

Report on the examination of the painting
Still Life with Tiger Skin (1908)
by Natalia Goncharova

Author of the report: Verena Franken
Report editors: Jilleen Nadolny and Petra Mandt
Location and date of the report: Museum Ludwig, Cologne, May 2018

1. Identification of the artwork

object type:	painting
genre:	canvas painting
title(s):	<i>Still Life with Tiger Skin</i> (<i>Stilleben mit Tigerfell</i>)
artist:	Goncharova, Natalia (1881-1962) variations in spelling: Gontscharowa, Natalia Gontscharowa, Natalija Ssergejewna Gontcharova, Nathalie Goncarova, Natalija Sergeevna
signed:	N. Gontcharova. (front side, left upper corner)
date of object:	1908 (as given in the museum files)
inventory number:	ML 01305
owner:	Museum Ludwig, Cologne Donation of Peter and Irene Ludwig (Ludwig Collection)
location:	Museum Ludwig, Cologne
material/ technique: description in catalogue / museums files:	Oil on canvas
size of object without frame (height x width x depth):	140 x 136,5 x 2,0 cm

2. Technical investigation

Methods of examination:

The investigation of the painting *Still Life with Tiger Skin* was carried out in April 2017 by Verena Franken; it contained the examination of the artwork with the naked eye as well as with a stereomicroscope¹ in different light sources (incident light, raking light, reflective light). In addition, results of investigation under ultraviolet light (UV) are considered in the following text.

2.1 Canvas support

The presence of a lining makes it difficult to give a precise description of the original canvas support. Investigation of the original canvas can only be done on the front side. As no selvage is preserved warp and weft directions cannot be determined unambiguously. The type of textile weave probably is a tabby weave.

2.2 Stretching

Stretching probably was changed when lining treatment was done. As the tacking margins were cut away at the current turnover edge the position of the original turnover edge cannot be determined and no original fastening points are preserved. The lining canvas is mounted at the tacking margins with non-original, round-headed tacks.

2.3 Stretcher

The actual, non authentic stretcher has a cross-bar and twelve keys (all keys are present). It measures 140 x 136,5 x 2,0 cm and all stretcher bars have a width of 7 cm. The stretcher bars are not mitred at the corners and are possibly fastened by mortise-and-tenon joints. It appears to be composed of softwood. There are only the following three labels present on the stretcher's reverse²:

- '2507', handwritten inscription on paper support (no idea whereupon the number is referring to), localisation: vertical cross-bar (centre area)
- 'Andre Chenue', label with printed and handwritten text related to shipping of the painting, localisation: lower stretcher bar (centre area)
- 'GARDE-MEUBLES ODOUL
N° 23440
16 RUE DE L'ATLAS PARIS'

Notes: label with printed and handwritten text related to storage of the painting at ODOUL³, localisation: vertical cross-bar (top area)

After the death of Larionov 'more than 600 paintings and works on paper were kept in an art storage warehouse in Paris'⁴, or maybe in two warehouses⁵. It is known with certainty that some works were locked away in the Odoul Warehouse⁶.

¹ Type: 308795, firm: Wild Heerbrugg, magnification: x 10-40.

² All localisations related to labels and inscriptions are considered from the reverse.

³ GARDE-MEUBLES ODOUL was built in 1931-1933, address: 8 passage de l'Atlas, 75019 Paris 19e Arrondissement. < <http://paris-promeneurs.com/Le-garde-meuble-Odoul> >, (02.05.2016). The Odoul warehouse was a storage house specializing in articles of value.

2.4 Sizing and ground layer

Sizing cannot be determined because there are no representative areas not fully covered by the ground layer on the recto and the original canvas is covered by the lining on the verso. The white ground was applied as an opaque but relatively thin single layer which fills all of the pores. As the size of the canvas support was reduced it is not possible to detect if the ground was applied up to the cutting edges. At passages between different motifs and in parts within motifs there are several areas where the ground remains exposed. They are often clearly visible with the naked eye (see Fig. 1). No trace of any application tool is discernible in the layer. Additionally, the ground is very granular and contains coarse-grained particles (see Fig. 2, see also report on *Landscape of Tiraspol*). No significant water and alcohol sensitivity was detected.⁷ Viewed under ultraviolet light the white ground seems to exhibit a whitish fluorescence.

2.5 Underdrawing

Even with the naked eye a grey-to-black material is visible on the ground layer (see Fig. 3). It is noticed in many passages between motifs respectively at outlines of different shapes and motifs (see Fig. 25). It might be the remains of an underdrawing worked in a powdery material (maybe with charcoal, see Figs. 4 and 5).

2.6 Paint layer

Paint was applied on the entire painting's surface with brush. As the size of the canvas support was reduced it is not possible to detect if the paint layer was applied up to the cutting edge. Surface Optical examination reveals that a wide colour palette (white, yellow, orange, red, pink, blue, green, brown, black tones) but the different colours were used in various extent. The body of the tiger is painted especially in colourful and brilliant tones as orange, yellow, red and black. The upper background is painted predominantly in brown and red colours and the lower background was done in red and green tones as well as in brown colours of different shades. For the upper square in the left part of the painting especially blue paint of different shades as well as other colourful paints were used. The motif of the lower square in contrary contains mostly ochre and brown paint. In some areas tones were mixed homogeneously on the palette (see Fig. 6) while in others paints were taken up by the brush and blended on the canvas (see Fig. 7). Within painted areas and at passages between different motifs there are several absences of oil colour where the white ground layer remains exposed. In areas with thin layers the granular structure of the ground may be discerned (see Figs. 8, 9 and 10).

