

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The David Booth Department of Conservation

TITLE: *Naxos*

MUSEUM No.: 654.1994

ARTIST: Jack Youngerman

DATE: 1958

MEDIUM: Oil on canvas

DIMENSIONS: 6'3" x 56 1/8"

SIGNATURE: In pencil on the verso

CONSERVATORS: Laura Richter Le and Anny Aviram

DATE OF EXAMINATION: July 1, 2024

PROVENANCE

Nina and Gordon Bunshaft Bequest, 1994

EXHIBITION HISTORY

May 22- September 21, 1980, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution
Exhibition: *The Fifties Aspects of Paintings in New York*

ART HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Youngerman made a painted preparatory study for this work, which remained in his collection.¹ These small studies, he called "'seeds' – about to break open into the 'potentialities of shape.'"² See image below of the study for *Naxos*, on view at the Washburn Gallery.



Left: Jack Youngerman, *Study for Naxos*, 1958, Oil on canvas, 20 x 15 in, Washburn Gallery. Right: Exhibition photo, *Jack Youngerman, Paintings from the 1950s – 1060s*, Washburn Gallery, May 25 – June 27, 2014.

¹ Youngerman had the study in his collection when he completed the AQ for this work on 2/20/95 and now is part of the artist's estate, represented by Washburn Gallery.

² Peiffer, *The Slip: The New York City Street That Changed American Art Forever*, p. 182.

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In the Artist's Questionnaire (AQ), Youngerman wrote: "Naxos was painted on the top floor of 27 Coenties Slip, New York. Hard contrasts, soft forms, it mirrors my inside/outside life then. Naxos is the place name of the Greek Island. Never visited, it resonated for me, like many place names, unvisited."

In a 1968 interview with Colette Roberts, Youngerman describes the period in which he painted *Naxos* in comparison to his style at the time: "that period when I was working with tense or strained or heavier shapes as oppose to those now that are cooler or airier. These forms at that period did demand a heavy use of paint and a rough use, a rough articulation of the paint on the canvas. They simply had to have that. They forced themselves to be that way. Now they demand a lighter use of paint, and a lighter use of color. I used to work in black a lot, in my early paintings. In my first several shows at the Parsons Gallery I used reds and yellows and so forth. It was always a stark contrast to black, which went with the nature of those paintings. Now I use black very rarely."³

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Peiffer, Prudence. 2023. *The Slip: The New York City Street That Changed American Art Forever*. HarperCollins Publishers.

Rosenzweig, Phyllis D, and Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. 1980. *The Fifties, Aspects of Painting in New York : Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution*. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press : United States Government Printing Office.

DESCRIPTION

The work has a metal L frame attached with screws to the verso. The four corners are further reinforced with metal triangles.

The painting is stretched on a 5-member stretcher with one horizontal cross bar. The stretcher has wooden braces in all four corners attached with screws to the inner edge of the stretcher. Additionally, there are metal keys in all four corners. However, these are no longer able to be keyed out as the stretcher is held in place by the braces, triangles, and metal frame.

The canvas appears to be artist's primed with an off-white ground. The background is covered in white paint, applied in quick, sweeping strokes, and leaving the ground visible in several small patches, especially along the edges of the black form and along the tacking edges.

The black and yellow paint is applied with a brushy and thick impasto. In the AQ, Youngerman writes that he used Winsor & Newton ivory black and cadmium yellow. Under ultraviolet analysis, there appears to be two layers of yellow paint, one that remains yellow and the lower layer which fluoresces bright orange (as seen in cracks and losses). This could be two shades of cadmium yellow paint (light and dark, for example). There are small drips of black paint within the lower, white portion of the painting, presumably from applying the black passages above.

³ Youngerman and Roberts, *Archives of American Art Journal*, 1972, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1972), The University of Chicago Press on behalf of The Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, p. 10.

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SEM analysis from April 13, 1995:

- 1) The yellow paint sample contained Sulfur, Cadmium, Titanium, Zinc, and Copper
- 2) The "yellow w/ black" sample contained Sulfur, Cadmium, Titanium, Zinc, and Copper, as well as trace levels of Carbon and Iron
- 3) Large gray particles in the samples were associated with Sulfur and Zinc (and according to the report "coated w/ Cd, S, Ti, Zn")
- 4) The white background also contained Sulfur, Cadmium, Titanium, Zinc, and Copper

There is a layer that fluoresces green over the black paint that is uneven and brushy. Scientific analysis carried out by Abed Haddad and CUNY intern Tomika Benjamin, identifying the coating as an acrylic resin (see FTIR data below and on the O Drive). Given that it is applied selectively to the black paint and in sweeping, uneven strokes, it is assumed this layer was added by Youngerman. Youngerman was aware of the tendency of black paints specifically to develop drying cracks and in other works added medium, such as turpentine, to his black paint (see UKIC presentation on Youngerman's *Black, Red, and White* on the O Drive by Michael Duffy). He could have added acrylic resin with a similar intention.

