

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The David Booth Department of Conservation

TITLE: *Reservist of the First Division*

MUSEUM No.: 814.1935

ARTIST: Kazimir Malevich

DATE: fall-winter 1914

MEDIUM: Oil on canvas with collage of printed paper, postage stamp, and thermometer

DIMENSIONS: 21 1/8 x 17 5/8 in.

SIGNATURE: Recto: "K. Marebur." lower right script in pencil; verso: signed and dated, "K. Malevic 1914 g." and inscribed "Ratnik 1-g razrjada/Moskva" ("Reservist of the first class, Moscow")

CONSERVATORS: Laura Richter Le and Anny Aviram

DATE OF TREATMENT: February, 2024

PROVENANCE

This work is included in the Provenance Research Project.¹ The current entry (2024) lists:

The artist, Moscow and Petrograd/Leningrad. 1914 - 1927

Hugo Haering, Berlin, 1927 - 1930. Malevich took approximately seventy works, including this one, from Leningrad to Berlin in 1927, where the work was displayed at Große Berliner Ausstellung. Malevich left these paintings and drawings in the care of a Berlin Architect named Hugo Haering when he returned to Leningrad later in 1927. In 1930, Haering transferred the collection to the care of Alexander Dorner, director of the Provinzialmuseum in Hannover. Malevich never returned to Germany to collect the works, and died in Leningrad in 1935 without leaving instructions directing the disposition of his art.

Provinzialmuseum (later Landesmuseum), Hannover, 1930 - 1935. Dorner exhibited the pictures until the Nazis came to power in 1933, and then placed them in storage to save them from possible destruction. In 1935, Alfred Barr, acting on behalf of The Museum of Modern Art, bought two paintings and two drawings from Dorner, and borrowed other works.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1935 - present. The works remained on extended loan to The Museum of Modern Art until 1963, when they were acquired into the collection.

The acquisition was confirmed in 1999 by agreement with Malevich's heirs and made possible with funds from the Mrs. John Hay Whitney Bequest (by exchange).

ART HISTORICAL INFORMATION

This work is representative of Malevich's "Fevralist" period, in which he explored absurdist semantics through the incorporation of pictorial nouns and at times, physical objects – as in this painting with the addition of a postage stamp and thermometer.² It displays a cubist interpretation of a head and shoulder portrait, interrupted by a large blue square placed over the position of the

¹ <https://www.moma.org/collection/provenance/?locale=en>.

² Nakov, p. 165.

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face. Writing about the significance of squares, Malevich wrote, “the square is not a subconscious form. It is the creation of intuitive reason. It is the face of the new art.”³

In 1914, when this work was painted, Malevich had begun to explore the concepts behind suprematism, a movement which forefronted color and form through basic geometric shapes, and which Malevich officially established as an art movement in 1913. However, he did not begin to paint his “Supremus” series until 1915 (continuing through 1922).⁴

In the Hardziev archives in Amsterdam, there is a black and white photograph of the painting, on which Malevich wrote on the back: “kubisticeskoe razresenie zivopisnoj poverhnosti, 1914. Elementy izobr. (azenija) ratnik, ob’javlenie, ruz’jė, lico, temperature Priobreteno v Gosud.Musej Sovrem. Iskusstva” (which translates directly “cubist resolution of the pictorial surface, 1914. Elements of the image: reservist, advertisement, rifle, face, thermometer).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Nakov, Andrei B., and Kazimir Severinovich Malevich. *Kazimir Malewicz : catalogue raisonné*. Paris: A. Biro, 2002.

DESCRIPTION

There is a layer of artist’s applied ground that extends just up until the tacking edge. Scientific analysis by Eugena Ordonez in 1998 found lead white and barytes in the ground layer.

