

Basic Detail Report



Outskirts

Date

1969

Primary Maker

Philip Guston

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

165.1 x 190.5 cm

Description

A leading Abstract Expressionist, Philip Guston shifted dramatically to figuration in the late 1960s. In a bid to make palpable his sense of existential doubt, he developed an iconography, which drew on his early life and the personal universe of his studio. Recurring motifs include shoes, books, cigarette butts, clocks, a head with a single open eye, arms, bare light bulbs, each often appearing to mutate into something else. His repeated depiction of these items was in an attempt, as he put it, to investigate the "objectness" of ordinary forms. The Klansmen reference that appears in *Outskirts* occurs mainly in the paintings of 1969-70. Involved in strike action at a Los Angeles factory when he was 17, Guston had first-hand experience of the Ku Klux Klan when they slashed paintings he had done of the strike. He portrayed himself hooded in some paintings, smoking and painting, "imagining what it would be like to be evil" and set others in an imaginary city overtaken by the KKK. Influenced by the buildings he passed on the West Side Highway towards New York City, the receding file of red monolithic structures in *Outskirts* also recall the shape of the fireplace of the New York loft Guston occupied in the 1930s. It was one of the paintings exhibited at Guston's famous exhibition at Marlborough Fine Art, New York, in 1970, which heralded his return to figuration.