

DIPARTIMENTO DI STORIA E CRITICA DELLE ARTI  
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI VENEZIA

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# GIORGIO MORANDI



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ELLE ARTI  
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EGLI STUDI  
EZZIA

WORLD HOUSE GALLERIES



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FRONT COVER: *Still Life*, ca. 1952 (no. 20)

BACK COVER: *Three Country Houses at Grizzana*, 1929 (no. 41)

# GIORGIO MORANDI

*Retrospective*

**paintings      drawings      etchings**

1912-1957

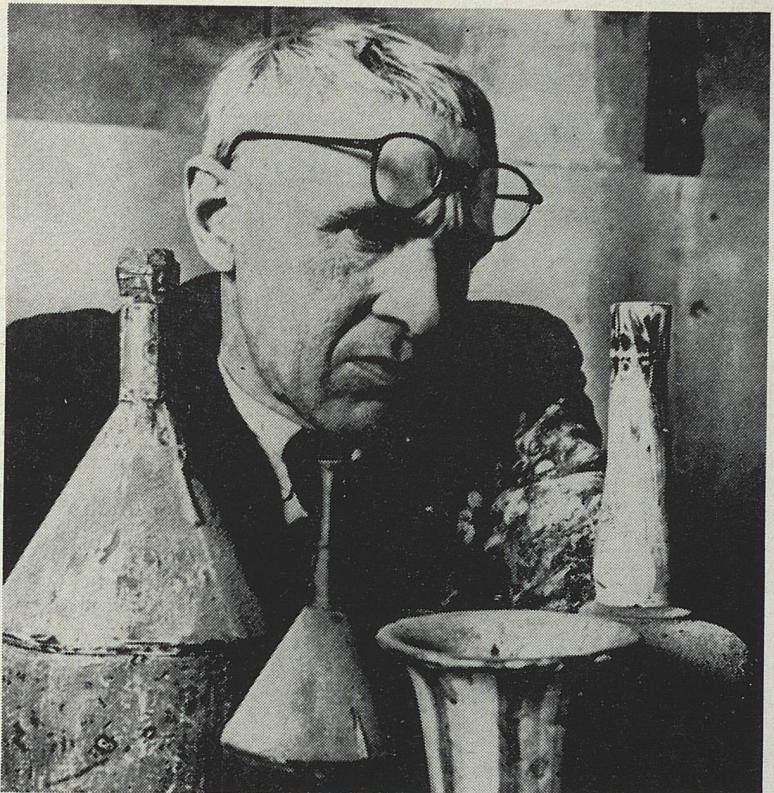
*exhibition opens tuesday, november 5  
through saturday, december 7, 1957  
monday through saturday: 10 to 5:30 pm*

**WORLD HOUSE GALLERIES**

Madison Avenue at 77th Street, New York



## *Giorgio MORANDI*



Courtesy Municipal Art Department, The Hague

Giorgio Morandi, born in Bologna on July 20, 1890, is sixty-seven years old, but his fame is quite recent. He has a group of faithful admirers and friends who became aware thirty years ago that his art has a perfection and a purity beyond compare in Italy during his generation. Yet even today his followers are not so numerous, because the public at large sees a limitation in Morandi's insistence upon representing small bottles, and in his refusal to paint a human figure. (He is called "il pittore delle bottigliette.")

However, outside Italy Morandi's fame is even more recent, for it is difficult to classify him within one of the trends which dominate the artistic scene of the world. He does not care for renown, he tries to avoid as many exhibitions of his own work as he can, and he lives very modestly in an old apartment with his sisters. He taught etching—not painting—in the Bologna Academy of Fine Arts, and now is retired.

Even when he was young he never made his trip to Paris like the majority of Italian artists. But through collections and exhibitions in Venice, Milan and Rome, he was able to understand with an acute perception what

was in his opinion the best in the world production of painting. Hence he learned the lessons of Cézanne since 1912, observed Matisse and Picasso, and experimented with the so-called "metaphysical painting" of De Chirico and Carrá. But Morandi never renounced his own way, so that what he learned from other artists was completely transformed into something which still belonged to him. Very few were aware fifteen years ago that this solitary artist who seemed to be the most provincial of all was in fact one of the most international among the Italian artists.

