

Passage through Rome

EVEN FROM a very rapid comparison of the latest London works of Howard Rogers with the Roman landscapes shown here, one realizes at the first glance that something has changed, in the subjects, in the choice of colours as well as in the way of composing images. Instead of the tall buildings and the wide open expanses crossed by motorways or by bridges, Rogers has painted trees and glimpses of residential apartment blocks; instead of the grey Nordic mists, the clean skies of Rome.

One could easily argue that all this is a result of making these works during his stay in Rome, and consequently one could suppose that Rogers is a traditional painter, the type who goes around the streets of Rome armed with his canvas and easel in the style of an Impressionist eager to record a picturesque image or view. But this interpretation would be too simplistic as well as old fashioned.

One has just to look at the large works on paper which Rogers painted shortly after his arrival in Rome. They are inspired by an unmistakably

introspective, intimate nature; bare interiors, few objects on the walls, only a leather jacket hanging on a chair to recall the presence of the man, of the artist himself. An assumption which is reinforced by looking at the first of his large works on paper, *Threshold*. In fact this work allows us to reconstruct Rogers' inner journey. Arriving in Rome for the first time last December, Rogers found himself disorientated, confused vis-à-vis an unknown city and one can understand his situation if one considers the fact that he does not paint from the subject (*sur le motif*) but strictly from memory. One can understand him even more if we consider the city not just as an ensemble of architectural objects, but rather as an endless swarm of spiritual tensions. Only this way can we grasp Rogers' sense of displacement. A displacement which is not born out of an existential difficulty but rather from the need to erase previous memories and prevent new evidence from being contaminated, and being

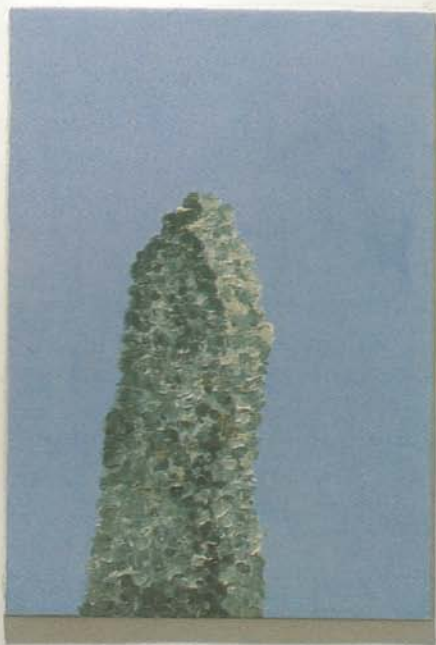
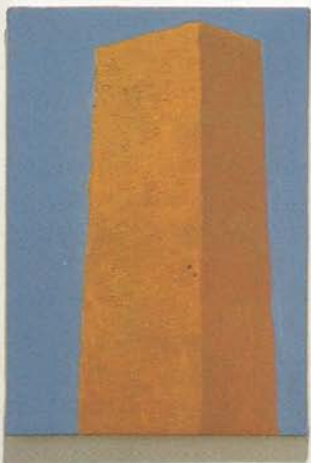
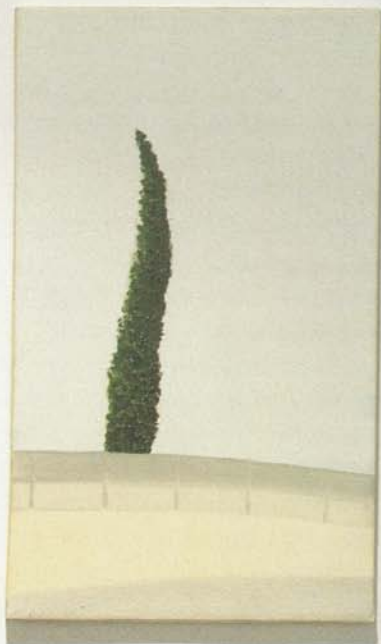
HOWARD ROGERS
studio view



merged with the old. In *Threshold* we seem to capture the difficulty of this passage, both from the point of view of painting (in other words the subject, the composition and the colours) and from the point of view of the narration. The process enacted by Rogers, that of the internalization of experience and of the consequent artistic expression, leads us to identify the artist with the subject and therefore to attribute the greatest symbolic value to the blindfold covering the eyes. In the same way that we are led to interpret the absence of the protagonist in *Annunciation* and *Whispers* as a token of the laborious search for that objective: to close the eyes, to forget, to let go of the images and of their inner effects. In conclusion, we could see these three works as a true autobiographical triptych, revealing that difficult passage from one horizon to another, from the threshold of a new reality to the silent waiting that leads to the rebirth of a new sensibility. Only by letting go of his

memories could Rogers approach Rome, free from the previous images, emotions and experiences, and thus *Threshold* or *Whispers* could be followed up by works such as the series of *Views of Rome*, small cityscapes which, while in keeping with his vision, create new atmospheres and moods, marking a real breakthrough. In looking at small landscapes such as *Remember* or *Small pine* one can feel the atmosphere of 'Scuola Romana' painting, a familiar one for those who know Rome. One could even recall well-known precedents such as the urban landscapes of Ziveri, just to mention one name. But I would like to emphasize that this does not depend on Rogers' previous knowledge of the city or of its painters, it is simply because thanks to his way of working and as a result of the above-mentioned shift in sensibility Rogers has been able to grasp an aspect of Rome, possibly its most authentic and profound.

Roberto Lambarelli



HOWARD ROGERS

(clockwise from top left)

Small pine 1999

oil on canvas, 25 x 20 cm

Whispers 1999

oil on canvas, 50 x 30 cm

Mausoleum 1999

oil on canvas, 50 x 35 cm

As evening falls 1999

oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm

Tuscan tower 1999

oil on canvas, 35 x 25 cm