

Skica za meandar
crtež, olovka na papiru, 1960.

JULIJE KNIFER

Crteži 1959-1979.

Studio GSU

21. 1 — 7. 2 1980.

Julije Knifer rođen je 23. 4. 1924. u Osijeku. Završio Akademiju likovnih umjetnosti u Zagrebu.

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CRTEŽI JULIJA KNIFERA

Prije dvadeset godina, točnije, 1959/60, nastaju prvi »meandri« Julija Knifera. Sâm autor najbolje objašnjava to vrijeme početaka rada na meandru kad kaže da je, »motiviran idejom stvaranja anti-slike, krenuo metodom radikalnog reduciranja sredstava«. U čemu se očitovala ta krajnja redukcija? Očitovala se prije svega u odbacivanju svih aluzija na predmetni svijet isto koliko i iluzionističkih natruha plastičkog jezika.

Izbor boja sveden je na dvije — crnu i bijelu — kojima je moguće izraziti krajnje kontraste, a svođenjem na sistem meandra ostvareni su krajnje mogući ritmovi horizontala i vertikala. Taj, prije dvadeset godina započet i riješen problem, Knifer nije napuštao. Štoviše, čitavo je njegovo stvaralaštvo obilježeno upravo znakom meandra. Stotine i tisuće minimalno različitih varijanti jedne iste formule čine tako umjetnički opus ovog slikara. Ta, za nj plodonosna, formula sadrži u sebi krajnje suprotnosti: crno i bijelo i minimum su i maksimum isto kao i horizontalno-vertikalni poredak članaka meandra.

Promatrajući s današnje distance Kniferove početke, nužno nam se nameće pitanje ishodišta ideje o »stvaranju anti-slike«. S druge na strane zanima kontinuitet rada, točnije; kontinuirano istraživanje minimalnih varijanti jedne iste ideje — meandra.

Što se ishodišta tiče, nerijetko se Kniferovo djelo promatralo u kontekstu postsliskarske apstrakcije isto koliko i »novih tendencija« na kojima izlaže od samog početka, 1961. godine. Međutim, autorove bilješke, a isto tako i brojni crteži, pokazuju da je riječ o sasvim individualnom idejnom zrenju. Nadalje, pripadanje umjetničkoj grupi »Gorgona«, koja počinje djelovati u

