

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The David Booth Department of Conservation

TITLE: *Self-Portrait I*

MUSEUM No.: 1238.1979

ARTIST: Joan Miró

DATE: Paris, October 1937-March 1938

MEDIUM: Pencil, crayon, and oil on canvas

DIMENSIONS: 47 7/8 x 47 7/8"

SIGNATURE: Signed U.R. side, black oil "Miró". Inscribed on verso: "Joan Miró / Autoportrait I / 1937-38"

CONSERVATORS: Laura Richter Le and Anny Aviram

DATE OF EXAMINATION: August 1, 2024

PROVENANCE

Collection of Pierre Matisse, New York. By January 1939 - 1949
James Thrall Soby, New Canaan, Connecticut. Acquired from Pierre Matisse, July 1949 - 1979
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. James Thrall Soby Bequest, December 1979

EXHIBITIONS

Exhibition Title	MoMA Exh. No.	Display Date	Department
Gifts of Drawing	1267	August 9 - November 13, 1979	Drawings & Prints
A Century of Modern Drawing, 1881–1981	1329	March 1 - March 16, 1982	Drawings & Prints
Miró and Picasso	1356	June 9 - September 12, 1983	Painting & Sculpture
The Modern Drawing: 100 Works on Paper from The Museum of Modern Art	1367	October 26, 1983–January 3, 1984	Drawings & Prints
Large Drawings	1411	November 25, 1985 - April 15, 1986	Drawings & Prints
MoMA2000, Making Choices: Seeing Double	1864	April 30, 2000 - September 26, 2000	Photography
Painting and Sculpture: Inaugural Installation	1931	November 20, 2004 - December 31, 2005	Painting & Sculpture
Painting and Sculpture Changes 2006	1960A	January 1 - December 31, 2006	Painting & Sculpture
Painting and Sculpture Changes 2007	1989A	January 1 - December 31, 2007	Painting & Sculpture
Painting and Sculpture Changes 2010	2103	January 1, 2010 - December 31, 2010	Painting & Sculpture
Joan Miró: Birth of the World	2413	February 24, 2019 - June 15, 2019	Painting & Sculpture
5th Fl: 523, Joan Miró's Self-Portrait I	2450	Monday, August 24, 2020 - Sunday, March 7, 2021	Cross-Departmental Exhibition

DESCRIPTION

The painting is stretched on a six-member stretcher with twelve keys (all present). The canvas is pre-primed and roughly cut around the edges.

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The canvas is a plain weave with a yellowed fiber with short, brittle yarns for the warp and a thinner, lighter fiber with longer yarns for the weft. Given these characteristics, the warp is likely hemp or jute, and the weft a linen thread.

This is comparable, to other canvases sold between the world wars in France. For example, Spencer Gore (who was ordering materials from Paris at the time), used a canvas with “plain, slightly open weave, yellowed hemp weft and less yellowed flax warp with thin glue size” for *The Artist’s Wife*, 1913.¹

There is a white, commercially applied ground layer that extends around to the cut edge on the verso.

The paint is applied in thin washes, leaving the color of the ground and texture of the canvas clearly visible. The shape is formed through pencil and crayon lines over the thin paint.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dupin, Jacques. 1962. *Joan Miró: Life and Work*. New York: Harry N. Abrams. Fig no. 289.

Repr. Soby Collection, p. 59; in color, *The Mod. Drwg.*, p. 165; MoMA: Hist. and Coll., p. 141

CONDITION AND TREATMENT HISTORY

In Jun, 1998, grain beetles were noticed on the surface of the paintings (under the glazing). They were removed from the object (samples in object file).

In Oct 2001, it was examined for possible loan and the following condition issues were noted: small buckle in upper, right corner, canvas on verso weak at turnover edges, some missing canvas at the top, upper right corner or verso, and a series of parallel vertical cracks center near right edge.

The painting came conservation after it returned from loan to the Fundació Joan Miró in March, 2024 and small flakes were noticed at the bottom of the frame.

The verso is very dusty, especially along the lower stretcher bar, and there are small wooden splinters, pebbles, and paint chips lodged behind it. The canvas is brittle (especially the yellowed warp thread) and sheds small fibers upon abrasion.

