

*Four artists who have been
important to me*

Rembrandt. Chardin. Giorgio Morandi. Saul Leiter.

Rembrandt's 1658 self-portrait (in The Frick Collection) was the single most important factor determining my concentration on self-portraiture in my painting and drawing. It also formed the foundation of my thinking about composition. Beyond the power of that face lies an astonishing matrix of abstract shapes and gestures; a judicious amount of often-audacious distortion of visual and plastic truths; great variety of organic and mechanical transitions between forms; and an intelligence attuned to knowing which areas of a work require more detail and which areas less. To my eye, the painting is a perfect combination of content and form.

The plums in Chardin's *Still-life with Plums* (also in The Frick Collection) moved me in my earliest painting days (and still do) by the simplicity and effectiveness of their edges and tones in creating form and spatial relationships. In particular, the foreground plum and the four that recede from the highest down and back to the right taught me the importance of caring about the edges of things and their relationship to what is adjacent to them. All this sounds basic and obvious to me now, but seeing or thinking about these plums brings me back to the time I did not know these things and reminds me how entrancing it has been for me to stare at certain works and try to figure out precisely what it is that makes me want to look.

Morandi's paintings, drawings, and etchings, which I came to know in his 1981/82 Guggenheim Museum exhibition, determined my commitment to making small works. I was captivated by the elegance of his simple, sometimes undecipherable shapes and by the idea that artworks could be small and humbly conceived yet at the same time be powerfully affecting. His works announce the endless invention that is possible when an artist chooses just a few of the many possible variables available in a craft and continues to explore them carefully and coherently. Morandi's success in finding so many intriguing

permutations of the same simple subjects encouraged my decision to focus narrowly and deeply.

Like Leiter, I find inexhaustible artistic possibilities in merely walking around my neighborhood with my camera. Many of his compositions and croppings leave images poised between just legible and just not and either way remind us of the beauty (sometimes immediately recognizable, sometimes not) available to us every day. His use of outdated film, which had budget advantages as well as the potential for unexpected color effects and relationships, is a wonderful example of melding the practical with the artistic. Finally, the strength he showed early in his adulthood to escape the authority of his family's expectations and embrace his life as an artist serves as a wonderful example, not far from some aspects of my own personal history, of a man's determination and persistence.

Jeffrey Saldinger
December 2015