

**Marcello Guasti** (Florence, November 17, 1924 – Bagno a Ripoli, January 11, 2019), was a sculptor, painter, engraver and printmaker.<sup>1</sup> Of the many elements of Guasti's childhood shaped him as an artist, two in particular stand out. Having lost his father early in life, Guasti was raised by his mother. He grew up with her in the bakery that she ran with his brother. Guasti's uncle—another significant figure in the artist's young life—was a carpenter who often drew and painted. His family was not wealthy but they managed, and the environment in which Guasti was raised educated him not only as an artist, but also as a native Tuscan. The feel and scent of both bread and wood would come to greatly influence the way Guasti approached the making of art. After all, he made his first xylographs in his uncle's workshop. Guasti's other relatives also played a large part in his development as an artist; his cousin encouraged him to enroll in a graphic arts school after his elementary school graduation. At the Florence Art Institute, which he later attended, Guasti refined his skills and made connections with teachers and influences such as Pietro Parigi and Francesco Chiapelli.

In the 1940s, when Guasti created his first xylographs, the artist was greatly inspired by nature and objects from the natural world. The pieces crafted during this time in his career were realistic, though not necessarily precise in detail and form. In this period, Guasti received many; in 1948, the XXIV Biennale of Venice accepted two of Guasti's xylographs for an international exhibition. During this time, Guasti was serving in the military near Rome, whose rich artistic, architectural, and archaeological landscape allowed him to become acquainted with ancient art. In the 1950s, Guasti explored further his interest in ancient art, and focused his attention on Etruscan works. He also developed an interest in Japanese prints, particularly the work of artists like Hiroshige and Hokusai. These influences played a role in his desire to move away from strictly black and white xylographs, and around this time, Guasti also ventured into the field of painting. Giorgio Di Genova, in his essay "Marcello Guasti: Modern Classicality Between Nature, Geometry, and the Absolute," observes: "the 1950s were the years of the elaboration of the necessary

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<sup>1</sup> See (in Italian) [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcello\\_Guasti](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcello_Guasti)

‘distances’ between language and reality: this elaboration was carried out through a work constantly supported by the absorption of the lessons of the art of the past.” With this new gravitation towards symbolism and experimentation, fueled by creations from the past, Guasti began to move in a new direction. He displayed his xylographs at his first one-man exhibit, in the Galleria La Strozzi in Florence. During this time, he also made a group of bronze works, strongly influenced by Egyptian sculpture, and later, masterpieces such as the wooden sculpture *Renaiolo drying himself*, which depicts a man who worked in the Arno river.

The 1960s brought about a major change: Guasti abandoned the representation of figures. Then, at the age of forty, he was selected to produce a monument sculpture, which would become *Monument to the Three Carabinieri*. The 1970s saw him creating more public sculptures in various Italian cities, such as Florence and Pesaro. Throughout the shifts in his practice, such as an increasing interest in geometric form, Guasti was always inspired by ancient art. At the beginning of the 1980s, he wrote in his journal, claiming that, “modernity is nourished by antiquity.” Throughout his career, Guasti was invested in exploring, utilizing, and representing the natural elements and perspectives of the ancient. The titles of many of his works, such as the sculpture *Four Elements*, allude to his investment in nature. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Guasti was asked to create a public statue in Beijing, and it was based on none other than the five elements: earth, water, fire, wood, and metal. Working into his 90s, Guasti’s approach to art making never tired; his legacy, like many of his most notable creations, has become one with the urban landscape of Italy.

based on entries written by Ashlyn Brooks Buffum and Natalie Pashaie (Syracuse Florence, undergraduate interns, Fall 2018 and Spring 2019)