



We are image-makers and image-ridden.

PHILLIP GUSTON

Philip Guston

Painter's Forms II, 1978

Oil on canvas

75 x 108 inches

**Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth,
Museum purchase, The Friends of Art Endowment Fund
Acquired in 1999**

Philip Guston's *Painter's Forms II* 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. Guston gained prominence as an Abstract Expressionist, painting dense networks of brightly colored lines. His work took a dramatic turn in the late 1960s, when he began painting his highly autobiographical works in a bold, often cartoonish style. 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. For the remainder of his career, Guston would use this style to depict his most powerful and emotional self.