⁴ Source: Akinsha, K., Kozlov, G. and Hochfiel, S. 'The Strange, Illegal Journey of the Larionov-Goncharova Archive', *ARTnews*, March (1997), pp. 80-85, esp. p. 82.

⁵ Original text: 'Artworks were deposited randomly in the storage rooms at the two Paris warehouses.'

Source: Chauvelin, J. 'Témoignages/ Encounters', *InCoRM Journal*, vol. 1 Nos. 2-3 (2010), pp. 6-11, esp. p. 8.

⁶ Original text: 'Well, I am off the point – I knew Mme. Larionov, we all did in the early 1980s: Sue Compton, John Bowl et al., but the paintings at this time were locked away in the Odoul Warehouse.'

Source: < <http://www.incorm.eu/journal2011/goncharova%20reviews.pdf> >, (14.05.2017).

⁷ Water and alcohol solubility was tested at the lower and right part of the painting in two areas where the white ground is clearly discernible (magnification of x 40).

For the most part, paints were applied as thicker layers with more body and with impasto (see Fig. 11). On the contrary, there are a few thinly applied layers where the underlying paint or ground is visible (see Fig. 12).

Generally Natalia Goncharova applied the paints wet-on-wet and wet-in-wet (see especially see Figs. 7, 15 and 17). In some parts paints were also applied on slightly dried layers (see Figs. 19 and 20). Especially in areas with impastos paints of different tones were taken up by the brush, were applied with undulating brush strokes in wet-in-wet technique and in parts blended when the brush was applied on the ground layer (see Fig. 21).

Natalia Goncharova used dark painted outlining for several motifs, especially black contours for bodies, faces, eyes, noses and mouths (see Figs. 7 and 22). No systematic sequences of paint application were noticed. However, outlining often seems to be painted as last step. No major revisions or changes are visible in the composition in normal conditions or under magnification.

The painting is inscribed 'N. Gontcharova.'⁸ dark brown-to-black tones with a brush (width of paint brush: approx. 2 mm) at the upper left edge. The inscription was applied when the underlying ochre-brown layer had dried slightly (see Figs. 23 and 24).

2.7 Varnish

The painting is not varnished. Neither the macroscopic and microscopic investigation nor the examination under ultraviolet light gave an evidence for the presence of a varnish layer. No evidence for a former removal of varnish was detected (no residues of varnish in depths of the paint layer, no structural change of the paint layer caused by swelling process and no overcleaning of the paint layer).

