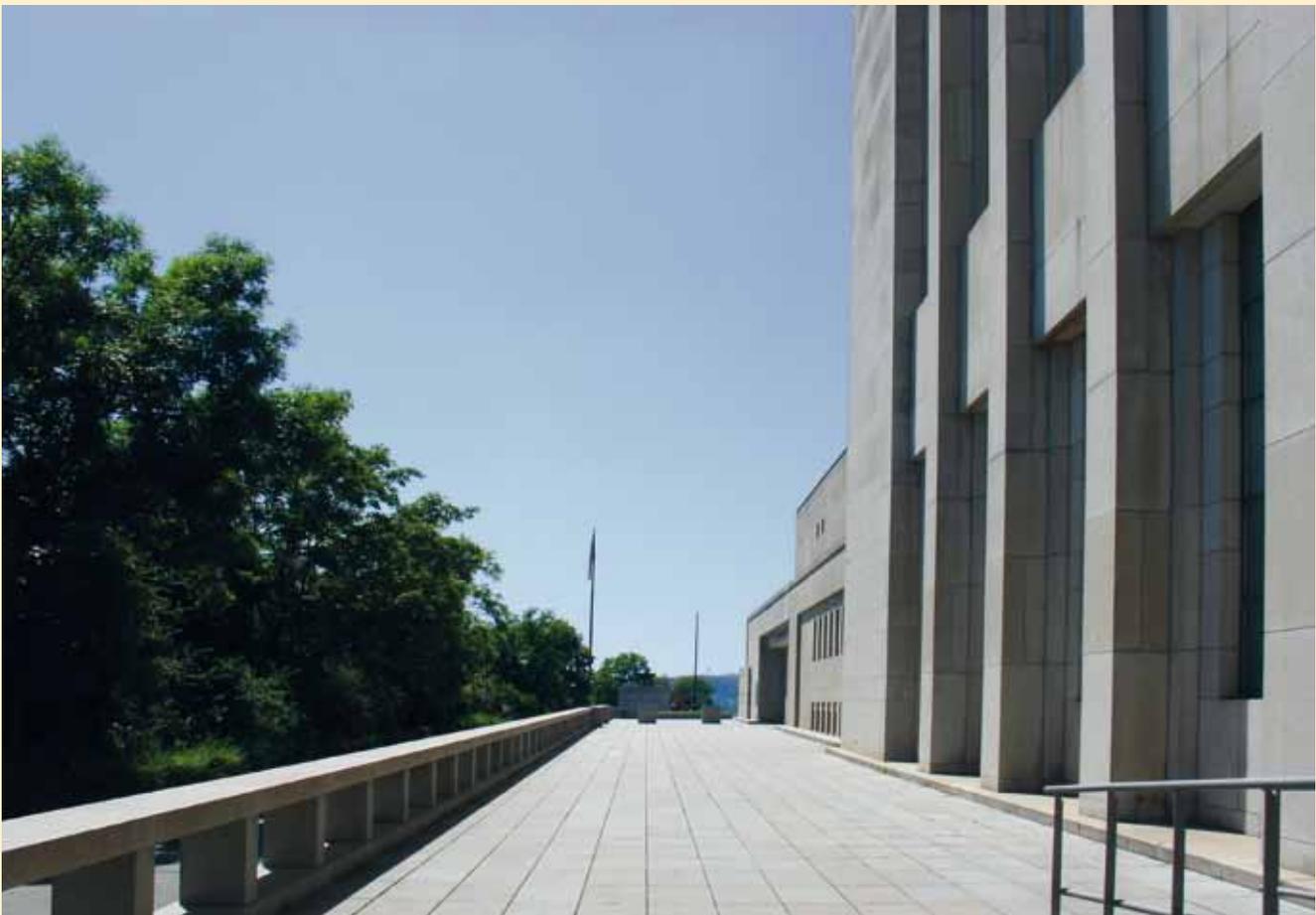
Honorary Yard – work in progress



Honorary Yard after reconstruction



Work in progress



After reconstruction