

POLLOCK 

CONSERVATION STORIES

Conservators conduct research, repair damage to works of art, and restore objects to their original condition. Becoming an art conservator requires an advanced degree with many years of study in art history, studio arts, and chemistry.

The conservation of Jackson Pollock's *Mural*, beginning in 2012 by the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, yielded new insights into its materials and painting technique. This recent conservation can be compared with the historic treatment of Robert Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No. 126*.

MOTHERWELL 



POLLOCK

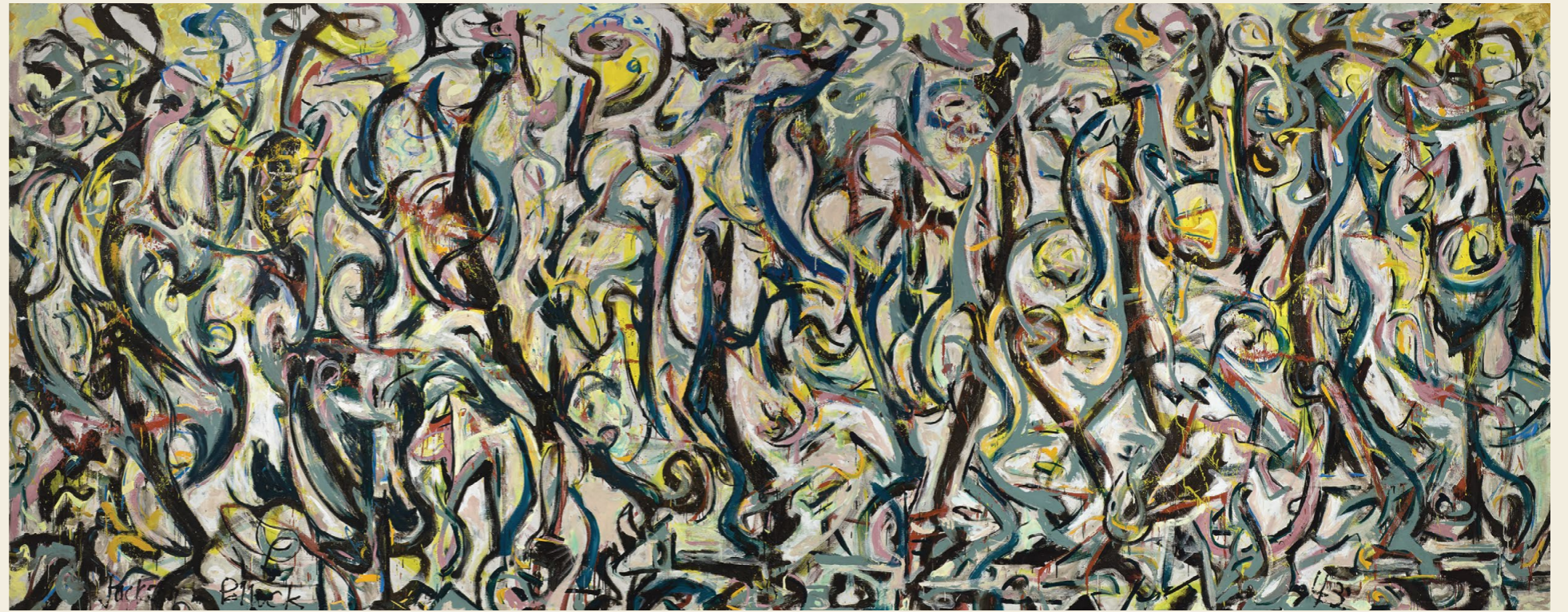
Conserving *Mural*

2 Treatments

Testing & Research

3 Major Findings

Mural under the Microscope



Jackson Pollock, American (1912–1956). *Mural*, 1943. Oil and casein on canvas, 95 5/8 x 237 3/4 inches. Gift of Peggy Guggenheim, 1959.6. University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City. Reproduced with permission from The University of Iowa Museum of Art. Photograph courtesy the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2014.

Jackson Pollock's *Mural* arrived at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, in 2012 for study and conservation. This effort provided a rare opportunity for a team of conservators and researchers to look closely at the painting's material structure and to identify the specific paints Pollock used and how they were applied. The study also informed the conservation treatment and future display of the painting.

The study revealed an artist who combined traditional materials and methods of

application with unconventional ones. The scale of *Mural* allowed Pollock to expand his practice beyond the confines of the smaller canvases he had produced thus far, and to develop innovative methods of paint application that would later become the hallmark of his style.

The results from the study demystified some of the legends that have surrounded the painting since its creation, including the question of how long Pollock took to paint it.

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George Karger (German, 1902–1973), Peggy Guggenheim and Jackson Pollock in front of *Mural* (1943), first floor entrance hall, 155 East Sixty-First Street, New York, about.1946. Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

Conserving *Mural*

Large paintings often lead difficult lives. *Mural* was rolled and unrolled at least five times as it moved from Pollock's studio, to collector Peggy Guggenheim's New York apartment entrance hall, to Vogue Studios (for photography), to New York's Museum of Modern Art, to Yale University, and finally, in 1951, to the University of Iowa.



Mural's early itinerant history took a toll on its condition. The paint began to flake, and the weak original stretcher caused the canvas to develop a pronounced sag. By 1973 its structural condition was in need of attention, and a conservation treatment was carried out in Iowa to stabilize it. This included lining the painting (attaching a secondary canvas to the reverse of the painting using adhesive), replacing the original stretcher with a sturdier one, and varnishing the painting.

By 2012, grime had accumulated on the surface, and the varnish had aged poorly. The 1973 lining stabilized the flaking paint, but the weight of the lining materials worsened the canvas distortion. Additionally, the replacement stretcher was insufficient to support the extra weight of the double canvas. The more rectangular shape drew unpainted canvas, originally on the sides, to the front. The recent treatment of *Mural* at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, removed the grime and varnish, replaced the stretcher, and attempted to reestablish the painting's original edges.

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Conserving *Mural*

2 Treatments

#1

#2

Testing & Research

3 Major Findings

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Treatment #1

Correcting canvas distortion and re-stretching

From the very beginning, Pollock's stretcher was likely not sturdy enough to properly support the heavy canvas. Early photographs suggest that the upper canvas may have begun to sag even as it was painted.

The canvas distortion grew worse with time. In 1973, the painting was re-stretched onto a new support.

However, this treatment resulted in areas of the original tacking margins becoming visible at places on the picture plane.



Many people and much planning were necessary to secure such a large painting onto a new stretcher. Image courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

When *Mural* arrived at the Getty, the stretcher was deemed inadequate. During the 2012 treatment, the painting was mounted onto a stretcher designed to follow the contours of the original painted surface. While the painting is no longer perfectly rectangular, the subtle contour allows *Mural* to be seen as closely as possible to its original presentation.

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Treatment #2

Cleaning the surface

Pollock generally preferred the appearance of an unvarnished surface and did not apply a surface coating to *Mural* in 1943.



Conservator removing dirt and grime from the surface of *Mural*.
Image courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

The glossy varnish applied to *Mural* as part of the conservation treatment in 1973 was intended to protect its surface but with time it had become somewhat cloudy. Combined with accumulated grime, it dulled the original surface qualities and vibrant colors of the painting. Furthermore, the uniformly reflective surface of the varnish prevented viewers from observing the entire composition from one vantage point.