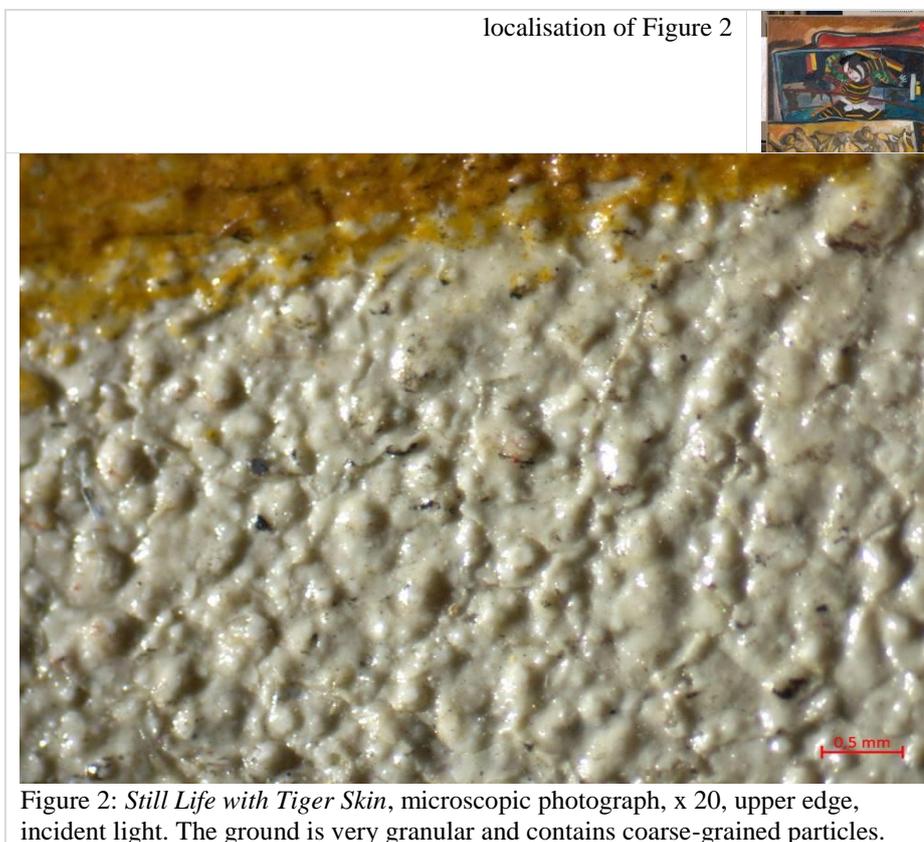
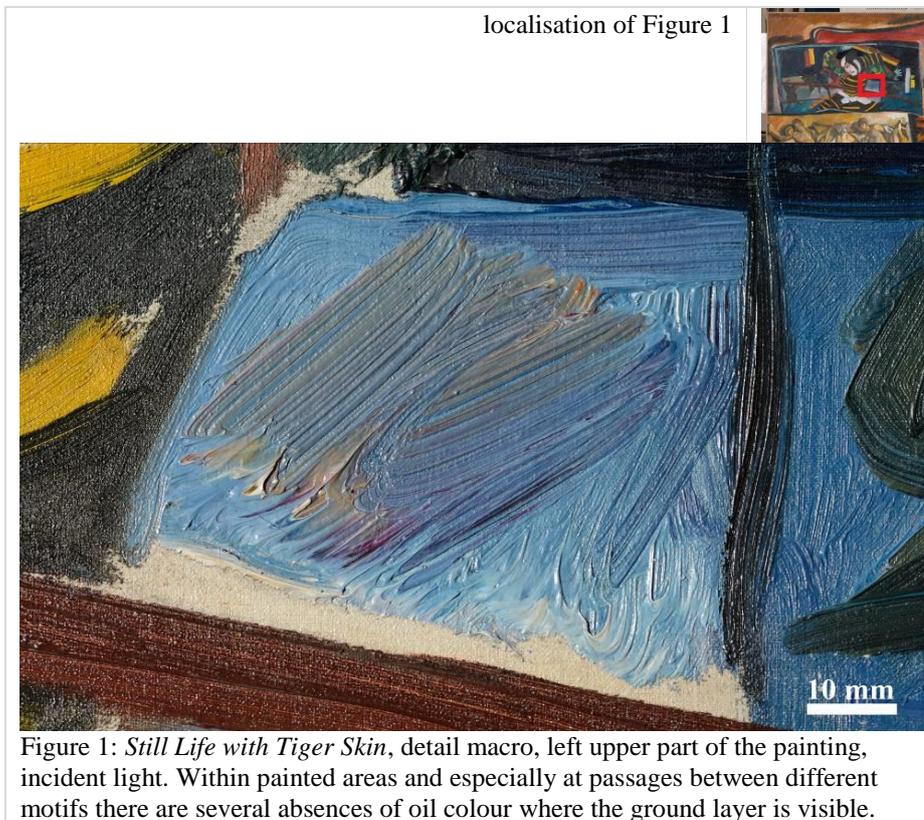
2.8 Frame

The existent frame is not date of origin.

⁸ A similar signature ('N. Gontcharova') can be noticed for example for the paintings *Nature morte à l'ananas* and *Fleurs* (1914). Source for *Nature morte à l'ananas: Rétrospective Gontcharova* [exhibition catalogue, 14 April to 3 June 1973, Maison de la culture de Bourges], editor not identified, Bourges: publisher not identified (1973), unpagged, cat. n. 11. Source for *Fleurs: Larionov - Gontcharova* [exhibition catalogue, July to September 1961, Galerie Beyeler, Basel], editor not identified, Basel: Galerie Beyeler (1961), p. 43, cat no. 42.

3. Photographic documentation

Technical aspects



localisation of Figure 3



Figure 3: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, left lower edge, incident light. Even with the naked eye a grey-to-black material is visible on the ground layer.

localisation of Figure 4

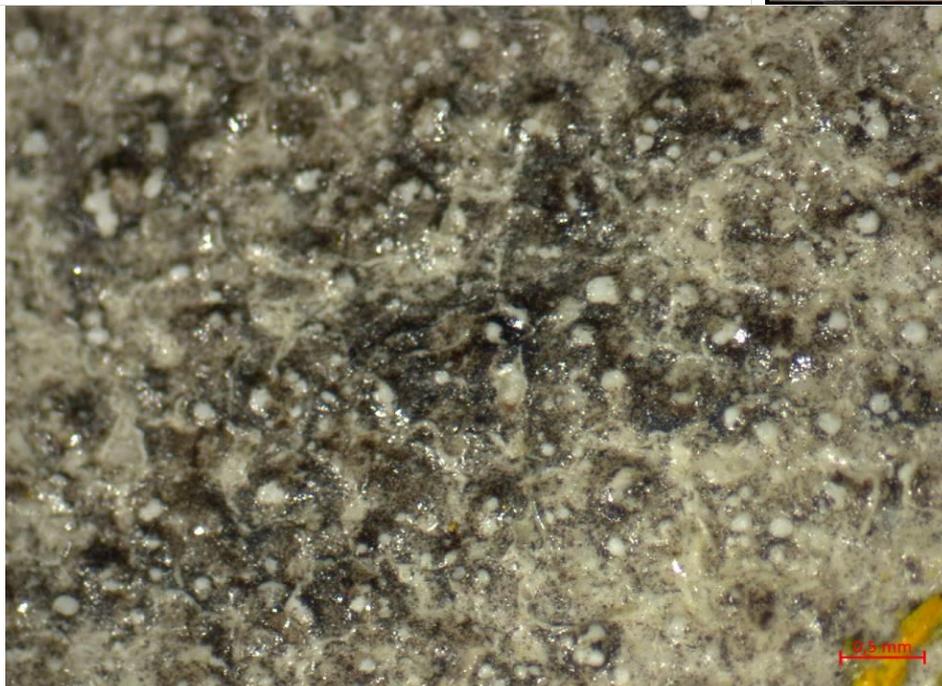


Figure 4: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, microscopic photograph, x 20, left edge (centre area), raking light. On the granular ground layer a powdery material, possibly charcoal, is visible.

