

DIA No.:	2019.99	Date:	7 July 2023
Department:	American Art before 1950	Conservator(s):	Josephine Ren
Classification:	Paintings		
Artist/School:	Roberto Montenegro, Mexican, 1885-1968		
Title:	Untitled (Tehuana in Huipil Grande Headdresses)		
Object/Date/Place:	ca. 1940		
Dimensions:	36 1/8 × 30 inches (91.8 × 76.2 cm)		
Medium/Technique:	Oil on canvas		
Signature/Inscriptions/Labels:	“Montenegro” written in script in red paint at lower proper left corner, recto		
Mount/Frame Description:	See <i>Frame</i> section from Becca Goodman’s Report		
Dealer:	Christie’s Auction House		

Condition (*Additional notes to Becca Goodman’s report*)

Support:

The stretcher is original as there is only one set of tack holes along the margins, confirming that the painting has never been removed from its stretcher. The canvas is very slack and has vertical undulations throughout the center. Some fraying threads are along all canvas edges.

Ground and Paint Layers:

The ground was commercially applied, as it extends evenly to all edges of the canvas. Examination under ultraviolet light reveals a zinc white ground, as indicated by yellow-green fluorescence. FORS and XRF analyses confirmed the use of zinc white pigment for all white areas. There is a noticeable grime layer of yellow discoloration throughout the entire paint surface that is disfiguring to the artwork. This discoloration may be due to tobacco/smoke. There are broad areas of yellow-brown, matte, vertical drips/streaks in the lower right quadrant, and horizontal splatters of the same coloration in the lower left quadrant. An accretion of what appears to be dirt is in the shadow of the bottom hand, below the pinky and by the lower painting edge. Minimal retouching was done along the stretcher bar cracks (see UV imaging) and has discolored.

Coatings:

It is unclear whether the work is varnished. There is a slight, uneven sheen across the entire paint surface. If a varnish is present, it was likely done in a thin application of synthetic varnish.

Aqueous cleaning tests suggest that the sheen might be from the present grime layer, as test areas become matte when the grime is mostly removed.

Treatment Proposal

1. Perform written and photographic documentation.
2. Dry-clean back with a soft brush and HEPA-filtered vacuum.
3. Dust face with a soft brush.
4. Perform aqueous solubility testing.
5. Remove grime with an aqueous cleaning system.
6. Remove accretions with mechanical action and aqueous cleaning as necessary.
7. Address areas of prior retouching if necessary.
8. Humidify undulations either locally or overall as needed.
9. Apply a custom archival backing board with a padded insert.
10. Remove old hanging hardware and wire from frame. Replace with larger, vertically-oriented D-rings.
11. Add glazing to frame if possible.

Treatment

1. All photographic documentation was completed by Aaron Steele.
2. Dusted face of painting with a soft brush.
3. Vacuumed back with a brush and HEPA-filtered vacuum.
4. Conducted aqueous solubility testing to determine a cleaning system for grime removal.
5. Removed grime with the following system:
 - a. All areas in the white fabrics and background were cleaned with hand-rolled cotton swabs and 3.5% triammonium citrate plus 1% Marlipal in deionized water (7 g. TAC, 2 g. Marlipal, 200 g. water) followed by clearance with deionized water (see Figure 1).
 - b. The flesh tones (faces and hands), blacks in the hair and hands, and bouquets (all other colors) were cleaned with hand-rolled cotton swabs and 2% EDTA in deionized water followed by clearance with deionized water.
6. Removed drips and splatters (see Figure 2a-b):
 - a. Performed solvent solubility testing to determine whether solvents were necessary for their cleaning. Solvents were not necessary.
 - b. Reduced drips by locally brushing on 3.5% triammonium citrate plus 1% Marlipal in deionized water and agitating the areas with a small brush, then clearing with deionized water using hand-rolled cotton swabs. Some areas required more than one pass.

7. Removed brown accretions (one in flower and one by bottom edge) by softening them with deionized water and using mechanical action via dental tools. Performed under the microscope to ensure that the paint surface was not affected.
8. Performed solvent solubility testing to determine a cleaning method for overpaint removal.
9. Removed old overpaint (see Figure 2a-b). Locally brushed on ethanol and agitated with a small brush, then cleared paint residue by swabbing with ethanol or water depending on how much residue was left behind. Performed under the microscope to better understand reactions of the overpaint and ensure that the paint surface was not affected.

