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Giorgio Morandi and the “Return to Order”: From Pittura Metafisica to Regionalism, 1917-1928

ALTHOUGH THE ART OF THE BOLOGNESE painter Giorgio Morandi has been showcased in several recent museum exhibitions, important portions of his trajectory have yet to be analyzed in depth.¹ The fact that Morandi’s work has failed to elicit more responses from art historians is the result of the marginalization of modern Italian art from the history of modernism given its reliance on tradition and closeness to Fascism. More importantly, the artist himself favored a formalist interpretation since the late 1930s, which has all but precluded historical approaches to his work except for a few notable exceptions.² The critic Cesare Brandi, who inaugurated the formalist discourse on Morandi, wrote in 1939 that “nothing is less abstract, less uprooted from the world, less indifferent to pain, less deaf to joy than this painting, which apparently retreats to the margins of life and interests itself, withdrawn, in dusty kitchen cupboards.”³ In order to further remove Morandi from the

1. The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museo d’Arte Moderna in Bologna organized a retrospective in 2008-2009; the Phillips Collection in Washington D.C. held its own in 2009.

2. Francesco Arcangeli, *Giorgio Morandi*, Milan, Edizioni del Milione, 1964; Emily Braun, “Speaking Volumes: Giorgio Morandi’s Still Lifes and the Cultural Politics of Strapaese,” *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1995, pp. 89-116; Janet Abramovicz, *Giorgio Morandi: the Art of Silence*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004.

3. The original text reads: “Nulla è meno astratto, meno avulso al mondo, meno indifferente al dolore, meno sordo alla gioia, di questa pittura, che apparentemente si ritira ai margini

world and from politics, Brandi emphasized that Morandi's art was best understood as "formal research," describing it as "the composition of two figurative modes that seemed opposed, one of them turned to volumetric and architectonic construction, the other meant to reabsorb all the spatial relations via color and light."⁴ While Brandi's approach illuminates Morandi's reconciliation of plasticity and color, it has masked his art's relationship to Italian cultural and political debates, especially during the fascist regime.

Morandi's stylistic experimentation from 1909 to 1920 traced the rise and development of Cézannism, Cubism, Futurism, and the Metaphysical School in Italy.⁵ His trajectory is also indicative of how Italian artists working between World War I and World War II explored the avant-garde in light of Fascism's call for a national aesthetic. In the case of Morandi, he abandoned the ill-received Metaphysical School in the years after World War I in order to join *Strapaese* (Supercountry), whose regionalist aesthetics were close to the regime's rural policy. An analysis of Morandi's trajectory between 1917 and 1928 will illuminate the development of his art as well as how the artist constructed and adapted his artistic identity in response to the national scene.

Morandi was associated with Giorgio de Chirico's Metaphysical School from 1917 to 1922, a period during which he adhered to its aesthetics and theoretical postulates. This school was based, among other things, on the idea that the "metaphysical" artist, a thinker and privileged seer, could render a world beyond physical reality. This involved a particularly intellectual role, displacing the notions of tradition and craft as paramount in the creation of art and invoking an image of the artist as the discoverer and interpreter of hidden metaphysical truths. Morandi's alliance with this school launched his career in Italy, but during the last two years of his association with the movement,

della vita, e si interessa, umbratile, ai pulverulenti ripostigli della cucina.", Cesare Brandi, "Cammino di Morandi," *Le Arti*, February-March, 1939, p. 29.

4. The original text reads: "la composizione di due modi figurative che sembravano opposti, l'uno rivolto alla costruzione volumetrica e architettonica, l'altro inteso a riassorbire nel colore e nella luce tutte le relazioni spaziali," Brandi, "Cammino di Morandi," p. 247.

5. For more on Futurism, see Olga Sáenz, *El futurismo italiano*, translated by María Pía Lamberti, José Luis Bernal and Sara Bolaño, Mexico City, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2010. On de Chirico and the Metaphysical School, see Teresa del Conde (ed.), *Giorgio de Chirico: obra selecta*, exhibition catalog, October 28-January 16, Mexico City, Museo de Arte Moderno, 1993, and María Teresa Méndez Baiges, *Modernidad y tradición en la obra de Giorgio de Chirico*, Mexico City, Ediciones Sin Nombre, 2001.

he reconsidered this closeness to de Chirico, eventually forging his own identity as a regionalist artist during the mid-1920s. This essay traces Morandi's relationship with the Metaphysical School between 1917 and 1922 and his progression towards a regionalist aesthetic and persona in order to dispel the myth that he was an isolated individual and to move away from formalist interpretations of his work.

Morandi first showed an interest in de Chirico's philosophical and artistic views in his self-portrait from 1917 (fig. 1). This *Self-Portrait* (Vit. 33) is an enigmatic reconfiguration of de Chirico's *Self-Portrait (and what shall I love if not the enigma?)*, proving that Morandi was familiar with de Chirico's style and more importantly, with his strategies of self-representation (figs. 1 and 2).⁶ In replicating de Chirico's posture, Morandi places himself within a painting or studio setting, announcing his decision to become a metaphysical artist. Morandi continued this self-conscious construction of his identity as a metaphysical painter through several still lifes which feature a mannequin bust or head.⁷ Despite their seemingly exclusive focus on the articulation of space and the uncanny relationship between their simple objects, Morandi's still lifes trace his shifting views regarding the Metaphysical School. In 1918, for example, Morandi presented a mannequin/artist in the act of painting; towards 1920, the mannequin head is depicted as an inert oval mass, deprived of any subjectivity that had been previously bestowed on it.⁸ It will be argued that these works function as self-portraits, as they depict him as a metaphysical artist and refer to his own engagement with the movement.

Eventually, Morandi turned away from metaphysical painting and developed a rustic style which was embraced by the leaders of the regionalist group *Strapaese*. After 1920, he ceased to include the mannequin head in his works, focused on creating more realistic still lifes, and returned to the depiction of

6. Morandi's works are here identified by their catalog number in Lamberto Vitali's *catalogue raisonné*. See Lamberto Vitali, *Morandi*, 2 vols., Milan, Electra Editrice, 1977.

7. For more interpretations regarding mannequins in metaphysical paintings, see Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism: Art and Politics under Fascism*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 73-74; and Willard Bohn, "Apollinaire and de Chirico: The Making of the Mannequins," *Comparative Literature*, vol. 27, no. 2, Spring 1975, pp. 153-165. Bohn argues that de Chirico was inspired by Apollinaire's poetry, in particular, "Le Musicien de Saint-Merryand" and by Savinio's opera, *Les Chants de la mi-mort*. Morandi painted mannequins in the following still lifes: Vit. 30, 35, 37, 40 and 43.

8. See also, figure B, Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*, 1919, Vit. 46, oil on canvas. Fondazione Roberto Longhi, Italy, at <http://mgaguirre.blogspot.mx/p/images.html>.



1. Giorgio Morandi, *Self-Portrait*, 1917, Vit. 33, oil on canvas, 44 × 32.5 cm. Private collection. Photo: Museo Morandi. © Giorgio Morandi/SIAE/SOMAAP/México/2013.

landscapes. More importantly, Morandi's new style prompted him to abandon the idea of the artist as a complicated, active subject, which was the key to the school's conception of the artist as metaphysician. It will be shown that his regionalism was in conflict with the Metaphysical School's aesthetic and ideas regarding artists, leading him to cultivate a persona which matched his new aesthetic.

Morandi's decision to abandon the Metaphysical School did not occur in a vacuum, as it was informed by the Italian cultural and political climate. Specifically, his abandonment of his metaphysical persona was intended to avoid the school's largely negative critical reception in post-World War I Italy, and he did so by turning to more acceptable sources. He approached Piero della Francesca for his representation of space, volume, and, more importantly, pictorial craft as early as 1920. That same year, Morandi turned to Paul Cézanne and Ardengo Soffici, two artists who had left Parisian Bohemian circles and returned to their provincial origins in rejection of avant-gardism. Soffici, a Tuscan artist, was one of the leading figures in Italian cultural circles from 1900 until the beginning of World War II.⁹ He wrote art criticism about Cézanne as early as 1908, praising this artist's return to Aix-en-Provence and his plasticity.

Soffici's trajectory and his reading of Cézanne provided Morandi with examples of artists who, after a period of experimentation, arose as rustic alternatives to the Metaphysical School's thinking artist. Although there are no classical elements in Morandi's post-metaphysical works, his articulation of a regionalist aesthetic, derived from Soffici's writings and example, was one of several ways in which Italy manifested its "return to order" after the Great War. Given that Morandi had been part of the Metaphysical School, his newer still lifes and landscapes, their warm colors and uncomplicated compositions were heralded as a decision to abandon it. Thus, rusticity replaced metaphysics, the earthiness of the Bolognese countryside and interiors asserting themselves over Morandi's metaphysical conceits.

