

# Guston, Schapiro, Rosenberg, . . .

## Dialogue

*Why do we think Guston made paintings like these? This becomes a question, too, about how we are compelled, how we respond.*

By William Eaton

I think every good painter here in New York really paints a self-portrait. I think a painter has two choices: he paints the world or himself. And I think the best painting that's done here is when he paints himself, and by himself I mean himself in this environment, in this total situation.

— Philip Guston, 1960<sup>1</sup>

I saw the best minds of my generation . . .  
who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for  
Eternity outside of Time, & alarm clocks fell on their heads  
every day for the next decade,

— Allen Ginsberg, from *Howl*, Part I, 1955

I found myself in a partial situation—or in a total one masquerading as a partial one?—a retrospective of the painter Philip Guston's work from the late 1950s and 1960s.<sup>2</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> David Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists* (Yale University Press, 2001), 93. Guston was speaking in a context established by Harold Rosenberg's essay, [The American Action Painters](#) (*Art News* 51/8, December 1952). E.g.: "A painting that is an act is inseparable from the biography of the artist."

<sup>2</sup> [Philip Guston, Painter, 1957-1967](#), Hauser & Wirth, New York, 18<sup>th</sup> Street, 26 April – 29 July 2016.

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**N.B.:** The reproductions of Guston works that accompany the online version of this piece are quite integral to it. See [Zeteo version](#) to view these images.

was when he was having a good deal of success as a member of the New York School of more or less Abstract artists, and before he again openly embraced the figurative, cartoon-like, editorializing painting of his Los Angeles youth.<sup>3</sup> It was a gray afternoon, heading toward evening; the gallery's many skylights were offering little light; and I was in a gray-heading-toward-evening mood. I was struck by the emptiness in the large, clean rooms of this gallery, by how uninteresting, passionless, depressed Guston's paintings seemed. In a 1948 essay on "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," the then dominant New York art critic Clement Greenberg (not referring to Guston's Abstract work, which was just getting under way) wrote of how pictures were dissolving into "sheer texture . . . sheer sensation".<sup>4</sup> Harold Rosenberg, in "The American Action Painters," his seminal 1952 essay on Abstract Expressionism, wrote:

Satisfied with wonders that remain safely inside the canvas, the artist accepts the permanence of the commonplace and decorates it with his own daily annihilation. The result is an apocalyptic wallpaper.<sup>5</sup>

While I would not associate Guston's paintings with "the commonplace," it could seem "apocalyptic"—and a kind of annihilation of the artist—the flatness and frightened imagery, the repetitions of colors, brush strokes, and patterns. We are not surprised to learn that Guston was someone who struggled with depression.

Before coming to the gallery—Hauser & Wirth, 18<sup>th</sup> Street, New York—I had read some of the critical literature, but not that much and long enough ago to have forgotten a good deal. For the moment I was a naïve, curious about my lack of interest in Guston's paintings. Could it be a sign that I was about to spend the next month, if not five years, of my life studying and writing about these abstract canvases and how rich they were? Fate might have drawn me into this gallery and this room, and my initial negative reaction could be to not wanting to always be fate's slave.

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<sup>3</sup> We here confront long-standing terminological problems. In a footnote to **'American-Type' Painting** (first published in *The Partisan Review* in 1955), Clement Greenberg proposed that "abstract expressionism" was "very inaccurate as a covering term"; hence his use of "American-type painting." "Abstract impressionism" was a term that Guston used to describe his own work. Greenberg wrote that this term "denotes very inaccurately certain after-comers". He also mentions the French critic and curator Michel Tapié's term "art informel," which seems to offer an approach to the "Abstract" work of Guston (among others). The term for European Abstract Expressionism became, however, not *art informel* but "tachisme."

<sup>4</sup> Clement Greenberg, **The Crisis of the Easel Picture**, 1948. Reproduced in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, edited by John O'Brien (University of Chicago Press, 1986) and previously in Greenberg, **Art and Culture: Critical Essays** (Beacon Press, 1961). In the better-known **'American-Type' Painting**, *op. cit.*, Greenberg wrote: "The issue is raised as to just where the pictorial stops and the decorative begins." I can't help noting that, in our day and age, we have artists, such as Taryn Simon, about whom it might be said that the issue is raised just where the political stops and the decorative begins.

<sup>5</sup> Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *op. cit.* N.B.: "Wallpaper" is a word Greenberg had introduced to the discussion in "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," *op. cit.*, wherein he wrote that "'all-over' pictures," which relied "on a surface knit together of identical or closely similar elements," come very close to the kind of decoration "seen in wallpaper patterns".

In her memoir of her father, Guston's daughter Musa Mayer notes how, repeatedly, he "abandoned ways of working that had met with critical success."<sup>6</sup> I think our subject is—and that Guston's work reflects, *inter alia*—compulsion, both psychological and social (the extent to which external forces, often internalized and combining there with our native biochemistry, dictate our fate). And compulsive work is both driven and disconnected, fighting off depression and seeking to slip away from the forces through activity. From Mayer:

Something my father remembered the composer John Cage saying to him during the 1950s often came to his mind: "When you start working, everybody is in your studio—the past, your friends, enemies, the art world, and above all, your own ideas—all are there. But as you continue, they start leaving one by one, and you are left completely alone. Then, if you're lucky, even you leave."<sup>7</sup>

Of course we can hear Buddhist echoes and thus imagine, or indeed feel, that the resulting work has a special purity or spirituality. And yet—or simultaneously—confronted with the work, an art-gallery visitor could also feel or see, less happily or more empathetically, distances—between the artist and his work and the world, and thus, too, between the work and the viewer.

Here at the outset, I should say, too, that I later returned to Hauser & Wirth, on a sunny day, and after having read and read—Greenberg, Rosenberg, Mayer, Meyer Schapiro, Roberta Smith, Eva Cockcroft, Louis Menand, Wikipedia. I had particularly sought out texts that might help me appreciate why the work of Guston and his colleagues had been lionized in the 1950s. And I had looked again and again at versions of the paintings available online, versions that, *grâce à la technologie*, deformed the work, backlighting it, making it more resplendent and translucent—almost as if one were holding an old photographic slide up to a light.

