

Three Artists Who Have Been Important to Me

Rembrandt. Chardin. Giorgio Morandi.

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.

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