

# Károly Hopp-Halász (1946-2016)

acb



Károly Hopp-Halász in his hometown, Paks, at the river Danube in the 1960s.

The artistic career of Károly Hopp-Halász (1946-2016) was kick-started by his period as a member of the Pécs Workshop (1969 - 1980). It was in this collective atmosphere that he found his own voice, coupling his formal language rooted in nature with the influence of international trends and artists he had taken great interest in throughout his high school years. The most important among these were op-art and Victor Vasarely, resulting in Hopp-Halász's deep sensitivity for geometry, as well as an experimental approach that manifested itself in the actions carried out with the other members of the Workshop (Ferenc Ficzek, Károly Kismányoky, Sándor Pinczehelyi and Kálmán Szíjártó). The traditions and new methods of constructivism have equally left their mark on a career diverse in both media and subject matter, where alongside painting, the dominating medium, photography, photo-action and performance, graphic art, object art and installation also feature prominently. As art historian Márta Kovalovszky put it, "his desire to reach a classic picturesque expression through simple geometry", to pass geometric thinking through a personal filter, signified a cornerstone in Hopp-Halász's path as an artist, leading him to create a private mythology of recurring motifs and themes.



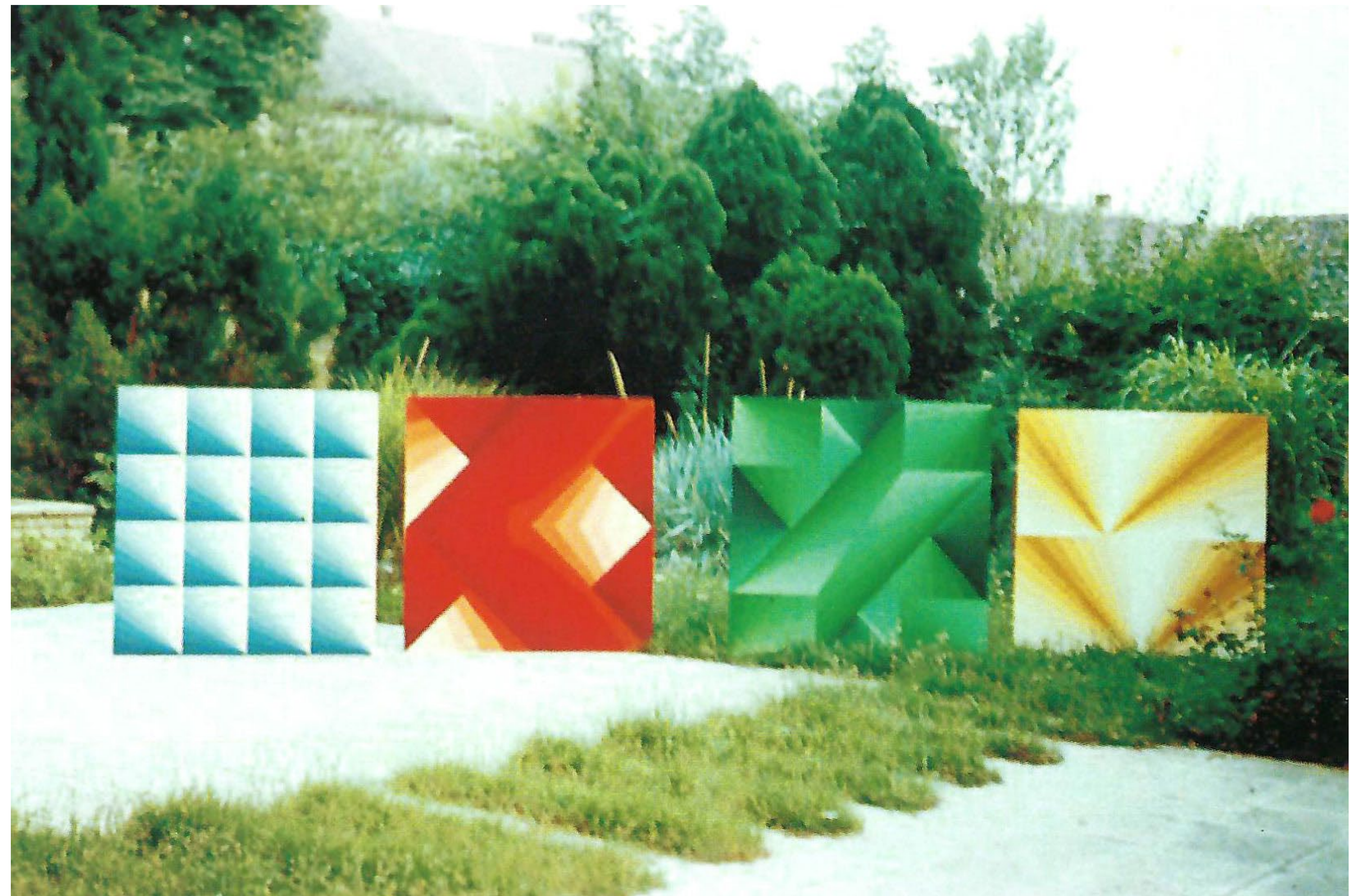


*Radial sketch V*, 1971, tempera on paper, 50 × 50 cm

“Peripheral existence is a decisive experience in the art of Károly Hopp-Halász. He lived in peripheral Hungary on the eastern side of the iron curtain. As opposed to most artists of the Hungarian neo-avantgarde, his beginnings are not related to the capital, Budapest. He was born in Paks and his artistic career started in Pécs. The forming of his approach was defined by the peculiarities of the artistic scene in Pécs and by the remarkable fine arts traditions of the town. These traditions are related to the modernist tendencies of geometric abstraction that were mediated to young artists by Ferenc Martyn, Martyn was an born in Pécs and was member of the international abstract art group called Abstraction-Création. The master of the Pécs Workshop members, Ferenc Lantos also played an important role in this matter.” Dávid Fehér art historian in Károly Hopp-Halász - Imre Bak. Radiuses and Points of View, published by acb ResearchLab, 2017



International trends of modernism may also be related to Pécs in other ways: among others, Marcel Breuer and Victor Vasarely were born in Pécs, therefore the Bauhaus and op-art became important references of the art scene of the town. The Central- and Eastern-European – and thus Hungarian – traditions of constructivism were also very important in reference to the new abstract tendencies appearing in the 1960s: “Moreover, Victor Vasarely who was born in Pécs also became an important figure of the artistic discourses in Hungary by the end of the 1960s. Vasarely’s grandiose solo exhibition held at Műcsarnok in 1969 was a milestone in Hungarian cultural politics that was not at all tolerant with abstraction. Introducing Hungarian artists who became famous abroad was a sign of careful opening towards western scenes in the official artistic sphere, although contemporary abstract tendencies in the 1960s could almost never appear in official artistic institutes of Hungary.” Dávid Fehér art historian in Károly Hopp-Halász - Imre Bak. *Radiuses and Points of View*, published by acb ResearchLab, 2017.



Archive photo from 1970 showing paintings by Károly Hopp-Halász installed in his garden





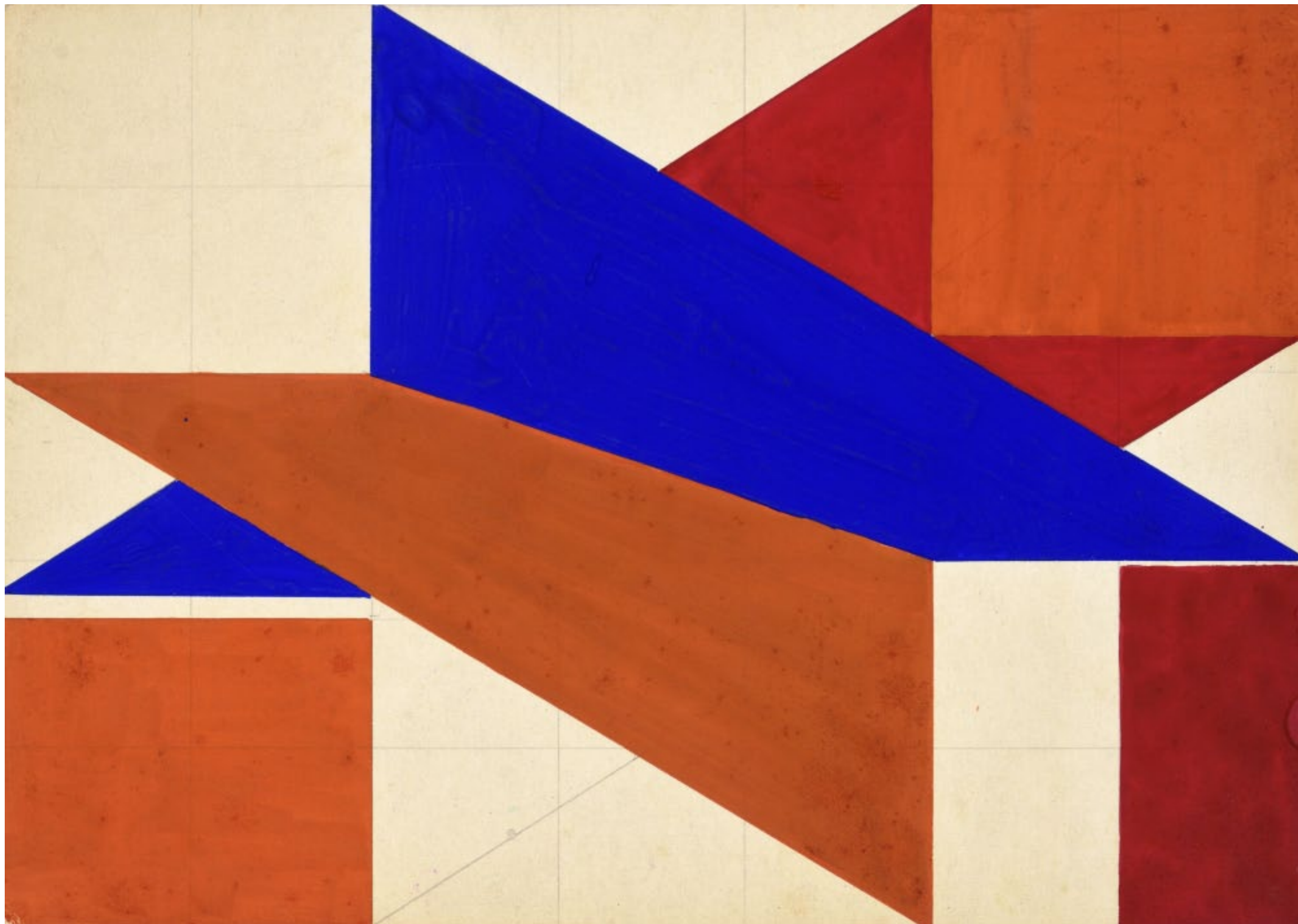
Károly Hopp-Halász's industrial enamel-work from 1969  
installed in the Buda Arbortetum at acb's online exhibition in 2020

The Bonyhád Enamel Factory hosted artists experimenting with enamel during the late sixties and early seventies. These activities - linking the originally industrial material to architecture - took shape in 1968 as the “Architectural Enamel Art Camp” organised by Ferenc Lantos. From 1969 to 1972, members of the Pécs Workshop –including Károly Hopp-Halász – regularly attended the art camp in Bonyhád. These activities executed in a factory environment distantly refer to László Moholy-Nagy's telephone pictures from 1922 as well as Victor Vasarely's practice and his concept of the Colourful City. The initiative's aim was to use the architectural potential of enamel, while also adapting it to industrial and serial production.



