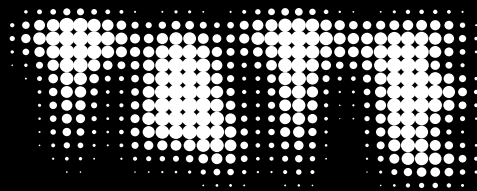


PHILIP GUSTON

5 OCTOBER – 25 FEBRUARY 2024

LARGE PRINT GUIDE



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# **PHILIP GUSTON**

Large Print Guide Sequencing

All rooms sequenced clockwise from the entrance of room

# CONCOURSE

## Concourse

### **PHILIP GUSTON**

5 OCTOBER 2023 – 25 FEBRUARY 2024

**Philip Guston** is presented in the Eyal Ofer Galleries.

Supported by

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The exhibition is co-organised by Tate Modern, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Tate Modern's exhibition is curated by Michael Wellen, Senior Curator, International Art, and Michael Raymond, Assistant Curator, International Art.

The touring exhibition has been curated by Harry Cooper, Senior Curator and Head, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, National Gallery of Art, Washington; Kate Nesin, Guest Curator, Megan Bernard, Director of Membership, Ethan Lasser, John Moors Cabot Chair, Art of the Americas, and Terence Washington, Guest Curator, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Alison de Lima Greene, Isabel Brown Wilson Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Michael Wellen, Senior Curator, International Art, Michael Raymond, Assistant Curator, International Art, and Mark Godfrey, former Senior Curator, International Art, Tate Modern.

This exhibition has been made possible by the provision of insurance through the Government Indemnity Scheme. Tate would like to thank HM Government for providing Government Indemnity and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England for arranging the indemnity.

Image: Philip Guston The Line (detail) Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
© The Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy Hauser & Wirth.

ROOM 1

## Room 1

### Legend

1977

Oil paint on canvas

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Museum purchase funded by the Alice Pratt Brown Museum Fund, 88.35 X76058

**Legend** is littered with items from the studio, including an empty bottle, cigarette butts and a wooden wedge used to stretch canvases. Guston's late paintings are often enigmatic and dreamlike, their compositions showing objects in precarious balance.

Humorously, this composition also makes visual parallels between a horse's rear end and Guston's sleeping head. The horse may be a reference to one of his favourite books, Isaac Babel's **Red Cavalry** (1926). Babel's book narrates events of the Polish-Soviet war (1918–21), including persecution of Jews in what is present-day Ukraine, the area Guston's parents had fled.



## **Painter**

1980

Lithograph on paper

Tate. Purchased 1983

P77009

Guston presents himself covered in plasters but still resiliently at work. This series of prints were some of the last works he produced and were made by Gemini G.E.L. studio in Los Angeles. The studio's co-founder Sidney Felsen commented, 'His imagery is languid and sleep-charged ... The time frame is non-linear, mixed, zigzagging elusively between the present and the past. Nor are we certain at any given moment as to whether Guston is awake or asleep or, implausibly, both.'

## **[Wall Text]**

**1**

### **RESTLESSNESS**

**Probably the only thing one can really learn, the only technique to learn, is the capacity to be able to change.**

Philip Guston

It's late at night. Philip Guston (1913–1980) is in the studio. He's not sleeping but he's painting images of people who are. **Legend** (on view in this room) shows the artist in bed, crowded by a nightmarish mix of objects. Punching fists, broken glass, a police baton, bricks, dirty cans, a startled horse. This scene captures the restlessness of an artist caught up in a world in turmoil.

This exhibition charts Guston's 50-year career, his varying approaches to painting as well as his artistic, philosophical and social concerns. Living through much of the 20th century, Guston watched on and responded to wars, racial injustice, violence and political and social upheavals. These works raise questions about injustice and accountability. Throughout his life, he thought about the artist's responsibility to bear witness to what he called 'the brutality of the world' and to challenge oneself creatively. Consistently changing and reinventing, he sought to make work that embodies life's complexities, its beauty, absurdity, humour and suffering.

ROOM 2

## Room 2

[Wall Text]

2

### STRUGGLE AND SOLIDARITY

**I grew up politically in the thirties and I was actively involved in militant movements and so on, as a lot of artists were ... I think there was a sense of being part of a change, or possible change.**

Philip Guston's birth name was Phillip Goldstein. Born in 1913, he was the youngest child of Jewish immigrants who had fled antisemitic persecution in present-day Ukraine. The family moved first to Montreal – Guston's birthplace – before relocating to Los Angeles in 1922. They had little money and faced several tragedies. His father, who worked as a scrap collector, took his own life when Guston was still a child. His brother died a few years later after a car accident. He turned to art as a way of dealing with the impact of these traumas in his formative years.

Young Guston took an interest in drawing and cartooning, spending hours at the library pouring over Italian

Renaissance art books. His teenage friends, including artists Jackson Pollock and Reuben Kadish, shared his interest in modern art from Europe, particularly surrealism and the work of Pablo Picasso. His early paintings, such as **Mother and Child** (on display in this room), show him responding to this wide range of interests.

Guston began to engage with politics while he was still a teenager in LA. The 1930s was a time of growing anti-immigrant, antisemitic and racist beliefs in the United States, contributing to the rise of hate groups. Most notably, the Ku Klux Klan saw a resurgence in the 1920s and 1930s.

Guston and his friends were involved with socially-engaged art, creating large-scale, narrative-driven murals and paintings. They joined the Bloc of Painters formed under Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros. Through their art this group aimed to support workers' rights and protest against racial injustice in the US.

**[Shelf]**

## **AGAINST THE KU KLUX KLAN**

When Guston was growing up in LA, support and

membership for the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) reached its peak with an estimated 2–5 million members across the US. One of the oldest and most visible far-right hate groups in the US, the KKK promote white supremacy and violence. They intimidated, beat and murdered people, particularly Black Americans in the South. Across the US, they also targeted anyone with racial, religious or political differences to them, including Catholics, Jews, immigrants, communists and leftists.

In LA during the mid-1920s, the KKK was a publicly visible group. They had chapter houses, led rallies and conducted cross burnings. Their members held powerful positions, including the chief of police and the city council president.

### **Drawing for Conspirators c.1930**

Whitney Museum of American Art, Purchase, with funds from the Hearst Corporation and the Norman and Rosita Winston Foundation, Inc. Courtesy of The Guston Foundation, © The Estate of Philip Guston

Left: Klansmen advertise a lecture in Southern California in 1924 Courtesy of Anaheim Public Library

## **DRAWING FOR CONSPIRATORS**

Guston depicted racial injustice in his art from early

on. Around age 17, he made **Drawing for Conspirators** (reproduced on the left) which depicts the KKK lynching a Black man. Guston focuses on the perpetrators of racist violence, placing a Klansman in the foreground. The conspiracy plays out in the background, where the murdered man appears next to Jesus. Within the imagery and literature for anti-lynching campaigns of the time, artists and writers often drew parallels between Black victims and the crucifixion of Jesus.

