

Report on the examination of the painting
***Still Life with Crayfish* (1907;1908/09?)**
by Mikhail Larionov

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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 Crayfish</i> <i>(Nature morte à l'écrevisse)</i> <i>(Stilleben mit Hummer)</i>
artist:	Larionov, Mikhail (1881-1964) variations in spelling: Larionov, Michail Larionoff, Michel Larionov, Michail Fedorovic
signed:	monogram (illegible), recto, right lower corner
date of object:	1907, 1908/09 (different dates given in the museum files)
inventory number:	ML 01331
owner:	Museum Ludwig, Cologne Donation of Peter and Irene Ludwig (Ludwig Collection)
location:	Museum Ludwig, Cologne
material/ technique: description in catalogue / museum files:	 Oil on canvas
maximal size of object without frame (height x width x depth):	80,0 x 95,5 x 2,0 cm

2. Technical investigation

Methods of examination:

The investigation of the painting *Still Life with Crayfish* was carried out in February/ March 2017 by Verena Franken consisting of examination of the artwork with the naked eye as well as with a stereomicroscope¹ in different light sources (incident light, raking light, transmitted light, reflective light). In addition, results of investigation under ultraviolet light (UV) are considered in the following text.

2.1 Canvas support

The type of textile weave is a tabby weave with one thread in horizontal and in vertical direction (Fig. 1). The selvedge edge is preserved at the bottom of the canvas (see Fig. 2). Thus, warp and weft directions can be determined unambiguously. The warp runs in horizontal direction parallel to the selvedge edge: The weft runs at right angles to the warp respectively to the selvedge edge. The weave is made of relative high density. There is a z-twist in vertical and horizontal direction. The canvas has quite regular threads but occasionally there are a few slubby threads especially in vertical direction. In addition, it has some lumps and knots in noticed on the reverse (see Fig. 3). They are also visible on the front side in areas with a thin paint layer. At the lower tacking margin in the left corner there is a large slubby thread in vertical direction (see Fig. 2).

On the reverse of the canvas there is an unfinished composition, possibly painted by the artist. Different tones as yellow, rose, violet, blue, green or black were applied with brush on the entire canvas up to the cutting edge. Most of the surface is overpainted with a white layer (see Figs. 4 and 5). This white tone was probably applied after the painting *Still Life with Crayfish* was fixed on its stretcher because the white layer is not present in the areas of the outer stretcher bars (see Figs. 4 and 5). It is not possible to determine when this overpainting was done and if it was done by the artist. No overpainting is visible in areas covered by the actual cross-bar (see Fig. 6). Additionally, in the centre of the painting there is the shape of a half circle which is mostly covered by the cross-bar. It was drawn with a dark glossy material, maybe with a graphite pencil, on the white layer (see Fig. 6).

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

In total three inscriptions and one paper label are present on the reverse of the canvas. In the following section the texts of all labels and inscriptions, numbered consecutively, are listed²:

1. LARIONOV

N. M. à l'ecrevisse,

Notes: inscription (artist's name and title in French), written with dark material, localisation: left upper part of the canvas

2. maybe 'L' (inscription is quite illegible, localisation: upper part, mid-left)

Notes: inscription, written with blue paint (see Fig. 7)

3. 26

Notes: inscription (unclear what this number refers to), written with pencil, localisation: right lower part of the canvas

4. THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN

4 St. James's Square, London, S.W.1

Whitehall 9737

EXHIBITION Larionov/ Goncharova

CATALOGUE NO. 24

TITLE OF PICTURE 'Still-life: crayfish'

ARTIST Mikhail Larionov

NAME OF OWNER artist's collection

80 x 95,5

2

Notes: paper label with printed and handwritten text, localisation right upper part of the Painting. The label may be refer to the exhibition in 1961 (Larionov and Goncharova, a retrospective exhibition of paintings and design for the theatre, see archive review).

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

2.2 Stretching

The current stretching may represent the second or the third stretching of the canvas but it is oriented largely to the attachment points of the first stretching. The position of the actual fastening points with tacks corresponds largely with the primary position of the original fastening points (see Figs. 9 and 10). The current position of the turnover edge probably corresponds with its original position. It is supposed that it remained consistent and has not been changed. Additionally, there is no evidence that the size of the canvas support was reduced; the selva edge is preserved.

It is supposed that the painting has been re-affixed without changing the position of most of the primary fastening points; however, the original fastening points at the upper tacking margin³ - at least twelve old non-damaged holes in fastening intervals of app. 5-8 cm spacing - were not re-used (see Fig. 8). Marks of nail/ tack heads and traces of corrosion in the fabric from the primary fastening points are visible (see Fig. 8). For these former fastening points no corresponding cusping was detected.

For the current stretching 50 round-headed tacks of the same type and size (diameter of tack heads: approx. 6 mm) were inserted at irregular intervals⁴ of 0, 5-12, 0 cm spacing. Cusping of the canvas is evident between these points (see Fig. 9). The tacks were driven into the tacking margins in parts in primed and also in painted areas (especially at the left tacking margin on top, considered from the reverse, see Fig. 10). In addition, there are 23 holes in the canvas support with corresponding holes in the stretcher bars. These holes at the tacking margins are related to a former framing of the painting. They were used to mount non-original strips of wood to the stretcher.

2.3 Stretcher

It is not possible to state unambiguously if the actual stretcher is authentic, though it does not appear to be. Although most of the fastening points seem to correspond to holes in the stretcher there are doubts in relation to the stretcher's authenticity. It should be mentioned that - evaluated relating to the stretcher's appearance and condition - the current stretcher does not look like a stretcher manufactured at the beginning of the 20th century. Additionally, a label related to the painting's earliest exhibition does not exist. The earliest label mounted on the stretcher is from 1969.

