

Happenings in Prague

A 'manifestation' by Czech artists and writers

The illustrations on this spread form part of a series sent by a group of Czech artists to the symposium on destruction in art—DIAS—held recently in London. They were placed on exhibition during the conference. Whereas the New York Happenings illustrated in the September issue of *Studio International* seemed to have lost much of their spontaneity and to have become formalized into sequences reminiscent of vaudeville, the Prague events, arranged last year by artists, writers and others, were less organized, more spontaneous, and took place in an informal environment. They also had evident, if ambiguous, political overtones. In the Happening described below, for example, it is unclear whether the participants were responding to all nuclear tests equally—American, Russian, British, French—or only to the Chinese tests (as the demonstrative destruction of a book on the Renaissance might suggest).

This description of the sequence of events which comprised *Manifestation of August 2nd* is an edited and abridged version of a description given by some of the organizers:

Participants assembled one Sunday morning on Novyvet Street. Proceedings started with a talk on the second Chinese nuclear test and its effect on the arts. The speaker ripped pages from a book on the Renaissance and handed them round. On the ground were piles of books and pictures; these were passed through a window into a room. Revolver shots were heard. Everybody went down the street to a high wall from which hung various articles—a bed, a table, a stove, trunks, utensils. Clothes littered the ground. Things fell from the wall and

smashed. Onlookers began to join in. Thousands of wet sheets of paper were strewn on the muddy street, and people picked them up, screwed them into balls, and threw them at each other. At this point the police tried to intervene but were persuaded not to.

The participants, about seventy all told, now crowded into a 15ft.-by-13 ft. room, reached down a dark narrow corridor, into which all the broken objects had been carried. A gramophone played a scratched record. People made their own music with whatever lay to hand—boards, bits of junk, pans. The noise and the shouting became unbearable. The room emptied, everyone went outside, back to the high wall.

Here a 'newspaper' was being produced—paints and paper for all; 'everyone is a creator', said one of the organizers. They elected a 'beauty queen', and presented her with a bundle of wet, dirty paper. Then they trooped back to the house and went down into the cellar, carrying candles and making smoke patterns on the ceiling. A girl distributed 'orders': call such-and-such a telephone number, discuss a particular aspect of art, etc. The candles were snuffed. Silence. The sound of shots. People emerged from the house; outside were displayed photographs of the Terezin ghetto. Each person was given a hot baked potato to eat. But police officers were watching. To avoid being watched they dispersed, and re-assembled outside the Savoy Hotel ten minutes later.

From the Savoy they marched in line to a park, where they built a fire and were ordered to sing popular songs. A girl wearing a cloak and gold-coloured shoes began to strip—but only down to tights—and threw her clothes on the fire. The others were told to follow suit. They laughed with embarrassment. Someone threw on the fire a handkerchief, someone else a tie, some threw on money.

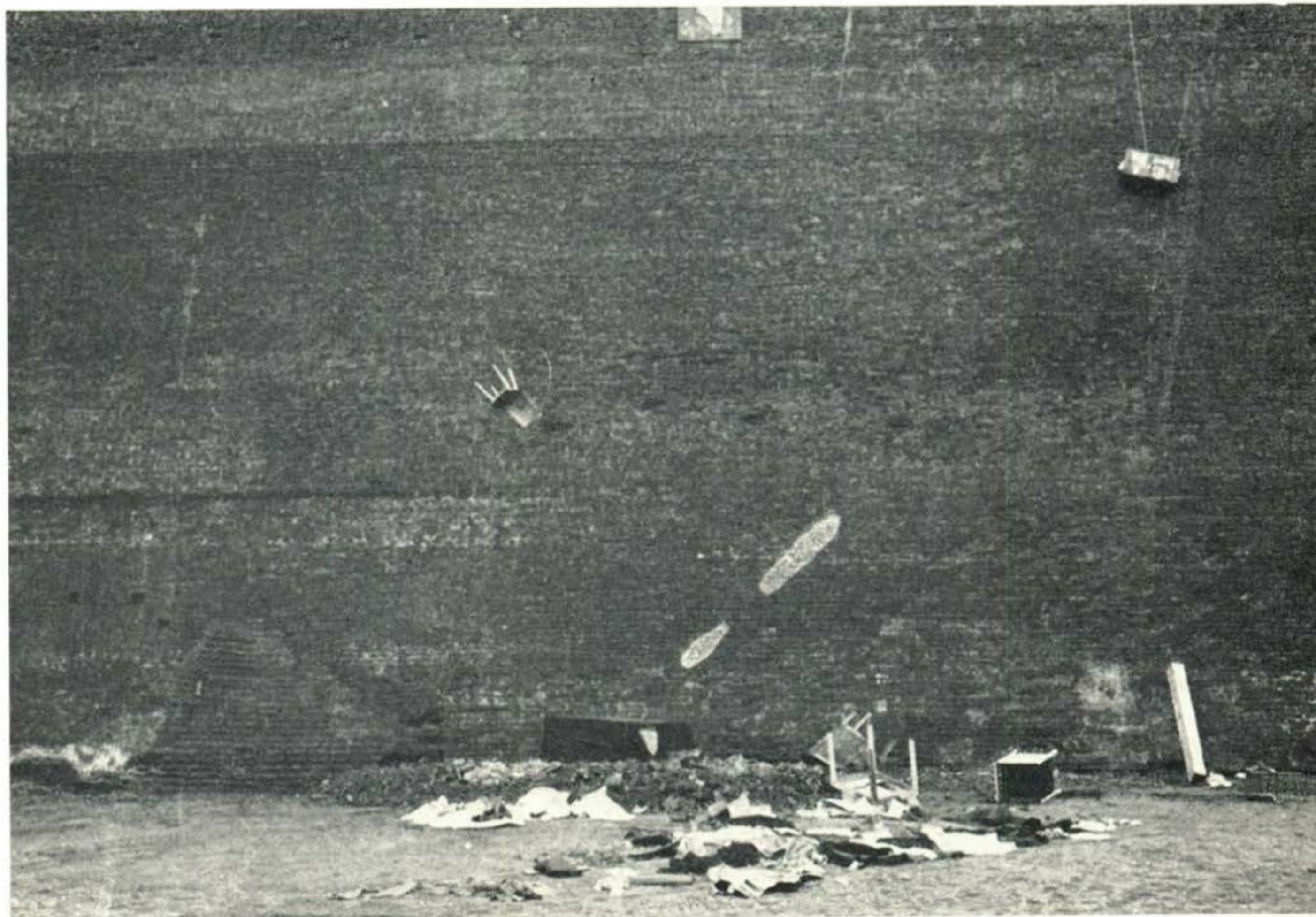
The event continued at 6 p.m. that evening, at Tram No. 6 terminus (Julda Fulda Park), where instructions, some sausages, a loaf and a ball were attached to a tree. The ball was thrown into the river that runs through the park, and then brought into the bank by throwing stones. Everybody played football. After the game they made a fire, roasted the sausages, and sang songs.