The paint is thinly applied with a light impasto. In passages (most noticeably around the thermometer), the brushstroke impasto is lightly flattened and there is instead a pattern of small waves in the paint, appearing as if something was pressed onto the still wet surface and then lifted (see Image 3). The beige paint also has a faint blue color in these passages. Additionally, in the upper, left corner, there are small paper fragments, including one with “T” in ink (see Image 1). Perhaps, Malevich played around with placement of paper/objects placed on the surface, p

There are traces of two lines of handwritten text to the right of the thermometer that looks like an inscription in pencil (Image 2). The signature at the bottom right reads “K Marebur” in pencil (Image 5). According to the MoMA archives, old photographs of the painting reveal that the postage stamp in the center was replaced in the 1940s.⁵

TREATMENT HISTORY

1984: Lifting paper was set down with pure rice starch paste, slightly diluted with DI water.

1984: Lifting paint around losses was set down with Elvace 1875. The losses were filled with gesso and inpainted with Magna. The lower left corner was more tightly secured by resetting the tacks.

³ MoMA Gallery label from 2015.

⁴ ‘Catalogue Entry: Kazimir Malevich, *Dynamic Suprematism*’, Tate, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/malevich-dynamic-suprematism-t02319/text-catalogue-entry>.

⁵ Nakov, p. 165.

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1990: The lower left corner was slightly deformed and had a small tear. The corner was flattened with moisture and weights, and the tear was patches with Beva film.

2000: A polyester batting insert was added behind the canvas.

CONDITION

Some of the nails along the tacking edges are rusted. There are old tacking holes and around some, the canvas is loose, creating local buckling.

Along the edges, the ground layer is flaking, but appears to have been primarily stabilized in past treatments. The canvas around the tacking edges has a jagged edge with many loose fibers hanging from the edges, especially along the left side.

There is a loss in the upper right corner where the canvas has been torn, leaving around a 1 cm loss. The paint in the top right corner is cracked near the damage, likely from the change in tension. There are three small punctures, two small pinholes and one slightly larger (around 2 mm) through the canvas near the center right – just below and to the left of the paper with “I” (see image 4).

Overall, there are cracks through the paint and ground layers around the edges, especially in areas where the canvas is slightly loose or buckling. There are several small cracks in the center of the work that have been consolidated in past treatments (see condition map).

There are fly specks across the surface, all around 1 mm in size.

The paper additions are lifting slightly around the edges, but remain well adhered.

TREATMENT

- 1) Japanese tissue toned with Gamblin to match the canvas color was adhered below the canvas tear in the upper right corner using wheat starch paste.
- 2) The tear was filled with a linen patch, adhered with wheat starch paste. Flaking ground near the edge of the fill was inpainted with gouache.
- 3) The nail above the upper right corner was removed, and its hole reinforced with toned Japanese tissue from behind, attached with wheat starch paste. The corner was folded and the nail placed back in the same hole.
- 4) Loose threads around the tacking edges were placed back in plane with wheat starch paste.
- 5) To stabilize the small puncture in the center right, the frayed ends of the threads were reinforced with wheat starch paste.

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CONDITION IMAGES



- | | |
|--|---|
|  Fly specks |  Writing - graphite/ink on paper |
|  Cracks |  Lifting paper |
|  Loose canvas |  Canvas tear |

Condition Map

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Image 1: Residues of paper and black text ink on the upper left edge



Image 2: Faint writing (estimated to be pencil) to the right of thermometer

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Image 3: Texture around the thermometer

