



Open Washes

Date

1966

Primary Maker

Philip Guston

Medium

Lithograph on paper

Description

Philip Guston was a primarily self-taught artist who, like many of his generation, experienced the United States government's Works Progress Administration as a training ground: "The project kept me alive and working—it was my education." As part of the

program, he designed and executed numerous public murals in the New York City area and beyond while developing his personal style. Around 1948, Guston shifted from figurative to abstract mode, but he rebelled against the label "Abstract Expressionist" and, in general, struggled with his choice. "I don't know what non-objective art is," the artist told a group of students in 1966, the year this print was published. "There is no such thing as non-objective art. Everything has an object. Everything has a figure." It is not surprising, then, that the artist dramatically announced his return to figuration with an exhibition held in October 1970—a time when it was ideologically out of favor and when social and political turmoil was engulfing the world at large. He later wrote: "When the 1960s came along I was feeling split, schizophrenic. The [Vietnam] war, what was happening in 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." Guston created *Open Washes* at the beginning of that transition, when figures were once again starting to take shape in his work—though they may be recognizable only in hindsight. Drawing was very important to the artist at the time, and this print, with its reduced palette of black, white, and gray, appears almost calligraphic. It was donated to the Emerson Gallery by Philip W. Abell, Class of 1957, an avid print collector who gave approximately twenty-five modernist and contemporary works to Hamilton College during his lifetime and bequeathed more than forty additional works upon his death in 1994. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017)

Dimensions

Sheet: 22 5/16 × 30 in. (56.7 × 76.2 cm) Frame: 26 3/4 × 34 1/4 × 2 in. (67.9 × 87 × 5.1 cm)