



PÉCS WORKSHOP

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THE MAYOR GALLERY

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Three Times Ten (Days) The Enamel Works in the Activity of the Pécs Workshop (1969–1971)

Róna Kopeczky

The contemporary artistic potentials of enamel were (re)propelled to international attention at the end of 2016, when László Moholy-Nagy's *EM 1 Telephonbild* (Telephone Picture) was auctioned at a record price and was integrated into the collection of MoMA in New York. Moholy-Nagy created the piece in 1923, a few years after leaving Hungary. Although it is not proven that the idea of using the medium was born before he left, the geometric abstract, constructivist, experimental line, typical of the European avant-garde spirit of the 1920s, that he represented was set to persist in the activity of the Pécs Workshop (1969–1980), composed of Ferenc Ficzek (1947–1987), Károly Hopp-Halász (1946–2016), Károly Kismányoky (1943–2018), Sándor Pinczehelyi (1946), and Kálmán Szijártó (1946).

Enamel certainly is an unusual material that despite being regularly used by major artists and architects in the course of the 1950s and 1960s – just to mention György Kepes designing the exterior frieze of the Youth Library in Fitchburg, Massachusetts (1950), Le Corbusier enamelling the doors of his Notre Dame du Haut chapel in Ronchamp (1955) and his Palace of Assembly in Chandigarh, India (completed in 1963), or Joan Miró commissioned by UNESCO to realise a large enamel piece for its Paris headquarters (1958) – remained undervalued for different reasons that reach far beyond simple technical challenges. Supposedly blurring the sharp line between applied art, fine art, and architecture, its prevailing decorative reception also supplanted more complex theories of permeability between media and disciplines over time, such as the Bauhaus endeavour to introduce art into people's daily lives using industrial means or Victor Vasarely's *Colourful City*, a concept that was already known to the Pécs Workshop members in the middle of the 1960s.



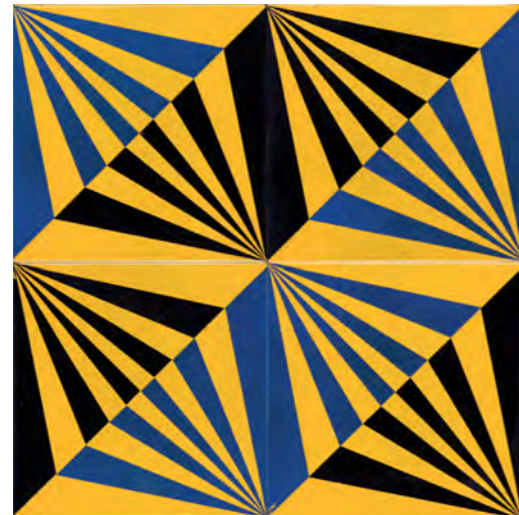
Károly Kismányoky, Sándor Pinczehelyi, Ferenc Lantos, Mária Koppány, Csilla Csutor, Ferenc Ficzek, József Benes, and Kálmán Szijártó at the Country House of Mecseknyásd
photo by Katalin Nádor

The program of the Bonyhád enamel workshop represented a strikingly progressive spirit in a communist country favouring socialist realism as its prevailing aesthetical ideology: "The colony sets itself the goal to attain the unity of architecture and the fine arts. It is our conviction that panel painting is only able to continuously emit radiating strength if it transforms in its function and organically changes the daily environment of man by becoming an organic part of buildings, squares, and streets built by man. ... The workshop wishes to give the possibility to artists representing a large spectrum of styles to deal with artistic questions related to architecture in systematic and manifold ways. The experiments – primarily in the case of enamel works – naturally touch upon the questions of industrial reproducibility through industrial design. ... The works conceived during the workshop are therefore not made for museums and exhibitions in the first case, but are to be the companions, the direct attendants of people's daily life and work."¹

Even in this broader constellation and contextualisation, the artistic practice of the Pécs Workshop focusing on enamel remains unparalleled not only in its visual coherence and geometrically compact character, but also in the conceptual and mediatic transition it allowed the artists to achieve. In 1969, painter and teacher Ferenc Lantos introduced his younger students to the enamel factory in Bonyhád, next to the city of Pécs, and urged them to take advantage of the possibilities offered by enamel

as a medium in developing a new visual language based on his reductive geometric principles. This event is also considered by the artists themselves as the official start of the Pécs Workshop as a group; its members kept influencing and inspiring each other for over a decade. Each summer between 1969 and 1971, the young artists participated in 10-days workshops to indulge in exploring this material, creating geometrical compositions on the basis of their preparatory sketches by fusing industrial enamel to iron plates with the assistance of the factory workers.

"Ferenc Lantos selected us for the enamel workshop of 1969. It was Kamill Major who inspired the founding of the whole Bonyhád enamel workshop a year earlier. ... He had been visiting the place for years, so he knew it very well. In 1968, Kamill successfully invited Ferenc Lantos, Tihamér Gyarmathy, Gyula Pauer, Oszkár Papp, and others. This was the beginning, and they made very interesting things. An exhibition was held in the garden of today's Csontváry Museum. Gyula Pauer coated an assortment of ladles in different sizes welded together to make a plastic artwork. So this wasn't a flat plane, but welding, twisting, and this was how the whole story began. The factory must have introduced stricter rules for the 1969 workshop, and that was the end of welding and making waves. Kamill Major could already do anything he wanted, though. When we were there in '69, Kamill was there too; he would bring sheets discarded by the factory workers, coat them and put them in the oven. He worked totally independently. Lantos gave us strict instructions, and we were allotted eight sheets for the day. The firing master would help us with the firing at night until we learned to do it on our own. We really enjoyed it, and by this time the group basically held together."² We can read the above details in Károly Kismányoky's reminiscence of the beginnings of their activity in the enamel factory of Bonyhád, next to Pécs.



