

Renovation of the stone lion sculptures in front of the main courtyard of the Presidential Palace.

The four stone lions that stand guard at the entrances to the Presidential Palace were forged by Italian sculptor Camillo Landini, a student and collaborator of Bertel Thorvaldsen - creator of monuments to, among others, Prince Józef Poniatowski and Nicolaus Copernicus. Each of the sculptures, measuring 222 cm in length, 100 cm in width and 118 cm in height, was carved from a single block of stone using chisels, abrasives and whetstones, i.e. traditional artistic stonemasonry techniques. Monolithic blocks of sandstone of the Bolesławiec type, probably from the quarry in Żerkowice were used as the sculptural material. The lions were placed on pedestals measuring: 228 cm in length, 104.5 cm in width and 126 cm in height, which are connected to eight stone posts (six in the central part of the fence, one by each outbuilding) by means of massive iron chains with rectangular links.



Fryderyk Krzysztof Dietrich, *Palace of the Royal Gouverneur in Warsaw*, [in:] Józef Wawrzyniec Krasiński, *Guide du voyageur en Pologne et dans la République de Cracovie, Varsovie 1820*, pages [26-27], [Polona.pl](https://polona.pl).

The ornamental fence separating the Krakowskie Przedmieście Street from the palace's avant-cour was created as part of a comprehensive reconstruction of the former Radziwiłł residence, carried out between 1818 and 1819 by one of the most eminent Polish architects of the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Chrystian Piotr Aigner, the author of designs for, among others, St. Alexander's Church on Plac Trzech Krzyży [Three Crosses Square] in Warsaw, the façade of St. Anne's Church in Warsaw as well as the Temple of the Sibyl and the Gothic House in Puławy. The new classicist look of the palace was to the liking of Varsovians. "Gazeta Warszawska" (newspaper) wrote on 5 October 1819: "This

palace [...] today ranks among the most beautiful palaces and is one of the first ornaments of the Krakowskie Przedmieście Street".



Hyacinthe Traversier according to a drawing by Auguste Alexandre Guillaumot, *View of the Governor's Palace*,
[in:] Charles Forster, *Pologne*, Paris 1840, drawing 48, [Polona.pl](https://www.polona.pl/).

The four stately lions guarding the entrances to the palace's avant-cour became one of the symbols of Warsaw's most representative route leading from the Belvedere to the Royal Castle. In addition to their decorative functions, the sculptures also played another role in November 1830: "the people's speakers would stand on stone lions in front of the edifice and speak to the people from there".



A pre-war Warsaw postcard, *The Korotyński Collection*, 1794 – 1928,
State Archive in Warsaw , catalogue number [72/201/0/4/39](https://www.ksiaznica.gov.pl/ksiaznica/72/201/0/4/39).



A picture of the lion on the right side of the Northern entrance made in 1938,
„Na posterunku. Gazeta Policji Państwowej” [*On the Guard. State Police Newspaper*], 1938, Y. 20, issue No 47 (20 November 1938),
Polona.pl.



A picture of the lion on the left side of the Northern entrance made in January 1943,
Collection of the Press Publishing House Kraków-Warszawa, National Digital Archives,
catalogue number [3/2/0/-/5708a](#).

During the Warsaw Uprising, the sculptures suffered a great deal of damage as a result of the fighting in the Krakowskie Przedmieście area. The lion on the left side of the Southern entrance suffered the most damage to its body, muzzle and paws. The sculpture to the right of the Northern entrance, on the other hand, suffered structural cracks to its head and rump. On the surface of all four lions, there were numerous bullet holes.



Presidential Palace during the German occupation after its transformation into the German House, *Collection of the Press Publishing House Kraków-Warszawa*, National Digital Archives, catalogue number [3/2/0/-/5701](#).

After 1945, thanks to the efforts of the sculptors and conservators, the lions were reassembled into one whole, using previously collected fragments of various dimensions. A traditional method of Dutchman repair was applied with the use of mineral mortar, which unfortunately favours the penetration of rainwater inside the sculptures and causes the patches to burst, cracks to recur and intensive growth of algae and mosses in the joints. In addition, Szydłowiec sandstone from the Śmiłów deposit was also used for the restorations, with a light grey colour that differs from that of the Bolesławiec stone used by Landini. This stone is also less resistant to weathering. As a result, the sculptures, permanently exposed to the destructive effects of the weather, have become an object of constant concern for conservators.



The sculpture most severely damaged during the Warsaw Uprising (the lion on the left side of the Southern entrance) following restoration works. "Stolica" ["The Capital"], issue No 31, 1947, page 6, [Mazovian Digital Library](#).

In the 21st century, renovation works were carried out in 2002 and 2013. The effort was of an ad hoc prophylaxis nature and aimed at saving the sculptures from environmental degradation. The lions have now been transported to a conservation studio, where they are undergoing a comprehensive restoration that will permanently protect them from weathering. As a first step, external layers and loose patches will be removed. The surface of the stone will then be disinfected and thoroughly cleaned using chemical, laser and dry ice blasting methods. Mineral mortar fillings that no longer serve their purpose will be mechanically removed. The conservators will also decide on any structural reinforcements for the sculptures in the form of rods or carbon fibre bands. New Dutchman repairs will be inserted using modern stone adhesives, and fillings that do not require Dutchman repair will be made of durable and pigmented mineral mortars. On completion of the work, disinfection by low-pressure spraying will be repeated, followed by colour unification. Finally, the surface of the sculptures

will be covered with a hydrophobic protective layer.



Wojciech Roman, *Lion L3 – rump view*. Note the completely detached stone fragments (stacked next to the sculpture),
[in:] *Program prac konserwatorskich [The conservation work programme]*, developed by Wojciech Roman, Warsaw 2023, photo 38, page 41.



Wojciech Roman, Scale of damage to the L2 sculpture - the whole trunk is composed of separate fragments,

[w:] *Program prac konserwatorskich* [The conservation work programme] developed by Wojciech Roman, Warsaw 2023, photo 53, page 49.

Thanks to the use of state-of-the-art restoration techniques, the sculptures will regain their former splendour, and the preservation methods used will ensure that they are protected from adverse weather conditions. Once the work has been completed, the lions will be restored to their original place to watch over the entrance to Poland's most important palace as they have done for the past 200 years.



The lion on the left side of the Northern entrance,
Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, own collection.

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