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<sup>6</sup> Musa Mayer, "My Father, Philip Guston," *New York Times*, August 7, 1988. Adapted from *Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston by His Daughter* (Knopf, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* By contrast, or as a kind of counterpoint, see this [\*\*analysis, prepared by the Museum of Modern Art of Fort Worth\*\*](#), of Guston's *Painter's Forms II*, 1978, from his later, post-Abstract period:

depicts a large mouth coughing up (or eating up) a mound of legs, shoes, cigarette butts, nails, trashcan lids, and other unidentified shapes. All of these objects have great personal meaning for Guston, and they occur in his work from the late 1960s to the time of his death in 1980. . . . In *Painter's Forms II*, the mouth is likely Guston's, and the mound of objects are the thoughts (or "forms") in his head that he must get out, or digest, through painting. The legs refer to his brother, who had his legs amputated and later died from complications of the operation. During Guston's youth, his father, a blacksmith, took a job as a junk collector, referred to in this painting (and many others) by the trashcan lids. Overwhelmed and depressed by having to take the job to support his family, Guston's father committed suicide shortly thereafter. The presence of these objects from his past, powerful symbols of painful moments in his life, are still stuck in his mind, shown by the mouth which barely contains them. Guston's bold, even garish, colors and rough style of painting add to the intensity of emotion and urgency he must have felt while painting this piece, as if he had to get the painting out of his head, the same way the mouth coughs up the excess of painful objects.

Surprise, surprise, given all this, on my second visit the work looked quite different. For one, the figurative elements in many of the paintings leapt out at me. As one may see faces in the clouds, so now I saw all the black, cartoon heads peering out through the forest of the “texture.” Hammers, a wizard, chairs, a woman with a handbag, a ghoulish figure with a crutch, black and white faces together, as on the prow of a ship, a Santa’s bag, full of presents, but not red and white: black.

It occurred to me, too, that in the United States—and certainly with white male police officers continuing to murder black men—black can never just be a color. Rosenberg had written, “The big moment came when it was decided to paint . . . just to PAINT,” but an American artist whose palette includes black—and so much black—can never be just painting, can never be liberated “from Value—political, esthetic, moral.”<sup>8</sup> Monochrome painting, which became infamous when the Abstract Expressionist Ad Reinhardt exhibited his nearly all-black paintings, is said to have begun with the French writer Paul Bilhaud’s painting *Combat de nègres dans un tunnel* (Negroes fight in a tunnel), 1882.<sup>9</sup>

James Baldwin’s approach to blackness in America has come to mind (and I would not be surprised to discover that Guston was as impressed by Baldwin’s essays as I and as so many “liberal” Americans have been). From “Everybody’s Protest Novel” (which is rooted in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*):

The conundrum of color is the inheritance of every American, be he/she legally or actually Black or White. It is a fearful inheritance, . . .

It is savagely, if one may say so, ironical that the only proof the world—mankind—has ever had of White supremacy is in the Black face and voice: that face never scrutinized, that voice never heard.<sup>10</sup>

Readers will be noting that the present text is complex piece, moving between specific experiences in an art gallery and reading done in response to those experiences or independent of it. Readers may also be noting that I, like Guston and like his black figures, have a heavy head. The first afternoon, I found my way to a bench in one of the quieter rooms of the gallery. I wanted both rest and to try to absorb something about Guston’s “Abstract” work that, naïve, I wasn’t absorbing.

Among other things, it is a simple fact that in 2016 Abstract Expressionist work is a lot harder to understand in an art gallery or museum than it is when you see a painting in this style gracing the security desk of the headquarters of a large corporation. Nothing better than an art work that speaks of human creativity and of being modern and with it and wonderful and pure, and without speaking openly about how organized forces are at work in our times and how human beings are caught up in the machinery. There is an extensive

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<sup>8</sup> Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” *op. cit.* N.B.: The essay does not mention Guston’s work.

<sup>9</sup> I have also seen the painting titled, “Combat de nègres dans un tunnel pedant la nuit”—during the night added at the end.

<sup>10</sup> James Baldwin, [Everybody’s Protest Novel](#), *Partisan Review*, 1949. Reproduced in *Notes of a Native Son*.

literature on how Abstract Expressionism—Guston paintings included—became a tool in a Cold War effort to win over the hearts and minds of foreign elites: writers, thinkers, and artists who remained attached to the Soviet Union, communism, and that now quaint idea: from each according to his ability, to each according to his need. I quote from *New Yorker* writer Louis Menand’s summary of the literature:

The theory . . . is that abstract painting was an ideal propaganda tool. It was avant-garde, the product of an advanced civilization. In contrast to Soviet painting, it was neither representational nor didactic. It could be understood as pure painting—art absorbed by its own possibilities, experiments in color and form. Or it could be understood as pure expression—a “school” in which every artist had a unique signature. A Pollock looked nothing like a Rothko, which looked nothing like a Gorky or a Kline. Either way, Abstract Expressionism stood for autonomy: the autonomy of art, freed from its obligation to represent the world, or the freedom of the individual—just the principles that the United States [claimed to be] defending in the worldwide struggle. Art critics therefore [and themselves subsidized by the CIA, et al.] developed apolitical modes of appreciation and evaluation, emphasizing the formal rigor or the existentialist drama of the paintings; and the Museum of Modern Art favored Abstract Expressionists in its purchases and international exhibitions, at the expense of art whose politics might have been problematic . . . <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Louis Menand, **Unpopular Front: American art and the Cold War**, *The New Yorker*, October 17, 2005. Clement Greenberg provides the dominant examples of formalist readings of Abstract Expressionism and of the denial of political sources of the art work—and of the accompanying art criticism—through the application of political rhetoric to art-historical analysis. E.g., from “‘American-Type’ Painting,” *op. cit.*: “the most radical of all the phenomena of ‘abstract expressionism’—and the most revolutionary move in painting since Mondrian—consists precisely in an effort to repudiate value contrast as the basis of pictorial design. Here again, Cubism has revealed itself as a conservative and even reactionary tendency.”

In 1950, Greenberg had become part of the CIA-sponsored American Committee for Cultural Freedom, of which Jackson Pollock, Alexander Calder, John Dewey, John Kenneth Galbraith, Mary McCarthy, J. Robert Oppenheimer, and many more, were also members.

