

Guston Enargia



This week, write an ekphrastic poem inspired by Philip Guston based on any painting in [this NYTimes](#) article about a new exhibit of his work in Boston. Pick any painting, pick the photo of a woman looking at a Guston painting, pick another Guston painting you find online, or write an ekphrastic poem about someone else's painting.

An enargia is a rhetorical term for a visually powerful description that vividly recreates something or someone in words... the broader term energia (energetic expression) "came early to overlap with enargia. . . . Perhaps it would make sense to use enargia as the basic umbrella term for the various special terms for vigorous ocular demonstration, and energia as a more general term for vigor and verve, of whatever sort, in expression." (A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms, 1991).¹

This article on ekphrastic form says:

“The term *ekphrastic*... originates from a Greek expression for *description*. The earliest ekphrastic poems were vivid accounts of real or imagined scenes. Through effusive use of details, writers in ancient Greece aspired to transform the visual into the verbal. Later poets moved beyond description to reflect on deeper meanings.

¹ <https://www.thoughtco.com/enargia-description-term-1690648>

“Couple in Bed” (1977) is a zany and dark portrait of an artist — typical of the mood of much of Guston’s work. Credit...Estate of Philip Guston; Hauser & Wirth, Art Institute of Chicago and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Today, the word *ekphrastic* can refer to any literary response to a non-literary work.”

This is an exercise in perceiving luminous details and transferring the visual to the literary. But tone in dealing with Guston, is especially critical. His visual goofiness is about the best response one can have in dealing with terror. Ridicule. Sometimes it is all the artist has and our time is rich with possibilities for satire. That the museums are conservative and have been called out for their own racism (especially MFA-Boston) adds thickness to the irony here as does fear of Woke-ism.

We live in a culture where Artificial Intelligence is trusted to make decisions on some of the most powerful platforms in our day, such as Facebook and Twitter. I heard that Facebook at one time banned mentions of the late Jazz trumpet genius Fats Navarro because of fear that this was an example of “fat-shaming.” Twitter banned a Tweet by a Christian satire website that was critical of Twitter censorship. Is critical thinking dead? That Guston is the child of Ukrainian immigrants to Canada fleeing pogroms makes this story even more relevant and compelling given the Russian invasion of Ukraine complete with pogrom-like déjà vu all over again.

Your task is to create an homage to Guston, consider using repetition and combination, consider how to shed light on those who would seek to control in the First-World AI way, in the old world pogrom way or in the USAmerican white supremacist terror way (or cancel way), complete with vivid reportage of what is in the painting you choose. Think “visual power.” Think “goofiness.”

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