Journal of Contemporary Painting
Volume 9 Number 2
 https://doi.org/10.1386/jcp_00056_1
Received 1 February 2023; Accepted 8 August 2023; Published Online June 2024

JOAN KEY
University for the Creative Arts

'Thingly' forms in *Guston Reloaded*: Filipo Caramazza at Handel Street Projects

Keywords
postcards
museum
appropriation
photography
miniatures
dynamogram
Klansmen

Abstract

The paintings by Filippo Caramazza were made during years of protracted expectation of the major retrospective of paintings: Philip Guston Now. *Delay was caused by significant debate between major receiving institutions as to their responsibilities when exposing provocative imagery to public view. Potential for misjudgement was a foremost concern in planning publications and installations. As if to manage a sense of deprivation, Caramazza imaginatively substitutes the real paintings, currently withheld, as postcard re-presentations, as if to mark their existence* in absentia. *The faithful painterly address to detail of image and technique suggest his reverence for the presence of the original works without attempting to replicate their powerful impression. The passive form of copying, a 'humble address' to the original paintings, stands in contrast with the authoritative nature of the institutional debate. Much of the concern*

with public reception of the paintings focused on issues raised by the contemporary 'Black Lives Matter' movement and references to the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) within Guston's work. Effectively the museums decided to acknowledge but defuse problematic content. This article takes the view that the politics of Guston's paintings address sociopolitical and personal issues generally, as well as formal painterly issues in contemporary American painting. Taking these ideas further, Caramazza's paintings offer an opportunity to consider how museums shape critical and theoretical narratives in the construction of displays and a consideration of how painting may act as a critical witness.

> When [Guston] returned to confronting racism […] it seems that the paintings were a condemnation, ongoing, for white Americans' indifference to Black suffering. So his use of Ku Klux Klan imagery was a reminder, indeed a warning, that racism had not dissipated.
>
> (Goodman 2022: n.pag.)

In June 2020, the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC postponed the opening date for the widely anticipated touring exhibition, *Philip Guston Now*. Dates for subsequent showings of the exhibition in Boston, Houston and Tate Modern, London were also delayed indefinitely.[1] Following the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police in May 2020, and in response to the 'Black Lives Matter' protests, this major retrospective was considered too politically charged for that sensitive historic moment. The museums now questioned protocol: how to expose such struggle for social justice in Guston's imagery to a divided American public. References to earlier demonstrations and histories of discrimination, in the current climate, could reflect provocatively on current events. Trenton Doyle Hancock, in a catalogue essay for the exhibition, captures the explosive potential of the exhibition: 'what happened if my character Torpedoboy, a black superhero, met up with Guston's klansmen?' (2020: 15). Glen Ligon writes in the same catalogue: 'Guston's "hood" paintings, with their ambiguous narratives and incendiary subject matter, are not asleep – they're woke' (2020: 117).

The term 'woke' originally held a positive meaning: of being alert to racial bias. In current usage it evokes conflicted intersectional positions and class associations. The museums felt that images, such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) masks, found in Guston's paintings, would need to be carefully managed in the exhibition design but without imposing an identifiably 'woke' policy position. *The Art Newspaper* reported that, in response to demonstrations and disturbances seen on the streets and in the press, 'the museums were apparently trying to figure out a way to protect *museum-goers* […] from Guston's already well-known visual references to the Ku Klux Klan' (Marcus 2022: n.pag., emphasis added). This account of the issue evades mentioning Guston's images of chaotic mayhem and troubling thoughts in everyday life. Problematic aspects of Guston's imagery, combined with a sense of

1. Original exhibition dates, published in the catalogue *Philip Guston Now*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2020:
   - National Gallery of Art, Washington, 7 June–13 September 2020;
   - Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 18 October 2020–18 January 2021
   - Tate Modern London, 16 February–13 June 2021;
   - Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 17 July–17 October 2021;
   - The exhibition subsequently opened at Tate Modern, 6 October 2023–25 February 2024.

struggle in the act of painting that often informed the appearance of the finished works, opened the museums to the possibility of violent antagonism towards the exhibition. The opening was originally rescheduled for 2024 so that changes in presentation could take into account questions of exhibition design. Discrete arrangements of paintings with contemporaneous materials from the press were used to interpret and liaise Guston's images with the expectations of an attendant public.

In response, during 2021–22, Filippo Caramazza addressed contentious aspects of this delay. Some seventy postcard sized copies of Guston's paintings, many chosen from the more political works, were exhibited in Handel Street Projects's front-room gallery in back-street Islington.[2] The works, collectively entitled *Guston Reloaded*, were shown in a rigorously gridded but non-chronological arrangement (Figures 1–3). Postcards of Guston's smaller paintings, of the everyday objects Guston described as 'thingly', were on one wall; larger more narrative paintings were on the other. Meanwhile the first showing of *Philip Guston Now* opened in Boston, May 2022.[3] Delay had allowed the museum to compromise: histories of Guston's contentious images were explained with related documentation while the artist's significant contribution to twentieth century American painting was recognized.

Caramazza's own position on Guston is reserved; the dispassionately accurate process of copying suggests an exquisite act of *homage.* The painterly drama of Guston's original works is displaced by the calm, always-already-seen aspect of these miniaturized versions. Caramazza's paintings are all exactly the same postcard size, on zinc or copper plates of the same gauge, with postcard-style white borders. Found photographic reproductions were the source material. Unifying Guston's varied uses of scale and medium, including canvases, cartoons and works on paper, into a singular collection of equally painted postcards, Caramazza shuffles comparative meditations. The respectful delicacy with which each work has been copied raises a sensation of disavowal for the viewer: 'I know these paintings are Caramazza's, but all the same I imagine them as Guston's, essentially reproducing the same problematic content'.

The question then becomes one of assessing Caramazza's meanings, as painter and curator, in relation to the issues confronting the American museums. The gallery press release states that 'Caramazza's "Gustons" are presented to comment on the power of art-institutional messaging to shape our relationship to the image' (Handel Street Projects 2022: n.pag.). This suggests that by supplying a 'reloaded' Guston exhibition, Caramazza critically comments on the original paintings' temporary withdrawal from public view as an attempt to control opinions. The idea that Guston's message was too brutally inscribed within the evidence of the paintings' content and facture was quietly contradicted by postcard sized paintings which nevertheless re-instated the specifics of that message for anyone to see.

Guston's work developed in New York in the 1950s. The postcard-size paintings suggest Caramazza's ambivalence towards the history and attitude of the large-scale Abstract Expressionist

2. *Guston Reloaded* Handel Street Projects, London, 10 June–16 September 2022.