Menand was responding to half a dozen books, including: Taylor Littleton and Maltby Sykes, *Advancing American Art: Painting, Politics, and Cultural Confrontation at Mid-Century* (The University of Alabama Press, 2005); Michael Krenn, *Fall-Out Shelters for the Human Spirit* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (The University of Chicago Press, 1983); Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (Granta, 1999), David Caute, *The Dancer Defects* (Oxford University Press, 2003). See also, among other valuable texts: David and Cecile Shapiro, “Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting,” *Prospects* 3 (October 1978): 175-214; and, last but not least for the moment, the muralist and critic Eve Cockcroft’s **Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War**, *Artforum* 12, no. 10 (June 1974): 39-41. Reprinted in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (Harper & Row, 1985).

More sources are given in a later footnote, and I would also here raise this question: Who is now writing so well about the politics of twenty-first century art? Abstract Expressionism was thought to have a “nonpolitical” quality that made it politically useful—in propaganda—while also helping leftist artists avoid losing their livelihoods to McCarthyism. The present situation is an inversion, with some artists getting rich, or at least earning good livings and reputations, by doing art that is ostensibly political, and yet seems to serve, above all, an obfuscating function, undermining the very politics to which it seems to be allied. Who is writing well about all this?

Naturalist art, for example.

At the same time, Menand notes that “no work reduces to a single context.” Indulging ourselves? falling back on bourgeois habits and diversions? pretending that the story of our times is not like the story of the meteor that wiped out the dinosaurs, that it is not simply the story of capitalism’s power and reach and insatiability? On my gallery bench I was open to many possibilities. Like many another, I have been a fan of the art criticism of Leo Steinberg, and like him I am open to seeing abstract paintings as—like a microscope—helping us see what is essential yet normally imperceptible.<sup>12</sup>

But what—I am looking around at ten or so Guston Abstract paintings, to include, for example, *The Light* (1960)—what would, what could this essence be: our primitiveness? our incapacity—for intellectual, psychological, or politico-economic reasons—to make sense of our experience, our predicament? Marx (shoved) aside, could this *art informel*—Guston’s seeming refusal to bother himself with order, beauty, seeing—could this be an inversion, as in a mirror, of the extraordinary human capacity to find order in the universe and to superimpose orders on it, to delight in our perceptive capacities?<sup>13</sup> And beauty in art is certainly related to this finding and superimposition of order. And so was my seeming lack of interest in Guston’s work an inversion of, a response to, anxiety provoked by his seeming disinterest in beauty, order . . . ? Or, in his best works, could there be found, as in the remains of a fire, the ashes of an anger that had once burned bright, against order and oppression? A recognition that order was a kind of oppression? “The difficulties begin,” Guston once observed, “when you understand what it is that the soul will not permit the hand to make.”<sup>14</sup>

Guston’s father, a blacksmith who had scratched out a living as a junk collector, had committed suicide when Guston (then Goldstein) was about 10, and it has been said that one of the reasons for this suicide was the anti-Semitic prejudice that had dogged the family

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<sup>12</sup> Leo Steinberg, “The Eye is a Part of the Mind,” first published in *Partisan Review* 20, No. 2 (March-April 1953). Quoting here from the version published in *Other Criteria with Twentieth-Century Art* (Oxford University Press, 1972), page 300:

[This essay] will try to show that representation is a central esthetic function in all art; and that the formalist esthetic, designed to champion the new abstract trend, was largely based on a misunderstanding and underestimation of the art it set out to defend. . . .

[T]he inversions of modern psychology and the iconoclasm of contemporary physics have once again, as in the Middle Ages, subverted our faith in the reality of palpable appearances. And it is right and proper for the modern artist who is worthy of his time that he should turn his back on the apparent since he holds with Plotinus that “all perceptible things are but signs and symbols of the imperceptible.”

<sup>13</sup> *Art informel*, a term of French critic and curator Michel Tapié. See previous footnote on terminology.

<sup>14</sup> *ARTnews Annual*, October 1966. Also from that text:

To will a new form is unacceptable, because will builds distortion. Desire too, is incomplete and arbitrary. These strategies, however intimate they might become, must especially be removed to clear the way for something else—a condition somewhat unclear, but which in retrospect becomes a very precise act. This “thing” is recognized only as it comes into existence. It resists analysis—and probably this is as it should be. . . . All these troubles revolve around the irritable mutual dependence of life and art – with their need and contempt for one another.

from the Ukraine to Canada to Los Angeles. When he was 18, Guston/Goldstein painted for the John Reed Club in Los Angeles an indoor mural—not about anti-Semitism, but—on the subject of the Scottsboro Boys, the nine black teenagers who, in the 1930s, were being framed for raping two white women. The mural was defaced by local police officers, and I have also read that Ku Klux Klan members, who in Southern California were after Jews and African-Americans, defaced Guston’s early, political murals.

**I**n the Hauser & Wirth room in which I was trying to pass to the other side of my lack of interest and to collect my thoughts, there were two other people: a young man who was touring the canvases and a woman about my age—early sixties—who was sitting at the other end of “my” bench. I could describe her as non-descript; however, sometime after a brief exchange we had and which I will eventually describe, I had the odd, unkind thought that she was a potato. A potato dressed as a human. (And what kind of unkind vegetative growth am I? A parsnip?)

I like asking people—strangers in art museums and galleries—what they think of art works that we are both looking at. It’s a way of making a little conversation; it touches on my curiosity about how other people are experiencing the world, what their points of connection are. And these people’s responses often help me develop my own. A Bakhtinian, I believe in “responses” more than in “my own.” That is, “the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ individual utterances.”<sup>15</sup> Hence all my reading and quoting.<sup>16</sup>

I am an echo chamber that has bursts its bounds, sounds, ideas crashing? Yet often I speak calmly, in a reasonably soft voice, albeit one with clashing overtones. I asked the woman sharing the bench with me, “Why do you think Guston made these paintings? Or why did he make paintings like these?”

It could well be imagined that questions such as this had been in Guston’s own mind during the period when he was making these Abstract paintings. His daughter: “[T]he image maker in him that feared and longed to create golems probably never did feel entirely comfortable with abstraction.”<sup>17</sup>

On the bench, though, I was more attuned to something else I had read, decades earlier, in *The Essential Tension*, a book by the sociologist of science Thomas Kuhn. Kuhn had

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<sup>15</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres”, in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, translated by Vern W. McGee (University of Texas Press, 1986), 89.

