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# JULIJE KNIFER

Fiac | booth C36

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# Julije Knifer

Born in 1924 in Osijek, Croatia.

Died in 2004 in Paris, France.



Julije Knifer is today largely recognised as one of the most prominent Croatian painters of the 20th Century. One of the founding members of the 1960s Croatian avant-garde group Gorgona, his oeuvre is centralised over the exploration of a single form – the meander, which started in the late 1950s and later developed into the single central point of his artistic production.

The artist arrived at the meander whilst searching for the utter reduction of all expressive elements: «*Within a few months I came, as it were, to the end, that is to a black and white painting (which I referred to as an anti-painting) – to a meander from which one simply cannot go any further*». In art iconography, the winding meander of the river has been used since the earliest artistic production and is considered a synonym for the eternal flow of life; however, to Knifer the meander was a key to a world in which chronology had no meaning, and a way of creating works that were beyond their singular self, but part of a group of works that he continued to paint until the very last days of life. Gorgona group, which Knifer co-founded, was international both in its core activities and in its ethos.

Archives of the group reveal regular exchanges between Croatian artists associated with the group and their international contemporaries, including Lucio Fontana, Robert Rauschenberg and Piero Manzoni.

Furthermore, François Morellet, Piero Dorazio and Victor Vasarely exhibited with Gorgona in the first exhibition of the New Tendencies movement in Zagreb in 1961.

Knifer articulated the meander conceptually in his early sketches before he formally started painting the motif, and his life-long dedication to this simple form - the study of absence, the reduction and complete perfection in execution - reveals an artist who found his meditative outlet in the process of painting. Much like On Kawara in his Date Paintings, Knifer used a singular theme in his work to record the timeless existence and repetition of the purest, simplest form, creating calmness and beauty that exudes from these works.

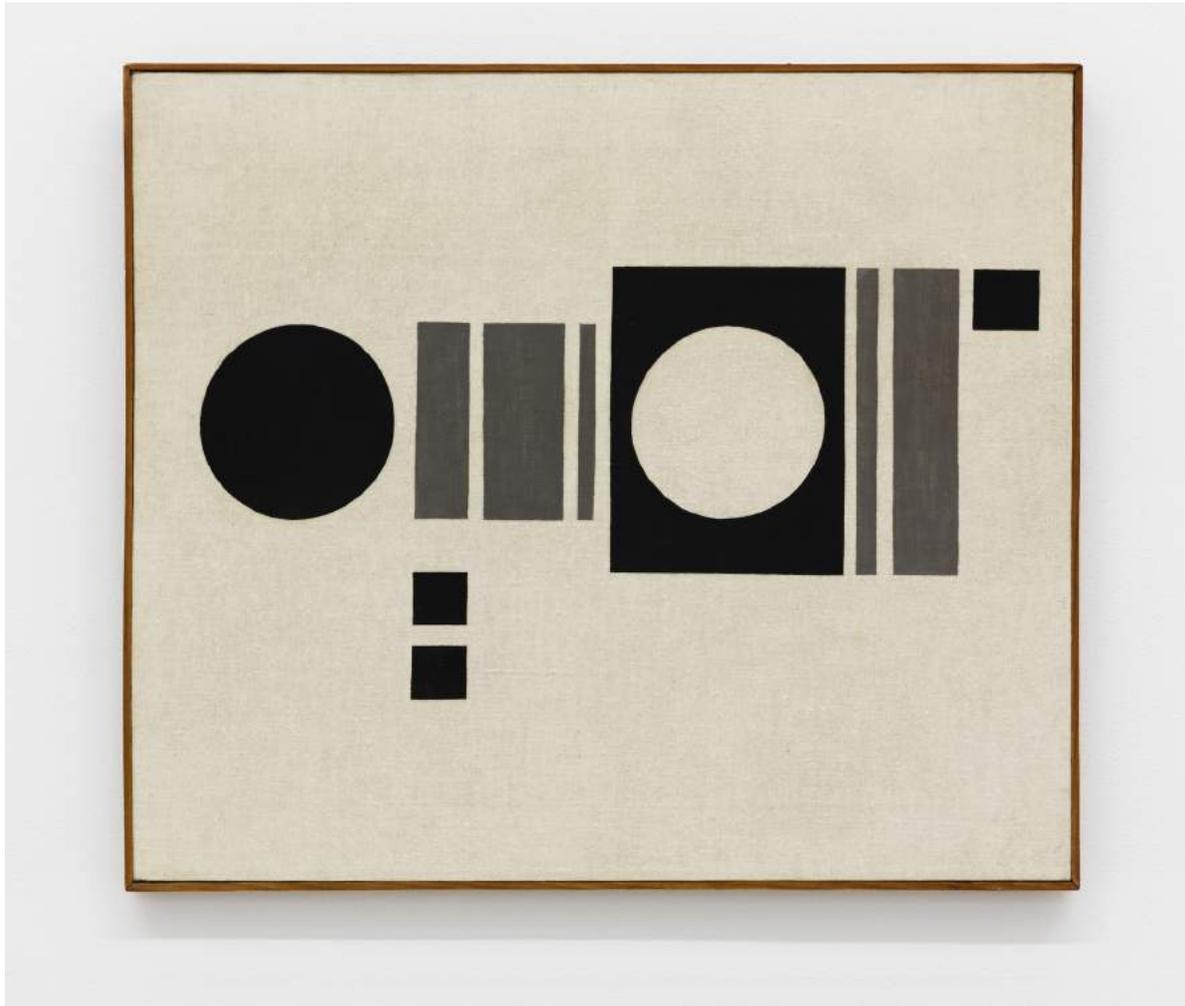
Knifer represented Croatia in the 2001 Venice Biennale, and in 2014 the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb mounted a full retrospective of his work. He has exhibited at Centre Pompidou, Paris, MAMCO in Geneva and Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and his works are in numerous private and public collections around the world, including the MOMA in New York, the Tate London, The Centre Pompidou in Paris and the National Gallery in Berlin.