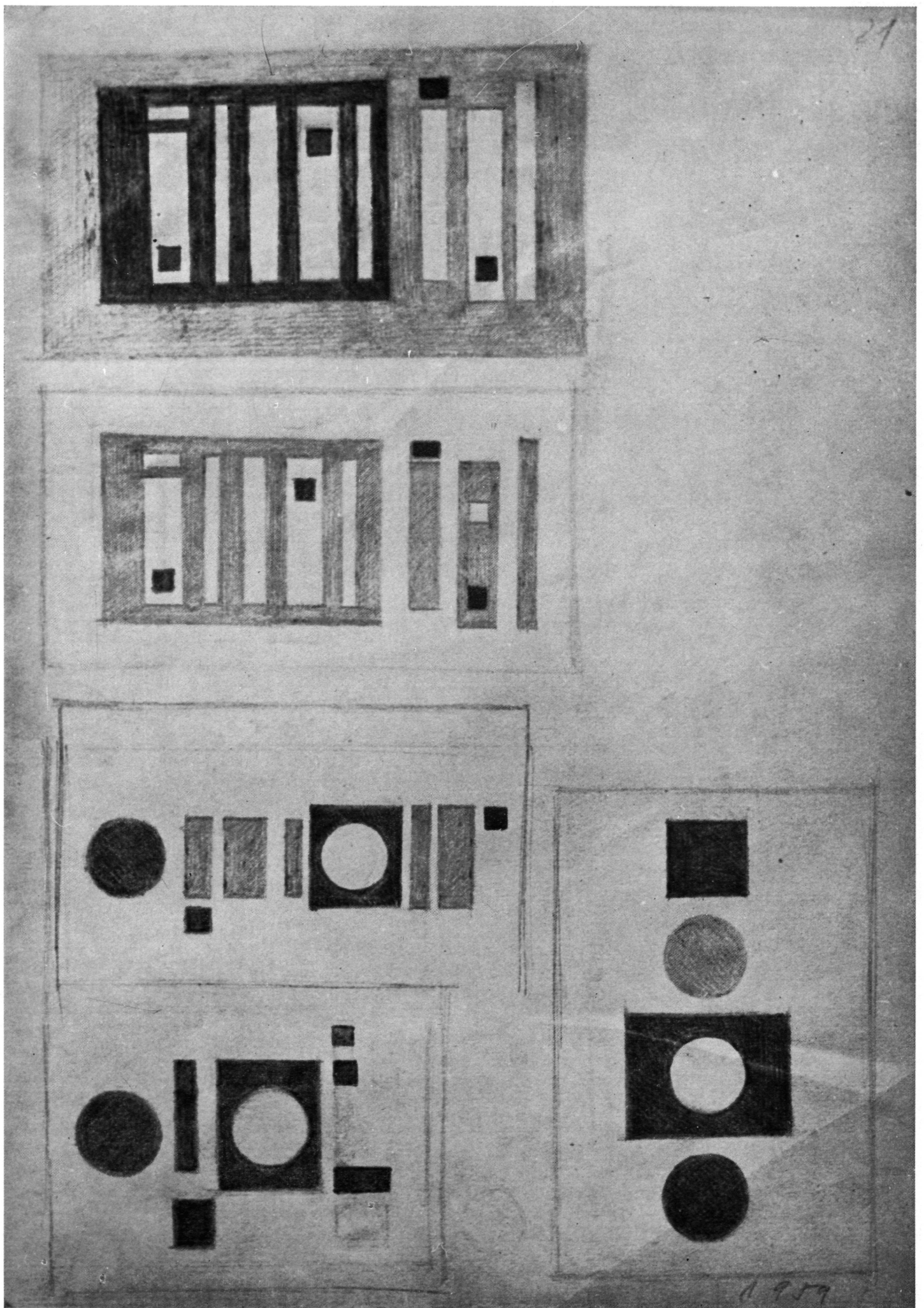
JULIJE KNIFER'S DRAWINGS

Twenty years ago, that is in 1959/60 Julije Knifer made his first »meanders«. The best explanation of that beginning comes from the artist himself, who states: »... motivated by the idea of creating an anti-picture, I adopted the method of radically reducing the medium«. What did the reduction consist in? It consisted first of all in discarding all the allusions to the world of objects and all the illusionistic elements of the plastic language. The range of colours was reduced to two — black and white — which can express