

Report on the examination of the painting

Portrait of a Man (Antosha Besval)

(1910) 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>Portrait of a Man (Antosha Besval)</i> (<i>Porträt eines Mannes / Antosha Besval</i>)
artist:	Larionov, Mikhail (1881-1964) variations in spelling: Larionoff, Michel Larionow, Michail Larionov, Michail Fedorovic
signed:	n. a.
date of object:	1910 (as given in the museum files)
inventory number:	ML 1306
owner:	Museum Ludwig, Cologne Donation of Peter and Irene Ludwig (Ludwig Collection)
location:	Museum Ludwig, Cologne
material/ technique: description in catalogues / files in the archive of Museum Ludwig:	Oil on canvas
size of object without frame (height x width x depth):	109,5 x 80,0 x 2,0 cm

2. Technical investigation

Methods of examination:

The investigation of the painting *Portrait of a Man* was carried out in February 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, transmitted light, reflective light). In addition, results of investigation under ultraviolet light (UV) are considered in the following text.

2.1 Canvas support

As no selvaže is preserved warp and weft directions cannot be determined unambiguously. The type of textile weave is a tabby weave with one thread in both directions. Occasionally there are some thicker and slubby which are present on the reverse in vertical and in horizontal direction. On the painting's reverse as well as on the front side in primed areas without paint layer there are some knots and lumps within a thread. Additionally, several bundles of fibres stand proud on the surface (see Figs. 1, 2). There is a z-twist in vertical and horizontal direction.

Totally three handwritten inscriptions, one ink stamp and two paper labels are present on the canvas support which cannot be dated. In the following section the texts of all labels, stamps and inscriptions, numbered consecutively, were listed²:

1. Larionow

Notes: handwritten inscription, written with a blue material which has accumulated especially on the heights of the canvas, localisation: lower part of the canvas (in parts covered by bars of current stretcher Since 1915 Goncharova and Larionov lived in France, leaving a greater part of their works in Moscow. The inscription "Larionow" was purportedly done by L. F. Zhegin (1892-1969) before sending the painting from Moscow to Paris between 1925-27 Except main works, a lot of these paintings which had been sent from Moscow to Paris, remain packed and un-stretched in the studio in Paris..

2. N° 10

Notes: handwritten inscription written in black tone, localisation: on top right

3. [illegible]

Notes: handwritten inscription, written in black tone, localisation: right upper edge, inscription is covered by the right stretcher bar

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

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

4. First letters of the artist's names and numeration in Cyrillic Г und И N. 70.

These paper-labels were stuck on the reverse of the canvas by N.D. Vinogradov (1885-1980) when the painting was removed from the home of Goncharova and Larionov in Moscow and put into storage.

Notes: adhesive paper label with handwritten text, paper support is aged, discoloured and without significant fluorescence indicating that the paper does not contain optical brighteners, localisation: right upper part of the canvas

5. N° 10
Larionov
Portrait d'Homme
109 x 81

Notes: adhesive paper label with handwritten text, paper support is aged, discoloured without significant fluorescence indicating that the paper does not contain optical brighteners, in parts possibly residues of adhesive, localisation: right upper part of the canvas

6. [illegible]

Notes: ink stamp, localisation: right lower part of the canvas

2.2 Stretching

The current stretcher on which the painting is mounted is not original. There are numerous holes in the tacking margins with associated traces of red corrosion and with marks of the fastening material (see Figs. 3 and 4). These holes do not correspond to the current fastening points and there are no corresponding holes present in the current stretcher. It is supposed that these holes are original fastening points. Only slight cusping of the canvas is evident between several of these points (see Fig. 5). The original stretching was made with round-headed tacks or nails which were mounted in fastening intervals³ of approx. 1, 5-5,0 cm, predominately 3,0-4,0 cm spacing. They were fastened in the tacking margins but in contrary to the current stretching they were not inserted in primed areas. Additionally, they were mounted further away from the turnover edge in areas of bare canvas (see Figs. 3 and 5).

The canvas has been re-affixed onto a new stretcher; the original tacking holes often were not re-used (see lower, right and left tacking edge). However, at the upper tacking margin several original holes were probably re-used. As the cutting edges are frayed there is no evidence that they were cut away by someone else than the artist. The current position of the turnover edge

³ Numbers of original fastening points and their fastening intervals (considered from the reverse):

right tacking margin:	31 tacks/nails (not reused), intervals: 2,5-5,0, predominately 3,0; 3,5 and 4,0 cm,
left tacking margin:	33 tacks/nails (not reused), intervals: 2,5-4,5 cm, predominately 3,0 and 3,5 cm,
upper tacking margin:	minimum 8 tacks/nails (not reused), intervals: 2,5-4,5, predominately 4,0 cm,
lower tacking margin:	30 tacks/nails (not reused), intervals: 1,5-4,5 cm, predominately 3,5 cm.

probably corresponds with its original position. It is supposed that it remained consistent and has not been changed.