<sup>16</sup> I would say similarly regarding “art experiences.” I recently proposed to a model that her poses could be responses to the room of figure-drawers eager to draw her, and thus we amateurs were, in a sense, recording our responses to her responses to us. And this, we might say, is the superficial view. The young woman’s naked breasts, for example—for all they lay calmly over her ribs—were an echo chamber of social responses, resounding with ideas about nurture and sexuality, a dialogue between what a woman is or may be, and what she is supposed to be, for others, for herself, for mankind, for the sisterhood. “To an artist, the breasts are perhaps the most significant characteristic of the female figure.”—Alexander Dobkin, *Principles of Figure Drawing* (The World Publishing Company, 1948; reprinted by Dover, 2010.)

<sup>17</sup> Mayer, “My Father, Philip Guston,” *op. cit.*

written that he did not understand Aristotle’s approach to physics, to motion—it seemed to him absurd and of little interest—until he asked himself how a “sensible person” could have done such theorizing. “When reading the works of an important thinker,” Kuhn thus proposed:

look first for the apparent absurdities in the text and ask yourself how a sensible person could have written them. When you find an answer, . . . when those passages make sense, then you may find that more central passages, ones you previously thought you understood, have changed their meaning.<sup>18</sup>

And so, I was hoping I could come to understand how a once-politically-engaged, gifted artist could have made such seemingly aphonic or frightened paintings (or paintings about fear and repression)—paintings that, in their day, had seemed of great value, had been part of a euphoria, part of the United States’ first great contribution “to the mainstream of [European] painting and sculpture”—paintings that now, on this gray day in 2016, seemed weak.<sup>19</sup> An answer, or answers, might help me learn something about Guston’s career, the art world, myself, and the “total situation” in which we find ourselves.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* (The University of Chicago Press, 1977), xii. Passage includes a footnote: “More on this subject will be found in T.S. Kuhn, ‘Notes on Lakatos,’ *Boston Studies in Philosophy of Science* 8 (1971): 137-46.”

<sup>19</sup> “Mainstream” phrase is from the notoriously chauvinistic conclusion of Greenberg’s “‘American-Type’ Painting,” *op. cit.* He goes on, wrapping up:

At the Biennale in Venice in 1954, I saw how de Kooning’s exhibition put to shame . . . that of every other painter his age or under in the other pavilions. The general impression is still that an art of high distinction has as much chance of coming out of this country [the USA] as great wine. Literature—yes, we know that we have done some great things in that line; the English and French have told us so. Now they can begin to tell us the same about our painting.

<sup>20</sup> N.B.: I do not wish to imply that my reactions on a gray afternoon represent the general, contemporary view of Guston’s Abstract work. In her memoir, his daughter writes about how, in the 1980s, twenty years after he was done with such painting, “people were still coming up to him at openings and telling him how much they loved the paintings of this period. Why had he changed, they always wanted to know. How he hated that question!”

Nonetheless, in 2016, artnet® and its Price Database were reporting: “seven of the ten highest lots of Guston’s work at auction are for abstract works. The record, of \$25.8 million, was set at Christie’s New York in May 2013, for *To Fellini* (1958). Note that *To Fellini*, while not lacking in black, cannot be described, as “haunting, black forms awash in a gray scumble,” as Mayer so well describes some of the other work of this period. *To Fellini*, bright and colorful, is decorative—it could enliven a living room in a way that *Reverse*, 1965, or *Painter III*, 1963—or *Painter’s Form II*, 1978, could not.

Prices from Eileen Kinsella, **[Hauser and Wirth Opens Huge Philip Guston Show Pinpointing ‘Pivotal’ Decade](#)**, *artnet® news*, April 27, 2016. Mayer, “My Father, Philip Guston,” *op. cit.* The “euphoria” allusion comes from Mayer’s text, too, where it is a quotation from Elaine de Kooning: “The response to the painting had created a kind of euphoria. Everyone was used to bread crumbs, and suddenly here was all this attention in the press. You felt you were not working in a vacuum anymore.”

I take the following to be a significant moment in the history. The account below is from Menand’s “Unpopular Front,” *op. cit.*:

In February, 1949, when Pollock had started on the short, great period in which he created the drip paintings, *Time* ran a mocking story referring to him as the “darling of the highbrow cult.” In March, [the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred] Barr wrote a letter to Henry Luce, the publisher of *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune*, to propose that his magazines

It has, for example, been said that the New York painters were trying to get out from under European modernism, the tremendous reputations and accomplishments of Picasso, Mondrian, the Surrealists, and so many others. And in this effort they could not help but succeed, since they came to maturity in the aftermath of the United States' triumphs in the Second World War, and thus when New York was truly the media and financial capital of the world. And, thanks to the Cold War, they had the CIA, the Rockefellers, the Museum of Modern Art, Henry Luce, etc., eager to promote their work.

The artist Barnett Newman (1905-1970) once apparently offered this, alternative view: "After the monstrosity of the war, what do we do? What is there to paint? We have to start all over again."<sup>21</sup> (Guston: "To paint is always to start at the beginning again".<sup>22</sup>)

And thus an old, mocking stereotype: Abstract Expressionist like child enraged, with finger paints, smearing a wall? Or making vague forms—the red pants suggested in Guston's *Actor*, 1958 and his untitled painting of the same year? Was Guston, passive-aggressively, playing off how such forms can, in our imaginations, propaganda, and sales pitches, and with some help from hubris, grow into extraordinary constructions, works of genius? All it takes is the chauvinism of a rich and victorious country eager to imagine—force the world to accept?—that it didn't just know how to make bombs and sell cars and cigarettes, it could make great art, too?<sup>23</sup>

On the bench, my first hypothesis was that the paintings were in dialogue, if not with propaganda, then at least with advertising. The artists were at pains not to make work that could seem to be advertising, that, above all, lacked its saccharine charm, its aggressive claims about what mattered in life, its reductiveness. This hypothesis led me to realize that the art historian and critic Meyer Schapiro had long ago taken this idea a step further, made it more encompassing. In his 1957 essay on "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art," he wrote:

Communication . . . aims at a maximum efficiency through methods that ensure the attention of the listener or viewer by setting up the appropriate reproducible stimuli which will work for everyone and promote the acceptance of the message. . . .