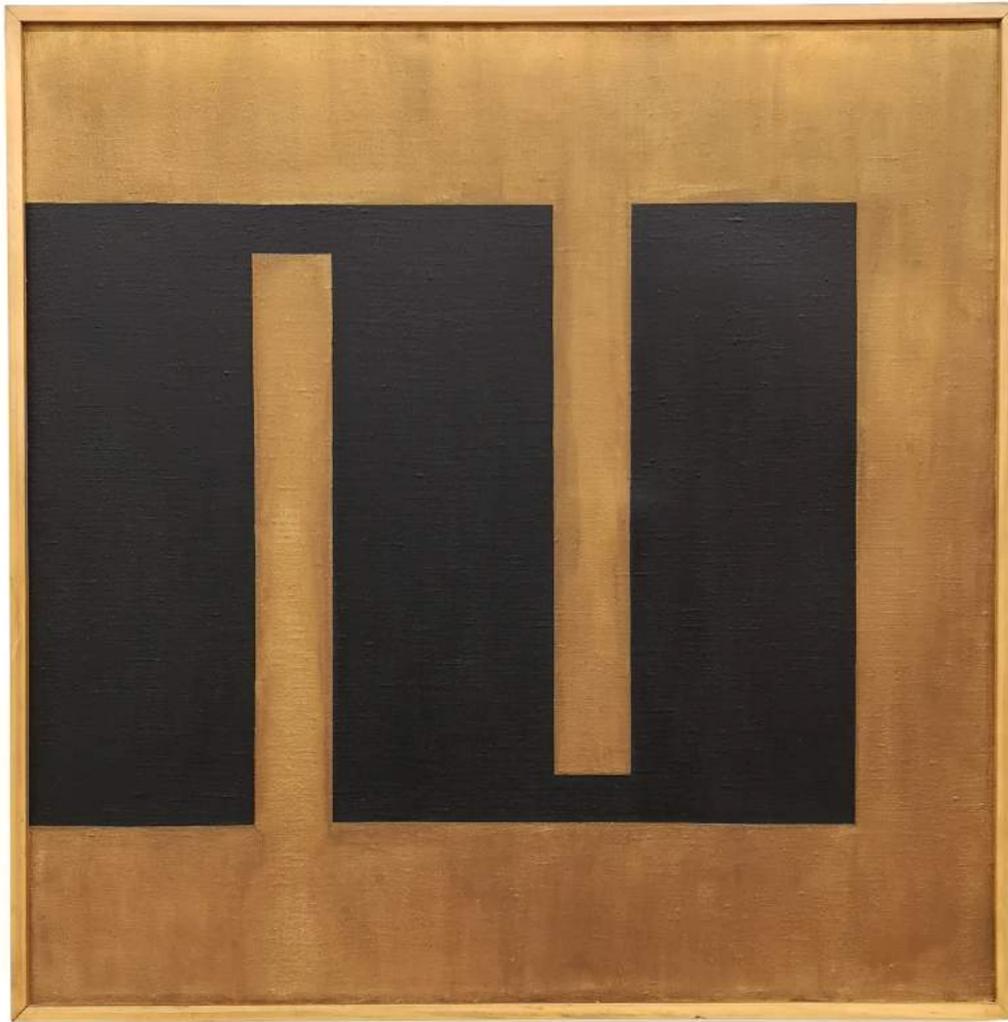
Composition 15, 1959 is a « pre-meander » work, historically important because it underlines the thought process that the artist undertook to obtain what would become the sole motif of his oeuvre.

