

Afro (Afro Basaldella)

(Udine , 1911 – Zurich 1976)

Permesso di Soggiorno (Resident Permit) and *Via Traversa (Byway)* are among the most significant works from Afro's mature period and represent an important juncture between abstract research in post-war Italy and the developments that occurred internationally during that same period, particularly in the United States.

1957, the year when *Permesso di Soggiorno* was created, has frequently been recognized as a crucial year, a turning point in Afro's painting, as well as in the production of artists then working in Rome. After 1960, the date of *Via Traversa*, art seemed to change in other directions, above all through new investigations carried out by the Piazza del Popolo School. In late 1957 Afro wrote a few lines describing his poetics, which he sent to Lionello Venturi. These still remain the most valuable commentary on the changes in his work that year: "For some time I have experienced a certain unease in terms of my work; I was extraneous to the painting I was creating, as if it did not respond to a development, to an inner necessity that became more urgent and precise. I felt a distance from my work because it wasn't enough for me to represent a reality of fantasy, of dream, or of memory [...], but I wanted that reality to be identified with the painting and for the painting to become the very reality of the feeling, not its representation." (From some thoughts Afro wrote down at the request of Lionello Venturi, for the then imminent publication of *Pittori italiani d'oggi*, De Luca, 1958).

The close identification between pictorial authenticity and authenticity of feeling leads his works toward a gradual dissolution of any linear structuring, of any framework that is even distantly figurative, toward an increased freedom of color and light that would always be his hallmark, but which only now seems to shape his painting, with the same need for a flight-like breadth and freedom. The narrative matrix of his titles reminds us how his works continue to recount feelings unleashed by memory, but now the emotional core of the story is offered to us without any concept, object, or name, cleared of any typical obstacle so that it might be revealed in its essence, made up of ethereal planes of transparent light where the glance penetrates, as— it has been said — in a dream of subtle clouds traversed by sunlight. ((EV)