In addition, there are several holes in the canvas at the upper and left⁴ tacking margin with corresponding holes in the actual stretcher. These holes possibly might be from a former but non-original stretching. Possibly the position of some fastening points was changed without removing the canvas from its wooden support and re-affixing the painting.

For the current stretching totally 114 round-headed tacks of the same type and size (heads of tacks: diameter of approx. 6 mm) were inserted in intervals of approx. 1,0 - 8,0 cm spacing. These tacks were driven into the tacking margins in primed and in parts also in painted areas (especially at the right tacking margin, considered from the front side). Additionally, 99 non-original staples were inserted at irregular fastening intervals of approx. 1,5 - 8,0 cm spacing and were used to secure the canvas at the tacking margins and predominantly on the reverse.

2.3 Stretcher

The original stretcher/strainer is not preserved. It is supposed that the width of the original outer bars was thinner (possibly approx. 4,0 cm) than those of the current stretcher (approx. 5,5-5,8 cm). The evidence that suggests that the current stretcher is not authentic is as follows:

- No holes in the stretcher related to the original fastening points
- Marks of the former outer bars on the front side (see Fig. 24), width does not correspond to the width of the actual stretcher outer bars
- Penetration of the ground layer through the weave (see Fig. 6) especially in the areas covered by the original outer bars, the width of these marks does not correspond to the width of the current outer bars, no marks of the ground in the area of the current cross-bar
- No label referring to the painting's earliest exhibition (of the painting's exhibition history); the earliest label is dated to 1969
- Given its new appearance and very good condition it does not look like a stretcher manufactured at the beginning of the 20th century
- An inscription on the reverse of the canvas is covered by the current right stretcher bar indicating that the painting has been re-affixed and the original outer bars probably were narrower

The stretcher measures 109,5 x 80,0 x 2,0 cm and the bars have a width of approx. 5,5-5,8 cm. It is an adjustable stretcher with twelve expansion keys (all keys are present) with a cross-bar. It appears to be composed of softwood. The construction of the corner joints possibly is a mortise and tenon joint and the bars are not mitred at the corners. The high degree of finish and regularity, with traces left by a circular saw from manufacture process suggests that the stretcher is machine-made.

⁴ Localisation: considered from the reverse.

On the reverse of the stretcher there are several inscriptions, one stamp and nine paper labels which are all later additions. Most of these labels are related to former exhibitions or to shipping of the painting. In the following section the texts of all labels, stamps and inscriptions, numbered consecutively, were listed⁵:

1. ACQUAVELLA GALLERIES, Inc.
18 EAST 79TH STREET. NEW YORK 10021
114 Portrait d'Homme
Oil 31 1/2 x 43 inches
by MICHEL LARIONOV

Notes: paper label with printed text, discoloured paper support without significant fluorescence indicating that the paper does not contain optical brighteners, localisation: cross-bar (horizontal direction), label is related to an exhibition in 1969 ('Michel Larionov', organised by the Acquavella Galleries, New York)

2. ACQUAVELLA GALLERIES, Inc.
18 EAST 79TH STREET. NEW YORK 10021
Exhibition Michel Larionov
April 22 - May 24, 1969
Catalogue # 37

Notes: paper label with printed text, discoloured paper support without significant fluorescence indicating that the paper does not contain optical brighteners, localisation: cross-bar (horizontal direction), label is related to an exhibition in 1969 ('Michel Larionov', organised by the Acquavella Galleries, New York)

3. MAISON DE LA CULTURE
Quai Pierre de Coubertin
NEVERS [illegible]
[illegible]

Notes: ink stamp, localisation: cross-bar (centre area, vertical direction), label is related to an exhibition in 1972 ('Rétrospective Larionov', organised by Maison de la Culture de Nevers et la Nièvre)

4. MUSEÉ TOULOUSE-LAUTREC, ALBI
EXP. M. LARIONOV ET SON TEMPS
M. LARIONOV
CAT. N° 22 PORTRAIT D4HOMME [spelling mistake]

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

Notes: paper label with printed text, paper support with significant fluorescence indicating that the paper probably contains optical brighteners, localisation: upper stretcher bar (left area), label is related to an exhibition in 1973 ('Michel Larionov et son temps', organised by the Musée Toulouse-Lautrec, Albi)

5. MUSEÉ DES BEAUX-ARTS D'IXELLES
RUE JEAN VAN VOLSEM, 71 – BRUXELLES 5

Auteur LARIONOV
Titre Portrait d'Homme
N° 38
Collection EVEREST - LAUSANNE
Exposition LARIONOV-GONTCHAROVA 29/4 au 5/5/76

Notes: paper label with printed and handwritten text, paper support with significant fluorescence indicating that the paper probably contains optical brighteners, localisation: upper stretcher bar (left area), label is related to an exhibition in 1976 ('Rétrospective Larionov, Gontcharova', organised by the Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Ixelles, Brussels). This label gives an important information related to the artwork's former owner: It indicates that the painting was owned by 'EVEREST – LAUSANNE' before it was acquired by the Gallery Gmurzynska⁶ LEMOINE PERIGNON & Cie