He considers himself a figurative painter "faithful to nature," and in fact always represents either still lifes or flowers or landscapes. He would think it criminal to use willingly an abstract form or to distort the form of an object to accentuate expression. It is difficult to conceive how such an artist can live and be "modern" in a world where distortions and abstractions dominate everywhere.

This is the problem which it is necessary to solve, at least tentatively, if one wishes to understand Morandi's art.

First of all, why does he so persistently paint small bottles, old lamps, packages, and so on? Perhaps he himself is not aware that he devalues the subject matter by choosing to represent things which are in themselves of interest to nobody. When the subject is not interesting, the observer concentrates his attention on lines, forms and colors.

To think that Morandi expresses himself through bottles is quite ridiculous. It is his form, his space, his colors which express his fancy, as if he were an abstract artist. But he is not. Abstract art always implies a severance from tradition, and Morandi is a traditional man.

His way of life is thoroughly traditional. He loves old things. He collects some old paintings, even old bottles. In his love there is even a certain pity for the old, useless things he has found in the "mercantino" (marché aux puces) of Bologna.

The task of the bottles in Morandi's paintings is to assure him that tradition is safe; that he may live, even when he is painting, in the old tradition. Such an atmosphere, artificially created by him, corresponds with his feelings and his sympathies, and is a secure background from where he can set free his imagination in order to create modern forms and colors. Moreover, he is not satisfied with finding bottles, glasses and lamps to re-

produce. He must change them with some tints, with lining some transparency, with letting some dust appear here and there. In a certain sense he invents the objects he reproduces, in order to paint from his own imagination—with the illusion that the objects of his imagination could really be the dear old things of his traditional family. Even when he paints a landscape, he represents a spot of Grizzana, an indifferent country place where he owns a small house. This is an extreme achievement for an artist: to humble even a landscape in order to avoid any rhetoric, and to concentrate upon the values of form.

To find the most refined subtleties of modern art rooted in the most modest and traditional way of feeling: this is the secret of Morandi's art—his charm, his uniqueness, his greatness.

Between the two wars, when Italy made a great clamor over its classic tradition and its monumental power, painting small bottles assumed an unsurpassed irony which was a warning against illusions, and advice to follow a better road.

The oldest painting by Morandi that I know is a landscape painted in 1911, its structural solidity accentuated by a simplified motif. Another landscape of 1913 shows the influence of Cézanne in its transverse brush strokes and in the turning road which helps to represent the space in depth. In some still lifes of 1914 there are the approaches to the flat surfaces of Matisse or, on the contrary, to the geometrical volumes of Picasso. But in still lifes and flowers of 1916, the trend toward abstraction is apparent, with a distinction of forms expressing the idealistic temperament of the artist. But it is from 1918 to 1920, under the influence of De Chirico and Carrá, that Morandi succeeds in finding the necessary volume for the realization of abstract forms. This kind of "metaphysical painting" reveals two elements which are essential for his future work: one is the purity of form, a need for naïvete, which impresses a human touch even in a geometrical figure. The second element is the preciousness of color. In fact, Morandi feels that a geometrical form has a sense in painting if an abstract color dresses it. Since then, and to the present time, Morandi's coloring has been essentially the same, even though it has become more and more refined.

It is extremely difficult to describe such coloring, for while it is perfectly natural, it can never be found in nature. This means that it seems



natural to us because its harmony is always perfect and forces us to find it natural, even though it is the unforeseen creation of imagination. Generally, Morandi's light does not exist outside, but only inside the material of the painted objects. They are luminous by their own strength. It appears that they have a subdued phosphorescence. The delicacy, the anxious feeling, the melancholic survival of the images of Morandi—as if they belonged to an eternal life after death—and all the mystery of his paintings, are comprised in his unique conception of color harmony. Such a color-light, so personal, so created, becomes necessarily spiritual. The task of form is reduced to the opportunity of being illuminated by coloring.