localisation of Figure 5

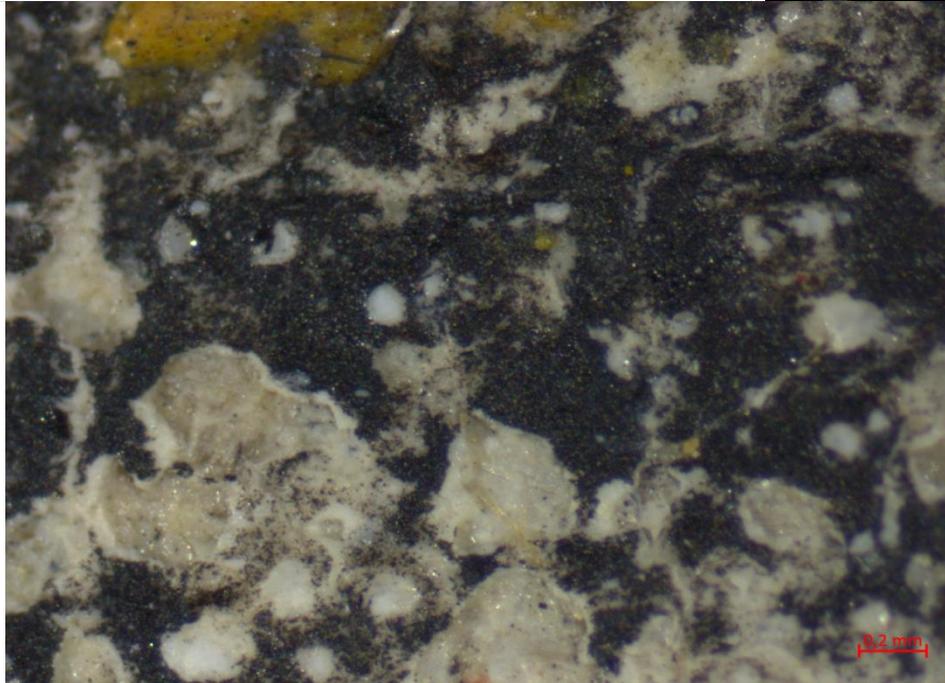


Figure 5: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, microscopic photograph, x 32, left edge (centre area), raking light. The artist used an grey-to-black material.

localisation of Figure 6



Figure 6: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, left upper part, incident light. The light blue paint was probably mixed by the artist quite homogeneously on the palette with white paint.

localisation of Figure 7

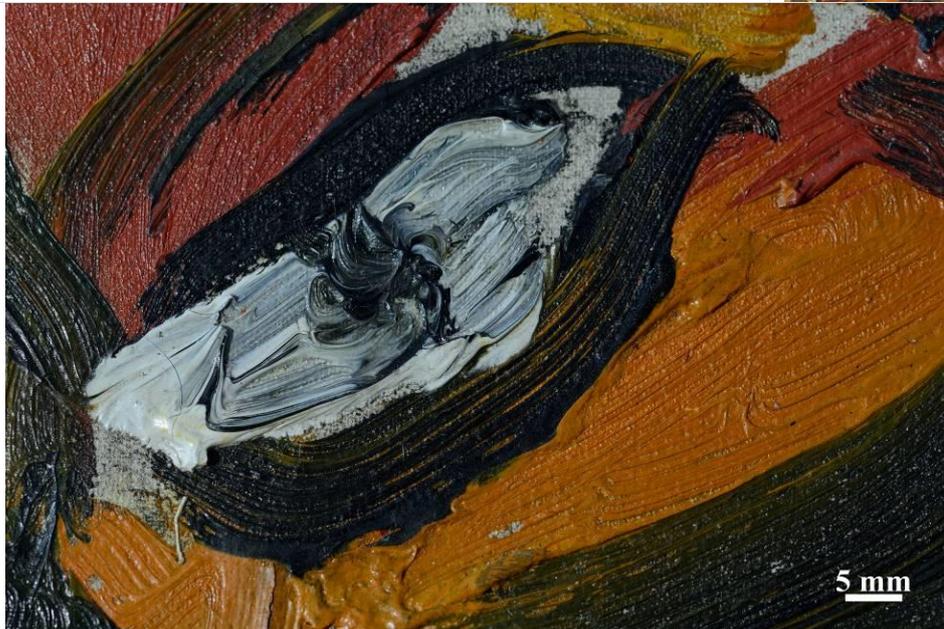


Figure 7: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, right upper part, incident light. White and black tones were taken up by the brush undulated and in parts blended when the brush was applied to the canvas. Goncharova used black contours for the eye.

