

## Renato Guttuso

(Bagheria, Palermo, 1912 – Rome, 1987)

*Candela e pacchetto di tre stelle (Candle and Pack of Three Stars)*, 1940, is, as the artist recalled, one of first paintings he made in his studio on via Pompeo Magno in Rome, a place that would soon become one of the principal venues for encounters and exchange of ideas for an important segment of the Italian art world. This work belongs to a series of still lifes that Guttuso began in 1940 and would continue with great intensity until 1942 and beyond. It is no accident that 1942 is also the date of his well-known *Crocifissione (Crucifixion)*, for which he won the Premio Bergamo. At that time, Guttuso felt in every object and in every image, from the most prosaic to the most noble, the same outcry of human existence, the reification of the same vital force and, even more, a single pictorial reason: “A Crucifixion looking like a still life and a still life looking like a Crucifixion: this has happened with all true painting from the Byzantines to Caravaggio, to Picasso,” he would write in 1942.

This work represents an important phase in Guttuso’s history as an artist, but more generally it is a paradigmatic moment in the primary dialectic of twentieth century Italian painting, because the objects, tables, and walls in these still lifes, rendered incandescent by a harsh and violent feeling about life, constructed through color contrasts and composed through a deliberately disorderly, unharmonious arrangement, seem the opposite of the formal mediation carried out by Morandi during the early part of the century. But it is an antithesis deliberately positioned within the iconography of Morandian poetics; these works are carried out as if they were part of a pictorial theory match-up. Guttuso lines up his black pieces against Morandi’s white ones, but he does this while agreeing to play on the master’s chessboard. Later, in 1966, he would write: “I, along with other young people of my generation, was then in a polemical position with regard to Morandi, because [...] he also seemed to us like the symbol of a reductive general situation, linked more to the twilight of Post-Impressionism than to the movements and undertakings of the European avant-garde; [...] That polemic, however, at least as far as I am concerned, did not ignore a dialectical relationship, and in my still lifes of 1940, ’41, ’42, the points of contact with Morandi are explicit, along with the contradictions, through the presence of certain Morandian objects, bottles, carafes, lamps, and even the spiral ‘opaline’ bottle.” (EV)