extreme contrasts, while the meander system opened the possibility of endless variations of the rhythm of horizontals and verticals.

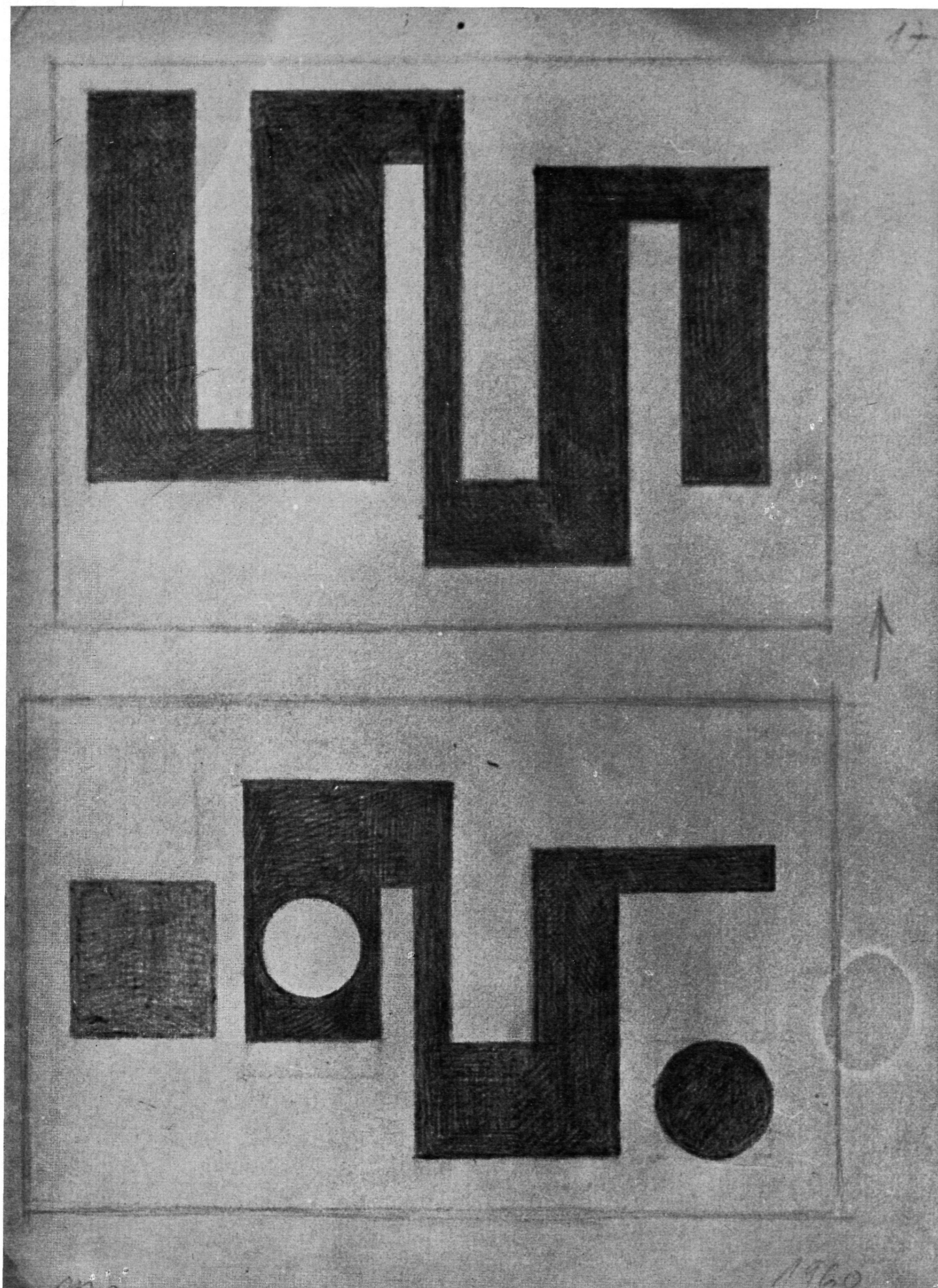
Knifer has been tackling this subject ever since. What is more, all his work is marked by the meander. He has produced hundreds and thousands of slightly different variants of the same formula. There are two ultimate extremes in the formula which has proved so fruitful for Knifer: black and white are both the minimum and the maximum in the same way as is the horizontal-vertical order of the paths in the meander.

