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The Turning Point

1992 brought about a decisive turning point for *Ádám Gáll*. He had been born in 1953 and graduated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest in 1978, but after that, apart from teaching, he wrote and painted only for himself, cutting himself off from the art scene and market. He would not exhibit, would not try to eke out a living by selling his paintings; nevertheless, he had worked tirelessly; beginning anew time after time, he had searched for his own painterly idiom until he had reached a standard that met his own internal requirements; and, having given up teaching, he began putting on shows to present his work to the world.

These pictures are thus the upshot of the turning point, showing that a creative period has come to its final conclusion, and that something new has begun; something new that is the sole property of its creator, and that carries the germs of what is going to unfold in the future. The change is clear from even the titles, the way they ensue from one another. It seems that a tendency is evolving in *Gáll* which leads from the falling apart of initial unity to re-organisation: from the elimination of the elements of traditional pictorialness to new foundations: *Memory Garden*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Shifts*, *The Back*, *Purifying Image*, *Definitions*, *From the Other Side*, and *Re-nativity*.

So, this exhibition displays works from a creative period that has closed, kaleidoscopically summarising the foregoing, and leading to new definitions, new beginnings, and going beyond the stations of the artist seeking his own way of depicting men, figures, types, and landscapes – the landscape of the soul.

Still, if we take a more thorough look at these new works, we notice that each one of them is a quest for a form, for a mode of expression of what lives in the innermost realm of our being. Accordingly, I will now first attempt to outline the inner meaning of this quest; second, I will demonstrate what consequences the artist arrived at in his first creative period on the basis of his drawing in chalk entitled *Shifts*; and how he produced consistent formulations of these in *Definitions I-III*, which, in *Re-nativity*, opened the way to the series of wall pictures.

I will try to grasp all this in my own words and in words borrowed from the poems of *Ádám Gáll*, and I hope that, in talking of the visible, I will not lose the inner force that holds things together, that, though invisible, defines the world of phenomena by being present. For the essential in the eyes of *Ádám Gáll* is what is particularly our own; that which we can experience if we follow our fears and anxieties and have no more chance of taking stock of

everything through our conscious. At such a moment, we might come to sense that there is a place in our innermost being where everything coincides; a place which is both distant and close, both nothing and everything. Or, as Ádán Gáll in a poem of his puts it:

“Possibly, ... the fear-corners are not perpendicular
possibly the endless scream-rails are not parallel,
possibly the rigid geometry of sense will mould itself to our bodies
and then we shall become the circle. Possibly.”

We shall become the circle, so says Gáll in his poem *Psychopolis*. And this “possibly” means more than the expression of our non-knowledge; it is perhaps an opportunity, a desire, a hope, a non-knowledge in its hopeful perspectives, in its infinitude, in its out-stretched freedom as the only thing to exist is that which is one and endless; as the only thing to live in us is that which we have the greatest certainty about in our non-knowledge. This is a space where we have nothing left but silence and, in spite of all, speech, again and again, saying “not this way, nor that way, and not another way either”, “more, infinitely more than” or “perhaps.”

It is perhaps the circle, this mediaeval mystic sign that is one and all, the one point and the infinitude of points, from which we can grasp the artistic efforts of Ádám Gáll, which his painting seeks to point to. The result of these attempts is that everything has to be begun all over again; that emptiness, the final point, darkness and nothingness, open up again and again; that what befalls on us in the boundless night is the only thing that can give birth to something more – perhaps all. Ádám Gáll is a painter who seeks this inner circle, persistently starting anew repeatedly.

In this exhibition, we see two ways: the way of seeking perfection and a way which consistently and radically turns away from seeking perfection, and thus achieves more consistent and precise definitions simply because it is beyond usual craftsmanship. The first way is thus that of craftsmanship, which reaches a point where skill and know-how fall flat, and do so necessarily because the more precise the drawing, the line, the colouration, the more freedom is fettered, the more the no-longer-graspable and the one-yet-whole are excluded. If we seriously pay attention, we can have a hunch of this; and we can associate them with the stylistic elements of decay, fragmentation, mediaeval lighting: the duality of light arising from the depths and the darkness in the depth of things.

This becomes fully graspable in *Shifts*: we have a fragmented light circle on the right and light radiating from the depths in the foreground. The two dark spots right on the border of the white red and the white blue conjure up the dual condition of human existence: a face at the

top, coming from the darkness, dissolves into the outline drawing of a renaissance portrait before it turns to the viewer and immerses in the extinguished colours of the picture. And down below, we have the other face welcoming us: eyes closed, it is engrossed in itself, rendering the eternal duality of presence and absence, present and past palpable.

Living and being conscious in the vertical and horizontal bounds of – to refer to Gáll’s poem, too – the “polis” we ourselves seek the circle and hope for a world better to live in. But this can never be perfectly and finally achieved as we ourselves cannot succeed in our own desire to perfection and eternity; nevertheless, to use the expression of the artist, “one begins to forge hope out of hopelessness” in the here-and-now, in the midst of his constraints.

Moreover, the painter refers this hopelessness not only to his own life, being as it is on the way to the inner circle, but to the general crisis we are in, and which offers no hope to us, but, in spite of all, arouses our hopes.

The course the artist took to present man, this characteristically mediaeval course, has now come to an end. It has reached its final point, the limits of craftsmanship and representation. The new pictures are different: they lack the quest for human likeness, as I am inclined to call it due to my own work. With *Unbound, From the Other Side, Wait, and Everyman*, something new has begun – objectlessness.

The fault line is *Definitions*: it once again has shaping and revocation in one – only far more radically, without the soft cover of seeming wealth. There is no longer anything for the sake of appearances. What we have here is what there is – explosively and finally: the radical revocation of all exact shaping and precise definition. It is hopelessness and hope simultaneously. One is tempted to quote Schiller that real greatness is manifest in its fall. Point zero. And then, the line goes through point zero to become a circle, to encompass and bring out everything bound in the horizontal and the vertical, and to open a window on to the innermost circle. I have Paul Celan’s meridian on my mind: the line that runs through the greatest cold and the greatest heat – this is what we have here as the black and the white, the red and the blue lines; and where they meet, there is concentration, and signs come into being. In the pictures *Ádám Gáll* paints today, there is only abstraction left in order that, through our empathy, everything can be anew: a point and an infinite circle – beyond our mundane knowledge. Let us quote Gáll again:

“Our evenings our tales have been broken
dark night fell through our windows
– our knowledge is a chair a corner
Mouse eyes of hope pierced in twilight

guard the emptily gaping distances.”

Then, after all and in spite of all, the artist formulates a new hope: following the pictures he kept in white and grey, which were the transition, he shapes the walls of meditation. Material, colour and form acquire new meanings where we submerge with the eyes of our minds closed, and where we re-emerge, stepping across and leaving behind the walls of our confinement, and where “we shall become the circle. Possibly.”

(Galerie Egg, Rheineck, 11 December, 1992)