The current wooden support is an adjustable stretcher with cross-bar and with twelve expansion keys (all keys are present). It measures 80,0 x 95,5 x 2,0 cm and all bars have a width of 6,0 cm. The construction of the corner joints is a mortise and tension joint and the bars are mitred at the corners. It appears to be composed of softwood (possibly spruce or fir wood). The high degree of finish and regularity with marks left by a circular saw from manufacture process suggests that the stretcher is machine-made.

³ At the lower, right and left tacking margin no old holes related to a former stretching were noticed.

⁴ Numbers of tacks and their fastening intervals of the current stretching (considered from the reverse):

right tacking margin:	14 tacks, intervals: 0,5-10,0 cm, predominately 4,0; 6,5 and 7,5 cm,
left tacking margin:	12 tacks, intervals: 1,5-10,0 cm, predominately 6,5; 7,0; 8,0 and 9,0 cm,
upper tacking margin:	13 tacks, intervals: 2,5-12,0 cm, predominately 7,0; 8,5; 9,0 and 9,5 cm,
lower tacking margin:	12 tacks, intervals: 4,0-12,0 cm, predominately 4,0; 7,5; 8,5 and 12,0 cm.

On the reverse of the stretcher there are five paper labels and several inscriptions which are possibly later additions. Three labels refer to the painting's inclusion in former exhibitions (earliest label from 1969). Additionally, there is one label from the former owner Gallery Gmurzynska and one label from inventory. In the following section the texts of all labels and inscriptions, numbered consecutively, are listed⁵:

1. ACQUAVELLA GALLERIES, Inc.
18 EAST 79TH STREET. NEW YORK 10021
103 Nature morte a l'Ecrevisse
By MICHEL LARIONOV
Oil 37 1/2 x 31 3/8 inches

Notes: adhesive paper label with printed text, discoloured paper support without significant fluorescence indicating that it does not contain optical brighteners, localisation: horizontal cross-bar (right area), label refers to the painting's inclusion in an exhibition in 1969 ('Michel Larionov', organised by the Acquavella Galleries, New York)

2. MUSEÉ TOULOUSE-LAUTREC - ALBI
EXP. M. LARIONOV ET SON TEMPS
M. LARIONOV
CAT. N° 13 N. M. A L ECREVISSE

Notes: adhesive paper label with printed text, paper support with quite significant fluorescence indicating that it possibly contains optical brighteners, localisation: horizontal cross-bar (right area), label refers to the painting's inclusion in an exhibition in 1973 (exhibition 'Michel Larionov et son temps', organised by the Musée Toulouse-Lautrec, Albi)

3. MUSEÉ DES BEAUX-ARTS D'IXELLES
RUE JEAN VAN VOLSEM, 71 – BRUXELLES 5
Auteur LARIONOV
Titre Nature morte a l'Ecrevisse
N° 25
Collection ~~EVEREST~~ - LAUSANNE
Exposition LARIONOV-GONTCHAROVA 29/4 au 5/5/76

Notes: adhesive paper label with printed and handwritten text, paper support with quite significant fluorescence indicating that it possibly contains optical brighteners, localisation: horizontal cross-bar (left area), label refers to the painting's inclusion in an exhibition in 1976 ('Rétrospective Larionov – Gontcharova', organised by the Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Ixelles, Brussels).

⁵ All localisations related to labels and inscriptions are considered from the reverse.

4. galerie gmurzynska
obenmarspforten 21 5000 köln 1 tel. 236621/22
Michail Larionow
„Nature Morte à l'Ecrevisse”
Öl auf Leinwand
80 x 95 cm
1907

Notes: adhesive paper label with printed text (former owner Gallery Gmurzynska), paper support with significant fluorescence indicating that it probably contains optical brighteners, localisation: horizontal cross-bar (centre area), estimated date of the label: approx. 1970's/ 1980's

5. WALRAFF-RICHARTZ-MUSEUM
GEMÄLDE-INVENTAR 1925
Nr. ML1331

Notes: adhesive paper label with printed and handwritten text (inventory of the painting), paper support with quite significant fluorescence indicating that it possibly contains optical brighteners, localisation: lower stretcher bar

6. CONZEN
RAHMEN
DÜSSELDORF
Nr. 15318

Notes: shield with printed text (framing company Conzen), localisation: vertical cross-bar

7. LARIONOV N. M. À L'ÉCREVISSE, 1907

Notes: inscription with red marker pen containing artist's name and title and inscription with pencil containing the date of the artwork, localisation: upper stretcher bar

8. 80 x 95,5

Notes: inscription with black marker pen containing the painting's size, localisation: upper stretcher bar

9. 103

Notes: inscription (no idea whereupon this number is referring to), written with green marker pen, localisation: upper stretcher bar

10. 78

Notes: inscription (no idea whereupon this number is referring to), written with pencil,
localisation: upper stretcher bar

11. 15318

Notes: inscription (no idea whereupon this number is referring to), written with pencil,
localisation: upper stretcher bar

12. D47

Notes: inscription (no idea whereupon this number is referring to), written with pencil,
localisation: upper stretcher bar

2.3 Sizing and ground layer

It is not possible to detect if a sizing is present because the entire reverse is painted and there are no representative areas on the front side⁶. The white non-water-sensitive⁷ ground was hand prepared; there is no evidence for commercial pre-priming. The ground was applied on the entire painting's surface always up to the turnover edge and particularly maximal 1,5 cm beyond the turnover edge on the tacking margins (especially at the right tacking margin on top, see Figs. 10 and 11). As the ground is a relatively thin layer the structure of the canvas is visible on the front side in areas with thin paint layers. In the passages between different motifs paints do not always cover the ground layer (see Fig. 12). Microscopic investigation reveals that parallel brush strokes in vertical direction are visible in the ground layer, indicating that the ground was applied with brush (see Fig. 15).

2.4 Underdrawing

With naked eye a dark material is noticed in several passages between motifs. Especially at the edges of the tablecloth these dark lines of a brushy, greyish material are clearly visible on the ground layer (see Fig. 16). Optical microscopic investigation reveals that it is an underdrawing which was possibly drawn with a fluid paint material (see Fig. 17) that contains black particles and a yellowed medium. In several areas, especially passages between the motifs of the wallpaper and the painting's background, this material has also accumulated at edges of impastos and sometimes is embedded in the paint layer (see Fig. 18). It is supposed that an underdrawing was used in order to sketch the outlines of all motifs (see Fig. 30).