3. The exhibition re-design received some negative comment, see Liebman (2022) and Colucci (2022).

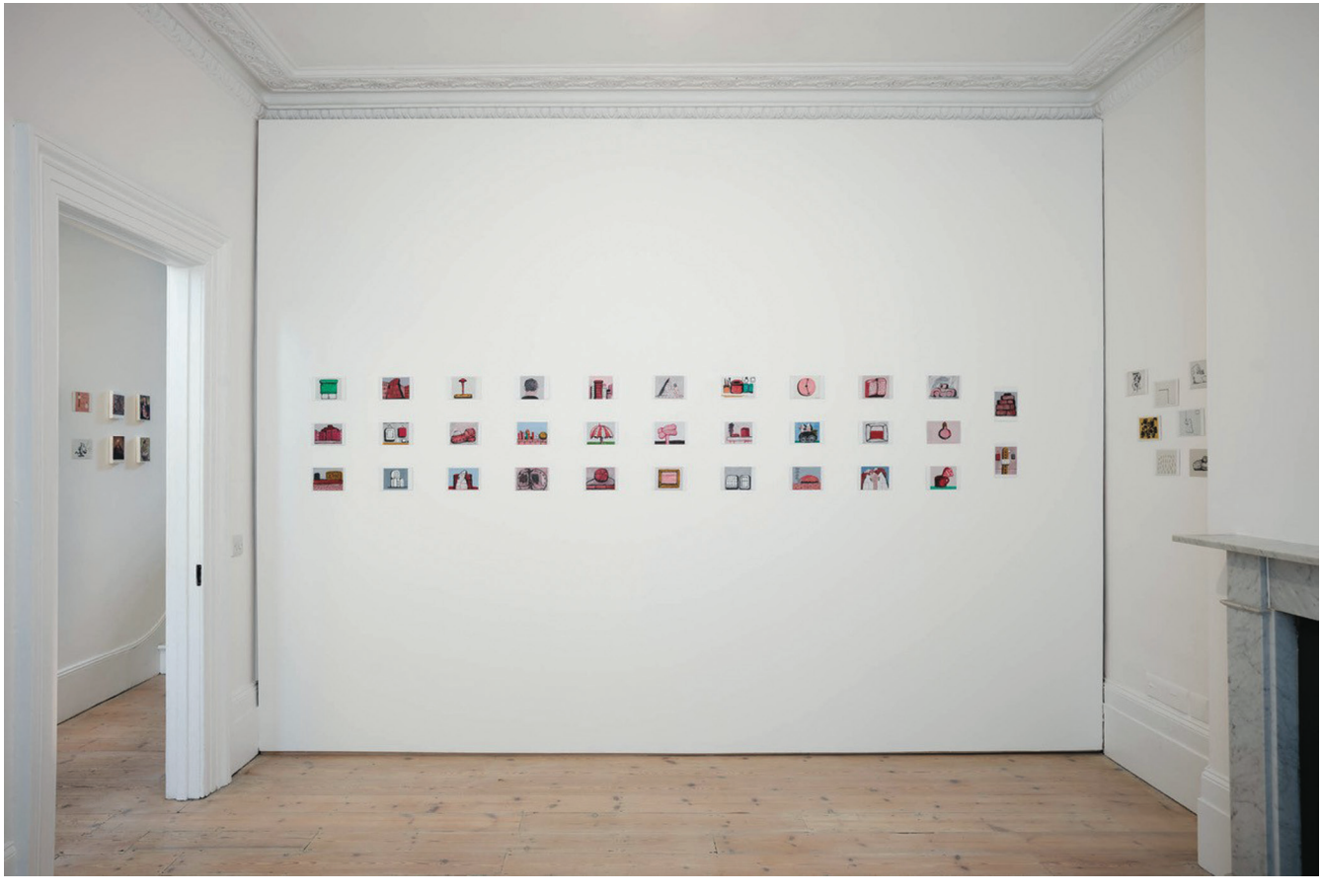

Figure 1: Filippo Caramazza, installation view of Guston Reloaded, *Handel Street Projects Gallery, London, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Fedja Klikovac, Handel Street Projects.*

works of that period which formed the background to Guston's work. The critical uses of postcards in 'Mail-art', as a pluralizing format in which the use of gridded displays may indicate counter-hierarchical orderings are possibly a resource to this installation. The equivalences of Caramazza's postcards implied criticism: of the internalized hierarchies of formal decision-making; the ideological appropriation of the paintings' cultural symbolism; and the stratified appreciations of individual artists' authenticity and originality that permeated the mythology of Ab.Ex painting. These prejudices have been questioned through the lens of institutional critique, feminism, minimalism and conceptualism.

The museums' critical positions are symptomatic: Matthew Teitelbaum, a curator of *Philip Guston Now* in Boston, acknowledges that the postponement of the exhibition allowed his own museum to

Figure 2: Filippo Caramazza, installation view of Guston Reloaded, *Handel Street Projects Gallery, London, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Fedja Klikovac, Handel Street Projects.*

Figure 3: Filippo Caramazza, installation view of Guston Reloaded, *Handel Street Projects Gallery, London, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Fedja Klikovac, Handel Street Projects.*

'think more strategically about the ways in which audiences will relate to the work' (Marcus 2022: n.pag).[4] This indicates a conceptual move, away from the directly haptic appeal of Guston's paintings towards an assessment of their ideological content in reception. Related to this equivocal approach, Peter Suchin's review of the exhibition finds a comedic or ironic project underlying Caramazza's deliberated miniaturizing activity: 'Cutting Guston down to size at the same time as "bigging him up"' (2022: 27). Suchin refers to the conceptual strategy of 'appropriation' in contemporary fine art, so Guston's paintings 'reloaded' appear to have the ordinary use-value of postcards as memorial images, even though repositioned as original paintings by Caramazza.[5] The gallery participates in this duality by supplying postcards of a single work that visitors may take and use. It is captioned: 'Filippo Caramazza, *Philip Guston*, Hand and Stick, 2021, 15x10cm, oil on zinc plate' (Figure 4d).

Caramazza's implied reference to collecting, sending and receiving of postcard images, now of Guston's paintings, seen not in Washington but in a domestic setting in Islington, brings questions of transmission. Suchin refers to Jacques Derrida's extensive discussion of the postcard medium as a guide to reading unstable meanings and impermanent messages, made complex by shifts in place and time.[6] *Guston Reloaded* resonates intimately with the viewer's own memories of sending, receiving and collecting postcards. Derrida observes that, in reading postcards, unregulated variables in meanings create speculations for a postcard's receiver or finder (or in this case, viewer). Suchin suggests that Caramazza's usage of the postcard format engages those disjunctive narratives of place and time, text and image. Derrida describes this complexity as being 'in relation, without discretion, to tragedy', speculating on text as textural breakdown in the sent-received relation ([1980] 1987: 5).[7]

The tragedy exists not only in the instability of a postcard's implied reference to 'signers and addressees', 'senders and receivers' but in the unsettling questions of what finally remains innate or authentic to the message. Perhaps an indirect communication between Guston and Caramazza was implied through Caramazza's representations of Guston's works as postcards. The question of sender and receiver, in this case, holds that tragic sense of the displaced promise of Guston's richly painted work as it is currently withheld. The patient copying suggests attachments to memories of the original works, but what depth of attachment could be implied to such an unstable format? The speculation on what attachment Caramazza might have to Guston, or the relation of painted postcards to Guston's actual paintings, was left to the viewer: how to read the relative thought processes invested in Guston's works in alignment with the different thoughts engaged in Caramazza's copying?