The "small bottles," the small packages, etc., are the best supporters of the spiritual life of color, because they do not pretend to have a life of their own. A consequence of this fact is that a still life by Morandi is most beautiful when it is most simple; when few objects of common shape are offered on the canvas. In recent years Morandi has become aware of this, and his simplifications of motifs are more and more emphasized, in order to let the color harmony speak by itself. Two of the still lifes exhibited here—one of about 1946, the other of 1956—prove this point, when compared with the one painted in 1935.

Another characteristic of Morandi's paintings which is beyond any realism is the space in which his motifs appear. It is a space without limits; a suggestion of space by nuances of color and by the placing of objects. It is created in an indirect way—a fanciful space.

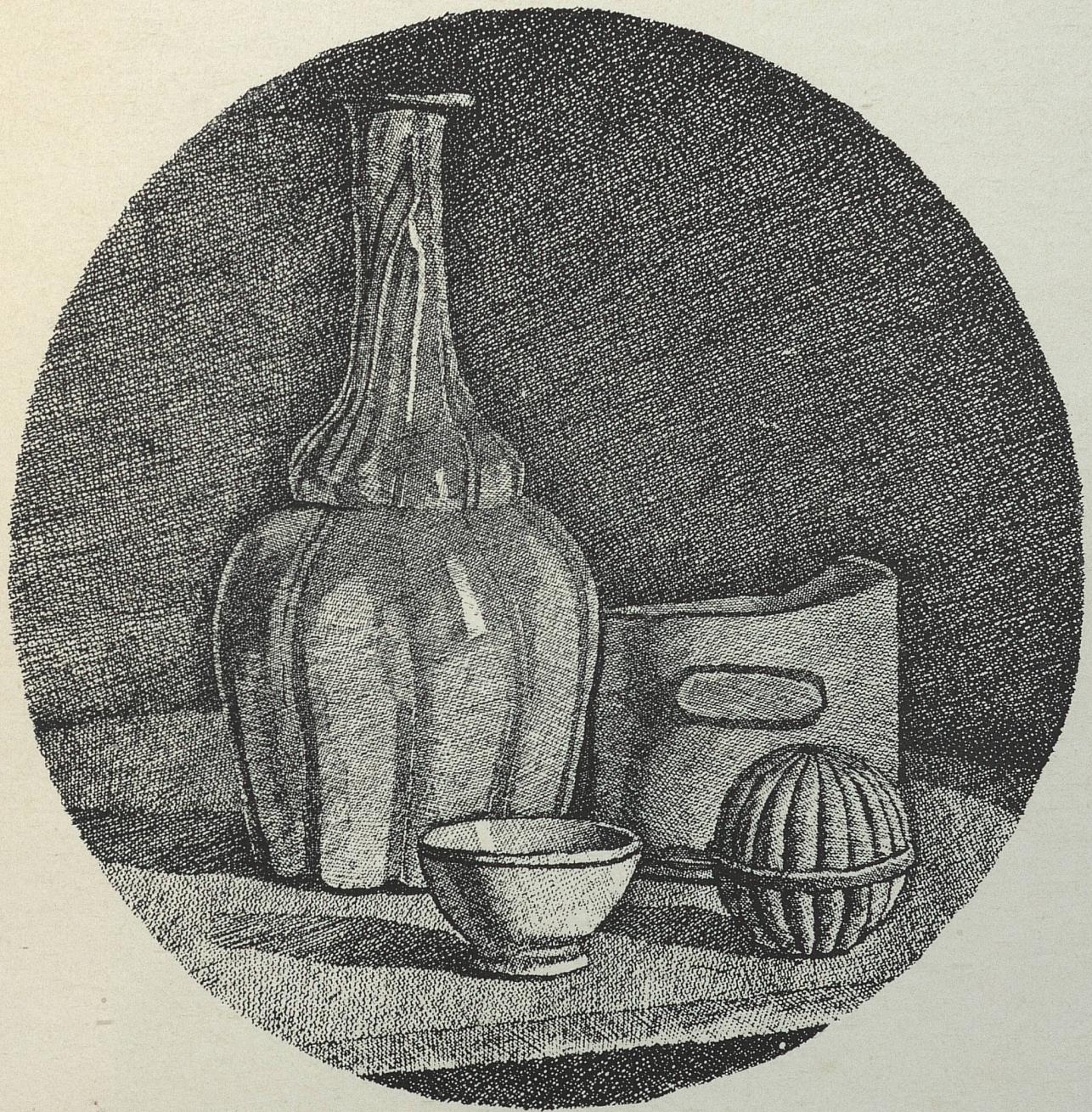
Morandi's style has such a unity that his approach to landscape is not particularly different from his approach to still lifes, in spite of the different conditions of the surroundings. Of course, he sketches on the spot and finishes in his studio. Here he brings forward the structural solidity of the composition, defines the contrasts of light and shade, and specifies the interplay of volumes. In spite of the modesty of the choice—trees and houses of Grizzana—he succeeds in realizing a certain monumentality. This exhibition shows a landscape painted about 1933 where the need for abstraction is strongly felt and helps to realize the monumentality of the effect. Another landscape of 1943 accentuates the volume and the heaviness of the motif with a clear recollection of Cézanne. But in these two, as in the other landscapes by Morandi, the color scheme is completely different from that

