**PRESS  RELEASE**

**Exhibition title:** Variations of Silence **Authors:** Imre Bak **Venue:** Koppel villa, Ján Koniarek Gallery in Trnava, Zelený kríček 3, Trnava **Curator:** Áron Fenyvesi, Vladimír Beskid **Opening:** 18 May 2023 (Thurs) at 18:00 **Duration:** 18. 5. 2023 (Thurs) – 2. 7. 2023 (Sun)

Ján Koniarek Gallery presents a selection from the last two monumental painting series of the late Imre Bak (1939-2022), one of the most influential figures of Hungarian painting of the past six decades. The artist emerged as a significant member of his generation in the mid-1960s. Imre Bak at the beginning of his career created his own painterly response to the American and German hard-edge and minimalist movements. For decades thereafter, Bak steadily developed the formal language of post-painterly abstraction balancing local avant-garde traditions with the ever-changing language of contemporary painting. Over a career spanning more than half a century, his painting programme has been both varied and unparalleled in its consistency. With an incredible humble attitude towards painting, he was able to constantly open new horizons and synthesise his earlier motifs into new ones, thus interconnecting different phases of his oeuvre.

The core of Bak’s Trnava solo exhibition is his last two painting series created in 2021 and 2022. The entirety of the Variations of Silence series is pervaded by the elemental experience of whitely toned colours. Never before has white played such a central role in Imre Bak’s painting oeuvre, nor has this colour been so emphasised by the artist in the foreground of his pictures. Pure white illuminates this series as an allegory and a source of mystical light, shining through all the light shades. Although Bak has always been interested in a metaphysical interpretation of geometric abstraction, the symbolism of white makes his explorations in this direction even more striking. White can be read in his paintings as transparency, translucence, or even as a manifestation of ‘nothingness’.

His largest ever painting complements the Variations of Silence series as it is also focusing on the connection of white colour and light. Imre Bak stated in his 2018 interview with Hans Ulrich-Obricht á propos of the monumental Light Stories V. piece from 2014: “Light is also a mystical thing for me. The process when you start with the paints, which are matter, and then you try one of them and it becomes a colour. As a next step, it can also be light or shadow, a spatial substance. It is a symbol for me in art and it can also be a symbol in life: how can one get from matter, from the tangible, to the intangible. For this our task, even as human beings: to achieve a spiritual quality from the material.”

Imre Bak consciously painted his last ever painting series in 2022 as a closure of his oeuvre, and as a summary of his more recent painting program. On these canvases, as well in others all along in the last decades, the dynamics of geometric planes are transformed into palpable spatiality by the artist, furthermore portrait-like facial archetypes become recognisable in the paintings. Bak while focusing on eternal themes of painting such as landscapes and portraits also experimented with new collage-like compositions and different texture surfaces. Compared to the Variations of Silence, Bak painted his last series with a much more vibrant and stronger colour palette. The main focus of the series is on the topic of relationships, especially in the complementing twin panels and abstract faces of Together 1. and Together 2., but the theme is highlighted also by other paintings as well. As a proof for his consistent, energetic drive towards new experiments, Bak used even in his last series a completely new form of paint texture, which made his gestural brushtsrokes visible on some of his works. The Eternal Totem - inspired by Gustave Courbet’s infamous painting, Origin of the World - is the final piece of the oeuvre of Imre Bak. With this exceptional painting he addresses the mysterious, even sometimes mystical questions of life and death, and human existence in general.

Imre Bak graduated from the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest in the middle of the 1960s. His neovantgarde generation was labelled as the “Iparterv generation” in Hungarian art history, named after the construction company which hosted their self-organised exhibitions in 1968 and 1969. Imre Bak’s works today can be found in such prominent public collections as the Tate Modern in London, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, the MUMOK in Vienna, Slovenská Národná Galéria in Bratislava, Muzeum umení in Olomuc and Galéria Umenia Ernesta Zmetáka in Nové Zámky among others. During his exemplary career, Bak won the Kossuth and Herder Prizes, he represented Hungary at the Venice Biennale in 1986.

Áron Fenyvesi