And thus, by contrast:

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consider changing their attitude toward modern art. He suggested that Abstract Expressionism might be regarded as "artistic free enterprise," and he reminded Luce that attacking abstract art was something that totalitarian regimes did. In August, *Life* published a lavish piece on Pollock, with photographs of him at work by Arnold Newman. It made Pollock famous—the "action painter," the very type of the modern American culture hero.

<sup>21</sup> I do not know the original source of this quotation. The Web links it to a Museum of Modern Art website on Abstract Expressionism.

<sup>22</sup> *ARTnews Annual*, October 1966.

<sup>23</sup> See earlier footnote quoting Greenberg on how the "American-Type" painting of de Kooning had put a whole host of European artists to shame.

what makes painting and sculpture so interesting in our times is their high degree of non-communication. You cannot extract a message from painting by ordinary means; the usual rules of communication do not hold here, there is no clear code or fixed vocabulary, no certainty of effect in a given time of transmission or exposure. Painting, by becoming abstract and giving up its representational function, has achieved a state in which communication seems to be deliberately prevented.<sup>24</sup>

Hence my puzzlement and frustration.

And hence now, in a new century, when in a museum I find myself wandering into a room of Abstract Expressionist work, I do not find myself pausing long before all the non-communicating paint brushed by the Absolute or the unconscious, these liberations from the object and from the demands of the past or of any future.<sup>25</sup> Nor have I found these rooms filled by audio-touring or picture-snapping multitudes, curious to absorb or take something from, say, Robert Motherwell, Joan Mitchell, Lee Krasner, Franz Kline, Clyfford Still.<sup>26</sup> And I assume that this fact—the flagging interest, this disinterest in work that ignores or scorns “the usual rules of communication”—is inspiring agents of the art market to organize prominent shows of Abstract Expressionist and related work, in order to try to re-inflate its value. (Another promising venture; the reviews I’ve seen of the Guston show share the present essay’s broad outline: initial not-positive reaction which then gives way to variations on “given the opportunity to spend time with the work, I find more in it.”)

As for Guston, given his return in the later 1960s to unabashedly figurative work—and in light of the figurative elements in his “Abstract Impressionist” paintings, as he called them—it could be said that he was ahead of a curve. Or meeting Pop Art half way? In 1960, in the midst of his Abstract Impressionist phase, he noted:

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<sup>24</sup> Meyer Schapiro, “The Liberating Quality,” *op. cit.* Interesting that Schapiro decided not to mention any Abstract Expressionists or specific works in this essay, and that Rosenberg in “The American Action Painters” also mentions none. Rosenberg’s good friend Elaine de Kooning apparently once said that Rosenberg “knew almost everything. Everything except how to look at a painting. He would stand in front of a painting . . . and talk about great ideas.” “We pass for what we are,” as Emerson noted in “Self-Reliance.”

I would note further that, like many others, Schapiro contrasts the abstract and the representational. I am not alone in viewing this distinction as misleading. When Guston, for example, speaks of painting himself in his abstract canvases, this is to say he is engaged in representation. See earlier footnote quoting from Leo Steinberg’s “The Eye is a Part of the Mind.”

<sup>25</sup> Phrases here are extracted from Rosenberg’s essay “The American Action Painters,” *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> For what it’s worth, I note that Kline was, like Guston, an artist whose father had committed suicide (or like Guston and Eva Hesse, another artist who in childhood had a parent who committed suicide). The art historian Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev has written, Kline’s “art both suggests and denies significance and meaning.” This is also a way of describing how many human beings wrestle with trauma, to include the trauma of morality. [*Franz Kline, 1910-1962* (Skira Editore, 2004), 57.]

There is something ridiculous and miserly in the myth we inherit from abstract art. That painting is autonomous, pure and for itself, . . . But painting is “impure”. . . . We are image-makers and image-ridden.<sup>27</sup>

This is an observation with a bit of fury or restlessness in it. In the explanatory materials Hauser & Wirth offered visitors, there was another quote—warmer, sadder—from the same period. For me it was worth going to this show just to come across this observation and, especially, its heart: “a loss from which we suffer.” The whole quote, as it appeared in the explanatory materials:

I do not see why the loss of faith in the known image and symbol in our time should be celebrated as a freedom. It is a loss from which we suffer, and this pathos motivates modern painting and poetry at its heart.<sup>28</sup>

A statement from Paul Schimmel, Partner and Vice President of Hauser & Wirth and former chief curator of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art: “The loss of the object was catastrophic for the New York School.”<sup>29</sup>

This went along with a feeling I had had in two of the other rooms of the gallery. These were filled with large paintings (roughly 6’ on a side) that were variations on the same subject. A limited palette of colors, a limited pattern of brush strokes, and the same large, square-ish black object: the same black head, bandaged or bound in one case; a well-dressed man’s shoulders in another; a simple, heavy stone weight in a third. In *Painter III* (1963) it is a cartoon head—the racist, anti-Semitic cartoonist Hergé’s Capitaine Haddock in blackface? And, lower down, we can make out a forearm, with the hand holding a paint brush.

Clement Greenberg wrote that “the dissolution of the pictorial . . . into an accumulation of repetitions seems to speak for and answer something profound in contemporary sensibility.”<sup>30</sup> Faced with Guston’s canvases, we might speak rather of the unwillingness of the pictorial to die. Schapiro wrote that in Abstract work we can see “the track of emotion, its obstruction, persistence, or extinction.”<sup>31</sup> Faced with Guston’s

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<sup>27</sup> Transcript of a panel discussion, March 1960, held at the Philadelphia Museum School of Art, as quoted in *Abstract Expressionism Creators and Critics*, edited by Clifford Ross (Abrams, 1990), 61.

One of Guston’s favorite painters was Piero della Francesca. He apparently once told some of his art students that, as a young man, he wept when he first saw the Italian painter’s frescoes *della Leggenda della Vera Croce* (The History of the True Cross) in the Basilica di San Francesco in Arezzo. Guston’s reflection to his students many years later, as paraphrased by one of these students: “The culture of epicurean high art that had formed around ‘pure’ abstraction and the New York School in the 1950s had left him with a kind of disgust and enervation, and he wanted us (his students) to understand that great art was deeply indebted to the inheritance of cultural stories.” Bruce Herman, Forward to *Broken Beauty*, edited by Theodore L. Prescott (William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Quotation found in *Nature in abstraction; the relation of abstract painting and sculpture to nature in twentieth-century American art*, exhibition catalogue, text by John I.H. Baur, curator, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (Macmillan, 1958).