⁶ Although in parts traces of a glossy and transparent adhesive material were noticed at the tacking margins it is not possible to conclude that it is a sizing. It is rather to suppose that this adhesive material refers to a former consolidation treatment.

⁷ The solubility of the ground layer was tested in areas of the tacking margins where it is not covered by the paint layer.

2.5 Paint layer

The entire surface of the painting was used for colour application. The colours were applied with a brush⁸, always up to the turnover edge, sometimes up to 1 cm beyond the turnover edge on the tacking margins (see Fig. 10). The surface structure shows slight differences in gloss, application of paint, non-water-sensitivity and alteration that suggests the artist's use of oil paint.

The palette used in the painting is extensive. It is obvious that the artist mixed paints with white colour – the extent varies, especially light colours with large quantity of white paint (especially for the upper background). Optical microscopic investigation reveals that the white paint layer contains not only white but also various coloured particles (especially red and blue, see Fig. 19). The pink paint also contains blue and red particles.

The thickness of the paint layer varies between opaque, smooth layers and slight impasto applications for a few details and for outlines (see Fig. 20). Predominantly opaque layers are visible on the entire surface. Brushwork is apparent throughout. In areas of the painting's background the ground is often covered with a white paint layer. The white paint layer bears more impression of the brush than does the ground layer (see Fig. 21). There are different shapes of brush strokes. A few areas were painted with slightly wavy-shaped brush strokes (see Fig. 22). In several areas brush strokes of various widths were applied in different directions (see Fig. 23). The shape of the brushwork also differs in relation to the load of binding media used by the artist. On the one hand there are areas where paint was possibly diluted and with a quite high load of binding agent was used creating a glossy surface with soft brush strokes (see Fig. 24). On the other hand there are areas with 'harder' brush strokes due to a lower amount of binding medium. Brush strokes are also oriented to the shape of the motif (for example brush strokes in vertical direction for the shape of the table, see Fig. 25).

Often the paint is applied in wet-on-wet technique in quite rapid succession (see Fig. 24); particularly paints slightly blended when the brush (see Fig. 26). Additionally, in several areas paints were applied wet on layers that had already dried (see Fig. 27).

⁸ Several hairs of paint brushes are embedded in the paint layer from colour application by the artist.

Outlines were used in order to paint different motifs (as motifs of the toy-like wallpaper, bottles, bread, table, crayfish etc., see Figs. 10 and 28). It is supposed that the artist did not paint one motif systematically after another. However, the following information on the painting technique and on sequences of paint application was noticed:

a) Background and motifs of the wallpaper in the upper part of the painting:

- Painted outlines of wallpaper motifs: Within the motifs of the wallpaper in most cases the painted outlines (dark red crimson tone) were painted as last step often in wet-on-wet or wet-in-wet technique.
- Background: Turquoise paint was rapidly applied in different hues (some parts with bluish and others with greenish hue). This tone possibly is a mixture of different pigments. At a magnification of x 40 several blue pigment particles were noticed.
- Sequence of paint application for background layer: In some parts the turquoise paint lies over the painted outlines of the wallpaper motifs but in some other parts the outlines of the wallpaper motifs lie over the turquoise paint layer of the background. Thus, no systematically sequence for application of the background layer was noticed.
- In the passages between motifs of the wallpaper and background the ground layer often is visible and not covered by the paint layer.

b) Tablecloth and crayfish:

- Crayfish: Within the motif of the crayfish different tones (yellow, orange, dark orange, dark red) were applied rapidly in wet-in-wet technique. Often painted outlines (dark red crimson tone) were possibly painted as last step.
- As first step the space of the crayfish was filled out and the outlines of the crayfish were painted (just one small exception) and afterwards the white layer of the tablecloth was applied
- On the white paint layer of the tablecloths in parts a greyish tone was applied in wet-on-wet technique. It lies over the painted outlines of the crayfish.
- In the passages between crayfish and tablecloth the ground layer is often visible and not covered by the paint layer.

c) Table:

- Several different tones were layered upon one another rapidly in thin layers
- Dark outlines of the table were possibly painted at last step

Generally, outlines are applied as a last step (see Figs. 13 and 24). Nevertheless, these contours were often applied in wet-on-wet technique (see Fig. 23) and rather rapidly on painted areas.

The painting is inscribed with a monogram. As there are lots of tiny losses in this area only the first letter, 'M', is legible. It is rendered in the lower right corner using dark brown paint, which was applied in wet-on-wet onto the underlying paint layer (see Fig. 29). No major revisions or changes are visible in the composition in normal conditions or under magnification.

2.6 Varnish

It is supposed that the painting was unvarnished originally. During sampling of the painting by AA&R a non-original varnish as a thin and transparent layer was detected at a magnification of x 40 (see chapter 3.2).

2.7 Frame

The present frame is not authentic (re-framed in 2012).

3. Photographic Documentation

Technical aspects



Figure 1: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, lower tacking margin, incident light. The type of textile weave is a tabby weave with one thread in horizontal and in vertical direction.



Figure 2: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, lower tacking margin, incident light. The selvage edge is preserved on bottom. Two large, slubby threads are visible at the tacking margin.

