GALÉRIA PŘEMYSL STRAKA

A virtual guide to selected works by Přemysl Straka



PAINTINGS · DRAWINGS · SKETCHBOOKS · GRAPHIC WORK



Přemysl Straka

25 June 1926, Terezín – 1 January 2003, Litoměřice

A virtual guide to selected works by Přemysl Straka

Paintings, drawings, sketchbooks and graphic work

Prepared by Galéria Přemysl Straka
Drawing on contemporary texts by Jiří Dolejš and Jan Škvára

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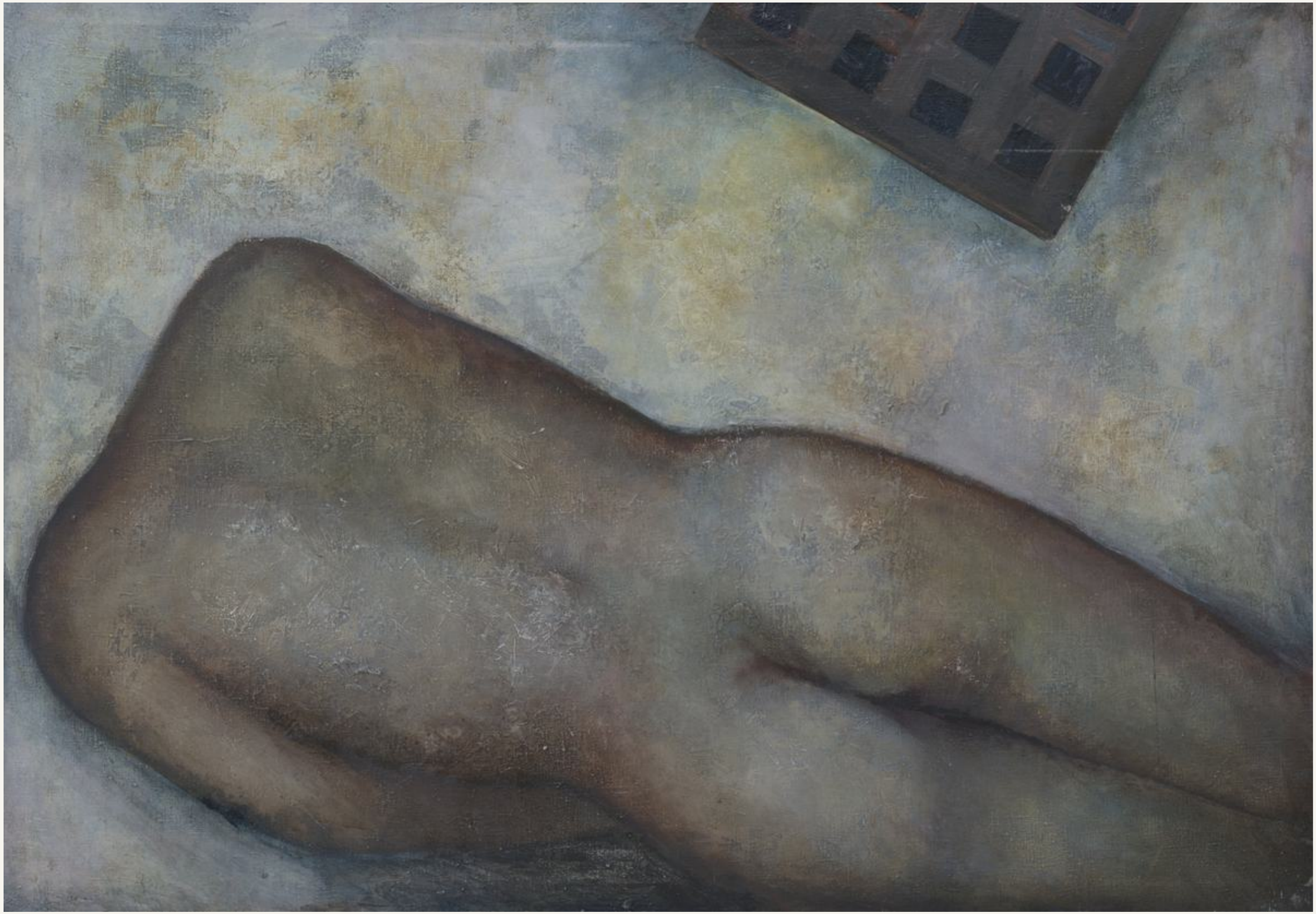
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Looking closely

This guide invites you to explore Přemysl Straka’s paintings at a leisurely pace. From the human face and gesture, it leads to the torso; from richly articulated paint surfaces, to streets and open countryside. The paintings are accompanied by drawings, sketchbooks and graphic designs. An unexpected affinity may emerge alongside a familiar subject: a similar rhythm of lines, the same tension between two colours, or light that transforms an ordinary object.

Large reproductions give the works themselves room to breathe. Smaller working sheets bring us closer to moments of exploration, quick observations and patient looking. Surviving printed materials and a letter in the artist’s own hand reveal another side of his world. You can follow the guide from the beginning, but also return to earlier pages, pause at a single pair of paintings and explore what they share.

Jiří Dolejš’s retrospective essay accompanies this journey with a contemporary perspective on Straka’s work. His complete text from 1988 and excerpts from 1980 and 1991 are supplemented by selected passages by Jan Škvára. The chapters around them leave ample room for a personal encounter with the paintings: their stillness, their colour, and the changing closeness of humanity and nature.



Male Torso. Undated. Oil on canvas, 100 × 140 cm. [D639]

Přemysl Straka 1926 to 2003

Přemysl Straka was born on 25 June 1926 in Terezín and died on 1 January 2003 in Litoměřice. He was a painter, graphic artist and typographer. Litoměřice became his home and, together with Terezín and the landscape of České středohoří, one of the principal settings of his work.