Reflecting on the period in the 1970s, Guston wrote, 'The KKK has haunted me since I was a boy in L.A. In those years, they were there mostly to break strikes, and I drew and painted pictures of conspiracies and floggings, cruelty and evil. Also I made a connection with my attraction to medieval and Renaissance paintings, the flagellation pictures of Piero [della Francesca], Giotto, and Duccio. Violence in formal painting.'

Clockwise from top left

4,000 march on Washington on 8 May 1933 to free the  
Scottsboro Nine

Bettmann / Bettmann via Getty

Eight of the Scottsboro Nine, 1936

From left to right: Ozie Powell, Olen Montgomery, Willie  
Roberson, National Association for the Advancement of

Coloured People (NAACP) representative Juanita Jackson Mitchell, Charley Weems, Clarence Norris, Haywood Patterson, Andy Wright, NAACP representative Laura Kellum, Eugene Williams and NAACP representative Ernest W. Taggart (defendant Leroy Wright is not pictured)

Photograph by Britton & Patterson, courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; acquired through the generosity of Elizabeth Ann Hylton

Ada Wright, mother of Andy Wright and Roy Wright, campaigning in Glasgow

Photograph by Duncan Brown. First published in **The Bulletin**, 5 July 1932, courtesy of Irene Brown

## **JUSTICE FOR THE SCOTTSBORO NINE**

In 1931, nine Black young people were falsely accused of raping two white women. During the following trial, an all-white jury in Scottsboro, Alabama, sentenced all but one – who at age 13 was deemed too young – to the death penalty. The trials became a landmark case, representing the extent of racial injustice in the US. It sparked outrage and the Communist Party USA sought to defend the Scottsboro Nine. They organised for Ada Wright, the mother of two of the defendants, Andy and Roy Wright, to travel to Europe to raise international support for the case. Eventually all were either acquitted, pardoned or had death sentences commuted.



At the time, Guston was associated with a group known as the Bloc of Painters, who supported artist David Alfaro Siquieros to paint murals in LA. Several of the group, including Guston, created portable murals highlighting and condemning racial injustice and violence, including the Scottsboro Nine case. The murals were intended to be exhibited in February 1933 in Hollywood at the John Reed Club, a network of social clubs supported by the Communist Party USA.

**Los Angeles Illustrated Daily News**, 13 February 1933,  
showing damage to  
Murray Hantman and Philip Guston's portable frescoes  
Courtesy of The Guston Foundation

### **THE RAID ON THE JOHN REED CLUB**

On 11 February 1933, days before Guston and the Bloc of Painters planned to open their exhibition, the John Reed Club was raided by the police and the murals destroyed. The news article on the left shows two damaged panels, one by Murray Hantman depicting the Scottsboro Nine and Ada Wright, another by Guston portraying Klan violence.

It was previously understood as a targeted attack against Guston and his fellow artists. But new research shows that the raid was primarily carried out to disband Japan Night, an

evening of performances, music and dancing to raise money for the communist Japanese-language newspaper **Rodo Shimbun**. The event was stormed by the Red Squad, a violent arm of the LA police tasked with targeting and disrupting leftist and communist activity. They broke up Japan Night, attacking attendees and damaging the clubhouse and its property. The murals by Guston, Luis Arenal, Murray Hantman, Reuben Kadish and Harold Lehman were violently attacked. Trials, hearings and attempted indictments followed but no justice was won for the event organisers, the John Reed Club or the Bloc of Painters.

Statement by the Bloc of Painters, 1933

Murray Hantman papers, c.1940–2006. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

## **Mother and Child**

c. 1930

Oil paint on canvas

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

X75303

Guston made this painting when he was 17 years old and it featured in his first exhibition at a bookshop in Hollywood, Los Angeles in 1933. It incorporates many different artistic influences. The subject references depictions of Mary and Jesus by Renaissance painters. The monumental mother figure alludes to Pablo Picasso's paintings while the surroundings recall Giorgio de Chirico's ghostly cityscapes. He would go on to be inspired by these artists throughout his life. Guston noted his admiration for them in the 1970s, saying 'Marvellous artists are made of elements which cannot be identified. The alchemy is complete. Their work is strange, and will never become familiar.'

## **Female Nude with Easel**

1935

Oil paint on canvas

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

X75305

## **Nude Philosopher in Space-Time**

1935

Oil paint on canvas

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

X75307

Guston had the opportunity to study contemporary art from Europe through visits to Louise and Walter Arensberg's private collection in LA. Here he became fascinated by the work of artist Giorgio de Chirico. He also had several mentors, including the surrealist painter Lorser Feitelson whose influence can be seen in the dreamlike collection of images in these paintings. In each composition, a nude is partnered with an array of objects suggesting the form of a person.

ROOM 3

## Room 3

### Gladiators

1940

Oil paint and graphite on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Edward R.

Broida 2005, 701.2005

X75308

## **Martial Memory**

1941

Oil paint on canvas

Saint Louis Art Museum, Eliza McMillan Trust, 115:1942

X75310

Having worked for years with fresco painting, Guston turned to oil paints in the 1940s. In this work, Guston was interested in experimenting with space, saying, 'I was very involved with forms overlapping each other in a very dense manner'. He depicts a kettle, bin lids and other objects he would paint again later in his life. Guston considered **Martial Memory** to be his first mature work on canvas and it was also the first to be purchased by a museum.

His focus on depicting scenes of children fighting began in his Queensbridge Housing Project mural of 1940, shown in a photo in this room. He developed a section of the mural into the painting **Gladiators**, on display nearby.



## The Porch II

1947

Oil paint on canvas

Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Museum of Art,  
Utica, New York, Museum purchase, 48.26

X75361

At the end of the Second World War, Guston was troubled by images and footage of the recently liberated concentration camps in Europe that had started to surface. **Porch II** was made in response. 'Much of our talk was about the holocaust and how to allegorize it', he said. Here, he depicts tormented musicians under a black sky from which a taut rope ominously stretches down. 'I think I consciously thought of these children not as children but as lost agonised beings. Using the porch idea as a kind of confine, as if these figures were all compressed.'