As Arnauld Pierre describes in *Les images du temps*, 2001, from 1959 onwards forms become more and more rare in Knifer's work reducing themselves to circles, squares and rectangles that seem to float in a space where black and white oppose each other and eventually seem to appear as positives to negatives. Pierre considers this abstraction close to the suprematism of Malevich although evolving towards a very personal form that by its rhythm and composition, the alignment of thick and thin lines and punctuations, reminds us more of writing or music than of traditional painting. For Pierre the rhythmical research of this work and of *Composition*, 1960 led to the emergence of the meander.

**Julije Knifer**  
*Composition 15*, 1959  
Oil on canvas  
55,3 x 64,7 cm  
21 3/4 x 25 1/2 inches  
KNI1959-1614



**Julije Knifer**  
*Composition 15*, 1959  
Oil on canvas  
55,3 x 64,7 cm  
21 3/4 x 25 1/2 inches  
KNI1959-1614



Having previously worked with oil paint, Knifer switched to using acrylic in 1968, impressed by the new possibilities it offered in relation to the compactness of the painted surface. In *Untitled*, 1969, as with other works made using acrylic, the traces of the brushwork are invisible. Art historian Vera Horvat Pintaric has noted that acrylic enabled Knifer to create colour surfaces that were 'evenly condensed, solid and impenetrable, taking a new tactile quality' (in Makovic 2002, p.68).

*Untitled*, 1969 was made at a time when Knifer was turning to a more open chromatic range in his painting in an attempt to reassess the radical reduction of means that he had begun ten years earlier. This work is related to number of other works colour such as M 69-41 1969 (Tate collection). Knifer titled his works in a variety of ways, using the terms 'meander' and 'untitled' at times, at others incorporating his own system of letters and numbers.