During the 2012 treatment, the grime and varnish were carefully removed with small cotton swabs and mild, water-based solutions. As a result, the painting's appearance is now closer to Pollock's original intention, with a varied and richly painted surface, both glossy and matte.

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Testing and Research

Getty researchers used two state-of-the-art imaging techniques, macro-X-ray fluorescence scanning and hyperspectral imaging, to map the location of specific materials across the painting. The combination of paint analysis, cross-sections, and analytical imaging allowed the conservators and scientists to identify the materials and better understand the order, distribution,

and method of application of the mural's various paint layers. The development of the painting appeared to follow three general phases: an initial laying in of the compositional framework using four dilute paint colors, applied with lively, sweeping brushstrokes; a second sequence of painting that strengthened and further defined compositional forms using a variety of paint applications—broad brush, narrow brush, splattering, and flicking; and a late retouching phase that Pollock added after the painting was photographed in his studio.

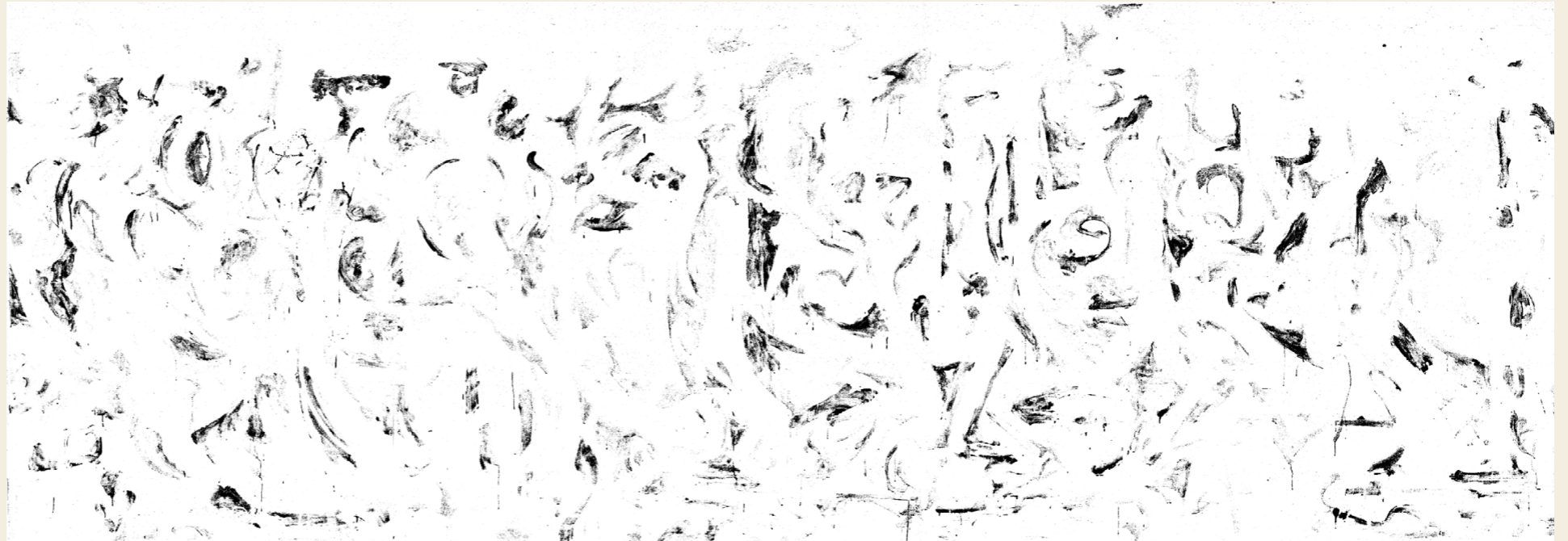


Macro-XRF scanning of *Mural* in progress. The measuring head containing the X-ray source and spectrometer, which is mounted on an X, Y translation state, scans across the selected test area in small increments, gathering X-ray fluorescence spectra with each incremental displacement. The spectral data is computer processed to generate images that represent maps of the distributions of elements within the scanned area, from which the presence of particular pigments can be inferred. Image courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

◀ HOME

Finding #1

Pollock used both traditional oil paint and house paint



Mural with hyperspectral image corresponding to a particular paint type: silicate-rich retail trade paint. The raw hyperspectral image has been subjected to inversion and filtering to render the occurrences of the paint type as dark fields against a light background. Analysis and image: John Delaney, Senior Imaging Specialist, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Scientific analysis of *Mural* has confirmed that it was made almost entirely in oil paints. Conservators identified more than 25 paints and paint mixtures.

One off-white paint used across the work has a distinctive pigment composition and appearance quite different from the other paint. Its binder was identified as casein (milk protein) rather than oil and it contains a cheap lithopone pigment (barium sulfate

and zinc sulfide) and silicate extenders. It would have been a water-based product, pointing to Pollock's early use of house paint.

The artist's isolated but significant choice of a less conventional paint anticipates his later well-known experimentation with such materials. Although experts do not know why Pollock began using this paint, its quick-drying nature, compared with oil paint, would likely have been an important factor.

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Finding #2

Pollock brushed, dabbed, and flung paint onto an upright canvas

Mural is a complex and intricate composite of brushstrokes, splatters, smears, and dabs. Pollock applied most paints by brush with the canvas upright.

Some of the paint splatters—the pink stringy color in particular—resemble Pollock’s later “drip,” or “action,” paintings, where the canvas was placed flat on the studio floor. In this case, conservators were able to reproduce the drip effects on a vertical test canvas, confirming that Pollock painted *Mural* with the canvas positioned vertically. The combination of quickly applied brushwork and spontaneously thrown paint is evident across much of the painting.



Detail of *Mural* showing skeins of delicate pink paint that foreshadow Pollock’s later drip technique. Image courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

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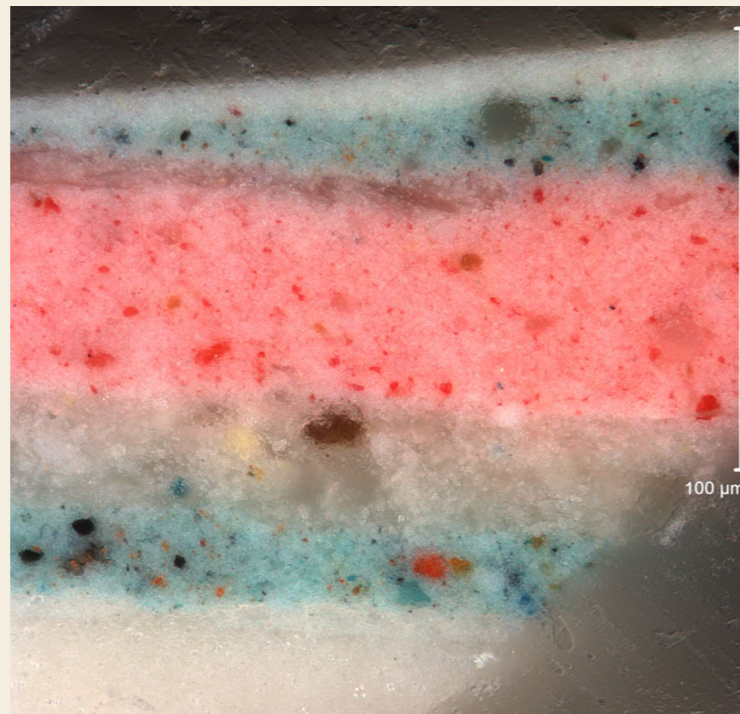
#1