CONDITION

According to a condition report when the work was acquired in 1994, there was mold across the black paint (appearing as gray spots). Conservation treatment at the time removed the gray spots with saliva. The painting was also consolidated with Beva in benzine, and humidification and pressure were used to relax tented paint. Some of the cracks in the yellow paint have a glossy halo around them, presumably from the consolidation treatment.

There are draws in three of the four corners, the largest of which is in the upper right.

The screws were loose on three of the four wooden corner braces.

The yellow paint has an extensive craquelure pattern. These cracks generally appear stable. There is a small loss in the center left, as well as an area with mismatched retouching near the left edge of the central, black circle (see images below)

On the lowest, right edge of the black paint, there is an ~2 in loss along the turnover edge, as well as unstable, lifting cracks surrounding it.

The white background has extensive retouching, especially along the lower edge in areas of loss. Some areas are yellowed in comparison to the surrounding paint.

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- Canvas distortions
- Cracking - throughout yellow point
- Inpainting / overpaint
- Uneven surface gloss w/ matte spots

TREATMENT

- 1) The verso was dusted with a brush and soot sponges. Accumulated dust and grime were lifted from behind the lower stretcher bar.
- 2) The loose screws on the corner crossbars were tightened.
- 3) The recto was dusted with nylon brushes and cosmetic sponges. Ingrained dust in the impasto was removed with cotton swabs coated in Lascaux 303 HV (which remains tacky when dry).
- 4) The draws were flattened by moistening the area with blotter and leaving under weights overnight. Each dent required approximately 3 rounds of flattening. The largest draw in the upper right corner was still faintly visible after treatment, especially in raking light. However, since the stretcher is held in place by the corner braces and metal frame, it was determined that keying it out would be too invasive and that further flattening would merely move the distortion.
- 5) Losses were inpainted with Qor color. Losses in the white ground layer around the tacking edges were filled with Modostuc toned with watercolors.
- 6) A coroplast backing board was cut and attached with screws to the verso.

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IMAGES



Before Treatment, Recto, Top Light



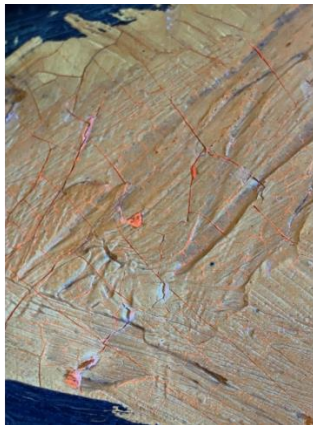
Before Treatment, Verso, Top Light

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Before Treatment, Recto, Raking Light



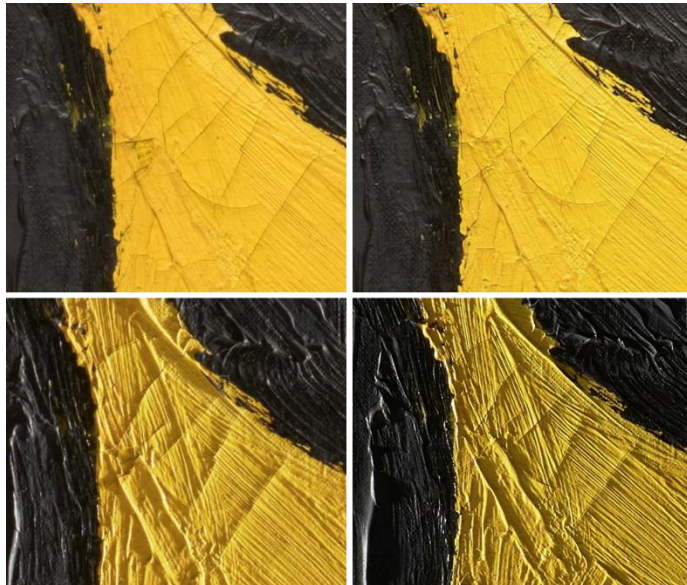
Left: Black paint under UV illumination, revealing an uneven coating that fluoresces green-blue
Center: Detail of yellow paint under UV illumination. The lower layer that fluoresces bright orange is presumed to be another shade of cadmium yellow.
Right: Area of overpaint in white background near the lower left corner

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Debris removed from behind the frame (using cardstock coated in Lascaux 303 HV)



Before (left) and After (right) Treatment: Detail of past, discolored inpainting that was refilled and inpainted, shown in normal and raking light