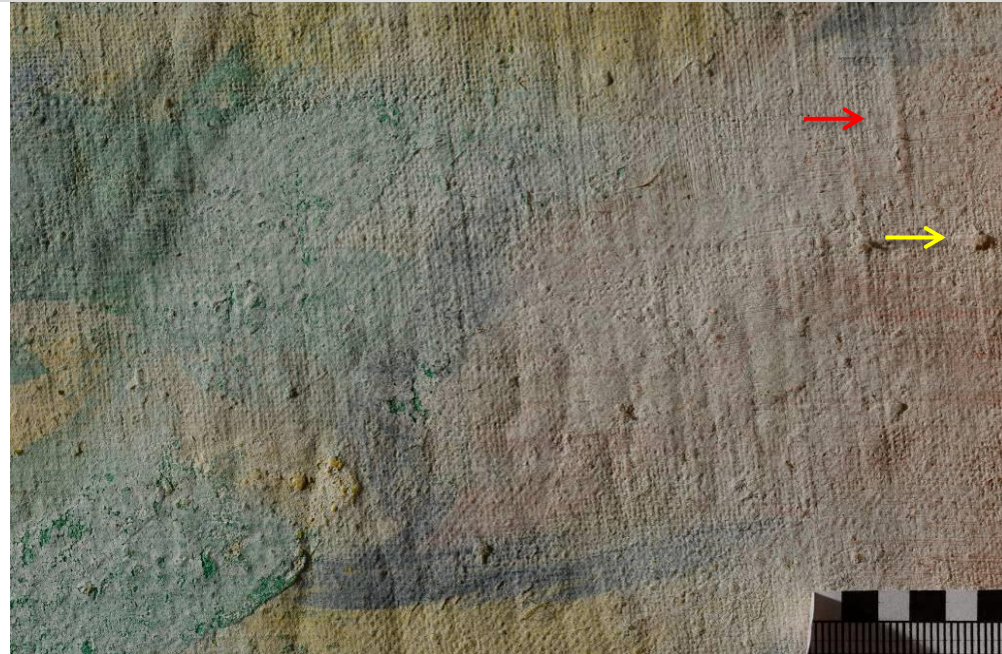


Figure 3: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, reverse, left lower part, raking light. Often the canvas has regular threads but occasionally there are a few slubby threads especially in vertical direction (see red arrow). In addition, it has some lumps in it (see yellow arrow).

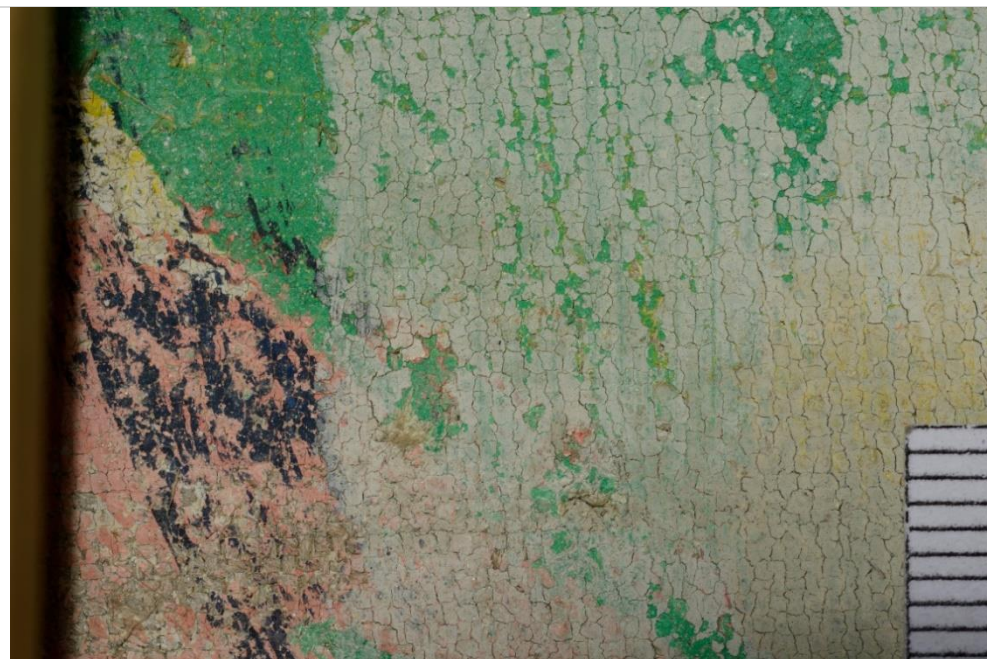


Figure 4: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, reverse, incident light. On reverse of the canvas there is an unfinished composition painted in different tones.



Figure 5: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, reverse, upper edge, incident light. The composition on the reverse is overpainted with a white layer.

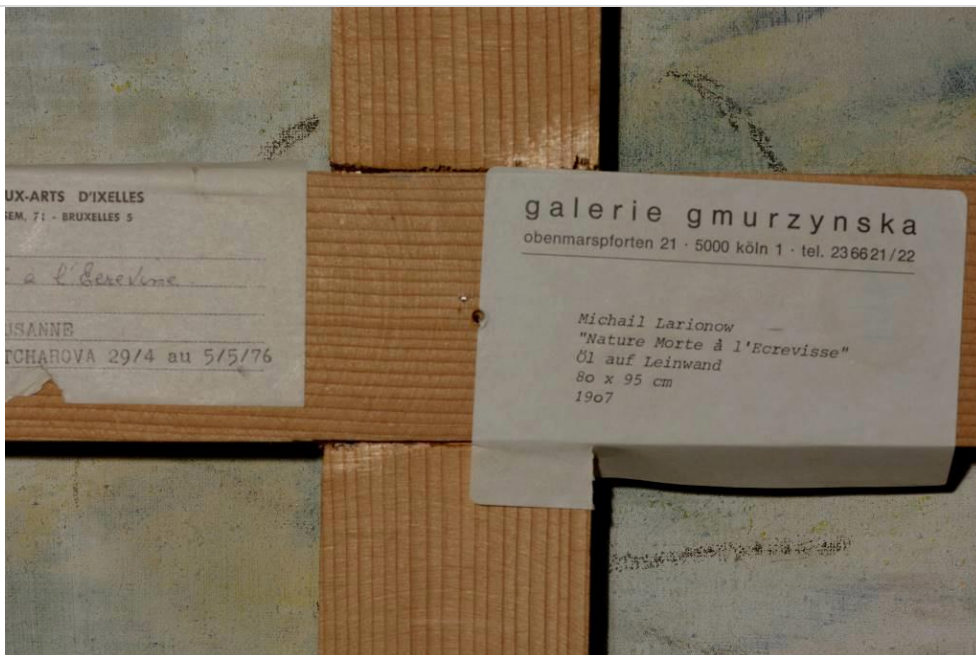


Figure 6: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, reverse, centre of the painting, incident light. In the centre, covered by the cross-bar, the shape of a half circle is visible. It was drawn with a dark material on the white layer.



