

ARTFORUM

FEBRUARY, 1975 \$3.00

**pasadena's collapse &
simon take**

**three museums
& unioniza**

**the modern's
design departm**

**a critique of the
hirshhorn musc**

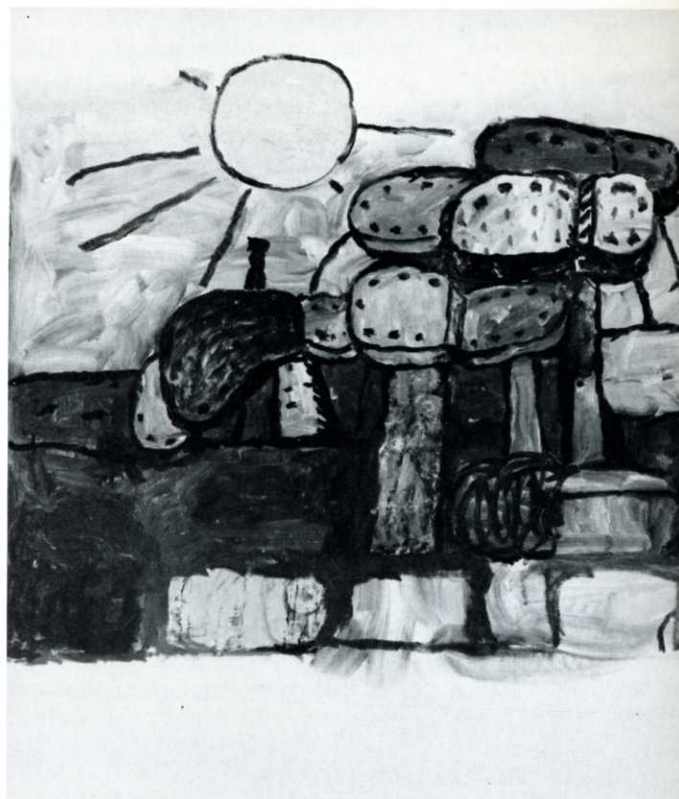
varied. In some paintings the colors remain distinct, brightly inharmonious. The paint is not as thick as previously and occasionally gives way to bare, unprimed canvas. In a work titled *Ykes* canvas shows white through a bluish green color at the bottom, balanced with streaks of white paint at the top. There is a tendency for largely unvaried color to shift rather dramatically at some crucial point, usually an edge or a corner. This happens in the extreme in *Parrot Island*, the best painting in the show. Predominantly green and blue splintered with white, its surface contains hints of flesh near the right edge which descend to a solid flesh area, edged in deep red, in the lower-right corner. The flesh decreases across the bottom edge of the painting, disappearing completely toward the far-left side. The paintings reflect greater control, but their structure is still quite dependent upon these isolated incidents for articulation. Poons's work looks like an obvious response to the combined challenges of Pollock and Morris Louis: drips into fountains. His earlier paintings may not have taken on the past the way these do, but they were infinitely better. Despite what seems to be a formulated sense of history, it is apparent that Poons sees a challenge somewhere and is pursuing it. In the mid '60s he did some very fine paintings. One continually hopes that sooner or later he will do them again.

DOUG OHLSON continues to stain his canvases with large round shapes and the interstices between them with a lighter, sometimes contrasting color. Both result from the same process; the shapes are placed over a different color or are denser accumulations of a single color. The latter occurs in the largest painting in the show, *Yellow* (about 20'

long) in which denser yellow shapes are visible due to slightly paler, bluer interstices. The entire surface tends to merge into a continuous yellow light and the distinctions disappear altogether as you get close to the painting. The painting is both subtle and straightforward in a way that most of the others in this exhibition are not.

As with Poons, too many of the others depend on an isolated incident or shift of color that draws attention to one area of the painting, as if the remainder existed to provide contrast. This is particularly true in two paintings where gray or black shapes and interstices are relieved by an interstice or two of a brown or rust shade. In a third the black shapes change to rust for the entire bottom row of the painting. Three others deal with combinations of various grays and pinks: a series of flat opaque salmon pink shapes over slate gray; light gray over pink which shows through the shapes themselves as well as the interstices. In a small painting hot pink shapes are interrupted at the center by four lavender pink ones — a color which also fills the interstices in other parts of the painting. The structure here is loose, almost disintegrating and seems different from the rest. But it is generally apparent that Ohlson is attempting to achieve diversity within this constant structure and use of one or two colors. The diversity is not yet interesting; Ohlson's color is either too pastel or thinly brooding. The paintings are better as they become more monochrome as in *Yellow*: this plays down the structure which seems simplistically naturalistic when the shapes are more discrete.