He combined his independent practice with private study in Munich, Rome and Jerusalem. In Prague, he consulted Jan Zrzavý about his work. As a self-taught artist, he gradually developed a distinctive pictorial language, pursuing applied graphic design alongside his fine art.

The paintings reveal the broad arc of his development. Portraits, figures and still lifes are gradually joined by torsos, urban structures and abstract compositions. Landscape later grows in importance: first its expansive space, then the close detail of grasses, flowers, trees and water surfaces. Alongside the paintings, he produced drawings, prints and designs for printed materials.

Within the art world of northern Bohemia, he belonged to the early circle of the Objekt group and described himself as one of its co-founders. Group and solo exhibitions accompanied his work from the early 1960s onwards. This guide traces the different aspects of his practice through paintings and surviving documents.



Untitled. Undated. Oil on canvas, 95 × 145 cm. [D640]

Looking Back at the Painting of Přemysl Straka

Jiří Dolejš / 1988

The exhibitions of Přemysl Straka held in 1986 and half a year later in the Dílo exhibition rooms in Ústí nad Labem and Teplice offered an exceptionally interesting insight into the creative workshop of this Litoměřice artist, inviting deeper reflection on the complex trajectory that characterises the nature of his artistic struggle.

They showed that the changes in his development were not always smooth or without dramatic shifts. More than once on his journey, the artist arrived at certainties that would often have provided someone else with a lifelong programme. Straka was not afraid to leave those certainties behind, for he wanted to test his powers across different areas of subject matter.

At the beginning of his endeavours, even before he became a member of the OBJEKT artists' group, his work was figurative, reflecting his childhood experiences and memories of pre-war and wartime Terezín. In the mid-1960s he produced a cycle of paintings in which, by then a member of OBJEKT, Straka responded with particular sensitivity to the crises facing humanity. This was the TORSOS and FIGURES cycle, in which the human figure became a metaphorical expression of the complex situation of humanity in the 20th century. The profound human content, already characteristic of his earlier major works (for example, Women of Lidice in Terezín), was intensified by the intricately layered structural organisation of the picture surface. The fundamental impression made by the cycle could be described as an affirmation in paint — a defence of human dignity. It was probably no coincidence that

individual motifs in these paintings evoked associations with the events then unfolding in Biafra, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, a shift occurred in both subject matter and genre. Přemysl Straka moved the focus of his interest from figurative motifs to landscape. He began painting the intimately familiar countryside around Litoměřice and in České středohoří, with an emphasis on a reflective approach. His landscape painting has undergone various changes since then, but in none of them has Straka been content merely to describe the landscape.

His paintings have always been meditations on landscape. The term reflective meditation, with which critics sought to capture the particular nature of his painting, remains justified today and certainly says more about his approach to landscape than assigning a wide variety of currents and approaches to the category of expressive realism. At its heart, Straka’s approach treats landscape painting as a sounding board for the artist’s inner world. Into the image of the landscape, the painter transfers the outcome of his thoughts and experiences, his pleasures and anxieties. In his conception, nature provides the impulse, but the painting’s existence, its composition and its means of expression emerge from the artist’s inner life.

In this sense, Straka takes nature and landscape as his starting point, but in the process of painting overcomes their outward appearance, as F. X. Šalda once put it, in order to transform them into a new artistic synthesis.

Looking Back at the Painting of Přemysl Straka / continued

In recent years, further shifts have taken place in Straka’s painting. While the 1970s were dominated by panoramic views of the landscape, allowing Straka to capture its distinctive features, the endless variability of the panoramas of České středohoří and the changes brought to the landscape by the advent of industrial civilisation, the past decade, and especially the past five years, have seen a process in the artist’s work that may be characterised as a closer attachment to nature.

This closer attachment can be observed in the most fundamental elements of a painting’s construction.

It is evident in the motif itself, now a narrower section of landscape in which the life of nature can be observed with far greater immediacy. Straka has even changed the proportion between the area devoted to the earth and nature and the area devoted to the sky. In the new paintings, he leaves the latter only a narrow strip along the upper edge of the canvas, so that he can concentrate on the simplest things — grasses, stones, flowers, shrubs, little streams of water and their reflections. This changed focus has enabled Straka to make new use of the material qualities of the paint itself. The artist now sensitively seeks out visual focal points and chromatic counterpoints, consciously bringing the emotional qualities of the paint into play.

It is precisely this more intensive use of the magic of paint that contributes to the deeper lyrical and emotional resonance of his paintings. At the same time, Straka has not lost his interest in revealing the distinctive features of a particular landscape. His South Bohemian motifs, for example, are readily distinguishable from his North Bohemian ones, even though

the subjects are similar in many cases.

Another welcome change has taken place in Straka’s series of pastels. They reveal a new unity of drawing and colour. This has had a particularly positive effect on the way the artist renders the foreground of his pictures. It now feels more spontaneous, and the freshness of his handling enhances the overall impression of the pastels.

If, as we have said, the Torsos cycle of the mid-1960s achieved a first artistic synthesis, today we can speak of a new synthesis resulting from the artist’s maturation both as a person and as an artist. Of a number of paintings from this latest period, we may even say that the Litoměřice painter has succeeded in realising possibilities in his painting that had previously remained untapped. Among these works is undoubtedly his Confluence, in which the magic of the paint has wholly absorbed the drawn construction of the image. Summer and Meadow in Bloom are equally compelling. It may be surprising that he has found a renewal of his painting in subjects that might seem the simplest of all.

