

Hol Bulletin

September 08



With apologies for our long absence...

A Still Life

THE MYTH OF GIORGIO MORANDI



[Giorgio Morandi, 1890-1964](#), opens this month at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (September 16-December 14, 2008). It will be the most comprehensive exhibition of the Italian artist's work ever to be shown in the United States.

If you have ever seen the work of Giorgio Morandi before (like [here](#) or [here](#)), it was most likely a smallish oil-on-canvas still life; probably a group of simple objects -- vases, bottles, maybe a box -- clustered on a barely-defined surface and painted loosely, in muted tones. Indeed, this kind of still life, and with these particular kinds of objects, was one of the only two or three major themes Morandi would explore throughout his fifty-year career.

The best of these works are spare, elegant, and isolated. And for years, these are the same words biographers would use to describe Morandi himself. They painted a picture of a man untouched by artistic influence, personal idiosyncrasy, and political turmoil alike. In her 2005 book *Giorgio Morandi: The Art of Silence*, **Janet Abramowicz** argues otherwise (2005, Yale University Press, \$70, 9780300100365).

Abramowicz's book is one of comparatively few on the artist in English, and aside from bringing some much deserved attention to his work here, she also seeks to set the record straight for Morandi scholars and admirers everywhere. And by the halfway point of this well-written (though not always cleanly edited) work, she has made her point abundantly clear.

From the beginning, Abramowicz says, Morandi felt isolated and unappreciated in his hometown, Bologna, Italy. It was a cultural backwater compared to Italy's other great cities, and for a young painter and printmaker straining against tradition to find his own way, it was a difficult place to be. Straight out of school however, and continuing throughout his life, he worked tirelessly and consciously to learn about and participate in larger art movements around Italy and abroad -- including the Futurists, Cubism, Pittura Metafisica, and the Strapaese.

It was only in the 1930s, during Fascism's reign in Italy, that the

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Exhibition Openings

London

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Sept 11 - Jan 4

Tate Britain

Nashville

[Rodin:](#)

[A Magnificent](#)

[Obsession](#)

Sept 12 - Jan 4

Frist Center for the

Visual Arts

Washington D.C.

[Richard Avedon:](#)

[Portraits of Power](#)

Sept 13 - Jan 25

Corcoran Gallery of Art

Los Angeles

[Martin Kippenberger:](#)

myth of Morandi as isolated and untouched by outside influence was born. Whether as a political tool to give him position and some amount of freedom during difficult times, or simply as a device to protect his increasingly valuable privacy, it was a myth that would persist for decades after the artist's death. And that it lasted so long is in no small part due to the artist's own effort.

Near the end of his life, Morandi handpicked Francesco Arcangeli to write the first comprehensive monograph of his work, but the two had a falling out over, it seems, Arcangeli's unwillingness to toe the line of the Morandi myth. Abramowicz says: "Arcangeli's book was the first monograph to place Morandi in the company of European modernists and to situate the man within the context of his own time. This did not please Morandi, who remarked that Arcangeli's book was not a monograph about him but rather a history of Italy."

Curiously, the same could be said of Abramowicz's book. So focused on connecting Morandi to the world around him, Abramowicz's biography ignores the one aspect of the artist that always remained private and disconnected -- his art making. And while readers may find themselves wanting more along these lines, perhaps we are better left to stand in front of these austere canvases armed only with our own perception. Perhaps, armed with a little history, we should let the scholarship, the exhibition dates, the correspondence, and the articles sort themselves out and simply try to make of Morandi's art what we will... as he intended.

[More on Giorgio Morandi: The Art of Silence, from Yale University Press...](#)

Other writings on Morandi:

- *Giorgio Morandi: Works, Writings, Interviews*, Karen Wilkin (2007, Poligrafa, \$45, 9788434311404)
- *Mysteries of the Rectangle*, Siri Hustvedt (2007, Princeton Architectural Press, \$24.95, 9781568986180), contains her essay "Giorgio Morandi: Not Just Bottles"

Both Wilkin and Hustvedt will be speaking as part of a [Sunday at the Met program devoted to the exhibition](#) on September 21.