EXPRESS TRANSPORT S.A.
33, RUE DE CHABROL, PARIS 10^E
TRANSPORT DE TABLEAUX ET STATUES
AUTEUR Larionov
TITRE Portrait d'Homme
REFERENCE EM/ [illegible]
NUMÉRO ... Daulte [illegible] enleve chez De la Rancheraye

Notes: paper label with printed and handwritten text, paper support with slight fluorescence (paper might contain optical brighteners), localisation: cross-bar (vertical direction), label is related to shipping of the painting by the French shipping company Lemoine Perignon et Cie

⁶ This information is not mentioned in the report on the archive review.

2.4 Sizing and ground layer

No sizing of the canvas was detected by examination with an optical microscope. It is supposed that there is no sizing because the ground layer in parts has penetrated through the canvas on the reverse (see Fig. 6), especially in the areas covered by the original outer bars and in areas recto where the priming is not covered by a paint layer. In areas with a thick paint layer no marking of the priming on the verso was noticed.

The white ground was applied presumably as thin single layer on the entire painting's surface always up to the turnover edge and maximal 1,5 cm beyond the turnover edge onto the tacking margins (especially at the right and lower tacking margin). There is no evidence for commercial pre-priming. As the ground is not applied up to the cutting edge of the canvas (see Fig. 7) and as there are slight differences in the thickness of the layer it can be assumed that the canvas was hand-prepared. Within painted areas and between motifs there are some small absences of oil colour where the ground is visible (see Fig. 8). In larger spaces of the painting the ground is not covered by a paint layer, especially in the area of the background in the right upper corner and in the area of the long-sleeved shirt (Figs. 2, 9). It is not possible to determine if the painting is unfinished in the right upper corner. The ground does not always fill all the pores and the structure of the canvas remains clearly visible. The tops of the threads are hardly covered by the ground, so that the canvas structure and its irregular nature are clearly discernible (see Fig. 10). No application tools were noticed and the ground seems to be quite brittle and porous. It is supposed that it contains a relatively low proportion of binding medium. The ground is slightly water soluble⁷. Viewed under ultraviolet light the ground exhibits fluorescence of a white-blueish tone which is visible where the ground is exposed on the recto, verso and at the tacking margins.

2.5 Underdrawing

With the naked eye a dark material is discernible on the ground layer in several passages between a motif and the painting's background. Especially at outlines of the man's long-sleeved shirt and the man's face these dark lines of a brushy, anthracite-to-black powdery material are clearly visible (see Fig. 11). At a magnification of x 40 a powdery material is noticed on the ground layer (see Fig. 12). There may have been some underdrawing in charcoal. In addition, there are several brushy outlines of a black paint. These were applied with a low amount of binding medium (see Fig. 13). Thus, it is supposed that Larionov used an underdrawing work in order to sketch outlines of motifs (especially to sketch the shape of the man's body, see Fig. 23).

2.6 Paint layer

Larionov utilised the entire surface of the canvas for colour application. Except from the right lower corner he applied the colours with brush up to the turnover edge, in particular also maximal 1 cm beyond the turnover edge on the tacking margins (see Figs. 3 and 6).

⁷ Solubility of the ground layer according to water was tested at the right upper corner (magnification of x 40).

The surface structure, slight differences in gloss, application of paint, non-water-sensitivity⁸ and alteration might indicate the artist's use of oil paint as paint material. Microscopic examination reveals that Larionov utilised a large colour palette. Beside different shades of green, brown and grey paint, he used white, yellow, orange, orange-red, purple, blue and black tones. Several single tones were used over a large area (especially dark brown or green for the background area). Particularly small areas of blue and red crimson paint are visible but the use of these colours is limited in the examined composition. Viewed under ultraviolet light the red crimson paint exhibits fluorescence of a significant orange tone (see especially the man's left ear). Additionally, the man's left cheek painted in yellow, fluoresces in a bright yellowish tone and a blue paint layer exhibits a fluorescence of a significant blueish tone (see area of face, book and left upper corner).

Shades of green and brown paints were probably mixed by the artist. Optical microscopic investigation reveals that the orange-red tone used for the area of ear and nose contains large granular material creating a rough surface (see Fig. 14). Occasionally there are a few small lumps and paint fragments in the paint layer.

The thickness of the paint varies between an opaque layer filling all pores on the one hand (see Fig. 16) and areas painted in impasto technique with relief-like character on the other (see Figs. 9 and 17). At the edges, between motifs and within paint layers there are many absences of colour where the ground is visible. Within a colour field or motif there are small areas which are not losses, but rather places where the brush stroke of the paint layer has not covered the ground (for example brown areas at the upper part of the painting).

