

Giuseppe Santomaso

(Venice, 1907 – 1990)

Santomaso's pictorial history went through numerous phases: the still lifes from the 1940s; the synthetic, Post-Cubist paintings of the early postwar period, already well represented in the GAM collection by a significant work, *Peschereccio (Fishing Boat)*, 1951; then, a bit later, the experience of *Informel* painting; and, finally, the late works, enveloped in a dusty light, broken only by a disembodied architectural division of the space.

Placed alongside one another, *Peschereccio* and the work acquired for the CRT Collection, *Storia Catalana (Catalan Story)*, 1959, constitute a significant example of the painter's two most important periods. Santomaso worked within the territory defined by Post-Cubist painting, finding in it a language suitable for expressing his own passionate feelings about the human condition.

He said: "Reality surrounds us, we too are reality." The first statement, basically still traditional for an Italian painter of his generation, is enhanced by a nuance of social humanism that characterizes all his art. Significantly, he devoted time to observing the work and positive activity in the Venetian shipyards, where he identified a constructive framework for the image, made up of riggings, nets, masts, and mooring posts, and marked by the geometric grounds that the veils delineated against the luminous Venetian sky. Those constructions traced a dark grid of corporeal black lines against the clear screen of the painting, almost as if to support the flat zones of color, in a distant memory of stained glass windows in a cathedral. This black structure anchors the compositional equilibrium of *Storia catalana*, as well as other works from the same period. He traces the subtle axis of the work, supplying a visual hook to the large white ground, which he then nails down to all the quadrants with rapid brushstrokes at the top and bottom. What appears here, and what was not present in works such as *Peschereccio*, is the temporal dimension of memory. He recounted that he painted these abstract works in the darkness of night, as if only in the annihilation of the Venetian light he was able to remove himself from the reality outside his studio and conquer the memory of an earlier experienced reality. And it is in that word, *Storia*, or *Story*, in the title, that one still seems to sense both the living presence of man, acted upon and shaped by that story, and man's awareness, which reorganizes the story in the telling. (EV)