

May 8, 2017

Fabulous! Philip Guston & the Poets at Accademia in Venice - To Ernest, with Love



The Line by Philip Guston (1977) (Venice, Italy) I have eagerly anticipated the arrival of [Philip Guston and the Poets](#). When I lived in the hills of Los Feliz, a section of Los Angeles, one of my dearest friends and neighbors was Ernest Lieblich, a wealthy German Jew who was a great supporter of the arts. One day, Ernest insisted that we dash to the City of Hope hospital to see a mural he had discovered. He drove, speeding down the freeway at age 82, to a decrepit building. After we entered the doorway, Ernest demanded, "Now turn around!" On the wall surrounding the door was a dramatic mural in poor condition.

From Ernest's 2009 obituary in the [Los Angeles Times](#) (which I recommend reading so you can see the fabulous life Ernest led):

"Ernest Lieblich, a businessman and philanthropist with a passion for the arts who financed the painstaking restoration of a valuable 1930s-era mural and helped uncover the true identity of one of its creators, died April 4 at his Los Feliz home. He was 94.

One of his most notable efforts was the recovery of a faded floor-to-ceiling mural at the City of Hope medical center in Duarte. The experts he assembled to restore the mural by Reuben Kadish and Phillip Goldstein found that Goldstein was actually [Philip Guston](#), a leading Abstract Expressionist painter who achieved prominence after leaving Los Angeles for New York in the late 1930s.



[Philip Guston - Reuben Kadish mural City of Hope](#)

The mural, painted in 1935-36, depicts 30 draped and nude figures representing vigorous youth to frail old age. Although cracked and grimy from decades of neglect, its beauty made Lieblich gasp when he saw it for the first time in 1996.

"He used his famous word, which was 'Fabulous!' " recalled Robert J. Reid, who was then City of Hope's vice

president for donor relations. "He said, 'We must do something about this.'"

Lieblich was so buoyed by the discovery of a forgotten piece of local art history that he agreed to finance the renovation of the entire Spanish revival building that housed the mural and is now a visitors center."

Kosme de Baranano, Curator and Paola Marini, Director of Accademia - Photo Cat Bauer



Now, here in Venice, Philip Guston has a major exhibition at the renowned Galleria dell'Accademia, a city and museum which left a deep impression on the artist -- Guston loved the Italian Renaissance painters, but, with a few exceptions, didn't care much for the work of his contemporaries.

Philip Guston and the Poets was born in an unusual way. The

curator, Professor Dr. Kosme de Baranano, is a Guston scholar who wrote a rich essay about the artist's work through the lens of five poets of the 20th century: D.H. Lawrence, William Butler Yeats, Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot and Eugenio Montale. So, the essay is the inspiration for the exhibition, and the poets the foundation of the essay -- though the words of the poets were not always the inspiration for Philip Guston.

In the press notes, Dr. Baranano writes:

"...His images are carriers of desire and of memory, but they are also a treasury of previously unformulated ideas. Guston's pictorial work may be understood in relation to the poetic thought of five great literary figures of the twentieth century, poets who also sought to express ideas not previously formulated. Perhaps they may, like artificial light, precisely illuminate his paintings so as to draw us into them."



East Coker - T.S.E. by Philip Guston (1979) In one particular case, however, there is a direct connection between the poet and the artist, and that is in the haunting painting *East Coker - T.S.E.*, an homage to T.S. Elliot and a meditation on death. *East Coker*, a poem in Elliot's *The Four Quartets*, was written in 1943. Guston painted his *East Coker* in 1979 after suffering from a near-fatal heart attack. "I wanted to paint a man dying."

Now that's courage.

Philip Guston died the next year.

At the end of the exhibition is the *Pantheon*, and some thoughts from Guston's daughter, Musa, from her memoir, *Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston*:

"...In this painting, the names of five artists hover in the anxious air of the studio: Masaccio, Piero, Giotto, Tiepolo and de Chirico. My father would sometimes tell a story, his half-joking, half-serious fantasy of meeting the great masters in heaven, when he had gained acceptance into the

confraternity, of one of them patting him on the back and saying, 'Not bad, sonny. Pas mal.'"

"East Coker", from *The Four Quartets*, 1940



Pantheon by Philip Guston -
Photo: Cat Bauer
I hope the whole group is up there together in heaven, including Ernest Lieblch, smiling down on Philip Guston and the Poets here on earth.

Philip Guston and the Poets at the Galleria dell'Accademia opens to the public on May 10 and runs through September 3, 2017. Go to the [Accademia](#) for more information.