Although postcards have made Guston's works 'small', paradoxically they still indicate a 'big' painterly approach. Representing the detail of facture was important to Caramazza. Robert Slifkin has noted Guston's friendship with Harold Rosenberg and takes into account the influence of Rosenberg's view that the gestural dynamics of action painting were symbolic of the political agency of individuals. Agency became an important subtext to Guston's paintings. Even when moving away from atmospheric abstractions, more closely related to Rosenberg's views on painterly process, to

4. Guston's painting *The Studio* (1969), picturing a KKK figure painting a KKK portrait in a self-reflective reference, would be shown separately, in a room-within-a-room, for the protection of the viewing public.

5. There are many different examples of this strategy: e.g. in Gerhard Richter's postcard photographs re-presented with thickly applied paint, or the collecting of paint spattered images found in Francis Bacon's studio and reframed as works.

6. Suchin refers to Jacques Derrida's work, *The Postcard from Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (1987). Annie Proulx's novel *Postcards* offers another elaboration of their variable readings.

7. The tragedy is based on uncertainty: 'That the signers and the addressees are not always visibly and necessarily identical from one *envoi* to the other, that the signers are not inevitably to be confused with the senders, nor the addressees with the receivers' (Derrida [1980] 1987: 5).

deliberately adopting the depictive style of his later period, the capacity of imagery to emerge from gesture is retained in Guston's practice.[8] In *Philip Guston Now* the power of gestural painting would be undeniable. In *Guston Reloaded* the painting as space of Rosenberg's drama of enacting painterly activity is replaced by delight in Caramazza's finely wrought, highly intended, elegantly static paintings. Suchin remarks on this dislocation as the 'beautiful absurdity' of Caramazza's work: not simply a question of scale but one of the indexical trace of the action painter's gesture now displaced by the limited mimetic brushwork of the copyist.

That *Guston Reloaded* is Caramazza's personal selection of Guston's work, as opposed to the authoritative institutional historicizing of *Philip Guston Now*, is another 'absurdity'; Suchin's supposition that it constitutes an act of appropriation deserves consideration. The interrogation of a painting as specific historic artefact can be observed in Sherrie Levine's dour black and white photographs of the brilliantly coloured surfaces of Monet's Rouen Cathedral paintings. In Levine's highly selective appropriation a point is made about technology, period, framing and timing of impressionist and photographic presentation that resonates between Monet's paintings and their past and present mediations. The terms of different accountancies between Monet and Levine are opened to evidential scrutiny, or 'exhibition value', in the sense positioned by Walter Benjamin in relation to loss of aura or cultic value.[9] The contemporary context of timing in digital reproduction and its immediacy in transmission has transformed the consumption of images of painting and Levine's work makes a complex commentary on the cultural consequences of the dissemination and accumulation of painting into many personal collections and its consequent democratization.[10] Caramazza's copies are not appropriations in that sense; they play with the historic aura of miniature painting and the artisan skills of painting on metal. The effect is one of destabilizing the museum's authority to categorize rather than appropriating the actuality of Guston's original works. That feeling of a disturbed conjunction of historic place and time that disturbs the viewing of *Philip Guston Now* is precisely the dangerously charged fragmentation of context that confronts the museums in re-contextualizing Guston's work now.

In Caramazza's photo-copying there is a deliberate processual difference from Levine's appropriation: Caramazza implies that these postcards, as oil paintings and not photographs, correlate more directly to the oil paintings they copy. The factual intervention of photography, apparent in Levine's sense, is suppressed in Caramazza's re-presentation. Although Caramazza's painterly postcard account of Guston's attitude towards the agency of painting intervenes anachronistically in the present, Caramazza's exhibition title, *Guston Reloaded*, indicates that Guston's approach to subject-matter, and its intimate intersection with painterly facture, is intended to remain because mimetic process does not necessarily engage the revisionist intentions of appropriation. In the collectivity of Caramazza's exhibition, the meanings of Guston's images are now distilled into a single room but with a copyist's high degree of intention to focus on and recognize the content Guston brought to each specific work.

8. Robert Slifkin sees the history of a problematic latency of images as a tragic factor in the development of 'Action Painting' (2011a: 239–42).

9. Walter Benjamin juxtaposes the term 'exhibition value' with that of 'aura' or cultic value, see 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', Section V, 'Works of Art are received and valued on different planes [...] with one the accent is on the cult value, with the other on the exhibition value of the work' (Benjamin [1970] 1982: 226).

10. See Joselit (2016), on the democratizing effect of personal collections of paintings in digital form.

Contemporary appropriation strategies generally question the significance of fine art's historic values of originality and provenance as expressed through the archiving and authenticating processes of both museum and art-market. *Guston Reloaded* modifies this emphasis, openly imposing the deliberately copied process. Although Caramazza's copying of images appears technically straightforward, it shifts the institutional account of Guston's images away from the 'department of fine art' by placing the painted postcard copies 'in the gallery' but without historicizing contextual commentary. The collection of a matched set of 'plates' substitutes the activity of painting on canvas with different histories of practice, which could belong to a different department of the museum of fine arts. The collected postcards 'reloaded' elaborate Guston's significant place in the establishment of American art, as it is already celebrated through the postcard merchandise of great American institutions.

Caramazza includes variously charged images: the 'thingly' objects are made equal with those images most relevant to the museum's concerns about content, notably *The Tormentors*, 1947–48,[11] and *The Studio*, of 1969.[12] The comparisons that result could over-simplify Caramazza's position as decidedly subversive. A complex interweaving of histories is observed within the selection of images: the politics of the mocking cartoons of President Nixon; the hoods that symbolize Guston's references to KKK activities; the gestural relation to Rosenberg's radical approach to abstract painting in New York. Giving the smaller lexicon paintings of 'thingly' items, such as boots, clocks and lightbulbs, the same dimensions as Guston's larger compositions, Caramazza mixes personal histories of family, travel and poetry with Guston's self-reflexive depictions of the conflicted exigencies of 'studio-life' and the politics of histories from 'real-life'. These all reflect differing perspectives on scale that can feel humorous even though the politics of Caramazza's paintings ostensibly relate to the exhibitions' delays and the museums' fears of tensions to be exacerbated by revisiting Guston's memories of political unrest during an earlier period.