of Cézanne and of the cubist painters. It is clear and subdued: it is fresh and delicate, harmonized between the two poles of green and whitish-brown tints. Within these narrow limits the delicacy of nuances brings a poetical life, a calm, a sense of eternity, a human touch of love and devotion to nature.

Etching has been for Morandi as important as painting. One could say that the suggestion of coloring without colors has been one of the most passionate achievements of his life. Therefore his style in his paintings is the same in principle as that in his etchings. However, some secondary differences exist which can illuminate his art. It is significant that he etched landscapes more frequently than he painted them. This means that he felt that the reduction of all colors to black and white could better realize dramatic effects in landscapes than in still lifes. Consider *Three Country Houses at Grizzana*, 1929: there is a dramatic life very rare in Morandi's painting. The motif is not dramatic at all, but the struggle of light and shade realizes the effect. Morandi dreams an art calm and serene, but his heart is often troubled. In his paradise not all devils have been expelled. This can be seen in the delicacy of his colors when he paints. But in his etchings he brings out a more overt expression.

Of course, the perfection of his technique emphasizes his achievements. *Landscape*, ca. 1930 gives a strange illusion of color and transparency of the atmosphere.

One can appreciate Morandi's art by looking at his paintings and etchings, because the quality of both color and light-and-shade is self-evident. But because of the prejudices of subject matter and of the reality in taste, it is perhaps worth-while to emphasize that Morandi, by devaluating his subject matter, is much more of an abstractionist than he believes himself to be, and therefore he belongs to the art of today much more than people believe. At the same time, while his aim is to attain grace and beauty, as in a paradise on earth, his participation in art and life does not proceed without struggle, nor without a human consciousness of the dramatic life of today.





Courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York





***CATALOG***



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## ***Paintings***

**1 Still Life, 1916**

*Oil on canvas, 32½ x 22½"*

*Lent by The Museum of Modern Art, N. Y.  
Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest*