Yet this turn towards the heart of nature and landscape has allowed Straka to draw on possibilities and reserves of his talent that had long remained hidden. This return to the fundamental realities of natural life thus also appears as evidence of artistic maturity.

The welcome changes we have traced in Straka’s work of recent years, together with the artist’s diligence and determination, give us hope that further painterly surprises may lie ahead.

Jiří Dolejš, Kulturní listy litoměřického okresu, 1988, pp. 34–36.



Harbour. Undated. Oil on canvas, 85 × 125 cm. [D642]

Faces and closeness

A portrait begins with the meeting of two gazes. Sometimes it is direct and open; at other times the face turns away or almost disappears into shadow. The distance between the painter and the sitter changes in the process: from attentive observation of facial features to looser painting in which colour and gesture are the principal bearers of likeness.

Self-portraits, family faces and figures engaged in ordinary activities create a space of intimacy. Concentration on an everyday task can be as eloquent as a formal pose. The face remains part of the whole painting: the tone of the background, the position of the hands or a slight tilt of the head can transform its mood.

Alongside the paintings are drawings and related treatments of the same motif. Their proximity allows us to follow the passage from line to an area of colour without having to determine which version came first. At the end, individual faces join a group of passengers. Here, closeness emerges from a shared space and the quiet rhythm of repeated silhouettes.



Self-Portrait 1. 1951 or 1958, uncertain. Oil on canvas, 70 × 60,5 cm. [D47]



Self-Portrait 2. 1954. Oil on canvas, 60 × 50,5 cm. [D50]



Portrait of Father. 1951. Unidentified medium on canvas, 34,5 × 25 cm. [D59]



Parents. 1951. Oil on canvas, 71 × 59 cm. [D102]



Portrait of a Woman, Nada. 1957. Oil on canvas, 40 × 40 cm. [D51]



The Women: Nadia and Mother-in-Law. 1960. Pastel drawing, 58 × 39 cm. [D293]

Memory and a study of a face



Memory. 1975. Oil on canvas, 86 × 75 cm. [D643]



Study of a Woman / Memory. Undated. Black pen on paper, 19 × 14 cm. [D449]

Alongside the painting Memory is a detail of a portrait study catalogued in the archive under the same motif. According to a recollection recorded in the gallery’s inventory, the model for the study was Nada’s mother, Straka’s mother-in-law.



Return. Undated. Ink on paper, 30 × 50 cm. [D155]

Woman in the Kitchen

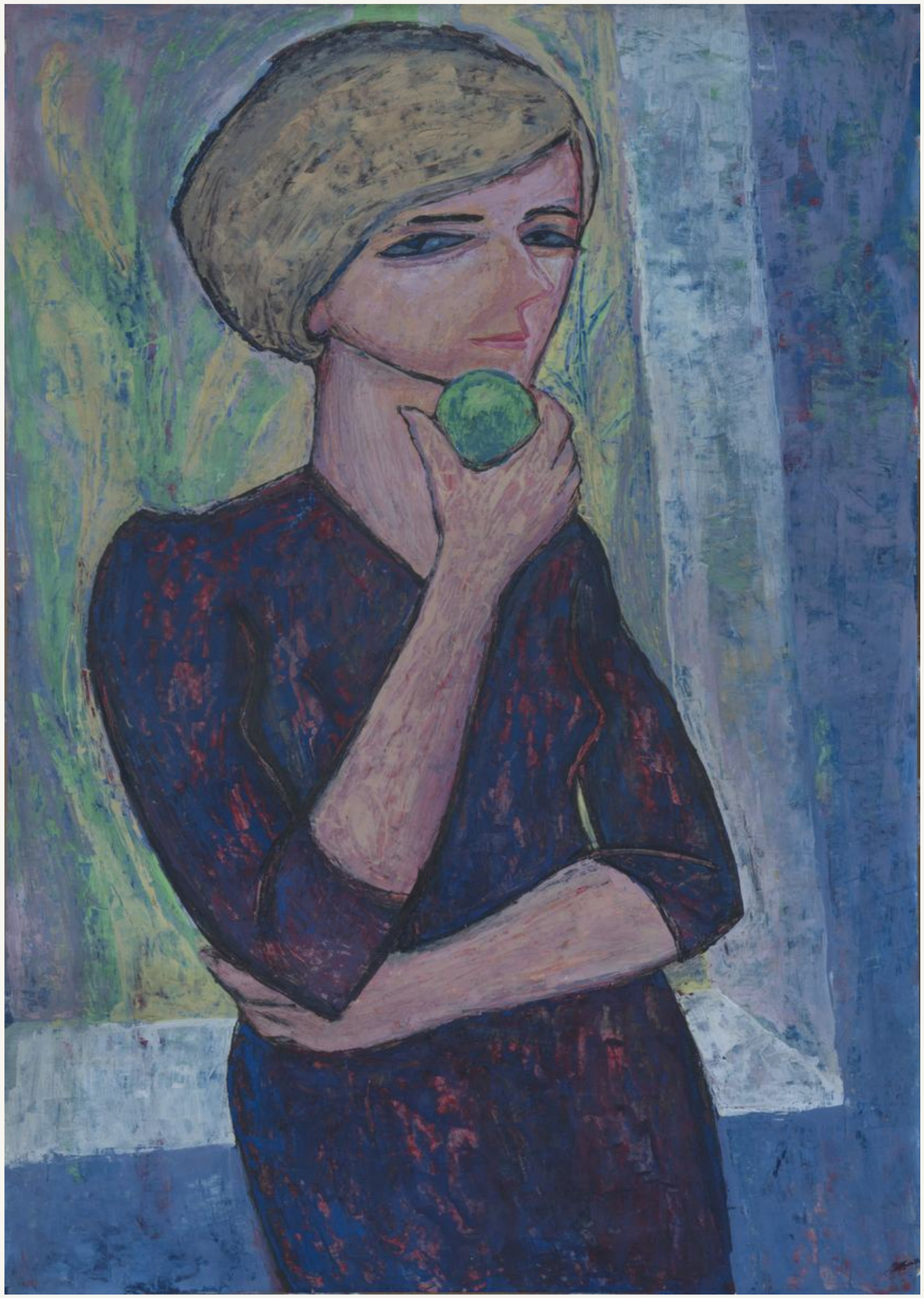


Woman in the Kitchen. 1950–1959 (estimate). Oil on canvas, 70 × 60 cm. [D46]