#2

#3

Finding #3

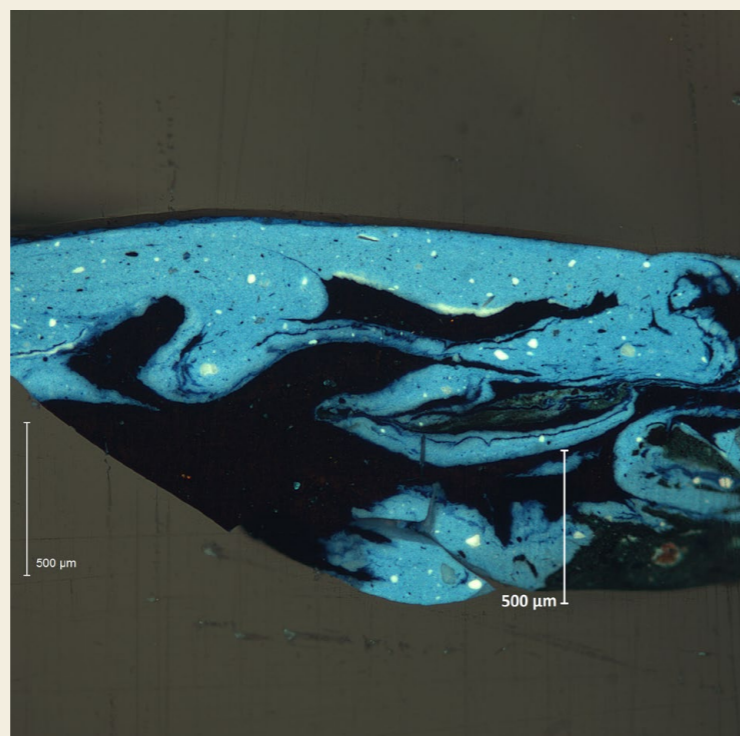
Pollock likely painted *Mural* relatively quickly



Artist Lee Krasner—Pollock’s wife and colleague—recalled that Pollock painted the work overnight. This story has often been repeated, including by Peggy Guggenheim in her autobiographies. However, Pollock himself, in a letter to his brother Frank in 1944, wrote that he painted *Mural* “during the summer” of 1943.

The physical evidence tends to support Pollock’s version of the story: oil paint is slow to dry, and much of the paint application on *Mural* can be described as wet-over-dry (wet paint is applied on top of paint that has already dried). Cross-sections of paint samples show clearly defined paint layers (see top image).

Other cross-sections confirmed that four colors—lemon yellow, dark teal, red, and dark brown—were likely the first paints applied across the canvas. Pollock thinned these colors with solvent and the paint colors intermingled as he painted (the bottom image shows intermixing between two layers). Perhaps it was this initial activity that resulted in the story of *Mural* being painted overnight.



Top: Sample taken and prepared as a cross section. Every paint layer is distinct, showing that the previous ones were dry.

Bottom: Sample taken and prepared as a cross section. An example of Pollock applying paint over still-wet paint. The two layers blend in a revealing swirl.

Images courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

◀ HOME

Preparing *Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No. 126*



Robert Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No. 126* was commissioned by the University of Iowa Museum of Art in 1972 by the Museum's director Ulfert Wilke. Wilke had seen the small sketch *Study for State II "Elegy No. 100"* in the artist's studio and wanted a larger version for his museum. Enlarging the drawing's design proved difficult due to the work's exceptionally large size and delicate material. The canvas's fragile threads and open weave would later present problems in installing the work. Stretching the painting could lead to canvas tears and cracks throughout the paint layers. Chicago conservator Louis Pomerantz was

asked to identify a solution to address the weak canvas.

The conservation of *Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No. 126* caught the attention of the local press in Iowa City, who detailed for the public the condition of the painting and the treatment needed.



Tap the image to read the full article.

Robert Motherwell, American (1915–1991). *Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No. 126*, 1965–75. Acrylic on canvas, 77 3/4 x 200 1/4 inches. Purchased with the aid of funds from The National Endowment for the Arts with matching funds and partial gift of Robert Motherwell. University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, IA. © Dedalus Foundation, Inc./ Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Rescue!

By NICK BALDWIN
Register Art Critic

IOWA CITY, IA. — The Robert Motherwell painting soon to go on display as part of the collection of the Museum of Art at the University of Iowa here is an action painting in more senses of the word than one.

In fact, one entire museum gallery has been turned into a laboratory to permit additional "action" on the work, "Elegy to the Spanish Republic No. 126," by a conservator of paintings and his assistants who are working to correct a major structural flaw.

The flaw centers on the fact that the painting, commissioned from Motherwell especially for the museum's sculpture court, was executed on a canvas so fragile that it cannot be stretched without being torn.

Louis Pomerantz, a nationally known conservator of paintings from Chicago, has been directing a rescue operation that was expected to take at least 10 days. After Pomerantz and his aides took over the Lasansky Paint Gallery for the project, their first action was to prepare a safe support for the delicate canvas. Unstretched, hanging from a roller, the loose fabric creating waves across the surface, the huge painting — 6½ feet high by 16½ feet long — dominated the room and illustrated Pomerantz' problem.

"To stretch it would have been suicide, and we had to figure out some other way," Pomerantz said. The "other way" he worked out involved constructing for the painting a support of wood (balsa and birch) with layers of muslin and linen to act as cushions between painting and support structure.

"When it is mounted, the painting will be without wrinkles and as flat as a board," Pomerantz predicted in an interview at the start of the rescue operation.

"Although it sounds simple, Pomerantz said the solution did not come to him overnight. Deciding on a remedy took a long time.

"I spent much more time thinking about and testing than I will have spent actually working on the painting," he said.

For example, he had to find a wood that could provide support for every square inch of the frail canvas. The wood had to be of such quality that it wouldn't buckle or warp or become brittle with time. Chemical factors that had to be considered included the adhesive and its compatibility with the Motherwell canvas and the paints the artist used.

Using pieces of excess canvas, Pomerantz experimented with adhesives and supports until he thought he had found an answer. But, he said, "when I tested the painting itself, I found that the white priming was soluble in everything but water and I had to start all over again."

He eventually wound up with a weak starch of great purity and stability that is produced by General Mills and used in bakeries. In the past, this starch also has been used to mount art works on paper, Pomerantz said.