9. For a general introduction on Soffici and the Florentine avant-garde *milieu* between 1900 and the advent of Fascism, see Walter Adamson, *Avant-garde Florence: from Modernism to Fascism*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993. The classic monograph about Soffici's early years is Mario Richter's *La formazione francese di Ardengo Soffici, 1900-1914*, Prato, Pentalinea, 2000.

Metaphysical Self-Portraiture and Morandi

Between 1918 and 1919, Morandi advanced his career in Italy and abroad as a member of the Metaphysical School. De Chirico's interest in the younger artist led to Morandi's first one-man show in Rome in 1919, after which its organizer, Mario Broglio, became his first dealer. Broglio brought several of his works into the school's main print forum, the Roman magazine *Valori Plastici* (1918-1921), which showcased the latest European artistic experiments while extolling a return to the Italian tradition.¹⁰ Thus, Morandi's association with Broglio and *Valori Plastici* was instrumental in expanding the artist's visibility beyond his hometown of Bologna, as he seldom went to the centers where Italian modernism was developing most noticeably, namely, Milan, Florence, and Rome.¹¹ Broglio also included Morandi in the seminal exhibition of metaphysical art *Das Junge Italien*, which toured Germany in 1921.

Although by 1922 two years had passed since Morandi had abandoned the metaphysical style, he showed his recent works with the *Gruppo Valori Plastici* at the exhibition of the *Fiorentina Primaveraile*. Morandi's catalog entry was written by none other than de Chirico himself who, intent on promoting the style he had created, described Morandi's art as the "metafisica degli oggetti più comuni," giving the impression that Morandi was still working in the metaphysical style.¹² Thus, for close to four years, Morandi was associated with the metaphysical style and the *Gruppo Valori Plastici*, exhibiting with them both

10. Two volumes provide a thorough overview of the magazine *Valori Plastici* within an Italian and European context. See Paolo Fossati, *Valori Plastici 1918-1922*, Turin, Einaudi, 1981; and *Valori Plastici: XIII Quadriennale*, Rome, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 1998. A recent monograph on Morandi details Morandi's early exhibition history, see Abramovicz, *Giorgio Morandi: The Art of Silence*, pp. 40-43. *Valori Plastici* published two early landscapes by Morandi (Vit. 4 and 25), as well as a number of his metaphysical works (Vit. 33, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48, 58). It also featured three of his watercolors of human figures, and two watercolors depicting flowers and a cactus, respectively.

11. Before Morandi was featured in *Valori Plastici*, only his friend Riccardo Bacchelli and Franchi had devoted articles to him. See Riccardo Bacchelli, "Giorgio Morandi," *Il Tempo*, vol. 2, no. 88, March 1918; and Franchi, "Giorgio Morandi," *La Raccolta*, vol. 1, nos. 9-10, November 15—December 15, 1918. Only the etching *Cubo-Futurist Still Life*, from 1915, had been published in *La Raccolta*, vol. 1, no. 3, April 1918.

12. Giorgio de Chirico, "Giorgio Morandi," in *La Fiorentina Primaveraile; Prima Esposizione Nazionale dell'Opera e del Lavoro d'Arte nel Palazzo del Parco di San Gallo a Firenze*, Florence, Palazzo del Parco di San Gallo, 1922, pp. 153-154.



2. Giorgio de Chirico, *Self-Portrait (and what shall I love if not the enigma?)*, 1911, oil on canvas, 70.5 × 45 cm. Private collection. Photo: Art Resource, New York. © Giorgio de Chirico/SIAE/SOMAAP/México/2013.

in Italy and abroad. Despite the fact that he was not as active within the group as de Chirico, Savinio, or Carrà, this was the first movement which allowed him to forge an identity within the art world.

As stated above, Morandi's *Self-Portrait* of 1917 represented a bold gesture, since most of his paintings between 1910 and 1917 were still lifes or landscapes, suggesting that the artist understood that de Chirico's metaphysical project was developed in terms of its oneiric content and self-representational strategies (fig. 1). By turning to portraiture, Morandi created the impression that he was already a metaphysical artist. Moreover, Morandi's self-portrait emulated de Chirico's *Self-Portrait* (fig. 2), as it depicted an artist-intellectual wearing a suit and not bearing any tools referring to manual skill or craft. This suggests that the artist's value was tied to his mental acumen rather than to manual dexterity, academic training, or knowledge of tradition. Morandi's *Self-Portrait* also resembles Renaissance portraits of courtiers, representations which highlighted the sitter's intelligence and sophistication. Morandi himself mockingly acknowledged this identification with de Chirico in a letter from 1918

to his friend, the Bolognese intellectual Giuseppe Raimondi, as he inquired, “E de Chirico? Cosa ti ha detto il mio *Io?*”¹³ Thus, the 1917 *Self-Portrait* foreshadows Morandi’s eventual appearance in the pages of *Valori Plastici*, while the exhibitions organized by Broglio and de Chirico’s catalog entry cemented his identity as a metaphysical painter in the public view.

Morandi’s continuing emulation of de Chirico’s metaphysical persona between 1918 and 1920 can be traced through his still lifes featuring mannequins. Within the Metaphysical School, mannequins stood for an artistic identity that privileged intellect and intuition, which gave de Chirico access to an invisible world. De Chirico emphasized this by titling several of his paintings featuring mannequins distinctly, as in the case of *The Troubadour*, *The Poet*, *The Painter*, *The Philosopher*, *The Archaeologist*, and *The Great Metaphysician*. These titles positioned the artist as a learned man whose knowledge of music, poetry, philosophy, and the ancients enabled him to tap into the metaphysical truth. De Chirico had established this identity in his previously referenced *Self-Portrait* (1911), whose allusion to Nietzsche’s pose and to the enigma defined his task as a painter as that of representing a parallel, if disquieting reality (fig. 2).¹⁴

For de Chirico, the enigma was a concept referring to the unseen, mysterious world that only the metaphysical artist could witness and, more importantly, represent. He first wrote about the enigma following an epiphany he experienced at the Piazza Santa Croce, in Florence:

It was of course not the first time I had seen this square [...]. The whole world, down to the marble of the buildings and fountains, seemed to me to be convalescent [...]. Then I had the strange impression I was looking at these things for the first time, and the composition of my picture came to my mind’s eye. Now each time I look at that painting I see that moment. Nevertheless the moment is an *enigma* to me, for it is inexplicable.¹⁵

13. Lorella Giudici (ed.), *Giorgio Morandi, Lettere*, Milan, Abscondita, 2004, p. 18. [The emphasis is mine.]

14. Alain Jouffroy, “La Metafisica di Giorgio de Chirico,” in Isabella Far de Chirico and Domenico Porzio (eds.), *Conoscere De Chirico: La vita e l’opera dell’inventore della pittura metafisica*, Milan, A. Mondadori, 1979; Maurizio Fagiolo dell’Arco, “Giorgio de Chirico l’enigma nicciano,” in *Surrealismo. La Creation d’un mythe collectif. Omaggio a Breton*, Rome, Agenzia d’Arte Moderna, pp. 89-95.

15. De Chirico, “Meditations of a Painter,” in Herschel B. Chipp (ed.), *Theories of Modern Art*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968, pp. 397-398 [The emphasis is mine].

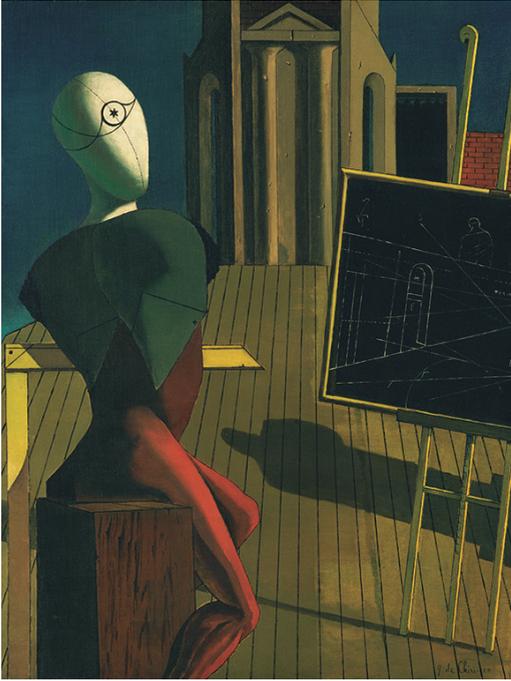
The enigma of the new and familiar was first depicted by de Chirico in *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, from 1909.¹⁶ De Chirico sought to portray something both familiar and strange by simplifying Santa Croce’s façade and by substituting the statue of Dante with a headless classical statue. The small figures to the right of the statue and the sails in the background do not provide the painting with a clearly articulated narrative, thus exacerbating the difference between the famous Piazza Santa Croce and the scene it inspired. Although de Chirico cannot rationally explain the sensation he felt when he saw the enigma, he attempts to evoke it in this representation, offering the viewer a glimpse into the world of the metaphysical artist. While *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* announced the direction his art would take, de Chirico’s *Self-Portrait*, painted two years later, indicated his continuing interest in the enigma while highlighting his status as a painter-intellectual.