Figure 7: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, reverse, upper part of the painting, incident light. There is one inscription ('L') written in blue tone on the reverse.



Figure 8: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, upper tacking margin, incident light. The primary fastening points were not re-used. Marks of nail/ tack heads and traces of corrosion in the fabric are visible (see red arrow).



Figure 9: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, left tacking margin (considered from the front side), incident light. The position of the fastening points possibly corresponds to the original position. Cusping of the canvas is evident between the current fastening points.



Figure 10: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, left tacking margin (considered from the front side), incident light. The position of the fastening points may correspond to the original position. The tacks were driven into primed and painted areas.



Figure 11: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, upper tacking margin (considered from the front side), incident light. The white ground was applied up to the turnover edge.

localisation of Figure 12

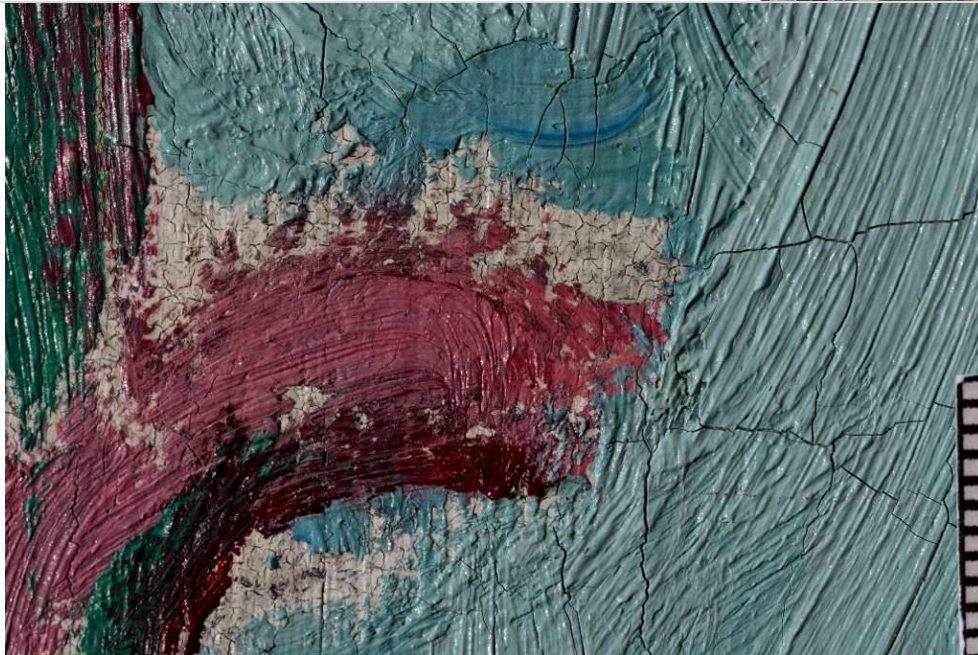
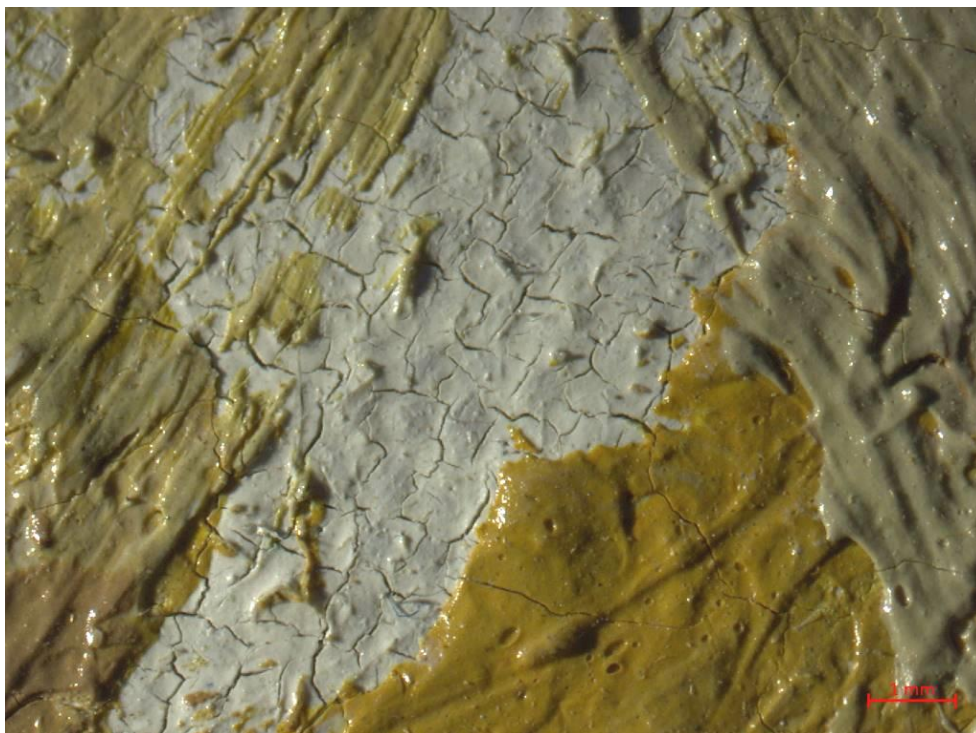


Figure 12: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, upper edge, incident light. Between the motif and the painting's upper background there are some areas where the paint does not fully cover the white ground.