## **The Tormentors**

1947–8

Oil paint on canvas

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, gift of the artist, 82.34  
X75362

This painting marked a major transition in Guston's style. Keenly aware that his allegorical works of the 1940s were out of step with the new abstraction promoted by Pollock and other painters, he began to adopt a new approach. Reluctant to fully abandon the social and political content of his earlier work, here he depicts abstracted shapes and figures including pointed hoods. He said, 'I know that I was on this picture for months and months and months ... and it felt like a breakthrough to me.'

## **Review**

1948–9

Oil paint on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, gift of Musa Guston,  
1992.86.2  
X75363

## PUBLIC PAINTING

Between 1934 and 1943, Guston worked on over 15 murals and public art projects, completing at least ten. Many were funded directly by the US government as part of New Deal initiatives to employ artists to create public murals and artworks to decorate government buildings. These projects were an important source of income for Guston and were key to developing his skills as a young painter. 'Most significantly', Guston said of these projects, they were 'my training ground in the real sense of the word... all of the best painters of my generation developed on the projects such as [Jackson] Pollock, [Willem] de Kooning, [James] Brooks, [Raoul] Hague, [Balcomb] Greene, and [William] Baziotes.'

Top: Philip Guston and Reuben Kadish with their Works Progress Administration mural **Physical Growth of Man** c. 1936, fresco, City of Hope TB Sanitarium Duarte, California  
Photographs of Reuben Kadish, Philip Guston, and others, 1934–1965. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

Bottom: **Early Mail Service and the Construction of Railroads** 1938, tempera on gesso, Commerce Georgia Post Office  
Courtesy of The Guston Foundation

**Work the American Way (Maintaining America's Skills)**

1939, chlorinated rubber paint on cement, Works Progress

Administration building New York World's Fair  
Courtesy of The Guston Foundation

Top: Guston explains his mural **Work and Play** for the  
Queensbridge Housing Project to local children, 1939,  
tempera on gesso, New York  
Courtesy of The Guston Foundation

Bottom: Guston working on the **Pulpwood Logging**  
mural for the United States Forestry Building in Laconia,  
New Hampshire, 1941, oil paint on canvas  
Courtesy of The Guston Foundation

**Untitled (Mural on Navigation, for Naval Preflight Training)**  
1943, Iowa City  
Courtesy of The Guston Foundation

**[Intermediate Wall Text]**

## **THE STRUGGLE AGAINST TERRORISM**

In 1934, Guston, Kadish and Langsner went to Mexico, where a revolutionary mural movement had been flourishing for more than a decade. Initiated after the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) and at first funded by the government, these murals retold stories of Mexican history on public walls and

buildings. David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera, two of the most prominent artists associated with the movement, steered the trio to their first major commission: a gigantic wall in a historic building then run as a museum by the Universidad de San Nicolás in Morelia.

They produced a monumental and startling work, best known as **The Struggle Against Terrorism**. Its complex imagery presents a history of persecution with the image of a tortured woman at its centre. The mural also draws visual links between the hooded priests of the Spanish Inquisition and the Ku Klux Klan. At its completion in 1935, **Time** magazine wrote that the left half of the wall depicts nude workers knocking down 'a colossal figure supposed to represent the Medieval Inquisition ... The other half of the wall is given over to the Modern Inquisition ... In the extreme upper right, Communists with sickle [and] hammer are rushing to the rescue.' Left of the main wall on the upper floor, is a scene of lamentation. The artists signed their names beneath a surrealist-inspired scene of abduction on the ground floor. The mural's criticism of the Roman Catholic Church and its depiction of nudity may have contributed to it being hidden from view in the early 1940s. Covered by a false wall until 1973, today it is preserved and maintained by the Museo Regional Michoacano, which is working with The Guston Foundation to conserve it.

Production by Fully Fledged Films, Director and Editor - Tessa Morgan, Director of Photography - Ángel Jara Taboada, Line Producer (Mexico) - Maja Moguel, Production Driver - Alejandro Maltrana López

Running time 4 min 26 sec

Special thanks to Museo Regional Michoacano, Dr Nicolás León Calderón, CULTURA / INAH and the Embassy of Mexico in the United Kingdom

## **Bombardment**

1937

Oil paint on fibreboard

Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of Musa and Tom Mayer

2011, 2011-2-1

X75306

In April 1937, during the Spanish Civil War (1936–9), Nazi and Italian Fascist forces – allies of the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco – bombed the Basque town of Guernica. The bombing killed hundreds of civilians and shocked the world.

Many artists responded to this event, notably Picasso with his mural-scaled painting **Guernica**. Guston made this work for an exhibition organised by the American League Against War and Fascism in New York. Because of its circular format,

one critic referred to Guston's work as an 'exploding tondo' (a popular format during the Renaissance deriving from the Italian word for round). The vortex composition reflects the kind of experimentation Guston and muralists like David Alfaro Siqueiros were carrying out to give dynamism to painting.

## **Musa McKim**

1942

Oil paint on canvas

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

X75311

## **Self Portrait**

1944

Oil paint on canvas

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

X75312

## **Sunday Interior**

1941

Oil paint on canvas

Private collection

X75309

These works from the 1940s show Guston exploring portraiture: **Self Portrait**, a portrait of his wife **Musa McKim**, and **Sunday Interior**, which depicts an unknown sitter. He made them when he was a lecturer and artist in residence at the State University of Iowa, Iowa City.



## **If This Be Not I**

1945

Oil paint on canvas

Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in Saint Louis, University purchase, Kende Sale Fund 1945, WU

3766

X75313

Guston worked on **If This be Not I** for about a year, saying that in this work, 'I tried to summarise everything I knew about painting'. While Guston created most of the figures from his imagination, he based the central crowned figure on his two-year-old daughter, Musa. The title emerged from a poem introduced to him by his wife, Musa McKim. Painted at the end of the Second World War, the image has an unsettling quality. Debris surrounds the masked children, while one figure lying down in a striped shirt gazes out with a haunted expression.

[Wall Text]

3

## FROM THE WALL TO THE EASEL

I would like to think a picture is finished when it feels not new but old. As if its forms had lived a long time in you ... It is the looker not the maker, who is so hungry for the new. The new can take care of itself.

Guston began working as a muralist during the Great Depression of the 1930s. He was inspired by Italian Renaissance fresco paintings of the 1500s, seeking to channel their monumentality and iconography. In 1934, he and friends Reuben Kadish and Jules Langsner secured their first major mural commission, creating a massive fresco in Morelia, Mexico. Called **The Struggle Against Terrorism**, it shows people's resistance to persecution and violence from the medieval period through to the Ku Klux Klan in the US and the rise of Nazism across Europe.

After this, Guston produced one final mural in LA before relocating to New York in 1936. There he was joined by artist Musa McKim, who he married the following year. His work continued as a muralist through government-funded programmes. It was also when he changed his name to Philip Guston to mask his Jewish identity, as many others were doing at a time of growing antisemitism.