Looking at Knifer's beginnings from the distance of the present day we cannot help wondering about where the idea of »creating the anti-picture« started. On the other hand we are interested in the continuity of his work, i.e. the continuous exploration of the minimal variants of one and the same idea — the meander.

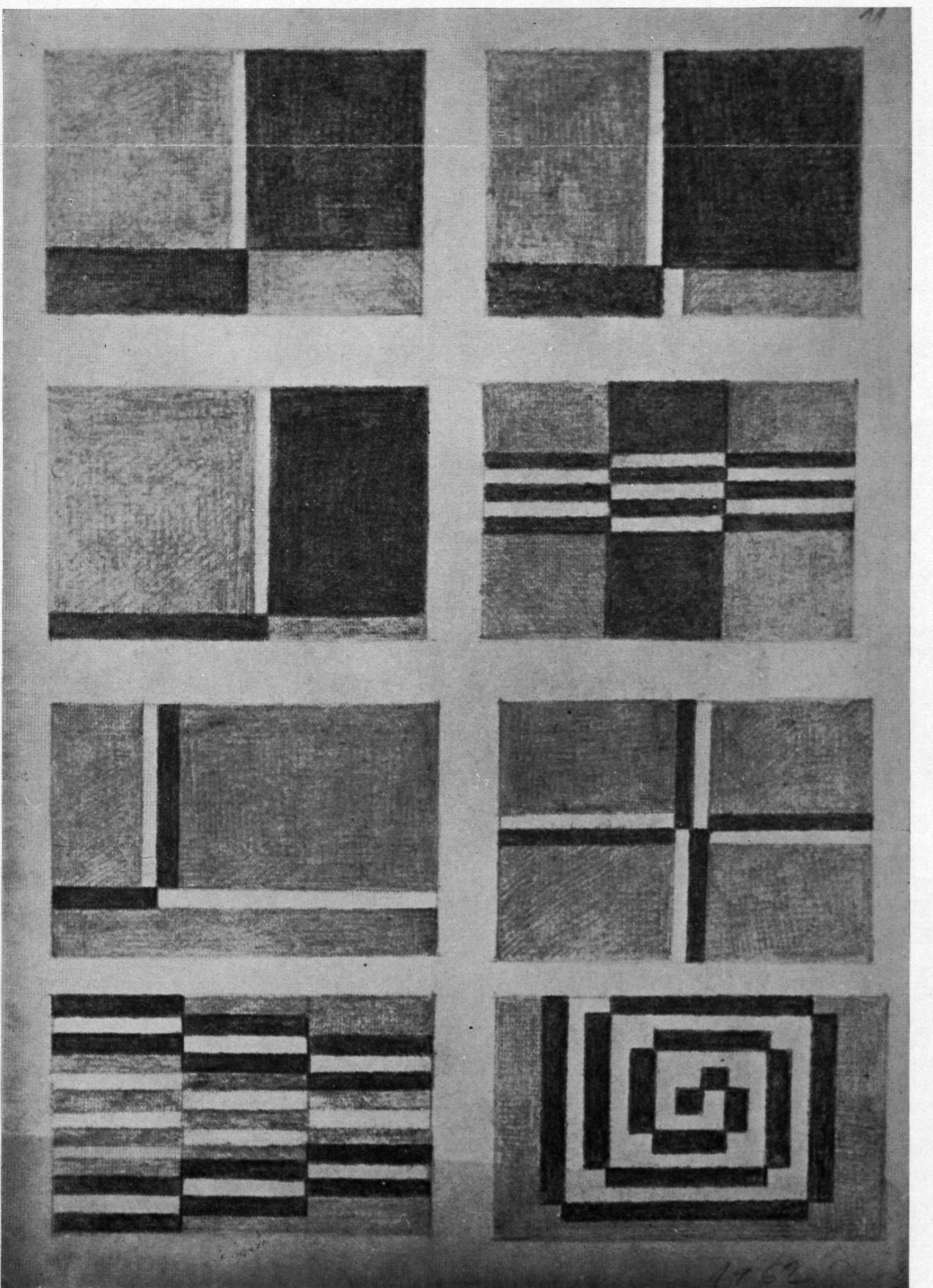
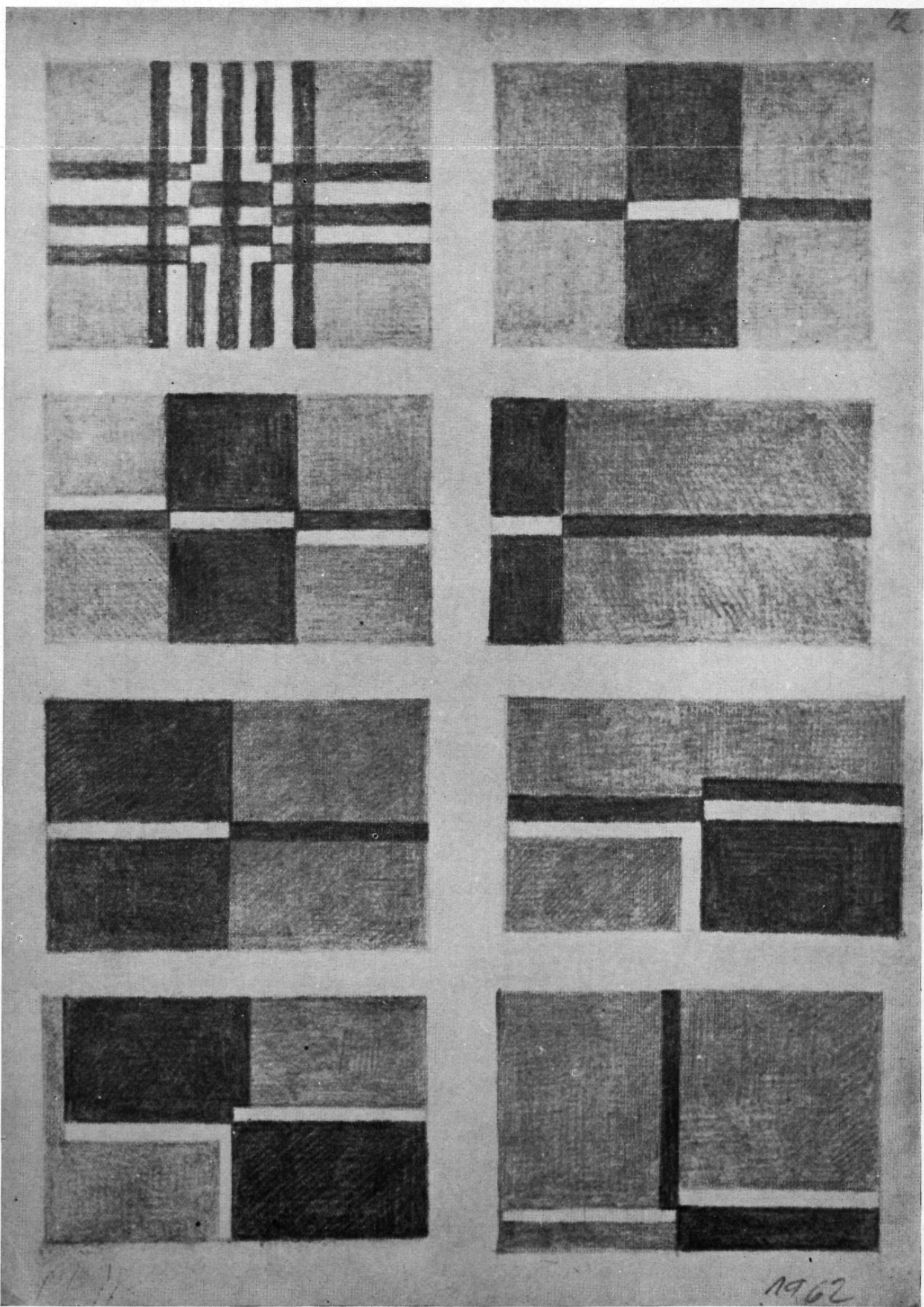
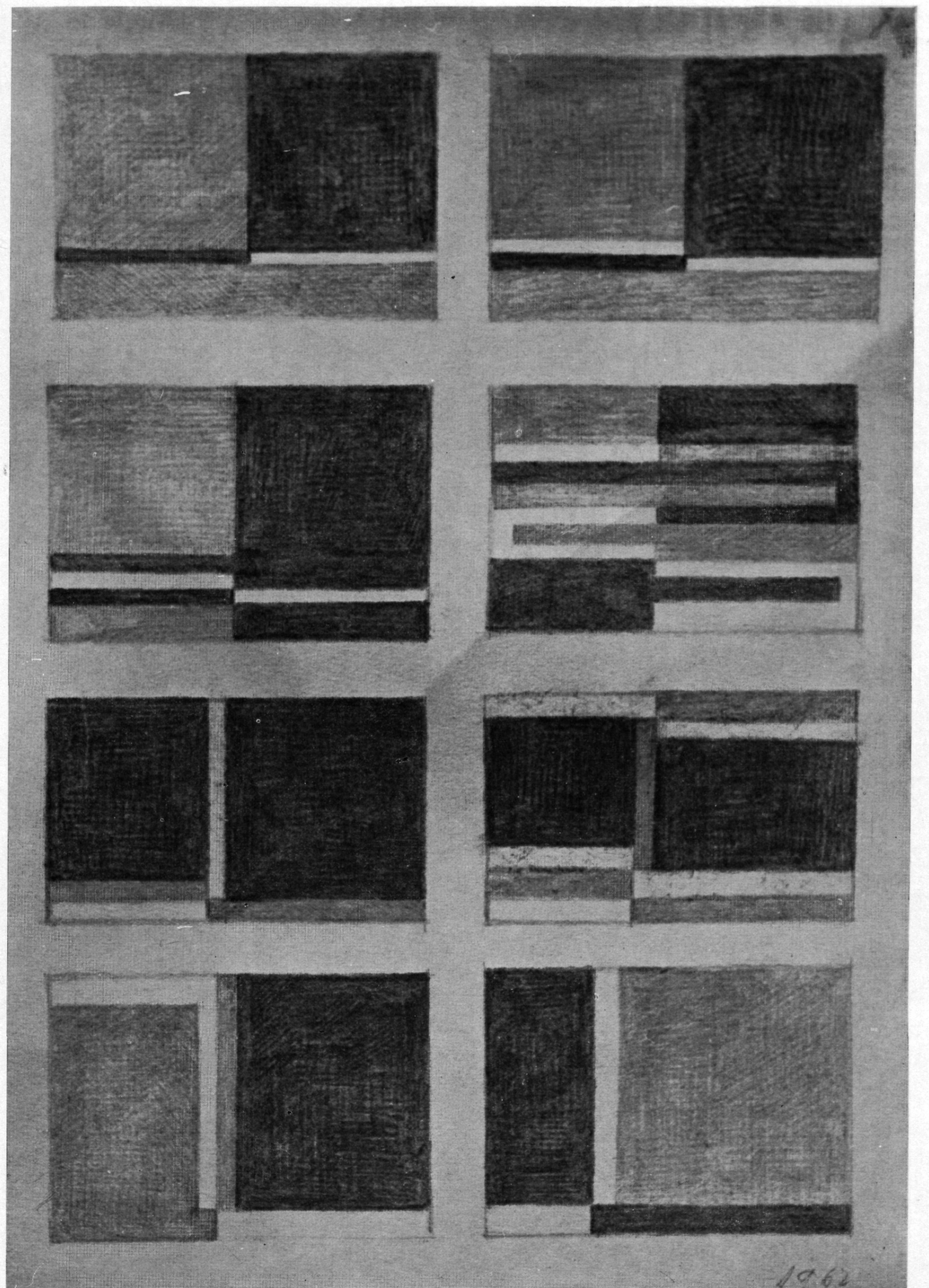
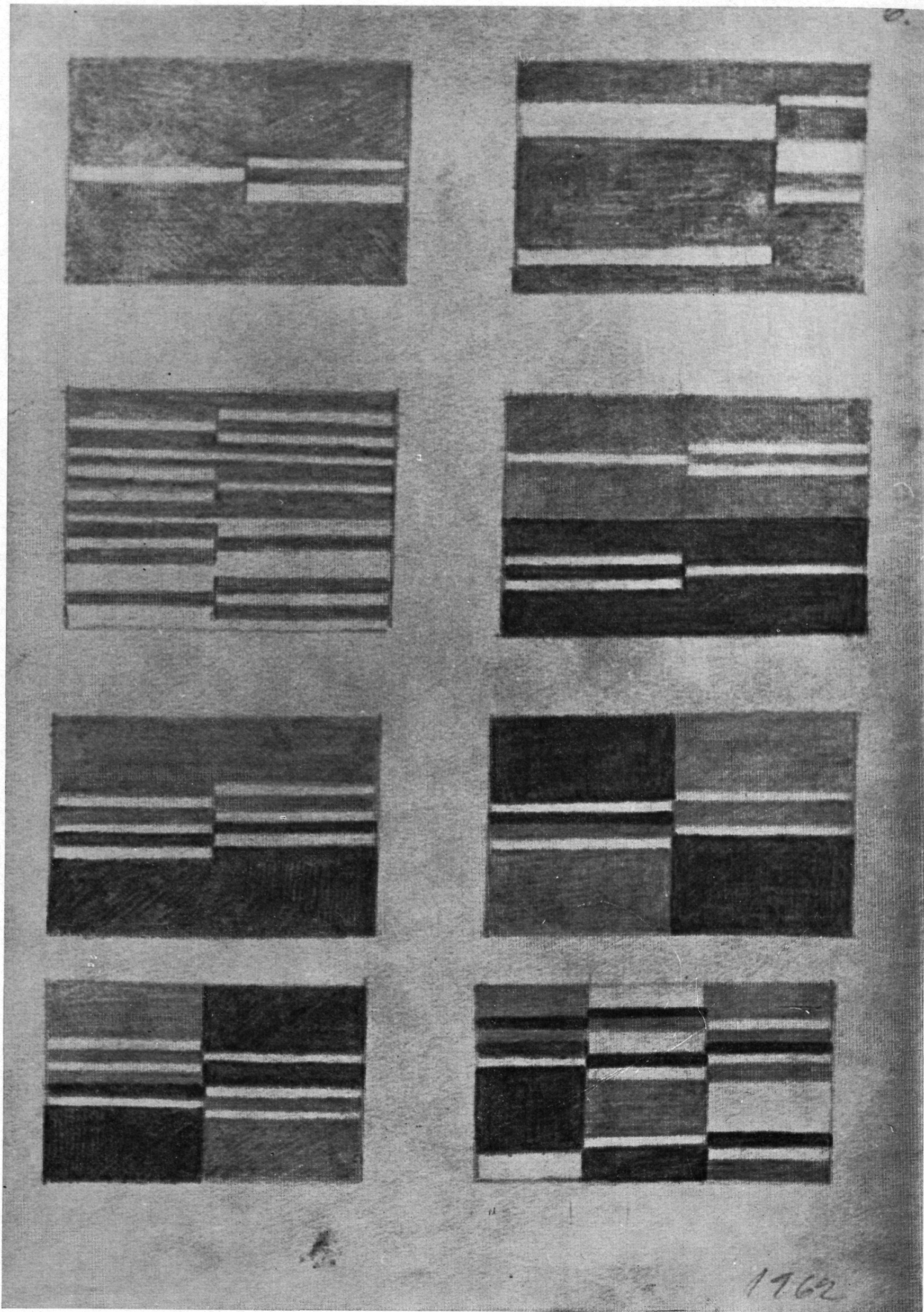
As for the starting point, Knifer's work has often been viewed in the context of post-painterly abstraction as well as of the »New Tendencies« at which he exhibited from the very beginning in 1961. However, Knifer's notes and his numerous drawings show that this is a development all his own. Furthermore, his participation in the »Gorgona« group, whose activity