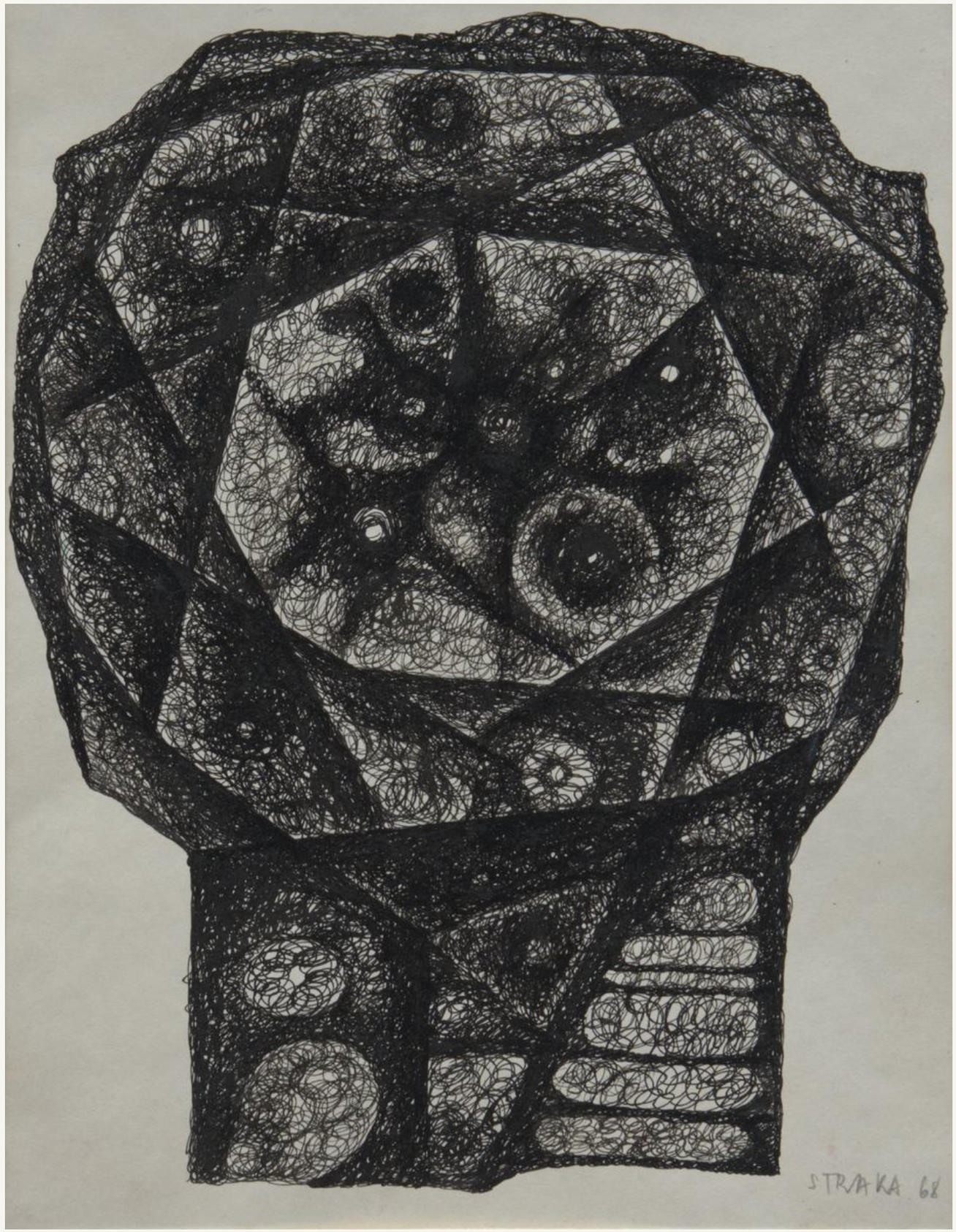


Woman in the Kitchen. 1958. Tempera or ink (medium unclear), 58,5 × 41 cm. [D292]

Two versions of the same motif. The relationship between the study and the finished painting is not documented.



Woman with an Apple, Naďa. Undated. Tempera on card, 88 × 62 cm. [D615]



Head. 1968. Ink on paper, 28 × 20 cm. [D192]



By Bus. 1957. Tempera on paper, 40 × 52 cm. [D125]



On Horseback. 1957. Tempera on paper, 52 × 40 cm. [D126]

Na zábradlí

A stage can emerge from just a few lines. An elongated figure leans forward, hands open up the space, and a small object becomes a partner in movement. In these sheets, the body has both lightness and the precariousness of balance. Colour gives it another voice: blue, green, yellow and red transform the silence of mime into a lively pictorial rhythm.

Divadlo Na zábradlí opened in December 1958, and Ladislav Fialka’s mime company was formed there in the spring of the following year. That same year, Jiří Suchý and Jiří Šlitr founded the independent Semafor theatre, named after seven small forms of performance. Prague’s small theatres were then opening up a space for song, poetry, humour and storytelling without words.