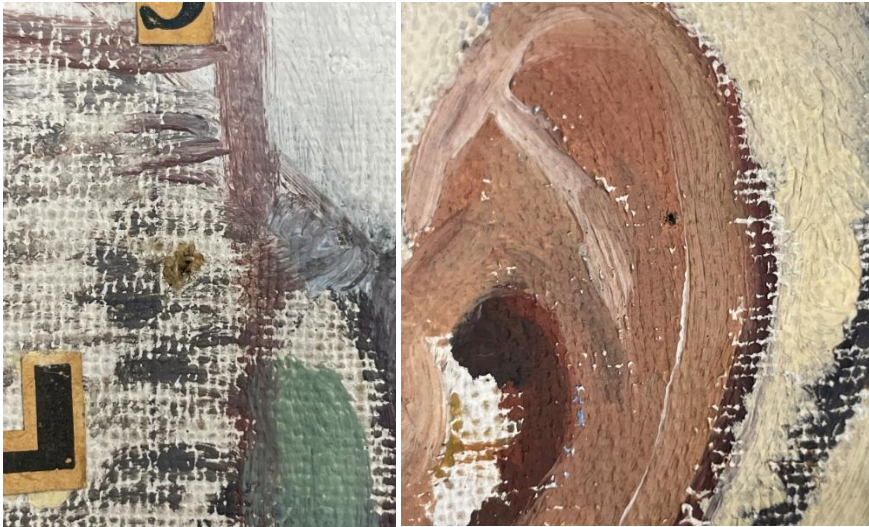


Image 4: Small punctures through the canvas; (a) larger puncture, and (b) small pinhole, presumably part of the artist's technique



Image 5: Artist's signature in bottom right corner

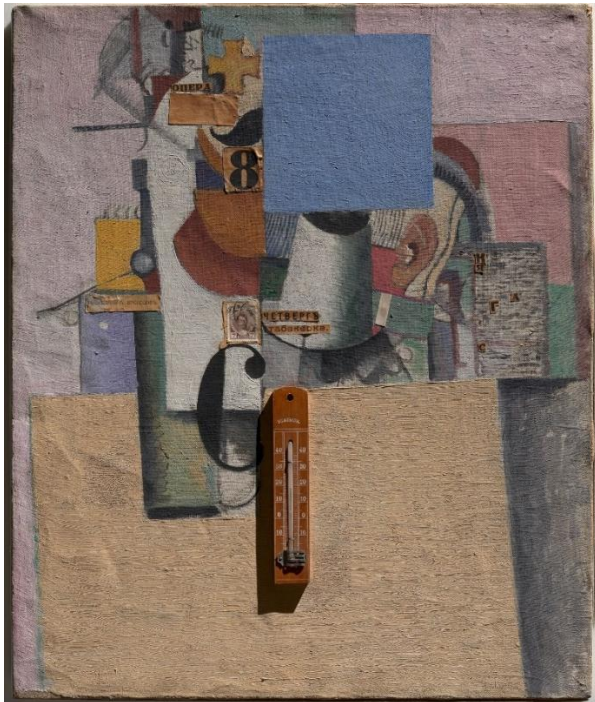
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TREATMENT IMAGES



Before Treatment, Recto, Natural Light



Before Treatment, Recto, Raking Light

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Tear in upper right corner, before (left) and after (right) treatment



Left tacking edge, before (above) and after (below) treatment



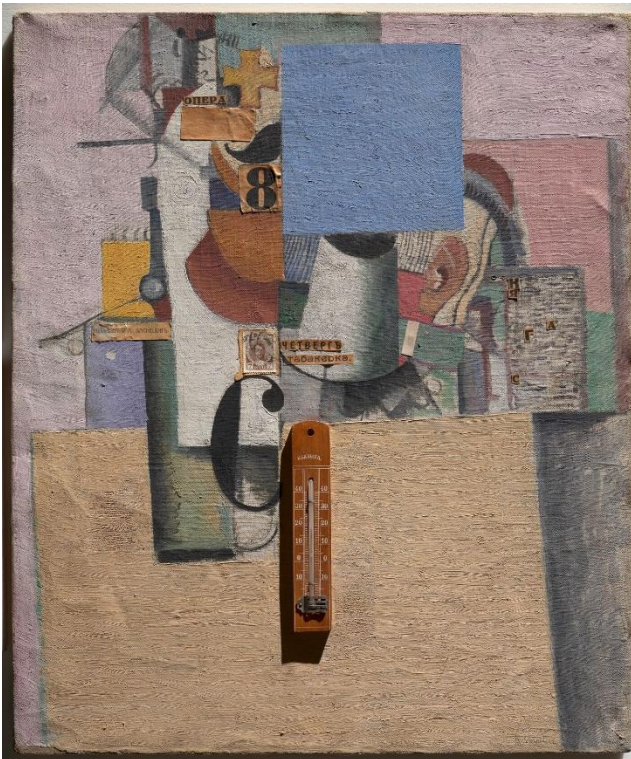
Upper tacking edge, before (above) and after (below) treatment

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After Treatment, Recto, Normal Light



After Treatment, Recto, Raking Light