Károly Hopp-Halász in the Bonyhád enamel factory around 1970.

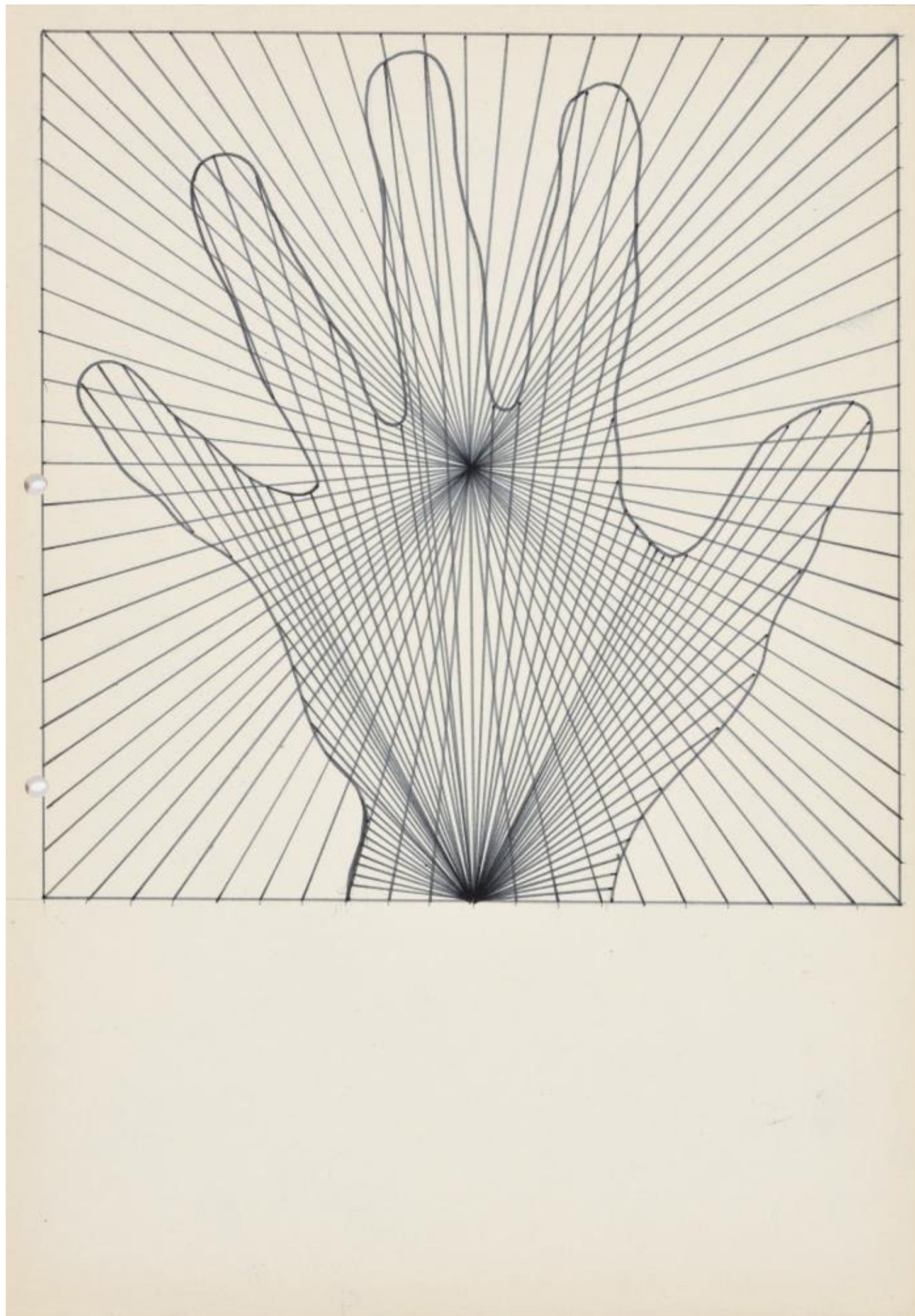




*Untitled*, c. 1967-71, tempera and pencil on paper, 14.9 × 20.8 cm. Presented at ARCO Madrid 2022.

Halász found the book of Ferenc Kárteszi titled *Szemléletes geometria (Illustrative Geometry)* in 1967 which – as the artist himself referred to it in his later autobiographical note – “turned out to be a treasure in solving various kinds of problems”. Halász is interested in optical illusions such as the Necker cube that disorientates and unsettles the human eye. The witty and playful motives of *Illustrative Geometry* are filled with new correlations in the works of Halász. He is interested in the tendencies of post-painterly abstraction – especially hard edge painting – as well as in the significant examples of pop-art, kinetic art and op-art.

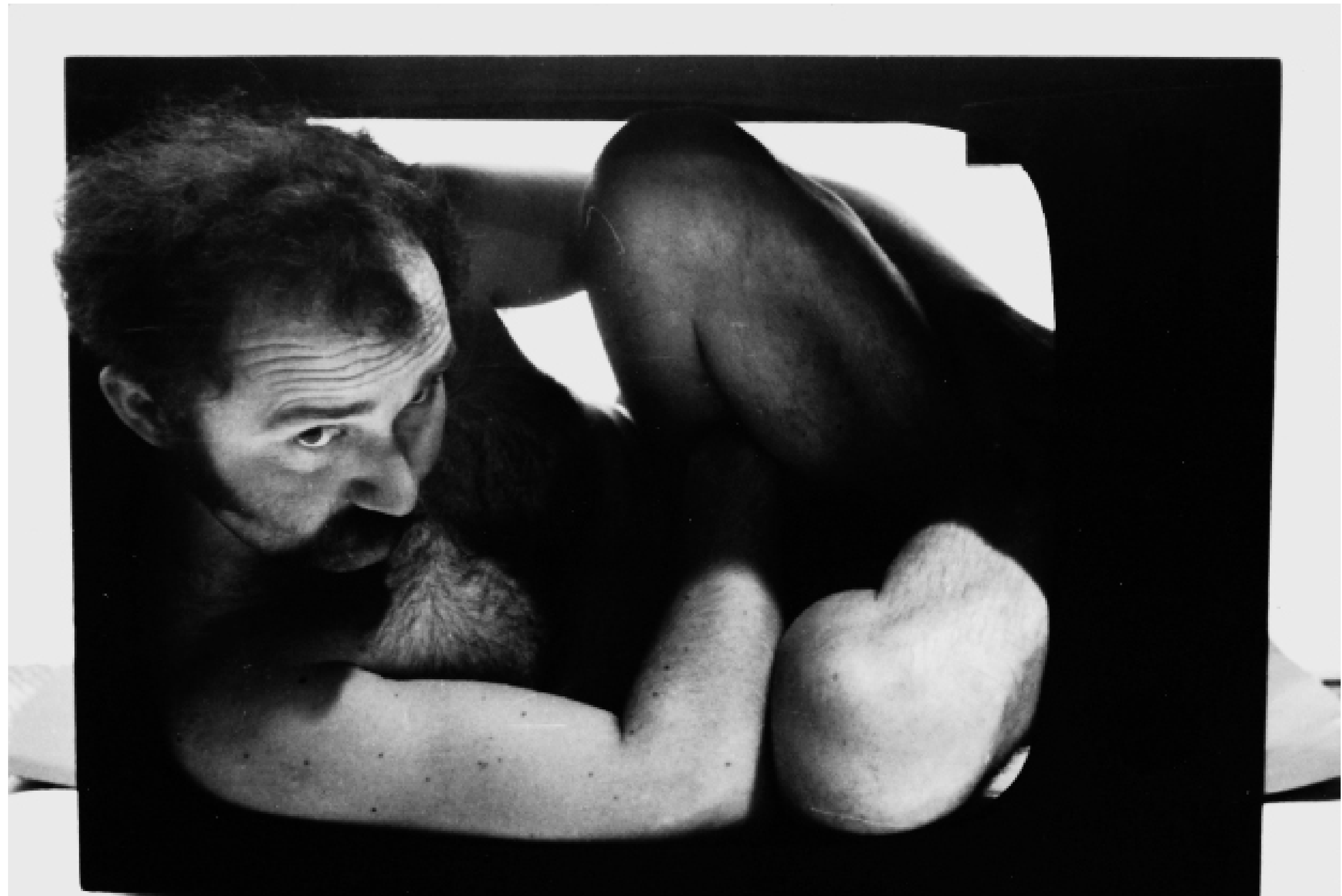




*Untitled*, 1968-69, pencil and felt-tip pen on paper, 30.5 × 21.5 cm. Presented at ARCO Madrid 2022.

Radial compositions are recurring in Károly Hopp-Halász's early graphic works, industrial enamel pieces as well as his paintings. These works were built up of thin intersecting webs or thickening rays arranged in the form of a palm leaf, and continued the artist's studies of light and shadow based on László Moholy-Nagy's writings and experimentations to eventually become a recurring characteristic element of visual investigation in Hopp-Halász's oeuvre. They also reflected the geometric reduction of natural forms as elaborated and taught by Ferenc Lantos (1929-2014), the artist-professor who led the art circle that further became the Pécs Workshop.

After the early geometric period unfolding both in painting, graphic and enamel works, members of the Pécs Workshop including Hopp-Halász, started to experiment with land art and outdoor actions in 1970. Besides documenting their own interventions, the members also started to develop a conceptual photographic practice. By discovering the various technical tools of photography and the process of enlarging and printing, through individual and collaborative experimentations, each group member developed their own individual approach towards the medium. Television became a central motive in the works of Halász in his *Private Broadcast* and *Modulated Television* series from the early 1970s. Television, on the one hand, is a symbol of information flow as it informs of distant events even in the (half-) peripheral regions, but it is also an important means of manipulation and propaganda. The television box object appears as a complex construction to deceive the eye, so it may be associated with the illusory shapes of op-art. In the *Private Broadcast* pieces, the naked body of Halász is exposed to the receptive eyes modelling the relationship between the observer and the observed, the dynamics of voyeurism and exhibitionism. It reflects the frustration of being observed, but also the inability to express one's identity as a homosexual male artist in socialist Hungary. The substitution of the television-broadcast image with the artist's own body marks a turn in perspective towards criticism of the media, while signifying one of the first attempts in Hungarian art to thematise the male body and the heteronormative male image.