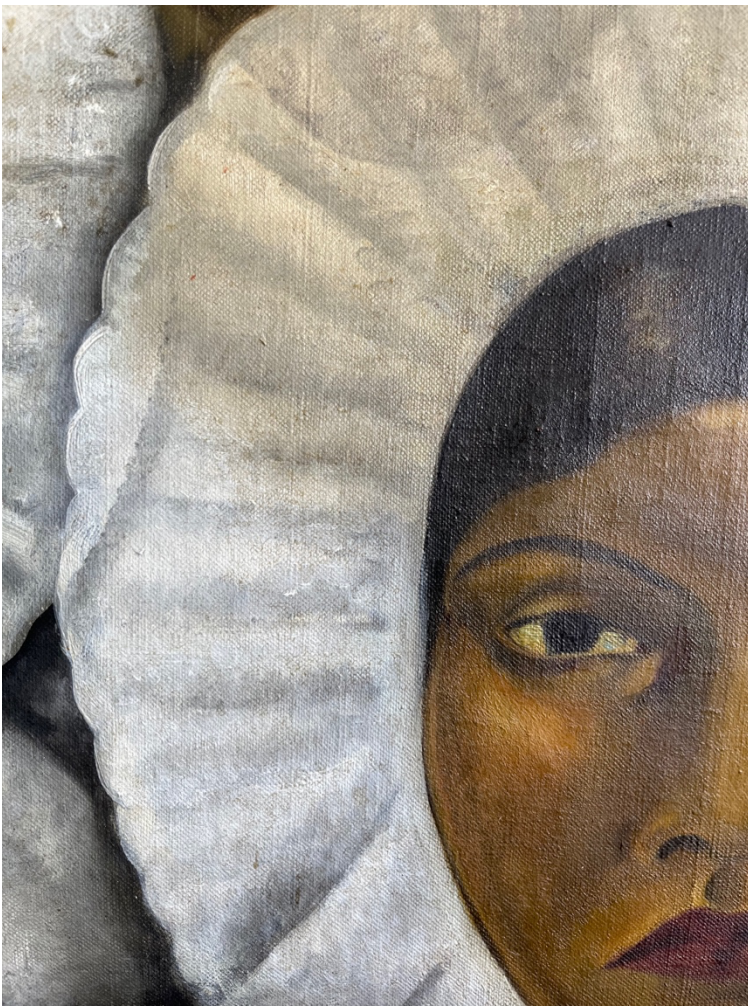


Fig. 1. Detail of partially cleaned section.



Fig. 1a. Detail of area before removal of drips and overpaint.



Fig. 1b. Detail of area after removal of drips and overpaint.

Treatment to be Performed:

1. Remove old overpaint. Locally brush on ethanol and agitate with a small brush, then clear residue with swabs and ethanol or water, depending on how much residue is left behind. Perform under the microscope. Avoid swabbing breaks in the paint layer with ethanol.
2. Continue reducing splatters in lower left quadrant using same method described in Step 6.
3. Consider removing some of the remaining grime in select areas to even out the surface appearance, if deemed necessary.
4. Humidify locally or overall to reduce undulations.
5. Inpaint losses, abrasions, and areas of remaining overpaint residue. Consider using Gamblin Conservation Colors to avoid water-based mediums and retain matte finish.
6. Apply a custom archival backing board with a padded insert.
7. Remove old hanging hardware and wire from frame. Replace with larger, vertically-oriented D-rings.
8. Add glazing to frame if possible.

Additional Treatment Notes (as of 7/7/2023):

- The browns and blacks in the faces and hands and all the colors in the flowers appear sensitive to water. Black details throughout the white and blue-gray fabrics and background appear fine under aqueous cleaning.
- There is still grime left behind – another pass in certain broader areas may be considered to amend this. The body of the lower middle figure appears more noticeably yellow/discolored at present.
- Paint layer in white fabric areas (where most of the prior retouching was done) appears to be fine under application of isopropanol and ethanol.
- Becca's original treatment proposal suggested keying out the stretcher. Not sure if this should be done or not, but something to consider when addressing the slackness of the painting. Humidification and a padded backing board may suffice to improve supporting the canvas.