The paint was applied in wet-on-dry (see Fig. 8), wet-on-wet (see Fig. 18) as well as in wet-in-wet (see Fig. 19) technique. In some parts paints of different tones were taken up by the brush undulate and in parts slightly blend when the brush is applied to the canvas (see Fig. 19). Often 'harder' brush strokes are visible, creating a matte surface and indicating that the paint layer contains a lower amount of binding media. Especially in areas where paint was applied more thickly, brushwork is discernible (see Fig. 20). There are different shapes of brush strokes. The impressions of brush strokes particularly are of a curved pattern which looks wavy (see Fig. 16). There are also areas with parallel brush strokes which are often oriented to the shape of the motif (see Fig. 22) or a few areas with a stippled texture (see Fig. 21).

Brushy contours in a black tone were used by the artist to outline several motifs and colour fields. The contours of the man's body and of a bag (see Fig. 22) are outlined in black. Generally paint application was done rather quickly. No systematic sequences of paint application were noticed. However, brushy contours in black tone were mostly painted as last step (see Figs. 21 and 22). The area of the face was filled out with different tones. They were applied as individual layers in wet-on-wet or wet-on-dry technique. Afterwards outlining around the head was painted in a black tone. The painting is not signed by the artist. No major revisions or changes are visible in the composition in normal conditions or under magnification.

⁸ Solubility of the paint layer according to water was tested in areas of yellow, red, blue, green, brown and black paint (magnification of x 40).

2.7 Varnish

The paint layer was 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 and no over-cleaning of the paint layer).

2.8 Frame

The current frame is not authentic.

3 Photographic documentation

Technical aspects



Figure 1: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, reverse, raking light. There are several knots within a thread and bundles of fibres stand proud on the surface.

localisation of Figure 2

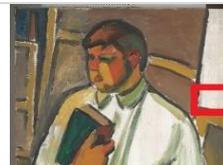


Figure 2: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, right upper part of the painting, incident light. Cusping and several knots in the fabric can be noticed at the front side in primed areas without paint layer.



Figures 3 and 4: *Portrait of a Man*, details macro, upper tacking margin, incident light. The original fastening points with marks of the heads of nail/ tacks and with traces of corrosion are preserved. The current position of fastening point does not correspond to the original one.



Figure 5: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, right tacking margin (considered from the front side), incident light. Only slight cusping of the canvas (see red arrows) is evident between several of these original fastening points. In contrary to the current stretching the original fastening material was not driven into primed and painted areas of the tacking margins. It was mounted further away from the turnover edge in areas of bare canvas.

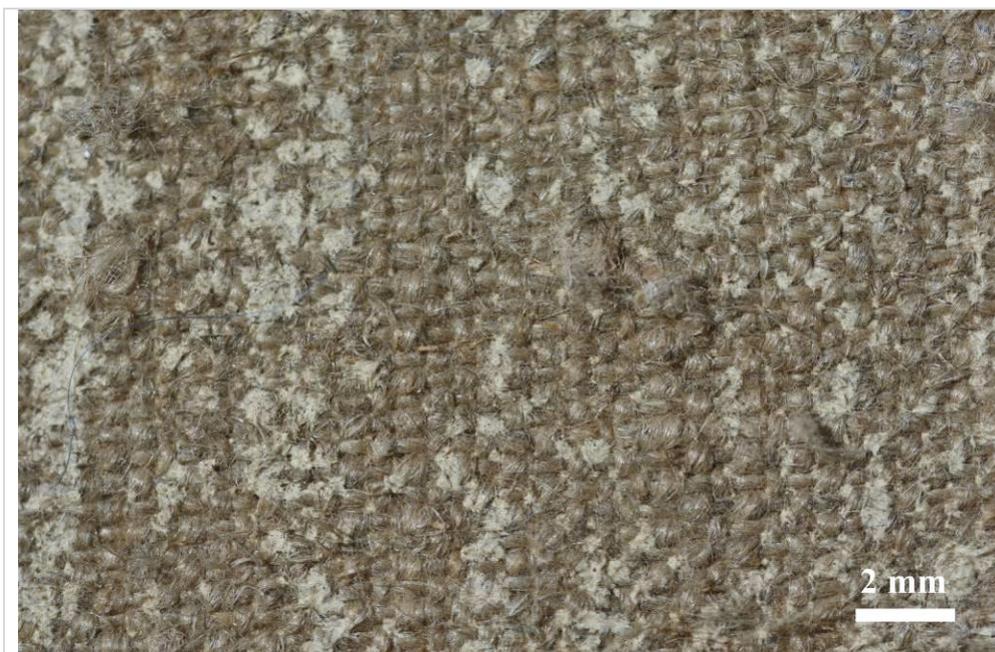


Figure 6: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, reverse, incident light. The white ground in parts has penetrated through the canvas.