**2 Landscape, 1933**

*Oil on canvas, 19 x 27½"*

*Collection Dr. and Mrs. John J. Mayers*

**3 Still Life, 1935**

*Oil on canvas, 20¾ x 18¾"*

**4 Still Life, 1935**

*Oil on canvas, 20¾ x 18¾"*

**5 Landscape, 1936**

*Oil on canvas, 21¼ x 23¾"*

**6 Landscape, 1936**

*Oil on canvas, 21¾ x 18½"*

**7 Landscape, 1940**

*Oil on canvas, 11 x 19"*

**8** **Landscape, 1940**  
*Oil on canvas, 10 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 17"*

**9** **Landscape, 1940**  
*Oil on canvas, 15 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ "*

**10** **Flowers, 1943**  
*Oil on canvas, 8 x 9 $\frac{7}{8}$ "*

**11** **Landscape, 1943**  
*Oil on canvas, 19 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ "*

**12** **Landscape, 1943**  
*Oil on canvas, 17 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ "*

**13** **Still Life, 1945**  
*Oil on canvas, 10 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 13"*

**14** **Flowers, 1945**  
*Oil on canvas, 12 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 9"*

**15** **Still Life, ca. 1945**  
*Oil on canvas, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ "*  
*Coll. Mr. and Mrs. H. Lawrence Herring*

**16** **Flowers, 1946**  
*Oil on canvas, 14 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ "*

**17** **Still Life, ca. 1946**  
*Oil on canvas, 11 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ "*

**18** **Still Life, 1949-50**  
*Oil on canvas, 15 x 17"*

**19** **Still Life, 1950**  
*Oil on canvas, 15 x 17"*  
*Collection Mr. and Mrs. Donald B. Straus*

**20** **Still Life, ca. 1952**  
*Oil on canvas, 13 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ "*

**21** **Still Life, 1953**  
*Oil on canvas, 9 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ "*

**22** **Still Life, 1953**  
*Oil on canvas, 12 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 16 $\frac{5}{8}$ "*

**23** **Still Life, 1953**  
*Oil on canvas, 16 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 21"*

**24** **Still Life, 1954**  
*Oil on canvas, 8 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 7 $\frac{5}{8}$ "*

**25** **Still Life, 1954-55**  
*Oil on canvas, 7 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ "*

**26** **Still Life, 1955**  
*Oil on canvas, 9 x 14"*

**27** **Still Life, ca. 1955**  
*Oil on canvas, 10 x 14"*

**28** **Still Life, 1955**  
*Oil on canvas, 14 x 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ "*

**29** **Still Life, 1956**  
*Oil on canvas, 11 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ "*  
*Collection Mrs. Janet S. R. Hill*

**30** **Still Life, 1956**  
*Oil on canvas, 13 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ "*

**31** **Urban Landscape, 1956**  
*Oil on canvas, 10 x 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ "*

**32** **Still Life, 1956**  
*Oil on canvas, 14 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ "*

**33** **Still Life, 1957**  
*Oil on canvas, 12 x 16"*

**34** **Still Life**  
*Oil on canvas, 12 x 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ "*

**35** **Still Life**  
*Oil on canvas, 17 x 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ "*  
*Collection Mr. Frank D. Butler*