In the 1940s, Guston's work transformed after he began teaching at universities in Iowa City and Saint Louis. Working from a studio, he turned away from public art and muralism, focusing instead on easel painting and portraiture. He painted allegorical scenes, often of children playing and fighting. Affected by the trauma of the Second World War and the Holocaust, he turned to increasingly abstract compositions. As the figures broke apart, so did Guston's practice, 'everything seemed unsuccessful', Guston said. 'I couldn't continue figuration.'

[Vitirne]

**Fortune Magazine, October 1943**

Private collection

Z75193

**Fortune Magazine, February 1944**

Private collection

Z75194

Guston completed illustrations for several editions of **Fortune** magazine, showing preparations for war and soldiers conducting training exercises. He avoids glamourising the conflict, depicting realistic and sometimes vulnerable scenes. Guston also completed his final mural in 1943, a celestial navigational guide for the US Navy Pilot Training Programme, shown in a photo in this room. The navy had set up a base on the State University of Iowa campus where Guston was teaching

ROOM 4

## Room 4

### Beggar's Joys

1954–5

Oil paint on canvas

Private collection

X78700

By the mid 1950s, Guston's reputation as an abstract painter was growing. He joined Sidney Janis Gallery in 1955, which also represented abstract artists de Kooning, Pollock and Rothko. Patches of red, orange, pink and black often come together in the centre of Guston's paintings from this time. Reflecting on his love of red, Guston said, 'It took me a few years to get the feeling of red, and particularly cad red medium, which I happen to love. I like pastrami. I just like it. I couldn't tell you why. I like cad red medium. It has a certain resonance to it.'

## Dial

1956

Oil paint on canvas

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, purchase,

56.44

X75381

Taking inspiration from Guston's artistic exchanges with musicians and poets in New York, we have invited London-based creatives to respond to Guston's work. DJ, producer and curator Anja Ngozi explores sound's potential to create alternative ways to engage with Guston's paintings. Here she responds to **Dial**. Ngozi was partly inspired by musician Morton Feldman's piece For Philip Guston.

Scan the QR code to hear Ngozi's response on your phone. Or listen to Stop 43 on the audio guide.



## **Untitled**

1954

Ink on paper

Tate. Purchased 1991

T06480

## **White Painting I**

1951

Oil paint on canvas

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, T. B. Walker

Foundation Fund purchase, 71.43

X75373

This painting marked a significant breakthrough for Guston, not only in terms of its abstract style but also his method of painting. Working more spontaneously, Guston created it in a couple of hours during a single session. 'I forced myself to paint the entire work without stepping back to look at it', he later said. 'I was most anxious to break all my habits of construction ... It was a very significant discovery for me ... to discover that no matter what I did there would be structure.'



## **Drawing No. 2 (Ischia)**

1949

Ink on paper

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

X84894

Reflecting on this work in 1974, Guston said, 'This drawing actually was done on the beach of a little island in the Bay of Naples called Ischia. It's a drawing of the town, just looking at the complex of the town. Little white buildings and black windows, done with just a reed I found on the beach, with my bottle of ink. It's strange how something done offhand like this can lead to painting, you know, like a seed. This led me into a whole period of painting, all through the early fifties.'

**[Wall Text]**

**4**

**NEW BEGINNINGS**

**I began to feel that I could really learn, investigate, by losing a lot of what I knew.**

In the late 1940s, Guston's practice began shifting dramatically. He travelled to Europe for the first time in 1948 after he was awarded a fellowship at the American Academy in Rome. Confronting a creative crisis, he grew increasingly unsatisfied with figurative painting. He recalled, 'The forms I wanted to make couldn't take the shapes of things and figures ... I felt torn ... between conflicting loyalties ... The loyalty to my own past, and the other loyalty of what you might still do.' He did little painting and destroyed nearly all the works he made in Rome. A few small sketches survived the trip, including **Drawing No. 2 (Ischia)** on view nearby, documenting his continued journey towards abstraction.

After travelling across Europe and seeing art, Guston felt inspired to paint again. On returning to New York, Guston immersed himself in the growing scene of abstract painters. He became good friends with artists Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline, the critic Harold Rosenberg as well as composers John Cage and Morton Feldman. In his paintings from this period, he tested himself by working intuitively in long bouts without stepping back from the canvas to analyse the composition. In 1957, he explained, 'When I work, I am not concerned with making pictures, but only with the process of creation ... I feel that I have not invented so much as revealed, in a coded way, something that already existed.'

ROOM 5

## **Room 5**

### **Fable**

1956–7

Oil paint on canvas

Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in Saint Louis, University purchase, Bixby Fund 1957, WU 3782 X75382

### **Passage**

1957–8

Oil paint on canvas

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, bequest of Caroline Wiess Law, 2004.20  
X75422

Taking inspiration from Guston's artistic exchanges with musicians and poets in New York, we have invited London-based creatives to respond to Guston's work. Poet Andra Simons explores how poetry can open up different readings of Guston's paintings. He has written 'Channel' in response to **Passage**.

Scan the QR code to read Simon's response on your phone. Or listen to Stop 52 on the audio guide.



Philip Guston, exhibition installation view, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1962  
Courtesy of the Guston Foundation

## The Return

1956–8

Oil paint on canvas

Tate. Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1959

T00252

Guston sometimes titled works himself and sometimes they came from conversations with friends and with McKim. He commented that the title **The Return** relates to the work's abstracted forms. He described them as being like figures who had been away for some time and were now returning, jostling each other as they came. Speaking later about this period, he said, 'I was very definitely, at this point, becoming interested in solid forms ... But the forms, at this time, were more of an ambiguous nature.'

Morton Feldman 1926–1987

## **New Directions In Music 2**

1959



To listen to this album on Spotify, scan this code in the app's search page using the camera icon at the top right

Private collection

Z88812

The cover of this Morton Feldman album is a reproduction of Guston's **Drawing** 1959, a work he renamed **Head–Double View**. Close friends throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the two shared and exchanged artistic ideas and beliefs. This album is an example of what poet and curator Frank O'Hara described as, 'the inter-involvement of the individual arts with one another' in New York at this time. As Guston experimented with form and space, Feldman did so with music, ignoring traditional melodies and rhythms in favour of improvisations, silence and notes carefully arranged to disguise patterns.