*Private Broadcast*, 1974-75. Presented at ARCO Madrid 2022



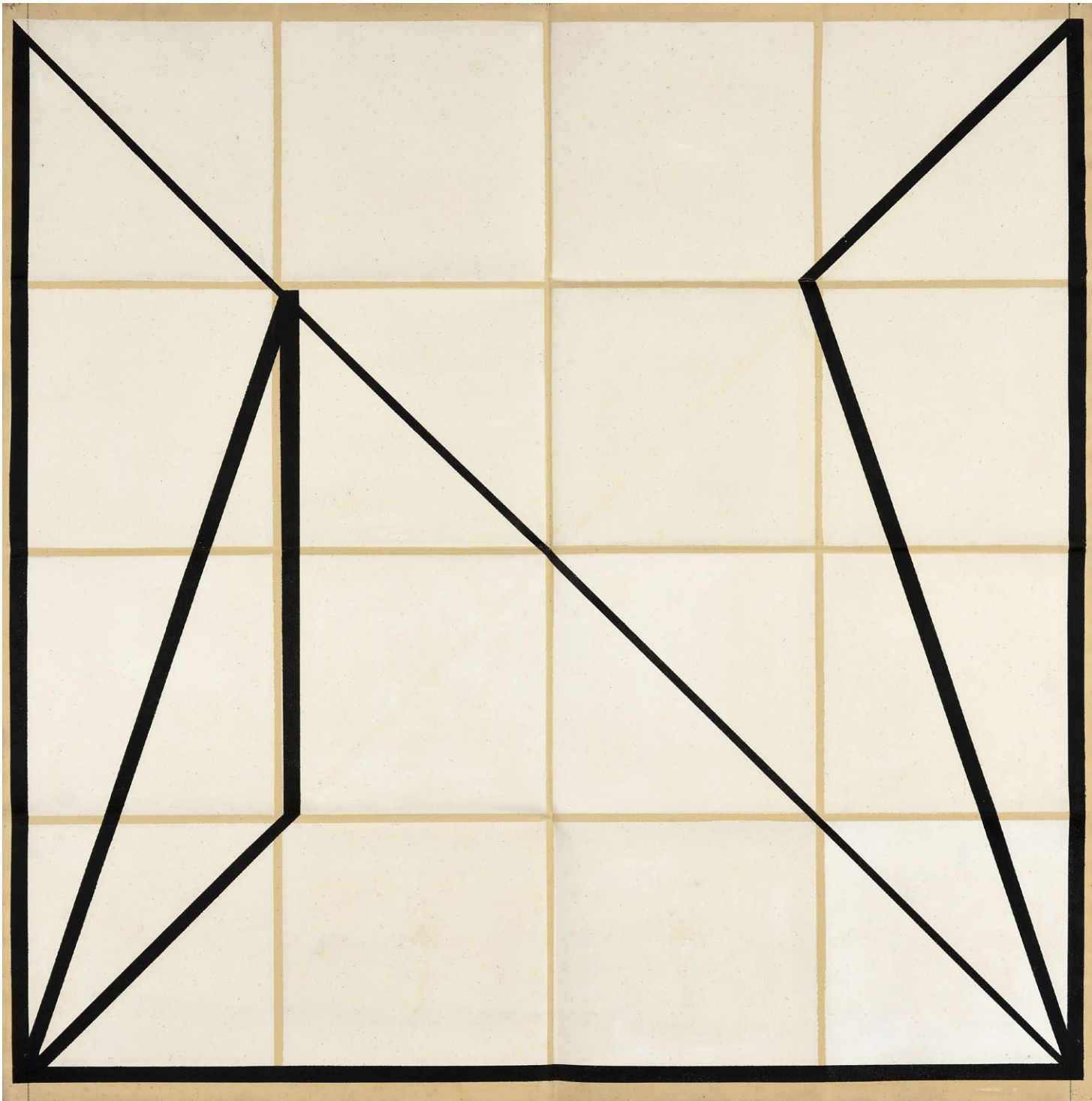
In the conceptually based series *Modulated Television*, the broadcast images of a telefilm on the *Odyssey*, a football game and a travel film on Istanbul interact with the geometric structure superimposed on them, thereby manipulating both the televised images and the viewer's perception of them.



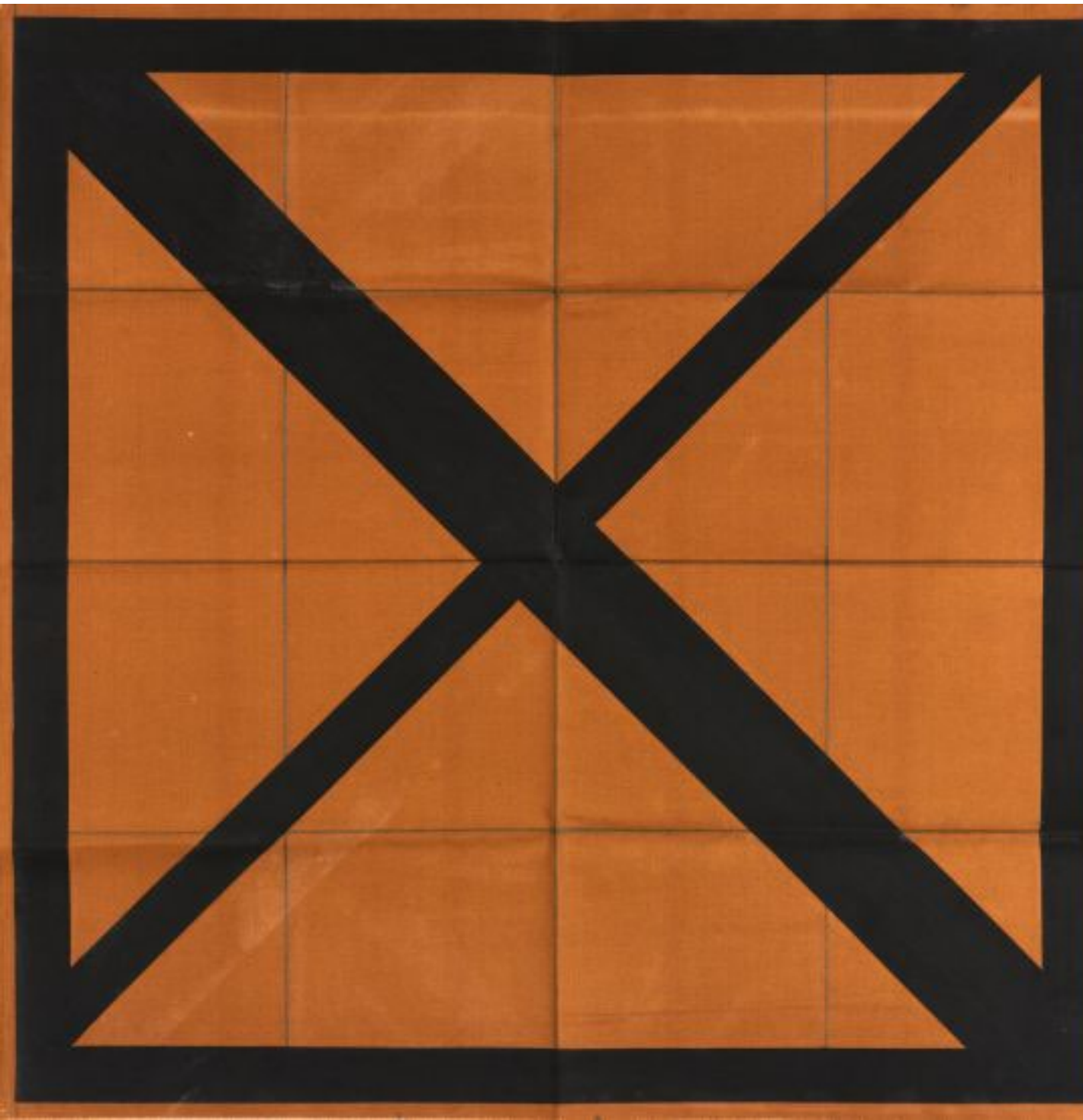
*Modulated Television I (Odyssey)*, 1973, gelatin silver print, 30.2 × 40.3 cm



He begun working on the motif of the hunter's high-stand in 1972. By reducing the structure of a hunter's high-stand geometrically, the series investigates issues concerning the relation of geometry and nature. Through the tension emanating from the composition, the structure created by the meeting points and variations of horizontals, verticals and diagonals reflected the everyday conditions in 70s Hungary: the wider cultural-political context expanded the possibilities of interpretation towards a metaphorical reading of the presence of monitoring and control in a totalitarian era. By invoking Lajos Kassák's image architecture, not only did Hopp-Halász pay tribute to the constructivist heritage but he also reflected the modern endeavours of constructivism, which were gaining ground in contemporary Hungarian painting through the works of Imre Bak and István Nádler. The notions of surveillance, exclusion and anxiety are the focal points of the series. By these concepts, the *High Stand* works – and their derivative variations *Part and Whole* and *Structure* series – are connected to the artist's *Private Broadcast* pieces, which also reflect Hopp-Halász's holistic and multimedial approach.

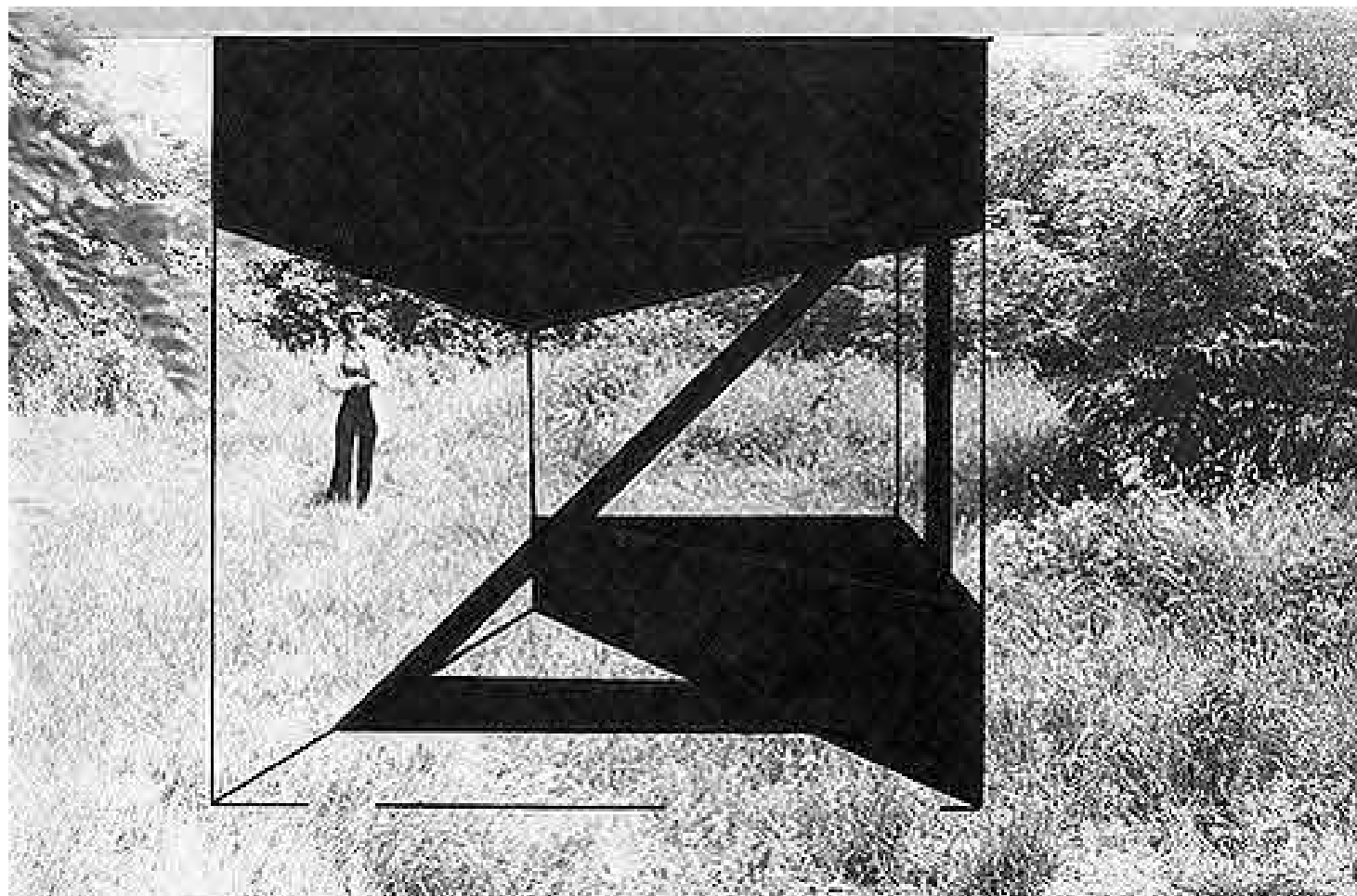


*Sctuture and Construction / Cologne, 1979*  
acrylic on impregnated canvas, 100 × 100 cm