These issues cannot become reduced to an ethical 'nutshell' by painting postcards. Similarly the remorse and tragedy within Guston's personal experience, reflected in his many compulsive repetitions and revisions of motif, are not straightforwardly associated with the specific narratives arising in the histories of events surrounding the present moment of *Philip Guston Now*. Guston's ethical concerns are informed by longer awareness of racially divisive decisions by American judiciaries. Steve Phillips, writing on this legislative history remarks that even the New Deal programmes of the thirties, in which the young Guston participated as a muralist, 'were the result of compromises with confederate congressmen working to preserve white power' (2022: n.pag.). *The Tormentors*, painted almost twenty years later, remembers Guston's own experience of the KKK's politically motivated strike breaking activities in Los Angeles, around 1930, when anti-union violence had been carried out at a factory where he was working. These events had already been the subject of a set of paintings, some of which were violently damaged by KKK sympathizers while on exhibition in Los Angeles at that time. The complex mixture of traumatic elements that inform this memory of KKK

11. *The Tormentors*, 1947–48, oil on canvas, 40¾ inch × 60½ inch, 103.8 cm × 153.7 cm, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

12. *The Studio*, 1969, oil on canvas, 48 inch × 42 inch, 121.9 cm × 106.7 cm, private collection.

Figure 4a: Filippo Caramazza, Phillip Guston, Flatlands, 1970, *2021–23. Oil on metal plate. 15 cm × 10 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Fedja Klikovac, Handel Street Projects.*

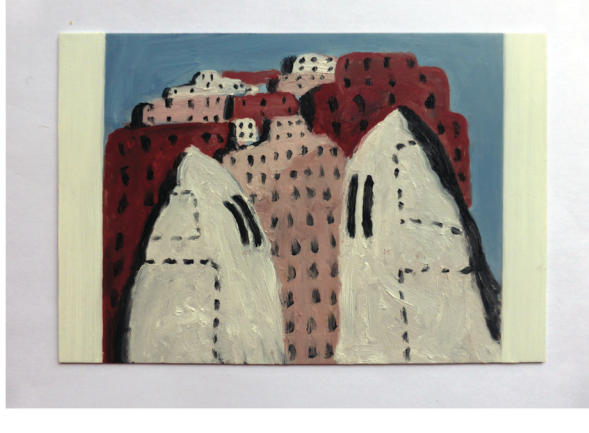

Figure 4b: Filippo Caramazza, Phillip Guston, Head 1969, *2021–23. Oil on metal plate. 15 cm × 10 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Fedja Klikovac, Handel Street Projects.*

Figure 4c: Filippo Caramazza, Phillip Guston, The Tormentors, 1947–48, *2021–23. Oil on metal plate. 15 cm × 10 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Fedja Klikovac, Handel Street Projects.*

Figure 4d: Filippo Caramazza, Philip Guston, Hand and Stick, *2023. Lithograph on card. 15 cm × 10 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Fedja Klikovac, Handel Street Projects.*

activities, and their subsequent recollections in the imagery of the late paintings, mark the profound impression such events created in Guston.[13]

Other works in Caramazza's selection suggest a broader politics underlying Guston's adoption of 'action painting' and Rosenberg's politicization of the relation to the canvas, as an arena which, by dramatizing the immediate activity of painting, reveals and develops emergent forms, opening them to unrestrained visual interpretations. Slifkin notes about 'action painting' that 'the essentially imaginative and artificial aspect of the creative act [of painting] was in fact fundamental to its agency in the real world' (2011a: 233). This comment reflects Marx's insistence on the significance vested within human sensuous behaviour as a diverse resource of socialized meanings.[14] In Guston's later work this includes an emphasis on 'thingly' utilitarian objects rendered sensuous in paint. Speaking of painting a book, Guston says to Rosenberg: 'I read, so I painted books. I must have painted almost one hundred paintings of books. It's such a simple object you know – a book. An open book, a couple of books, one book on top of another book' (1974: 56)[15] The 'thingly' image of the book held variable qualities at each re-emergence in painting: telling stories, keeping registers, religious text, rules, laws and commandments, blocks of flats, the pages of poetry Guston absorbed.

Caramazza's activity, of selecting paintings and making postcards, positions his work generally as human sensuous activity *in memoriam* but Guston's images of KKK figures derive from a less reflective form of memory. They were present in earlier work but crucially re-occur at a moment of recall which Guston related to anti-war demonstrations around 1967–68. The events around protests against American violence in Vietnam fused with intense recollections of earlier experiences of KKK anti-union violence in Los Angeles. Speaking in a lecture, given in 1978 at the University of Minnesota, Guston says this conjunction of violence in Vietnam and at home created a significant impact: '[The KKK] became my subject matter and I was flooded by a memory' (McKee 1982: 52). Guston then describes a 'circular' but involuntary remembrance that imposes on his later work.[16] This access to memory is unpredictable and therefore threatening. It could lie in the pale white triangular hoods, the stacked soles of boots, the suffocation of floods or bedclothes, the little puffs of smoke and pointing fingers.

The room filled with post-cards by Caramazza cultivates a different form of memory, they recount the drama of being with the paintings 'in repose': the luminosities of Guston's colour scheming; the artist's attachment to certain pigments; their tints to light or dark; the clarity of their patterns of dispersion across the painted surface. Within the assembly of small Caramazzas, neatly spaced around the room in London, the gallery becomes a *Wunderkammer*, a collection of samples, organized as if appealing to rational investigation while provoking curious response. The processes of miniaturization and repetition condense Guston's repertoire, surveying, as Guston must have done in the studio, comparisons, thematic contents and decisions made. Caramazza's other role, as curator, creates for the viewer a constant scanning and checking activity that refers back to that feeling of

13. See Cooper (2002, 2020a).

14. Karl Marx, 'Theses against Feuerbach' discusses the significance of 'practical-critical activity': Thesis 5: 'Feuerbach, not satisfied with abstract thinking, appeals to *sensuous contemplation*; but he does not conceive sensuousness as *practical* human-sensuous activity'. Thesis 3: 'The coincidence of the changing circumstances and human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionising practice*' (Marx 1968: 28–29, original emphasis).

15. See Cooper (2002: 99).

16. Walter Benjamin refers to similar effects of 'involuntary memory' intervening in the present moment, in Proust's writing.

messages not only copied, but continually circulating. This permits Guston's repetitions or combinations to be identified as already out there, not distanced, diverted or limited by ironic mode of appropriation or by protective editorial precautions of the museums. The uncertain relation of sender and reader and the absence of the formative commentary of the museum's issues with Guston's paintings recede as Caramazza's appreciation for their more liminal content comes to the viewer's attention, but indirectly, informed by the postcards' own sense of transient, circulating meanings.