*Morawie*



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## *Etchings*

**36** Bridge over the Savena at Bologna  
6½ x 8½" 1912  
43/50

*Italian Private Collector*

**37** Still Life with Three Objects, 1917  
9 ¾ x 7 ¾"  
1/50

*Lent by The Minneapolis Institute of Arts*

**38** Landscape, 1924  
6 x 6"

**39** A Garden on the Via Fondazza  
4 ¼ x 6" 1924  
35/55

**40** Landscape near Grizzana, 1929  
9 ¾ x 11 ¼"  
12/50

**41** Three Country Houses at  
Grizzana, 1929  
9 ¾ x 11 ¼"  
21/40

**42** A Haystack near Grizzana, 1929  
9 ½ x 9 ½"  
19/30

**43** Still Life with Vase and Bottles  
5 ¾ x 8" ca. 1929  
55/62

**44** Landscape, ca. 1930  
6 ¾ x 7 ½"  
13/50

**45** Landscape near Grizzana, 1932  
11 ½ x 9 ½"  
3/60

**46** Landscape near Roffino, 1936  
10 ½ x 12 ¾"  
58/60

**47** Round Still Life with Vase  
and Three Objects, 1946  
10 x 12 ½"  
4/65

**48** Still Life, 1951  
9 ¼ x 13 ¾"  
6/50  
*Lent by The Minneapolis Institute of Arts*

## *Watercolors*

**49** Still Life I, 1956  
*Watercolor on paper, 6 ¼ x 8"*  
*Collection Mrs. Myrtile Frank*

**50** Still Life II, 1956  
*Watercolor on paper, 7 x 9 ½"*  
*Collection Mrs. Myrtile Frank*

## *Drawings*

**51** Bottles, 1940

*Pencil on paper, 8 x 7½"*

**52** Still Life with Pitchers, 1945

*Pencil on paper, 5½ x 9½"*

*Collection Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Finkelstein*

**53** Bottles, 1946

*Pencil on paper, 6¾ x 8"*

