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Interpretations of Philip Guston

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JULIA HENEY

INTERPRETATIONS OF PHILIP GUSTON

The exhibit label calls attention to the bare light bulb
high in the center of the tableau
which was *perhaps a reference to the artist's father*
who committed suicide by hanging
although nothing in the scene suggests
his family life. It is still life,
although the cartoonish objects show
no sign of decay or care—blank-sided boxes,
boots overturned on a shelf, and a bulb
the pale yellow of a moon made yolky
in an afternoon of blue it just won't leave.
This mid-century work suggests one might never
recover from this particular type of loss
while the world keeps hanging one's paintings
from walls, keeps insisting on wrapping
each swordfish steak in a perfect twine-tied package
that the butcher swings across the counter
too fast so you just catch it by its knotted bow
and love its weight the whole stroll home
where you place it on the countertop
beside the inherited lamp whose cord is still wrapped
around its soldered globe while it waits to be moved
to the dining room, to be hung and filled with light.