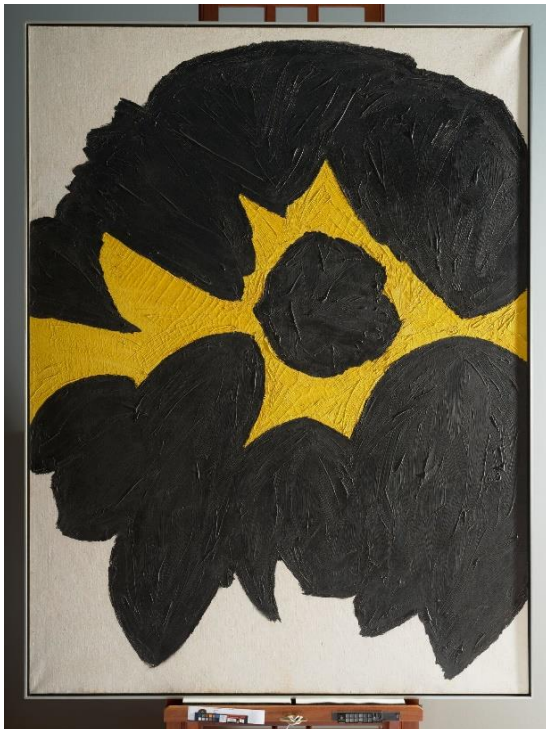
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After Treatment:



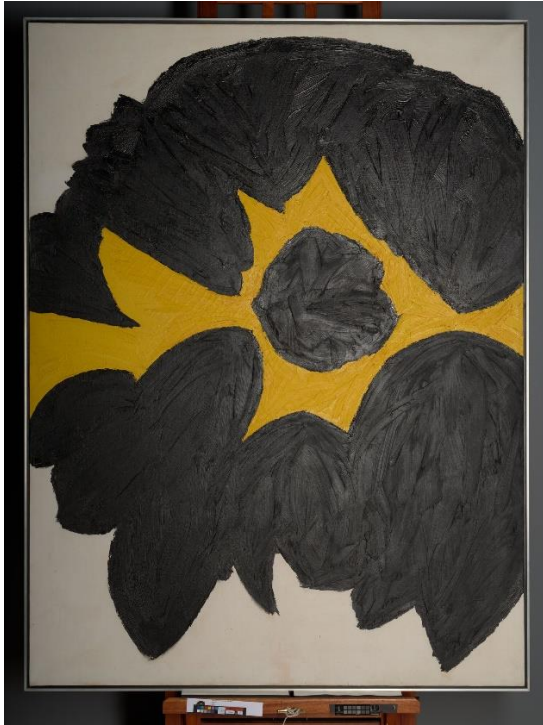
After Treatment, Recto



After Treatment, Raking Light

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After Treatment, Oblique Specular Light



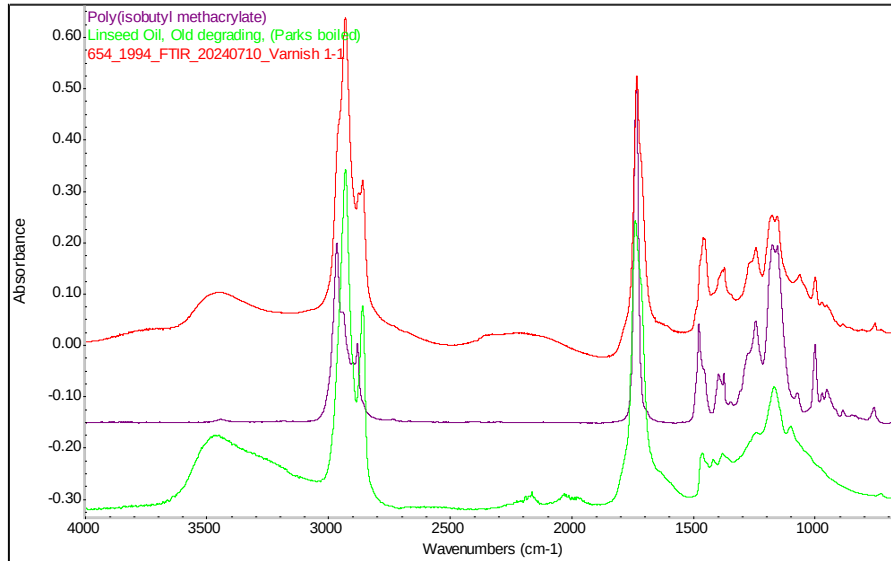
After Treatment, Ultraviolet Light

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SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS

FTIR analysis of the fluorescing coating over the black paint was carried out by Abed Haddad and Tomika Benjamin:



The coating appears to be made of an acrylic resin, which can fluoresce a milky color with age.⁴ Some traces of oil could also be present from the paint medium (especially in the C-H stretch region between 2800-3000 cm⁻¹)

⁴ Rivers S, Umney N. Conservation of furniture. Oxford, England; Burlington, MA: Butterworth Heinemann; 2003.