Károly Hopp-Halász: *Untitled (Radial Structure)*, 1968
enamelled steel plate,
4 pcs, 45 x 45 cm each
courtesy of acb Gallery



Károly Hopp-Halász: *Untitled (Radial Structure)*, 1968
enamelled steel plate,
4 pcs, 45 x 45 cm each
courtesy of acb Gallery

The first enamel pieces created by the young artists showed a clear continuity with their early graphic works and respective artistic endeavours, and mostly bore the logic of colourful drawings, with a dynamic, detailed, and saturated surface. Károly Hopp-Halász developed and focused on radial compositions constructed as thin intersecting webs or thickening rays arranged in the form of a palm leaf, which continued his studies of light and shadow on the basis of László Moholy-Nagy's writings and experimentations, the geometric reduction of natural forms as elaborated and taught by Ferenc Lantos, and was to become a recurring and characteristic element of visual investigation in his oeuvre. The visual influence of the Bauhaus master, László Moholy-Nagy, especially his *Light Space Modulator*, was also determining for Ferenc Ficzek in terms of construction, composition, light and shadow, refracting textures and surfaces, and use of colours. In both his preparatory sketches and enamels, Ficzek examined the possibilities offered by representation and spatial construction. Placing neon grids, geometric elements, perforated sheets as well as metalworking items³ on the surface, he was spraying them several times consecutively with printing ink, while rearranging them on the board during the process. The resulting montage-like graphic works obtained by overlapping layers of negative prints attested of an interest for texture and sensuality of the surface. Sándor Pinczehelyi systematically



Kálmán Szijártó:
Untitled, 1970
enamelled steel plate,
45 x 45 cm
courtesy of acb Gallery

examined the motif of two interlocked concave forms inspired to him by the art of former Abstraction-Création member, Ferenc Martyn, who played an important role in the Pécs art scene after coming back to Hungary. From the very start, Pinczehelyi stylised and simplified this motif to the extreme, then examined its chromatic potentials with the use of harsh tones confronting, completing, or cancelling each other. His early inclination towards graphic design proved to be useful in the work with enamel conceived in relation with architecture; his compositions were clear, geometrically simple, and chromatically spectacular. Kálmán Szijártó's first experimentations concerned the idea of interference and explored the possibilities of enamel to express this idea. With this, Szijártó joined Károly Kismányoky's endeavours, whom he closely collaborated with. This interest appears in small enamel pieces he realised in the first session of the enamel workshop, that combine the optical tricks resulting from lines of different colours or thickness interfering with geometrical forms and the different surfaces obtained with the help of spraying either colour powder directly on the surface, or through grids. The visual results were sensual and lyrical, as op art and geometrical elements mingle with sprayed or brushed fields of colours evoking movement, gesture, and dynamism.



Károly Kismányoky:
Moebius, 1970
enamelled steel plate,
10 pcs, 45 x 45 cm each
private collection

In contrast to the other participating artists, geometrical concerns are remarkably absent from Kismányoky's early and later enamel pieces; these works rather continue, coherently and systematically, his propensity for the idea of visual relations, influences, interference, interconnection, and movement and permeability expressed in his graphic works as early as 1968-1969. His experimenting and questioning nature led him to deny the fixed, finalised form of an artwork and to focus on the process rather than the result – the living activity rather than the lifeless product. Thus he challenged the constructivist and geometric legacy of Pécs – a city that can be regarded as the cradle of Hungarian Bauhaus – which also defined its architectural environment, artistic positions, and intellectual attitudes. Kismányoky, however, made no attempt to oppose these currents, instead placing emphasis on a different aspect of the Bauhaus by drawing on its spirit which was very open and supportive of versatility. " ... I imagined art as a constant movement that is never to be fixed. ...

I was constantly engaged with this problem: what can be fixed, what turns inanimate, and what stays alive continually. I think, a system that keeps running virtually forever consists of such components, each constantly seeking its place. What bothered me with others making works was that as soon as they created the work, it instantly died on the spot."⁴

While the other members of the Pécs Workshop developed an interest in the architectural potentials of enamel, their works gradually shifting towards more homogeneous, clear compositions and vivid colours which could prevail outdoors, in an urban environment, Károly Kismányoky kept being the restless motor of mediatic experimentation and permeability. The classical rigidity that Ferenc Lantos tried to impose as a *modus operandi* on the group was from the start a frame to break loose from rather than to evolve in for the young artist and the question of how geometry would behave in a non-built, living natural environment already made its way into Kismányoky's and Szijártó's discussions about art in the summer of 1970. Taking the basic signs that they would use for enamel works, in the natural environment, the two young artists, later followed by the other members, opened a phase of conceptual experimentation, of focusing on visual questions and problems related to structuralism and seriality in the activity of the Pécs Workshop. The collective spirit that developed in the group and the activities entailing common goals, tasks, and obstacles were indeed a determining drive, as Kálmán Szijártó recalls: "Especially during the print and enamel periods, we regularly used each other's motifs. It was obvious that we were using the same techniques and tools – screen and paper printing – and using the same paint. It is obvious from the works that we used each other's motifs, but, under these circumstances, that is natural. Nevertheless, you could still tell things apart, as we had different motives. ... When, around 1970, we began shooting these photos in the sand and stone mines, we were simply interested in what those elements that appeared on the enamel works and, till then, had functioned as architectural enamel would have to say – how they would sound, as it were – when placed in non-human, non-built environments."⁵

Károly Kismányoky and
Kálmán Szijártó: *Sand Quarry*
(*Staggered Alteration of Basic*
Elements), October 8, 1970,
photo documentation
Archives of the Pécs Workshop

