

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The David Booth Department of Conservation

TITLE: *OOF*

MUSEUM No.: 256.1988

ARTIST: Ed Ruscha

DATE: 1962 (reworked 1963)

MEDIUM: Oil on canvas

DIMENSIONS: 71 ½ x 67 x 1 ¾ in

SIGNATURE: None¹

CONSERVATORS: Michael Duffy and Laura Richter Le

DATE OF TREATMENT: February 2024

PURPOSE OF TREATMENT: This treatment was carried out following display in “Ed Ruscha / Now Then” at MoMA and before traveling to LACMA.

DESCRIPTION

The painting is executed on a medium weight cotton duck canvas, stretched on a LeBron stretcher with two horizontal and one vertical crossbar, and stapled on the reverse. There are old nail holes with small halos of rust on the back edge of the canvas. There is a foam core backing board (2 pieces).

Across the canvas, there is a layer of artist applied white ground. The blue background is applied in layers of thin and glossy oil paint. It is fluidly applied, with visible brushstrokes seen through the pattern of lighter and deeper blue. There is an 18 ½ inch strip of darker blue paint with more visible, gestural brushstrokes stretching across the canvas in line with the letters “OOF” (it aligns perfectly with the top and bottom of the “F” and is slight smaller than the two “O”s). The yellow paint is more matte and also contains gestural brushstrokes. Pencil lines are visible around the edges of the yellow letters, along with several horizontal and vertical lines in. In the center of each “O” is a pin prick (one in the left “O” and two in the center “O”), presumably from a compass used to mark out the circular shapes of the letters (Image 2).

Some blue paint came through the pinholes in the center of the “O”s to the back of the canvas (Image 3). There are lines of blue paint toward the upper center that appear to have come through cracks in the ground layer, along with a small dot of blue paint toward the lower left edge. The verso also has an inscription in pencil on the upper right: “18+” (sic).

In Ruscha’s diary, he wrote that he began working on a series of “OOF” paintings on May 28, 1962. He also details the materials: Bellini Blue (pthalo), turpentine, paint thinner, and lemon yellow. The following year, in March 1963, Ruscha writes that he added 2 coats of watery cobalt blue and turpentine, and then “added 2 more coats of cobalt and Bellini blue.”

¹ Corey D’Augustine’s treatment report notes that the original stretcher included Ed Ruscha’s signature.

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The painting was damaged early in its life when it fell forward into a chess set and Ed Ruscha repaired it, intentionally leaving, however, traces of the accident.²

In July 1997, Eugena Ordonez carried out scientific analysis on a cross section of the blue background and another from the yellow letters. She analyzed a lower and upper level of blue paint, both of which were an organic blue, likely a phthalocyanine blue. The upper layer has a lot of blanc fixe, while the lower does not, suggesting different paints. She could not confirm the presence of cobalt blue, as Ruscha writes in his diary. The yellow color was found to be zinc potassium chromate. Finally, the white ground layer was found to likely contain calcite mixed with titanium white.

TREATMENT HISTORY

In 1988, the painting was mounted on its current Lebron stretcher. Dilute plexisol was fed into the cracks created by the sharp edges of the old stretcher.

In 1998, Michael Duffy consolidated cracks around the turnover edge with Beva 371, and inpainted them with watercolor. Losses and minor surfaced abrasions were also inpainted, and dark inpainting at the upper center were toned with watercolors. Matte passages were locally adjusted with Winsor & Newton Retouch varnish.

In July 2009, Corey D'Augustine treated a small dent on the bottom left edge of the work (3 ½" from the left and 9 ½" from the bottom). The dent was flattened by moistening the area with damp blotter and massaging both sides of the canvas with dry blotter as it dried.

In 2013, the surface was dusted with a soft bristle brush and scuff marks were removed with a small, stiff brush.

CONDITION

There is a dent, approximately 1 inch in diameter, along the lower right edge of the painting, around 15 in from the bottom edge and 2 in from the right edge (see Image 7).

There are cracks across the surface through the ground and paint layers. The cracks along the tacking edge are most pronounced, with a line corresponding to the sharp edge of the old stretcher bar and several small losses (Image 4 and 5). There are pencil lines on the side tacking edges across the center.