Figure 7: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, upper tacking margin, incident light.
The thin, white ground layer was not applied up to the cut edge of the canvas.

localisation of Figure 8

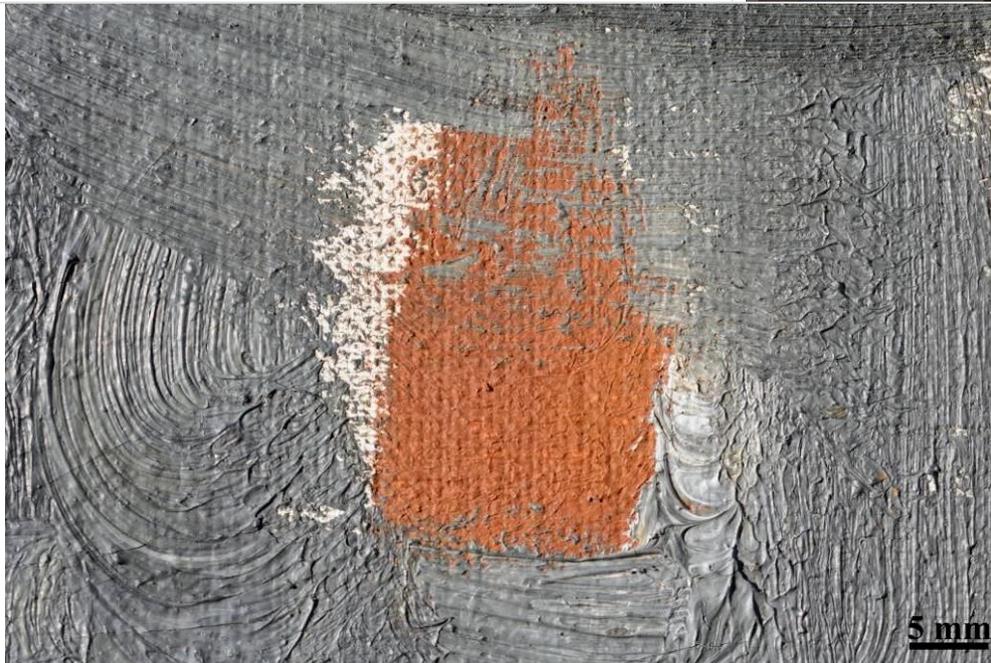


Figure 8: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, lower centre of the painting, incident light.
Between the red and grey paint field there is a small absence of oil colour where the ground is visible. The grey tone was applied in wet-on-dry technique on the red layer.

localisation of Figure 9



Figure 9: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, upper part, collar of the man's shirt, incident light. In the area of the man's white long-sleeved shirt the ground is not covered by a paint layer. The dark green tone was applied with relief-like character.

localisation of Figure 10

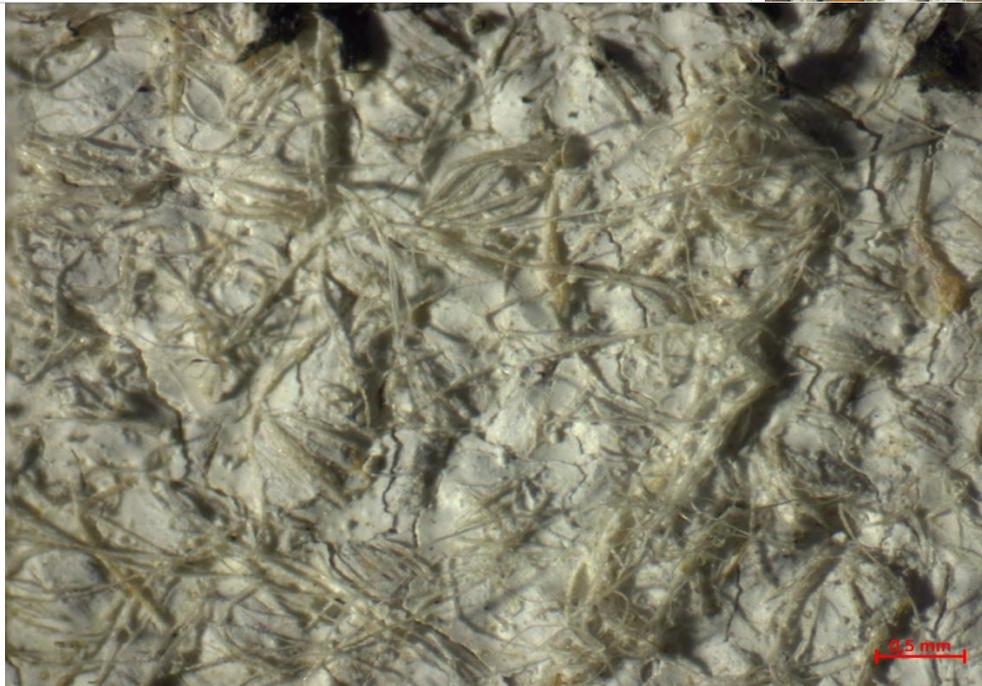


Figure 10: *Portrait of a Man*, microscopic photograph, x 20, upper right part of the painting, incident light. The tops of the threads are hardly covered by the ground.

