

# HYPERALLERGIC

## Ackermann and Guston Go Toe-to-Toe, One Loses

by Brendan S. Carroll on March 26, 2012



*install view, Rita Ackermann and Philip Guston (image courtesy of Katharine Overgaard, Franklin Parrasch Gallery)*

Franklin Parrasch Gallery's exhibition Rita Ackermann + Philip Guston is the third in a series of two-artist, cross-generational shows. Included in this show are two works on paper by Guston (dating from 1966 and 1971), and a new painting by Ackermann (2012).

The project space is a great venue to see art. The room is spare, high ceilinged and offers lots of natural light. The monastic vibe offers viewers a calm, contemplative environment to look and think about art. Too bad they include Rita Ackermann in the show.

I love the idea behind the exhibition — two artists from opposite sides of the planet coming together, each represented by one work, it's high stakes! — but I did not get the

pairing. What do Guston and Ackermann have in common? He can paint. She cannot. Talk about an odd couple. In fact, I found it heretical to place Ackermann in the same room as Guston. That being said, Guston is one of my favorite painters.

In theory, I guess, the pairing makes sense. Both artists turned their backs on the styles that cemented their reputations. Guston refuted his all-over abstraction in favor of cartoon-like figuration. (And paid dearly for it.) Ackermann, on the other hand, has discarded her comic book cast of moribund pubescent girls for something like pure abstraction.



**Philip Guston, "Back View" (1971) (image courtesy of Katharine Overgaard, Franklin Parrasch Gallery)**

Guston's painting, "Back View" (1971), features his trademarks late symbols: bare light bulb, hooded figure, bulbous head and some trash. Palette is all tint-paste pink. His customary thick, black line is used to demarcate crude forms, which seem to weigh a ton.

The painting is ugly, and I love it. Though the paint is fleshy, and the forms crude, his post-apocalyptic vision of hell, or isolation, is clear, distinct and crisp.



**Rita Ackermann, "Fire by Days XX" (2012) (image courtesy of Katharine Overgaard, Franklin Parrasch Gallery)**

Like the Guston work, Ackermann's painting, "Fire by Days XX" (2012), is ugly too. But I hate it. The large work resembles a bloody diaper and has all the charm associated with a soiled undergarment. Ackermann, unlike Guston, does not compose elements as much as she vomits in the direction of a canvas. From the puke, I could detect what looked to be an elfin head in profile with a Pinocchio nose. Or, I detected a headless figure groping its crotch (maybe it's both). But who cares. It's all surface, no style.

As I mulled over the show, I had to ask myself why I find the pairing so outrageous. Both artists work can be described as grotesque. Why is one grotesque more appealing than another grotesque? Is it just a matter of personal taste or preference?

What is intriguing about this show and format is it forced me to reconsider an artist that I have often dismissed as a hack, or trash-collector-cum-painter. It also forced me to think about what it is that I admire about Guston, and why it is I admire his work. With

Ackermann's amorphous red-stain looming over my shoulder, Guston's sense of composition never seemed tighter, more controlled and dramatic. His icons have a depth and weight. I can see and feel the world he is depicting. Plus, they seem to simultaneously emerge and recede from the pink abyss of his backgrounds.

If it were not for Franklin Parrasch Gallery, I would have never have thought to utter Guston and Ackermann in the same breath.

Rita Ackermann + Philip Guston continues at at Franklin Parrasch Gallery (548 West 22 Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) until March 31.

<http://hyperallergic.com/48964/ackermann-guston-franklin-parrasch-gallery/>