



palermo

I first saw Palermo's work in a side room or Heiner Friedrich's office when his gallery was on Wooster Street. It must have been in 1974, when I was a young painter making the rounds of the SoHo galleries. The surface, paint on metal, bothered me and I didn't like the painting. But I kept returning to see it again. I've found that it is often that way – the best work aggravates me, but then with time I understand it more. After that experience I followed Palermo's work closely. It seemed so fresh – different than other abstraction – always about some kind of content that I couldn't easily articulate, always so emotional. I was especially impressed by Palermo's *Times of the Day* paintings when they were shown at Heiner Friedrich Gallery on West Broadway in 1978. I decided that in these paintings color became light. His colors referred to how light changes over time and the colors also seemed to shift slightly as one viewed the panels from different angles, in relation to the white wall, and to each other. Because of the multiple panels the paintings expanded out into the space of the gallery. They made me aware of myself looking, standing in the space, asked for my involvement over time. These were paintings that looked outward.

Once in Cologne at a dinner party in the early '90s I was seated by chance next to a curator who was organizing an exhibition of Palermo's work. He made a distinction between Palermo and what he called American formalist abstraction – Frank Stella and the Greenberg painters such as Jules Olitski, Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis. He didn't believe me when I spoke about the huge impact that Palermo's work had on younger painters, my age, in New York. We knew that Palermo was living in New York and we also wanted to take painting in a different

direction. His work showed us that there were other possibilities. We went to his shows, argued and discussed what we saw. For us, as well as for the artists that Palermo knew in New York, and for other younger artists to follow, Palermo's work has been a great example and inspiration for a way out of formalism.

Recently I was asked to give a talk about Palermo's work at the Dia Art Foundation in a series in which artists speak about other artists. I took this as an opportunity to again study Palermo's work. Looking at *To the People of New York City* at Dia:Beacon I noticed that the top horizontal edge in Part XV, the last panel in the painting, is not horizontal, but slants down to the right. It looks like a mistake in measuring or sloppy taping. But this slant is important to how the panel works. It opens up the space in the central black band, makes it seem endless, a fitting last experience when viewing all the panels. Was it done on purpose? When I looked at slides of Palermo's notebook drawings for *To the People of New York City*, I found notations of measurement on the drawing for panel XV. The left side of the top horizontal is notated as 36 centimeters down and the right side is notated as 36.5 centimeters down. When I went back to check these measurements against the painting I found that they matched exactly. Either Palermo planned the slant and measured out the divisions in the painting to follow the measurements in his notebook or after measuring by eye or a mistake in taping or measurement, he decided that he liked what had happened and wrote down the measurements to remember. Either way, the slant of that top horizontal is on purpose. Now, I'm very interested in how something can seem to be a mistake, but is in fact what opens the work up, engages the viewer.