**[Wall Text]**

**5**

## **CONJURING BLUE**

**Blue is a strange colour to use for me in any case – because it always evaporates ... But to bring it frontal, to make it feel on the plane, to me, is something to conjure with.**

Over the course of the 1950s, Guston's reputation grew as an abstract painter known for his shimmering use of colour and expressive brushstrokes. He spoke about the challenges of creation, as well as the difficulty of deciding when a painting is finished. 'The canvas is a court where the artist is prosecutor, defendant, jury, and judge ... You cannot settle out of court. You are faced with what seems like an impossibility – fixing an image which you can tolerate.' Searching for 'a more solid painting', his works of the late 1950s contain larger blocks of colour that spread across the canvas.

New York in the 1950s and 1960s came alive with creativity. Musicians, visual artists, dancers and poets came together in a series of exchanges. Guston found the intellectual stimulation of these dialogues very productive, in particular with composer Morton Feldman. Both had a lasting impact on the other's creative practice.



Gaining increasing success, Guston was selected in 1960 to help represent the US at the Venice Biennale art exhibition. Two years later, the Guggenheim Museum in New York organised his first retrospective, helping secure his status as one of the leading abstract painters of his time.

ROOM 6

## Room 6

Morton Feldman 1926–1987

### **For Philip Guston**

1984

Feldman composed **For Philip Guston** after Guston passed away in 1980. The entire composition is over four hours long, here you can listen to an excerpt every fifteen minutes.

Speakers courtesy of [AudioGold.co.uk](http://AudioGold.co.uk)

[Wall Text]

6

### **IMAGE MAKER**

**I hope sometime to get to the point where I'll have the courage to paint my own face ... That's all a painter is, an image maker, is he not?**

By the mid-1960s, Guston, restless and always challenging himself to evolve, entered a new phase. He drained most

of the colour from his work, largely restricting himself to using black and white pigments. In these paintings, dark shapes, usually identified as heads, seem to emerge from grey backgrounds. He spoke about the miraculous feeling of reaching a point 'when the paint doesn't feel like paint ... And you feel like you've just made a thing, like a living thing is there.'

Fighting with an impulse to paint figuratively, Guston described how he was 'driven to scrape out the recognition' of images in his works. 'The trouble with recognizable art is that it excludes too much', Guston explained in 1965. 'I want my work to include more. And "more" also comprises one's doubts about the object, plus the problem, the dilemma, of recognizing it.'

By the time he exhibited these works at the Jewish Museum in New York in 1966, Guston was experiencing a major crisis in his creative life and his marriage with McKim. He gave up painting for around 18 months and eventually began to produce simple drawings. Some were abstract shapes or spare lines, yet others were of objects, often books. Torn between these two competing impulses, eventually he said, 'the hell with it, I just wanted to draw solid stuff.' The image maker within Guston had won.

## **Painter III**

1963

Oil paint on canvas

Private collection, London

X75427

## **Mirror - To S.K.**

1960

Oil paint on canvas

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark,  
acquired with funding from The C. L. David Foundation and  
Collection, 2978

X75425

The initials S.K. in the title refer to Søren Kierkegaard, the 19th-century Danish philosopher and a founding figure of existentialism. Believing in human choice and free will, he also thought that looking into a mirror, far from being a simple daily act, was a call to self-knowledge. According to Kierkegaard, 'To see oneself in a mirror one must recognise oneself.' For Guston, the problem of seeing was even more general: 'The thing is recognised only as it comes into existence.'

## **Untitled**

1964

Oil paint on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, gift of Musa Guston,

1992.86.1

X75432

## **Head I**

1965

Oil paint on canvas

Tate. Presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery,  
courtesy of a private collector 1996

T07131

Top row, left to right:

**Untitled**

**Untitled No. 4**

1967

**Loaded Brush**

1966

**Untitled**

**Aloft**

1967

Ink on paper on board

Private collection

X77978, X77977

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

X77974, X77980

Private collection

X77983

Bottom row, left to right:

**Untitled**

**Untitled**

1967

**Untitled**

1966

**Untitled**

**Untitled**

1967

Ink on paper on board

Private collection

X77982

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

X77979

Private collection

X77975, X77976, X77981



After the Jewish Museum exhibition in 1966, Guston moved down to Florida and, during a period of personal crisis, stopped painting. Instead, he turned to producing simple drawings. 'I drew constantly ... Drawing very pure lines, very few lines. Some of them ended up just one line or two lines on the paper.' For Guston, 'the successful ones ... were the ones where the space felt filled and they weren't just lines.'

## **Untitled**

1968

Charcoal on paper

Private collection

X77959

As he struggled to find his way, Guston began drawing the objects around him: ink jars, light bulbs, food and books. 'I must have done hundreds of books', he recalled. 'They're just such a simple form, but it seemed filled with possibilities ... And then some of the books started looking like stone tablets. They keep changing.'

## **Ink Bottle and Quill**

## **Untitled**

1968

Charcoal on paper

Promised gifts of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

X77951, X77962

## Book and Charcoal Sticks

1968

Charcoal on paper

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

X77984

'The strong feeling of doing these was alternating between great exaltation, like I'm sure the Zen Buddhist monk who drew would feel, and feelings of great depression, terrible depression. Like, my God, I've given everything up. Is this what I do? It's all that's left? ... absolute vacillation between those two extremes. And the fact that I had those extremes depressed me ... But then I acquired a tiny little touch of wisdom: Ah, give it all up anyway.'

## **Untitled from A Suite of Ten Lithographs**

1966

4 Lithographs on paper

Tate. Presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery,  
courtesy of a private collector 1996

P11396, P11399, P11401, P11402

These four works are from **A Suite of Ten Lithographs** that Guston created in 1966. Some evoke the black patches and head-like forms of Guston's paintings from this time. Others feature swirling lines and cluttered figures that, while abstract, feel as if they're on the cusp of becoming

ROOM 7

## Room 7

### Untitled

1968

Acrylic paint on board

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

X75810

In this self-portrait, remnants of an earlier picture emerge behind the artist's wide-eyed gaze. Guston has painted over a hooded figure, likely a Klansman, creating an unsettling image. Is the hooded figure emerging in his mind, creeping up from behind him or is it part of him?

**The war [in Vietnam], what was happening to America, the brutality of the world. What kind of man am I, sitting at home, reading magazines, going into a frustrated fury about everything – and then going into my studio to adjust a red to a blue?**

## **Group I**

1968

Charcoal on paper

Tate. Presented by the Tate America Foundation, courtesy of David and Renee McKee 2019

T15446

Unlike in Guston's early works that show Klansmen huddled and conspiring together, in this drawing, five hooded figures sit together informally, each one seemingly alone in thought. The casualness of their stance contrasts with their ominous and threatening presence, creating a disconcerting feeling he would explore in many of his later works.