<sup>29</sup> From talk to gallery visitors recorded and put online as the [Exhibition Tour with Paul Schimmel](#).

<sup>30</sup> Clement Greenberg, “The Crisis of the Easel Picture,” *op. cit.* 1948. To make my sentence, I removed a comma that appears after “repetitions.”

<sup>31</sup> Schapiro, “The Liberating Quality,” *op. cit.*

canvases, we might amend this: the track of emotion, its obstruction and its persistence in the face of threatened extinction.

Another rough thought came to me: supposing every night—armed by the afternoon’s caffeine and nicotine, and this on the heels of the previous night’s drinking and pontificating—supposing you went into your studio to work on the next one in this series of paintings. *A quoi rêver de se prendre une balle dans la tête*—one could start dreaming about a bullet to the head. From *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith’s review of the Hauser & Wirth show: “He [Guston] could not go on [making abstract works]. In 1965 he stopped painting, and did not resume for three years.”<sup>32</sup>

Much later, describing why, in the last phase of his career, he again openly embraced figurative painting, Guston offered a glimpse of where he was at during his intermediate, Abstract phase:

So when the 1960s came along I was feeling split, schizophrenic. The [Vietnam] war, 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.<sup>33</sup>

Or, say, painting glimpses of himself, of the darkness in which he felt bound? Or we can think of his Abstract paintings as Rorschach-ish images that, in denying or only hinting at significance and meaning, awaken our longing for it? Rorschach-ish images made by an artist caught—by childhood trauma, or a desire to live comfortably? the art market? the media?—in the possibility of being an enigma, and that this could be enough for him to live on and others to feed off?

**A**s I have worked on the present text, McCarthyism has come to seem, increasingly, an answer to my question about why these particular paintings.<sup>34</sup> The art historian Stella Paul has written that the Abstract Expressionists were looking to make work “redolent of social responsibility yet free of . . . explicit politics.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Roberta Smith, [Philip Guston’s About-Face, in a Bracing Show at Hauser & Wirth](#), *New York Times*, May 12, 2016. From the opening of the review:

Philip Guston, who died in 1980 at 66, is the Abstract Expressionist who got away. . . . [circling] back to representation, baffling many of his admirers. From the late 1960s on, he devoted his final years to a dark, goofy figurative style that earned him a new, younger audience, producing one of the greatest finales in modern painting.

<sup>33</sup> As quoted in [It’s About Freedom, Philip Guston’s Late Works in the Schirn’](#), Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, 11/6/2013 – 2/2/2014.

<sup>34</sup> This is also to say—again—that in 2016 I am not buying this description in Rosenberg’s essay: “The gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation, from Value—political, esthetic, moral. If the war and the decline of radicalism in America had anything to do with this sudden impatience, there is no evidence of it.” “The American Action Painters,” *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> Stella Paul, [Abstract Expressionism](#), Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, October 2004.

With my “McCarthyism,” I am implying that Abstract Expressionism was a way of going into hiding or of trying to talk in code, and thus to avoid being publicly attacked and blacklisted as a traitor (a.k.a. a defender of other interests than those of capital and of business executives).<sup>36</sup> But at the time, in the 1950s, the politics of Abstract Expressionists and other *Poputchiki* (fellow-travelers) was given a much more positive spin, and one that should not be dismissed. Nor has it been dismissed, in the sense that these artists’ “political” struggle—their championing of individuation in the midst of mass, bureaucratic society—this struggle is ongoing, never-ending, and may be seen today not only in serious and silly proceedings of many kinds of artists, but also in tattoos, hair styles, the championing of non-normative sexual orientations, etc.

As the cause of individuation underlies Schapiro’s championing of Abstract Expressionism, I will let him make the case.

What is most important is that the practical activity by which we [modern, Western humans in general] live is not satisfying: we cannot give it full loyalty, and its rewards do not compensate enough for the frustrations and emptiness that arise from the lack of spontaneity and personal identifications in work . . . .

The object of art is, therefore, more passionately than ever before, the occasion of spontaneity or intense feeling. The painting symbolizes an individual who realizes freedom and deep engagement of the self within his work. . . .

Hence the great importance of the mark, the stroke, the brush, the drip, the quality of the substance of the paint itself, and the surface of the canvas as a texture and field of operation—all signs of the artist’s active presence. . . . All these qualities of painting may be regarded as a means of affirming the individual in opposition to the contrary qualities of the ordinary experience of working and doing.<sup>37</sup>

**A**nd meanwhile I—whose dilemma is to be an out-and-out individualist and—thus?—attached to dialogue—I asked the woman sharing the bench with me, the other

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<sup>36</sup> For more on McCarthyism and artists’ careers, one might see [My Bar Mitzvah \(and Thanksgiving\) Speech](#). Reprinted in *Surviving the Twenty-First Century* (Serving House, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Meyer Schapiro, “The Liberating Quality,” *op. cit.* Another approach to this topic would start with Rosenberg’s lines about how—

At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or “express” an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.

That is, the politics were in the approach to art and in the event, not on the canvas. (“The American Action Painters,” *op. cit.*)

person in this room at this gallery that was showing the abstract works: “Why do you think he [i.e. Guston] made these paintings? Or why did he make paintings like these?”

“I’m not going to answer that,” she said. “That’s such a dumb question.”

A door closing, slamming. If you are going to hit strangers with questions, they certainly have a right to hit back at you with answers.

And yet, a door closing, and a reminder that only a few people—and they only rarely—want to talk about the subjects that I would like to talk about with my contemporaries. (And, yes, Socrates comes to mind.)

I think the woman may have gone on to add, “That’s one of the dumbest questions I have ever heard.”