localisation of Figures 13 and 14



Figures 13 and 14: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, bottle at the right edge, incident light (Fig. 13) and microscopic photograph, x 6.3, left lower part, raking light (Fig. 14). Within a motif or colour field there are small absences of oil colour where the white ground is may be seen.

localisation of Figure 15

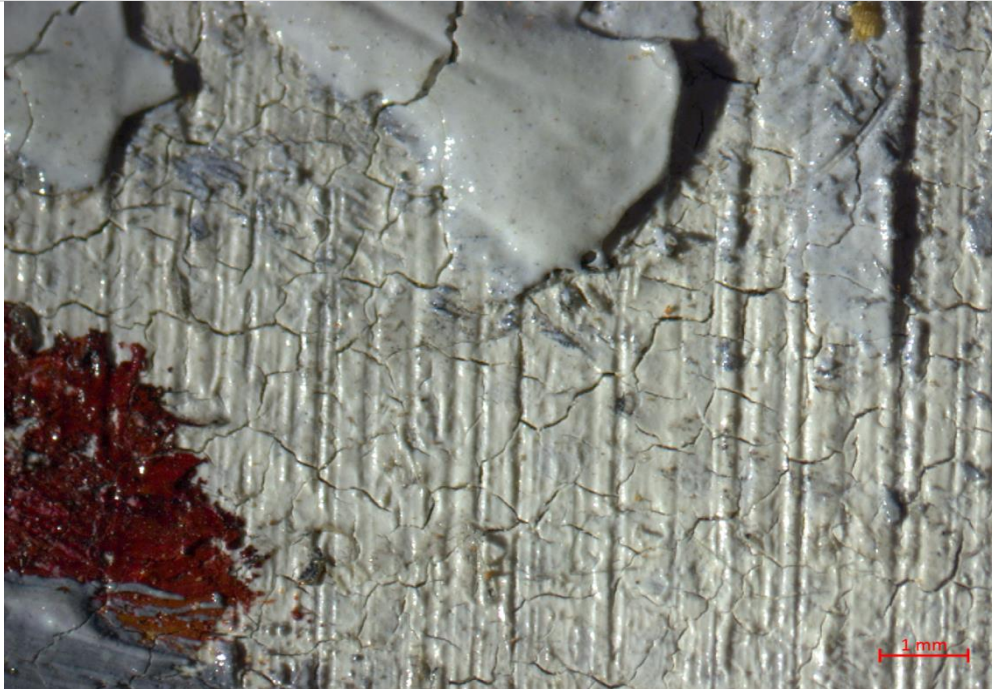


Figure 15: *Still Life with Crayfish*, microscopic photograph, x 10, right lower part, right area next to the crayfish, raking light. Parallel brush strokes in vertical direction are visible indicating that the ground was applied with brush.

localisation of Figure 16

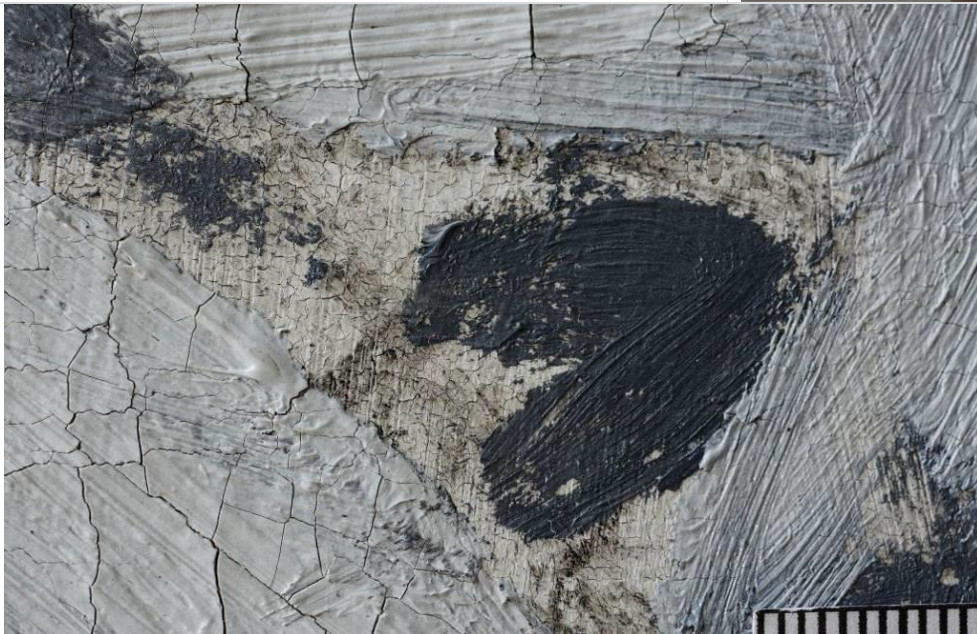


Figure 16: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, lower part, area of the tablecloth, raking light. Even with naked eye dark lines of a brushy, greyish underdrawing material are clearly visible.