Károly Kismányoky and
Kálmán Szijártó: *Pécs Stone*
Quarry. Behind Tettye, 1970,
photo documentation
Archives of the Pécs Workshop



This urge to leave the closed space of the studio and to head to the natural environment also introduced a diverse use of (new) media - such as photography, video, outdoor interventions, public art, and later performance - as well as a conceptual and critical thinking in the group.⁶ The period of their enamel activity also coincided with the participation of the Pécs Workshop in a series of exhibitions, marking the recognition of their artistic endeavours and connecting their provincially located activity to the avant-garde stream of the capital, Budapest. Their first appearance of the kind occurred in August 1971, when the renowned art historian László Beke, curator of several progressive art events in the 1970s, sent out a call to 28 artists - among them Ferenc Ficzek, Károly Kismányoky, Sándor Pinczehelyi, Kálmán Szijártó, and their professor Ferenc Lantos - to participate in an exhibition revolving around the concept of the work of art being the documentation of the imagination, the idea.⁷

While Károly Hopp-Halász did not take part in the project, Sándor Pinczehelyi, Kálmán Szijártó, and Károly Kismányoky responded with proposals that integrated an enamel work put in dynamic relation with the urban or natural environment, whereas Ferenc Ficzek applied with a program revolving around the idea of space created from plane to volume, revealing that his interest had turned from the outdoor back in the studio, where he began to explore the relation between the object/subject of representation and its image, as well as the representation of space and reality. Károly Kismányoky and Kálmán Szijártó both synthesised movement and interconnectedness in their respective projects by merging land art actions they had realised beforehand, i.e. the dynamic visual effect obtained by the encounter of geometry and nature, with preparatory sketches and enamel works which kept the memory of this action and encounter on a static surface. Not only did this reveal their intellectual approach, but also the visual process through which they synthesised the view of



Károly Kismányoky,
Kálmán Szijártó:
Rolling Yellow Stripe, 1971
photo documentation
Archives of the
Pécs Workshop



Károly Kismányoky and
Kálmán Szijártó: *Forest. Ordered-Disordered Signs, Signs Turning Disordinate*, September-October 1970, photo documentation Archives of the Pécs Workshop

horizontal, diagonal, and vertical stripes placed on trees - *Forest. Ordered-Disordered Signs, Signs Turning Disordinate* (1970) - or running down the hill - *Rolling Yellow Stripe* (1971) - into an abstract composition based on the same serial and structural principles but carried out as enamel pieces, thus effecting a medial transition.

Sándor Pinczehelyi, whose proposal was selected by László Beke for the Imagination project, created a series of photomontages in which he placed the cut-out dynamic form, a simple square rotated on its tip in order to show a direction rather than a position, in different public spaces or natural settings. These rearranged cityor landscapes reached far beyond the simple relation between geometry and the environment, and were to be interpreted as visual corrections - a notion typical of the Pécs Workshop's land art actions - but also a subtle critique of erecting monuments, an official practice that was flourishing in communist Hungary.



Sándor Pinczehelyi's proposal for László Beke's concept exhibition *Imagination/Idea*, 1971 Archives of the Pécs Workshop

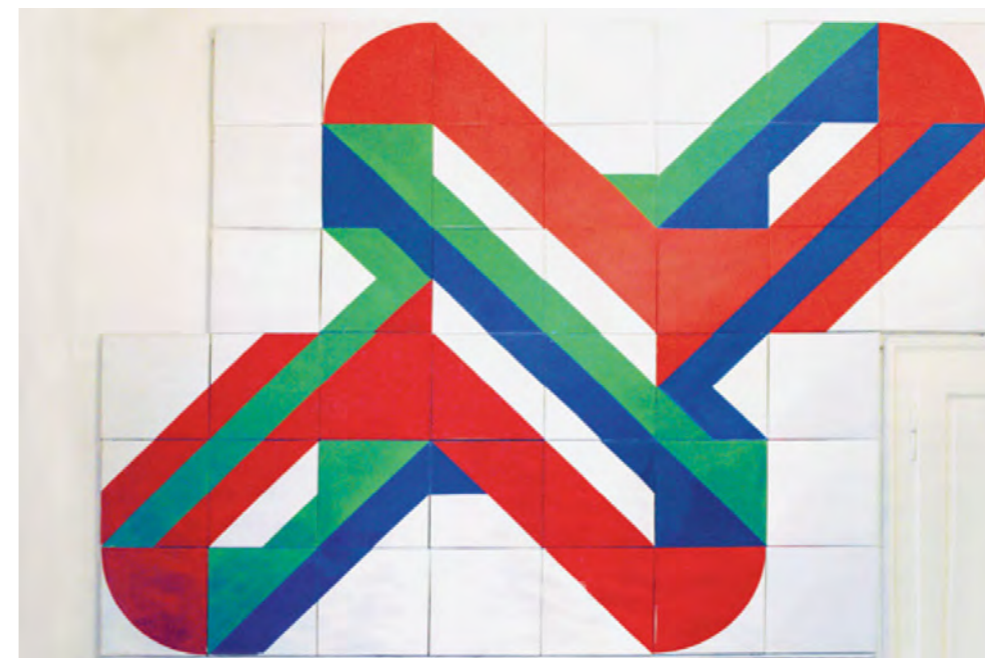
At that time, the members of the group started to take respective directions and their individual artistic identity and interest outlined more clearly. They completed their last common enamel project in 1972 for the interior spaces of the Baranya County boarding-school for boys, which shows their mastery of the visual potentials and technical parameters of the material. They compiled large compositions from smaller units featuring sleek geometrical shapes and fields of vivid colours that attested their serial approach of combining and permutating basic forms or motifs. Despite the homogeneity of the works and the similar set of forms and colours they were using, the respective enamel mural pieces bear their distinctive and clearly recognisable style; Kálmán Szijártó preferred playing with the idea of "shaped enamel" and defying the traditional square arrangement by combining the unit sections of a basic motif on plaques of different shapes and sizes, which he implemented here using sharp contours and curves spanning across the standard square tiles in his composition; Sándor Pinczehelyi monumentalised his interlocked concave forms in a vertical icon, while Ferenc Ficzek's piece, again creating its own volume and depth despite the two-dimensional properties of the work, confused the viewer's sense of space. The largest mural covering a whole wall surface, created by Károly Kismányoky, combined all sections of an ovoid form evoking the stylised motif of the shoe sole recurring in his works and symbolising the long journey both already undertaken and still ahead.