In a world of blogs and selfies and people defacing themselves to try to achieve some measure of individuation, it is at best quixotic of me to expect much overt dialogue! These days, when I do find myself engaged in what seems to me good conversation—with people who are enjoying exploring with other people what they might in fact think and feel—I am often surprised to hear my interlocutors say something like what a restaurant hostess recently said to me: “That was one of the strangest conversations I’ve ever had”; or a young environmental designer: “That was not your usual lunch conversation!”<sup>38</sup> I seem to make my way in the midst of people who don’t want to talk or who are too busy to talk or who are more than happy to repeat to me what people in the media have been saying about things—political, entertainment, sporting, art—in the media. And they expect me to echo some pieces of this back.

Which brings me to people—Guston, Greenberg, Rosenberg, Schapiro, Schimmel, Kuhn—I’ve never even met. As a result of working on the present piece—long hours, by myself, in cafés and restaurants, surrounded by strangers—it has seemed to me that I keep trying, as for a dialogue that cannot take place, to bring together thoughts and people—often from the past, either dead or dead to my dialogic interests. (But, to adapt an observation of another great socialite—from Nietzsche’s *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (Beyond Good and Evil)—all this, too, is still dialogue!<sup>39</sup>)

**A**t two points in his “Liberating Quality” essay, Schapiro, thinking perhaps of works like Mark Rothko’s, stresses a religious quality in Abstract Expressionist work, which thus demands “a sincere and humble submission [as] to a spiritual object, . . . [U]nless you achieve the proper set of mind and feeling towards [the work], you will not experience

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<sup>38</sup> A companion piece, you might call it: [\*\*Retirement, Conversation, Walls of Loneliness, Montaignebakhtinian\*\*](#), July 2016.

<sup>39</sup> From Walter Kaufman’s translation of Section 31 of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (Beyond Good and Evil):

when the young soul, tortured by all kinds of disappointments, finally turns suspiciously against itself, . . . how wroth it is with itself now! . . . how it takes revenge for its long self-delusion, just as if it had been a deliberate blindness! . . . [A]bove all one takes sides, takes sides on principle, against ‘youth’— Then years later one comprehends that all this, too— was still youth.

anything of it at all.” I can imagine my bench companion not wanting her reverence for Guston’s paintings disturbed. And certainly not by *un être humain* with so many thoughts and questions in his head!

Rosenberg: “The critic who goes on judging . . . is bound to seem a stranger”?<sup>40</sup> From my stranger perspective, I have observed a vast country of sales pitches and smooth talking (lying and denying), to include by art impresarios, but—like Athenians long before us—we Americans are afraid of dialectic or of even raising the lid on the possibility that we might question our values or our explanations. And be they spiritual or scientific. The leftwing has its columnists who repeat its articles of faith, and the rightwing its columnists. A prominent way that class and group interests are advanced is by attempting to shut down (or simply not subsidize) discussion of alternatives. What is most politically incorrect or otherwise unacceptable is open-ended exploration of our feelings, ideas, and beliefs. What are their sources and justifications? Through what bedrock do these sources and justifications flow?

On my bench I was feeling shut out, tongue-tied, aporetic; in a room of abstract paintings, painted by a painter who himself was losing interest in abstraction. And then the young man, who had been touring the paintings on the walls, sidled over to me and said in a soft voice, as if afraid of being overheard, “I liked your question.”

In Plato’s *Lysis*, chaperones lead Socrates’s young interlocutors away before anyone can say explicitly what friendship involves.<sup>41</sup> Now a member of the gallery staff took the young man by the arm and led him away before we had a chance to really talk about Guston’s work and about what Abstract Expressionism had involved. But not before I found out that the young man was in the arts himself, nor before he had a chance to give a four-word answer: “Because he had to.” Why had Guston made these paintings or paintings like these? Because he had to.

When the young man said this, I took it to be a psychological explanation: Guston was driven—say, by his father’s suicide or other inner demons or passions—to paint these paintings. It has been proposed by others that Guston in adolescence, in the wake of the suicide, retreated into comics, and thus became an artist. An artist who eventually came back to comics, as to his touchstone or solace—ever seeking the best means of escape from his total situation?

But the young man could have meant his “had to” as a social explanation. If you were a young artist starting out in the midst of the Great Depression, you painted murals, first for the John Reed Club and in Mexico with the help of David Siqueiros, and then for

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<sup>40</sup> Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” *op. cit.* The full sentence is: “The critic who goes on judging in terms of schools, styles, form—as if the painter were still concerned with producing a certain kind of object (the work of art), instead of living on the canvas—is bound to seem a stranger.”

<sup>41</sup> For more of my reading of the *Lysis*, see [Friendship, Deception, Writing, Agni](#), Spring 2016.

the WPA.<sup>42</sup> And if you were an ambitious painter after the Second World War or wished to survive in McCarthy's America, you didn't paint political murals or other kinds of figurative work, you came to New York with a changed name and became some version of an Abstract Expressionist. Then, when you had secured a reputation, a comfortable home and studio, and when the country was in a more progressive phase, you might—with a certain daring and dismay—make your way back to a kind of work that had once meant so much to you, done so much for you.

I confess to being currently under the influence of *Eva Hesse*, Marci Begleiter's about that sculptor. It gives the impression that what Hesse wanted to express and explore had little to do with Minimalism, but, when she was trying to become a prominent artist, Minimalism was a hot style, and some of her best friends were Minimalists, so she found a way to fit her work, somewhat, into a Minimalist mold (the synthesis gaining the name Postminimalism). If Hesse had lived longer than she did, she might have had a Guston-like moment. Become prominent, selling well, she might have made a more complete break from the movement that had helped her root herself in the zeitgeist and make a name for herself.

From this perspective, it is worth noting that Guston went to high school with Jackson Pollock. I can imagine Pollock saying to him, after the war and when there was no more WPA money, "Come back to New York and do abstract painting. You'll be a star. I know people who will help you." Become somebody you probably aren't? If escape is the goal, the good, then not quite being oneself is certainly one way of achieving it. But, again, this could also be why the resulting work—Guston's Abstract canvases—can be hard to connect to.

In her memoir of her father, Guston's daughter recalls him, in the last year of his life, being asked about his changes in style: murals-Abstract-figurative again.

My father looked slightly pained . . . "You know comments about style always seem strange to me—"Why do you work in this style or in that style"—as if you had a choice in the matter." He took a draft of his cigarette and paused to think. "What you're doing," he said slowly, "is trying to stay alive and continue and not die."<sup>43</sup>

I proposed at the outset that our subject is compulsion, both psychological and social. With "social" here including political repression and propaganda.