Skice
crteži, olovka na papiru, 1959.



Meandar br. 1
crtež, olovka na papiru. 1960.



Strip
crteži, olovka na papiru, 1962.

julije knifer

Crteži 1959-1979

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galerija suvremene umjetnosti

studio

Zagreb, Katarinin trg 2

isto vrijeme kada nastaju prvi meandri, govori nam još više o vremenu i značenju ranih Kniferovih slika. Jedan gorgonaški zapis Josipa Vaništa iz 1961./62. godine na najeksplicitniji način objašnjava intelektualne i umjetničke nazore koje je dijelio i Julije Knifer.

»Težnja spram jednostavnijeg slikanja.

Interesovanje za oskudnost.

Izbjegavati i mali stepen iluzionizma.

Veoma izgrađen izgled: negacija slikarskog prilaženja.

(...)

Rukopis je nepotreban.«

Kada danas čitamo tu Vaništinu tako jezgrovito izrečenu doktrinu, iza sebe imamo također i iskustva novije umjetničke prakse, tako konceptualne umjetnosti i primarnog slikarstva, pa značenje spomenutih rečenica uoprima nove vrijednosti. Isto tako i Kniferovo sistematsko i uporno dvadesetogodišnje ispitivanje mogućnosti meandra pokazuje se u novome svjetlu. Navodimo sve to zbog toga što želimo istaknuti čvrstoću i samostalnost Kniferova izbora. Dovodjenje njegovoga djela u blizinu svih mogućih umjetničkih pravaca koji su mu prethodili, kao i onih koji su zajedno s njim stasali, može nas odvesti samo na stranputicu. Ono nas u svakom slučaju udaljuje od samog djela. A približiti se antislukama meandra možda je najbolje upoznavanjem s crtežima koji su, isprva, bili i skice za slike da bi kasnije postali sami sebi svrhom. Drugim riječima, otčitatavajući postupne mijene u rasporedu pravokutnih polja i krugova na crtežima iz 1958. i 1959. približavamo se sistemu meandra. Ti elementi ispune isprva tvore nešto slobodniji ritam, a prostor je zgusnut, plošan, nerijetko gotovo fluidan. Usitnjeni i međusobno dosta razmaknuti pravokutnici polako se počinju grupirati u skupine koje tvore istegnutu shemu okomito-vodoravog rastera. Time se ispuna čvršće usuglašava s okvirom, a ujednačena metrika postaje osnovno ritmičko pravilo. Meandar se tako rađa postupno — eliminacijom svega »suvišnog« unutar formata. A »suvišni« su oni elementi koji remete pravilnost ritma, koji u okomito-vodoravni poredak unose zabunu, koji prostor čine višeznačnim. U skicama za slike s bijelom podlogom iz 1961. godine autor naoko odstupa od meandarske sheme, a zaokuplja ga problem crnih elemenata na bijeloj podlozi, elemenata koji razgrađuju plošni prostor slike i čine ga na pojedinim primjerima krajnje otvorenim. Podloga se, naime, uvlači u usjekline crnih ravnih linija čineći tako odnos dvaju planova napetim: svijetla se polja načas doimaju veoma duboko, načas su opet sasvim približena oštrim crnim trakama. Ovdje je, kao malo gdje, izoštrena suprotnost punog i praznog — punog crnog i prazne bjeline. Gusto crnilo tuša poprima čvrstoću punih geometriziranih volumena koji određuju ritam unutar bijelog neomeđenog prostora podloge.

Punoća i težina tamnih dijelova uočljiva je još više na nekoliko malih crteža kemijskom olovkom iz 1962. Siljasti usjeci bijelih polja naglašavaju tjelesnost tamnih dijelova, ali dvije skice s istog lista sa po četiri svijetla pravokutnika na tamnoj podlozi određuju potpuno drukčije značenje tamnog i svijetlog. Ovdje je tamno podloga, a bijela su polja figure na njoj koje naznačuju smjer i ritam pokreta.

Iste godine (1962) Knifer radi brojne crteže olovkom na jednakom formatu papira. Unutar svakog formata nalazi se po osam položenih pravokutnika s crnim, bijelim i sivim poljima. Promatrajući svaki list zasebno, gotovo je moguće otčitati pravu likovnu »priču«: Bijelo, crno i sivo međusobno izmjenjuju zapremninu ispune, mijenjajući također i mjesto u kadru. Tako oni poprimaju i drukčija plastička, psihološka i emocionalna značenja.

Crno nije uvijek podjednako »teško«, a bijelo »lagano«. Drugim riječima, pažljivim variranjem gotovo istih elemenata ispune nastaju uvijek drukčiji konteksti, a značenje svakoga pojedinog dijela ovisi prije svega o cjelini. Ovi i niz drugih crteža nastali su u kontinuiranom vremenskom slijedu — iz dana u dan, pa ih možemo shvatiti kao svojevrsan slikarski dnevnik.

Takav slikarski dnevnik, pisan isključivo likovnim jezikom, nalazimo u cijelom Kniferovu stvaralaštvu. Iz dana u dan on bilježi u pravokutnim poljima bezbrojne varijante meandarskih znakova. Te bismo »zapise« mogli shvatiti i kao projekte za slike i kao samostalno djelo. Međutim, pravo njihovo značenje ipak leži u cjelini, u međusobnoj ovisnosti.

Promatrani tako, oni jasnije i jezgrovitije ističu minimalne razlike, a najveća vrijednost Kniferova djela i jest u minimalnim, ali likovno značajnim razlikama jedne iste formule.

Godine 1977. autor počinje intenzivno raditi djela, meandre, olovkom na papiru. Ovaj put su to potpuno definirana djela, i nemoguće ih je zamisliti u drugom mediju. Umjetnik, naime, bezbrojnim slojevima grafita oblikuje crne meandre, ili podloge bijelim meandrima do potpune zasićenosti. Isprva je radio samo olovkom tipa F, a različitost je crnila umnogome ovisna o različitoj hrapavosti podloge. Nekada je papir hrapaviji, nekada gladi, pa samim tim ni crno nije podjednako gusto. Koliko je na ranijim djelima potez bio ugušen, stopljen i urastao u slikano polje, toliko su i ovdje tragovi olovke gotovo nevidljivi. Na tim novim crtežima autor tako ističe na dvostruk način minimalne razlike krajnje reduciranih oblika: razlike u obliku, veličini i količini bijelog i crnog, s jedne strane, te razlike u gustoći crnoga, s druge. Upravo takva, dakle još stroža, provedba one krajnje moguće zgusnutosti djela, koju je Julije Knifer konceptijski naznačio 1959/60, daje i novo značenje njegovu radu.

