

Morandi's Influence on Contemporary Still Life Painters

Giorgio Morandi's impact on still life painters is persistent but not always obvious. Boston painter Ellen Buselli creates opulent still lifes in oil, but she cites the spare, simple Morandi compositions as a strong influence on her work. "When I first saw Morandi's paintings, they helped me better see and understand the transitions that occur in the nature of a still life," says Buselli. "It was sort of a revelation. He welded together boundaries, or diffused edges. His economic use of color and values—and their transitions—unified objects as if they were one."

Oil painter Joe Gyurcsak says he's struck by Morandi's masterful way of handling details. "He created an illusion in his compositions of what appears at first glance to be just a simplification of subject matter," says the artist. "But further observation reveals that the deceptively simple appearance

becomes increasingly complex by showing restraint and reserve in the use of detail."

Massachusetts pastelist Janet Monafio focuses on Morandi's nearly obsessive choice of subject matter when discussing his influence. "He worked from observation, and he had his favorite things that he kept and was devoted to," she says. "Like him, I am also a fan of what you might call humble objects—things made from paper, cardboard, and such. Most of my still life objects are from flea markets and places like that. I use a greater variety of objects, but I'm in a similar pursuit—just in a more contemporary way."

"I can't give a verbal explanation as to why I am devoted to certain objects," Monafio continues. "If I could, I wouldn't have to paint it. I would like to think that I don't so much do a tabletop still life as much

as I try to assemble the objects from a different perspective, offering a different way of looking at things. I also appreciate Morandi's ability to take the same things and do them again and again, and to be able to come up with something different—and still interesting—every time. Like him, I stay fascinated with them."

To some extent, Gwyn Hanssen Pigott makes those fetishized objects. The Australian ceramic artist creates translucent porcelain pieces with all the calm, simplicity, and beauty of Morandi's subjects. They are meant to be seen arranged and in light similar to the conditions depicted in a Morandi work. "I have unashamedly been influenced by his quiet, intense still lifes—and his intense gaze has signaled a simplification in my work," says the artist. "In 1972 I saw the large Paris exhibition of Morandi's work and it was an unforgettable introduction to an artist whose paintings I have subsequently grown to love deeply over the years. I never tire of entering his work."

Indeed, the technical aspects of Morandi's paintings offer much food for thought, but the sheer beauty of his pieces is enough to affect contemporary painters. "Like most art lovers, I am moved by the simplicity and purity of his paintings," says Buselli. "As many have said, Morandi's paintings have a metaphysical presence. He seemed to give humble inanimate objects a lifelike personality, and his compositions seem to have an almost monumental status, like architecture. I try to think of these issues when painting because of my love of Morandi's work." Echoes Gyurcsak. "His work inspires artists to simplify details and to capture the essential qualities of their subjects through the most reserved use of color, value, line, and edges."