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<sup>42</sup> A point of Greenberg's (in "American-Type Painting," *op. cit.*) not to be overlooked: "I doubt whether they [Abstract Expressionists] would have been able to acquire the artistic culture they did without the opportunity for unconstrained work that most of them got in the late 1930s and early 1940s from the Federal Art Project." This was the name of the largest of the Works Progress Administration's art projects. It was designed to provide relief to artists and artisans during the Great Depression. Among those it engaged and paid to paint murals, easel paintings, and other art works: Guston, William Baziotes, Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Marsden Hartley, Lee Krasner, Louise Nevelson, Jackson Pollock, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko, and Mark Tobey.

<sup>43</sup> Musa Mayer, "My Father, Philip Guston," *op. cit.*

Schapiro writes of the Abstract Expressionists' "self-involved lines." Paul Schimmel, who organized the Guston show, said Guston had "spent a lifetime in a studio trying to find his own light."<sup>44</sup> I certainly know the feeling, the compulsion, and I know how—in our conformist country, in our schools and churches, and by our mass media—we Americans have been taught to believe in the importance and sanctity of our own lights and of being guided by them.

And when our views and habits change—when we think how wrong or silly or ignorant we have been, or how beholden to market forces and fashions, teaching and propaganda we have been—we do not think that *now* the times and the forces have changed me once again! We imagine, rather, that we've seen the light, a new light. Narcissus thought similarly, and thus was blind to his total situation, to the roles that light and his surroundings played in his particular vision—and played in the fact that he had any view of himself at all.

"The eye was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that particular ray," Emerson wrote in "Self-Reliance." This may involve seeing one's own light; but it is first and foremost an assigned task.<sup>45</sup> The eye does not place itself.

Must we—we Americans—lose ourselves in a deliberate denial of the external (and often internalized) forces that find expression, *inter alia*, in our creative work and in our ideas and feelings? I would certainly not ignore the economic forces, given how powerful they are, but—to close this piece at least—I will speak more generally of a dialogic force, of the sense in which we do not act, but respond (or, if you prefer, our actions are responses). We respond to economic forces, to intellectual and social ones, to the placement of our eyes and to whether skylights are, however temporarily, light-giving or gray.

For having broken out of the Abstract mold and broken free of the dictates of New York art critics and curators, Guston has become a standard-bearer for artistic independence and non-conformism. Nonetheless, when we juxtapose his own career with the changing times in which it took place, the role of his "own light" seems to have been relatively weak compared to the fierce demands and staggering opportunities of his childhood, the Depression, the Cold War, and the Sixties. In the late 1940s, he, along with several other artists, was attacked by the Hearst press and *Look* magazine for his leftist leanings. For example, the *Baltimore American*, a Hearst paper, editorialized in October 1946 that these "left-wing painters" were "members of Red fascist organizations."<sup>46</sup> These attacks were a response to a traveling exhibit which was to include Guston's and about 50 other artists' work—an exhibit the CIA had been secretly organizing as part of the cold war for peoples' hearts and minds.<sup>47</sup> From this perspective, one must read at least with a smile a comment

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<sup>44</sup> From talk to gallery visitors recorded and put online as the [Exhibition Tour with Paul Schimmel](#).

<sup>45</sup> Emerson, "Self-Reliance." First published in Emerson's 1841 collection, *Essays: First Series*.

<sup>46</sup> As quoted in *Law, Ethics and the Visual Arts*, fifth edition, by John Henry Merryman, Albert E. Elsen, and Stephen K. Urice (Kluwer Law International, 2007), 647.

<sup>47</sup> The secrecy was to get around rightwingers in Congress and the media. The artists were chosen with the assistance of a panel of New York art-world leaders, including the photographer Alfred Stieglitz and curators from the Whitney and Modern (MOMA) museums. See: entry on "Advancing American Art," page 4 of the

apparently made by Willem de Kooning regarding Guston's return to cartooning: "Phil, do you know what your subject is? Freedom!"<sup>48</sup>

And as for my own "ideas"—I believe the present piece gives plenty of evidence that—like all of us, I am proposing—I am a sort of conduit or switchboard, relaying things read and heard from others and inspired by others' comments and even by their refusal to engage in dialogue. As with electrical wires, does my—or does Guston's—resistance to, or our processing of, ideas and feelings generate some heat and light that could be called our own? Certainly. This, you might say, is a human being's personal contribution to the total situation, the total network, cosmic as well as Earth-bound, in which we find ourselves enmeshed.

Why do we think Guston made paintings like the more or less Abstract works that I happened to find on exhibit at Hauser & Wirth? Because he had to—his subjection, let's call it, blackening his self-image and dimming his own enthusiasm for the work. If we ourselves, having fought our way to this point, feel a certain euphoria, it may stem in part from the escape compulsive activity offers and in part from an appreciation that Guston was doing the best he could, under the circumstances, his circumstances, to whisper and shout to us about all this.

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*Historical Dictionary of American Propaganda*, by Martin Manning, with the assistance of Herbert Romerstein (Greenwood Press, 2004); *Art Interrupted: Advancing American Art and the Politics of Cultural Diplomacy*, by Scott Bishop, Robert Ekelund and Danielle Mohr Funderburk (Georgia Museum of Art, 2012); [When art fought the Cold War](#), by Lauren Ross, *The Art Newspaper*, May 2013, which has been posted online by the Institute of Museum Ethics; and [Modern art was CIA 'weapon'](#), by Frances Stonor Saunders, *Independent*, 21 October 1995.

<sup>48</sup> Original source for de Kooning's statement *might be* Musa Mayer's memoir, *op. cit.* Quotation appears in [The Tyranny of "Taste": The Triumph of Philip Guston](#), by Thomas Ganzevoort, blogpost, May 7, 2013. I note a warning from James Breslin: it is erroneous to assume that "because the work of certain artists was appropriated for official political purposes, *that* exposes its real character, as if an object were identical with its uses." As regards Rothko, he continues: "to describe his paintings as celebrations of individual freedom—whether you are a functionary of the State Department or a leftist art historian—is to distort them." James E.B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (The University of Chicago Press, 1993), n. 43, p. 629.