There are four matte spots in the upper center, presumably from when the painting was damaged by a chess board and repaired by Ruscha himself (see description above). On the verso, in corresponding locations, are four repairs that appear to be Beva patches, and which have darkened to a beige color (Image 6).

² According to a note dated April 5, 2019, by Michael Duffy.

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The top left corner of the Fome-cor backing board has been cut out to reveal a label below. The label is torn, dirty, and only loosely held to the stretcher below. Additionally, the gap in the backing board has allowed for a buildup of dirt and dust on the painting verso.

TREATMENT

- 1) The verso and upper tacking edge were cleaned with a brush and vacuum, followed by soot sponges. Material trapped between the canvas and stretcher bar was removed.
- 2) The dent was eased into plane using a combination of moisture and suction. A slightly dampened piece of blotter paper was held against the area for ~1 min. Then, a Mitka mini suction apparatus was placed against the canvas verso, and allowed to run for ~5 min. This process was repeated until the dents were no longer visible under normal illumination and barely noticeable in raking light (4 times total).
- 3) The top, left corner of the backing board was filled with Fome-cor adhered with Tyvek tape. The label from the top, left corner (along with two previously stored in the file: Ferus Gallery and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles) were encapsulated in Mylar and adhered to the backing board (Image 9). Black fabric strap handles were attached to the verso edges.
- 4) The painting was re-framed in its white "L" frame.