Zvonko Maković

began at the time when Knifer produced his first meanders, is another indicator of the time and meaning of his early drawings. A text Josip Vaništa wrote in 1961/62 about Gorgona's programme explains very clearly the intellectual and artistic ideas that Knifer also shared.

»A tendency towards more simplicity in painting.

An interest in sparseness.

Avoid even the slightest degree of illusionism.

A firmly defined attitude: the negation of a painterly approach.

(...)

Handwriting is unnecessary.«

When we read Vaništa's succinctly expressed doctrine now, we have behind us the experience of the more recent art practice, conceptual art and primary painting and his sentences acquire a new significance. By the same token, Knifer's systematic and persistent investigation into the possibilities of the meander appears in a new light. We are quoting all this in order to emphasise the stability and independence of Knifer's choice. An attempt to relate his work to the various movements in art that preceded it or to those that developed simultaneously with it, would only lead us astray. It would certainly not bring us any closer to the work itself. Perhaps the best way of getting closer to the anti-paintings of the meander is through studying the drawings that started as sketches for the paintings and subsequently became an end in themselves. In other words, by following the gradual changes in the distribution of the rectangular fields and circles in the drawings from 1958 and 1959 we are approaching the meander system.

These elements form at first a free rhythm and the space is condensed, flat and often almost fluid. The small and farbetween rectangles gradually begin to group into clusters, forming an elongated pattern in a vertical-horizontal direction. Thus the filling becomes more co-ordinated with the frame and the balanced metrics the basic rhythmic rule. And this gradually leads to the meander — in an elimination of all that is »superfluous« within the format. The »superfluous« elements include all those that disturb the regularity of the rhythm, produce confusion in the horizontal-vertical order and polysemy in the space. In the sketches for the paintings on a white ground made in 1961 the artist seemingly deviates from the meander pattern and becomes preoccupied with the problem of black elements on the white ground, elements that break the surface of the painting and make it maximally open in some paintings. The ground gets into the cuttings of the straight black lines and produces tension in the relation between the two plans: the light fields seem very deep at times and at times are brought very close to the sharp black stripes. The artist has succeeded in emphasising to the utmost the contrast between the full and the empty — the full black and the empty white. The dense blackness of Indian ink acquires the firmness of full geometrized volumes that determine the rhythm within the unlimited white space of the ground.

The fullness and weight of the dark parts is even more conspicuous in several small drawings in ballpoint made in 1962. The sharp cuts of the white fields emphasise the materiality of the dark parts, but the two sketches on the same sheet, each with four light rectangles on dark ground, define a very different meaning of the light and the dark. Here the ground is black and the white fields are figures upon it that determine the direction and rhythm of the movement.

In the same year (1962) Knifer made numerous pencil drawings on the same format. Each format contains eight rectangles with black, white and grey fields. Looking at each sheet separately it is almost possible to read a visual »story«: white, black and grey alternate in filling the fields, changing at the same time their position in the drawing. In this way they also take on different plastic, psychological and emotional meanings. Black is not always equally »heavy« nor is white equally »light«. In other words, by carefully varying the same elements different contexts are created, the meaning of each part depending on the whole.

These, and a number of other drawings have been produced continuously every day and may therefore be interpreted as a unique painter's diary. This kind of diary, expressed only in visual language, is present in all of Knifer's work. Every day he draws endless variants of meander signs in rectangular fields. These recordings can be interpreted either as sketches for paintings or as independent works. However, their true meaning lies in the whole, in mutual dependence. Viewed in this way they bring out more clearly and succinctly the minimal differences and the greatest value of Knifer's work lies in minimal but significant differences of the same formula.

In 1977 Knifer concentrated on drawing meanders in pencil on paper. These are independent works, inconceivable in any other medium. He shapes black or white meanders by drawing countless layers in pencil until complete saturation. Initially he used only type F pencils, and the difference in the shades of black depends largely on the varying smoothness of the ground. In his earlier paintings the brush is subdued, and blends with the painted surface; in the later drawings the traces of the pencil are also almost invisible. In this way the artist emphasises doubly the minimal differences between the highly reduced forms: differences in the shape, size and quantity of white and black on the one hand, and the difference in the thickness of black on the other. It is this rigorous adherence to the principle of maximal density of the work, adopted by Knifer in 1959/60, that gives a new meaning to his work.

Zvonko Maković.

Urednik kataloga: Marijan Susovski
Izdaje Galerija suvremene umjetnosti

TISAK: GZH, Zagreb