**Julije Knifer**

*Untitled*, 1969

Acrylic on canvas

63 x 63 cm

24 3/4 x 24 3/4 inches

KNI1969-2091



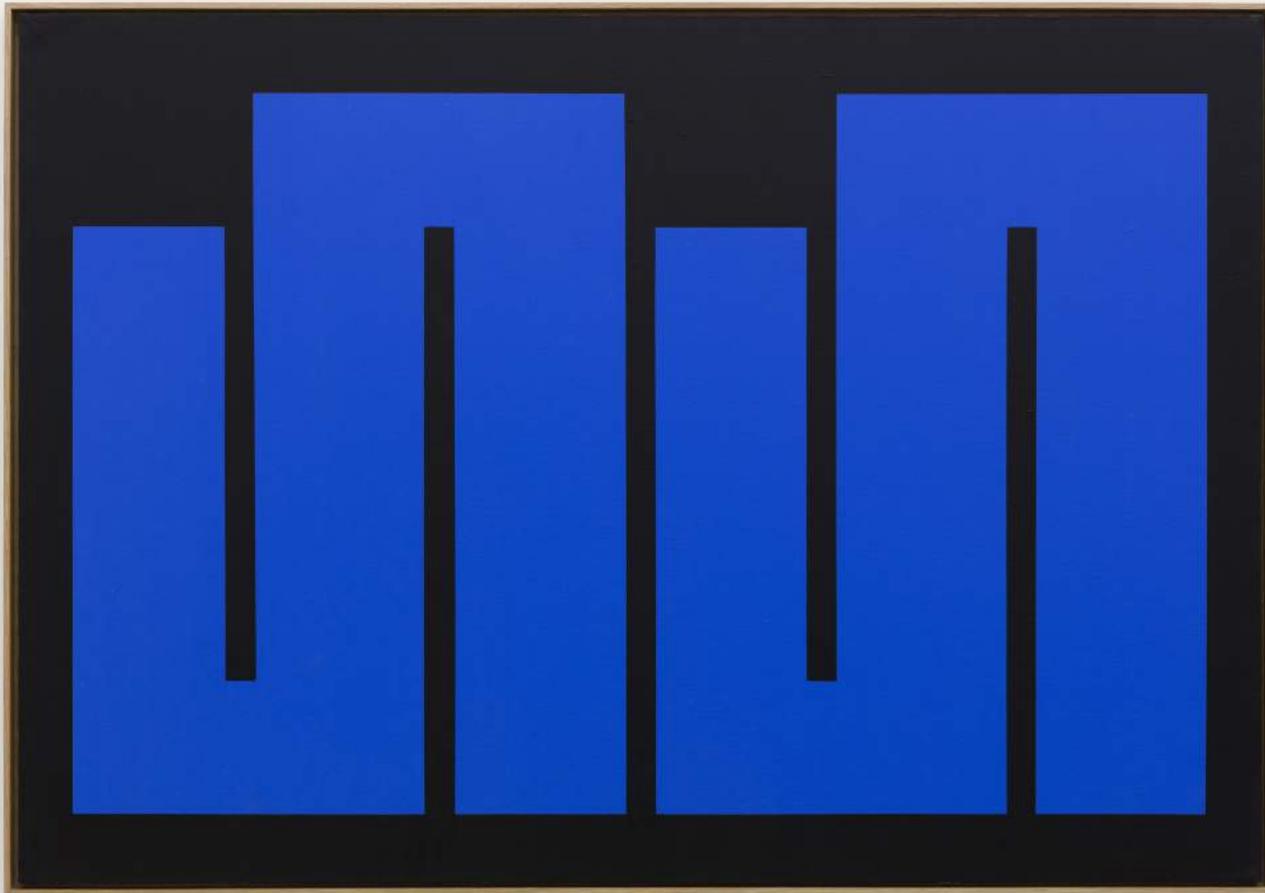
These works were made during a short period when colour appeared in his work, a black meander on a grey surface, and variations of a black symbol on a golden surface and a blue symbol on a black or golden surface. The paintings were made following his travels throughout Yugoslavia where he visited various monasteries and studied the icon paintings he saw there. Reference to Yves Klein's (1928–1962) monochromatic painting, his reductive approach and interest in transcendental and metaphysical concepts, as well as his experimentation with the colours gold and blue can also be inferred. The exhibition Yves Klein which took place at the Gallery of Contemporary Art (Gale-rija Suvremene Umjetnosti) in Zagreb from March to April 1971 would have resonated with Knifer at this time.

**Julije Knifer**  
*Untitled*, 1969  
Acrylic on canvas  
63 x 63 cm  
24 3/4 x 24 3/4 inches  
KNI1969-2091



In spring 1971 the Gallery of Contemporary Art (Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti) in Zagreb held an Yves Klein exhibition that undisputedly influenced Julije Knifer. Reference to Yves Klein's (1928–1962) monochromatic painting, his reductive approach and interest in transcendental and metaphysical concepts, as well as his experimentation with the colours gold and blue can be found in Knifer's works of that time.