De Chirico’s construction of the metaphysical artist as an interpreter of enigmas developed in paintings such as *The Seer* from 1914-1915, which represents a mannequin in front of an easel and an architectural diagram (fig. 3). Several of de Chirico’s earlier canvases had included a classical statue of Ariadne within deserted Italianate *piazze* in order to evoke themes of melancholy, waiting and yearning, rendering the statue a passive, female figure. Moreover, the sculpture is reclining empty-handed and with her eyes closed, as the setting and use of light single her out as an object to be contemplated. In *The Seer*, de Chirico turns his attention to a male subject who, though faceless, is engaging with the world around him through his activity as a creator. The design on the mannequin’s face, a single, cyclops-like eye, alludes to his special vision, namely, to his ability to see and depict enigmas, which sets the metaphysical artist apart from other creators. Whereas in de Chirico’s series of Ariadne the figure is a mute representation, the mannequin is sitting in front of an architectural diagram, actively observing and reproducing his environment.

De Chirico’s creation of a privileged role for artists culminated in *The Prodigal Son* (1922), whose preparatory drawing Morandi likely saw reproduced in *Valori Plastici* in 1919 (fig. 4).¹⁷ By presenting a male figure adjusting a mannequin, de Chirico highlights his own role in “discovering” or “composing” his metaphysical visions. Moreover, since the mannequin had been standing

16. See figure A, Giorgio de Chirico, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, 1909, oil on canvas, 45 × 60 cm. Private collection, at <http://mgaguire.blogspot.mx/p/images.html>.

17. See *Valori Plastici*, vol. 1, nos. 4-5, April-May 1919.



3. Giorgio de Chirico, *Le Vaticinateur (The Seer)*, 1914-1915, oil on canvas, 89.6 × 70.1 cm. James Thrall Soby Bequest, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, New York. © Giorgio de Chirico/SIAE/SOMAAP/México/2013.

in for the artist, this painting suggests that artistic identity could be constructed at will, as it is a function of what is made visible for the viewer. In other words, the metaphysical artist presents the enigma *and* his own artistic identity as artistic creations.

Morandi developed the artistic identity de Chirico had proposed in *The Seer* and *The Prodigal Son* in his still lifes featuring mannequins. Indeed, his first rendition of a mannequin remains among his most intricate, since he represents its bust in the act of painting (fig. 5). Though Poli and Arcangeli see Morandi's mannequin as the representation of the artist as dehumanized and bereft of any subjectivity, the force of the work is quite the opposite.¹⁸ *Still Life* (1918, Vit. 35) is a spare composition featuring a box, a bottle, a wooden stick, a frame, a mannequin/artist facing a frame, and a white bottle. While

18. Poli bases his interpretation on Arcangeli's monograph on Morandi, see Francesco Arcangeli, *Giorgio Morandi*, Turin, Einaudi, 1964; Francesco Poli, *La metafisica*, Bari/Roma, Laterza, 1989, p. 153.



4. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Prodigal Son*, 1922, oil on canvas, 87 × 59 cm. Museo del Novecento, Milan, Italy. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York. © Giorgio de Chirico/SIAE/SOMAAP/México/2013.

de Chirico’s large mannequins appear in architectural settings, Morandi’s inclusion of a bust highlighted the fact that this oblique self-portrait was also one of the objects within a still life. He cues the viewer regarding the mannequin’s role as an artist through its placement *in front* of the frame and the white bottle (the canvas within the canvas). This framing allows the mannequin (and Morandi) to guide the viewer’s gaze, establishing the relationship between the outside viewer and the framed bottle. Thus the painting’s spatial arrangement highlights the artist’s role in creation; as seen in de Chirico’s works, the mannequin in Morandi’s *Still Life* represents the intermediary between the viewer and artistic creation.

Despite Morandi’s adaptation of de Chirico’s style and his use of the mannequin, this *Still Life* proposed a peculiar identity for the artist. While de Chirico’s metaphysical artist was evoked in many works as a singer, poet, painter, philosopher and archaeologist, Morandi’s was a more focused individual. His precise composition and meticulous brushwork emphasize the manne-



5. Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*, 1918, Vit. 35, oil on canvas, 68.5 × 72 cm. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, Italy. Photo: © Alinari/Art Resource, New York. © Giorgio Morandi/SIAE/SOMAAP/México/2013.

quin's status as a painter first and foremost, excluding references to other professions. Though Morandi's smooth brushwork and sharp outlines approximate de Chirico's technique, he chose a darker palette consisting of brown, gray, and white hues. The painting's limited palette and the smooth surfaces keep the viewer's attention fixed on the relationship between the mannequin and the frame, namely, on the artist and his creation, as this is the subject of the painting. Interestingly, the space in Morandi's painting is much shallower than de Chirico's elongated Italianate *piazze*, referring instead to the interior of an artist's studio. Additionally, the mannequin's intense focus on the white bottle and the spare composition reveal that Morandi's artistic identity was that of a painter of still lifes working within a studio. Thus, *Still Life* distilled de Chirico's style and themes, focusing on the creation of a work within his preferred genre.

Morandi explores similar issues in still lifes that are indebted to Carrà, demonstrating his knowledge of the Metaphysical project beyond de Chirico's work. In Morandi's *Still Life* from 1918 (Vit. 36), objects from Carrà's *Drunk Gentleman*, specifically a bottle and a pipe, were recast into a representation of an artist at work (fig. 6). While in Carrà's work the artist is facing *away* from the canvas, namely, the pink square at the top right corner, in Morandi's, the mannequin/artist is facing away from the viewer. Moreover, the pipe against



6. Giorgio Morandi, *Metaphysical Still Life*, 1918, Vit. 36, oil on canvas, 54 × 38 cm. Fondazione Magnani Rocca, Corte di Mamiano, Italy. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York. © Giorgio Morandi/SIAE/SOMAAP/México/2013.

the wall suggests that he is in the act of painting a reality beyond that of the objects that surround him, as the bottle and the box it rests on are cast aside. Though the mannequin is faceless and has no body, its profession as a painter and unmediated relationship with its art is clearly presented.

Despite the fact that Morandi had carefully cultivated his identity as a metaphysical artist through the reproductions of his works published in *Valori Plastici* and by exhibiting alongside de Chirico and Carrà, he was soon to abandon this *modus operandi*. As early as 1919, he created a still life depicting the mannequin/artist as a disembodied head, a mere object within a composition.¹⁹ The painting's composition is architectural, recalling de Chirico's early metaphysical pieces set in desolate Italianate towns. Beyond that, the seemingly decapitated head is unable to take up the active role it had been granted, as it is neither painting nor mediating between the viewer and a work of art. While Morandi's earlier still lifes gave the mannequin active roles, this *Still Life* questions them; instead, it presents the mannequin as a misplaced object,

19. See figure B, Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*, 1919, Vit. 46, oil on canvas. Fondazione Roberto Longhi, Italy, at <http://mgaguire.blogspot.mx/p/images.html>.

lost within a crowded metaphysical *piazza* it is unable to represent. More importantly, the depiction of this mannequin head heralded Morandi's abandonment of the metaphysical style, as its passive pose refers to Morandi's eventual decision to move beyond the enigma.

