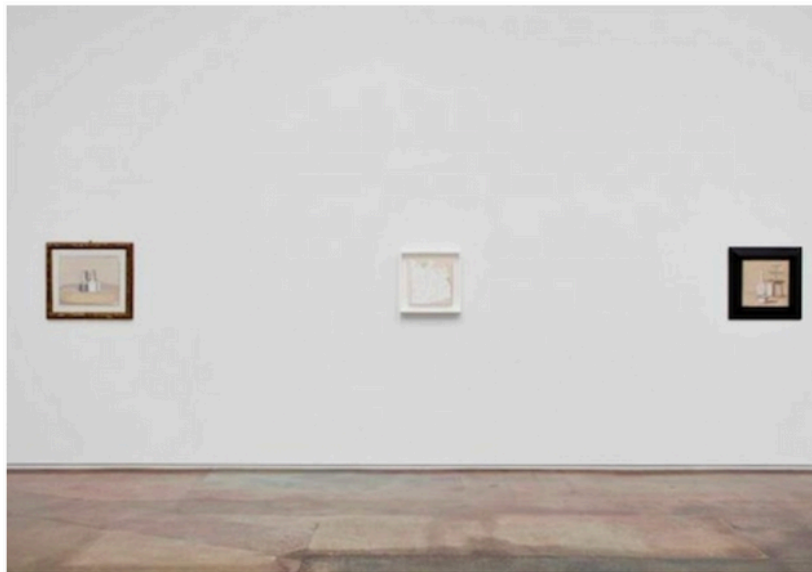


Giorgio Morandi and Robert Ryman

By Grant Johnson



View of "Giorgio Morandi and Robert Ryman: Object/Space," 2015.

In what feels like an inevitable, predestined union, small, quiet works by Giorgio Morandi and Robert Ryman come together in a vast white room. And yet they are not swallowed. Careful studies, these works dramatize and depict the melodrama that small details within a much larger whole can command.

In Morandi's *Still Life*, 1948, six vases bob atop the vast surface area of a table, thick and gray as a slab of concrete. Their casually sketched edges hum, playing with our expectation of symmetry. Blue slate, coral earth, fluorescent white, and bone china hues compliment and calm the eye, allowing the viewer to hold and hover safely here. In Ryman's *8 1/2" Square*, 1962, we can literally count the impasto brushstrokes that flock atop a small scrap of canvas, tacked so that its scalloped edges become a kind of tensile frame. Like the boisterous petals of a chrysanthemum, Ryman's uppermost layer of pure white strokes leaves only glimpses of the mustard yellow, pea green, cornflower blue, and chalky brown that amble beneath it.

Not combative or riotous, the affair between these works feels amorous and steady, united by neutral palettes. Each subject is meditatively studied, each brushstroke intimately considered, and each composition meticulously designed. They flirt productively. In Morandi's *Natura Morta*, 1948, the fluting of a white vase and ramekin, the hesitant contours of a tiered desert quiver animatedly, as if they might shift into a slightly different form as soon as one looks away. Beside it, Ryman's *Stamp*, 2002, employs essentially the same palette and arguably the same spirit. Upon a creamy ground, thin red posts bound a gestural storm of beige strokes conquered by white. This red fencing recalls the red band that cinches Morandi's ramekin or the reddish tiers that meter out and flutter in his negative space, lending his whites a similar sense of control. We might be looking at Plato's searching lovers, who only learn they are not whole when they discover their other halves.