localisation of Figure 8

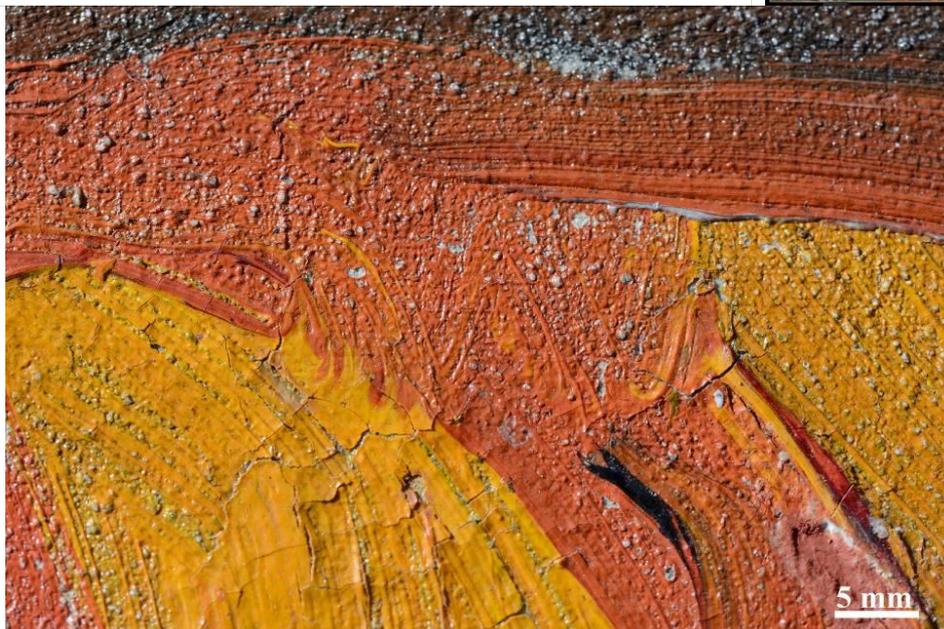
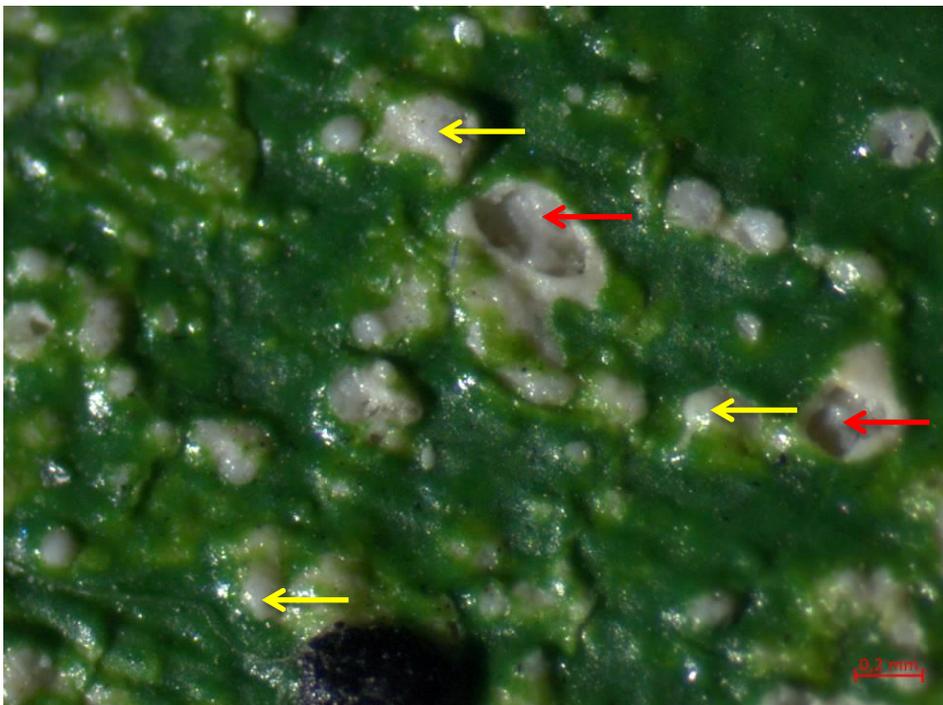


Figure 8: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, left lower part, incident light. Even with the naked eye the granular structure of the ground is visible through the paint layer.

localisation of Figures 9 and 10



Figures 9 and 10: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, microscopic photographs, x 10, right upper part of the tiger's face (Fig. top), x 40, left lower part (Fig. bottom), incident light. In areas with thin paint layers the granular ground not covered by the paint layer (see yellow arrows). Additionally, there are some tiny losses (see red arrows).

localisation of Figure 11



Figure 11: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, left upper part, incident light. Mostly paints were applied with impasto and with ‘soft’ brush strokes.