Catherine Opie

IN CONVERSATION



The big exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum this fall is [Catherine Opie: American Photographer](#) (September 26, 2008-January 7, 2009). Though Opie has shown extensively in galleries and contemporary art museums around the country over the past fifteen years, this upcoming show in New York is her largest to date. For the occasion, a comprehensive catalogue will be published, but for those interested in a more intimate read -- whether you're new to the artist or a fan who would like to know more -- there is the recent *Andrea Bowers/Catherine Opie*, edited by Alejandro Cesarco (2008, A.R.T. Press, \$13.95, 9780923183448).

[The Problem Perspective](#)

Sept 21 - Jan 5
Museum of Contemporary Art

London

[Rothko](#)

Sept 26 - Feb 1
Tate Modern

September HOTLIST

Hol picks from the
New Museum's
[September HOTLIST](#)



[Oyvind Fahlstrom: The Art of Writing](#)
Antonio Sergio Bessa
(Northwestern University Press)



[The Cool School](#) DVD
(Arts Alliance)

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Part of A.R.T. Press's *Between Artists* series, *Andrea Bowers/Catherine Opie* is a conversation between the two artists recorded in several sessions over the summer and fall of 2007. For those afraid of such a thing turning into a dull and impenetrable text, the opening lines should reassure:

"Bowers: Maybe we should start by talking about the similarities in our histories?"

"Opie: Our childhood?"

"Bowers: Yes, exactly. I love how on the first night we met..."

"Opie: At a cocktail party!"

"Bowers: Right, at Miles Coolidge's house."

"Opie: Yes, that's where it was, at Miles and Amy's. That was when they were living outside of Valencia."

"Bowers: Just upon my graduation from CalArts in the summer of 1992, I believe."

"Opie: That night we discovered, to the horror and boredom of everybody around us, that we were from the same small town in Ohio."

While this convivial tone continues throughout the all-too-short volume, the conversation also brings out some more penetrating insights into the practice and process of these two contemporary artists.

Early in her career, Opie's work was an equal and striking mix of solitary landscape and upfront portraiture. As she says to Bowers, "Both of us are trying to deal with history, but my approach is the documentation of people or places in the world." Of that early work however, Opie says, "everybody kept saying, 'You know, every time you photograph people they're queer, but when you photograph the cities they're all empty.'"

Opie has always been proudly associated with the gay and lesbian community, and she continues to be drawn to the specifics of certain places, but once noticed, she worked to address the overly rigid duality in her early approach. Consciously, over the course of a decade, she has come to a meaningful and satisfying pluralism in the type of people and places she captures:

"Opie: ...If you really want to talk about democracy, it can't be considered under the guise of a singular notion of community; it has to be represented in the kind of multifaceted layers that actually exist within our world. I do not exist only in a queer culture -- I exist in this world. And so I have to look at the United States in this broader way that I have been doing -- through American cities, or documenting L. A., or looking at temporary communities or icehouses or surfers. To me, it's about trying to create a true democratic voice in relationship to my ideas about how I participate in American culture."

Don't miss Opie's ever expanding vision of that democracy: in this lovely volume from A.R.T. Press; on display this fall at the

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Guggenheim; and certainly in many more ways to come.

Other Books in the *Between Artist Series*:

Alejandro Cesarco, ed., A.R.T. Press, \$13.95

- *Maria Eichhorn/John Miller* (2008, 9780923183431)
- *Amy Sillman/Gregg Bordowitz* (2007, 9780923183417)
- *Silvia Kolbowski/Walid Raad* (2006, 9780923183400)
- *Paul Chan/Martha Rosler* (2006, 9780923183394)
- *Liam Gillick/Lawrence Weiner* (2006, 9780923183387)

Available through [Printed Matter](#) and other fine bookstores, or visit [A.R.T. Press](#), a project of Art Resource Transfer.

Catalogue of the Exhibition:

- *Catherine Opie: American Photographer*, Dorothy Allison, Jennifer Blessing, Nat Trotman, and Russell Ferguson (2008, Guggenheim Museum, \$65, 9780892073757)

Fall Books Preview

THE BEST OF THIS SEASON'S LINEUP



[A Short Life of Trouble: Forty Years in the New York Art World](#), Marcia Tucker

(October 2008, University of California Press, \$27.50, 9780520257009). Memoir. "This engrossing memoir brings to vivid life the behind-the-scenes struggles of Marcia Tucker... the founder of the [New Museum of Contemporary Art](#) in New York City... highlights Tucker's commitment to forging a new system when the prevailing one proved too narrow for her expansive vision." Edited and with an Afterword by artist Liza Lou. Marcia Tucker, who died in 2006, has also just had a volume of her short stories published through the Acadia Summer Arts Program in Maine, [Marcia Tucker: Three Stories](#).