The Reception of the Metaphysical School in Italy, 1917-1918

Morandi's abandonment of the metaphysical style must be seen in light of the widespread disdain towards Futurism and the Metaphysical School which prevailed in Italy between World War I and the rise of Fascism.²⁰ Until about 1915, Italy had been at the forefront of avant-gardism due to the rise of Futurism in 1909 and the openness of magazines such as *La Voce* (1908-1916) and *Lacerba* (1913-1915) to the latest European cultural trends.²¹ *Lacerba's* internationalism soon gave rise to a full-fledged support of Italy's entry into World War I, since the conflict seemed to promise the political and cultural renewal sought by its editors and many other Italian intellectuals. Eventually, the Italian scene became more concerned with creating art with domestic roots rather than with exploring advanced European art. Soffici became one of the leaders

20. De Chirico and Carrà's *metafisica* was first featured in journals representing the transition between *La Voce* and *Lacerba's* avant-gardism and *Valori Plastici* and *La Ronda's* (1919-1920) turn towards classicism. *La Brigata* (1916-1919) and *La Raccolta* (1918-1919) published several drawings and articles by Carrà, De Chirico, and his brother, Alberto Savinio (Andrea de Chirico), which acquainted younger artists such as Morandi with the newly arrived style. While these magazines' concomitant interest in divulging the European avant-garde and in the promotion of a new Italian culture initially provided the Metaphysical School with a receptive environment, negative reactions to these works soon followed. See Cristina Misiti, "La rivista bolognese 'La Brigata' e gli esordi metafisici di Carrà," *Ricerche di storia dell'arte*, vol. 6, no. 13-15, 1981, pp. 83-90; and Niva Lorenzini, "Riviste bolognesi tra sperimentazione e ritorno all'ordine: 'La Brigata' (1916-1919) e 'La Raccolta' (1918-1919)," *Padania. Storia, Cultura, Istituzioni*, vol. 7, no. 13, 1993, pp. 228-237. See also Giovanni Lista, *De Chirico et l'avant-garde*, Lausanne, L'Âge d'homme, 1983.

21. See Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence*; Emilio Gentile, "The Myth of National Regeneration in Italy from Modernist Avant-Garde to Fascism," in Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (eds.), *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 25-45; and Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting*. *La Voce* and *Lacerba* featured several important articles by Soffici, which introduced Cézanne, Henri Rousseau and Cubism to an Italian audience. See Soffici, "Cézanne," *Vita d'Arte*, vol. 1, no. 6, June 1908; "Henri Rousseau," *La Voce*, vol. 2, no. 40, September 1910; and "Picasso e Braque," *La Voce*, vol. 3, no. 34, August 1911.

of this movement in 1920, as his vocal disavowal of his earlier avant-gardism, which he dismissed, and a youthful escapade to Paris, became the clarion call for an entire generation of artists and critics.

As early as 1917 and certainly by 1920, the term *metafisico* was used pejoratively in Italy, and de Chirico and his early production received the brunt of these insults. In particular, he was accused of being overly "cerebral" and "intellectual" due to his enigmatic visions. The Metaphysical School's foreign roots made it particularly vulnerable to post-war nationalism, since critics were clamoring for modern painting that could be easily read as Italian.²² De Chirico's cosmopolitan background, along with his allusions to German philosophy and culture, precluded any claims to Italian roots. With time, Futurism and the Metaphysical School were lumped under the rubric of avant-gardism, and the association with the former movement's violent antics and confrontational nature reflected negatively on de Chirico, and to a lesser extent, on Carrà's works, several of which were dismissed as "decadent."²³

Unfortunately for the Metaphysical School, the very exhibitions which sought to introduce it to Roman audiences provoked an adverse critical reaction.²⁴ Baldacci notes that de Chirico and Carrà's works shown at the *Mostra d'Arte Indipendente* were met with widespread critical incomprehension and

22. For an account of de Chirico's reception in Italy, see Paolo Baldacci, *De Chirico: The Metaphysical Period, 1888-1919*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1997, pp. 382-414; see also Baldacci, *Giorgio De Chirico Betraying the Muse: De Chirico and the Surrealists: April 21 to May 28, 1994*, New York, Paolo Baldacci Gallery, 1994. The fact that Breton and Barr favored de Chirico's early works has relegated his later production to a relative obscurity as well.

23. Lista, *De Chirico et l'Avant-garde*, p. 30.

24. The first of these exhibitions, the "Mostra d'Arte Indipendente," was held in Rome in 1918 at the Galleria dell'Epoca. De Chirico and Carrà showed alongside artists working in other styles, such as Soffici, the former futurist Enrico Prampolini, and the futurist Ferruccio Ferrazzi. De Chirico showed the following works: *The Troubadour*, 1917; *Hector and Andromache*, 1917; *Evangelical Still Life*, 1916; *The Great Metaphysician*, 1917; *Cassandra* (not identified), and *The Apparition of the Ghost*, 1917. The two other artists that were included in the exhibition, Mancuso and Riccardi, were marginal. Carrà showed *L'ovale dell'apparizione*, *Natura morta*, *Il cavaliere occidentale*, *Realtà metafisica*, *Penelope*, *Solitudine*, *Musa metafisica*, and *Natura morta*. The exhibition's curator, Mario Recchi, reviewed it in *La Raccolta*, stating that de Chirico and Carrà "brought the true face of modernity to the surface, replacing the outworn forms of Futurism, and that rather than returning to the traditional or the classical, it [*pittura metafisica*] served as a bridge of transition, the 'next step' in the transition from Cubism and Futurism but at the same time equally distant from the senility of the Academy." Perhaps unwittingly, Recchi's conflicting readings of the *pittura metafisica* as modern and

animosity.²⁵ Giovanni Papini, a prominent philosopher and writer whose magazine *Lacerba* had done much to advance French avant-garde art as well as Futurism in Italy, praised their Italian sources, for instance.²⁶ Cipriano Efesio Oppo, who eventually led the artistic syndicates and the Quadriennale exhibition created by Fascism, likewise claimed that he liked Carrà better than de Chirico, due to his “more Italian taste, and for his more fluent lyricism.”²⁷ In contrast, he described de Chirico as a “tragic metaphysical puppeteer, [...] a dark, dreadful colorist.”²⁸ The critic Goffredo Bellonci was harsher, likening de Chirico to a set designer and claiming that both he and Carrà lacked any humanity.²⁹ Thus, at the same time Morandi was aligning himself with the Metaphysical School via his representation of mannequins, the Roman critical establishment questioned the school’s credibility as an Italian style despite its use of classical and Renaissance references. Interestingly enough, the school’s metaphysical scenes were dismissed as mere theater and attacked as artificial sceneries, thus associating them with set design rather than the fine arts.

The final blow to the Metaphysical School was delivered by Roberto Longhi’s review of de Chirico’s one-man show in 1918, also held in Rome, which featured a great portion of his metaphysical production.³⁰ The influential critic and art historian attacked the artist, erroneously claiming that his production was an offshoot of Cubism and dismissing it as illustration, not painting. Thus, Longhi not only mocked de Chirico’s work but also questioned his status as a fine artist. This negative critical reception confirms that after World War I, Italy was gradually closing itself off to advanced art, as the Metaphysical School was attacked due to its perceived foreign provenance, its uncanny subjects, and its painters’ abilities and character. Moreover, it mirrored Longhi’s own rejection of Futurism, which he had done much to promote before World War I. The critical attacks against the Metaphysical School soon extended towards the

traditional backfired. See Mario Recchi, “Mostra d’Arte indipendente a Roma,” *La Raccolta*, vol. 1, no. 5, July 1918. Quoted in Abramovicz, *Giorgio Morandi*, p. 67.

25. Baldacci, *De Chirico: the Metaphysical Period*, p. 390.

26. *Idem*.

27. Cipriano Efesio Oppo, “La Mostra d’Arte Indipendente,” *L’Idea Nazionale*, May 28, 1918.

28. *Idem*.

29. Goffredo Bellonci, “Pittura in ordine,” *Giornale d’Italia*, July 3, 1918.

30. Roberto Longhi, “Piero di Franceschi e lo Sviluppo della Pittura Veneziana,” *L’Arte*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1914.

magazine *Valori Plastici*, since besides hosting Carrà and de Chirico's paintings and articles, the magazine analyzed the work of foreign artists such as Alexander Archipenko, Pablo Picasso, and Fernand Léger.³¹ The fact that these attacks against the school were so virulent likely led Morandi to reconsider his own association with the Metaphysical School and *Valori Plastici*.