There are several tears and losses along the tacking edge. The turnover edge of the verso has tears, loose threads, and losses throughout, most significantly in the upper right corner. There are staples on the upper tacking edge, some holding loose patches of canvas in place. However, many

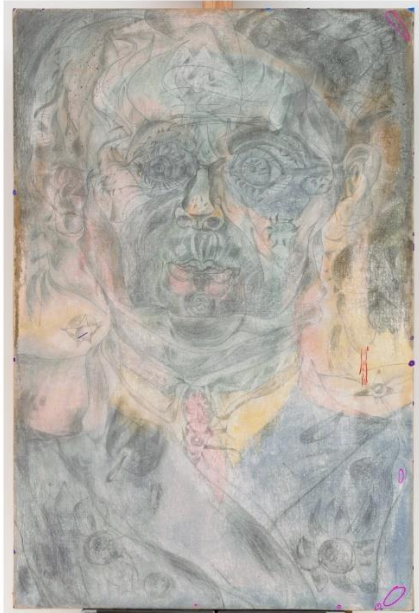
There is small buckle in the upper, right corner, as was noted in 2001. The lower, right corner has a small distortion near the protrusions.

¹ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/sarah-morgan-joyce-h-townsend-stephen-hackney-and-roy-perry-canvas-and-its-preparation-in-r1104353>

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In the upper left quadrant, there are many tiny losses (around 1 mm wide). These are not noticeable from a distance and appear stable. See photo and condition map below.



Condition map



Left: surface distortion in the upper, right corner; right: small losses in the upper, left corner

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TREATMENT

- 1) The verso was dusted with soot sponges to remove ingrained grime. After a first, black layer was removed with a gentle pass, further cleaning wore at the brittle fibers and was not carried further. The stretcher bars were cleaned more thoroughly with cosmetic sponges.
- 2) The pebbles, splinters, and paint chips stuck behind the stretcher bar were removed with cardstock paper coated in a tacky layer of Lascaux 303 HV, and by cleaning the painting upside down to help dislodge larger, stuck material. The protrusions on the canvas recto corresponded with larger material behind the stretcher bar (see photographs below).
- 3) The recto was dusted with an air puffer.
- 4) The tacking edge was reinforced in areas of loss and tears with Japanese tissue toned with Gamblin conservation colors, adhered with 5% Methyl cellulose. Staples that were not original and were distorting the canvas were removed.
- 5) Tears along the front tacking edge were repaired with linen threads and 90:10 Evacon R: Methyl cellulose. They were filled with Modustuc toned with watercolors and retouched with dry pastels and watercolors.
- 6) Punctures through the lower edge of the canvas were stabilized with 5% Methyl cellulose, filled with toned Modostuc where needed, and inpainted with dry pastels watercolors.
- 7) Labels that were lifting on the backing board were adhered into place with 5% Methyl cellulose. An archival corrugated blue board was cut to match the original board and placed between it and the stretcher, to protect the painting from acidic off-gassing.

IMAGES

Before Treatment:



Before Treatment, Recto

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Before Treatment, Raking Light



Before Treatment, Verso



Detail: Artist's Signature in black oil paint, upper right edge of painting

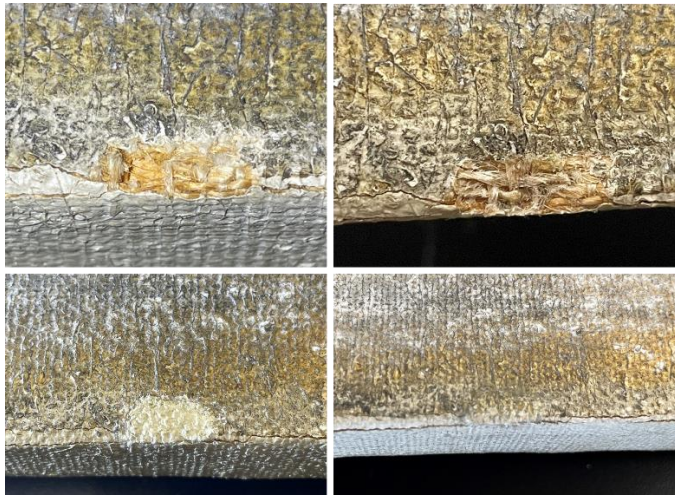
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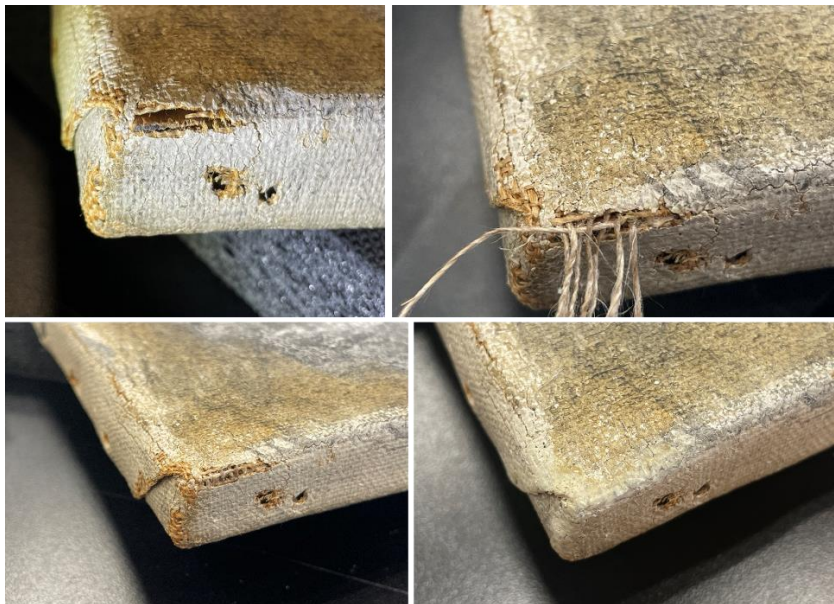
During Treatment:



Small rocks and fragments lodged behind the lower stretcher bar and creating protrusions



Tear on left edge



Tear in upper, right corner

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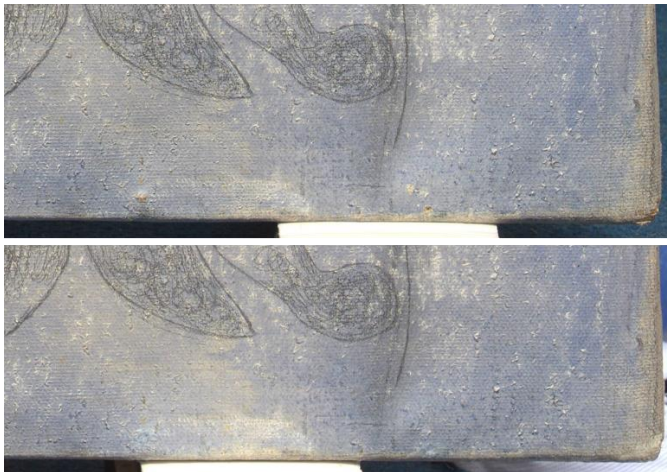
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Upper, right verso: before (above) and after (below) stabilization with Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste



Upper, left verso: before (left) and after (right) stabilization with Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste

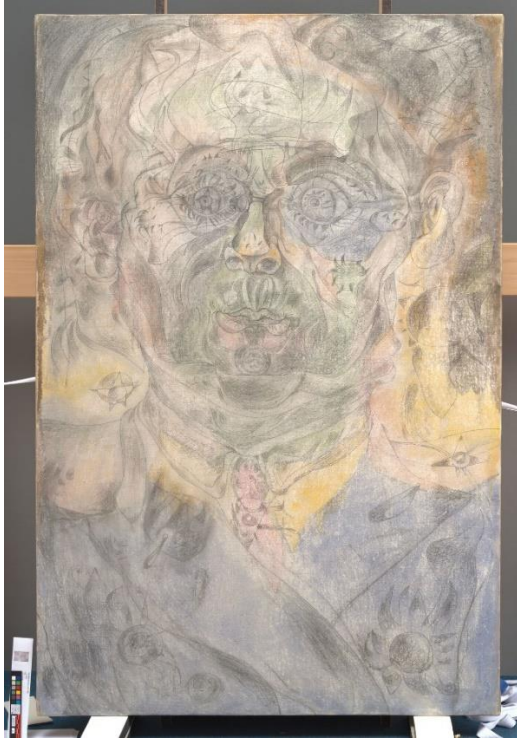


Punctures and distortions in the bottom, left corner: before (above) and after (below) treatment

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After Treatment:



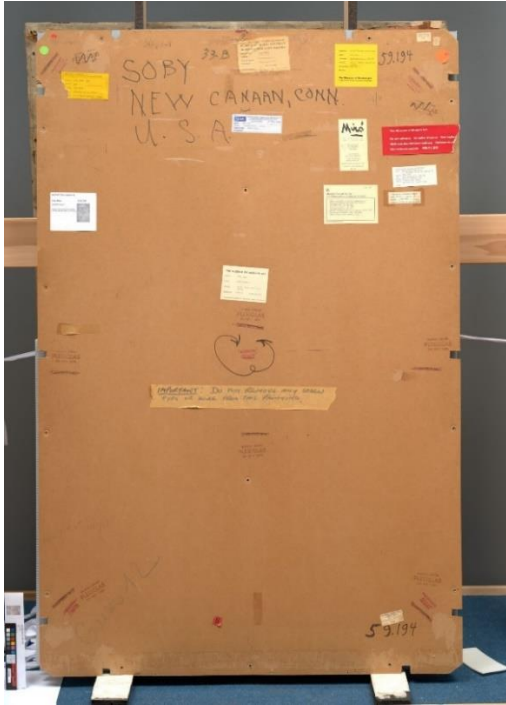
After Treatment, Recto, Normal Light



After Treatment, Verso

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Backing Board, Condition Image