**54** Still Life with Jars, 1948

*Pencil on paper, 7¾ x 11¾"*

**55** Still Life with Bottles, 1948

*Pencil on paper, 8 x 10¾"*

**56** Still Life, 1952

*Pencil on paper, 8¼ x 11"*

*Collection Mr. and Mrs. Phillip A. Bruno*

**57** Still Life with Bottles, 1953

*Pencil on paper, 6¾ x 10½"*

**58** Still Life, 1956

*Pencil on paper, 9 x 12½"*

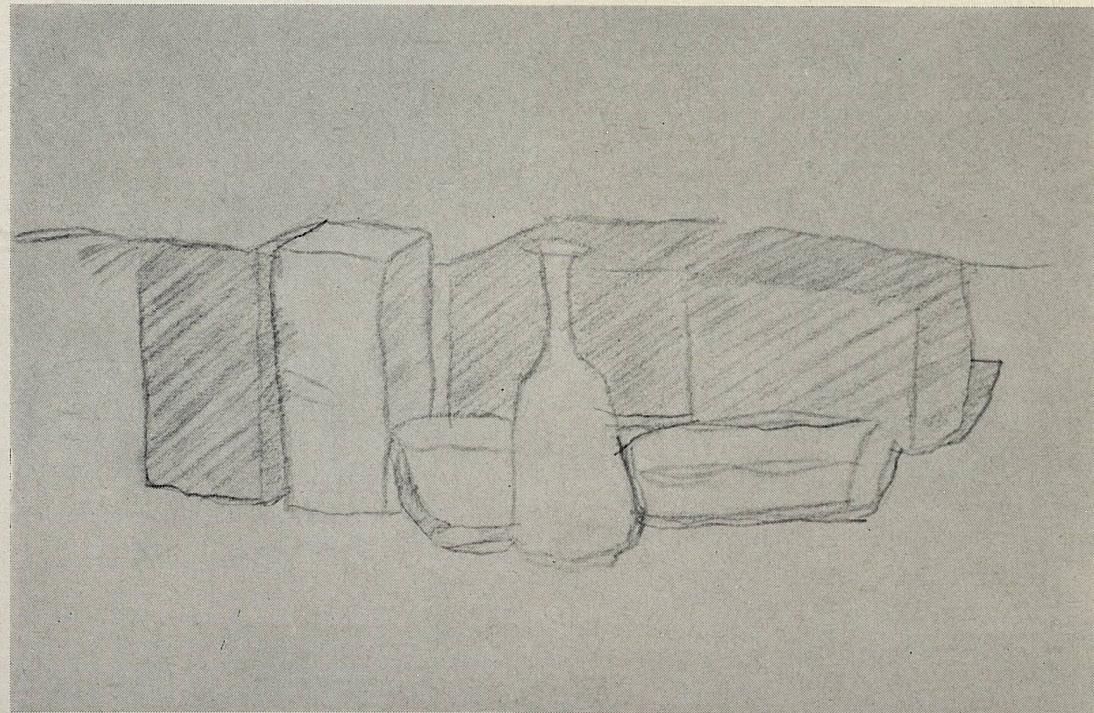
**59** Still Life with Bowl, 1957

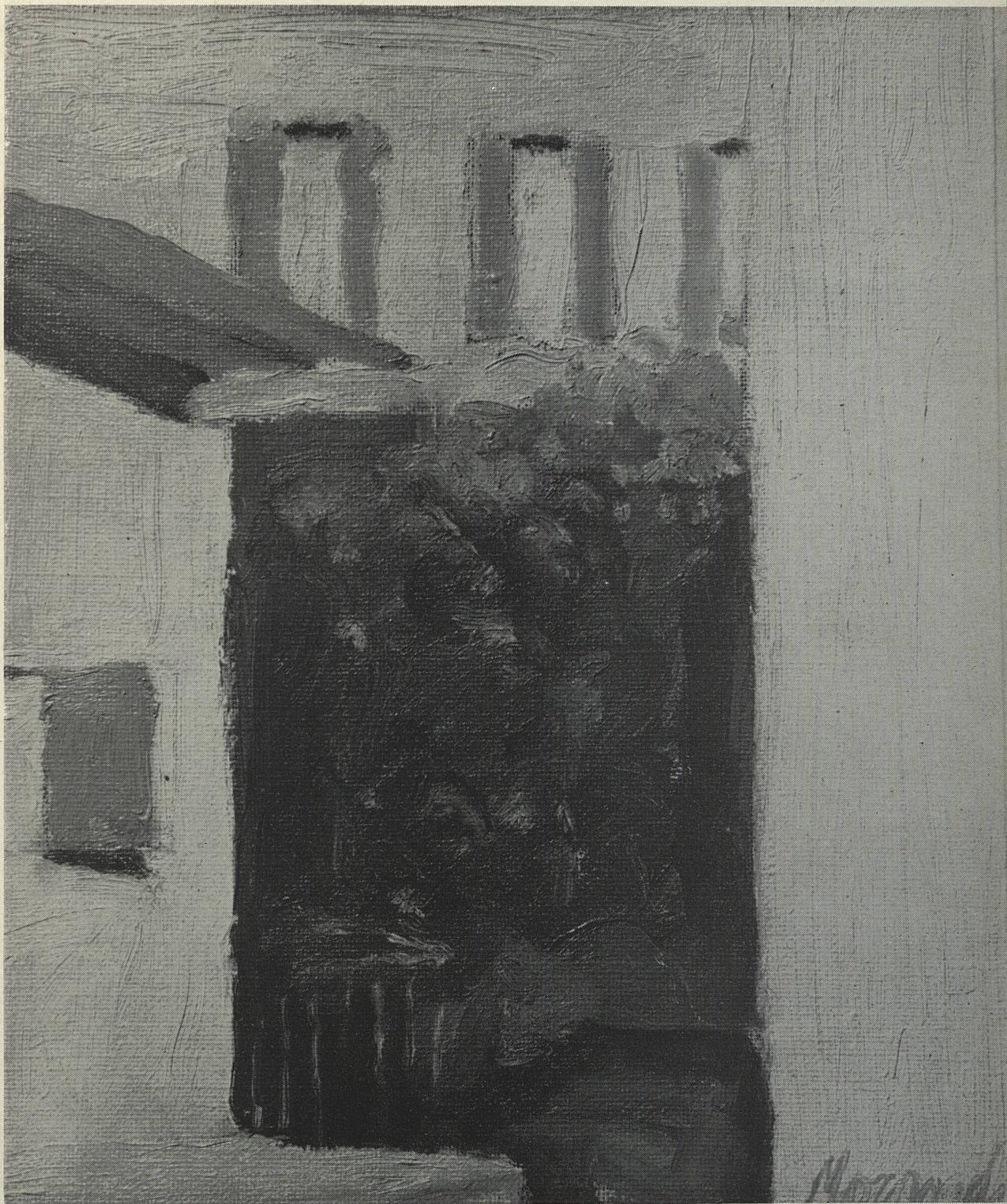
*Pencil on paper, 6 x 8½"*

**60** Still Life with Two Bottles

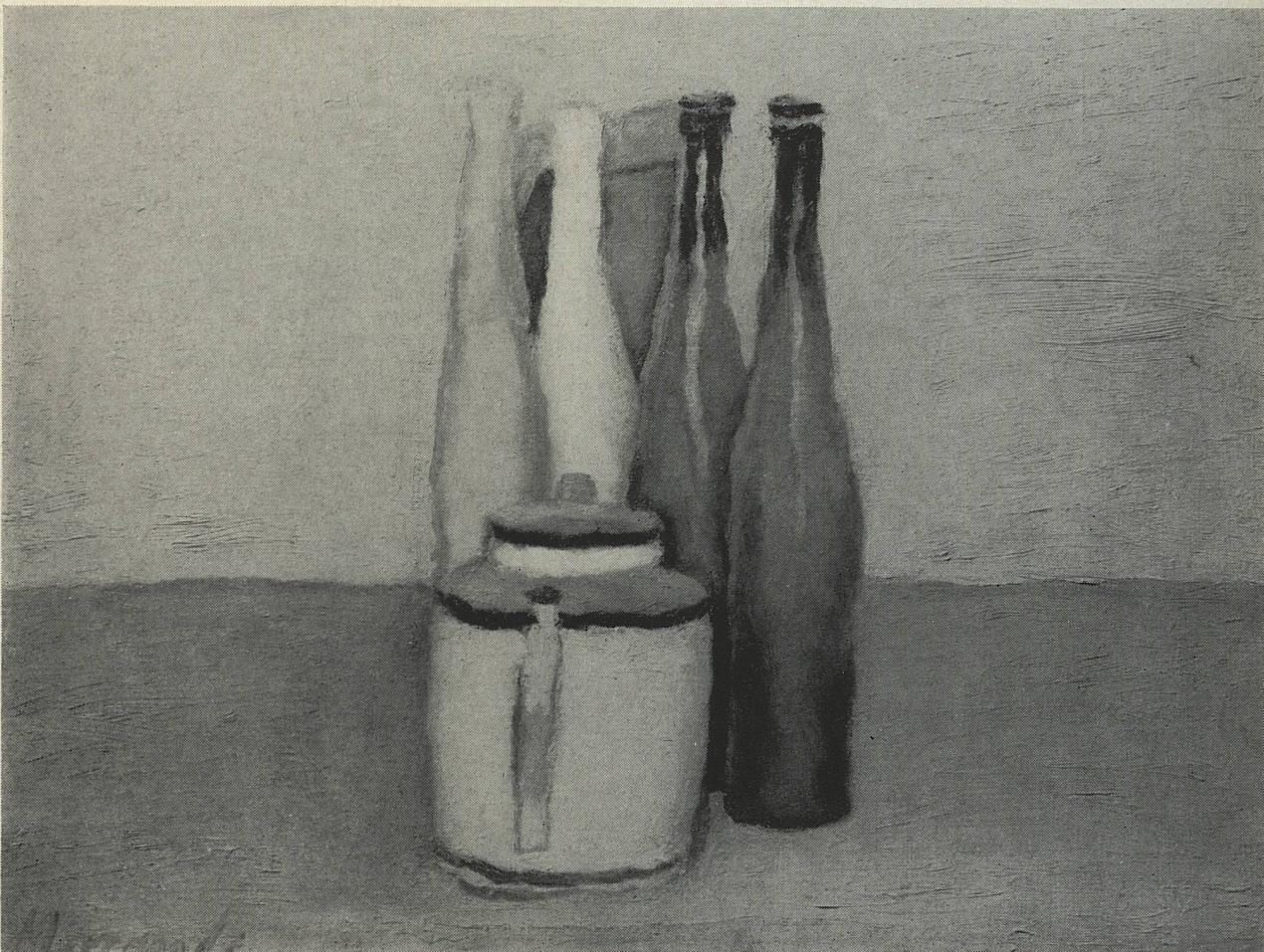
*Pencil on paper, 6¾ x 7¾"*

*Prices quoted upon request*









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