localisation of Figure 17

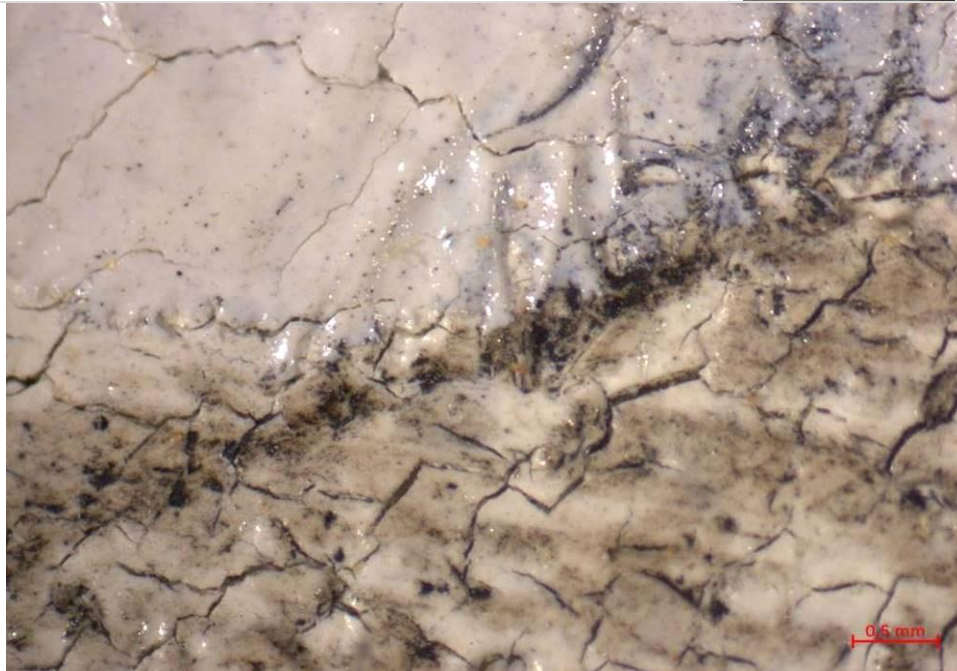


Figure 17: *Still Life with Crayfish*, microscopic photograph, x 20, lower part, area of the tablecloth, raking light. The underdrawing was possibly drawn on the ground layer with a quite fluid paint.

localisation of Figure 18



Figure 18: *Still Life with Crayfish*, microscopic photograph, x 20, right upper edge, incident light. Black particles of the underdrawing material have also accumulated at edges of impastos and are embedded in the paint layer.

localisation of Figure 19

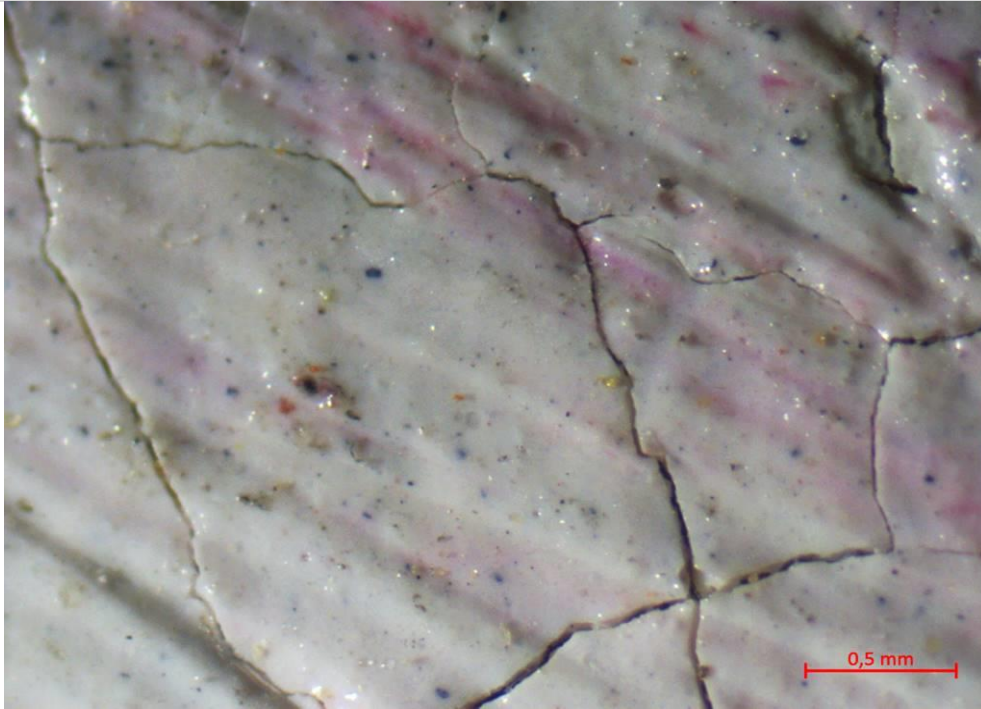


Figure 19: *Still Life with Crayfish*, microscopic photograph, x 32, area of the white background, right are from the table, incident light. The white paint layer contains different colourful particles (especially red and blue particles).

localisation of Figure 20



Figure 20: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, right lower part, area of the table, raking light. Details were painted with a slight impasto on the opaque paint layer.

localisation of Figure 21



Figure 21: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, right area from the centre with the painting's background, raking light. The white ground was covered by a white paint layer which has a significant brushwork.

localisation of Figure 22



Figure 22: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, left lower part, bread on a table, incident light. Wavy-shaped brush strokes are visible and parts of the bread are rendered in white tone.

localisation of Figure 23

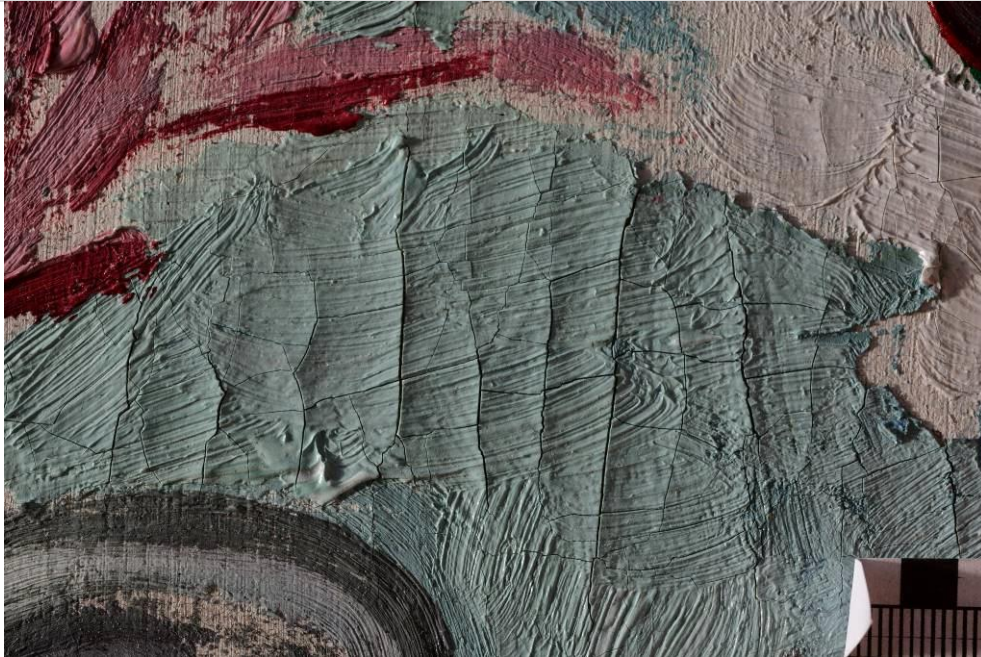


Figure 23: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, right upper part of the background area, raking light. In the turquoise paint layer brush strokes in different directions are seen.