localisation of Figures 11 and 12

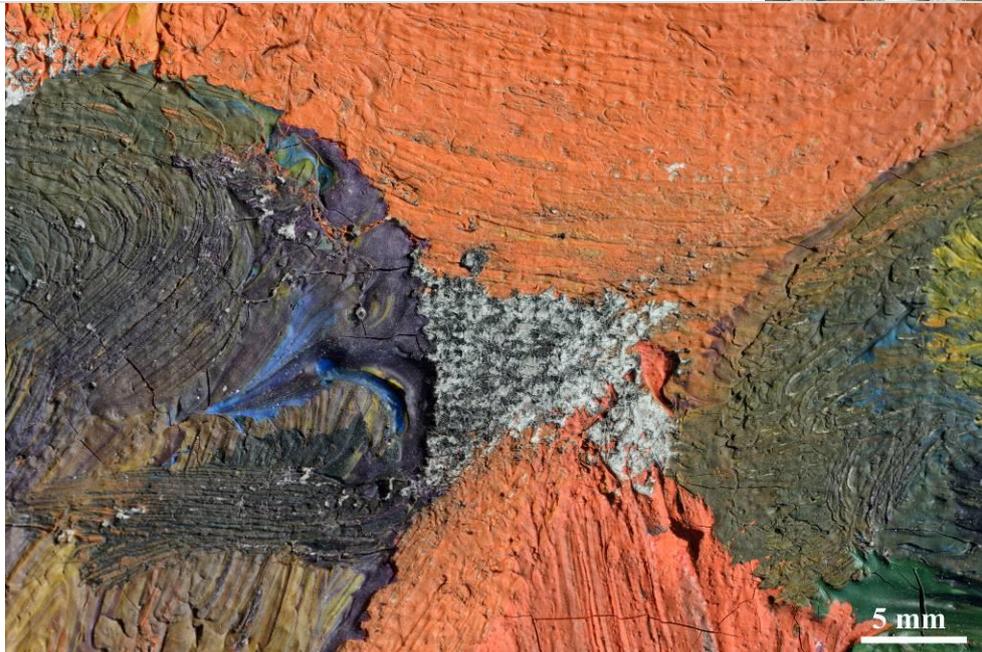


Figure 11: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, upper part of the painting, area between the man's eyes, incident light. Even with the naked eye lines of an underdrawing material can be noticed.



Figure 12: *Portrait of a Man*, microscopic photograph, x 20, upper part of the painting, area between the man's eyes, incident light. A powdery grey-black underdrawing material, maybe charcoal, is visible on the ground layer.

localisation of Figure 13



Figure 13: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, the man's left arm, incident light. Brushy contours in black tone are visible at the outlines of the man's shirt. The line of the black paint is broken, not flowing, indicating a low amount of binding medium.

localisation of Figure 14



Figure 14: *Portrait of a Man*, microscopic photograph, x 20, upper right part of the painting, area of the nose, raking light. The orange-red tone contains large granular inclusions, creating a rough surface.

localisation of Figure 15

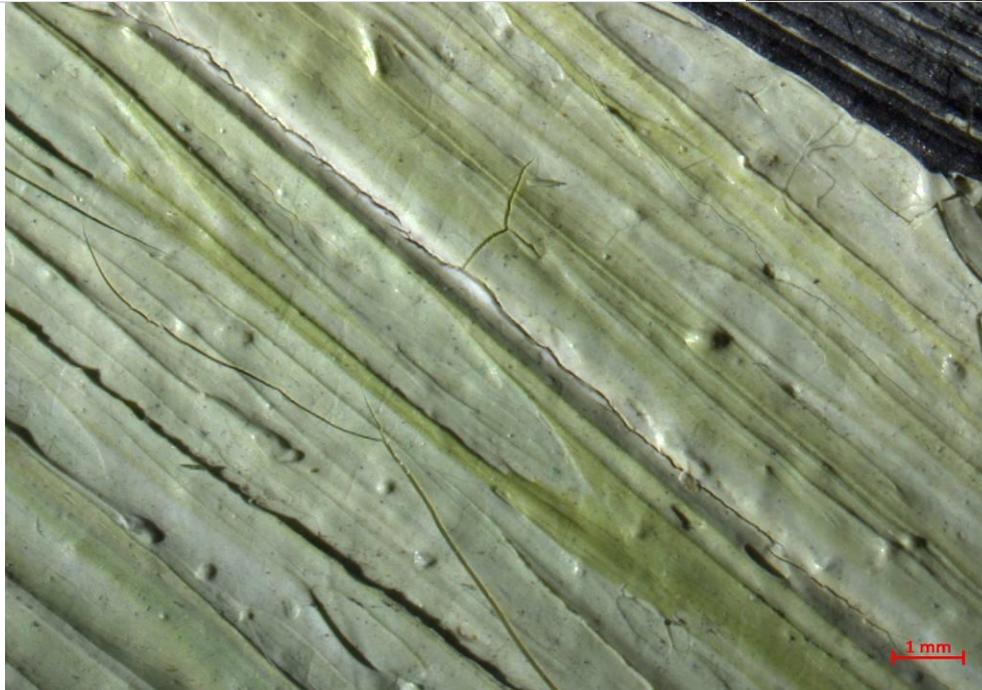


Figure 15: *Portrait of a Man*, microscopic photograph, x 8, area of the man's left arm, raking light. There are possibly a few small lumps embedded in the paint layer.