### **[Wall Text]**

**7**

#### **WHAT KIND OF MAN AM I?**

Guston often grappled with the role art could play in the face of violence, racism and polarised political views in the US and across the world. While he had stopped making directly political art in the 1930s, he remained politically engaged. For instance, he served as co-chair for Artists for

CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) in 1966. This group raised money for CORE, a civil rights organisation providing legal aid for activists, funding education and supporting Black voter registration.

In the late 1960s, like many around the country, Guston watched as a cataclysm of national and world events unfolded. In particular, the police violence against protestors at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago stood out to him. Such violence triggered Guston's memories of the Ku Klux Klan, prompting him to make new images featuring hooded figures. That same year, also thinking back to the horrors of the Holocaust, he articulated his view of the artist's responsibility to 'unnumb' oneself to the brutality of the world. He said, 'that's the only reason to be an artist ... to bear witness'.



ROOM 8

## Room 8

### [Diagram Label]

1. **Untitled (License Plate) 1968**  
Oil paint on board  
X75875
  
2. **Untitled (Picture) 1968**  
Oil paint on board  
X75814
  
3. **Untitled 1968**  
Oil paint on board  
X75873
  
4. **Untitled (Picture) 1968**  
Oil paint on board  
X75879
  
5. **Shade 1973**  
Oil paint on board  
X76072
  
6. **Untitled 1968**

Oil paint on board  
X75493

7. **Untitled (Bricks) 1972**

Oil paint on board  
X75876

8. **Untitled (Book) 1968**

Oil paint on board  
X75878

9. **Untitled (Shoe) 1968**

Oil paint on board  
X75811

10. **Untitled (Wall) 1972**

Oil paint on board  
X75889

11. **Untitled 1968**

Oil paint on board  
X75821

12. **Untitled 1969**

Oil paint on board  
X75816

13. **Untitled (Pictures on Wall) 1968**  
Oil paint on board  
X75888
14. **Untitled (City) 1968**  
Oil paint on board  
X75818
15. **Untitled 1972**  
Oil paint on board  
X75820
16. **Untitled 1968**  
Oil paint on board  
X75813
17. **Untitled (Two Hoods) 1969**  
Oil paint on board  
X75812
18. **Untitled (Hood with Clouds) 1969**  
Oil paint on board  
X75885
19. **Untitled (Nail) 1968**  
Oil paint on board  
X75884

20. **Untitled** 1969  
Oil paint on board  
X75819
21. **Untitled (Armchair)** 1968  
Oil paint on board  
X75882
22. **Untitled (Wall)** 1972  
Oil paint on board  
X75871
23. **Untitled (Light Bulb)** 1968  
Oil paint on board  
X75492
24. **Untitled** 1972  
Oil paint on board  
X75817
25. **Untitled** 1968  
Oil paint on board  
X75491
26. **Untitled (City)** 1968  
Oil paint on board  
X76074

27. **Cup** 1972  
Oil paint on board  
X76076
28. **Untitled (Head - Back View)** 1968  
Oil paint on board  
X75880
29. **Untitled** 1972  
Oil paint on board  
X75877
30. **Untitled (Cigar)** 1968  
Oil paint on board  
X75874
31. **Untitled (Head and Wall #1)** 1969  
Oil paint on board  
X75815
32. **Untitled** 1968  
Oil paint on board  
X75872
33. **Untitled (Car)** 1968  
Oil paint on board  
X76073

1, 5, 7, 8, 16, 26, 33: Private collection

2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24,  
25 28, 29, 30, 31, 32: Promised gifts of Musa Guston Mayer to  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

27: Renee and David McKee

The paintings featured in the Marlborough show emerged from a series of small panels sometimes referred to as Guston's visual alphabet. These panels range from depictions of the everyday furnishings of his studio – a chair, an easel, books, canvases, a lightbulb – to more disturbing images of hooded figures. He began making them in 1967 and continued to expand the series over several years. Here, they are arranged in a similar sequence to how he kept them in his studio.

Wall of small panel paintings in Woodstock, New York, 1975

Photograph by Denise Brown Hare, courtesy of the Guston Foundation

## **Dawn**

1970

Oil paint on canvas

Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland

X75643

Guston worked through the night to finish this canvas as dawn broke. 'The last touch [was] when I put the birds in. It felt good to put something in that was right outside happening.' He described the work as 'a very heavy sunrise'. Splashes of red paint dotting the hoods and a jumble of legs trailing the car reference the violent crimes of the Klan. Bringing a sinister feeling to the peachy morning light, Guston reminds us that evil can always be present.

## **City**

1969

Oil paint on canvas

The Guston Foundation

X75551



## **By the Window**

1969

Oil paint on canvas

Roman family

X75496

## **City Limits**

1969

Oil paint on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Musa Guston

1991, 363.1991

X75552

Three cartoonish Klansmen squeeze into a car and ride around the outskirts of the city. By presenting a world populated with Klansmen carrying out ordinary activities, Guston suggests that evil can lurk everywhere. While in this painting the Klansmen are easy to spot, Guston draws attention to the fact that in reality, evildoers could be hiding among us.

His use of pink, the stylisation of the figures and the presence of an old-fashioned Ford Model T car take inspiration from the comic strips he had loved as a child. He was particularly inspired by George Herriman's **Krazy Kat**, known for its surreal landscapes and twisted character relationships. Guston uses the visual language of comics, including satire and humour, to provoke and question.

## **Blackboard**

1969

Oil paint on canvas

Private collection

X75498

In this painting, hoods appear on the blackboard, infiltrating the classroom. Education was a key priority throughout the US Civil Rights movement. 'There would be no lynching if it did not start in the schoolroom', wrote Carter G. Woodson, the early 20th-century historian whose contributions helped establish Black History Month in the US. The image of the hooded figures on the blackboard points to power dynamics and white supremacy in schools, as well as the consequences of what is taught and what is excluded from the curriculum.

## The Studio

1969

Oil paint on canvas

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

X75500

Here, Guston presents the artist as a Klansman. The painting indicates Guston's willingness to ask uncomfortable questions about his own, as well as the wider art world's, privilege and accountability for society's injustices. 'I did a whole series in which I made a spoof of the whole art world', he recalls. 'I had ... hoods being at art openings, hoods having discussions about color.'

Adding his initials within an oval medallion in the lower lefthand corner was Guston's sign that he considered this a key painting and one that was not for sale.

[Wall Text]

8

## HOODS

**What if I had died? I'm in the history books. What would I paint if I came back? You know, you have to die for a rebirth.**

Guston's desire to make narrative work to address the nightmarish injustices he saw in society led him to create large-scale paintings of hooded figures at the end of the 1960s. He saw them as symbols for evil, commenting that 'my attempt was really not ... to do pictures of the KKK, as I had done earlier. The idea of evil fascinated me ... I almost tried to imagine that I was living with the Klan. What would it be like to be evil? To plan and plot.' The hooded figures can be seen driving around town, waiting at home or making art. By using cartoons' capacity for satire, the paintings challenge projections of strength and intimidation, presenting these figures instead as ridiculous, yet unsettlingly commonplace.

