

Ernő P. Szabó:
Walls from Pannonia

[...] With its title *Pannonian Panel Walls*, the picture refers to a genre of painting born as a distinct kind of applied art in the 16–17th centuries. In its heydays, however, it expanded the possibilities of expression to the widest range. In our time, with new architectural technologies and materials vastly increasing spaces, it can offer new opportunities to an artist. This is what Ádám Gáll's works are partly about, the meaning that can be compressed into a motif that has determined the framework of everyday life from antiquity to the present, and is both the subject matter of the work of art and its vehicle. The wall can be a metaphor of defence and being locked up at the same time; it surrounds and separates communities; it can be a labyrinth and a marker of the area of *hortus clausus*, as well as a place of prayer or execution. Between its construction in August 1961 and its demolition in September 1989, the Berlin Wall, for four decades, spoke about the divisions of the world, the violent interference in the closest human relations, the impossibility of communication and dialogue, which characterized politics, everyday life, and art.

What is behind the wall? The question may refer to walls built of stone, brick, or reinforced concrete in our environment, but more to the ones that determine the feelings and ways of thinking of most people, or those that are difficult to explore with our imagination, reason, and logic; it is only artistic invention or sympathy that can grasp the truths behind them. This truth is well illustrated by the high walls in the metaphysical painting of De Chirico, behind which are the infinite dimensions of a transcendental world, or those that hide the mysterious spaces of terror and hope on Lili Ország's canvases. In 20th-century art, the truths of wall surfaces, the real and particularly imaginary spaces hiding behind are convincingly presented by works of artists such as Antonio Tapies, Jean Dubuffet or Lucio Fontana.

For Ádám Gáll, as the titles of his earlier works demonstrate—*Wall Memento; Wall; Wall Addict; Ruin; Surface*—the wall motif has become decisive in the last decade, partly as a carrier of truths that can be expressed through facture effects and partly as a marker of space for art, as another group of his works—*Space Marker; Landscape Plaster; Terra*, and *Terrain*—suggests. *Terrain* was also the title Gáll gave to an album he published in 2009, which includes reproductions of his works, and, besides writings on them, his own poems, and thus, as it were, provides a new approach to his pictures.

This album includes Judit Szeifert's study entitled “*Terrēnum temporis—The Place of Time*”, which focuses on time as the central category in the art of Gáll from the 80's to the present. [...] In 1990, Gáll produced *Wall of Remembrance*, and, after the turn of the millennium, the titles of not only the works but also the exhibitions indicate the progress of his interest. He put up exhibitions with the titles *Walls* in 2001, *Memento* in 2006, and *Plaster Pictures* in 2008. In the same year, he arranged a show entitled *Continuo* at the Lajos Vajda Studio in Szentendre, which presented the works of the previous years as part of a single installation. *Degrees of Distancing* and *Abandoning the Image*—are titles referring to the process that took shape in his work. But does the fact that the elements of representation are missing really mean the abandonment of picture? Or, on the contrary, does it mean enrichment, finding layers that he could not otherwise incorporate into his art? Undoubtedly, geometric

motifs were still markedly present in the increasingly fracture surfaces of his ever more abstract world up to 2005, but then even these were relegated into the background, and became mere suggestions from then on. In the 2008 *Continuo* show, the extremely simplified signs, the circle, the square, the cross, the results of human action, appear as counterpoints to abrading and shaping natural forces, reinforcing, as it were, the truths compressed into the fractures.

But what are the surfaces of Ádám Gáll speaking about? Traces of time and man, signs of the state of life, origin, decay, as he himself writes in his poem "Walls", or about human defencelessness, as we read in the "Straight Labyrinth": "'Every brain is a state-unit' | Ideas, plaster falling in its cells". In his pictures and poems, a strange *Psychopolis* is built, parts of which are made up of individual and community, soul, feeling, thought, and time. The pain of the past strikes through the surface, is expressed in scars, lines of force, but, of course, hope is inherent in the formulation itself. Wholeness is outlined in individual works, but the four works exhibited at the Art 9 Gallery show are not simply the results, documents of a major, large-scale enterprise, but are parts of an organic whole.

These were begun by *Memento* in 2005 and *Post Mortem* in 2006, which was displayed at the exhibition entitled *On the Road* at Múcsarnok in honour of the 1956 Revolution, to which the concluding lines of the 2005 poem entitled *Psychopolis* can be read as parallels: "possibly among the dark firewalls of foreheads napes | the vertical alleys of the soul are not leading underground". With the motif of an altar faintly suggested in the forceful fracture surface, *Invocatio* (2008) raises the question of the possibility and impossibility of redemption like the poem entitled "Identity" ("blinding flash | white-washed picture of Mary | the ethereal cross of a shadow | cast on the wall | the sky projected on to itself"). The fourth work, *Pannonian Panel Walls*, contains the promise of re-starting: "The purifying eyes search inward | An unshaped brilliance expands" ("Beginning"). This promise seems to be a credible closure and solution to the problem raised by the ensemble not only because of the quality of the workmanship but also because of the fact that the picture came into being thanks to the major exhibition entitled *Panel Panoramas* held a few months ago at Modern in Debrecen. The works at this exhibition entered into a dialogue on the timeliness of the traditional genre of painting, on the prospects of contemporary art, on its finding its own identity and audience. If you wish, the walls that can be built or demolished by art.

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