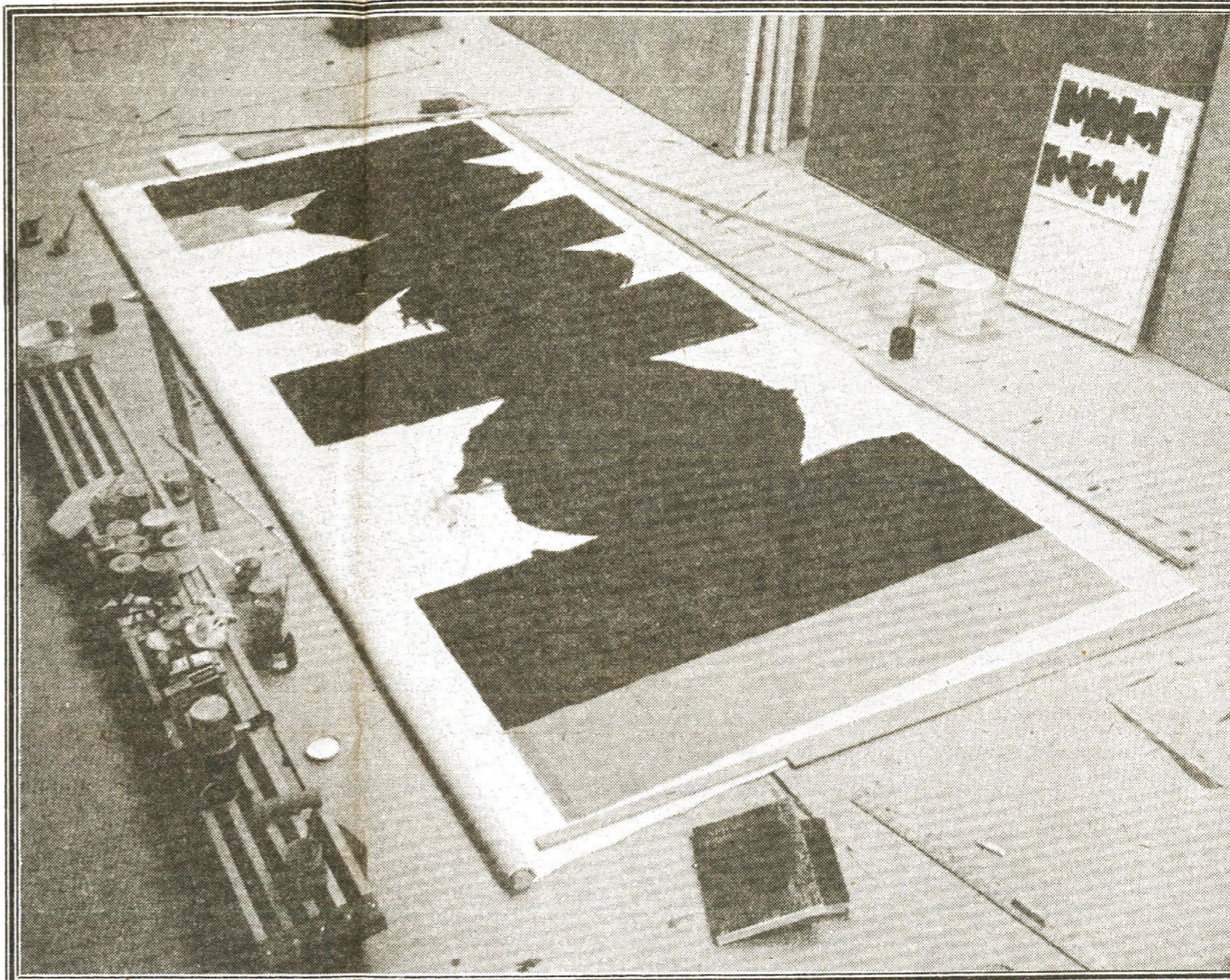
SIZE HAS been a problem from the beginning. Initially, an even larger painting was planned. Motherwell could not find a canvas in this country large enough for the work.

Ulfert Wilke, who was director of the Museum of Art when the painting was commissioned in 1971, said the originally contemplated work was to be 16 feet high and 20 feet wide. Wilke, now retired, recalls that no canvas measuring more than 10 feet high could be located in the United States and Motherwell eventually ordered one from Belgium.

Initially, the black forms of the Motherwell "Elegy" were to occupy the upper left portion of a large expanse of canvas that would otherwise have been white. The concept, Wilke said, was based on a drawing he saw in Motherwell's studio in Greenwich, Conn. The idea was to translate the small drawing into a large-scale work for the Iowa sculpture court. Plans called for Motherwell to paint on site in the museum, but he became ill and the plan was abandoned. When he did start to paint, it was in his studio. From the start, there were problems.

In a telephone interview, Motherwell said the work's "scale was so large that I had to paint on the floor and I couldn't back away far enough from it in the studio to judge it." Translating the sketchbook-size drawing into a 16-by-20-foot painting was not feasible. "If you are very sensitive to the different media, you can discover that the result can be very different in transferring from one to the other," he said. "Ultimately, the idea of hugeness was abandoned and the only possibility was to improvise."

The improvisation resulted in close cropping of the canvas so that the painted forms are contained within a white border of about three inches. Motherwell also decided to add a few



"Elegy to the Spanish Republic No. 126," as it looked on the floor of Robert Motherwell's studio.

areas of color — ocher and red — to enrich the composition and "to take away from the sharp edge of the black-and-white contrast."

While painting on the Belgian canvas, Motherwell did not anticipate the no-stretching problem. "I realized it was thin, but I did not realize what a problem it would actually become," he said.

THE "SPANISH ELEGIES," of which the painting in Iowa City is one of many variations, are an important chapter in Motherwell's work.

The black vertical rectangles within which black oval shapes are suspended have become so closely associated with the artist that they are sometimes considered to represent his largest achievement.

But the "Spanish Elegies," though they are important contributions in their general avoidance of color and in terms of their re-examination of a

single-theme, represent only a small percentage of Motherwell's work and only one aspect of his artistic output. Motherwell does not consider the Elegy works in the same classification as some of his collages or coloristically brilliant canvases like "Dublin 1916."

"In musical terms I would describe my Elegy paintings as string quartets and some of my paintings with strong colors and collages as my symphonies," he said.

Whatever the case, the Museum of Art's Motherwell painting will be an impossible-to-ignore visual statement when it takes its place on the wall in the sculpture court.

The combination of vertical rectangles and ovoid shapes, the juxtaposition of organic and sculptural forms and the predominant somber quality of the shapes are given additional strong emphasis by the areas and touches of color that were later added.

With all the improvisation and al-

teration that went into this mural painting, it would not have been surprising if the final product had emerged as a patchy, inconclusive affair.

Instead, the work stands up beautifully, giving the impression of having been planned in its present state from the start.

Assuming Pomerantz correct in predicting that the painting will flatten out perfectly when the rescue mounting is completed, "Elegy to the Spanish Republic No. 126" will hold its own quite well in the sculpture court, where a major Jackson Pollock work has long been on display.

There was no reason to doubt that conservator Pomerantz, whose fee is \$450 a day, would not succeed. He has served as consultant to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, to the National Gallery of Canada and to the Milwaukee Art Center. He has been devoting full time to independent practice since 1961 after serving

four years as conservator in the department of paintings and sculpture of the Art Institute of Chicago.

In Iowa City, he was retained earlier to clean and restore the Pollock painting and other works in the museum's permanent collection.

The Motherwell painting was purchased from the artist for about \$20,000. On today's art market, that figure couldn't begin to touch a Motherwell of similar size.

Funding came from a \$7,000 National Endowment for the Arts matching grant under a program for works of art in public places and from Friends of the Museum.

Museum Director Jan Muhlert says the "Elegy" will probably be ready for permanent display in September.