Collections of postcards have their own poignancy, re-presenting visits to places to which there may be no return or the image of an object, caught at one significant moment in its history now existing on the verge of memorial loss.[17] Guston's figurative paintings emerge gradually from the intensely troubled history of abstract expressionism, its arguments about painting and politics and their tragic personal consequences. That aspect of Guston's own experience appears disavowed by Caramazza's factual copies. Although Guston is ineffably present within Caramazza's exhibition, figural 'thingly' qualities, formatted as postcards, are experienced as testing inadequacies in, while suggesting similarities with memorial activities.[18] Walter Benjamin, for example, made a collection of postcard photographs of hand-made Russian toys.[19] They serve as a fragile echo of messages from a past intimacy with thingly qualities, now about to be lost to revolutionary disturbance and industrialization, but reproduced with hope they would be remembered.[20] Similarly Caramazza's postcards of Guston's paintings, which already record Guston's own melancholic references to childhood through their compositional distortions and cartoonish drawing, also convey Caramazza's own fears of loss, perhaps of sensitivity to Guston's messages, resulting from the mediation of *Philip Guston Now*.

This is a reminder that Caramazza's postcards not only copy paintings but acknowledge the memorial quality existing in postcards of Guston's paintings already sent. This, in Derridean analysis, would include further layers of memory and comment. Derrida explores the myriad instabilities of a postcards' existence: the intervening ritualistic rites of exchange and delivery; the capture of inadvertent details which become powerfully suggestive diversions.[21] Caramazza may have in mind the often psychoanalytic questioning in Derrida's text to remind the reader/viewer to make an adequate response to the postcard sender's intended meanings. For example, in spite of his comments on 'mechanical reproduction', Benjamin regards postcards as spiritual in the sense that they become 'secular fetishes', used in displacement of cultic objects that would have been collected during pilgrimages of earlier times, and whose content may serve as a warning of historic cultural change.

This relates to Guston's images of singular 'thingly' memorial forms, on small canvases, now appearing out-of-scale, or extra-large, in Caramazza's exhibition. Unifying scale is an important discretion in Caramazza's evasive disavowal of photographic trace. This inflects the curating function and the sequencing of image-comparisons to provoke revelations not necessarily intended within the original work. These smaller, apparently simple paintings, strongly represented in Caramazza's

17. See 'Travel scenes, picture postcards', letter to Gershom Scholem, from Volterra, 1929

> the letter before you now [...] comes from a centre of Etruscan culture. Let us say from its limbo, to the extent that I have atoned for thirty-seven years of ignorance of these things with a three hour visit to a museum.
> (Benjamin 2007a: 182)

18. See Slifkin (2011b: 227) speaking of an abstract Guston painting *The Evidence* (1957) as an example of Guston's abstraction of 1950s and 1960s: 'thingly' forms seem to emerge out of a web of tentative brushstrokes, as a kind of temporal figuration. Guston discussed the pre-figurative aspect of his abstract works in a 1966 interview with Rosenberg, claiming that ideally, '[a] picture is finished when it's in this unsettled, hovering state [...]. [The image] must feel as if it has been in many places all over the canvas and indeed there is no place for it to settle – except momentarily'.

selection, appear as equals in the layout of Caramazza's gridded presentation. They reflect a terse commentary on the use-value of the things, and their accultured exchange-value as paintings, for example Guston's working boots or those of Van Gogh. Guston himself occasionally exhibited these paintings in gridded layouts, as if to compare their singular historic references.

Twentieth-century modernist principles produced two important examples of how comparative grids of photographed images can work. André Malraux's *Museum Without Walls* (1967) was intended to compare historic images from different cultures for dispersal to a wider public.[22] They were made possible by the collecting and photographic re-scaling of artefacts of variable sizes and sources, to compare examples of figures that would previously have been held in museums, in inaccessible archives or foreign places. Similarly, Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* used re-scaled images, to create collections categorized according analyses of dynamic form. In both cases photographs were arranged and re-arranged to reveal connections between images from different materials, contexts, iconographies. Unified by scale very different thingly qualities from many periods could suggest and inform achronistic connections.

The inter-mediation of photography, in Malraux's usage changes the aura of the image, from unique incident in time and place, to becoming a participant in a configuration described by Douglas Crimp as a 'supermuseum' (1995: 54).[23] Crimp observes that Malraux deliberately creates heterogeneities of timing and origin of image, but, through photographic processing and editing, imposes an appearance of 'single perfect similitude'. It also imposes a western perspective on a global phenomenon of images of mankind: Malraux comments that through his process '[f]or all alike – miniatures, frescoes, stained glass, tapestries, Scythian plaques, pictures, Greek vase paintings, "details" and even statuary – have become "colour-plates"' ([1954] 1978: 44–46).[24] Maybe similitude, the unity imposed by Malraux's photography, is specious but pathologies emerge from this collectivity. Caramazza's room of Guston's images allows a similar sense of a singular vantage point, mixing scale and subject-matter, but appears to do so while mixing up that sense of organized comparative analysis.

Warburg's combinations of photographically reproduced images have a different principle. George Didi-Huberman quotes Flaubert to explain Warburg's process of analysis: 'It is to penetrate the thing in order to be penetrated by it' (2017: 161).[25] This 'pathosform' is profoundly relevant to Guston's appreciation of the objects he depicts. Caramazza's metal postcards also become 'things' of Guston's paintings recording thingly qualities absorbed, analysed and built by Guston over many repetitions, their re-inventions detailed and layered as *pentimenti* inscribed deep into the painted surface. Similarity of scale is significant in Malraux's gridded arrangement, but in Warburg's processing of images, scale is not as important to comparison as the compression of time present within the image. Automatic triggering of memorial connections through internalized dynamics are analysed as 'dynamograms', found within the thingly form of the image itself.[26] Caramazza's re-presentations

19. See 'Russian Toys' Appendix in Benjamin (1985): 'it is good [the toys] have found a safe asylum in the Moscow museum. For who knows how long even this kind of folk art can withstand the triumphant progress of technology which today sweeps across Russia' (Benjamin 1985: 124).