Ironically, the metaphysical artists themselves actively contributed to this climate of artistic nationalism. De Chirico, his brother Savinio, and Carrà wrote a series of articles in *Valori Plastici* linking their school to the Italian heritage, and more importantly, to this country's cultural and political resurgence.³² Articles such as "Il ritorno al mestiere," and de Chirico's 1920 *Self-Portrait (and what shall I love if not the metaphysical?)*,³³ sought to minimize the movement's foreign roots, Carrà's past as a futurist and the fact that neither de Chirico nor Savinio were born in Italy. In "Il ritorno al mestiere," de Chirico recommended studying the Old Masters in order to rediscover their pictorial techniques, offering them as an antidote to the avant-garde's visual and technical hubris. Tellingly, this article ended with the Latin phrase "pictor classicus sum," or "I am a classical painter."³⁴ The inclusion of Italianate architecture in the background of *Self-Portrait* (1920) connected it to his earlier production, and as such, reminded the viewer of his ongoing use of Italian sources. Whereas his previous self-portrait (1911) emphasized his interest in the enigma and his own status as a philosopher-painter akin to Nietzsche, the new-

31. The critical attack against the Metaphysical School soon extended towards the magazine *Valori Plastici*. This was likely because other than hosting Carrà and de Chirico's paintings and articles, the magazine promoted the work of foreign artists such as Alexander Archipenko, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Fernand Léger, Jacques Lipschitz and Jean Metzinger. In their journal *Il Centone* (1919), a futurist magazine, Corrado Pavolini and Primo Conti accused *Valori Plastici* of being German. See Lista, *De Chirico*. See also Corrado Pavolini, "Valori Plastici," *Il Centone*, vol. 1, no. 2, March 1919; and Primo Conti, "Carlo Carrà," *Il Centone*, vol. 1, no. 2, March 1919.

32. The most important articles in which the metaphysical painters sought to recast themselves according to nationalist priorities are the following: Alberto Savinio, "Anadioménon. Principi di valutazione dell'arte contemporanea," *Valori Plastici*, vol. 1, nos. 4-5, April-May 1919; Carlo Carrà, "Italianismo artistico," *Valori Plastici*, vol. 1, nos. 4-5, April-May 1919; and de Chirico, "Sull'arte Metafisica," *Valori Plastici*, vol. 1, nos. 4-5, April-May 1919.

33. De Chirico, "Il ritorno al mestiere," *Valori Plastici*, vol. 1, nos. 11-12, November-December, 1919, pp. 15-19. See figure C, Giorgio de Chirico, *Self-Portrait (and what shall I love if not the metaphysical?)*, 1920, oil on wood, 60 × 50.5 cm. Pinakothek der Moderne, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, at <http://mgaguire.blogspot.mx/p/images.html>.

34. *Idem*.

er self-portrait positions the *metafisica* within an Italian setting. In this portrait, de Chirico is wearing a plain shirt that looks like a painter's smock—a clear allusion to his painterly activity and to the Old Master tradition, not to his intellect. The figure's pose is also different from the earlier self-portrait; in the painting from 1911, de Chirico depicts himself engrossed in thought and removed from the viewer, while the later representation gazes directly at the viewer and features the artist's hand, an index of his craft, in a prominent position. Thus, his interest in the enigma, or vision that only a metaphysical artist could see, was replaced by works seeking to show that his metaphysical paintings were rooted in Italian values and emphasized his training as a painter. Thus, de Chirico reinforced the nationalist attitudes which had led to the previous condemnation of his work, as he attempted to dispel any questions as to the domestic provenance of the metaphysical aesthetic while stressing his commitment to it.

In spite of all his efforts, de Chirico's campaign to consolidate the Metaphysical School as a leading movement in Italy during the early 1920s was unsuccessful, and he moved back to Paris in 1925. The rise of Fascism had led to the creation of groups such as the classically oriented *Novecento* and the regionalist *Strapaese*, which espoused principles such as order, hierarchy, and plastic values and which featured clearly legible Italian sources. Though the artist continued to promote his own work in Italy, he no longer strove to promote the school. De Chirico's works were exhibited in several editions of the Biennale and in the Quadriennale, a national exhibition created after the rise of Fascism. Beyond that, despite completing a large mural for the regime in 1933, his art became less visible than that of painters closer to the regime, such as Mario Sironi. Given that de Chirico had revised his own identity as an intellectual who had access to enigmas by representing himself as both metaphysical *and* Italian, it is not surprising that Morandi began turning to regionalism in 1920, a style better suited to satisfying the demands for Italian values.

Moving away from the Metaphysical School

Critics who were disdainful of the Metaphysical School's foreign roots and strange subjects attempted to minimize Morandi's status as a *metafisico* even as the artist was developing this aesthetic. The Bolognese magazine *La Raccolta* (1918) published an article by Raffaello Franchi which described Morandi's

metaphysical works as being "dominated by the manual skill and the sensibility of a painter, not of a *metafisico*."³⁵ This passage drew an important distinction between a painter and a *metafisico*, as Longhi had in his review of de Chirico's one-man show, and dismissed the Metaphysical School as foreign. Franchi rejected the school's "metaphysical trampolines" and Nordic sources, since he saw them as anathema to the natural lyricism allegedly found in Italian art. His emphasis in noting that Morandi was not a metaphysical painter responded to the growing fears regarding the decadence of Italian culture, and he proposed Morandi as a cure for Italian art, claiming that his works recalled the "piacere della rinascita."³⁶ Interestingly, Franchi's allusion to a cultural "rinascita" foreshadowed the rhetorical use of this term during Fascism within official and unofficial cultural spheres and the ability of critics to co-opt Morandi's works to advance their own agendas.

While critics sought to interpret Morandi in light of the Italian tradition, the artist began to look at domestic sources as well. The first phase of Morandi's reconsideration of his early self-representation as a metaphysical painter developed through a study of Piero della Francesca, whose work he most closely approximated in a *Still Life* (Vit. 51).³⁷ Though de Chirico returned to France as a way to deal with his unfortunate reception in Italy, the younger, less established Morandi accommodated the calls for a more classic, Italian art by emulating Piero. Piero had been receiving favorable critical attention, which culminated in Longhi's seminal book, a revision of his first essay on the painter.³⁸ Morandi was likely influenced by Longhi's essays in *La Voce* (which the artist read) and the painter's friend Raimondi took copious notes on Longhi's

35. The original text reads: "si ritroveranno, nelle ultime sue cose, riproduzione d'oggetti di legno o di ferro, antiche armature, squadre da disegno ecc., studi della sordità aerea d'una stanza dalla luce uguale, e astratte, quasi algebriche costruzioni tutte dominate dalla manualità e dalla sensibilità d'un pittore, non da quella d'un metafisico," Raffaello Franchi, "Giorgio Morandi," *La Raccolta*, vol. 1, nos. 9-10, November 15-December 15, 1918.

36. *Idem*.

37. Maria Mimita Lamberti, "Le Campagne di Piero: Longhi, Soffici, Morandi," in *Piero della Francesca e il Novecento: prospettiva, spazio, luce, geometria, pittura murale, tonalismo, 1920-1938*, Museo Civico, Sansepolcro, 1991. See figures D and E, Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*, Vit. 51, 1920, oil on canvas, 60.5 × 66.5 cm. Private collection, Milan; Piero della Francesca, *Baptism of Christ*, 1450s, egg tempera on poplar, 167 × 116 cm. National Gallery, London, at <http://imgaguirre.blogspot.mx/p/images.html>.

38. Longhi, "Piero dei Francheschi e lo Sviluppo della Pittura veneziana", in *Piero della Francesca*.

writings and lectures.³⁹ By turning to Piero, Morandi became one of many artists to look at the Renaissance master with fresh eyes, as his art was a safe source of renewal for artists caught between the “return to order” and the need for a new Italian aesthetic.⁴⁰

The *Still Life* from 1920 (Vit. 51) is at once Morandi’s most thorough study of Piero’s art and a bridge between the metaphysical style and the regionalist style he would later adopt. This work uses Piero’s warm, pastel-like palette and replicates his treatment of the pictorial matter, as it is similar to the opaque surfaces typical of his frescoes and paintings. The volumetric rendition in Morandi’s *Still Life* recalls that of Piero’s *Baptism of Christ*, especially with respect to the latter’s treatment of the tree and the shading and coloring of Christ’s body.⁴¹ It also resembles Piero’s rendering of the female figures’ necks in *The Adoration of the True Cross* from *The Story of the True Cross*, the artist’s famous fresco cycle in Arezzo. Morandi’s decision to mimic Piero’s shading and his frescoes’ warm, matte finish superseded the smoother surfaces and sharp outlines present in his earlier works. Here, the mannequin has been replaced by the clay jug on the right, while its round surface and upright position recalls that of the mannequin’s head. The white bottle is no longer the subject of the mannequin’s composition; its purpose is to depict space due to its placement as a receding diagonal, mimicking the broken lances in the foreground of Paolo Uccello’s *Battle of San Romano*. Despite using warmer colors and eliminating the mannequin, Morandi’s composition retains some of the tension characteristic of his previous still lifes, as the objects are detached from one another and the table top’s angle seems to push them forward.