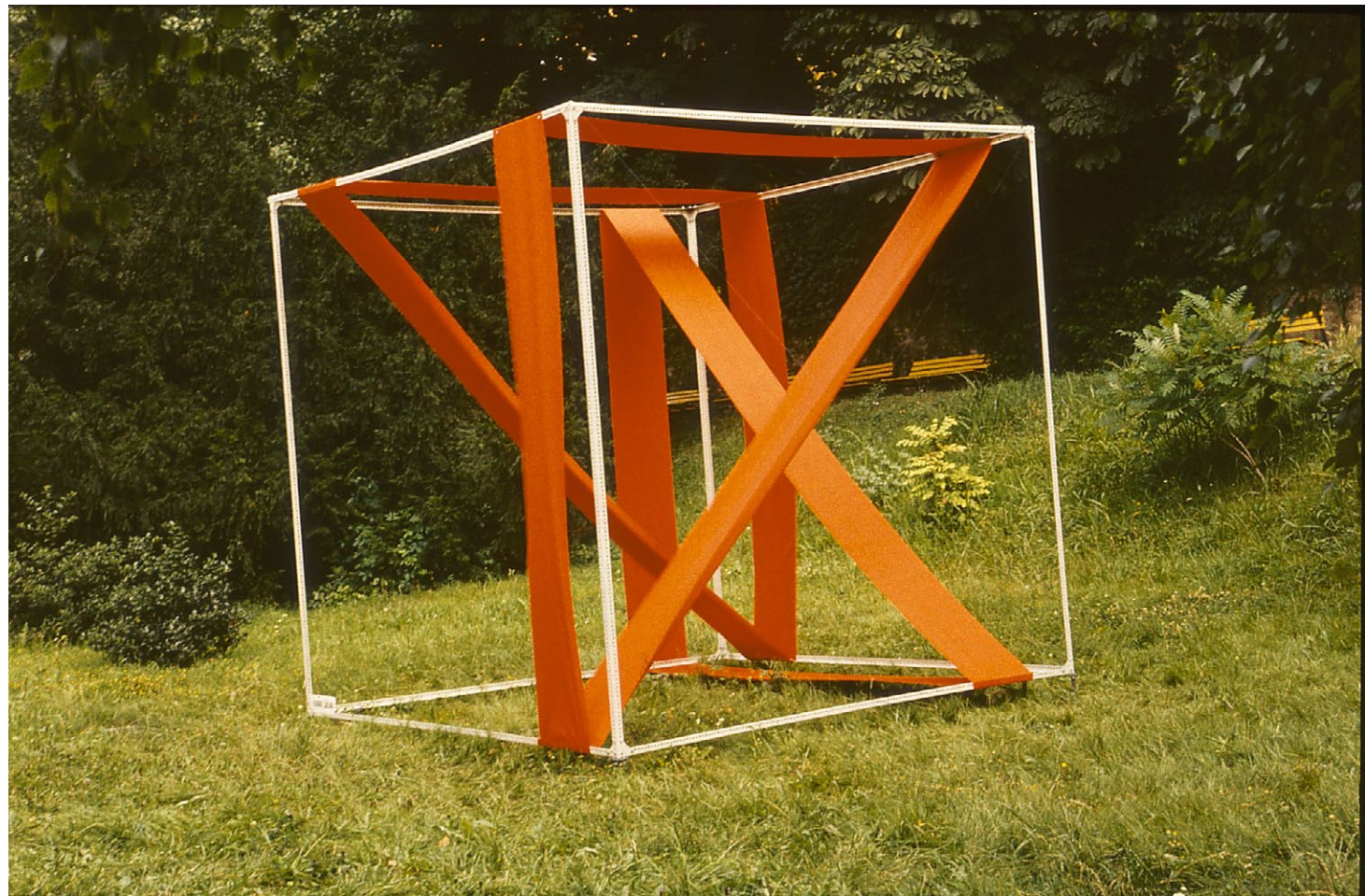


*Structures I, 1979*  
oil and graphite on canvas, 100 × 100 cm





Károly Halász's contribution to Pécsi Műhely (Pécs Workshop)'s *Landscape Corrections* at Balatonboglár Chapel Studio, 1972



Károly Hopp-Halász's work at the Pécs Workshop's open-air exhibition organised at a public urban square in Pécs in 1978



Károly Hopp-Halász at his solo exhibition *High Stand* in acb Gallery  
Sculpture: High Stand (Reconstruction), 1971-72/2016, iron, rope, 250 × 250 × 250 cm. Presented at ARCO Madrid.



