

## Afro. Realities at the edge of imagination

It is through the unfolding of layered meaning that we comprehend artistic expression. Afro Basaldella's internal landscapes are remote places at the edge of imagination that navigate us through a man's macrocosm, deeply embedded in a path of spiritual soul-searching. Mosaics of memory, freed from historical parameters of composition and colour, Afros' abstraction is disturbing and challenging in a gentle and remunerating way. As the eye moves over these canvases in a process of perdition, we slowly observe an organic disintegration of the artwork, constructed on torn pieces that survive a nocturnal darkness, and carry us into the less visited corners of our subconscious.

Afro defined form as psychological, giving shapes and colours an intellect, a significance beyond their physical attributes. He excavates through this practice an informality, resulting in an own subjective world order. His abstraction is a mental process, a liberation of scale and logic which casts aside preconceived notions of knowledge and develops a language comprehensible to anyone who is willing to embark on a journey of the unknown.

The path was an arduous one, an evolutionary road that encapsulated figuration, a revision of cubism and DeChirico's metaphysical *modus operandi*, bearing a secular transcendence that formulated the abstraction encountered in his later practice. It is with the arrival and his insertion into the Italian informal art movement, that his practice inherited the legacy we know of today.

The Italian *Arte Informale* was bred in a period of European post-war emancipation and reconstruction and incepted material explorations later encountered in the movement of *Arte Povera*. It did however formulate an incongruence which bears witness in the diverse artistic methodologies and aesthetics of its constituents. Between the literal meaning of not taking shape or having form, and the potency of conjectured formations, the tonalities and explosions of denominating signs are so strong, they perfectly embrace Italy's history, hardship, and resurrection during this time. Afro crowned his informalism by introducing Italian historicity within the tendencies of the European *informel* and forming close associations with the American Abstract Expressionists. An artistic mediator of cultural exchange, his art became a testament to a new Italy, reawakening its image as a modern country overseas.<sup>1</sup> His contemporaries within the *informel* were primarily moved by experimentation and instinctive process practices, as can be observed in Alberto Burri's polymaterialism, applying raw matter in a combined setting merging painting and sculpture. Instead, more in line to the ordered chaos of Emilio Vedova or the layered colour schemes of Toti Scialoja, Afro developed brushstrokes that disrupt a meticulously structured space in the background. Removing parameters with which to decipher the origin of his artworks, he brutally places the viewer in a nomadic state of desolation without escapism. The aim of his paintings is not to transmit a *zeitgeist*, instead they are hidden receptors of a spiritual and cultural awakening, which resembles an ontological study, a structure where the functioning whole prevails over the single units. As the viewer becomes an orphan of time and place, there's a gentleness that accompanies this isolation, evoking personal memories and

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<sup>1</sup> Bedarida, 2012, p.48

a sense of comfort in the gestures Afro proposes. These scenarios mutate into abstract but nevertheless formulated imaginaries, landing the observer in a reality beyond the real.

### **Afro and the Contemporary Periodlessness**

Afro's forms have themselves become a reality to overcome. His paintings do not only determine the timeframe they were painted in, and the spirit of the person they were painted by. They are creations of a man who distanced himself from a time-space context. It seems as if he had been able to predict the future path of abstraction, the point at which we are now- if we are in fact there yet. His negation of any formality perfectly captures the intense global interconnectedness we are experiencing and the multiplicity of temporal layers<sup>2</sup> we are accustomed to living within today. In this precise moment, the experience of time and reality is forming a close friendship to the metaphysical. This contemporary condition may therefore be less regarded as a *period* and more as an experiential category which defines what is happening as it happens.<sup>3</sup>

We are in a time where artistic formality, currents and epochs have vanished in the undergrowth of a *prosumer* led age. The domain of art echoes these traditional approaches, they can be peeled off as we slowly decodify artistic expression. But at first glance we are often submerged by proliferations of ahistorical saturation that culminates into a *periodlessness*.<sup>4</sup> In order for the contemporary to avoid becoming a tyrant in its oppressive removal of canonical structures, artists heroically aim to carry (un)resolved legacies<sup>5</sup> of previous epochs into their own practices.

An example of this can be observed in the world-renowned German artist Anselm Kiefer, whose *repertoire* orchestrates figurative consonances of historical facts into abstract dystopian landscapes. He has been able to grasp the contemporary desertification of memory by developing encounters of remembrance through his art. Within this engagement lies the ability to evoke emotive and culturally fertile responses, elevating the contemporary beyond a circumscribed temporal arena. It is through these practices that our contemporary know-how has kept mutating and evolving. We can, for example, perfectly grasp the meaning of the abstract in becoming a denominator without external input. With Afro, the opposition between his direct and simple titles and his abstract paintings has become a technique with which to decipher the mindmap of the overall artwork. Through his titles we obtain just enough information that can collocate us into a precise place or condition, just enough to remove these connotations once we look deeper into the piece and discover a world beyond any readability. Contemporary practitioners have experimented similar methodologies, sometimes in a deeply thought-through manner, as in Gregor Gleiwitz's corporeal oil paintings. The artist applies a comparable technique by using the title as a placemaker, a simple date which indicates the completion of the work yet forgotten as soon as we embark on the infinite journey of the canvas in front of us. His layering is a database of memory, with different thickness and intensities that carry various amounts of meaning. It is

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<sup>2</sup> Cox, Lund, 2016, p. 9

<sup>3</sup> Cox, Lund, 2016, p. 10

<sup>4</sup> Smith, 2009, p.3

<sup>5</sup> Smith, 2009, p.4

through this stratification that we understand the beginning and end point of Gleiwitz's endeavour.

If the postmodern intention of removal and of indeterminate knowledge states constitute a *file-rouge* in our contemporary condition, then we understand how Afro's paintings entail an independent and autonomous presence which work as singular irrational entities.<sup>6</sup> It is through them that we are able to grasp a continuum in the figurations within his abstractions, because reality can only be grasped through a lens of detachment from the context around us.

In a Magrillian approach, what we see in Afro's works is something that the visible is unable to show us. If Afro were to repropose through his lens a simple image of an apple, a perfectly rounded green fruit composed in its linear shapes and uniform colouring, through his artistic intervention, the apple would dilute any formalism or cultural identifiers and shape a never-before-seen identity. The abstracted apple with figurative origins not only becomes a carrier of new meaning of the fruit itself but, in fact, extends it beyond. The contemporaries of our time recognize his artistic gestures as they are reference points for contemporary artistic vocabularies we have inherited, generating passageways towards grander narratives and deeper experiential meanings.

What Afro leaves us with is not simply a feeling or gentle transgressions. He leaves us with a deep understanding of our current and past state, of how to 'look at' and 'look through' a work of abstraction, how to peel each layer of, how to remove in order to gain insight. It is through the unfolding of layered meaning that we comprehend artistic expression.

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<sup>6</sup> Bedarida, 2012, p.52, 53

## Bibliography

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