Such an important departure from the previous still lifes is rooted in its similarity with Piero’s works, reflecting Morandi’s own development of his craft as well. In fact, the artist expressed an interest in finding colors that could mimic Renaissance frescoes. In a letter to Carrà from 1919, he informed the older artist that he had found a pink pigment he described as “very beautiful,

39. Lamberti, “Le Campagne di Piero: Longhi, Soffici, Morandi.”

40. Morandi was also looking at other Renaissance artists, most notably Paolo Uccello, but his reliance on Piero was a result of the contemporary reevaluation of the artist by Longhi. In general, Morandi was most influenced by the primitives and artists interested in space and volume such as Uccello and Piero. He was not so indebted to later currents such as the High Renaissance and Mannerism.

41. See figures D and E, *vid supra* n. 37.

like the one seen in ancient frescoes.⁴² Instead of evoking de Chirico's metaphysical enigmas, Morandi began, if gradually, to pose as a craftsman whose presence is both obscured and revealed by his ability to replicate the textures and colors of Renaissance frescoes as they were perceived in post-war Italy.⁴³ In other words, Morandi moved away from the mannequin head as a symbol of artistic activity, focusing instead on crafting the canvas' surface based on his first-hand knowledge of Piero and his own interest in Renaissance pigments. De Chirico, who hailed Morandi as a metaphysical painter as late as 1922, also referred to him as an artisan who mixed his own colors.⁴⁴ In any event, although Morandi's study of Piero eventually led to leaving the Metaphysical School, it nevertheless responded to de Chirico's own call for a more Italian art. However, while de Chirico continued to paint self-portraits, Morandi erased his own presence from the canvas.

Morandi's formal exploration of Piero's work was tied to a widespread interest in the Italian *Quattrocento's* emphasis on plastic values, as expressed, for example, in Carrà and Soffici's letters dating from 1913 and 1914, and in Carrà's articles about Giotto and Uccello from 1916.⁴⁵ This return to Italian plasticity contained a conservative, nationalist overtone, as it responded to Soffici's condemnation of Northern European art, which he claimed was unable to depict space adequately.⁴⁶ While Morandi's study of Piero was akin to de Chirico's own shift towards an Italian *metafisica*, it eventually led him to Soffici's search for native, Tuscan roots and radical nationalism. Morandi could have followed de Chirico's lead in order to create a more "Italian" *pittura metafisica* and artist, but he chose to follow Soffici's route instead by returning to Cézanne. Tellingly, the 1920 *Still Life* includes Cézanne's iconic white fruit

42. Cited in Lamberti, "Le campagne di Piero," p. 31. The original text reads: "molto bello come si vede negli affreschi antichi," Morandi, *Lettere*, p. 22.

43. A complete restoration of Piero's frescos in Arezzo was finished in 2000, for example. Though the spatial and volumetric relationships remain, it is possible that the colors Morandi was seeking to imitate are not the same as those that were restored and preserved during this procedure.

44. De Chirico, "Giorgio Morandi", in *La fiorentina primavera: prima esposizione nazionale dell'opera e del lavoro d'arte nel Palazzo del Parco di San Gallo a Firenze*, Florence, Società delle Belle Arti, 1922.

45. Carlo Carrà, "Paolo Uccello, costruttore," *La Voce*, vol. 8, no. 9, September 1916; "Parlata sul Giotto," *La Voce*, vol. 8, no. 3, March 1916.

46. Soffici, "Pittori e scultori della 'Primaverile,'" *Il Resto del Carlino*, Bologna, April 27, 1922.

compote, a clear sign that this return to Piero would eventually lead to the master from Aix.

Morandi first became acquainted with Cézanne in 1909 through Pica's and Soffici's writings. By 1920, the significance of Cézanne in Italy had solidified, as he was one of the few French sources which, unlike Cubism, could not easily be disqualified as avant-gardist. Moreover, Morandi's return to Cézanne was sanctioned by the Italian art establishment, since the Venice Biennale featured twenty-eight works by the French artist in 1920. Though Soffici had complained in 1910 regarding the Biennale's retrograde artistic choices, Morandi's return to Cézanne must be seen in light of what appears to be a tentative national interest in the French master in 1920. Whereas conservative critics criticized Cézanne's deformation when reviewing the Biennale, Morandi's Cézannism from this period did not articulate any sort of elongation or awkwardness, working instead in terms of spatial relationships and shared motifs and, in a sense, creating a more "Italian" version of this artist.⁴⁷

Morandi's return to Cézanne was also a revisitation of his own trajectory, as his earliest landscapes bear witness to his study of the French artist. His renewed interest in this figure resurfaced demonstrably as early as 1919 in a letter to Giuseppe Raimondi.⁴⁸ By 1920, Morandi's still lifes reviewed his earlier Cézannism, allowing him to break away from the Metaphysical School even more decisively. *Still Life* (1920, Vit. 53) reworks Cézanne's *Still Life with a Dessert* (1873-1877), for example.⁴⁹ In particular, Morandi's placement of the carafe, glass, and knife is wholly derived, from Cézanne's composition, while the objects themselves are simplified and depicted in a warmer, more muted palette. In this painting, Morandi continued to use Piero's color scheme and to imitate the finish of frescos though he included a bright blue vessel as a lingering reminder of Cézanne's use of color.⁵⁰ More importantly, he also abandoned all references to the idea of the metaphysical artist and his repre-

47. Jennifer Hirsh, "For the Love and Fear of Painting: Cézanne, Morandi and Italian modernism," in Joseph Rishel (ed.), *Cézanne and Beyond*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009, p. 293.

48. Morandi, *Lettere*, p. 22.

49. See figures F and G, Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*, 1920, Vit. 53, oil on canvas, 49.5 × 52 cm. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Dessert*, 1873-1877, oil on canvas, 59 × 72.9 cm. The Mr. and Mrs. Caroll S. Tyson, Jr. Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, at <http://mgaguirre.blogspot.mx/p/images.html>.

50. Hirsh, "For the Love, and Fear, of Painting."

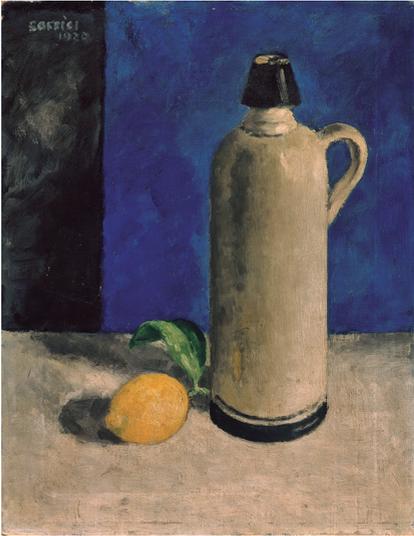


7. Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*, 1920, Vit. 57, oil on canvas, 30.5 × 44.5 cm. Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna, Italy. © DeA Picture Library/Art Resource, New York. © Giorgio Morandi/SIAE/SOMAAP/México/2013.

sensation *within* the picture plane. Instead, this work proposes other values, as it privileges the imitation, both compositional and technical, of works by painters whose careers exemplified what many critics demanded from Italian art, namely, order, sobriety, and plasticity. Paradoxically, the still life's patent reliance on other artists, including Cézanne, allowed Morandi to assert his independence from de Chirico and the Metaphysical School.

Morandi as a Regionalist Painter

While there is no clear explanation within Morandi's letters to this effect, it seems evident that to avoid being negatively associated with the Metaphysical School, he positioned himself as a painter who had overcome such a style, relegating it to an experimental phase. Thus, after having initially modeled himself after Piero and Cézanne to escape from de Chirico, Morandi soon looked to Soffici and his regionalist canvases to solidify his own “return to order”. Morandi's *Still Life* from 1920 (Vit. 57) resembles Soffici's pieces from 1919 and 1920, in which the latter left behind his earlier cubo-futurist style, such as *White Bottle and Lemon* (figs. 7 and 8). In several works created after 1920, Morandi



8. Ardengo Soffici, *White Bottle with Lemon*, 1920, oil on canvas, 35.5 × 46 cm. Vallecchi Collection, Florence, Italy. Photo: Scala/ Art Resource, New York. “Per gentile concessione degli eredi Soffici”.

replaced de Chirico with their contemporary Soffici, emulating the latter both stylistically and in terms of his self-presentation as an Italian artist. Specifically, the new, regionalist Morandi responded to Soffici’s urgent call towards tradition, rusticity and sincerity in 1920. Returning to Piero and Cézanne was enough to banish his metaphysical style, but as will be seen below, Morandi embraced a living artist in order to shape his new persona even further.