20. See Benjamin (2007b).

21. It is always a question of setting (something) on its way/voice [*voix*], and alley oop by pressing on a well-place lever, to compel unplugging, derailing, hanging up, playing with the switch points and sending off elsewhere, setting it off-route (go to see if I am there: and someone is always found there, to carry on, to take up the thread of the story, you follow). (Derrida [1980] 1987: 160–61)

22. See André Malraux, *The Imaginary Museum of World Sculpture (1952–54)*. The photograph of Malraux overseeing his modernist grid of photos is published in this encyclopaedic work. Donald Kuspit remarks on a photograph of Malraux with his images:

of paintings as postcards emphasize Guston's dynamic compressions of timing. They are not only a miniature depiction of a larger image, but a then-and-now relation of the postcard to painting. This relates Guston's dynamic compositions to that old-fashioned activity: the dynamics of producing and sending post-cards which, in comparison with modern digital collections and transmissions of images of painting, can feel outmoded.[27]

Comparative dynamics allow wider associations to occur in which 'circular memory' may intervene as historic reference is condensed with consciousness of immediate everyday experience in a split moment of recognition. Warburg's observations on form are explained by Didi-Huberman:

> on the one hand he saw the elementary gestures […] gestures elicited by immediate organic reactions such as seizing/fleeing, desiring/rebuffing, caressing/killing etc. on the other hand, Warburg discovered 'displacement formulas', through which 'emotional life' shows its capacity to find a home even in the semi-organic or inorganic folds of coiffures and flowing cloths agitated by the wind.
>
> (Didi-Huberman 2017: 262)

'Inorganic coiffures' and 'folds' in surface are so relevant to Guston's imagery, as are actions, such as building, defending, bashing, pushing, shoving, sleeping, dreaming. Caramazza's paintings, by unifying postcard scale, allow the sensations of timings in Guston's thingly presences to be informed by both the unstable timings of postcard usage and the internal dynamics of the postcard image. Both temporal frames have the capacity to invoke involuntary memory.

Malraux researches similarities in appearance, Warburg's arrangements of grouped photographs into the *Mnemosyne Atlas* researched a consistency of comparative pathos, within the formal structures of strikingly different images. These comparative groupings fascinate because they entice, but also evade, definitive somatic reading. Through his analytic collections of images, Warburg tracks transitional meanings of internalized form rather than surface comparisons of styles, periods or ethnographic sources. Warburg refers to a 'sly unconscious' grasp of image that researches fleeting moments of intensified recognition of a certain movement.[28] Guston observes his own feelings about the unpredictability of analysing dynamic form as the potential energy of ephemeral images becomes condensed.

> The forms which touch and bump and overlap each other, strain to separate themselves, yet cannot exist without one another. While they strive to become independent, a condition of delirium persists. […] What a startling state for forms to be in.
>
> (McKee 1982: 51)

> The Frenchman stands over an array of photographic plates like a god or a Caesar deciding their fate – whether they should survive, if only in the meagre form of the photograph or in the amphitheatre of the book, or disappear into oblivion.
>
> (2012: n.pag.)

In this text, Kuspit reviews a video appropriation, reconstructing the photograph of Malraux as a performance, using alternative images by artist Dennis Adams, *Malraux's Shoes*, Kent Fine Art, New York, 2012.

23. Crimp's text is illustrated with photographs by Louise Lawler, in another example of appropriation, showing grouped artworks in domestic and museum settings.

24. Andre Malraux, quoted by Crimp (1995: 55).

25. Also see a definition of Warburg's term *pathosformel* in Didi-Huberman's foreword to Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (2004: 15).

26. Arguing for abstraction as a function of the reading of the figural content of Guston's

paintings, Slifkin says the KKK hoods are not direct representations 'but specters, ghostly figures from the past' and as such become a liminal, abstracted reference, to time. (2011b: 228)

27. See Slifkin (2011b) in which pop-art recycles historic images in the form in which they were originally represented, subtly adjusting their historic dynamic to create fascinating alliances between historic and present appearances. In Didi-Huberman on Warburg the Freudian terms *Nachträglichkeit* and 'uncanny' are referred to in order to explain the complexities of recognition that extends from the appearance of forms in the present moment that contain symptomatic thoughts or feelings of historic depths of experience.

28. Accordingly, the significant detail pertains to movements or displacements of a desire that does not tell its name; what is involved here is less a *consciousness of minutiae*, than a *sly unconscious* which is always quick to reside where one is not looking for it (Didi-Huberman 2017: 324, original emphasis).

Encounters with motifs overtake description as Guston absorbs their sign-like qualities and analyses internalized momentum.

A Guston painting of 1960 *The Actors V*[29] is described by Slifkin as being on the cusp of Guston's move from abstraction to figuration, providing an example of Guston's awareness of the tension between the dynamics of action painting's gestural indexicality and its latent imagistic possibilities. The 'actors' of the title is a reference to Rosenberg's view of the painter as actor but the darkened triangle central to the group of shadowy shapes already suggests, without describing or identifying, the hooded KKK motif. In terms of dynamic form, this triangle floats parallel to the surface, holding threatening confrontational meaning.[30] The different, uncanny movement of Warburg's sensations of mobility in the presence of thingly forms can be felt in this emergent form. Slifkin describes how the critical apparatus of American art history may find this problematic:

> In the Post World War ll period of American Art the question of art's autonomy '[…] – from a culture considered debased by commercialism and discredited by political deception – was a central issue. The exclusively morphological definition of figuration conventionally invoked in art historical discourse has subsequently blinded the discipline to the larger aspects of the concept, and it has left art history unable to analyse what could be called alternative models of figuration'.
>
> (Slifkin 2011b: 227)

Guston's KKK hoods, in the works of the 1930s, were literal depictions. In their use from the late 1960s on, the hoods become a delayed presence, a surviving form of an abstracted sensation of menace. This was not exactly one of Warburg's categories, but similarly dynamic: the informe of Guston's historic and abstract reference to hovering that impinges on the dynamics of later depictions of the hood.

The geometric layout and standardized format of Caramazza's exhibition suggest the ethnographic science supporting Malraux's organizing project.[31] In contrast Guston's forms are both familiar and primitive, as are Van Gogh's boots or Benjamin's toys. Now collected in the Moscow museum Benjamin hopes the toys will not be lost but remain to evoke sensations of a longer scope of memory as revenance into a future to come.[32] Warburg's tracing of familiar dynamics from the past into present images is also relevant. Derrida describes how this retention of sensibility to such resonant warnings is a cultural necessity that requires the 'upkeep of a conversation' with 'ghosts of the present and the future', not in a rigorously historicized sense but as interiorized continuing process. For Derrida, this is a question of justice and responsibility that anticipates continuity (1994: xviii–xx). Guston, in the present moment of painting *In the Studio*, mirrors himself in the KKK hood

as a warning, its doubling of blanked vision both a picture and a present consequence of remorse that will resonate into the future.

