

## Julije Knifer Mural Paintings

Curated by Danka Sosic & Zarko Vijatovic  
Mural paintings executed by Stéphane Henry

June 9 - July 28, 2018

galerie frank elbaz  
66 rue de Turenne, 75003 Paris



Julije Knifer, *Mural*, Gornje Vrapce Elementary School, Zagreb, 1971  
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galerie frank elbaz is pleased to announce its fifth Julije Knifer solo exhibition. This is the first exhibition in France dedicated to Julije Knifer's mural paintings.

Internationally recognized as the most prominent Croatian artist, Julije Knifer was a founding member of the avant-garde group Gorgona in Zagreb. The proto-conceptual group situated the making of art in the domain of nihilistic and existential philosophical thought, a conceptual affair that did not necessarily require material expression. In this context, at the end of the 1950s, Knifer sought to create an anti-painting formula. The form of the meander gradually emerged in his work and by 1960 asserted its primacy as the sole and unique motif of Knifer's art. His oeuvre revolves around a geometric abstraction exploring proportional balances of horizontal and vertical lines made of almost exclusively contrasting pure black and white areas.

In 1959 during his visit to Documenta in Kassel, Knifer discovered large-scale contemporary American paintings. He was particularly impressed by Barnett Newman and his painting *Cathedra*, 1958 (249.8 cm x 543.5 cm). Knifer began very early to explore the intricate relation between space and painting previously introduced by Newman. In 1961, he painted *Meander in the Corner* (143 cm x 199 cm x 143 cm x 308 cm), a ground-breaking work for the artist as it abandoned the bi-dimensional space of the wall to form a three-dimensional angle in the corner of the room.

In 1971, as part of Vera Horvat Pintarić's TV-program *Urban Image*, Knifer created his first mural painting on the walls and the floor of the Vrapče primary school where he worked as an art teacher. The perfect symbiosis of the architecture of the school and the meander conferred to Knifer's work a specific and original outcome. The meander was not imposed to the school walls but integrated in a way that the architecture won its spurs.

Scale, proportion and rhythmical structure of positive and negative volumes are central to the murals just as they are to his paintings and drawings. When expanding his meanders from the limits of the canvas into 'real' space, Julije Knifer reintroduced the third dimension to his work in order to unify the temporal and spatial dimension. Knifer's methodology is based on sophisticated calculations, shown in studies made prior to the execution of his work. The meander, as a physical object, challenges architecture by refocusing the viewer's attention to their own interaction.

Since his first mural, Julije Knifer created a series of large-scale meanders in exterior and interior public spaces. In 1988, at the PM gallery (Extended Media Gallery) in Zagreb, Knifer devoted an exhibition exclusively to his mural paintings, exemplifying their personal importance to him. Among the murals he made in France two stand out: a long meander in the Dijon Library and a dense flow meander at Jean-Jaurès underground station in Toulouse. In 2001, when representing Croatia at the Venice Biennale, Knifer painted the walls of Palazzo Querini Stampalia.

Since the late 1950s, Julije Knifer's work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions including an extensive survey at the Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zürich in 2017, a retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb in 2014, and at the MAMCO, Geneva in 2000. Knifer's works are included in major international public collections such as Centre Pompidou in Paris, MoMA in New York, and Tate Modern in London.

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Stéphane Henry, the former assistant and collaborator to Julije Knifer, was designated by the artist and his estate as the executor for production of Knifer mural paintings.