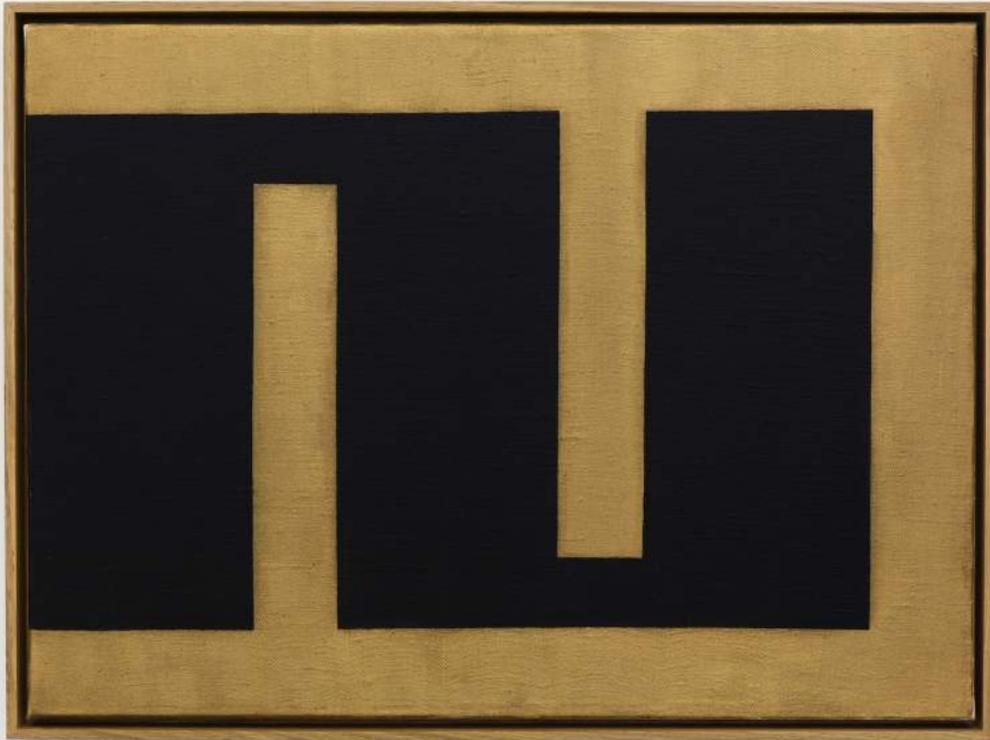
**Julije Knifer**  
*SP VIII 3, 1973*  
Acrylic on canvas  
90 x 131 cm  
35 3/8 x 51 5/8 inches  
KNI1973-1688