localisation of Figure 16



Figure 16: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, left lower corner, raking light. The brown tone was applied as an opaque and smooth layer. The impressions of the brush are of a curved pattern which looks wavy.

localisation of Figure 17



Figure 17: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, lower part, the man's trousers, incident light. The dark grey-to-black paint in parts was applied as impasto.

localisation of Figure 18

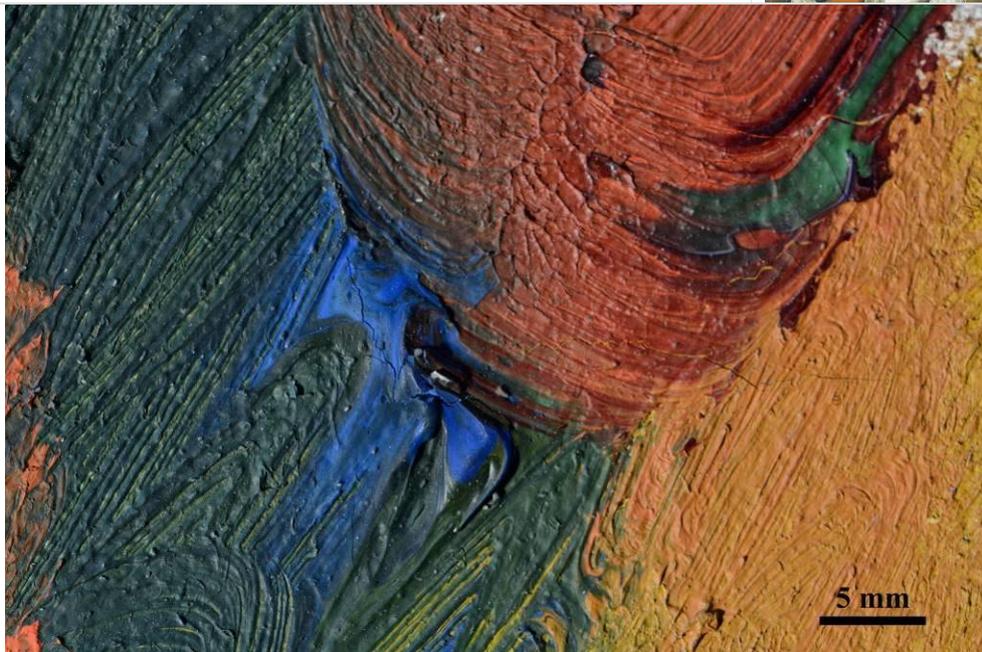


Figure 18: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, area of the man's face, incident light. The different tones were predominately applied in wet-on-wet technique.

localisation of Figure 19



Figure 19: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, lower part, area between the man's belt and trousers, incident light. White and black tones were taken up by the brush undulated and slightly blend when they were applied wet-in-wet on the ground layer.

localisation of Figure 20



Figure 20: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, the man's right arm, incident light. Paints were applied as thicker layer with significant brushwork. The yellow and white tones were not mixed homogeneously by the artist.

localisation of Figure 21



Figures 21: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, right upper part, incident light. There are impressions of the brush of a stippled texture. The artist used outlining in a black tone. It lies over the other paint layers. Thus, outlining was painted as last step.