Kálmán Szijártó's
Enamelled Wall at the Baranya
County Foster Home for Boys
in Pécs, 1972
enamelled iron plate,
48 pcs, 45 x 45 cm each
Archives of the Pécs Workshop



Sándor Pinczehelyi's
Enamelled Wall at the Baranya
County Foster Home for Boys
in Pécs, 1972
enamelled iron plate,
40 pcs, 45 x 45 cm each
Archives of the Pécs Workshop



Ferenc Ficzek's
Enamelled Wall at the Baranya
County Foster Home
for Boys in Pécs, 1972
enamelled iron plate,
42 pcs, 45 x 45 cm each
Archives of the Pécs Workshop

The enamel activity of the members of the Pécs Workshop, although very coherent and compact, proved to be much more than an artistic interest for the medium and its technical challenges. It was an experimenting period permanently fuelled by the urge to transcend the material and to solve visual questions and conceptual concerns rather than technical problems. Thanks to its lasting weatherproof properties, the young artists turned to enamel as both a physical and symbolical tool to channel their idea(l)s outdoors, in the public space or in the natural landscape surrounding them, therefore reconnecting interior and exterior, nature and city, immobility and movement, aesthetics and concept, as well as art and life.



Károly Kismányoky's
Enamelled Wall at the Baranya
County Foster Home for Boys
in Pécs, 1972
enamelled iron plate,
120 pcs, 45 x 45 cm each
Archives of the Pécs Workshop

ENDNOTES

1 "A Mecseknádasdi művésztelep működési szabályzata (1969)" [Operational rules of the Mecseknádasd artists' colony (1969)], in Henriette Vörös, "Művészeti kísérletek a Bonyhádi Zománcgyárban" [Artistic experiments in the enamel factory of Bonyhád], MA thesis, University of Pécs, Arts Department, 2008, 21-22.

2 Károly Kismányoky, ed. Róna Kopeczky (Budapest: acb ResearchLab, 2017), 24-25.

3 Ferenc Ficzek was originally trained as metalworker in the secondary school for art in Pécs from 1961.

4 Ibid., 26.

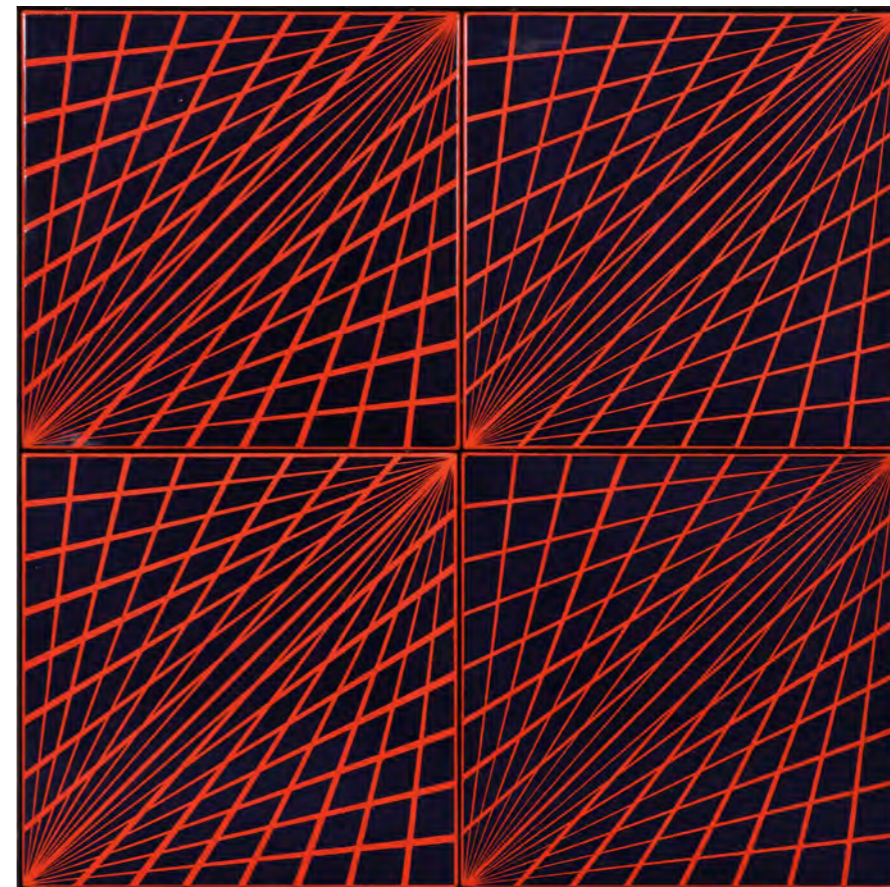
5 Kálmán Szijártó, ed. Róna Kopeczky (Budapest: acb ResearchLab, 2017), 25-27.

6 This event also disrupted their relation with Ferenc Lantos. The old master did not acknowledge the conceptual turn of his former students and this most probably contributed to the fact that while Lantos regularly received public commissions for enamel works to be placed on the facades of official buildings, the Pécs Workshop members were only commissioned once, for indoor pieces.