Straka’s sheets associated with Na zábradlí and the year 1961 capture precisely this ability of a gesture to set an entire story in motion. Figures meet, separate and arrange themselves into almost abstract patterns. Other theatrical motifs broaden the chapter to encompass different aspects of the stage world. The eye can follow an individual figure as well as the empty space around it, which allows the movement to continue.



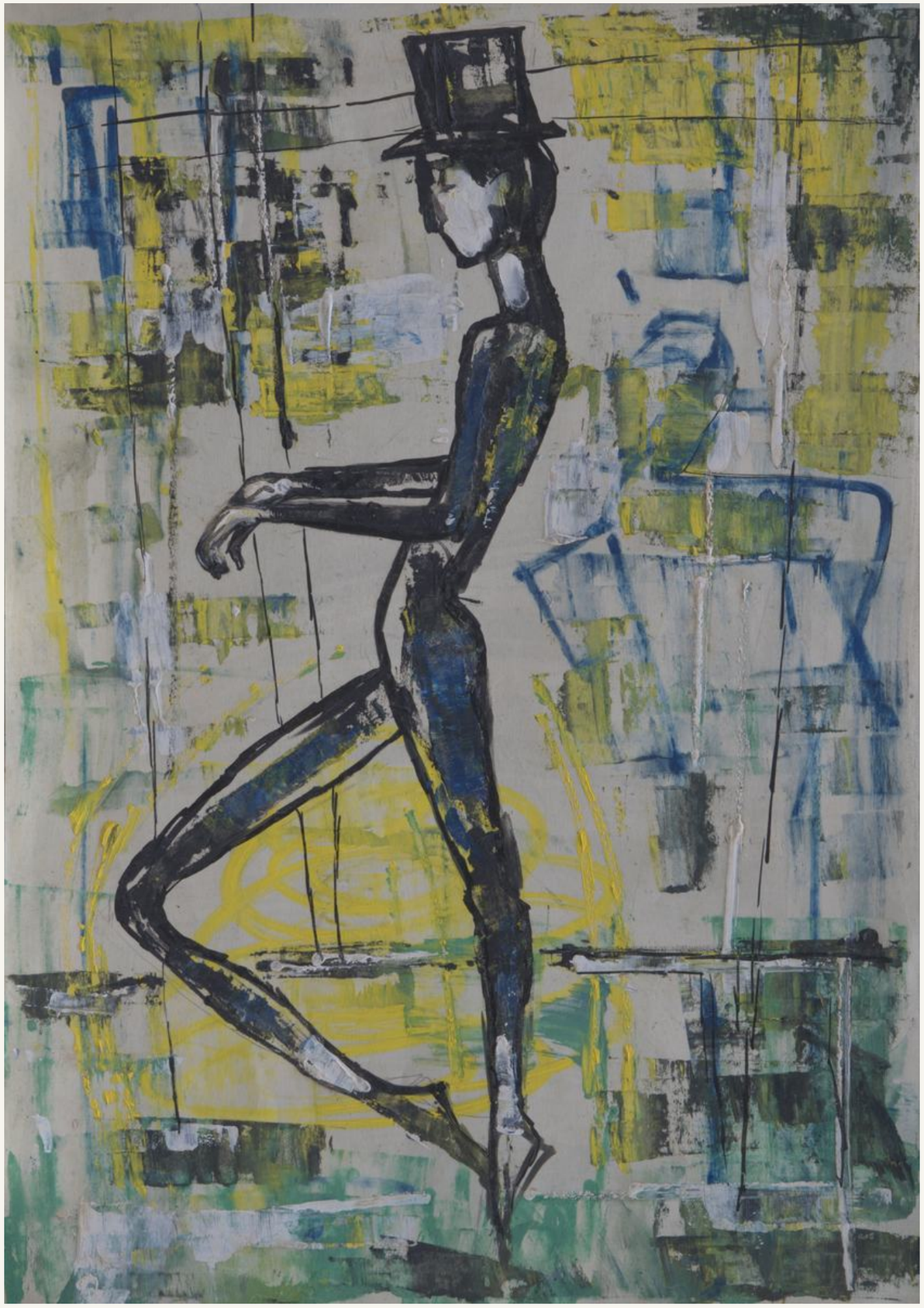
Zábradlí 61 No. 24. 1961. Watercolour, 42 × 60 cm. [D224]



Zábradlí 61 No. 28 / Mime. 1961. Dimensions according to the inventory 42 × 60 cm. [D228]



Zábradlí 61 No. 5. 1961. Watercolour, 42 × 60 cm. [D205]



Zábradlí 61 No. 25. 1961. Watercolour, 42 × 60 cm. [D225]