Although observing the cancellation of the *Guston Now* exhibition from the historic perspective of being based in London, it is not clear what relation Caramazza intends his paintings to have to the contemporary, much warier, American context. The museums have taken steps to provide help to the viewer in the form of 'emotional preparedness for *Philip Guston Now*' statements. Offers of counselling for visitors are supplied at the entrance to the first showing of the work in Boston, and information is provided in pamphlet form giving additional advice in case of distressed response. Emily Colucci reports the museum's address to the viewer: 'The content of this exhibition is challenging. The Museum offers these words in a spirit of care and invitation' (2022: n.pag.). The museum's uncertainty about what the public can take extends to black boxes with moveable covers which hide press reports of historic events related to the dates of the paintings. This action, covertly providing or hiding narratives, suggests an absurd satire on a filthy secret world of Guston's work which reflects the stories everyone already knows about and which are in the news daily.[33]

Caramazza makes no direct comment on Guston's move to figuration but Glen Ligon, in his essay for the exhibition catalogue, does: 'To be "in the hood" was a solution to a problem, one that enabled Guston to break away from the elevated discourse surrounding post-war abstraction and dive into the muck and mire of the American experience' (2020: 117). The details of Caramazza's discipline of copying do not reproduce the passion that is present in the paintings at full-scale, but an interest in dynamics of 'thingly' forms, now reified within the postcards. Caramazza's ostensible purpose is one of preservation and transmission, as with Benjamin's and Derrida's sense of maintaining collective memories in the postcard form. Ligon remarks that Guston's imagery, with its ambiguities between personal and political traumas, keeps America's incendiary subject-matter alive: '[the paintings] are not asleep – they're woke' as anyone can see' (2020: 117). Malraux, Derrida, Benjamin, Warburg and Levine consider subtle models of somatic responses based in histories and ambiguities of facture, comparative analogies of form, and accruals of meaning over time. Ligon's position is about the present experiences revealed symptomatically in a broader reading of Guston's imagery, now historicized in the new displays.

Proposing a temporal splitting between memory and immediacy of image, *Guston Reloaded*, speculates on painting's ability to comment on the ambiguities of being 'woke'. Ligon says that temporarily postponing *Philip Guston Now* in order to re-think the message of the exhibition was a correct course of action: the museums were right to suspect disturbing content in Guston's paintings, and right to reconsider the mode of their presentation. However Ligon shifts the agenda of where exactly the original aggravation lies by referring to Guston's decision to change the content of his paintings: 'It is incredibly brave to give up one's place as a pre-eminent Ab Ex painter to do the Klansmen paintings, which was seen as betrayal […] vilified at the time for many reasons'

29. Philip Guston *The Actors V*, 1960. Oil on Strathmore paperboard on Masonite, 76.2 cm × 101.6 cm, Estate of Philip Guston, private collection. This painting is considered as a transitional work in Slifkin's essay on Guston's *Return to Figuration* (2011b). The title 'Actors' reflects on Rosenberg's view of agency, the painter as actor in the canvas arena. The painting is not present in either exhibition but *Philip Guston Now* contains similar examples of transitional works, see Sillman (2020) and Dean (2020).

30. The opening essay of the exhibition catalogue *Philip Guston Now*, 'Guston, then: Telling lies' by Harry Cooper (2020a) is illustrative. A drawing of a knot image that completes a sentence beginning 'ALL THE ELEMENTS MUST', found in Guston's studio, Hooper gives a fascinating historical analysis of iconographic instances of knots related to Guston's painting, providing an account of the image's possible connections to specific events in Guston's life. The article is rationalizing and evidential without addressing the dynamic causation of a macabre range of values of knotted imagery.

(Brown 2021: n.pag.)[34] Here Ligon displaces emphasis on KKK references as the source of Guston's troubling content, citing the negative critical response to Guston's own historic rejection of abstract expressionism in his landmark exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery, New York, in 1970.[35]

The view expressed by Ligon is that Guston's paintings had become 'out of order' within New York's abstract expressionist community. Referring to a painting in the Marlborough exhibition Ligon says

> I think he has implicated himself in the notion that white supremacy is not something that is 'over there', it is something that lives within. If you make a painting called *In the Studio* and it is a painting of a Klansman painting a picture of a Klansman, that's Guston implicating himself, saying white supremacy splatters and stains.
>
> (Brown 2021: n.pag.)

Ligon has a point: the splattering agency of action painting is itself 'stained' by association with a supremacist cultural tendency. Caramazza manages to displace this reading of Guston's memories of American painting and the museums' historical perspective more generally. Instead, copying postcards remembers and elaborates, in many subtle yet politicized ways, the troubling and tragic meanings Guston attends to through painting. Caramazza evokes another memory of experience of Guston's paintings, based in the responsibility of their historical witness, their imaginative invention, clarity and beauty, and their unstoppable powers of transmission.

31. See photo of Malraux and his arrangement of photographic plates, for 'The Museum Without Walls', Paris Match/ Jarnoux, reprinted in Crimp (1995: 59).

32. See Derrida *Specters of Marx* (1994). Also see translator's note on 'l'avenir' as 'the future' and Derrida's different usage of 'l'à-venir' as 'future to come' (1994: 177n5).

33. See Colucci (2022).

34. In a subsequent question Ligon states that he agrees with the postponement of the exhibition because of the museum's own uncertainties about how to present the work: 'If your guards say that they are not going to stand in the room with that Klansman that is not going to get solved by putting those paintings in the room' (Brown 2021: n.pag.).

35. Ligon refers to Guston's exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery, New York, October 1970 and the critical shock of the figurative works made during 1967–70. See Cooper (2020b) and Ashton (1976). In contrast to Cooper, Ashton evades the critical response to the Marlborough paintings by emphasizing their

References

Ashton, Dore (1976), *Yes, But...: A Critical Study of Philip Guston*, New York: Viking Press.

Benjamin, Walter ([1970] 1982), 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in H. Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (trans. H. Zohn), London: Fontana Press, pp. 217–52.

Benjamin, Walter (1985), 'Moscow diary', *October*, 35:winter, pp. 4–135.

Benjamin, Walter (2007a), 'Travel scenes, picture postcards', in U. Marx, G. Schwarz, M. Schwarz and E. Wizisla (eds), *Walter Benjamin's Archive: Images, Texts, Signs* (trans. E. Leslie), London: Verso, pp. 171–96.

Benjamin, Walter (2007b), 'Physiognomy of the thingworld, Russian toys', in U. Marx, G. Schwarz, M. Schwarz and E. Wizisla (eds), *Walter Benjamin's Archive: Images, Texts, Signs* (trans. E. Leslie), London: Verso, pp. 73–105.

Brown, Kate (2021), '"Artists imagine that museums are brave: They're not": Glenn Ligon on his new show, Philip Guston, and how institutions can do better', artnet, 18 November, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/glenn-ligon-interview-2036127. Accessed 27 October 2022.

relation to classical landscapes, grotesque cartoons and European traditions in painting.