From his studio, Motherwell said he hopes someday to see the work in the sculpture court. "In looking at it again, I might even want to make more changes," he said.

MOTHERWELL

Conservator's Documents

Making Plans

Conservation Today

Conservator's Documents

A condition report is a form completed by an art museum registrar and/or conservator upon examination of a work of art. The document notes, in meticulous detail, the physical condition of the work.

LOUIS POMERANTZ, LTD.
Conservation of Paintings
1424 Elmer Place
Evanston, Illinois

PRELIMINARY REPORT OF CONDITION. Curator's priority rating: 1 2 3 4
Requested by: OWEN
Collection of: U. OF IOWA MUSEUM OF ART Curator's priority rating: 1 2 3 4

IDENTIFICATION No. _____
ARTIST, or SCHOOL (AS GIVEN): MOTHERWELL, ROBERT TYPE OF OBJECT: American fabric
TITLE: ELEGY #126, 1945-75 DATED: U. I. MOTHERWELL
SIZE (approx.): H 77 3/4" W 200" TH SIGNED: 65-75

(The following report was completed by the examiner in front of the object.)

I SUPPORT: Fabric, Cotton, Paper, Wood, Metal, Glass
CONDITION: lined, cradled, solid-mounted on rigid stretcher frame, fastened edges unsound, NOT STRETCHED, buckling, fragile, brittle, hole, tear, bulge, depression, keys are not secure, missing, lodged behind fabric

TREATMENT INDICATED: line, patch, reline, flatten locally, key-out or restretch, needs backing/strip mauling, apply moisture barrier, rejoin split

MEDIUM is characteristic of: oil, water color, tempera, pastel, collage, combination of, wax emulsion, ACRYLIC

II PAINT FILM: SOLUBLE IN ALL SOLVENTS EXCEPT WATER; THE PAINT IS REMOVABLE TO SOME EXTENT BY RUBBING WITH WATER VIGOROUSLY.
 is soft in a generally sound state, cleavage, cupping, flaking, powdering off, buckling, blister, scratch, abrasion, loss: s, tiny, in treated area at upper left in back, stain, covered with pale film, minor local treatment, major treatment, DUSTING

III SURFACE COATING: UNSAFE TO VARNISH WITH ANYTHING BUT SOLUBLE IN WATER.
 unvarnished, varnished, brittle, covered with grime, discolored, blooming, stain, scratch, finger marks, grime removal, bloom removal, varnish removal, varnishing, minor local treatment, DUSTING

IV FRAMING (status of): unframed, insecurely framed, glazed, nails used, fits too loosely, fits too tightly, rotted, cracked, loose ornament, weak rabbet edge, loose mitred joints, requires built-up back, install glass, isolate painting from glass, use mending plates & screws, modify rabbet edge, repair and retouch

EXAMINED IN: Lab., Gallery, Ship. rm., Store rm., While painting was framed, unframed

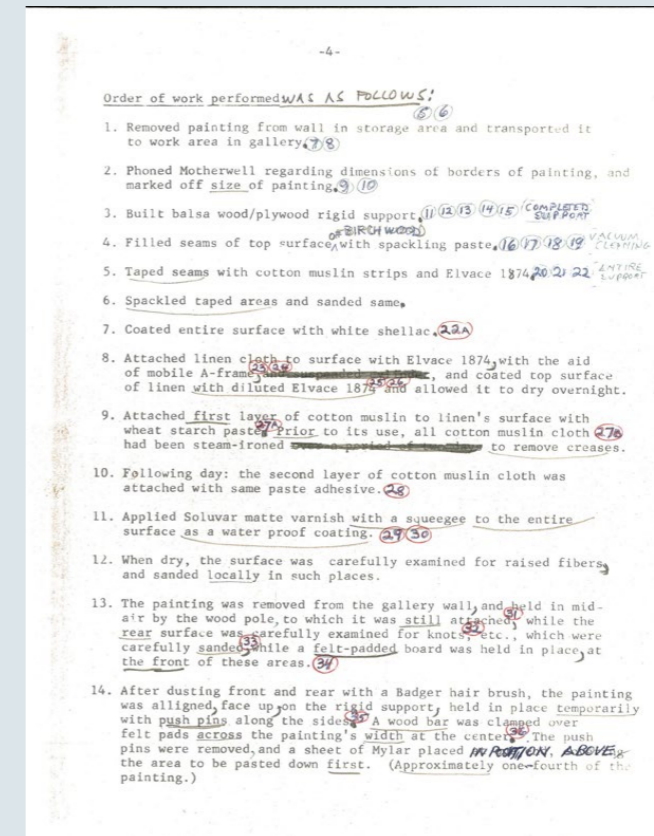
SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF EXAMINATION:
 No treatment necessary at this time
 Minor mechanical treatment required of I II III IV
 Minor local treatment required of I II III IV
 Minor general treatment required of I II III IV
 Major mechanical treatment required of I II III IV
 Major local treatment required of I II III IV
 Major general treatment required of I II III IV

RECOMMENDATIONS: unfit for loan as is, cannot be treated in time for loan

EXAMINED BY: Louis Pomerantz DATE: July 18, 1978

Tap the image to see Pomerantz's full initial condition report for *Elegy to the Spanish Republic*, No. 126.

As a part of a lecture, conservator Louis Pomerantz gave a detailed, 25-step list of the work he performed for the University of Iowa Museum of Art.



Tap the image to browse Pomerantz's original account of events for an inside look into his historical conservation treatment.

HOME

Pinch to zoom
in on document.

LOUIS POMERANTZ, LTD.
Conservation of Paintings

1424 Elinor Place
Evanston, Illinois

PRELIMINARY REPORT OF CONDITION.

Conservator's priority rating: 1 2 3 4

Requested by: OWNER
Collection of: U. OF IDWA MUSEUM OF ART

Curator's priority rating: 1 2 3 4

IDENTIFICATION No.
ARTIST, or SCHOOL (AS GIVEN): MOTHERWELL, ROBERT
TITLE: ELEGY #126, 1965-75
SIZE (approx.): H 77 5/8" W 200" TH

TYPE OF OBJECT: acrylic on fabric
DATED: U.R. MOTHERWELL
SIGNED: 65-75

(The following report was completed by the examiner in front of the object).

I SUPPORT:

Fabric, *COTTON? PREPRIMED*
 Wood, *WHITES, GRAZE-LIKE CHARACTER.*
 Paper
 Paper board
 Presdwood
 Metal
 Glass

CONDITION:

lined
 cradled, rigid
 solid-mounted on
 on rigid stretcher frame *mitred butted*
 fastened edges unsound
 NOT STRETCHED

Keys are not secure missing lodged behind fabric

is not protected with rigid backing.
 is not protected with strip molding.

TREATMENT INDICATED:

line reline key-out or restretch apply moisture barrier
 patch flatten locally needs backing/strip molding rejoin split

MEDIUM is characteristic of:

oil tempera collage wax encaustic
 water color pastel combination of emulsion
 ACRYLIC

II PAINT FILM: *SOLUBLE IN ALL SOLVENTS EXCEPT WATER; THE PAINT IS REMOVABLE TO SOME EXTENT BY RUBBING WITH WATER VIGOROUSLY.*

is not in a generally sound state
 cleavage
 cupping
 flaking
 powdering off
 buckling
 blister

scratch
 abrasion
 losses, *TINY, IN TREATED AREA AT UPPER LEFT IN BACK.*
 stain
 covered with pale film
 A SMALL AREA OF FORMER CLEAVAGE HAD BEEN TREATED IN THE PAST, AT U.L. & BACK.

