

Tihamér Novotny

### Continuo, or a Constant Deep-Tone Painting

To introduce his exhibition, Ádám Gáll has borrowed a patinated and all-decisive sentence by Paul Klee, which, no doubt, refers to his own sense of life, philosophy of being and thus his painting, too: “I cannot be grasped in the here and now. For I reside just as much with the dead as with the unborn.”<sup>1</sup>

Though a graduate in painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, the poet and the painter contested each other in Ádám Gáll for a long time. He had a perfect feel for the European “fate neurosis” the expressionist poet Gottfried Benn described: the relation between the self and the world, the self and reality, the self and the you is almost an incomprehensible and irresolvable problem of existence of Western man, as Gáll says in a poem: “»Every brain is a state-unit« / Ideas, plaster falling in its cells / Bullet pocks on a tightly locked consciousness. / Holes filled and touched by fear, / Sense walled against darkness. / It’s the infinite of consciousness – copies closed in on themselves.”

However, his poetic adolescence was defeated by the painter come of age in him. It was perhaps Leonardo, the Renaissance man, who formulated for the first time most clearly and most self-consciously that the sensory organ of the eye is superior to that of the ear: “Painting is mute poetry and poetry is blind painting,” but has sight win the debate between poetry and painting for: “To lose one’s sight means to be deprived of the beauty of the universe and is as if a living man were shut in a tomb in which he can exist and move.” And then goes on to exalt the eye: “It is the window of the human body through which the soul observes the beauties of the world and rejoices in them and therefore accepts the prison of the body, which would otherwise be a place of torment. Through it human enterprise could discover fire, which has given back to the eye what darkness had first taken away from it.”<sup>2</sup> And Werner Haftmann happens to write just of Paul Klee that, in him, as in all artists thinking and feeling in permanent *continuo*, “man and thing, earthly and divine meet in the intersection of the eye. We again find ourselves in the unity of this quaternity. [...] We now see Klee’s humanism as more significant in the centre of the whole circle. His schematic drawing will be an accentuated symbol of his relation to the world. In terms of language, this symbol – in which the border between the self and reality, the ‘Western fate neurosis’ is eliminated – is the

---

<sup>1</sup> See Felix Klee: *Paul Klee életes és munkássága*, Budapest: Corvina, 1975, 113. o. Cf. Wikiquote.

<sup>2</sup> André Chastel (ed.): *Leonardo on Art and the Artist*, Mineola (N.Y.), Dover, 2002, pp. 37, 38.

epitome of the unity of the quaternity following one of Heidegger's late formulations."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this is what Gáll's floating cube *Topos* alludes to, symbolising as it does the four basic elements and the sense of non-objectivity, i.e. something final, something superior, some invisible transcendental secret. The routes therefore converge in the eye, and "»lead to the synthesis of external looking and internal seeing. [...] The growth of the artist in looking at and contemplating nature enables him to freely shape abstract formations. [...] He will thus create works that are the similes of God's creation. [...] Art is a simile of creation«" as Haftmann quotes Klee. "The difference between self and reality ceases again and is withdrawn."<sup>4</sup>

"Everything comes from and returns to the One," writes Jakob Böhme; it is therefore the eye, the artwork, the painting, i.e. the mind and the spirit, the spiritual mind in its final fulfilment, that is the key element in the relation between the created world and the created man. Or, as Béla Hamvas would put it, an authentic work of art will have the power of address, in it the desire of the painter turns around, and addresses man, the viewer.

Ádám Gáll is also rowing his boat in such Charonic waters, on the border between the visible and the invisible, existence and non-existence. In the course of my career, I have met few Hungarian artists working in this genre that live and breathe together with their pictures, their material and spirit in such a strong community of fate. One often has the feeling that the only reason why Gáll builds and plasters these mock walls is to hide himself in them as a sacrifice. In order to bring some personal and universal good, the salvation of the soul or its *mater dolorosa*-like notion, as a deep and continuous resonance in the manner of *de profundis clamavi*, crying from the depths silently, looming up as a light phenomenon, the sacrifice, which is the sacrifice of others, too, then oozes back into earthly existence. And it leaves behind its associate phenomena, the veils of transfiguration as drops of clotted, coagulated, congealed blood, as crystallised spots of sweat in the works with moods of both *memento mori* and *ex morte vita*. Recall *Wall Memento* where a Pietà motif seems to lurk up from between the painted plaster layers. But something always seems to loom in each and every picture of Gáll, as though from some imaginary, condensed theatrical coulisses – something we might call a buried mood, a stored personal memory, a long-interred and forgotten atavistic vision erupting again, a specific historical experience rolled up round the axle of time, walking *On the Road* – from *Hopscotch* up to the Cross of Golgotha, from *Invocation*

---

<sup>3</sup> Werner Haftmann: *Paul Klee – A képi gondolkodás útjai*, Budapest: Corvina, 1988, p. 96. Cf. its English version: *The mind and work of Paul Klee*, New York: Paeger, 1954.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

(prayer, calling for assistance) to the state of *Post mortem* (after death), from throwing marbles to the memory of the Universe, from the image of man to the spiral of the store of universal signs, from the Earth to the blade of grass, from mass to light.

We must note that Gáll's show is a perfectly thought out, astonishing Unity!

It is an emotional and intellectual unity of a view of life summed up in plaster pictures the major, visually perceptible units of which we must recognise in space, and the particular details of which we must recognise in the plane layers.

And let us now forget the predecessors and intellectual relations; let us forget technique, as well! Let us turn to the layers of the "hautes pâtes", the thickly applied plaster materials, in which the god of depth and height, the aesthetics of spirit and moral philosophy dwell.

*(Lajos Vajda Studio, Szentendre, 28 September, 2008)*