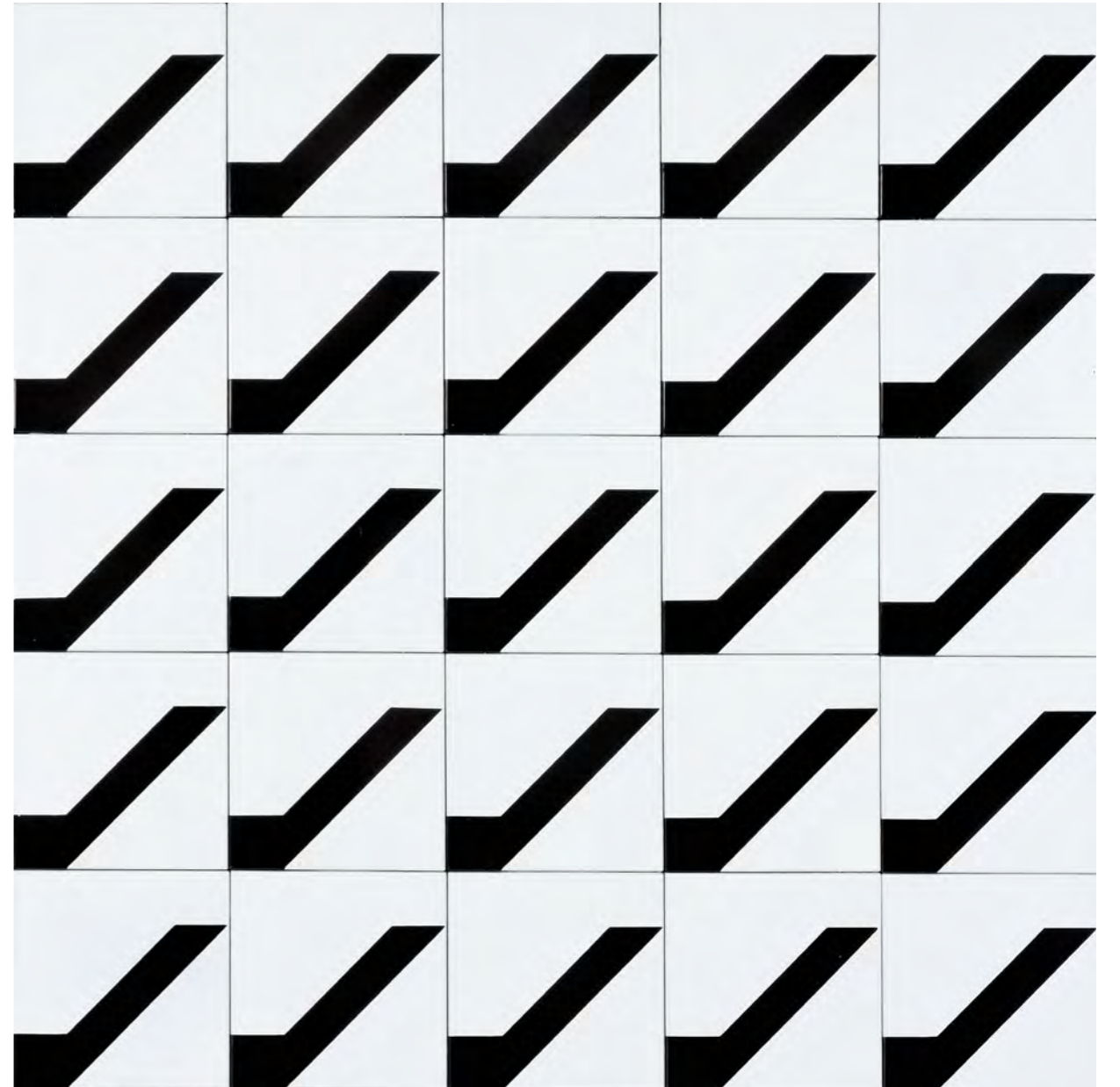
7 WORK = the DOCUMENTATION OF THE IMAGINATION/IDEA, in *Imagination/Idea: The Beginning of Hungarian Conceptual Art, The László Beke Collection, 1971*, ed. Eszter Szakács, *Tranzit series* (Zurich: JP Ringier, 2015). Although the exhibition remained a concept and never materialised, it was richly and precisely documented and archived, revealing the fundamental changes that took place in Hungarian art at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. The project showed the way "traditional painting, sculpture, and graphic arts were gradually replaced by a new system of media that could record light, witty, and provocative thoughts: typed texts, photos, montages, drafts, audio tapes. They represented intellectual freedom, rather than material values", *Ibid.*, 3.