localisation of Figure 12

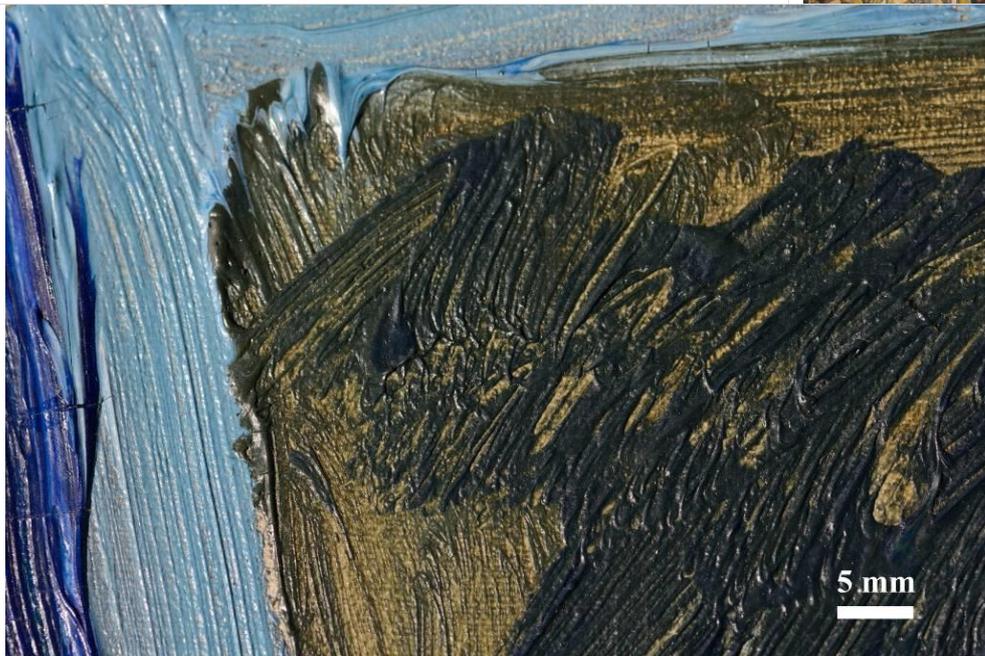


Figure 12: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, left upper part, incident light. The underlying layer is visible through the slightly transparent layer in top.

localisation of Figure 13



Figure 13: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, right lower part, incident light. Especially the tiger was painted with impasto and relief-like character.

localisation of Figure 14

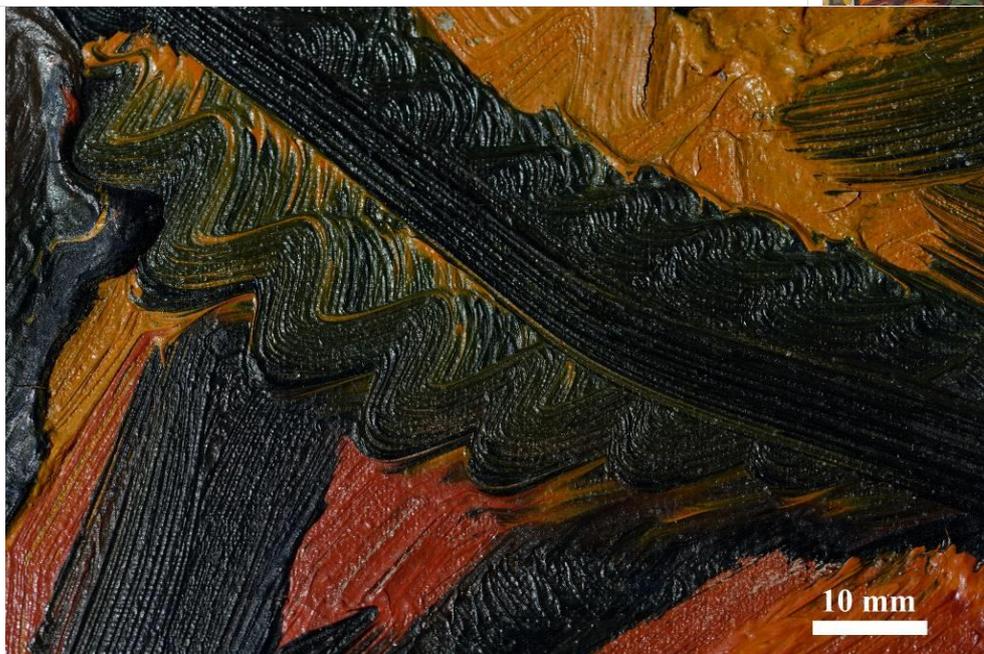


Figure 14: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, right upper part, the tiger's body, incident light. Dynamic brushwork involving wavy-shaped brush strokes can be noticed.

localisation of Figure 15



Figure 15: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, left upper part, incident light. Paints were applied mostly wet-on-wet. As brushwork individual dabs of yellow paint are visible.

localisation of Figure 16



Figure 16: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, left upper part, incident light. Paints were applied mostly wet-on-wet.

localisation of Figure 17



Figure 17: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, left lower part, incident light. Parts of the paint layer were highlighted in white tone.

