The American painter Philip Guston (American, b. Canada, 1913-1980) will be the subject of a major retrospective at The Metropolitan Museum of Art from October 27, 2003, through January 4, 2004. The exhibition will include more than 75 paintings and drawings dating from 1930, when he was 17, to 1980, the year of his death. Beginning with his childhood fascination with popular American comic strips, through mural painting laden with political imagery, to easel painting and a burgeoning interest in, advancement of, and ultimate disenchantment with abstraction and Abstract Expressionism, through his invention of a highly controversial figurative mode of painting and drawing that influenced younger artists, Guston courageously changed styles according to his beliefs and in response to social and political issues of the day.

Philippe de Montebello, Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, commented: "Philip Guston's oeuvre reflects influences ranging from the great Italian quattrocento masters Piero della Francesca and Paolo Uccello, to Watteau, to the early 20th-century works of de Chirico, Picasso, and Mondrian, as well as the popular American cartoon. Guston's particular genius was in mediating such seemingly diverse traditions, and, with fluent brushstrokes that speak to the artist's hand and brilliant color, creating works that vigorously defied conventions. He was a compelling figure who charted a course that was often contradictory, yet always courageous from an aesthetic and theoretical standpoint."

**Philip Guston** will explore and document the stages of this precocious and highly energetic artist's career, featuring key works drawn from around the United States, the United Kingdom, and rarely seen paintings from Australia. Highlights will include the *Drawing for Conspirators* (1930)-the artist's first reaction to the cruelties of the Ku Klux Klan, the tondo *Bombardment* (1937-38) and *The Tormentors* (1947-48), which, together with *White Painting* (1951), documents Guston's transition from Symbolic Realism into abstraction. Works that richly demonstrate Guston's personal interpretation of the Abstract Expressionist movement include *Painting* (1954), *Zone* (1953-54), *To Fellini* (1958) and other nuanced abstractions. Following a group of transitional drawings and paintings of the 1960s, *Edge of Town* (1969), *The Law* (1969), *The Studio* (1969), and *Courtroom* (1970) incorporate Klan imagery used both to comment on political issues of the day and to represent the artist surrounded by everyday artifacts. These were first seen in Guston's controversial 1970 Marlborough Gallery exhibition in New York. *Wharf* ([1976]), *Painting, Smoking, Eating* (1973), the powerful battle scene *The Street* (1977), and *Talking* (1979), further display Guston's autobiographical symbolism. Drawings and paintings included in the exhibition-most notably a painting, *San Clemente* (1975), depicting Richard Nixon-will demonstrate the artist's frustration with American politics during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Philip Guston brought a unique combination of moral intensity and probing self-reflection to his art. He was the youngest of seven children born to Jewish immigrants from Odessa in 1913 in Montreal, Canada. Guston-whose original surname was Goldstein-moved as a child with his family to Los Angeles. After witnessing his father’s depression and finding him following his suicide, the young Guston retreated to a place of literal isolation-a closet illuminated by a single light bulb-and began a lifelong career in art through an intense engagement with cartoons of his own invention. The light bulb later became a prevailing image in Guston's mature work. At Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles Guston met and became a friend of Jackson Pollock.

In his early schooling, art school, and throughout his career, Guston devotedly studied the history of art. His influences were broad, ranging from the Italian Renaissance masters of the 15th century to modern European artists such as Cézanne, Léger, and Mondrian. His mural paintings of the 1930s were inspired by the great Mexican artists David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974), Diego Rivera (1886-1957), and José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949). He was also influenced by the haunting cityscapes of Giorgio de Chirico (Italian, 1888-1978).
After moving to New York City in 1935, where he renewed his friendship with Pollock, Guston met and saw the work of many of his contemporaries—Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman, among many others. Together they would form the center of the major American art movement that became known as Abstract Expressionism. Gradually Guston shifted from painting public murals to working privately in the studio, at an easel. At the same time, he began to accept university teaching positions that brought him to cities in the Midwest. As Abstract Expressionism took root in New York City in the mid-1940s, Guston arrived slightly later at his personal version of the style. Guston's imagery of the 1950s and early 1960s is considered to be as complex and as moving as other works produced by the movement. Guston's emphasis on the brushstroke—what he saw as the most fundamental act of marking, the cornerstone of painting, the essence of an artist's uniqueness—remains one of his most enduring legacies. The brushstroke and a continuing inquiry into structure, recalling the “plus and minus” compositions of the mid-teens by Mondrian, became the chief pictorial components for Guston's Abstract Expressionism and are among his most significant contributions to the movement.