PLATES

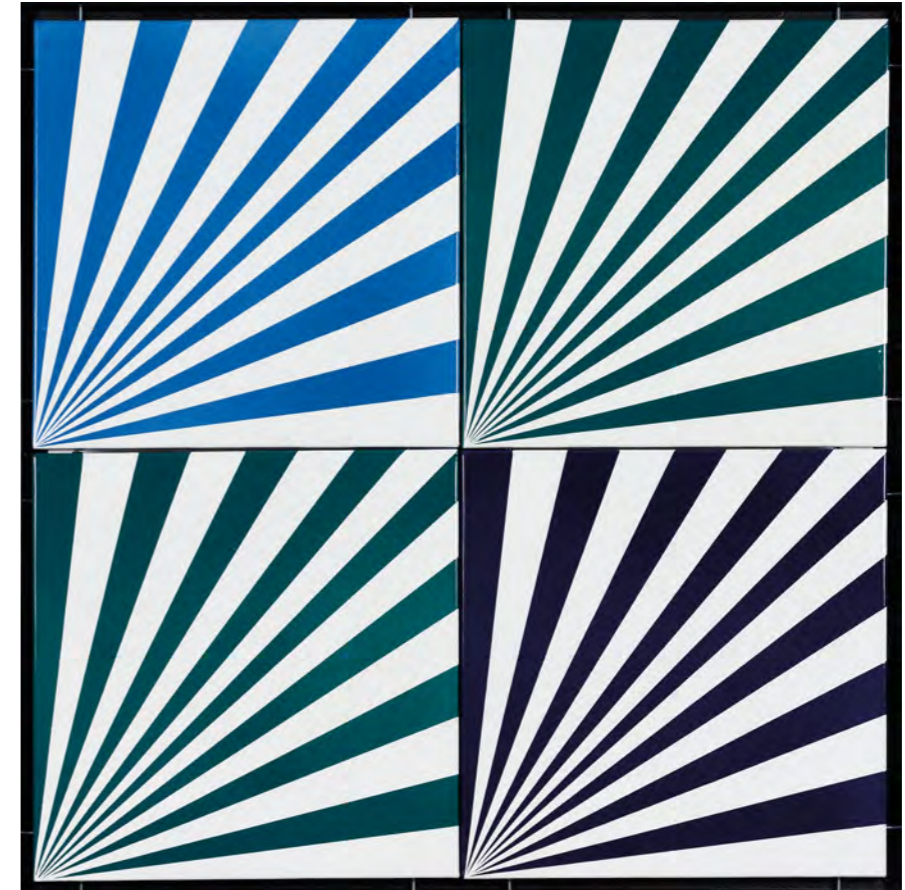
KÁROLY HOPP-HALÁSZ
Radial Enamel (Red-Blue)
1969
Enamel on metal plate
90 x 90 cm
35 ½ x 35 ½ inches



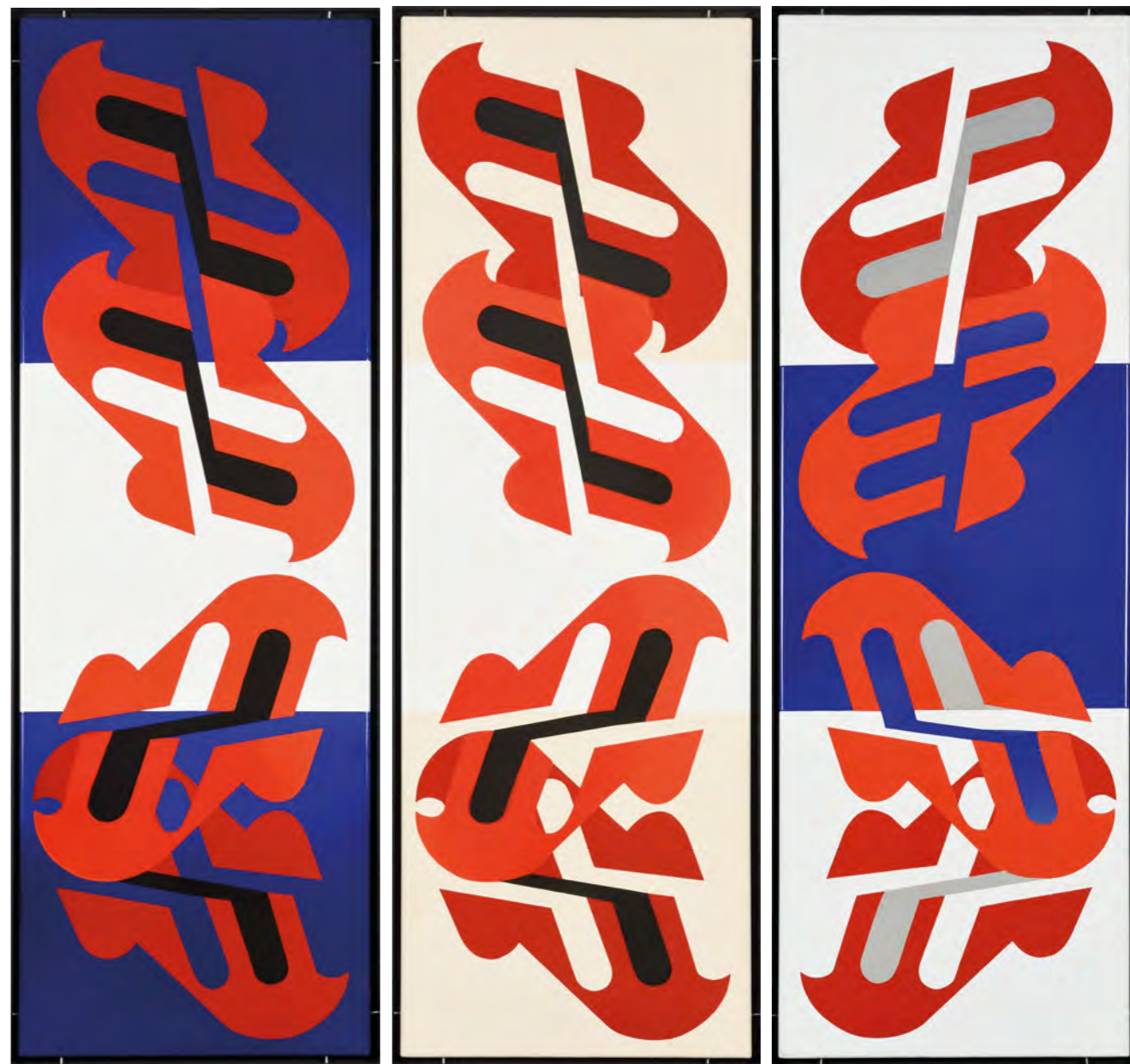
KÁROLY HOPP-HALÁSZ
Structure with Pipes
1970
Enamel on metal plate
150 x 150 cm
59 x 59 inches