[The Lightning Field](#), Kenneth Baker

(October 2008, Yale University Press, \$35.00, 9780300138948). Essay. "Critic Kenneth Baker visited [Walter de Maria's] [The Lightning Field](#) numerous times over the course of the past 30 years in order to write this text... rather than building on ideas in narrative sequence, he deploys quotation to effect multiple perspectives and points of view. Baker's

citations and elegantly crafted prose are arrayed -- in a metaphorical parallel to De Maria's choreographing of the vast landscape of the American Southwest -- to create a compelling text." Preface by Lynne Cooke.



[True to Life: Twenty-Five Years of Conversations with David Hockney](#), Lawrence Weschler

(October 2008, University of California Press, \$24.95, 9780520258792). Biography. "Soon after its publication in 1982, artist David Hockney read Lawrence Weschler's [Seeing Is Forgetting the](#)



[Name of the Thing One Sees: A Life of](#)

[Contemporary Artist Robert Irwin](#) and invited

Weschler to his studio to discuss it, initiating a series of engrossing dialogues, gathered here for the first time.... These conversations provide an astonishing record of what has been Hockney's grand endeavor, nothing less than an exploration of 'the structure of seeing' itself."

[And don't miss 16 other top picks at the Hol Notebook blog...](#)

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A new work, never before published, ***Museum Legs***, by **Amy Whitaker**, is an irreverent and witty but also warm and engaging collection of essays-ranging from "First Friday" (a visit to museum parties) to "Revenge of the Homunculus" (a word or two about wall labels). The essays culminate in "Dumb, Basic Ideas" for what museums might consider doing differently and "Crib Notes for a Museum Visit"

(on-the-ground suggestions for museum-going). [Read more about the project, download a sample of the text, or contact the team.](#)



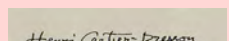
A reprint of **Ursula Meyer's *Conceptual Art***, paired with a new book examining contemporary examples of the form. As the team puts it: "The basic idea is to create a contemporary version of the book in which updates or analogs of the past work in contemporary form are gathered and presented in an homage to Meyer's classic edition." They potentially produce this project in two separate

volumes (one classic, one new); or as a single, bound volume with the texts interspersed; or in a single volume of only the new text, subsequently packaged with vintage copies of Meyer's original. [Read more about this project and download a sample of the text, or contact the team.](#)

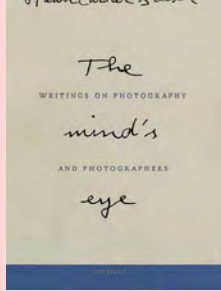
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"Being attentive to life"

THE PHOTOGRAPHY AND WRITING OF HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON



Celebrating the centenary of the artist's birth,



The Art Institute of Chicago will be showing [Henri Cartier-Bresson and the Art and Photography of Paris](#) (September 20, 2008-January 4, 2009). Though focused on connecting Cartier-Bresson to his contemporaries -- de Chirico, Matisse, Mondrian, and Picasso -- the exhibition gives us a good excuse to reacquaint ourselves with the photographer's writing, collected in ***The***

Mind's Eye: Writings on Photography and Photographers (1999, Aperture, \$19.95, 9780893818753).

This small volume is broken into three sections on photography, on travel, and on friends and artists. Many of the entries aren't much more than a paragraph, and each tries to capture a sometimes fleeting thought -- what Cartier-Bresson calls in his photography, a "picture story".

"The Decisive Moment", the longest single text in the collection, is also his most known and undoubtedly most aptly titled. It is (or should be) a foundational text for any would-be photographer, as it lays out Cartier-Bresson's approach to photography, and his belief in its powers and its apparently pleasant limitations. Subject, composition, technique -- each is thoughtfully conveyed to the reader not as a set of rules to be followed, or exercises to be performed, but rather as reflexes to be developed.

"In photography," he says later in the book, "creation is a quick business -- an instant, a gush, a response -- putting the camera up to the eye's line of fire, snatching with that economical little box whatever it was that surprised you, catching it in midair, without tricks, without letting it get away."

Ultimately, this more poetic approach to photography and to writing about photography perfectly suits Cartier-Bresson's relationship to the camera -- it was just his sketchpad. "What I am looking for, above all else," he reminds us, "is to be attentive to life."

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