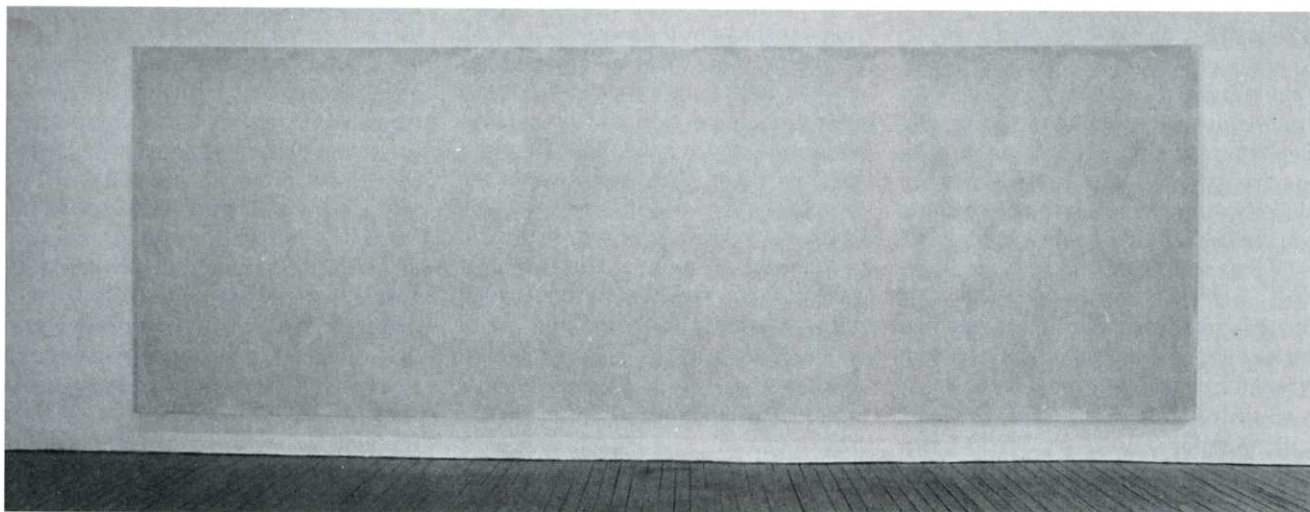
PHILIP GUSTON's paintings consist of three things: the images (and their possible meaning), the surfaces, and the color, all carefully balanced one against



Philip Guston, *Ominous*

the other. Guston paints a few items, most often old shoes, sole up, a position more of assertion than disuse. These shoes are in landscapes: singly in piles or on posts, which with Guston's characteristic duality suggest both tree trunks and grave-stones. In other instances the pile of shoes shares the canvas with a masked or unmasked head (cigarette in mouth), a light bulb, a window shade. In some ways these paintings are, as Guston's titles imply, "ominous" and "desolate" but it is hard to completely accept this sentiment. The masked head, in a Ku Klux Klan pillowcase, has an eye hole which is

a vertical black rectangle of paint, a departure from the horizontal slit, which is much less sinister, some say. The unmasked head has a single eye, single and through its size and ultimately more frightful mask. In several paintings (masked in one, unmasked in another) raises a handful of red hair and it is not clear if it is a flagellation or protection. However, it is Guston's style which balance the effigy imagery. The paintings are dominantly red and light and outlines in black. The surfaces are also robust. These paintings are done with extreme confidence and does not seem to be a paint anywhere. Usually he bothers to paint the bottom but finishes off anywhere eight inches up. Even differently — each painting. Colors are different; green shows through gray; or unmasked the colors go on in streaks with white. Guston's style like De Kooning's, but tauter. In *Painting, Sm*



Doug Ohlson, *Yellow*, 1974, o/c, 7½' × 21½'.