At 9 p.m. they went home.



Soldiers' game—a self-explanatory Happening played out in a wood on the outskirts of Prague

The illustrations on this page relate to *Manifestation of August 2nd*, described on the facing page

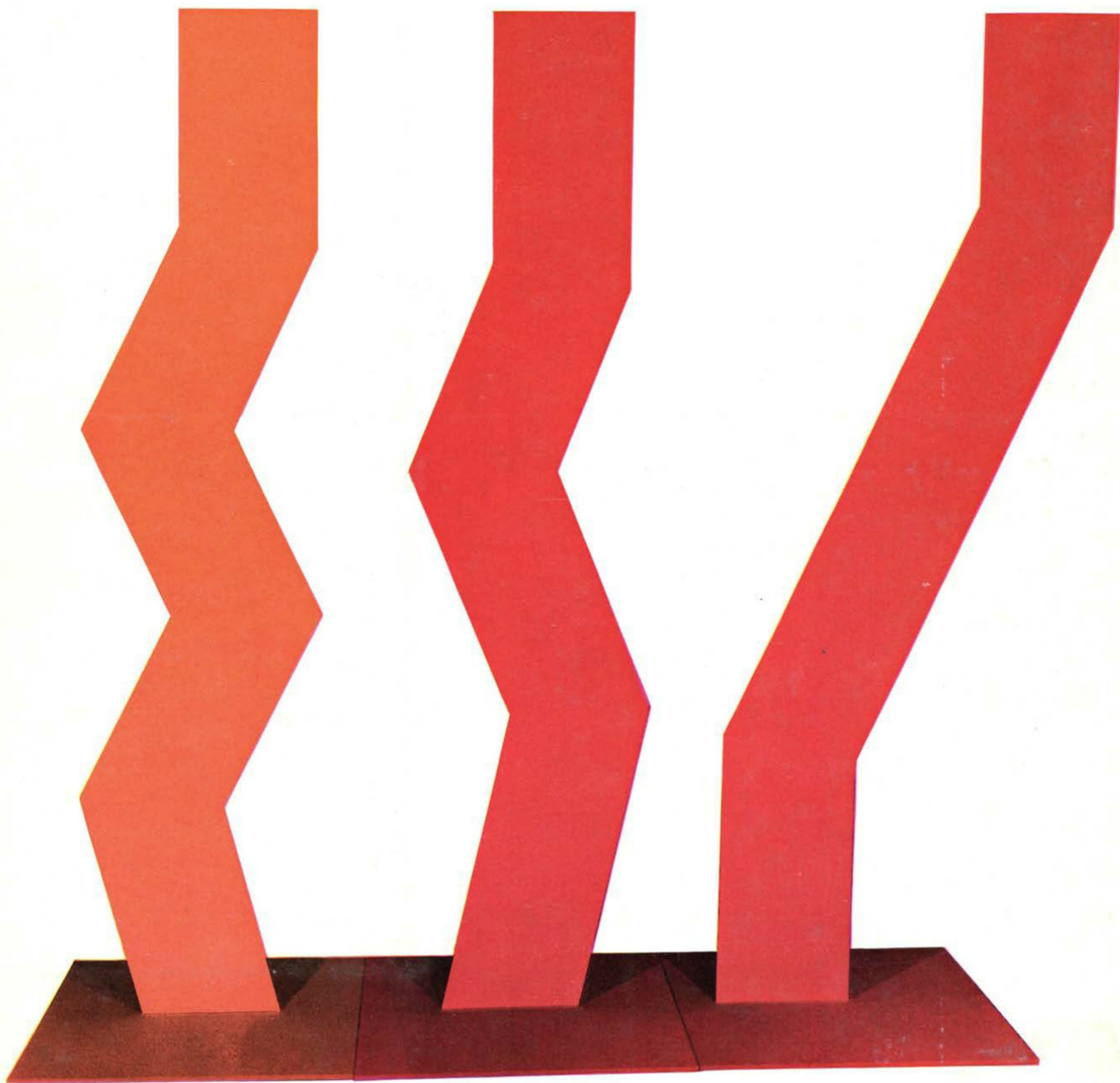


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