

## A PATH TO ABSTRACT PAINTING

Kregar came from a rural environment and therefore often depicted scenes of working in the fields. After WWII, he also started to portray workers. For health reasons, he had to leave Ljubljana after the war and spent some time in Preddvor, Istria, and on the Adriatic islands. In this period, he started to experience nature more intensively, named his relationship with it very special and noting his perception of its changing. This attitude influenced his art by gradually changing real images into coloured surfaces linked with sharp lines and ordered into an irregular geometric grid. He paid more and more attention to colours and their expression. His colour spectrum became freer and more subordinate to his feelings rather than reality, as for him it was not the imitation that was important but the perception of the object. Thus he started to paint classical motifs from the period of realism. In an interview with France Rode in the *Znamenje* magazine (Eng. *Sign*), he said that colours are more effective on bigger and clearer surfaces; therefore, he started to reduce the objects to the shape of surface. For him, this was not a matter of fashion but a necessity and a logical step that derived from his desire for colour. In doing so, he gradually distanced from objectivity naming it a harsh battle and a path leading from the reality of the world to a state of zero-gravity. Kregar's transitional period towards abstract painting was between 1951 and 1953.

The pastoral paintings *After Lunch* and *In the Fields* are best examples of Kregar's transition to abstract painting revealing that, in one year, he transformed a typical realist pastoral motif with a figural group from a real three-dimensional presence into a two-dimensional flat surface that remains recognisable, but moves away from reality. Kregar confirmed and further established his artistic style on a sabbatical to France in 1952. He was always in touch with parallel European art directions and travelled a lot, especially to Paris – the European capital of modern art. In Paris, he got acquainted with the work of the Parisian school or the so-called group “Young Painters of French Tradition”, which was much respected in France at the time. He often mentioned Alfred Manessier as his biggest role model, because his abstract painting was very similar to his own both in terms of shape and message. The selection of Kregar's early abstract paintings, such as *Chartres Symphony*, *Spring Wind*, *Battle*, and *Phantasy*, shows a close affinity with contemporary French painting, whereas his painting *Memory of the French Cathedrals* represents a tribute to France and its cultural heritage. In 1953, Kregar exhibited his new paintings for the first time in a joint exhibition with Riko Debenjak in the Modern Gallery. With this milestone exhibition that was attention-grabbing and criticised, Kregar established himself as a pioneer of abstract painting in Slovenia and the father of a new era of Slovenian art.