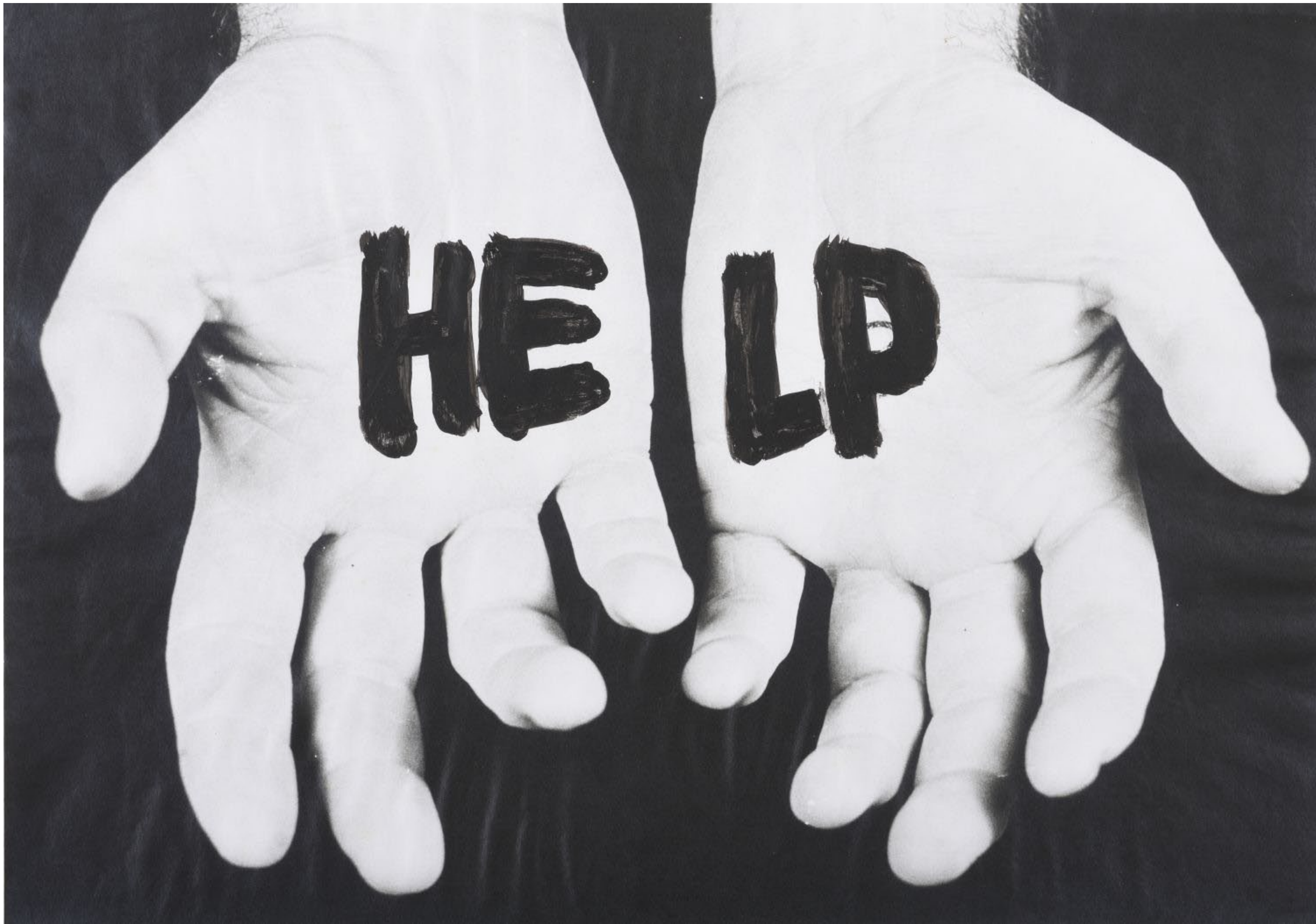
# Further works presented





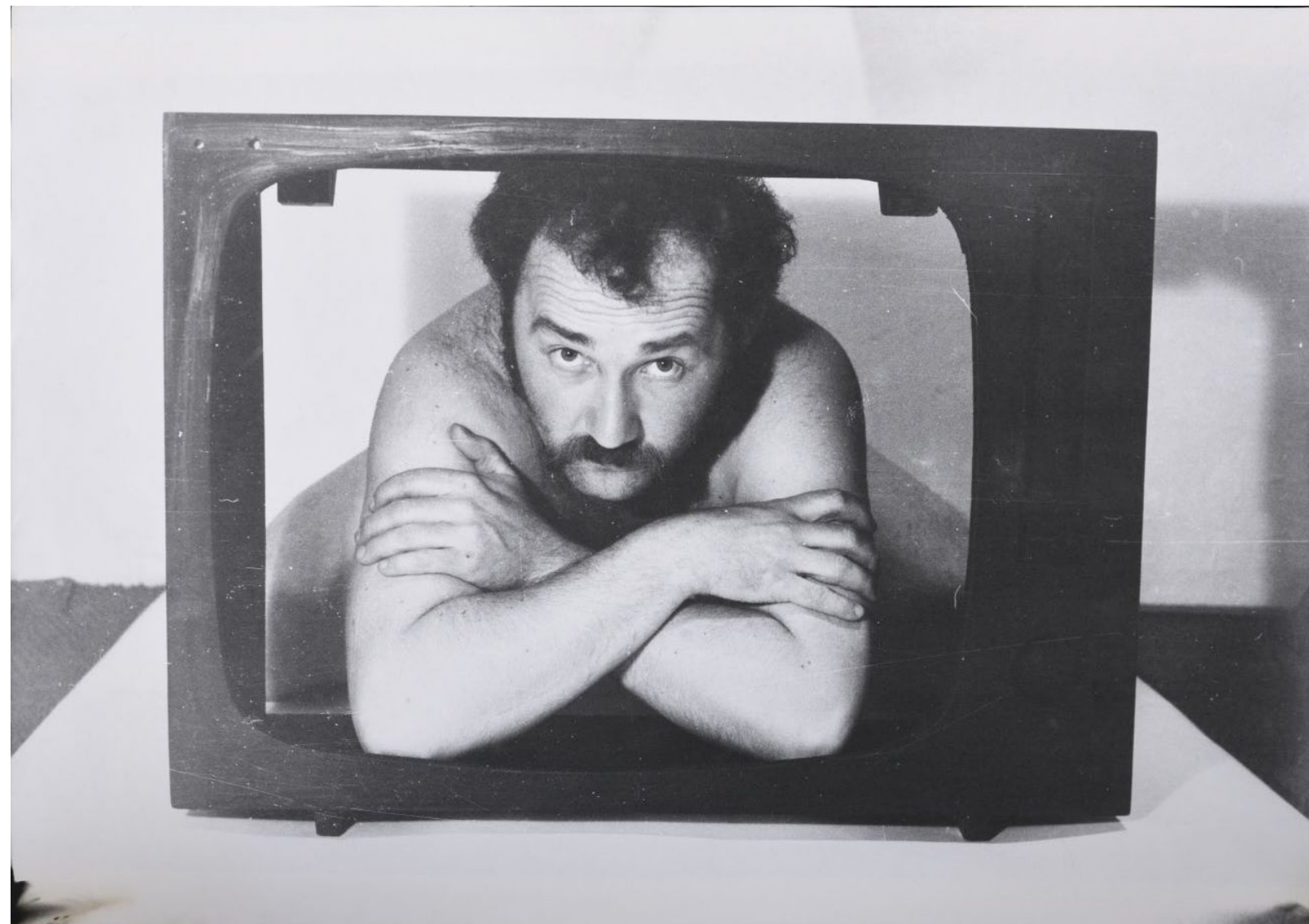
From the series *Modulated and Enrolled Figures*, 1968. tempera on cardboard, 42 × 65 cm





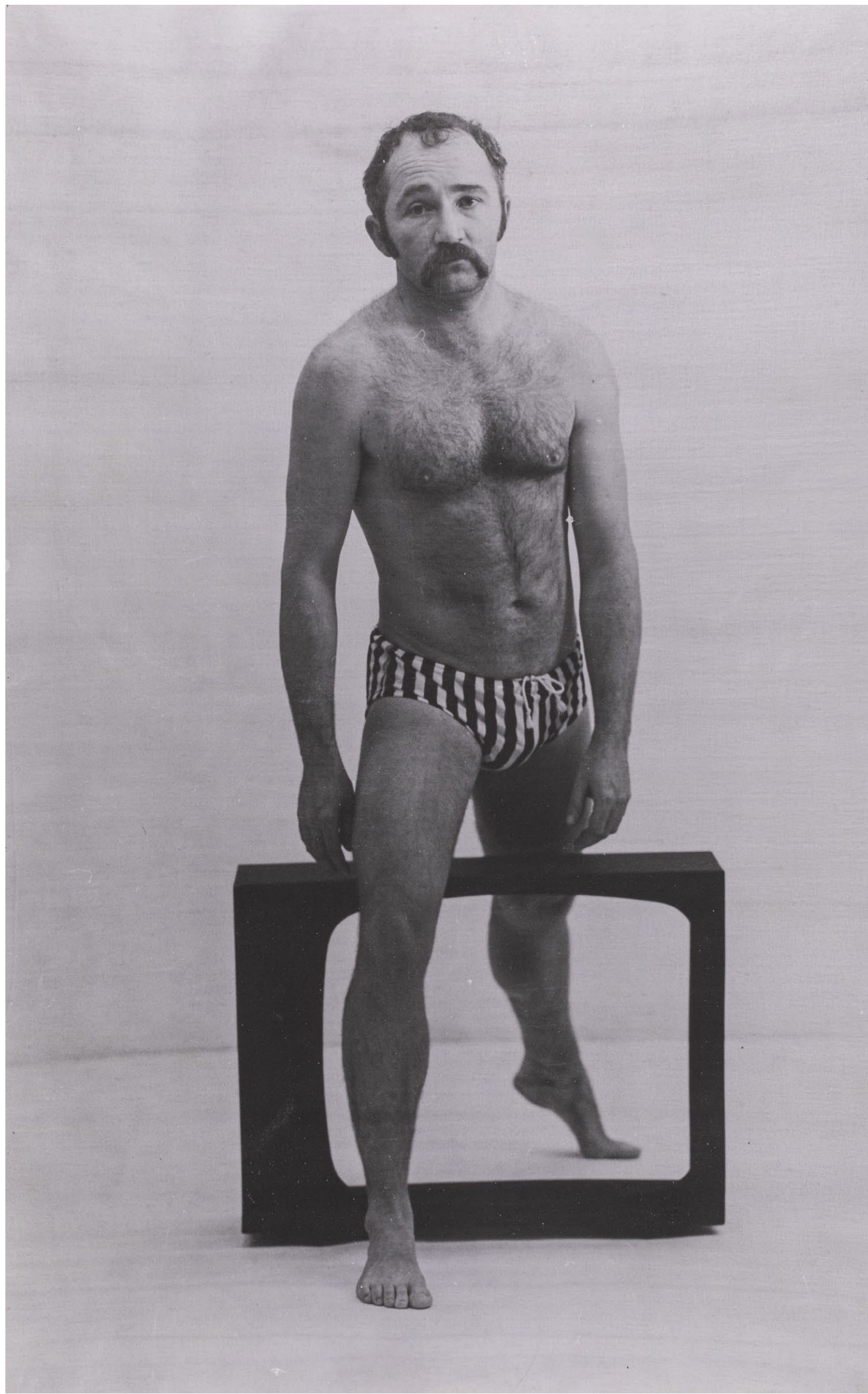
*Help*, 1979, ink, gelatin silver print on Docubrom paper, 29.5 × 46 cm





*Private Broadcast I-VI*, 1974-75, gelatin silver print on Docubrom paper, 6 pcs, 29.5 × 41.7 cm each





*Untitled (Private Broadcast)*, 1974, gelatin silver print on impregnated canvas, 103.3 x 64.5 cm





*Untitled I-VI*, c. 1980, collage, gelatin silver print on Docubrom paper, 30.5 × 21.8 cm