In addition to his devotion to drawing and painting, Philip Guston was also an avid reader of philosophy, fiction, and poetry and he was a writer and a charismatic educator, continuing to teach through much of his career. In 1965 he helped found the New York Studio School for Drawing and Painting. However in the 1970s, as his health began to deteriorate, Guston became increasingly withdrawn. He retreated from the New York art scene and spent most of his time at his home and studio in Woodstock, New York, where he continued the autobiographical figuration he had begun in the late 1960s. After Musa, his wife of 40 years, suffered a stroke in 1977, and after his own nearly fatal heart attack in 1979, he painted figurative works and intimate portraits. From this period, *Couple in Bed* (1977), *Sleeping* (1977), and a group of small acrylics from 1980 will be on view in the exhibition.

While dining at the Woodstock home of Sylvia and Fred Elias (his doctor), Philip Guston suffered another heart attack and died at the age of 67.

Michael Auping, Chief Curator at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and curator of the exhibition, wrote in his essay in the exhibition catalogue *Philip Guston Retrospective*: "Significant artists are often those figures who make bold and difficult transitions throughout their career, and in that process synthesize vast territories of art history. These are artists whose works reflect not only the aspirations and anxieties of their own generation, but of those that came before and after." Auping continued: "Having helped to define the one great movement associated with American art, Abstract Expressionism, he also had the boldness and skill to carve his way out of it." 

Prior to its presentation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Philip Guston* was on view at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Following its showing at the Metropolitan, the exhibition will be seen at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, England, from January 24 through April 12, 2004. The exhibition was organized by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, Texas.

A variety of educational programs are planned in conjunction with the exhibition. These will include a lecture on Sunday, November 2, at 3:00 p.m. by Harvard University Art Museums curator of modern art Harry Cooper on the Ku Klux Klan imagery of Guston's paintings; and a panel discussion on Sunday, November 16, 3:00-5:00 p.m., moderated by Nan Rosenthal, Senior Consultant in Modern Art and coordinator of the exhibition at the Metropolitan, and featuring artist Carroll Dunham, critic Roberta Smith, and Michael Auping of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. A fully illustrated catalogue accompanying the exhibition will be available at the Museum's book shop. *Philip Guston Retrospective*, published by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in association with Thames & Hudson, with essays by Michael Auping, Dore Ashton, Bill Berkson, Andrew Graham-Dixon, Michael E. Shapiro, and Joseph Rishel, as well as Guston's 1965 essay "Faith, Hope, and Impossibility."

The Museum's Web site (www.metmuseum.org) will include a special feature about the exhibition.

Editor's note: Please see our earlier articles *Philip Guston Retrospective* (5/23/03) and *Philip Guston: A New Alphabet* (9/13/00).

and from the Web:

- From *ArtForum* [Philip Guston - art exhibition - Brief Article Feb, 2001 by Francine Koslow Miller](http://www.artforum.com)

TFAO also suggests these DVD or VHS videos:

*Philip Guston, a Life Lived* A series of interviews with Philip Guston conducted throughout the seventies to 1980. Guston discusses his career as a painter and the influences from his personal life, politics, and the art community on his work and his place in the "New York School." Michael Blackwood Productions. 2005. 59 min. DVD 4259. Available from Media
TFAO does not maintain a lending library of videos or sell videos. Click here for information on how to borrow or purchase copies of VHS videos and DVDs listed in TFAO's Videos -DVD/VHS, an authoritative guide to videos in VHS and DVD format.

Links to sources of information outside of our web site are provided only as referrals for your further consideration. Please use due diligence in judging the quality of information contained in these and all other web sites. Information from linked sources may be inaccurate or out of date. TFAO neither recommends or endorses these referenced organizations. Although TFAO includes links to other web sites, it takes no responsibility for the content or information contained on those other sites, nor exerts any editorial or other control over them. For more information on evaluating web pages see TFAO's General Resources section in Online Resources for Collectors and Students of Art History.

Read more articles and essays concerning this institutional source by visiting the sub-index page for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Resource Library Magazine.

Search for more articles and essays on American art in Resource Library. See America’s Distinguished Artists for biographical information on historic artists.

This page was originally published in 2003 in Resource Library Magazine. Please see Resource Library's Overview section for more information.

Copyright 2012 Traditional Fine Arts Organization, Inc., an Arizona nonprofit corporation. All rights reserved.