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books


Reviewed by SAM LADKIN

This is a handsome book, the reproductions clean and bright, the tone largely welcoming. It is hard to imagine a better gift than a residence at the American Academy in Rome, and much of this book is dedicated to Philip Guston’s three stints in the Eternal City, the first in 1948–49, the second in 1960 (when he was not part of the Academy but resident while showing at the Venice Biennale) and the third in 1970–71. It incorporates papers given at a conference in Italy which coincided with the exhibition Philip Guston, Roma (that catalogue is available too, as is the definitive collection of Guston’s writings, edited by Clark Coolidge). Robert Storr suggests that Guston teaches us the ‘necessity of constantly mess ing up the tidy models of “artistic” progress’. Storr also infers that the artist’s three visits to Rome help us locate Guston’s messy transitions. All the essays have lively premises, although only a couple develop their contents with sufficient evidence or see through their arguments to completion. That said, there is much to follow up here for those who are willing.

Guston is well served by critical work, and some of those outliers are included here, with plenty of insights from Storr in his preface and as part of a panel. This reviewer would like to know more about the influence of John Cage and Zen that he posits, and the connection to the golem is intriguing. Doré Ashton has written persuasively on Guston before, although here the contribution feels a little more like a second preface, while William Berkson nicely captures Guston’s ‘touch’ and ‘all that meat and air’.

Rosme de Batañano considers the influence of manierism, which works to destabilise our sense of Guston’s known affection for Piero della Francesca and the quattrocento. It twines Guston’s late work with post-War Rome and Mannerism, both being late styles. Barbara Drudi returns us to post-War Rome and Piero della Francesca and the quattrocento. Ara H. Merjian accounts of Guston’s ‘meat and air’), Mirko Basaldella and Afro Basaldella. And while Robert Stolin’s account of Guston’s ‘break-up’ with Modernism, which works to destabilise our sense of Guston’s known affection for Piero della Francesca and the quattrocento. It twines Guston’s late work with post-War Rome and Mannerism, both being late styles. Barbara Drudi returns us to post-War Rome and Piero della Francesca and the quattrocento. Ara H. Merjian accounts of Guston’s ‘meat and air’), Mirko Basaldella and Afro Basaldella. 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