KÁROLY HOPP-HALÁSZ
Untitled
1968
Enamel on metal plate
90 x 90 cm
35 ½ x 35 ½ inches



KÁROLY KISMÁNYOKY
Untitled
c. 1970
Enamel on iron plate, 3 pieces
135 x 150 cm
53 x 59 inches



KÁROLY KISMÁNYOKY
Untitled
1972
Enamel on metal plate
100 x 100 cm
39 ½ x 39 ½ inches



FERENC LANTOS

Large Tulip

1969

Enamel on iron plate

97 x 97 cm

38 x 38 inches

Exhibition history:

Open air exhibition: in Tettey District of Pécs, 1969, reproduction of the exhibition view in Katalin Keserü: *Lantos*,

2010, p. 76, in *Ferenc Lantos*, ed. Sándor Pinczehelyi, 2006, p. 137, and in László Gergyádesz Jr.:

The Interrupted Prophecy, 2006, pp. 35-41



FERENC LANTOS
Untitled
1969
Enamel on iron plate
154 x 63.5 cm
60 ½ x 25 inches



SÁNDOR PINCZEHELYI

Imagination

1972

Enamel on metal plate

131 x 131 cm

51 ½ x 51 ½ inches

Exhibition history:

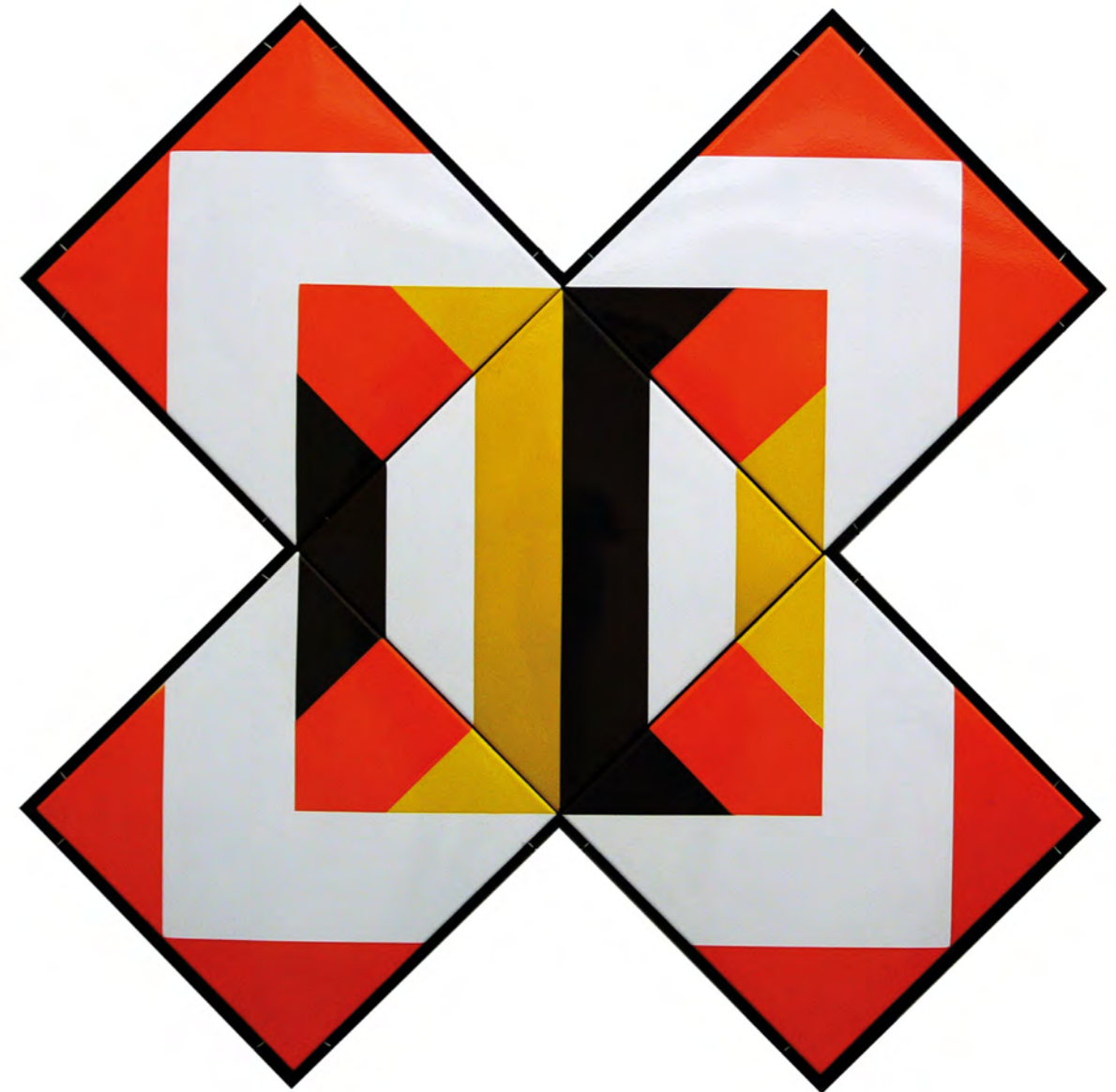
Open air exhibition: in the garden of fellow artist B. István Gellér, 1973, reproduction of exhibition view in Márta Kovalszky:

Pinczehelyi Sándor, 2010, p. 73

Parallel Avant-Garde - Pécs Workshop 1968-1980, Ludwig Museum - Contemporary Art Museum, Budapest, 2017,

reproduction in exhibition catalogue, p. 169

Principles of the work described and illustrated by the artist in the book. *Imagination / Idea, The Beginning of Hungarian Conceptual Art 1971*, 2014, ed. László Beke, Dóra Hegyi, p. 142