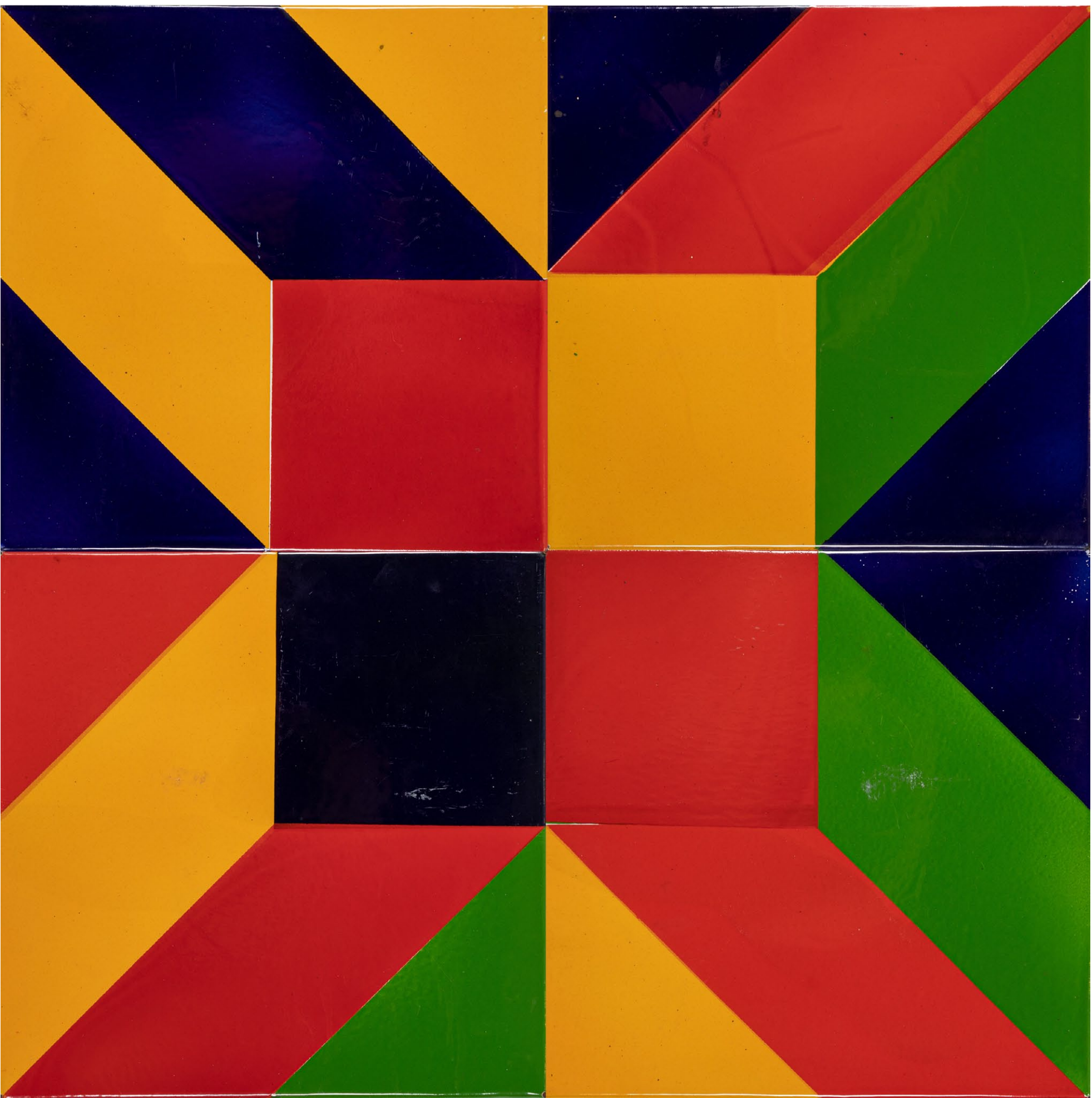






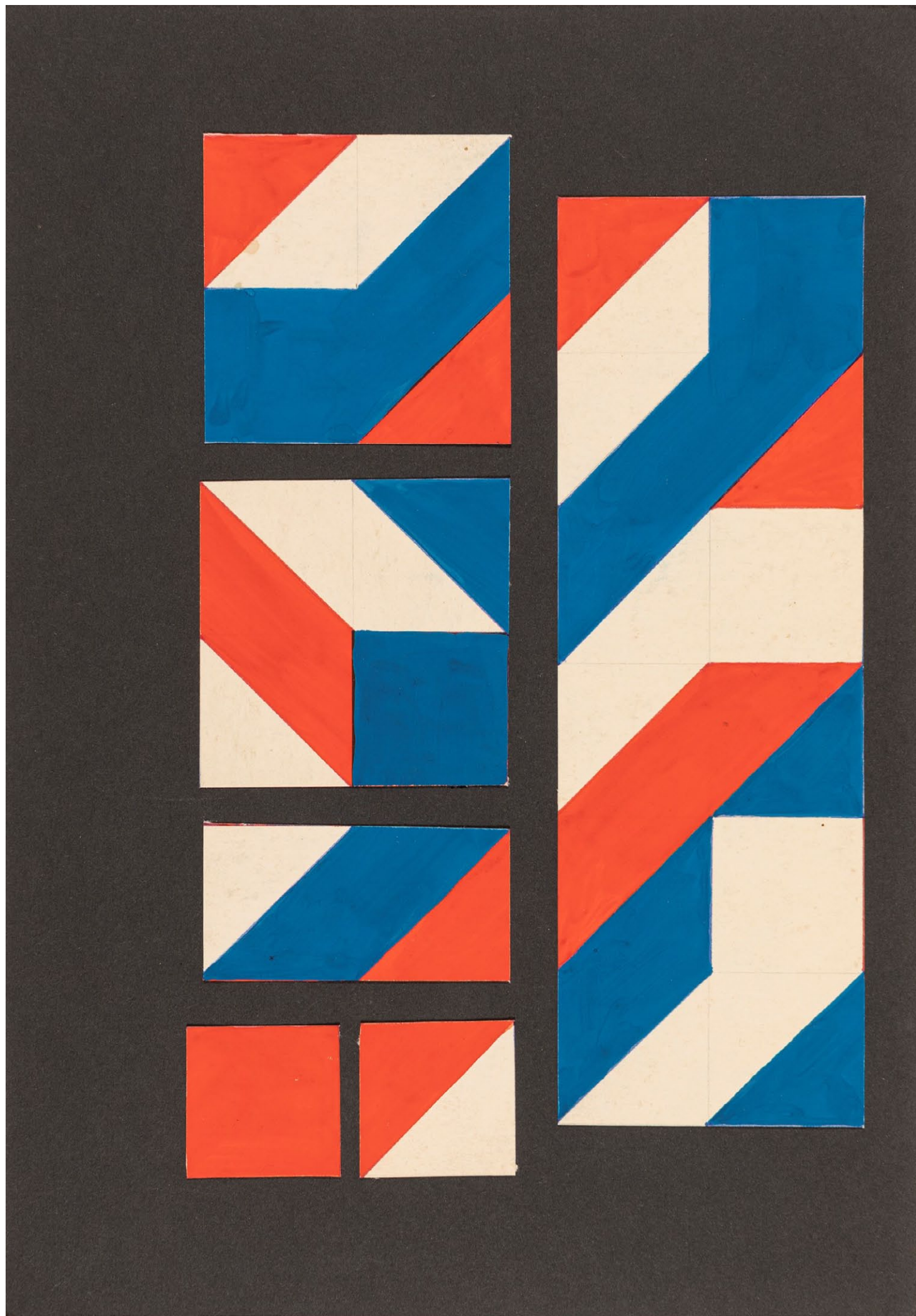


*Untitled*, 1969, enamelled steel plates, 4 pcs, 45 × 45 cm each



*Untitled*, 1969, enamelled steel plates, 4 pcs, 30 × 30 cm each





*Untitled*, 1967-71, tempera and collage on paper, 29.7 × 21 cm



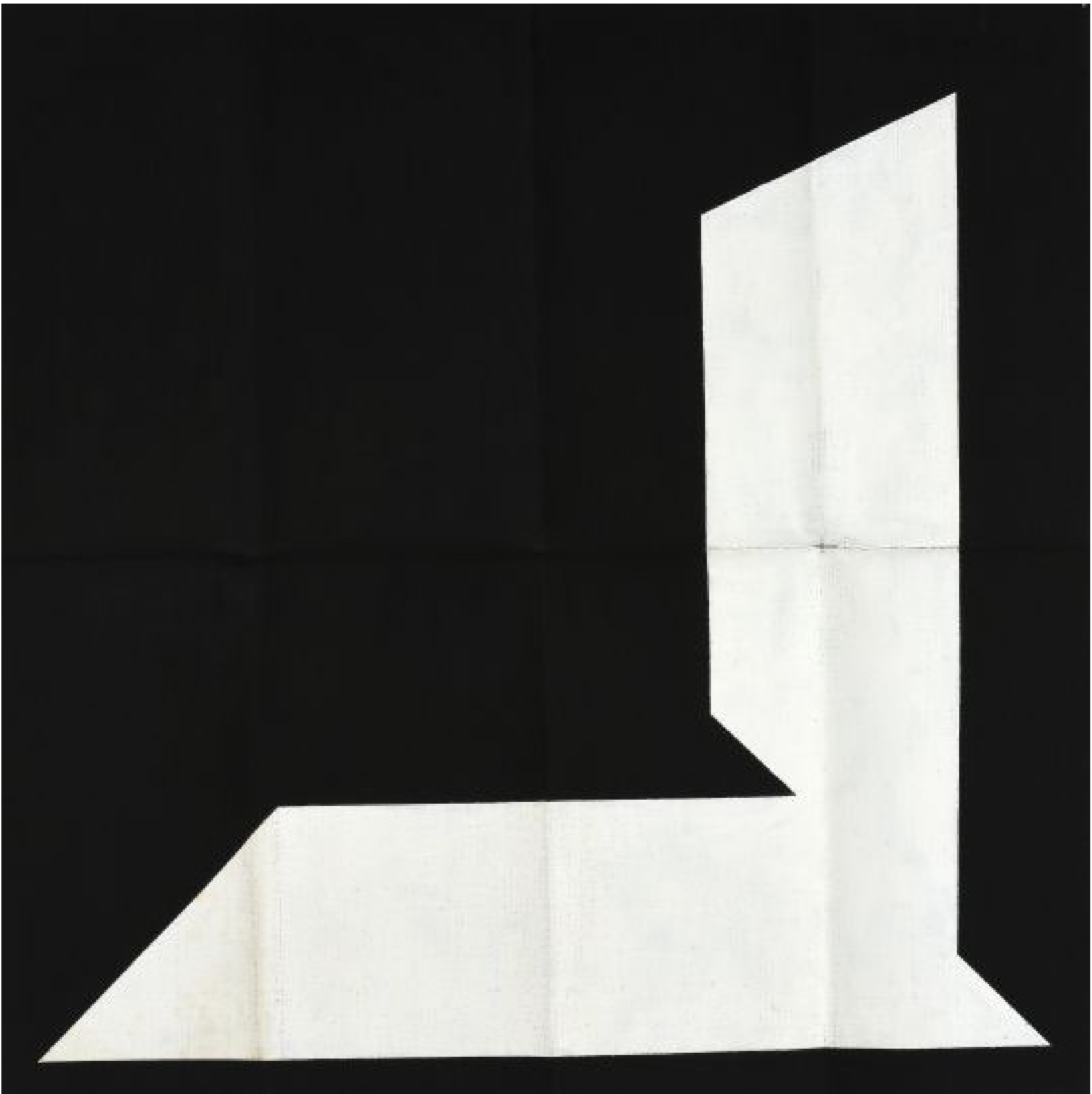
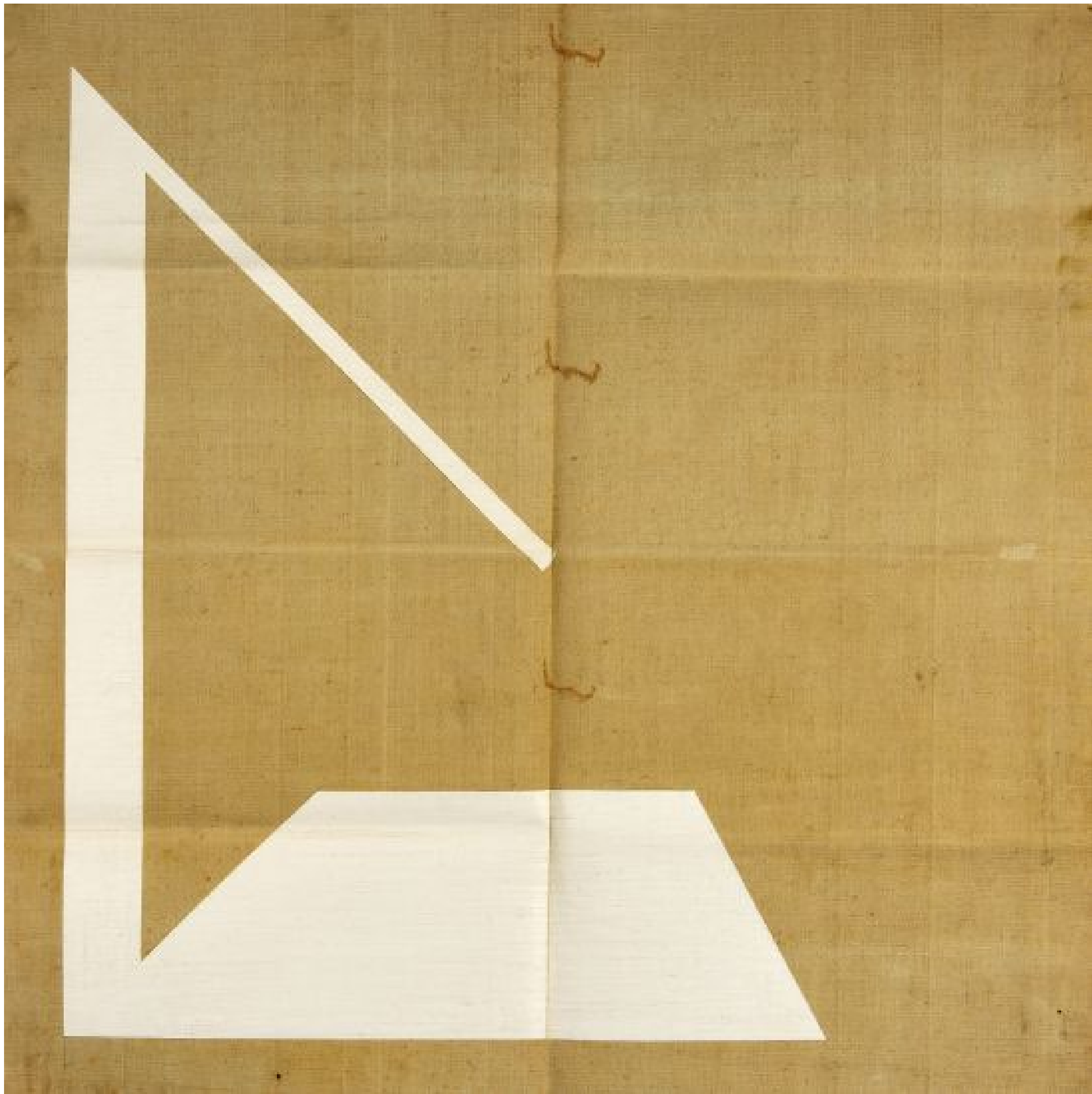
*Untitled*, 1967-71, tempera and collage on paper, 30.5 × 21.5 cm