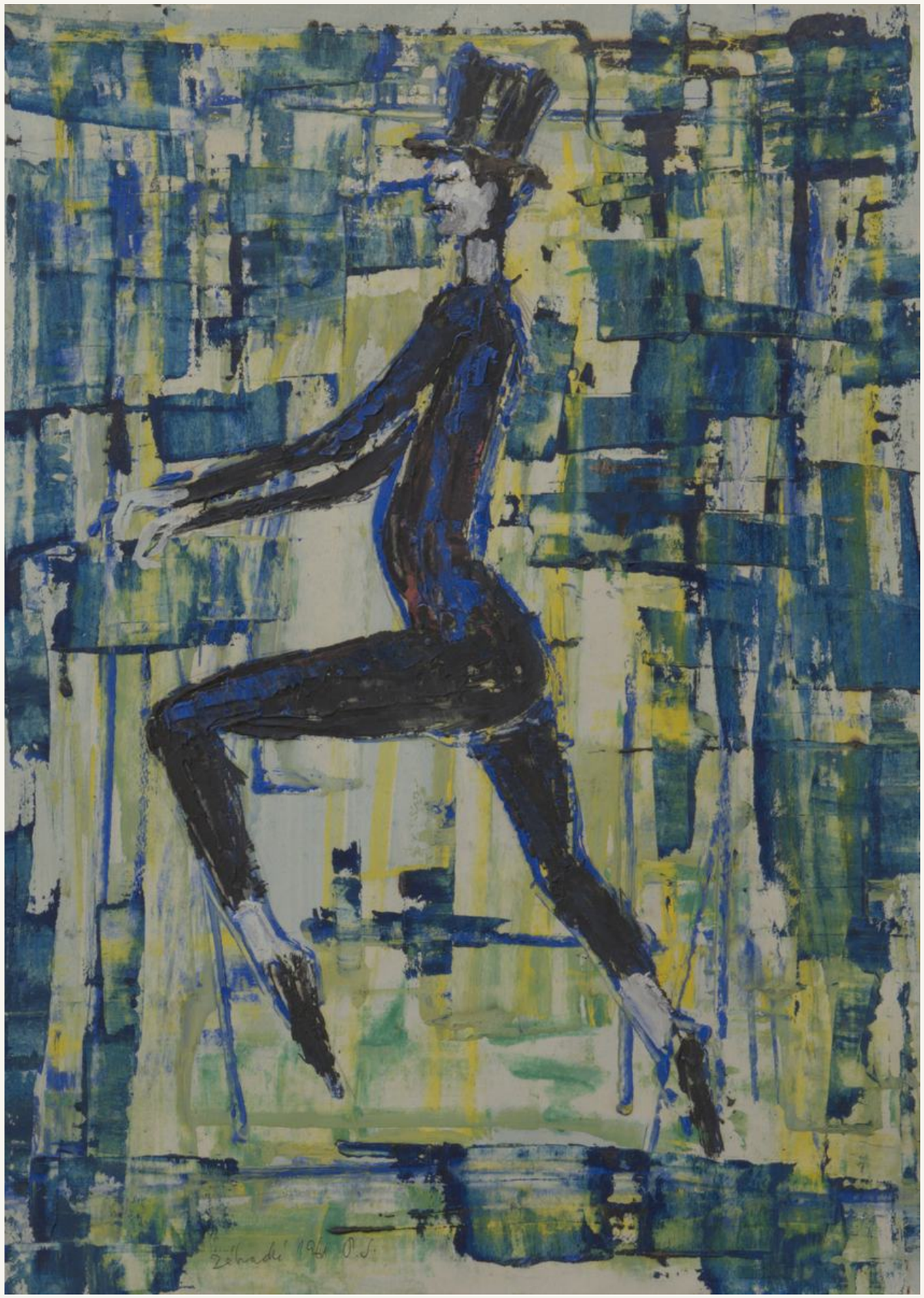
Zábradlí 61 No. 22. 1961. Watercolour, 42 × 60 cm. [D222]



Zábradlí 61 No. 21. 1961. Watercolour, 42 × 60 cm. [D221]



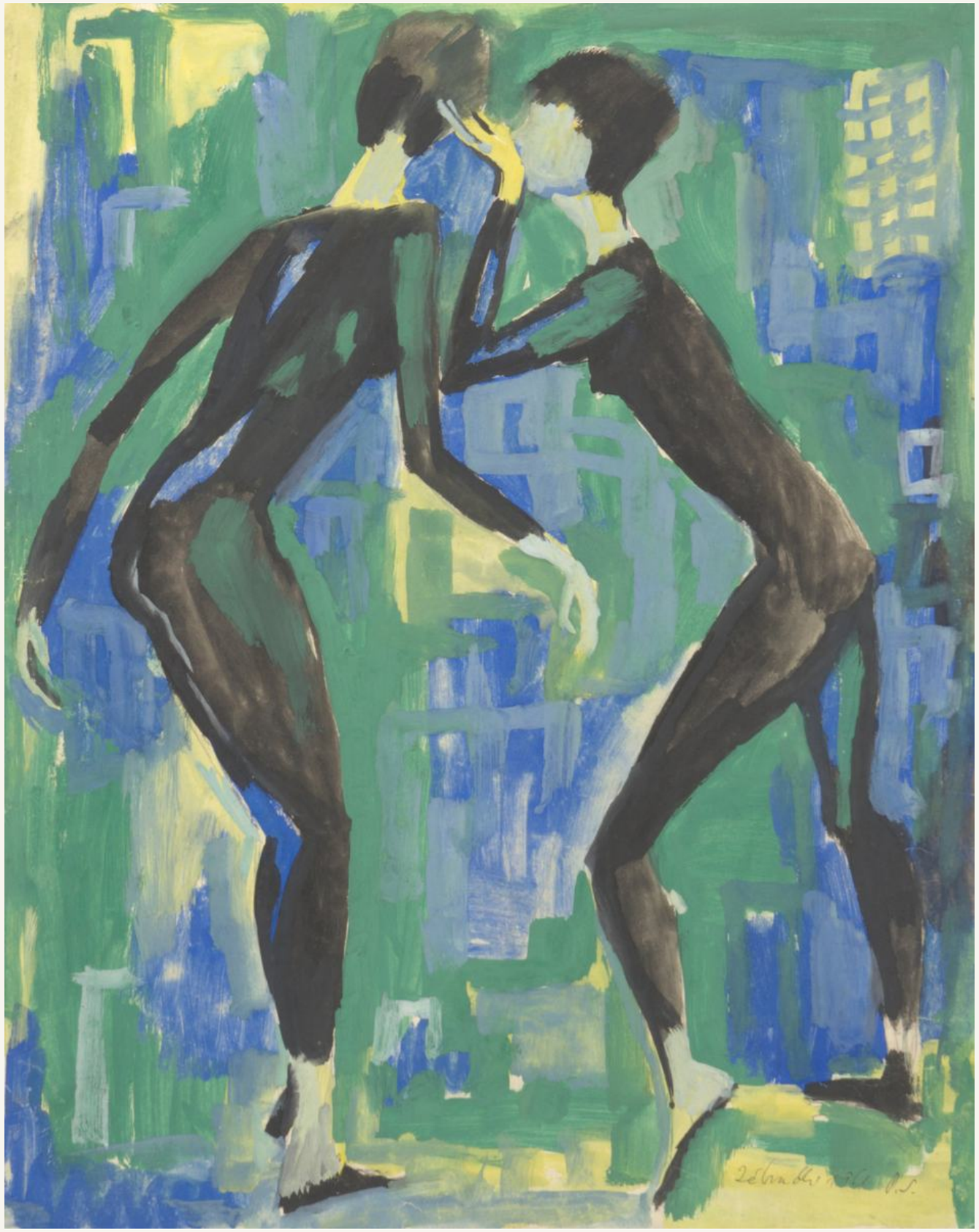
Zábradlí 61. 1961. Watercolour, 47,5 × 33,5 cm. [D234]