TREATMENT INDICATED:

minor local treatment
 major treatment
 DO NOT VARNISH

III SURFACE COATING: *UNSAFE TO VARNISH WITH ANYTHING NOT SOLUBLE IN WATER.*

unvarnished
 varnished
 brittle
 covered with grime
 discolored

blooming
 stain
 scratch
 finger marks

TREATMENT INDICATED:

grime removal
 bloom removal
 varnish removal
 varnishing
 minor local treatment
 DUSTING

IV FRAMING (status of):

unframed
 insecurely framed
 glazed
 nails used
 fits too loosely
 fits too tightly

rotted
 cracked
 loose ornament
 weak rabbet edge
 loose mitred joins

TREATMENT INDICATED:

requires built-up back
 install glass
 isolate painting from glass
 use mending plates & screws
 modify rabbet edge
 repair and retouch

EXAMINED IN: Lab. Gallery Ship. rm. Store rm.
 While painting was framed unframed

SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF EXAMINATION:

No treatment necessary at this time
 Minor mechanical treatment required of I II III IV
 Minor local treatment required of I II III IV
 Minor general treatment required of I II III IV

Major mechanical treatment required of I II III IV
 Major local treatment required of I II III IV
 Major general treatment required of I II III IV

RECOMMENDATIONS:

unfit for loan as is cannot be treated in time for loan

EXAMINED BY: *Louis Pomerantz* DATE: *July 18, 1978*



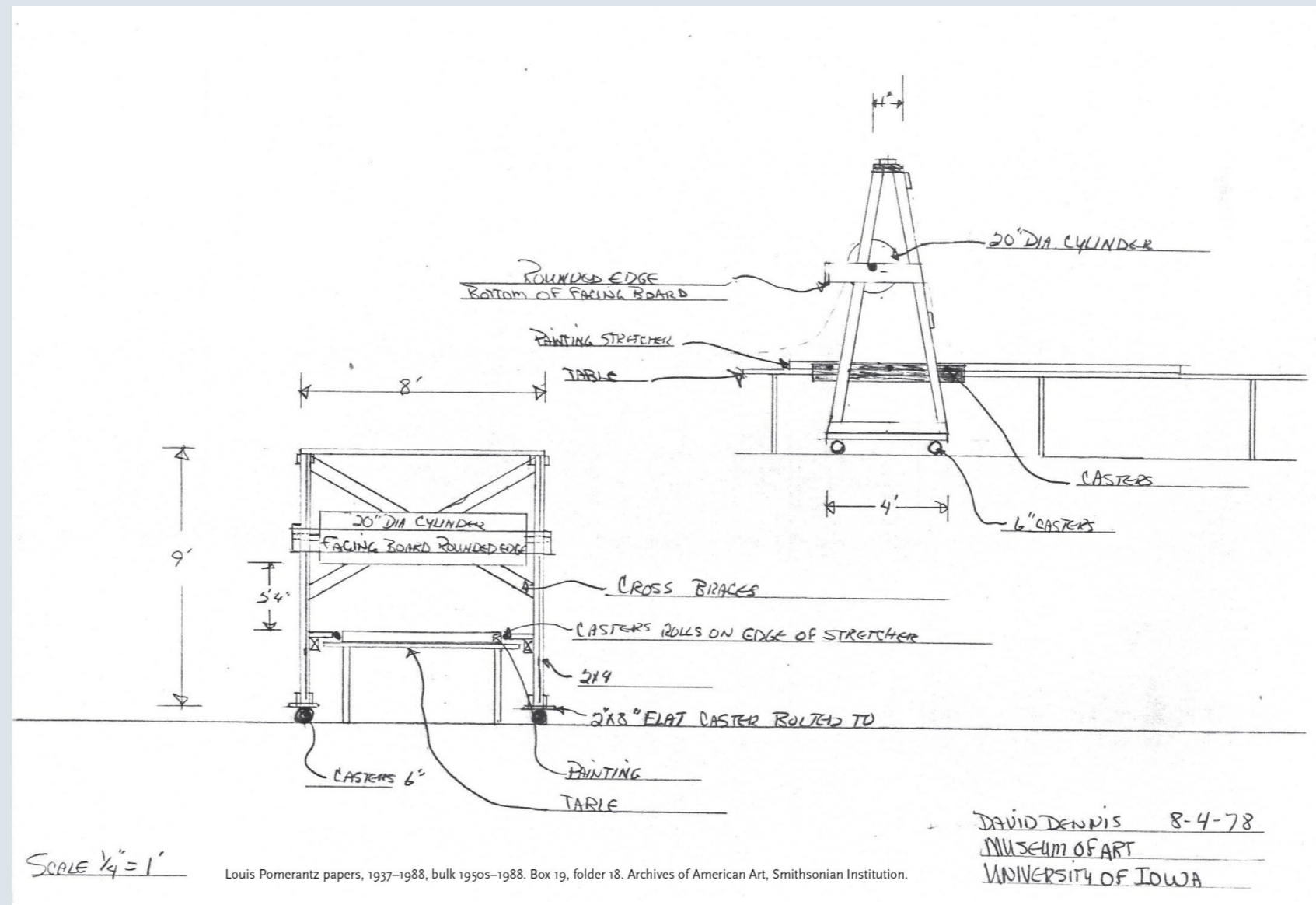
Order of work performed WAS AS FOLLOWS:

1. Removed painting from wall in storage area and transported it to work area in gallery. (5) (6) (7) (8)
2. Phoned Motherwell regarding dimensions of borders of painting, and marked off size of painting. (9) (10)
3. Built balsa wood/plywood rigid support. (11) (12) (13) (14) (15) (COMPLETED SUPPORT)
4. Filled seams of top surface ^{of BIRCH WOOD} with spackling paste. (16) (17) (18) (19) (VACUUM CLEANING)
5. Taped seams with cotton muslin strips and Elvace 1874. (20) (21) (22) (ENTIRE SUPPORT)
6. Spackled taped areas and sanded same.
7. Coated entire surface with white shellac. (22A)
8. Attached linen cloth to surface with Elvace 1874, with the aid of mobile A-frame, ~~and suspended roller~~, and coated top surface of linen with diluted Elvace 1874. (23) (24) (25) (26)
9. Attached first layer of cotton muslin to linen's surface with wheat starch paste. (27A) Prior to its use, all cotton muslin cloth (27B) had been steam-ironed ~~over a period of two days~~ to remove creases.
10. Following day: the second layer of cotton muslin cloth was attached with same paste adhesive. (28)
11. Applied Soluvar matte varnish with a squeegee to the entire surface as a water proof coating. (29) (30)
12. When dry, the surface was carefully examined for raised fibers, and sanded locally in such places.
13. The painting was removed from the gallery wall, and held in mid-air by the wood pole, to which it was still attached. (31) while the rear surface was carefully examined for knots, etc., which were carefully sanded. (32) while a felt-padded board was held in place, at the front of these areas. (33) (34)
14. After dusting front and rear with a Badger hair brush, the painting was aligned, face up, on the rigid support, held in place temporarily with push pins along the sides. (35) A wood bar was clamped over felt pads across the painting's width at the center. (36) The push pins were removed, and a sheet of Mylar placed IN POSITION, ABOVE the area to be pasted down first. (Approximately one-fourth of the painting.)