In 1920, Soffici published a series of articles in his magazine *Rete Mediterranea* (1920) dismissing his avant-garde experiments as a momentary interruption of his commitment to the creation of a modern Italian style inspired by the Tuscan landscape and its people.⁵¹ The article “Dichiarazione preliminare” explains in clear terms his desire to leave this style behind, denouncing it as “intellectual and aesthetic anarchy.”⁵² By describing his avant-gardism as youthful folly brought upon by an excess of intellectualism, and by advocating a return to the Italian tradition, Soffici sought to reposition himself as the leading modern Italian artist. Although he did not mention de Chirico or the Metaphysical School in this article, it would be clear to fellow critics

51. Giulia Ballerini, *Ardengo Soffici. La Grande Mostra del 1920 (Firenze, Palazzo Horne, 27 maggio-15 giugno)*, *Quaderni Sofficiani*, 13, Prato, Pentaleina, 2007.

52. Soffici, “La Metafisica.”

and artists that Soffici was in fact proposing an alternative to the latter's cerebral art and persona. Soffici had never claimed to represent enigmas, but his study of advanced French painting had to be atoned for, and it was a lesson younger artists such as Morandi monitored attentively.

A retrospective exhibition of Soffici's works complemented *Rete Mediterranea's* attempt to characterize the artist as a changed man. This exhibit, held in Florence in 1920, featured 117 works executed between 1903 and 1920 and was held at the "Sala di esposizioni fiorentine," in the Palazzo Corsi (now Palazzo Horne). Originally built in the thirteenth century, the Palazzo Corsi was remodeled between 1492 and 1502, and this grand architectural venue bestowed a sense of permanence to Soffici's modern depictions of Tuscan landscapes.⁵³ Although the exhibition included forty-five cubo-futurist works by Soffici, these were hung in a separate room, segregating them from his regionalist production. Tellingly, these works were set aside in order to atone for Soffici's past sins and as warnings for younger artists still attracted to Parisian art and Bohemianism.

Soffici's exhibition was reviewed positively by Ugo Ojetti, one of the leading conservative critics the artist had scorned in the past. Ojetti dismissed Soffici's cubo-futurism as a mere demonstration of theses, highlighting Soffici's Tuscan roots instead: "Logical and Tuscan (Soffici was born in a peasant family, in the Florentine countryside, in Rignano sull'Arno), he detests confusion, fog..."⁵⁴ This review was particularly important because it appeared in the prominent Milanese newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*, giving Soffici's exhibit a visibility beyond the Florentine cultural scene. Matteo Marangoni, an *ispettore* at the Uffizi writing for *Valori Plastici*, described Soffici's avant-gardism as a parenthesis unrelated to "[his] more genuine and essential artistic qualities."⁵⁵ Ojetti's and Marangoni's positive responses demonstrate that by 1920, Soffici had succeeded in transforming himself into a painter who was read in a regionalist key, and more importantly, inaugurated a critical

53. Ballerini, *Ardengo Soffici*, p. 128.

54. The original text reads: "Logico e toscano (il Soffici è nato di famiglia paesana, nel contado di Firenze, a Rignano sull'Arno) detesta la confusione, la nebbia e i sospiri in attesa del miracolo," Ugo Ojetti, "Cronaca d'Arte. Soffici pittore," *Il Corriere della Sera*, Milan, October 16, 1920.

55. The original text reads: "uno stato d'animo transitorio che non corrispondeva alle più genuine ed essenziali qualità artistiche," Matteo Marangoni, "Mostra Ardengo Soffici," *Valori Plastici*, vol. 2, nos. 5-6, May-June 1920.

discourse based on these values. Additionally, the critics focused on values that opposed those of metaphysical painting and its enigmas, meaning again Soffici's "genuine" qualities and "peasant origins." Thus, Morandi was reconsidering his links to the Metaphysical School just as Soffici's regionalism was emerging as a viable alternative.

Morandi had already followed in Soffici's footsteps by abandoning the metaphysical style in 1920, and by 1928 had developed a thoroughly regionalist style in his still lifes and landscapes (Vit. 128) (fig. 9). These show uncomplicated Bolognese interiors and panoramas, whose warm colors and visible brushstrokes departed from his metaphysical works' cool, moody palette and smooth surfaces. The still life veers from Morandi's complex meditations on the genre; it excluded the mannequin's head, and instead, presented objects within an environment that evokes the artist's provincial household. Indeed, the artist not only returned to a more traditional conception of the genre, but also included common objects that he or his family members might have used. While the *Still Life* from 1918 featuring a white bottle dissected the relationship between the mannequin/artist and the rest of the composition, the more rustic piece refuses to do so by portraying objects in a loosely arranged group (figs. 5 and 9). The pitcher, bottles, clay vessels and ink bottle are old objects which look as if they have been used and put casually aside. Unlike the pristine white bottle in the earlier piece, they are not meant to be studied or measured by a mannequin. Instead of depicting smooth objects and using a virtually monochromatic palette, this still life's visible brushstrokes and warm colors stand apart from any parallel reality Morandi portrayed from 1917 to 1920 and reference Bolognese middle class life.

Morandi's return to landscape painting in 1925 finalized his abandonment of the Metaphysical School since it distanced him even further from the artificial world of the artist's studio. Morandi's *Landscape* ventures into the Emilian countryside and its rich, warm tones.⁵⁶ The building in the background is a *casa colonica*, a farmhouse of the type depicted by Soffici and other regionalist artists during the 1920s, a common symbol of Italian country life. Although the 1928 *Still Life* had left behind Morandi's tense metaphysical compositions in favor of a casually ordered arrangement, this landscape seemingly rejects any sort of compositional order in favor of painting based on obser-

56. See figure H, Giorgio Morandi, *Landscape*, 1927, Vit. 125, oil on canvas. Private collection, Milan, at <http://mgaguirre.blogspot.mx/p/images.html>.



9. Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*, 1929, Vit. 128, oil on canvas, 34.5 × 46.5 cm. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, Italy. Photo: Mondadori Portfolio/Electa/Art Resource, New York. © Giorgio Morandi/SIAE/SOMAAP/México/2013.

vation from life. Abandoning his earlier works and their enigmas, this landscape, whether faithful or not, portrays the Emilian countryside as a peaceful site, which *Strapaese's* journals presented as the true Italy.

Morandi's etchings and paintings dating from the mid 1920s to the mid 1930s articulate a regionalist aesthetic that greatly appealed to Mino Maccari and Leo Longanesi. This pair of fascist artists led the cultural movement of *Strapaese*, while their magazines published glowing reviews of Morandi's work as well as many of his etchings. Mino Maccari founded the magazine *Il Selvaggio* in 1924 during the crisis following the murder of the socialist member of Parliament Giacomo Matteotti. In 1924 and 1925, the magazine was mostly political and dealt very little with art and culture, as the *selvaggi* pronounced themselves against the bureaucratization and normalization of the Fascist Revolution, proposing rural Tuscany and the violence of fascist *squadristo* as the true roots of an ever-changing Fascism. Based on the precedent

set by Soffici's *toscanità*, Maccari's magazine relied on tropes such as the purity of the rural people, landscape, and customs in order to critique the road Fascism had taken after 1922; he later used these same tropes to describe an aesthetic suitable for Fascism. Given *Strapaese's* focus, Morandi's decision to join this movement should come as no surprise.

Maccari's first article on Morandi, published in 1928, stresses the connection between the painter, his art and rural values.⁵⁷ Maccari acknowledges Morandi's avant-garde and by extension, metaphysical past, but highlights the painter's eventual distance from it. Like Franchi, Maccari considers Morandi in relation to the Italian tradition and its inevitable reemergence. According to him, Morandi's art "is *italianissima*, it has deep roots in our most genuine tradition and is nourished by the same vital sap that gave us the world and can only return it to us."⁵⁸ This reading not only distances Morandi from de Chirico, but also inserts him within *Strapaese's* attempt to aid Fascism's cultural project.