Zábradlí 61. 1961. Watercolour, 37,5 × 34 cm. [D334]



Mime. 1961. Watercolour, 47,5 × 34 cm. [D235]



Mime. 1961. Watercolour, 48 × 39 cm. [D236]



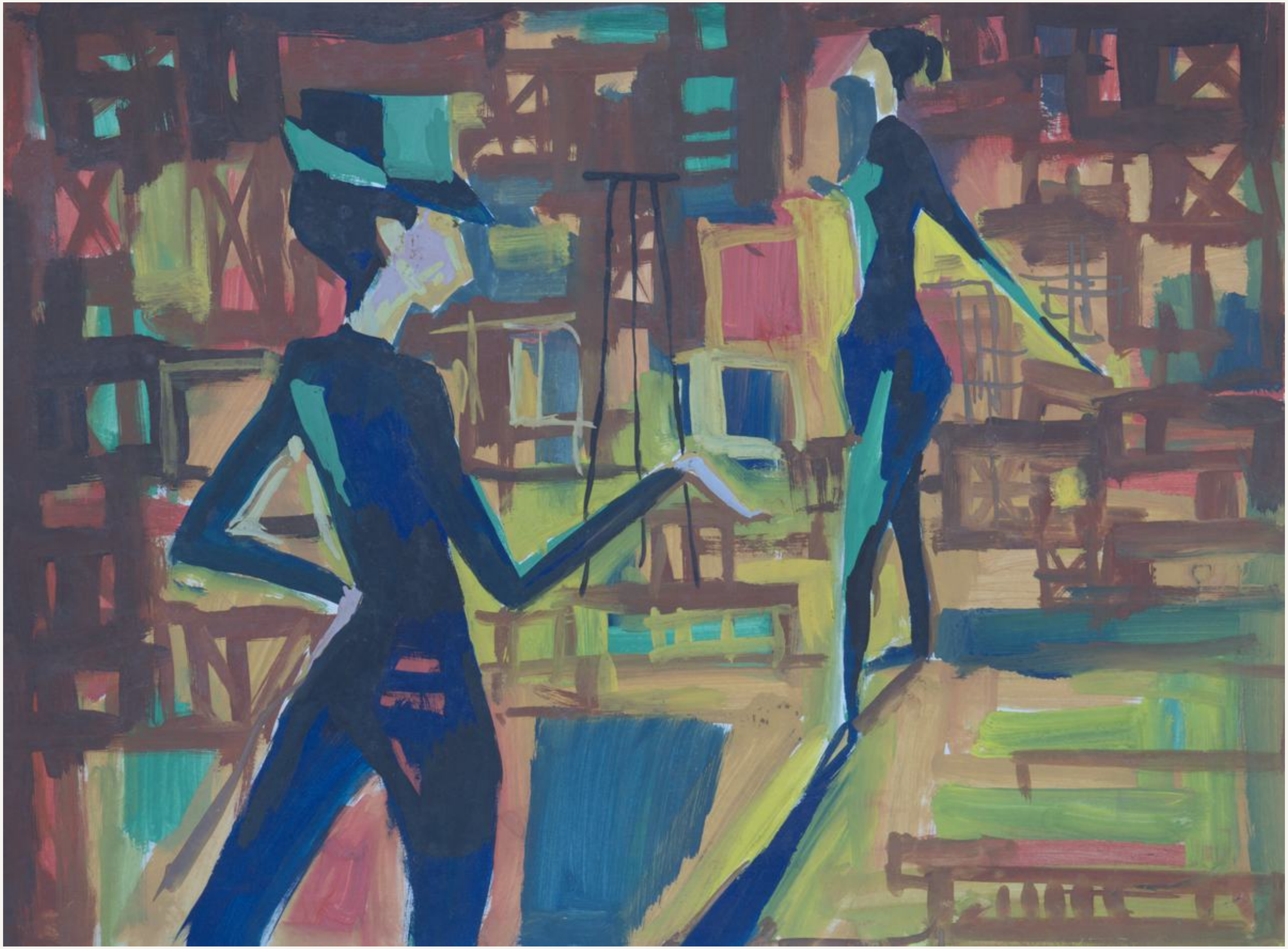
Mime for Four. Undated. Ink and tempera on card, 53 × 38 cm. [D538]



Mime. Undated. Tempera on card, 62 × 44 cm. [D498]



Actress / Dancer. Undated. Tempera on card, 62 × 44 cm. [D499]



