

## Alberto Burri

(Città di Castello, Perugia, 1915 — Nice, 1995)

In the period following the Second World War, Alberto Burri, more than any other artist in Italy, explored the pictorial urgency of confronting the material of his work. Unable to be satisfied with the embellishment of the body and soft consistency of paint, he took a step that leapt over pictorial technique, opening up new thresholds to the physical reality of the world, which, early in the century had been addressed in Cubist collages. In the years following the end of the war, Burri experimented exhaustively with different materials, modified the composition of the impastos, and created his *Muffe* (mold pieces). In 1950 he created his first *Sacchi* (burlap sack pieces), and two years later he returned to work on them, achieving a fully mature pictorial language. *Untitled*, 1953, belongs to this period. It has the small dimensions of a study, but is characterized by completeness and a formal knowledge that conveys the self-assured voice of the artist's entire poetics.

It is a work shaped in the same concrete black from which his early material grounds — surface buildups of color — emerged in the late 1940s. There is an immediate and natural contrast with the white, capable of cutting out windows of light and clear boundaries in the absoluteness of the solid darkness that emanates from the black.

Then a radiating red appears in different tones. These are clearly Suprematist colors, but — as Vittorio Rubiu has observed — substantially different from Malevich's investigations, because what the Russian painter called the "sensitivity of the pure absence of the object" finds its opposite in Burri's work: the solidity of the physical experience and an object-like presence.

Physical reality does not possess a single value in Burri's work; it cannot be simply superimposed, like the sheets of newspaper or packs of cigarettes that Braque and Picasso applied to the painted surface of the canvas. Whether burlap sacks, plastic, or the canvas and paper of the work in the CRT Collection, the material is understood as such by the viewer, but it also finds a sort of purification in the full formal control that the artist exercises over the composition of the work. As Cesare Brandi wrote in his extensive 1963 essay on Burri, the ostentation of the material, of residues and discards, activates a process of sublimation, and what at first appears to be a pitiless reality then disappears at a second look: "There is no longer anything of what had been seen before, or, to put it better, everything is there, but as if at another distance, in a different space and in a fixed light." (EV)