15. A cardboard tube, 6" in diameter was laid across the width of the painting, ³⁷ to prevent wrinkling of the canvas support while lifting it, in order to brush paste adhesive on the cotton muslin below. ³⁸
16. The canvas was lowered gradually as it was gently pressed down with a paper hanger's ³⁹ brush and a cloth pounce. ⁴⁰
17. The Mylar film was removed, and the surface examined. A few small areas, where the paste adhesive had surfaced, were carefully wiped with a damp sponge, and dried with surgical cotton. ⁴¹ The clamped wood bar, was now removed.
18. A strip of wood was attached to the opposite end of the painting to safely lift the end, and attach it to the cylinder with masking tape, once the wood strip was removed.
19. This allowed the painting to be raised safely from the rigid support, so that paste adhesive could be applied to the surface ⁴² adjoining the last adhered area. This was done in three stages, ~~covering the remaining three quarters of the rigid support.~~ ⁴³
- ^{IN} Each stage the Mylar film was placed over the painting above the surface to be adhered.
20. As this process progressed, the folded edges were pasted down, and held in place with nailed strips of wood. ⁴⁴
21. As the last section was reached, the taped end of the painting was freed from the cylinder, and held high, while the A-frame assembly was moved aside. The last section of painting was then adhered to the rigid support with the paste adhesive.
22. The painting was ^{THEN} examined for wet spots and surface irregularities. ⁴⁵
The painting was now solidly attached to its rigid support. ⁴⁶
23. The following day the wood strips were removed and the folded edges were stapled to the sides. ^{47 48 49}
24. The tiny areas of paint loss in the black form, and in a white area in the extreme corner of the painting, were inpainted with ⁵⁰ Winsor and Newton watercolors. ⁵¹ The black inpainting was coated ^{LOCKED} with Talens Rembrandt varnish to minimize its matte appearance.
25. Aluminum angle bars, ½" thick, approximately 2" x 2" ^{53 54} were fastened with screws along the four edges at the rear, ⁵⁵ to prevent the possibility of a bend, or warp, in the structure of the mounted painting, while handling it. It also provided a safe means of attaching the painting to the gallery wall.

Making Plans

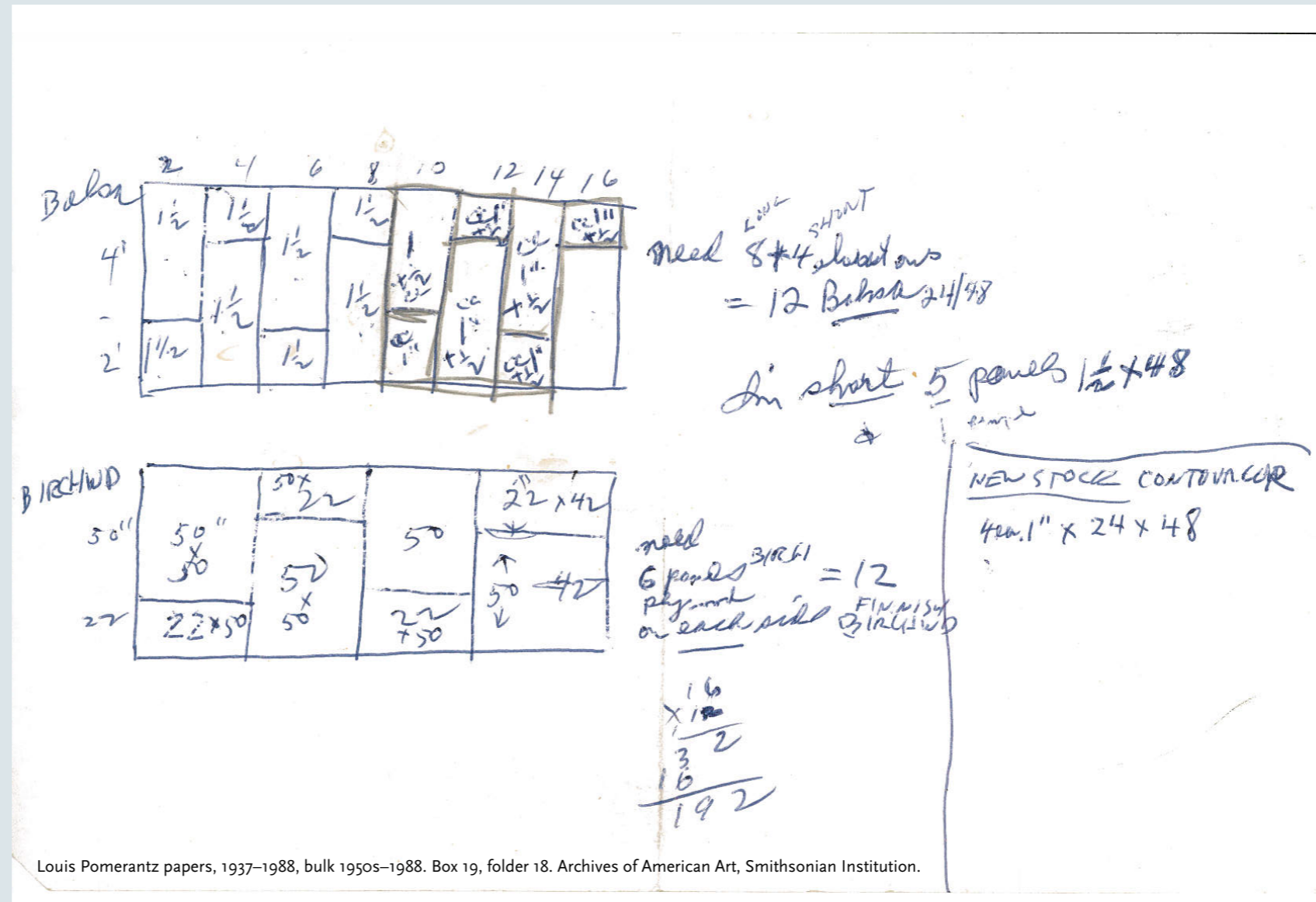
The University of Iowa Museum of Art and conservator Louis Pomerantz put many plans in place prior to the extensive undertaking of mounting the painting. Browse some original schematics, formulas, and procedures used on *Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No. 126*.



The museum's chief preparator David Dennis designed an extremely large table to work on the support structure in the museum. He also designed an A-frame on casters to support a 20-inch-diameter cylinder on which to roll and unroll the various fabric interleaves and the painting during treatment.