SÁNDOR PINCZEHELYI

Untitled

1970

Enamel on iron plate

132 x 196 cm

52 x 77 ¼ inches

Exhibition history:

Parallel Avant-Garde - Pécs Workshop 1968-1980, M21 Gallery, Pécs

The composition from different panels in the same arrangement was shown right after the Bonyhád factory residencies came to an end in the city of Pécsvárad and on the facade of the cultural house of Székesfehérvár in 1970. Reproduction of the exhibition view in *A Pécsi Műhely nagy képeskönyve* (Album of Pécs Workshop), 2004, ed. Sándor Pinczehelyi, p. 22



KÁLMÁN SZIJÁRTÓ
Untitled (Grey-Red)
1970
Enamel on iron plate
60 x 120 cm
23 ½ x 47 ¼ inches

Exhibition history:
Viennacontemporary 2017, acb Gallery Booth, reproduction in acb Researchlab's monograph; Róna Kopeczky:
Kálmán Szijártó, 2017, pp. 36-37



KÁLMÁN SZIJÁRTÓ

Untitled

1971

Enamel on iron plate

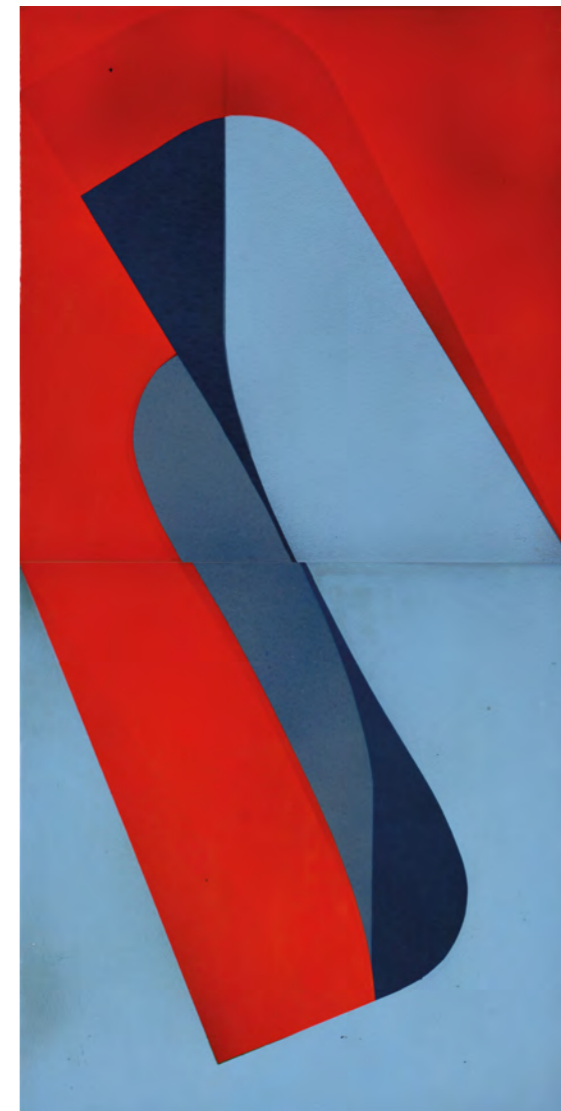
90 x 45 cm

35 ½ x 17 ¾ inches

Exhibition history:

Kálmán Szijártó: Art Gestures, 2017-2018, acb NA Viennacontemporary 2017, acb Gallery's booth, reproduction in acb Researchlab's monograph; *Róna Kopeczky: Kálmán Szijártó*, 2017, pp. 36-37

Parallel Avant-Garde - Pécs Workshop 1968-1980, Ludwig Museum - Contemporary Art Museum, Budapest, 2017, reproduction in exhibition catalogue, p. 156



LIST OF WORKS

KÁROLY HOPP-HALÁSZ

p. 21 *Radial Enamel (Red-Blue)*
1969
Enamel on metal plate
90 x 90 cm
35 ½ x 35 ½ inches

p. 23 *Structure with Pipes*
1970
Enamel on metal plate
150 x 150 cm
59 x 59 inches

p. 25 *Untitled*
1968
Enamel on metal plate
90 x 90 cm
35 ½ x 35 ½ inches

KÁROLY KISMÁNYOKY

p. 27 *Untitled*
c. 1970
Enamel on iron plate, 3 pieces
135 x 150 cm
53 x 59 inches

p. 29 *Untitled*
1972
Enamel on metal plate
100 x 100 cm
39 ½ x 39 ½ inches

FERENC LANTOS

p. 31 *Large Tulip*
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Enamel on iron plate
97 x 97 cm
38 x 38 inches

p. 33 *Untitled*
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p. 41 *Untitled*
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Enamel on iron plate
90 x 45 cm
35 ½ x 17 ¾ inches

THE MAYOR GALLERY since 1925

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Printed on the occasion of the exhibition:

PÉCS WORKSHOP

5 June – 31 July 2019

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Edition of 300

Three Times Ten (Days) The Enamel Works in the Activity of the Pécs Workshop (1969-1971) © Róna Kopeczky
originally published in *Burnt Geometry Experiments in Enamel Art at the Bonyhád Factory (1968-1972)*, acb
ResearchLab, Budapest, 2019
Archive photography © Archives of the Pécs Workshop, Katalin Nádor
Works © Károly Hopp-Halász, Károly Kismányoky, Ferenc Lantos, Sándor Pinczehelyi, Kálmán Szijártó

Special thanks to: acb Gallery, acb ResearchLab, Soma Bradák, Amy Baker, Christine Hourdé

All dimensions of works are given height before width before depth
The colour reproduction in this catalogue is representative only

Design by Stephen Draycott, Christine Hourdé

Published by The Mayor Gallery

Printed by Birch Print

ISBN: 978-1-9993170-5-8