Through this imagery, Guston raises questions about who is behind the hood and how their violent ideologies are masked in society. Refusing to offer direct explanation about the works, sometimes he spoke of them in relation to his own culpability saying, 'I perceive myself behind the hood.' The paintings also point to racist systems and institutions as well

as society's broader complicity in evil acts. He commented, 'Well, it could be all of us. We're all hoods.'

In 1970, Guston revealed over 30 of these new paintings at a solo show at Marlborough Gallery, a commercial gallery in New York. The exhibition shocked critics and many of his closest friends who were dismayed with this new direction, particularly his change of style away from abstraction. The negative reviews were devastating, calling his work 'crude' and 'out of touch'. Only a few friends and critics reacted positively. Art critic John Perrault for the Village Voice wrote, 'It's as if De Chirico went to bed with a hangover and had a Krazy Kat [a cartoon character] dream about America falling apart ... It really took guts to make this shift this late in the game, because a lot of people are going to hate these things, these paintings. Not me.'

ROOM 9

## Room 9

### Clockwise from doorway

#### [Wall Text]

9

#### PAINTER'S FORMS

**There is nothing to do now, but paint my life; my dreams, surroundings, predicament, desperation, Musa – love, need.**

Soon after the Marlborough show opening in 1970, Guston and McKim once again travelled to Italy for several months. Depressed and deflated, he found relief in visiting the frescoes of his favourite artist Piero della Francesca and soon began a series of works on paper inspired by Rome's gardens and ancient ruins. In these strange landscapes, hooded figures mingle with bricks and hedges, morphing into new forms like triangular pink trees. Living and working in Woodstock, New York for the rest of the decade, Guston remained out of the spotlight of the art world. It was the most productive period of his career, making hundreds of works each year full of his strange and uncanny imagery.

The everyday life of the painter, his memories as well as his personal hardships flooded his paintings. **Painter's Forms** (on view nearby) shows a head vomiting out objects, or sucking them in – an unusual kind of self-portrait. Guston also began to represent himself as a wide-eyed cyclops in many of his paintings of the period. He depicted piles of objects, which he sometimes called 'crapola' or junk, in compositions that are dream-like and often have an offbeat humour. 'I really only love strangeness,' he wrote. 'But here is another pileup of old shoes and rags, in a corner of a brick wall ... I've seen it before, but forgot.'

## **Open Window**

1969

Oil paint on board

Private collection

X75494

This painting demonstrates Guston's ability to give objects a life of their own. Decorations hanging on the walls mimic the buildings through the window, with black markings evoking the eyes of his hooded figures. This work is one of several smaller paintings featured in the Marlborough Gallery exhibition in 1970.



## Flatlands

1970

Oil paint on canvas

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, gift of Byron R. Meyer,

94.432

X75553

In this painting, pointing hands, horizontal legs, flying bricks, nail-punctured wood, blood-stained hoods and clock faces lay strewn across the canvas. Here, Guston combines many of the objects he had been fixating on over the previous two years and would continue to depict for the rest of his life. This was the final canvas Guston painted before the Marlborough exhibition. Reflecting on the end of this period, he described this work in terms of the aftermath of a great flood. 'It's what's left', he said.

## **Cornered**

1971

Oil paint on paper on board

Tate. Presented by the family of Frederick Elias in his memory through the American Federation of Arts 1987

T04885

## **Untitled (Rome)**

1971

Oil paint on paper on board

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

X85027

## **Untitled (Roma)**

1971

Oil paint on paper on board

Private collection

X85026

## **Painter's Forms**

1972

Oil paint on board

Private collection

X75642

## **Painter's Forms II**

1978

Oil paint on canvas

Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, Museum  
purchase, The Friends of Art Endowment Fund, 1999.5

X75635

## Painting, Smoking, Eating

1973

Oil paint on canvas

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, acquired with the generous support of the Vereniging Rembrandt and Mrs Guston, A

38964

X75622

After the Marlborough show, Guston started painting a butterbean-shaped cyclops as a symbol for himself. In this work, we see him smoking and eating chips in bed with a paint can and brushes on his chest. He portrays himself imagining another painting that emerges above, represented by the pile of shoes. 'I think painting is a dream, but it should be like a dream with eyes open fully with stuff.'

ROOM 10

## **Room 10**

### **Here We Are, There Gabriella Is**

c. 1972–5

Ink on paper

Private collection

X85029

### **I Thought I Would Never**

c. 1972–5

Ink on paper

Private collection

X85030

### **Whoever Gets There First**

c. 1972–5

Ink on paper

Private collection

X85031

Guston and McKim inspired each other throughout their creative lives. Trained as a painter, McKim later became a poet and was published in various literary magazines. In the 1970s, Guston made drawings using some of her verses, at times rearranging their sequence. Some of them, such as **Whoever Gets There First**, emerge from aspects of their home life and the notes McKim sometimes left Guston when he went to the studio to paint.

## **Unhappy Drugstore**

c. 1972–5  
Ink on paper

Private collection  
X85028

## **Black Sea**

1977  
Oil paint on canvas

Tate. Purchased 1982  
T03364

A strange form appears on the horizon in this painting. Is it the heel of a shoe or a horseshoe? It could be the parted hair and forehead Guston painted to symbolise McKim. He described the transformative potential of the painting process to the poet Bill Berkson: 'You're painting a shoe; you start painting the sole, and it turns into a moon; you start painting the moon, and it turns into a piece of bread.' The title of this work may be loosely autobiographical. The artist grew up hearing family stories about his parents' emigration in around 1905 from Odessa, a city on the Black Sea.



## **The Ladder**

1978

Oil paint on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, gift of Edward R.

Broida, 2005.142.17

X76079

Here, a scene depicts the top of McKim's head peeking over a blue wall. Or could it be a seascape with the sun just over the horizon? On a leaning or floating ladder, hang an impossible pair of legs. Often spare in composition with just a handful of forms, Guston's late works are nonetheless complex, enigmatic and filled with visual play.

## **Aegean**

1978

Oil paint on canvas

Private collection

X75638

## Monument

1976

Oil paint on canvas

Tate. Purchased with assistance from the American Fund for the Tate Gallery 1991

T05870

Guston presents a writhing mass of legs with horseshoes that gallop over the curved horizon of the painting towards or perhaps away from us. **Monument** echoes the jumbled limbs of children from Guston's work of the 1940s or the patches of reds and pinks of his abstract period. Guston was never explicit on the meaning of these legs. They might relate to his brother Nat, who died after his legs were crushed by a car when Guston was 17. Or they could reference the piles of bodies and shoes he saw in images of the Holocaust.

