

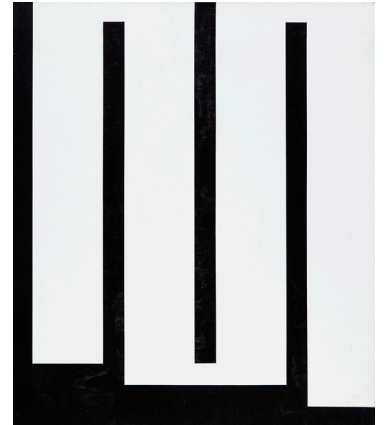
## Julije Knifer

### The meander is a form of my freedom

Curated by Zarko Vijatovic

Exhibition from May 23rd to July 31st, 2015

Opening May 23rd



Before adopting the concept of meander, there were two types of processes in Julije Knifer's artistic approach.

The first was the repetition of a single pattern, indefinitely varied: between 1949 and 1952 Knifer daily drew his self-portrait in the same format. The second was the reduction of pictorial means: from 1952 in a series of landscapes of Stenjevec his language becomes more and more bare. That way, he aspired to create some form of anti-painting. It was around 1959-1960 that he reduced his pictorial means almost exclusively to the contrast between black and white and the composition of vertical and horizontal lines. This had led Knifer to the form that, on the advice of the art historian Igor Zidić, he would call the meander.

With the meander, the two processes, the variation of a single motif and the reduction of means of expression, are associated. Although at that time we would have thought he had finished his artistic research, he was just starting. It was then that the meander became his distinctive sign, his "self-portrait". For Knifer the meander is not a decoration or aesthetics, for him it is a sequence of facts that make a meander or a series of meanders, which, in the end, make just one meander.

It is interesting to observe Knifer's operational protocols, the way he worked on his paintings and drawings. In the sixties he painted meanders on a traditional Gesso Chalk Ground. He diluted the black oil paint with turpentine creating a matte paint finish. During this period the pencil drawings are small in size, they are the result of his research and in the spirit very close to Malevich.

In 1969 Knifer discovered acrylic paint. He covered the surface of the canvas with number of layers of diluted gesso with a desire to get an absolute white color. For him, the canvas preparation process was also a process of meditation. The concept of time and iteration of superimposition of layers was at the very heart of the protocol characterized by a repetition in a monotonous rhythm. The drawings of the 70s became artworks in their own right. They were no longer only preparatory drawings. Knifer was particularly interested in variations of surfaces ranging from very pale gray, made with very hard pencils, to very deep blacks made with soft pencils. Already at that time he covered the surface of the sheet with several layers. In the late 70s, he began to use the graphite. Finishing these drawings was a lengthy process, numerous graphite layers were applied on the paper surface. The operational process could take months or even years. During the 80s and 90s the quest for an absolute black, lead Knifer to absurdity. The superimposed layers of graphite have begun to scatter light.

In an interview with Zvonko Makovic Knifer explained his working process: "When I started to work, I noticed that after two or three days of drawing no special effect can be seen. Then I said to myself: all that is absurd, but let me then push this absurdity to the limits."

For Knifer, from the beginning, the creative process was of paramount importance. He soon realized that he was not interested in the particular result, in a "masterpiece", in the result of a moment of inspiration, but in the process of achievement of meanders itself, which became for him a "voluntary servitude."

His membership in Gorgona group, active from 1959 to 1966 in the margin of art practices in Zagreb, was decisive. It was in the isolation that the group members reached moments of absolute freedom. Perhaps it was Josip Vaništa, in his notes about the mind of Gorgona from 1961 that best described Knifer's artistic attitude:

- The Gorgona thought is serious and rare.
- Gorgona does not demand neither a work of art nor any result in art.
- Gorgona is defined as the sum of all possible interpretations.

When François Morellet asked Knifer if he regrets that he left Paris in 1961, Knifer answered: "Because for me, in my work or in my life, there is no real chronology, perhaps I have already done my last paintings and I have not yet done my first paintings. I have not left Paris in 61. And if we have not had the opportunity to meet more often, it is because I was at that time in the atmosphere of Gorgona in Zagreb. "

Zarko Vijatovic