localisation of Figure 22

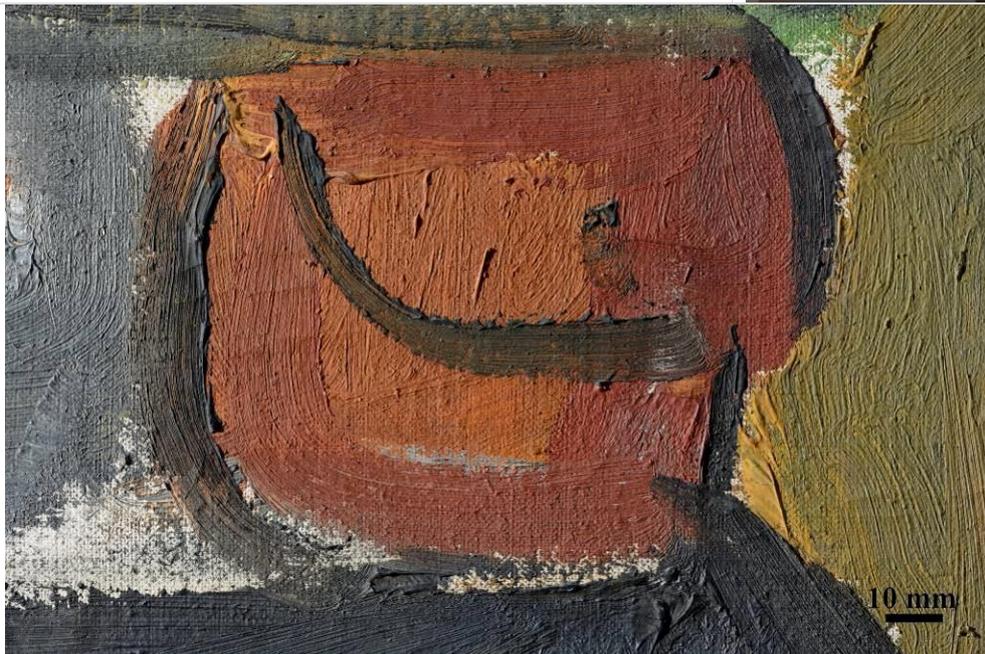
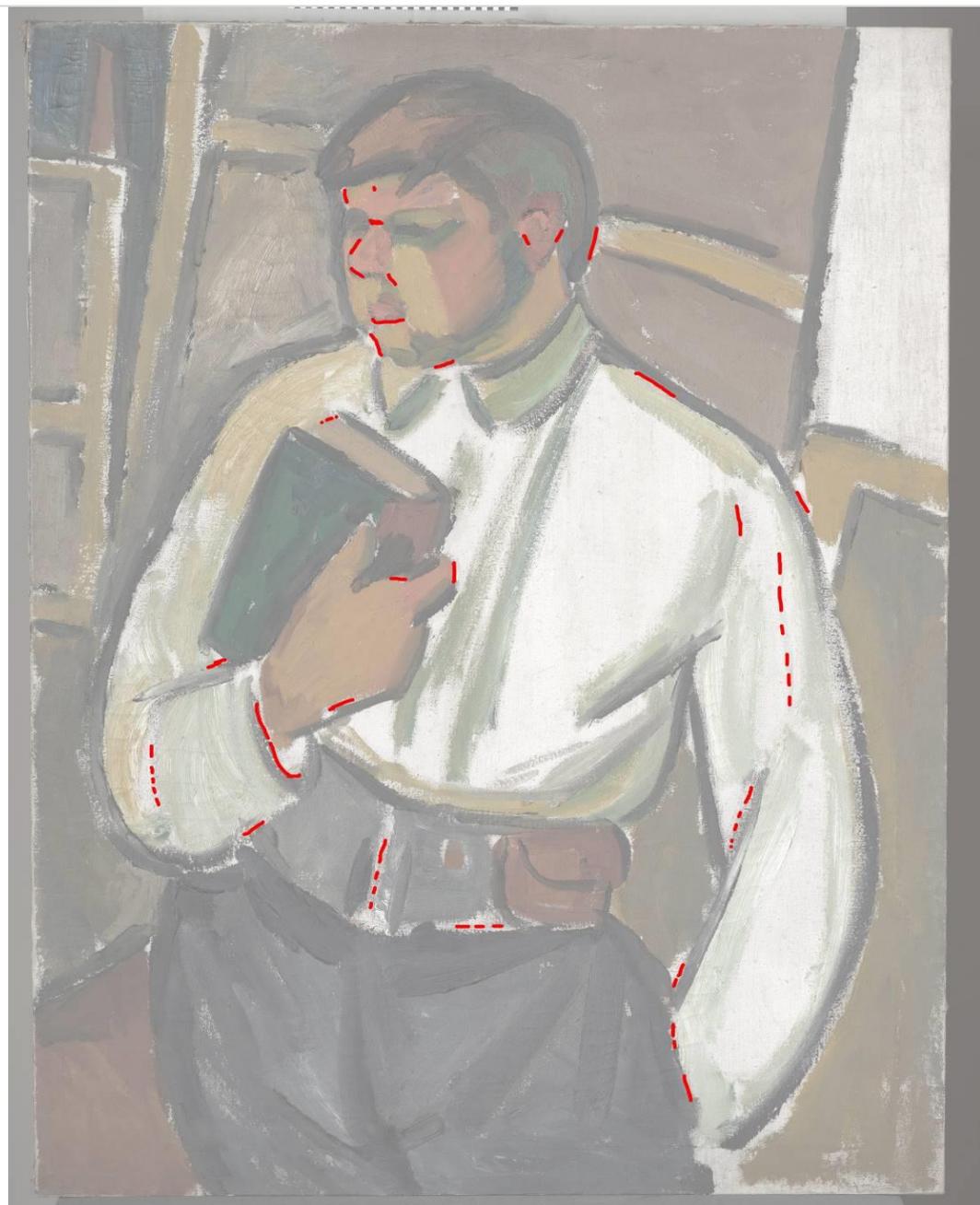


Figure 22: *Portrait of a Man*, detail macro, lower part, incident light. The artist used outlining in a black tone. These contours were painted on the underlying paint as last step.



 **underdrawing work**

stamp

Figure 23: *Portrait of a Man*, map of underdrawing detected with microscopic investigation.