Taking inspiration from Guston's artistic exchanges with musicians and poets in New York, we have invited London-based creatives to respond to Guston's work. DJ, producer and curator Anja Ngozi explores sound's potential to create alternative ways to engage with Guston's paintings. Poet Andra Simons reveals how poetry can open up different readings of Guston's work.

Ngozi has created a sonic piece for **Aegean. Meet Me At The Finsbury Eros** was written by Simons in response to Guston's painting Monument.

Scan the QR code to hear Ngozi's response and read Simon's poem on your phone. Or listen to Stop 103 and 104 on the audio guide.



## **Wharf**

1976

Oil paint on canvas

Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, Museum purchase, The Friends of Art Endowment Fund, 1994.3  
X75636

**[Wall Text]**

**10**

## **POEMS AND PICTURES**

**Paul Valéry once said that a bad poem is one that vanishes into meaning.**

For Guston, the poetry of image-making was all about ambiguity and open-endedness, combining the familiar with the uncanny. He said, 'My own demand is that I want to be surprised, baffled. To come in the studio the next morning and say, "Did I do that? Is it me? Isn't that strange!"' In Guston's personal iconography, objects seem to morph and rearrange. Piles of legs become a weighty monument, McKim's forehead a sunrise. 'I enjoy the feeling of the thing being caught at a very special certain moment ... like it just came into existence. And it's about to change into something else.' Guston challenged himself to create compositions that in their completion retain a sense of flux, as if always in a state of transformation.

In the 1970s, Guston forged close friendships with a younger generation of poets including Clark Coolidge, Bill Berkson and William Corbett, as well as the writer Philip Roth. Guston said, 'The few people who visit me are poets or writers, rather than painters, because I value their reactions.' He created images for various poets and writers, making 'poem-pictures' incorporating verses alongside his characteristic assortments of everyday objects. This room contains several poem-pictures he made with McKim's poetry, often representing her in his works by her forehead and parted hair.

ROOM 11

## Room 11

### Talking

1979

Oil paint on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Edward R.

Broida 2005, 727.2005

X75630

**Talking** is one of Guston's last self-portraits. It is distilled to a single extended arm, caught mid-gesture in conversation. His watch is pointing backwards and he has a paint-splattered sleeve and two cigarettes in hand, their blood-red smoke crossing paths with a pull chain of an unseen light. The scene captures Guston's enthusiasm for conversation. When he wasn't painting, he was known to stay up late into the night engaged in lively discussion with friends.

## **Flame**

1979

Oil paint on canvas

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

X75637

## **Sleeping**

1977

Oil paint on canvas

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

X85413

Here, Guston paints a portrait of himself curled up in bed, vulnerable and dreaming. He likely made it late at night when his restlessness prevented him from sleeping. For much of Guston's life, he faced the recurring nightmares of a violent and unjust world. He struggled with the limitations of his role as an artist to face the world and make it better.



## **Kettle**

1978

Oil paint on canvas

Philadelphia Museum of Art, bequest of Daniel W. Dietrich II

2016, 2016-3-17

X75633

## **The Line**

1978

Oil paint on canvas

Promised gift of Musa Guston Mayer to The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

X75639

Descending from the sky like a bolt of lightning, a hand grasps a stick of charcoal and draws the most basic of artistic forms: a straight line. The painting might reflect Guston's great ambitions and his equally great doubts about artistic creation. 'I think it's kind of like devil's work ... Only God can make a tree.' Perhaps this is also a reflection on Guston's spontaneous method of working, as though he was guided by something he did not completely control. Elaborating on this, Guston recalled something John Cage once said to him: 'When you start working, everybody is in your studio – the past, your friends, enemies, the art world, and above all, your own ideas ... But as you continue painting, they start leaving, one by one, and you are left completely alone. Then, if you're lucky, even you leave.'

## **Couple in Bed**

1977

Oil paint on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago, through prior bequest of Frances W. Pick, and memorial gift from her daughter, Mary P. Hines,

1989.435

X75623

In this double portrait, Guston shows the artist clinging with equal measure to his paint brushes and to his partner, McKim. The painting was completed after McKim suffered a series of strokes that left Guston shaken and thrust him into the role of caregiver. Through 40 years of marriage, Guston had counted on McKim for artistic, practical and emotional support. Here the couple's shared tenderness is made visible.

## **Hat**

1976

Oil paint on canvas

Tate. Presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery, courtesy of a private collector 1996

T07132

Taking inspiration from Guston's artistic exchanges with musicians and poets in New York, we have invited London-based creatives to respond to Guston's work. DJ, producer and curator Anja Ngozi explores sound's potential to create alternative ways to engage with Guston's paintings. Ngozi has created a sonic piece for **Hat**.

Scan the QR code to hear Ngozi's response on your phone. Or listen to Stop 112 on the audio guide.



## **Gulf**

## **View**

## **Studio Forms**

1980

Lithograph on paper

Tate. Presented by the American Fund for the Tate Gallery,  
courtesy of a private collector 1996

P11419, P11413, P11419

## **Web**

1975

Oil paint on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Edward R.

Broida 2005, 723.2005

X75629

**[Wall Text]**

**11**

## **NIGHT STUDIO**

**A painting feels lived-out to me, not painted ... So the paintings aren't pictures, but evidences – maybe documents, along the road you have not chosen, but are on nevertheless.**

Guston conjured up a world of lonely objects, bustling body parts, lively flames and sleeping figures. For years, he worked in the studio long into the night, painting and smoking. In the late 1970s, Guston and McKim struggled with health problems. McKim had a stroke in 1977 that kept her from writing poetry. Guston thought continually about his own mortality. Some of the paintings of these final years show colours emerging from thickly layered black paint. The imagery moves between nightmarish and comic.

A few weeks after the opening of his retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1980, Guston died aged 66 of a heart attack. This exhibition led to a renewed interest in his work, which has continued to grow ever since.

Throughout his career, Guston's practice shifted as the world around him also changed. Often preoccupied with life's nightmares, he was also wrapped up in his artistic dreams. His paintings, where shapes and meanings are never fixed, continue to provoke, puzzle and inspire conversation. 'A picture should tell stories', he wrote. 'It makes me want to paint. To see, in a painting, what one has always wanted to see, but hasn't, until now. For the first time.'

EXIT



**Philip Guston: A Life Lived** directed by Michael Blackwood  
(New York: Michael Blackwood Productions)  
1981

Running time: 58 min 50 sec