localisation of Figure 24

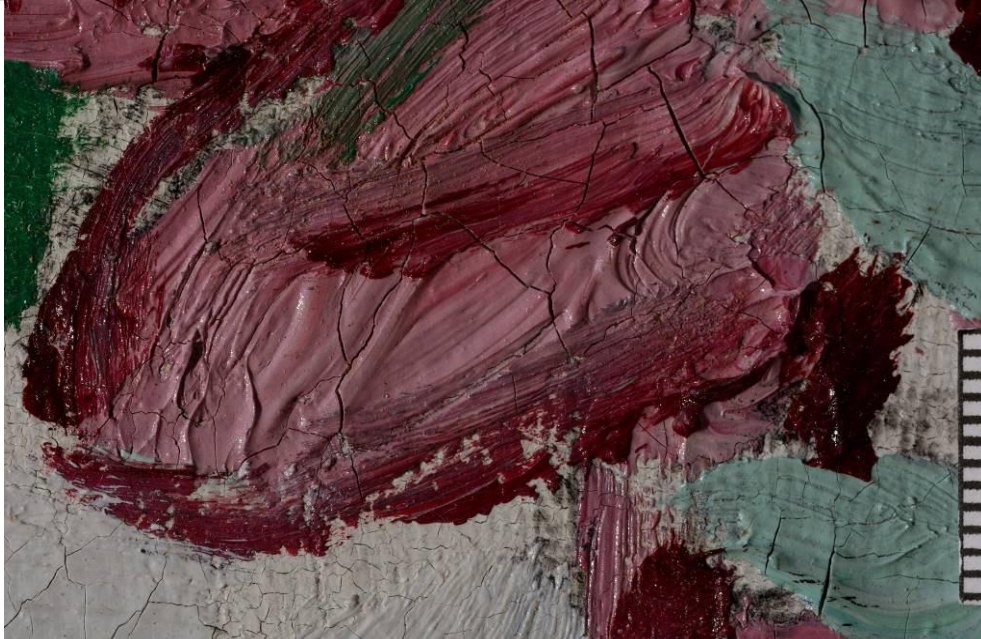


Figure 24: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, right upper edge, incident light. Outlines were painted in dark red crimson tone wet-on-wet technique on the pink paint layer.

localisation of Figure 25

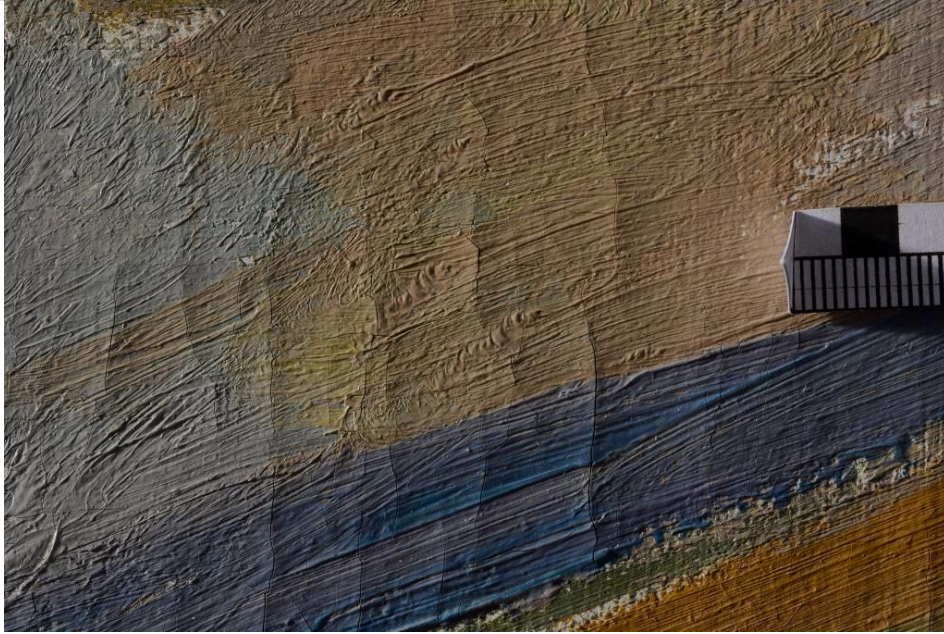


Figure 25: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, right lower part, area of the table, raking light. There are predominantly parallel brush strokes in the vertical direction which are oriented to the shape of the table. The bluish layer is slightly transparent.

localisation of Figure 26



Figure 26: *Still Life with Crayfish*, microscopic photograph, x 6.3, lower part, area of tablecloth, incident light. The greyish shades were worked into each other, wet-in-wet, on the slightly dried white under layer.

localisation of Figure 27



Figure 27: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, background area at the upper edge (centre area), incident light. The white paint was applied on the turquoise layer which was no longer wet.



Figure 28: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, lower part, raking light. Larionov used painted outlines of a greyish tone for the tablecloth and dark red contours for the shape of the crayfish.

localisation of Figure 29



Figure 29: *Still Life with Crayfish*, detail macro, right lower corner, raking light. The painting was inscribed with a monogram, rendered in a dark brown tone.

Figure 30: *Still Life with Crayfish*, map of areas where underdrawing was detected with microscopic investigation.



 underdrawing material