localisation of Figure 18

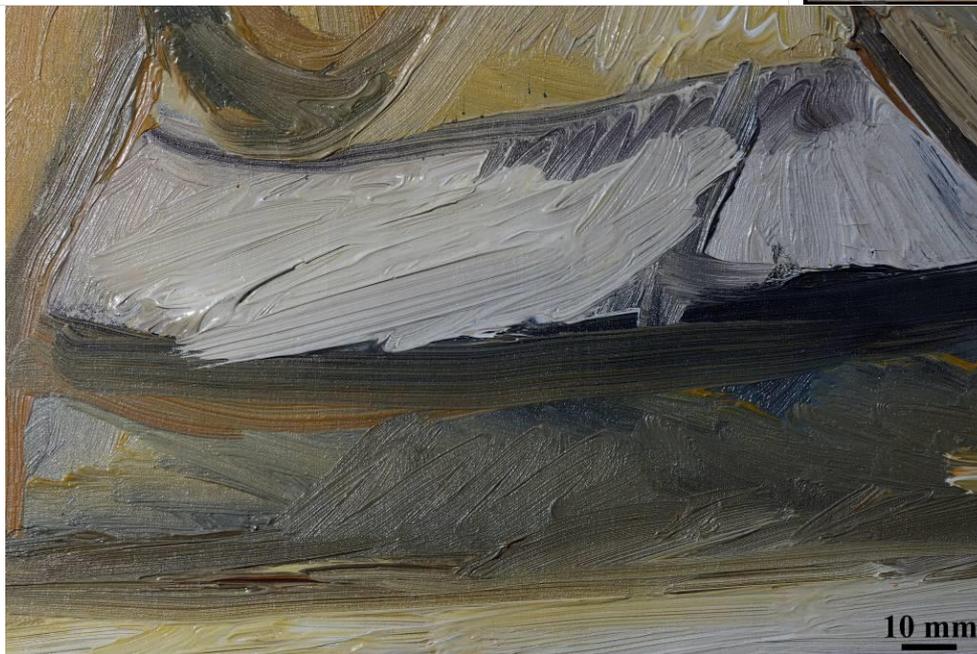


Figure 18: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, left lower part, incident light. White paint with brushwork was used for a larger space.

localisation of Figures 19 and 20



Figures 19 and 20: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, left lower edge, (Fig. 19) and microscopic photograph, x 6.3, left lower part (Fig. 20), incident light. In some parts paints were also applied on a slightly dried surface.

localisation of Figure 21

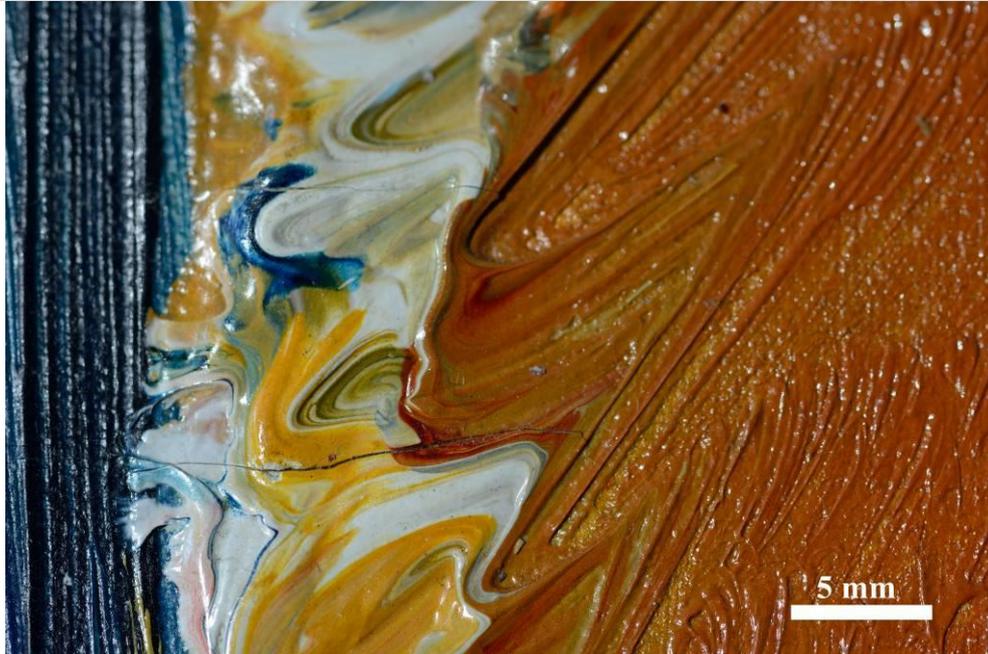


Figure 21: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, upper right part, incident light. Different colours were taken up by the brush and blended when the brush was applied on the ground layer.