Maccari's particular way of characterizing Morandi within *Strapaese* entailed describing his art as the "poetry of simple things."⁵⁹ Accordingly, Morandi's still lifes and landscapes made their subject's beauty readily available to the viewer, since, otherwise, their simplicity could lead to their being overlooked. His paintings were "still lifes, towns, fields, solitary angles of non-'picturesque' nature, neither dreadful nor dazzling, but common, simple, without excessive lines, colors and contrast."⁶⁰ This description proposes the artist as a privileged viewer who pointed out simple things to other people, revealing that *Strapaese's* love of the countryside was interlaced with a fear of a general indifference towards the landscape, as migration from rural to urban locations grew during Fascism. As such, Morandi guarded the landscape's beauty and by extension, rural life as a whole, since Maccari described him as "a poet [...], the custodian of that poetry that many say is dead because they cannot see, indif-

57. Braun, "Speaking Volumes," pp. 89-116.

58. The original text reads: "Perchè l'arte di Morandi è arte italianissima, che ha radici di profonde nella tradizione nostrana più pretta ed è nutrita di quelle stesse linfe vitali, che ci dettere nel mondo e che solo potranno ridarcelo," Mino Maccari, *Giorgio Morandi*, "Il Resto di Carlino," Bologna, June 8, 1928 [The emphasis is mine].

59. Braun, "Speaking Volumes," p. 96.

60. The original text reads: "Sono nature morte, paesi, campi, angoli solitari della natura non 'pittoresca', nè orrida, nè smagliante, ma commune, semplice, senza eccessi di linee, di colori e di contrasti," Maccari, *Giorgio Morandi*.

ferent or blinded by too many artificial lights."⁶¹ In Maccari's reading, the artist also presented a tonic against "excessive lines, colors and contrast," features of avant-garde art that threatened the Italian tradition's balance and plasticity.

Maccari's unequivocal praise of Morandi as a poet of simple things and a guardian of the countryside demonstrates that critics still needed to distance him from his Metaphysical past as late as 1928. In these articles, his art and persona are seen as anathema to the school's alleged foreign nature and enigmatic subject matter. Indeed, Morandi was needed by *Strapaese's* leaders as much as he needed their positive reviews and space at their group shows. In other words, Morandi became a regionalist artist whose art overcame his earlier decadent, avant-garde period, thus becoming a "poster child" for *Strapaese*. Moreover, his regionalism opened many doors for him, as his participation in *Strapaese* led to his works' appearance in *Il Selvaggio*, in a number of group exhibitions and even to a full-time position at the Accademia di Bologna.

Despite the fact that Morandi clearly benefited from his association with *Strapaese*, a fascist group, a formalist interpretation of the artist is extremely hard to dislodge. And yet, key facts about the artist prove that he was closer to Fascism than many are willing to admit. In an article that appeared in the magazine *L'Assalto* in 1928, Morandi wrote the following statement in support of Fascism: "I had lots of faith in Fascism since it began, a faith that never waned, not even during the grayest and most tempestuous days."⁶² *L'Assalto* was the official publication of the Bolognese section of the Gioventù Universitaria Fascista and its title refers to the violence against leftist groups after World War I perpetrated by disgruntled war veterans and members of the middle class, which led to Fascism. This article proves that *at least once*, Morandi adhered to Fascism publicly and unequivocally, which facilitated his success as an artist during this period. Such position was only credible because Morandi and his reviewers were able to purge his art and trajectory from any association with the Metaphysical School.

Morandi's adherence to Fascism allowed the artist to advance his career even further. For example, he was granted the chair in etching at the

61. The original text reads: "Ecco perchè Giorgio Morandi è un poeta, ecco in qual modo egli è custode di quella poesia, che molti dicono morta perchè non la vedono, indifferenti o accecati da troppe luci artificiali," Maccari, *idem*.

62. Giorgio Morandi, "Autobiografia," *L'Assalto*, Bologna, December 31, 1928. The original text reads: "Ebbi molta fede nel Fascismo fin dai primi accenni, fede che non mi venne mai meno, neppure nei giorni più grigi e tempestosi."

Accademia in 1930 “per chiara fama” thanks to the intervention of several members of *Strapaese*—Oppo and Longanesi—who contacted, or are assumed to have contacted, Giuliano Balbino, Minister of Education to persuade him to give this position to the artist. This was suggested by Morandi in a letter to Soffici from 1929.⁶³ As such, the letter demonstrates that Morandi enjoyed the support of committed fascists in order to appeal to important officials, which undoubtedly contributed to his being awarded the teaching position.

Throughout the 20s and 30s, Morandi published drawings and prints in *L'Italiano*, *Il Selvaggio* and *Il Frontespizio*, magazines with a clear fascist bias. The editors of the former two magazines, Maccari and Longanesi, participated in the Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, one of the most important propagandistic events organized by the regime. Moreover, in 1939 Morandi was awarded a one-man show at the Quadriennale, a key official exhibition held in Italy under Fascism. Given Mussolini's cultural policies during the late 1930s, which sought to create a nationalist visual language, only an artist that presented acceptable themes would have been invited. Given the way his career developed, a formalist interpretation of Morandi, at least during the fascist period, can only be sustained by refusing to acknowledge important facts about the artist and his context. It is only by assuming an aesthetic congruent to Fascism's view of the countryside, which was promoted in fascist magazines, that Morandi's career was able to flourish and prosper under Mussolini's regime. Though his still lifes and landscapes look like mere formal exercises when taken out of context, they participated in the creation of a fascist visual language that elevated the purity of Italian provincial life and values at the expense of cosmopolitanism and formal exploration. Thus, this new Morandi was meant to replace and supersede his previous metaphysical persona.

Conclusion

The absence of mannequins in Morandi's post-metaphysical works clues us as to the shift in his style and attitudes towards self-representation. Indeed, the mannequin bust was banished from the picture plane at roughly the same time in which Morandi began looking beyond de Chirico and his school. This occurred in 1920, as *Still Life* (Vit. 51) presents his borrowing from both Pie-

63. Morandi to Ardengo Soffici, Bologna, October 3, 1929, in Morandi, *Lettere*, 34.

ro and Cézanne, while *Still Life* (Vit. 53) replicates and simplifies a painting by Cézanne (fig. 7).⁶⁴ The turn towards Piero and Cézanne must be seen in the light of the rising tide of conservatism in Italy after World War I, which rewarded artists who resisted foreign and avant-garde influences, in this case, the Metaphysical School. Though seemingly apolitical and isolated, Morandi walked in lockstep with other Italian critics and artists, as he heeded the calls for the "return to order" which led to Benito Mussolini's regime.

The study of Morandi's shift away from the Metaphysical School shows us that his oblique self-representation as a metaphysical artist was replaced by the persona of a regionalist artist. This new identity was embraced in several ways, and it depended on erasing any traces of excessive formal experimentation, self-consciousness, and esotericism. Though Morandi's works from 1927 and 1928 seem simple with respect to his metaphysical pieces, they were created by the same sophisticated artist. In these works, Morandi sought to emphasize his provincial roots and his 'genuine' nature while reconfiguring Cézanne's landscapes and country houses. This myth of the rustic artist, created by Soffici and perpetuated by Maccari, was as artificial as de Chirico and Morandi's metaphysical identity. The difference between de Chirico and Morandi rests upon the fact that Morandi's regionalism concealed his previous trajectory and any notion of the artist as a cerebral visionary.

A great number of Morandi's still lifes and landscapes painted during the 1920s represented interiors and landscapes which conformed to Soffici and Maccari's idealization of the countryside and simultaneously erased any awareness of the previous avant-garde or metaphysical project. It is a vision which, paradoxically, sought to hide this idealization by presenting itself as a genuine representation that merely revealed the beauty of the non-picturesque. Thus, Morandi defeated de Chirico at his own game by representing a parallel reality that stood in for, or at the very least *was read as*, an unmediated view of the countryside. The fact that Morandi's 'rustic' identity was a fabrication is precisely the reason he was so ardently characterized as a sincere, provincial artist. In fact, he did much to debunk this interpretation during the late 1930s and after the fall of Facism, further revealing its artificial nature.

This essay has focused on several paintings by Morandi in order to analyze his affiliation and eventual move away from the Metaphysical School. Since Morandi wrote virtually nothing about himself and is currently seen as an

64. See also figure G at <http://mgaguire.blogspot.mx/p/images.html>.

apolitical painter removed from daily life, scholars usually address his career by tracing his paintings' formal elements. Rather than exclusively looking at this artist through formalist lenses, it is important to analyze the exact nature of the artist's solitary temperament within Italian culture and politics as mediated through his works. Morandi's use and abandonment of the mannequin allows us to address his self-awareness and self-representation as an artist even within genres such as the still life, as these pictorial works inform the scant biographical details we have about him. As his metaphysical and regionalist productions show, traces of Morandi's and his contemporaries' concerns are inscribed within his paintings. These works show us not only his stylistic progression and his sources, but also, the ways in which these interacted with the aesthetic and political debates of the time. ♣

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