

Antonio Sanfilippo

(Partanna, Trapani, 1923 – Rome, 1980)

Among the founders of the Forma group, which was established in Rome in 1947, Antonio Sanfilippo actively supported a renewal of artistic language, premised upon looking back to the experiences of geometric painting. Starting in the early 1950s, a series of trips to Paris and time spent there contributed to the rapid development of his painting in the so-called “concrete” style of the time, characterized by free plastic aggregations, arranged in contrasting chromatic relationships. His work continued to evolve, and between 1953 and 1954 he developed a style marked by interwoven signs.

One of the first interpreters of this new language, his investigation of signs was described by the painter Jaroslav Serpan in the following terms: “laying them down to contribute freedom (a certain freedom), that of stains spontaneously projected onto the canvas [...], he does not dwell on these, but on the contrary dominates them, superimposing their harsh and vibrant scratches, knotted and unknotted, volutes and curves that finally give the canvas its general configuration.” (*Antonio Sanfilippo*, exhibition catalogue. Rome: Galleria delle Carrozze, 1955). *Nero e Rosso (Schema astratto 28/55)* (*Black and Red – Abstract scheme 28/55*), 1955, represents the importance of the relationship between sign and color that marks the artist’s work in this period. The painting is dominated by the presence of vivid red, the vitality of which is illuminated by white signs and by a corporeal black background, sometimes lightened by gray-tinged brushstrokes. The result is a labyrinth that the eye runs across, following its irregular rhythm, lingering where the accumulation of signs becomes denser and more intense.

Sanfilippo’s career proceeded organically up to his final works, created over the course of the 1970s. *Untitled (Pittura 35/59)*, 1959, is an example of his work from the late 1950s-early 1960s. The canvas is traversed by broad brushstrokes, with an almost sfumato-like effect that calibrates the contrast between the black and white that dominate the composition. The balance between intuition and rationality in the works from these years is described by the artist as follows: “In my painting I tend to create images determined by a system of simple and elementary signs and also by the rhythm and by the distribution of space according to an exclusively subjective idea. I think that this clear and essential element is fundamental to the most direct and immediate communication. It is also my conviction that I can attain a more complex elaboration as the result of a longer and more rational process.” (*Appunti*, 1960). (MB)