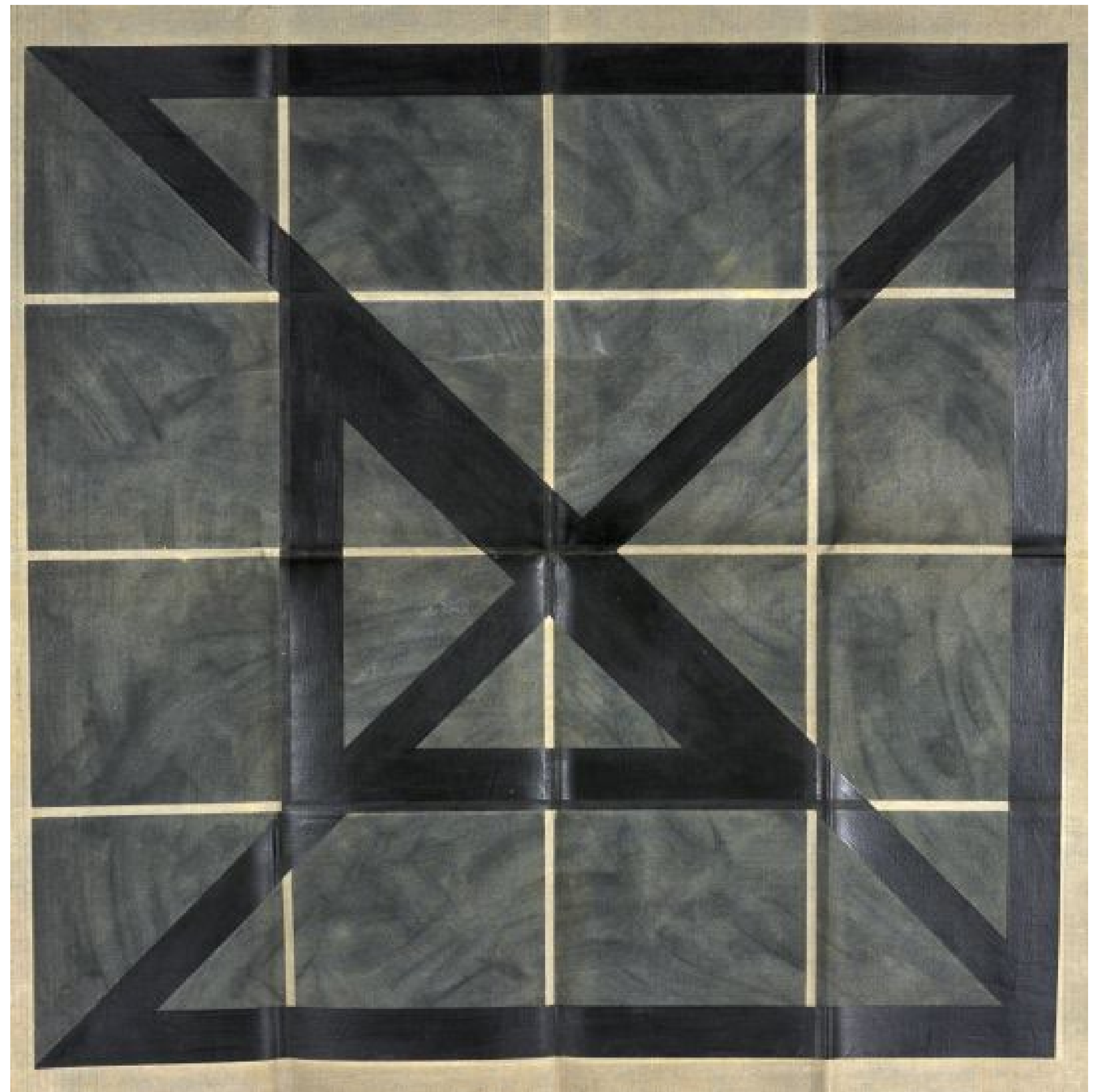
*Untitled I-II*, no date (early 1980s), tempera on paper, 50 × 35 cm each





*Part and Whole VII*, (left) *Part and Whole* (right), 1979, oil on impregnated canvas, 100 × 100 cm each