localisation of Figure 22

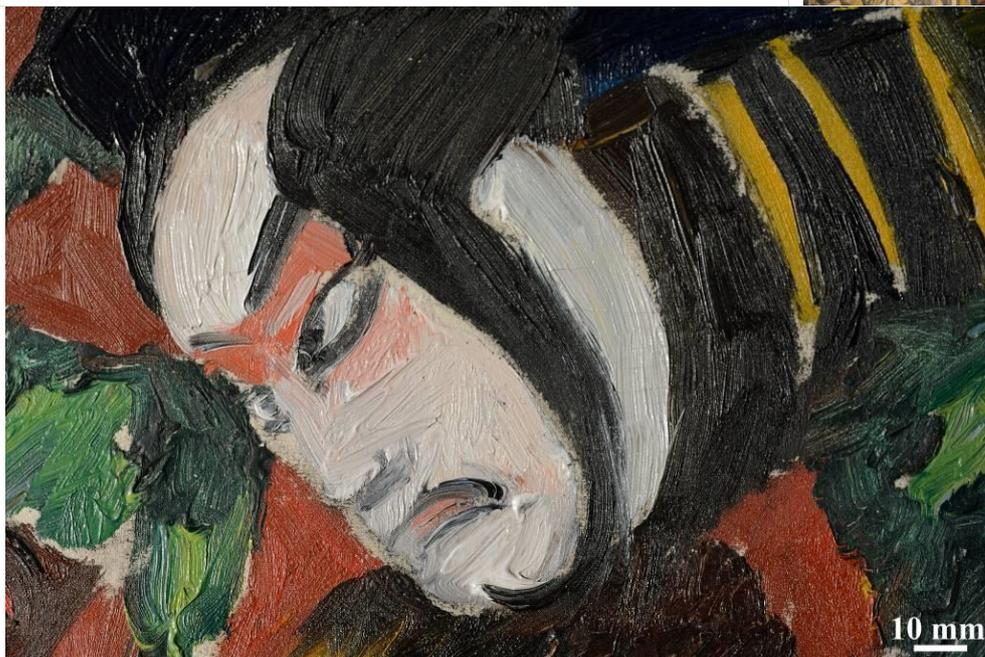
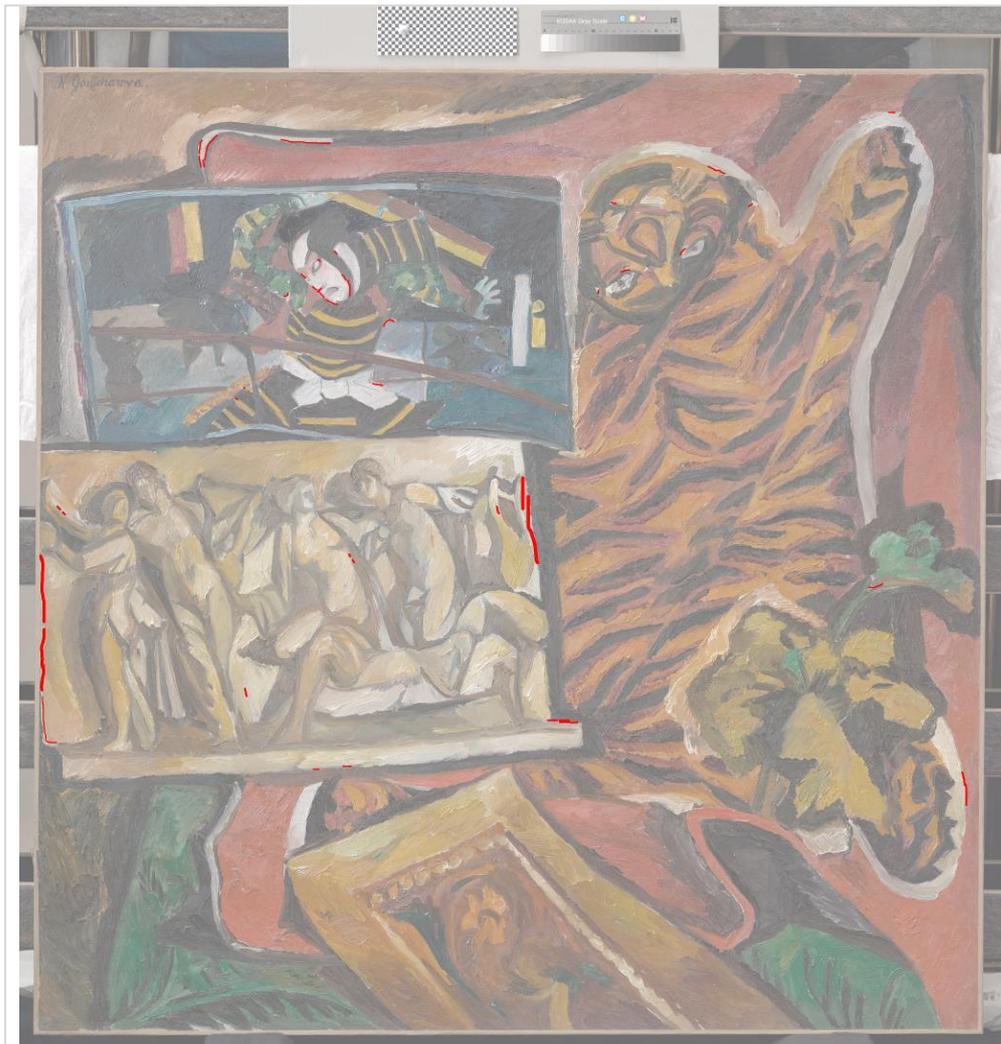


Figure 22: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, detail macro, left upper part, incident light. Goncharova used dark painted outlining for the area of the face (eyes, nose and mouth).

localisation of Figures 23 and 24



Figures 23 and 24: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, details macro, left upper corner, incident light. On top left the painting was signed with 'N. Gontcharova.'



areas with underdrawing work (most significant ones)

Note: During microscopic investigation several areas where underdrawing material is visible significantly were mapped. However, there are probably more areas with underdrawing work which are not mapped.

Figure 25: *Still Life with Tiger Skin*, map of underdrawing as noted in examination.