Colucci, Emma (2022), '"Philip Guston Now" is an unintentionally perfect satire of contemporary liberal cultural politics', Filthy Dreams, 23 May, https://filthydreams.org/2022/05/23/philip-guston-now-is-an-unintentionally-perfect-satire-of-contemporary-liberal-cultural-politics/. Accessed 27 October 2022.
Cooper, Harry (2002), 'Recognizing Guston (in four slips)', *October*, 99:winter, pp. 97–129.
Cooper, Harry (2020a), 'Guston, then: Telling tales', in *Philip Guston Now*, exhibition catalogue, Washington, DC: Distributed Art Publishers and National Gallery of Art (D.A.P.), pp. 5–7.
Cooper, Harry (2020b), 'Marlborough man', in *Philip Guston Now*, exhibition catalogue, Washington, DC: Distributed Art Publishers and National Gallery of Art (D.A.P.), pp. 83–87.
Crimp, Douglas (1995), *On The Museum's Ruins*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Dean, Tacita (2020), 'Guston head', in *Philip Guston Now*, exhibition catalogue, Washington, DC: Distributed Art Publishers and National Gallery of Art (D.A.P.), pp. 80–81.
Derrida, Jacques ([1980] 1987), 'Envois', in *The Postcard from Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (trans. A. Bass), Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 1–256.
Derrida, Jacques (1994), *Specters of Marx* (trans. P. Kamuf), London: Routledge.
Didi-Huberman, George (2004), 'Foreword, knowledge: Movement (the man who spoke to butterflies)', in P.-A. Michaud (eds), *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (trans. S. Hawkes), New York: Zone Books, pp. 7–20.
Didi-Huberman, George (2017), *The Surviving Image, Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms, Aby Warburg's History of Art* (trans. H. Mendelsohn), Pennsylvania, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
Goodman, Jonathan (2022), 'The Guston Foundation: The maintenance of Philip Guston's legacy', *The Brooklyn Rail*, October, https://brooklynrail.org/2022/10/artonic/The-Guston-Foundation-The-Maintenance-of-Philip-Gustons-Legacy. Accessed 22 October 2022.
Hancock, Trenton Doyle (2020), 'Drawing for conspirators, 1930', in *Philip Guston Now*, exhibition catalogue, Washington, DC: Distributed Art Publishers and National Gallery of Art (D.A.P.), pp. 15–36.
Handel Street Projects (2022), 'Filippo Caramazza: *Guston Reloaded*', press release, 10 June–16 September, http://handelstreetprojects.com/filippo-caramazza-guston-reloaded. Accessed 12 September 2022.
Joselit, David (2016), 'Marking, scorings, storing, and speculating (on time)', in I. Graw and E. Lajer-Burcharth (eds), *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, pp. 11–20.
Kuspit, Donald (2012), 'Dennis Adams, Kent fine art', *Artforum*, 51:3, https://www.artforum.com/events/dennis-adams-194984/. Accessed 22 October 2022.

Liebman, Joshua (2022), 'Guston is treated with contempt: *Philip Guston Now* reviewed', *The Spectator*, 20 August, https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/guston-is-treated-with-contempt-philip-guston-now-reviewed/#:~:text=Philip%20Guston%20is%20hard%20to,his%20approach%20altogether%20too%20winsome. Accessed 22 October 2022.
Ligon, Glen (2020), 'In the hood', in *Philip Guston Now*, exhibition catalogue, Washington, DC: Distributed Art Publishers and National Gallery of Art (D.A.P.), pp. 117–32.
Malraux, André ([1954] 1978), *The Voices of Silence: Man and his Art (Abridged from The Psychology of Art)* (trans. S. G., Bollingen), vol. 24, Princeton, IN: Princeton University Press.
Malraux, André (1967), *Museum without Walls*, London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd.
Marcus, J. S. (2022), 'Controversially postponed Philip Guston show finally gets going: How has it changed?', *The Art Newspaper*, 26 April, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/04/26/controversially-postponed-philip-guston-shows-finally-get-going. Accessed 22 October 2022.
Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick (1968), 'Theses against Feuerbach', in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 28–29.
McKee, Renée (ed.) (1982), 'Philip Guston talking', in *Philip Guston: Paintings 1969–1980*, exhibition catalogue, 13 October–12 December, London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, pp. 49–56.
Mckee, Renée (ed.) (2004), 'Philip Guston talking: A lecture given by Philip Guston at the University of Minnesota in March 1978', in *Philip Guston*, exhibition catalogue, 22 January–21 February, London: Timothy Taylor Gallery, pp. 21–36.
Phillips, Steve (2022), 'America is built on a racist social contract: It's time to tear it up and start anew', *The Guardian*, 22 October, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/oct/22/america-racist-social-contract-start-anew-steve-phillips. Accessed 22 October 2023.
Rosenberg, Harold (1974), 'Conversations, Philip Guston and Harold Rosenberg: Guston's recent paintings', *Boston University Journal*, 22:3, pp. 43–58.
Sillman, Amy (2020), 'From garbage cans to god', in *Philip Guston Now*, exhibition catalogue, Washington, DC: Distributed Art Publishers and National Gallery of Art (D.A.P.), pp. 63–79.
Slifkin, Robert (2011a), 'The tragic image: Action painting refigured', *Oxford Art Journal*, 34:2, pp. 227–46.
Slifkin, Robert (2011b), 'Philip Guston's *Return to Figuration* and the "1930s Renaissance" of the 1960s', *The Art Bulletin*, 93:2, pp. 220–42.
Suchin, Peter (2022), 'Filippo Caramazza: *Guston Reloaded*', *Art Monthly*, 458, July–August, p. 27.

Suggested citation

Key, Joan (2023), '"Thingly" forms in *Guston Reloaded* Filippo Caramazza, Handel Street Projects', *Journal of Contemporary Painting*, 9:2, pp. 203–22, https://doi.org/10.1386/jcp_00056_1

Contributor details

Joan Key is a painter, living and working in London. Currently an associate lecturer in fine art, University for the Creative Arts, Canterbury, she has written extensively on contemporary practice, often focusing on works by women artists. Her catalogue essays have been published by galleries including Peer Trust on Olga Jevric; Van Abbe Museum on Pavel Buchler; Spacex on Jayne Parker; Tintype on Lynne Marsh; and Anthony Reynolds Gallery on Amikam Toren. Key's essays also appeared in the Whitechapel and MIT Press publications on *Painting* and *Craft*, as well as in *Third Text*, *Art Monthly*, *Turps Banana, Journal of Contemporary Painting* and *Forward Slash Seconds*. *Make*, the journal of the Women's Art Library has published her essays on Lucia Nogueira, Prunella Clough and Susana Solana. Key is a member of Interval Research Group, based in Canterbury, investigating practical and formal exchanges arising from the presentation of painting in relation to moving image.

Contact: School of Fine Art and Photography, University for the Creative Arts, New Dover Road, Canterbury, CT1 3AN, UK.
E-mail: joan.key@colu1.plus.com