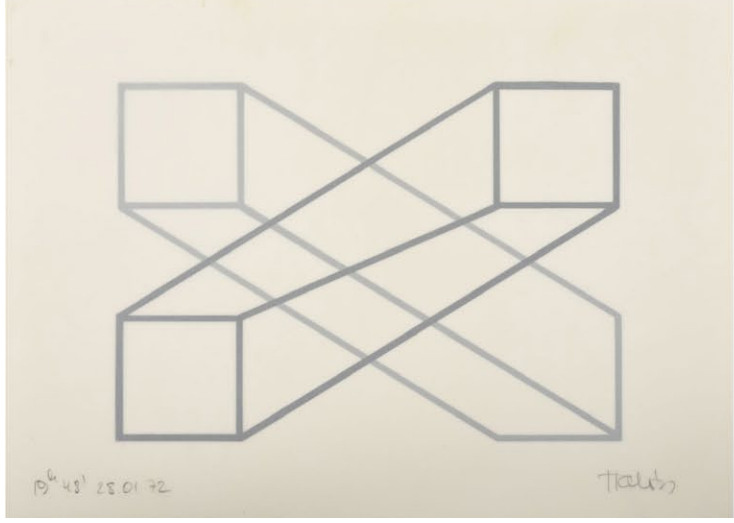
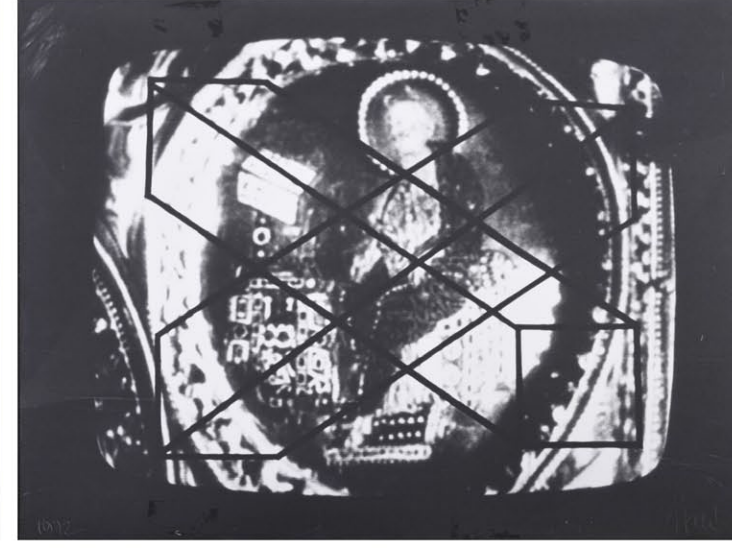
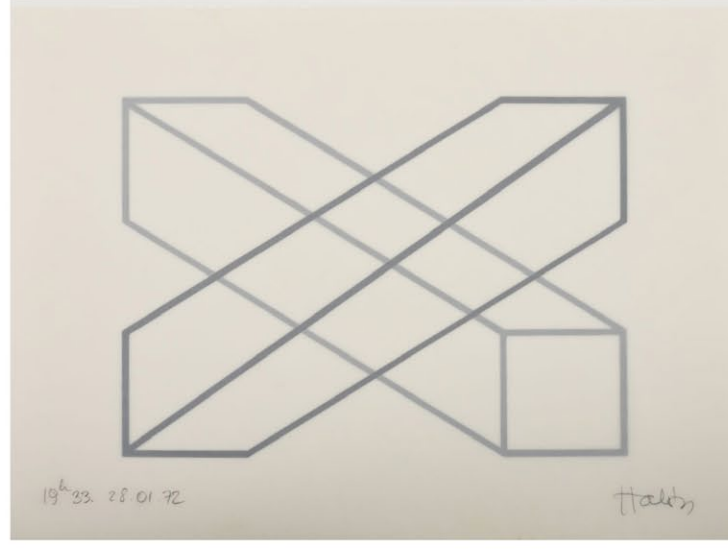
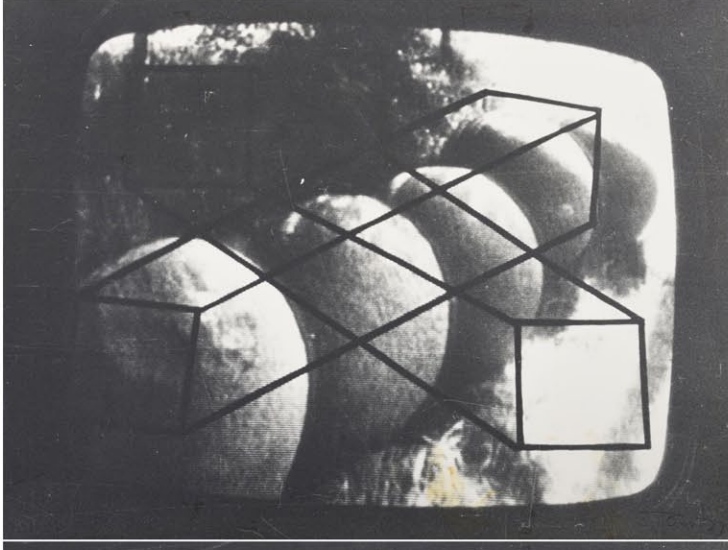
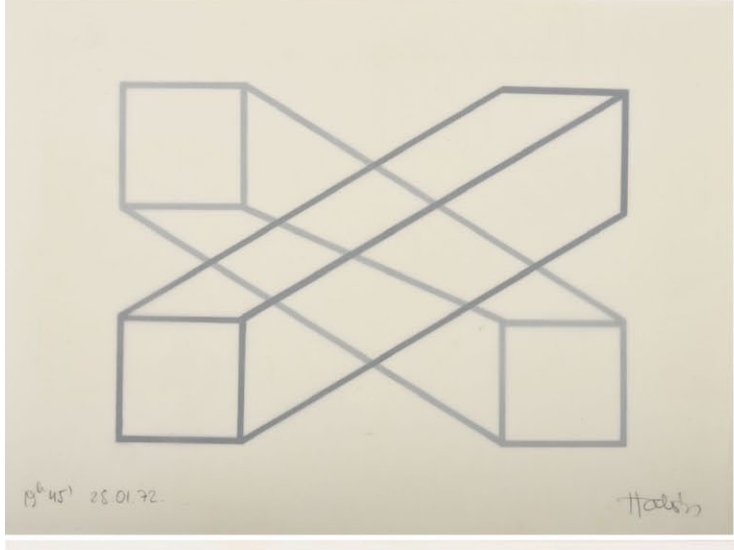
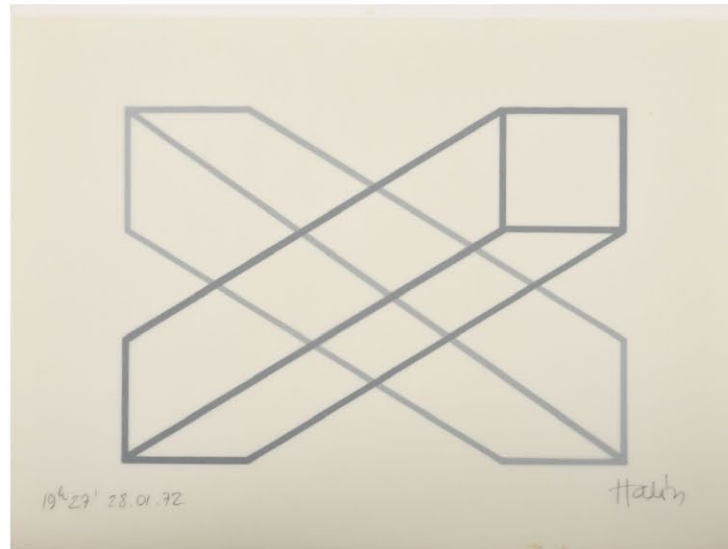
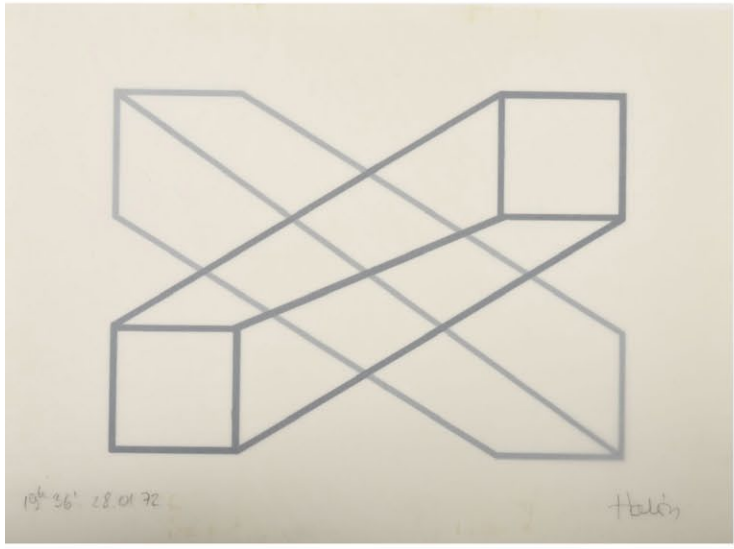
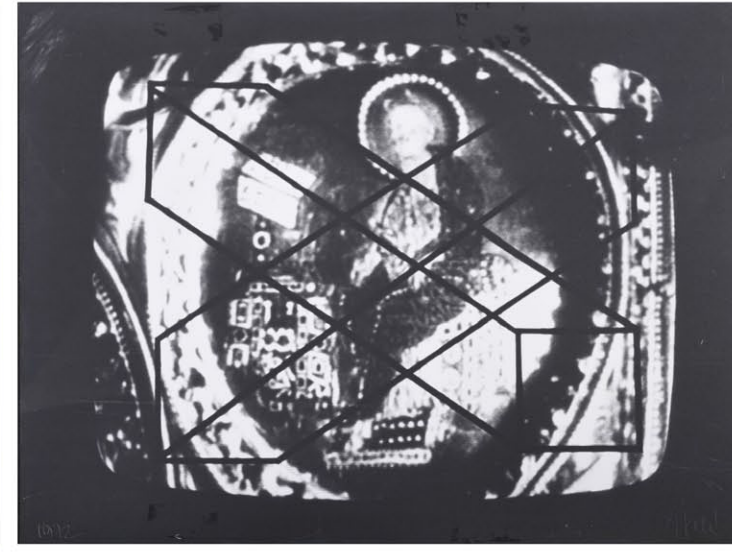
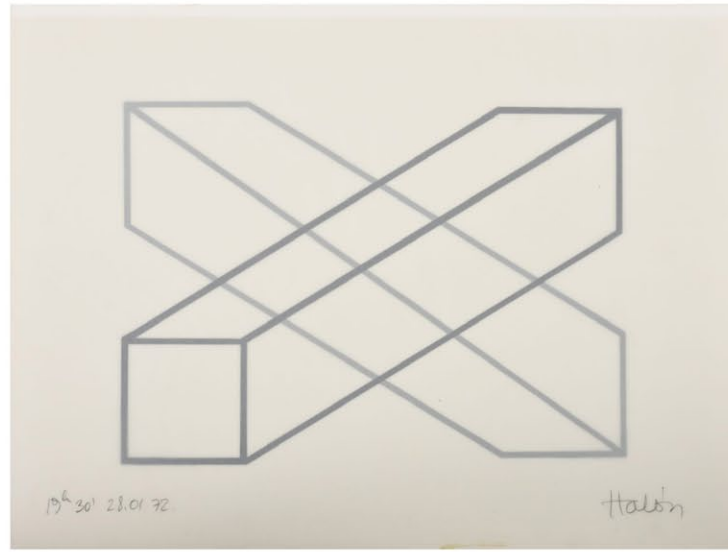
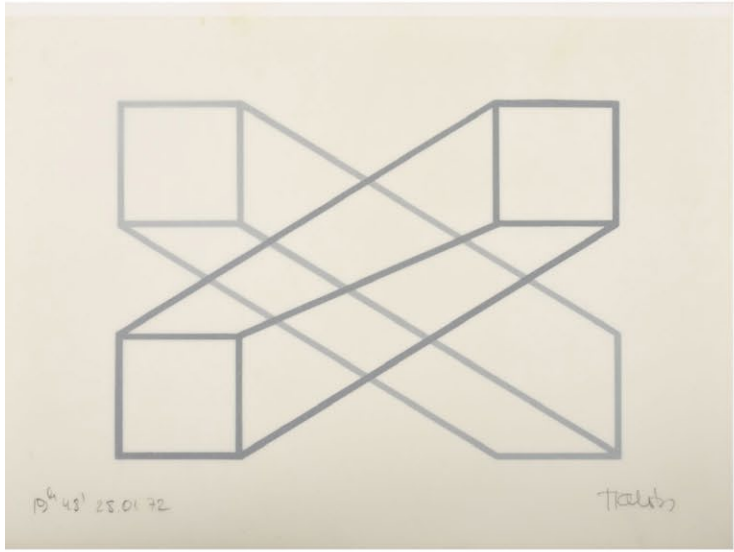
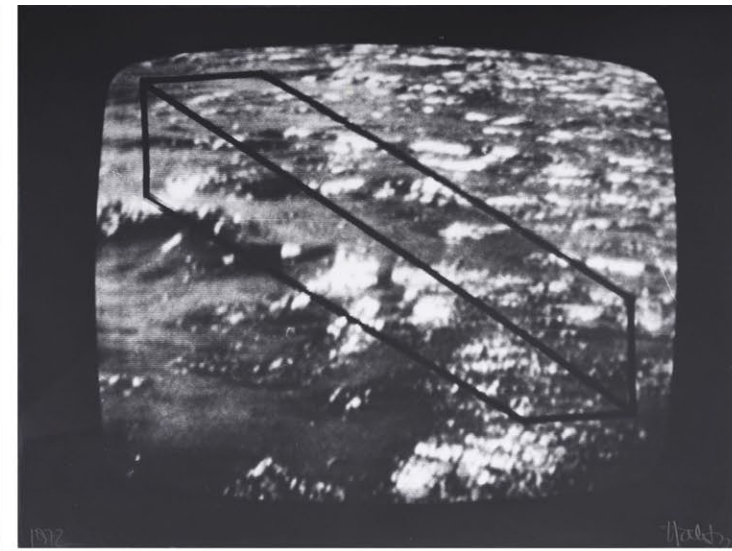
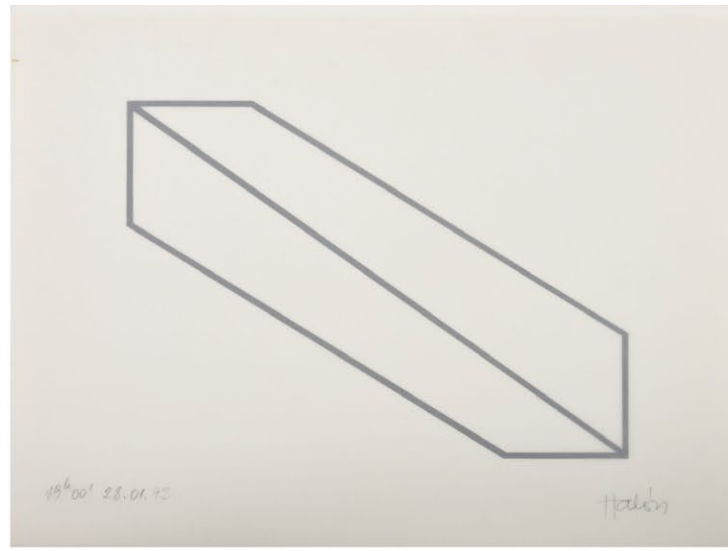
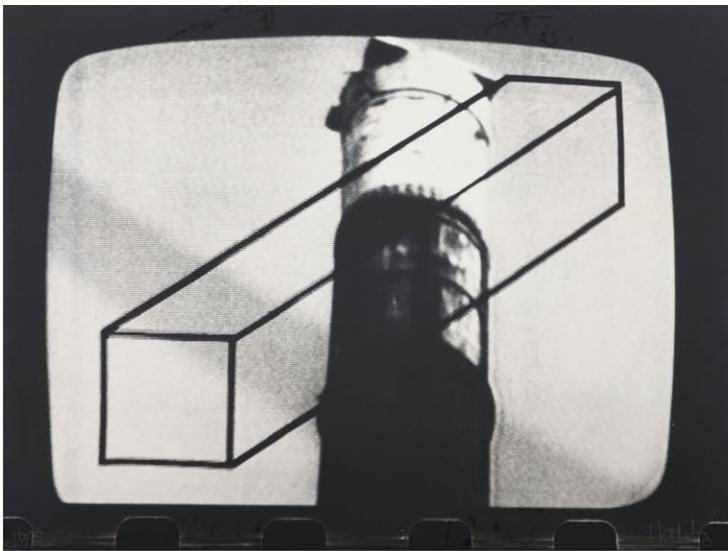
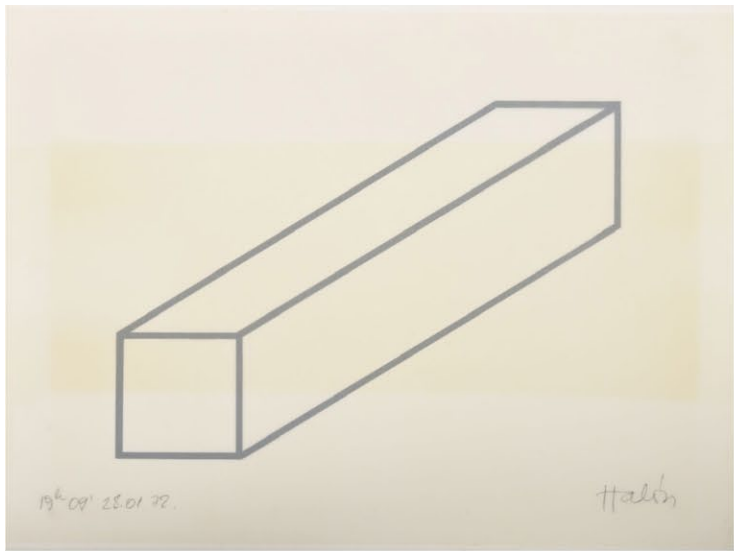


*Structures II* (left), *Sctructures III* (right), 1979 oil and graphite on impregnated canvas (left), acrylic, oil on canvas (right), 100 × 100 cm each









*Templates for Modulated Television (Byzantium); Modulated Television I (Byzantium), 1972*  
tracing paper and cardboard; gelatin silver print on RC paper, 30.4 x 40.6 cm each



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