**Julije Knifer**  
*SP VIII 3, 1973*  
Acrylic on canvas  
90 x 131 cm  
35 3/8 x 51 5/8 inches  
KNI1973-1688



**Julije Knifer**  
*SP VIII 3, 1973*  
Acrylic on canvas  
90 x 131 cm  
35 3/8 x 51 5/8 inches  
KNI1973-1688



**Julije Knifer**  
*Untitled*, 1969  
Acrylic on canvas  
40 x 55 cm  
15 3/4 x 21 5/8 inches  
KNI1969-1687



**Julije Knifer**  
*Untitled*, 1969  
Acrylic on canvas  
40 x 55 cm  
15 3/4 x 21 5/8 inches  
KNI1969-1687

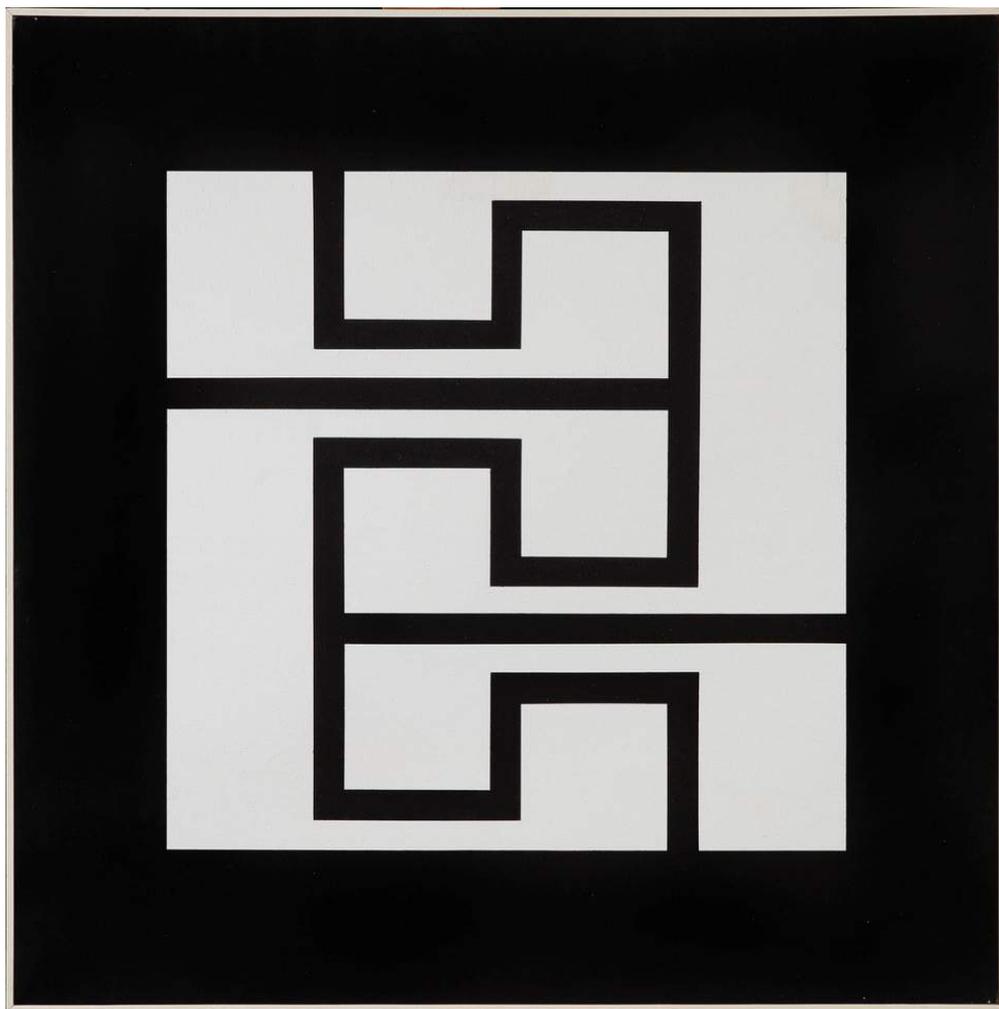


MK 73-7, 1973, was made at a time when Knifer was turning to a more open chromatic range in his painting in an attempt to reassess the radical reduction of means that he had begun ten years earlier. Having previously worked with oil paint, Knifer switched to using acrylic in 1968, impressed by the new possibilities it offered in relation to the compactness of the painted surface. According to Vera Horvat Pintaric acrylic enabled Knifer to create colour surfaces that were 'evenly condensed, solid and impenetrable, taking a new tactile quality' (in Makovic 2002, p.68). Knifer titled his works in a variety of ways, using the terms 'meander' and 'untitled' at times, at others incorporating his own system of letters and numbers just as for MK 73-7.

**Julije Knifer**  
*MK 73-7, 1973*  
Acrylic on canvas  
80 x 100 cm  
31 1/2 x 39 3/8 inches  
KNI1973-897



**Julije Knifer**  
*MK 73-7, 1973*  
Acrylic on canvas  
80 x 100 cm  
31 1/2 x 39 3/8 inches  
KNI1973-897



**Julije Knifer**  
*SPVIII 4*, 1973  
Acrylic on canvas  
100 x 100 cm  
39 3/8 x 39 3/8 inches  
KNI1973-1901



**Julije Knifer**  
*Untitled*, 1971-2002  
Solid steel  
33 x 30 cm  
13 x 11 3/4 inches  
Edition 1 of 5  
KNI1971-2002-651