Making Plans

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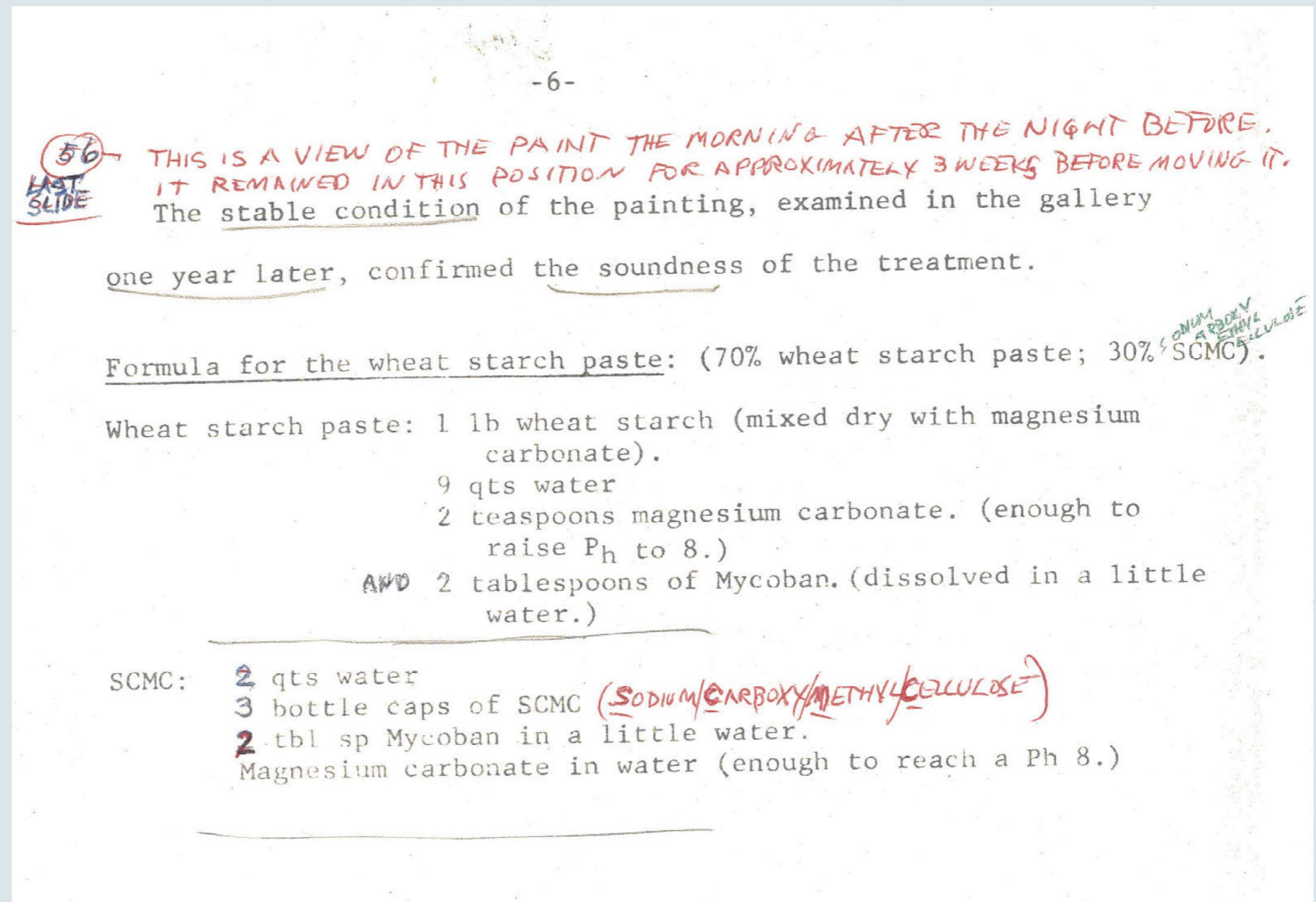


Louis Pomerantz papers, 1937–1988, bulk 1950s–1988. Box 19, folder 18. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Louis Pomerantz saved his hand-drawn proposal for the wooden support structure. It is composed of 16 smaller balsa wood rectangles and the exterior is made up of eight birch wood panels.

Making Plans

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Conservator Louis Pomerantz followed this recipe to mix up the wheat starch paste used to mount the painting to the wooden support.

MOTHERWELL

Conservator's Documents

Making Plans

Conservation Today

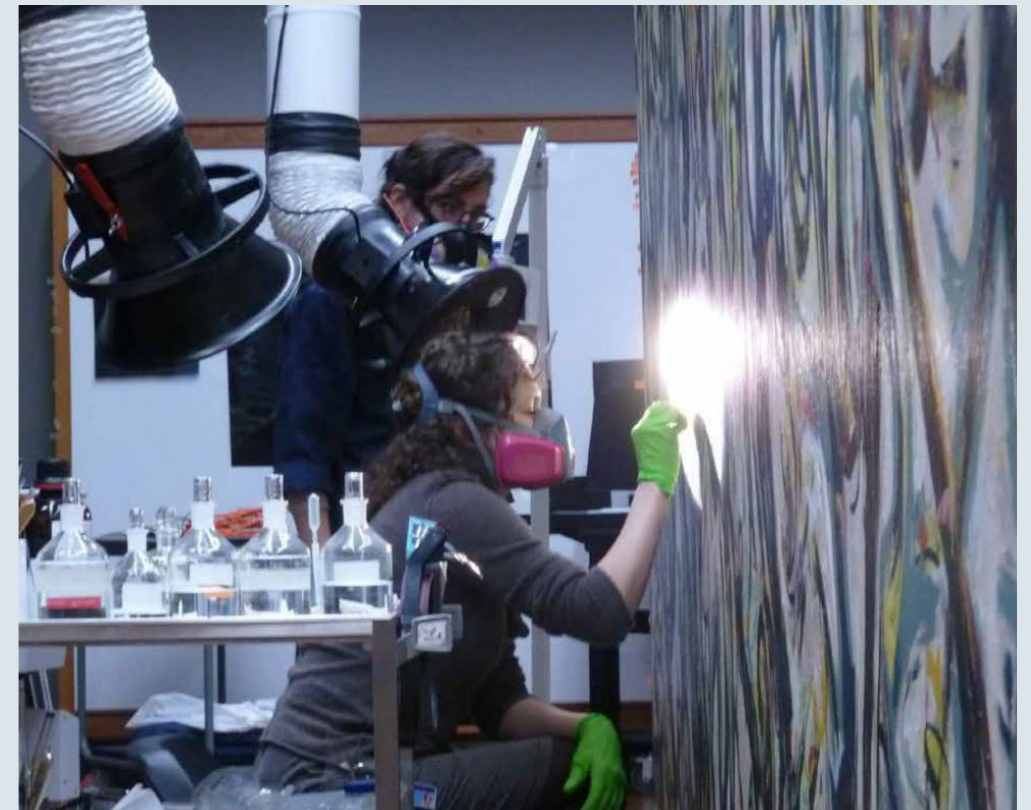
Conservation Today

Louis Pomerantz's conservation demonstrates practices and approaches that were common through the mid-century. Today, many conservators try to intervene as little as possible with the work of art. By using materials that are stable and reversible, they simultaneously attempt to minimize future deterioration and maintain



the original appearance of the artwork. This may mean removing dirt, discolored varnish, and overpaints that were not original to the painting.

Compare this historical conservation campaign with the recent one performed by the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles that began in 2012.



Getty Institute conservators cleaning *Mural* using state-of-the-art techniques and materials. Image courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

Left: Louis Pomerantz conserving Motherwell's painting in 1978. His approach was typical of conservation practices of the time. Photo: Leslie B. Hartigan, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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