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IMAGES



Image 1: Condition Photograph, 2019

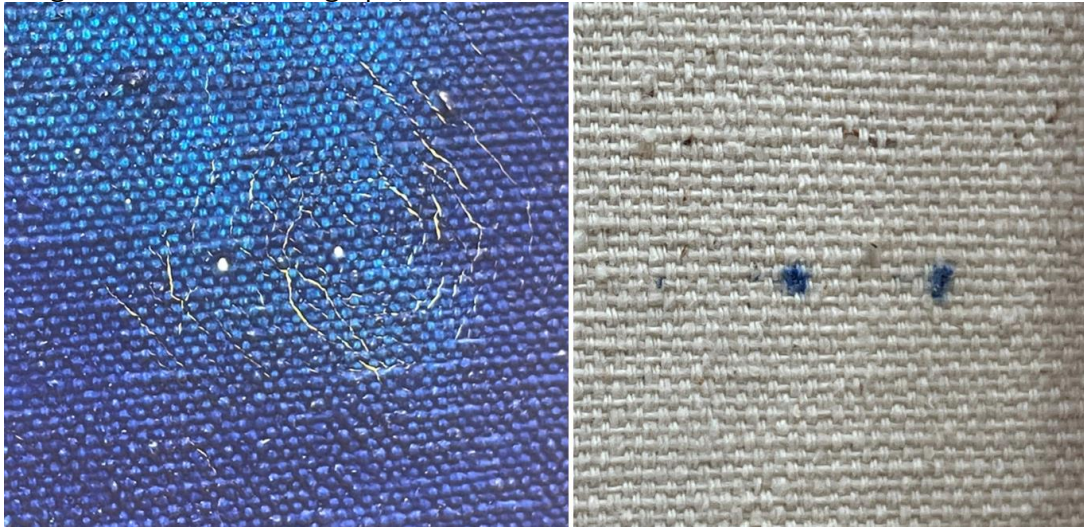


Image 2 (left): Pin points in center of middle "O", recto

Image 3 (right): Pin points in center of middle "O", verso

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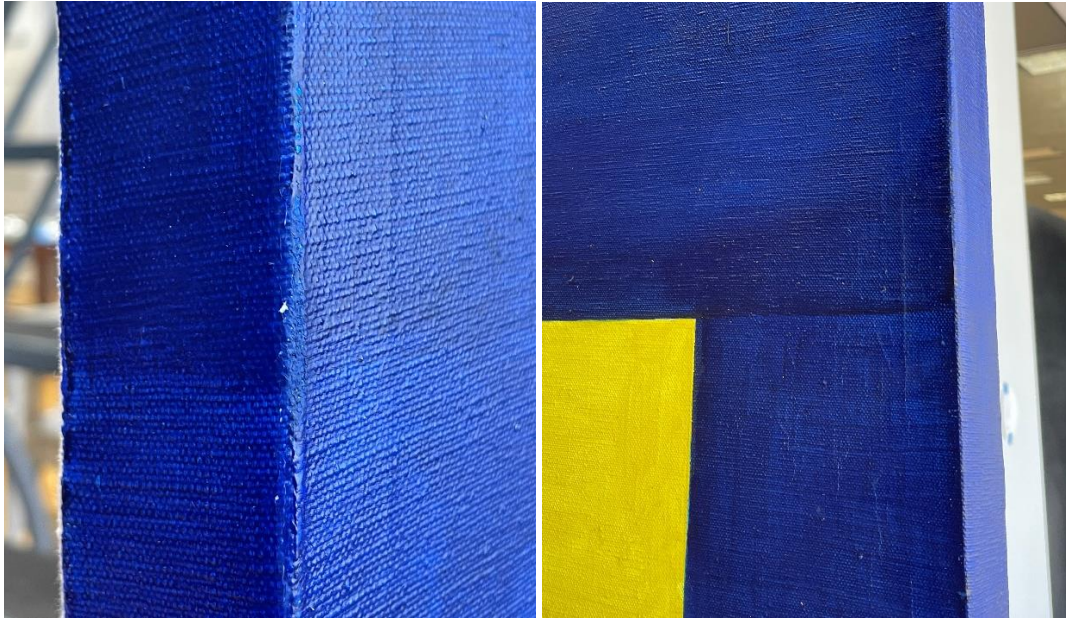


Image 4 (left): Small loss on left edge

Image 5 (right): Cracks near the tacking edge, including a line where the old stretcher bar fell



Image 6: Beva patches on the top center, verso

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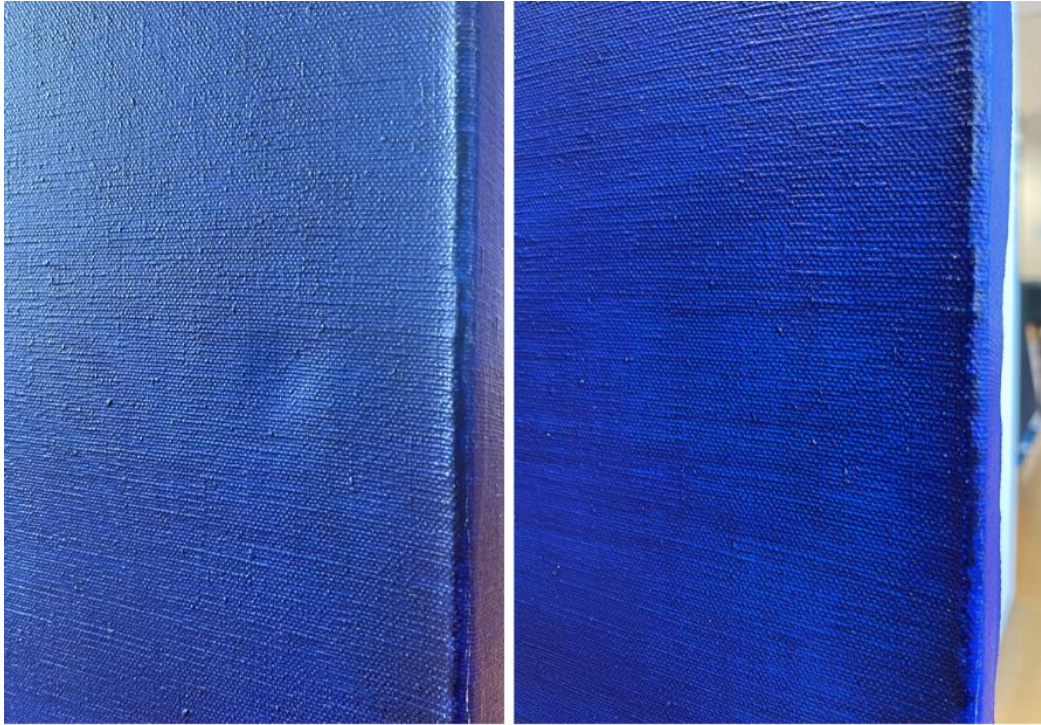


Image 7 (left): Dent on lower right edge, before treatment

Image 8 (right): Dent, after treatment

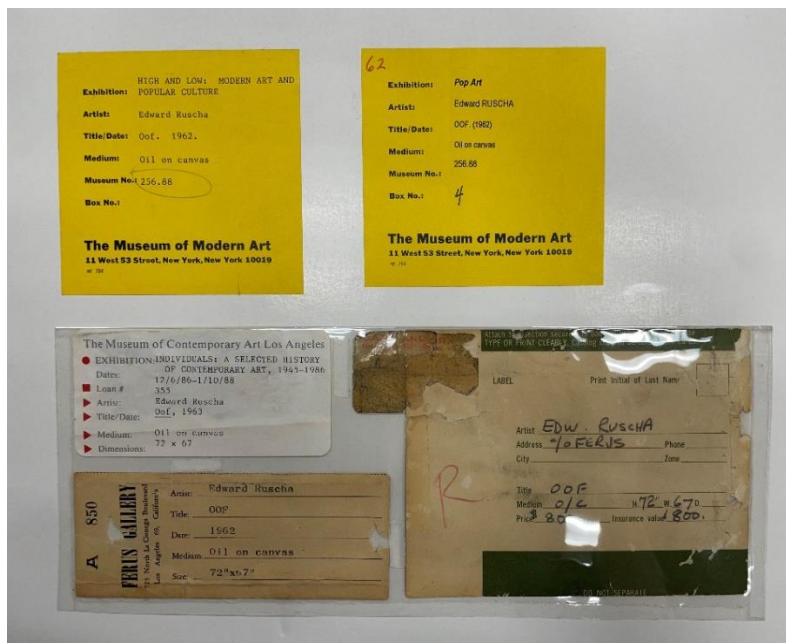


Image 9: Backing board labels

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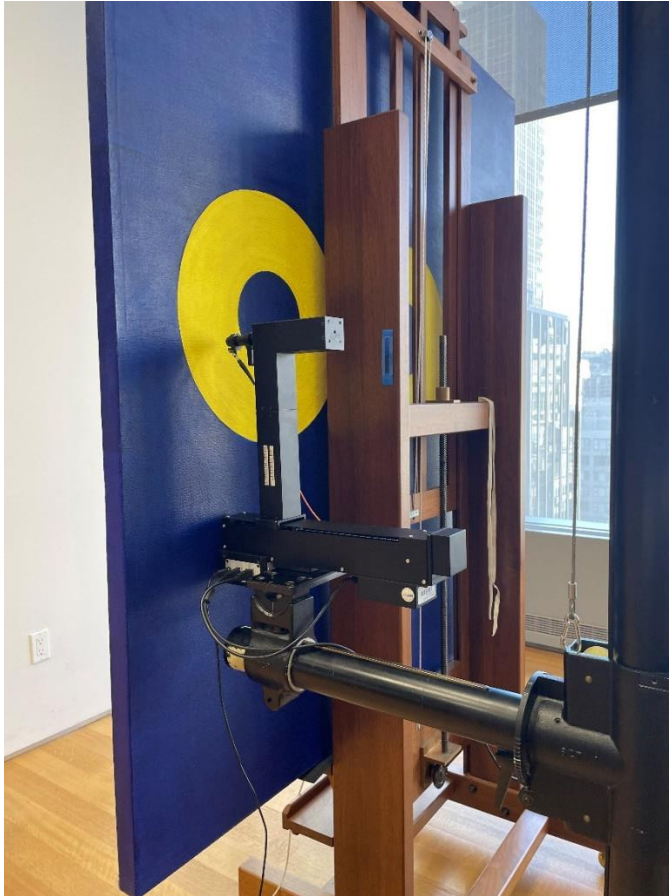


Image 10: Microfading test on the yellow paint

SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS

Catherine Stephens carried out a microfading test on the yellow paint and determined that it is not at risk of fading. For more information, see the science folder on the O drive.