At the Theatre. Undated. Tempera on card, 38 × 51 cm. [D543]



Mime: Three Figures. Undated. Pastel on card, 45 × 62 cm. [D507]



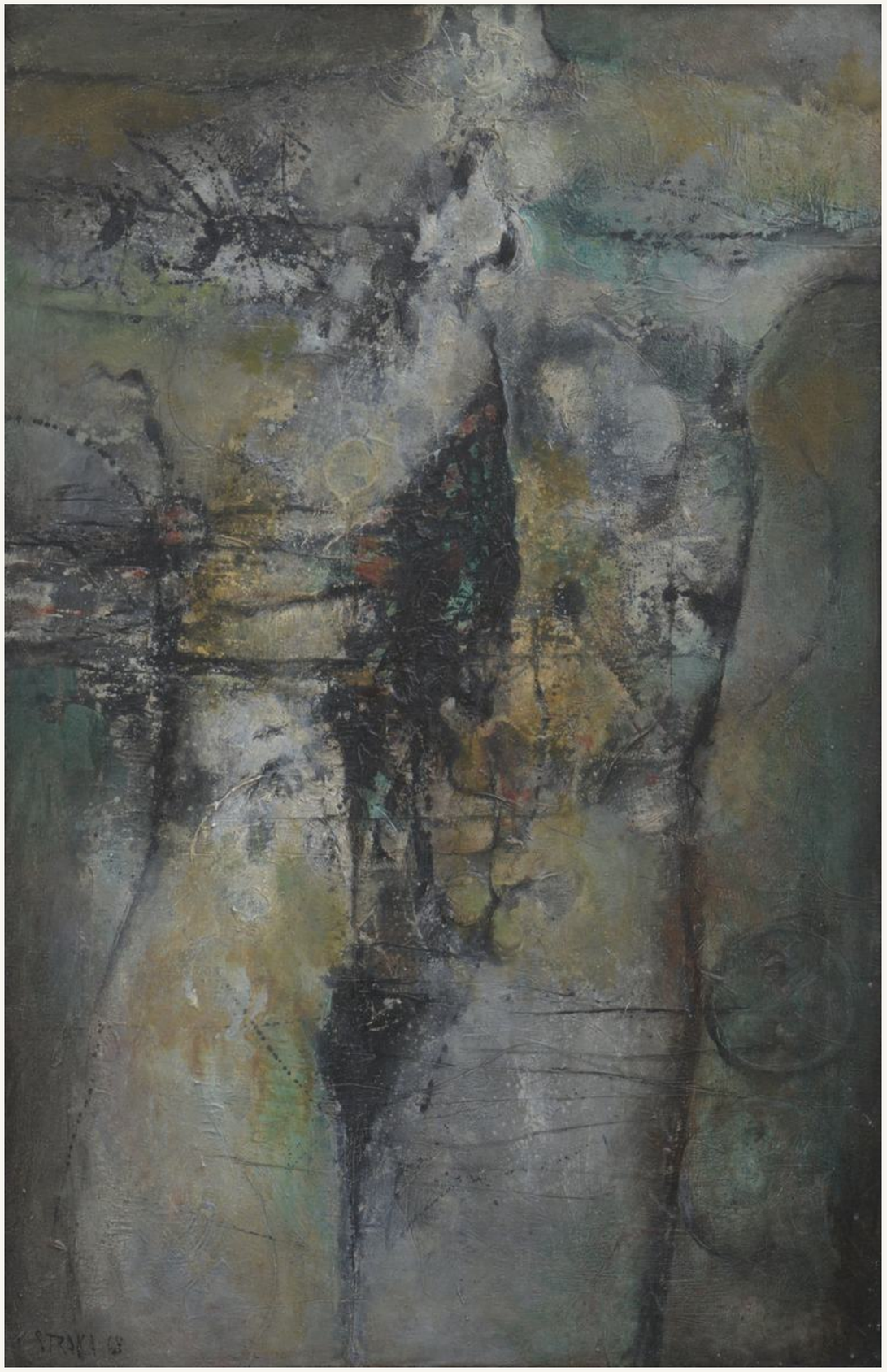
Mime 1. Undated. Mixed media: ink, tempera and pastel, 43 × 30 cm. [D570]

Torsos, abstraction and collages

The human body is transformed in these paintings. Sometimes the curve of a shoulder or the narrowing of a waist still holds it together; at other times only a few areas of colour remain. The torso stands at the threshold of recognition: it recalls a human being while also opening a view into the very substance of the painting, its layers, grooves and irregular edges.

From the figure, the path leads to openings, walls and urban structures. A similar vertical form may appear as a body in one work and a narrow passage in another. Painting acquires a space in which the solid and the disrupted, the enclosed and the open stand in close proximity. Some areas draw us in through the intensity of their colour, others through small traces that emerge only on closer inspection.

Dense paintings alternate with lighter ink works, colour studies and collages incorporating fragments of photographs and printed matter. A change of material brings a different pace and scale. One image grows out of layering, another from a rapid line or the meeting of found fragments. Across these differences, the search for form and for new ways to organise a picture remains alive.



Torso 427 B. 1967 / 1968 (dates differ between sources). Oil on canvas, 115 × 74 cm. [D130]

The painting as a place

From his first appearance on the art scene, Straka belonged to those artists whose work was marked by a profound existential experience. More precisely, it sprang directly from that experience. He carried within him an urgent need to understand the painting as a place in which, across a stylistic range between abstract expressionism and New Figuration, the motifs of torsos and figures could develop a parable of the complex situation and fate of humanity in the second half of the 20th century.

Jiří Dolejš, exhibition text for the gallery in Litoměřice, 1991. Excerpt.



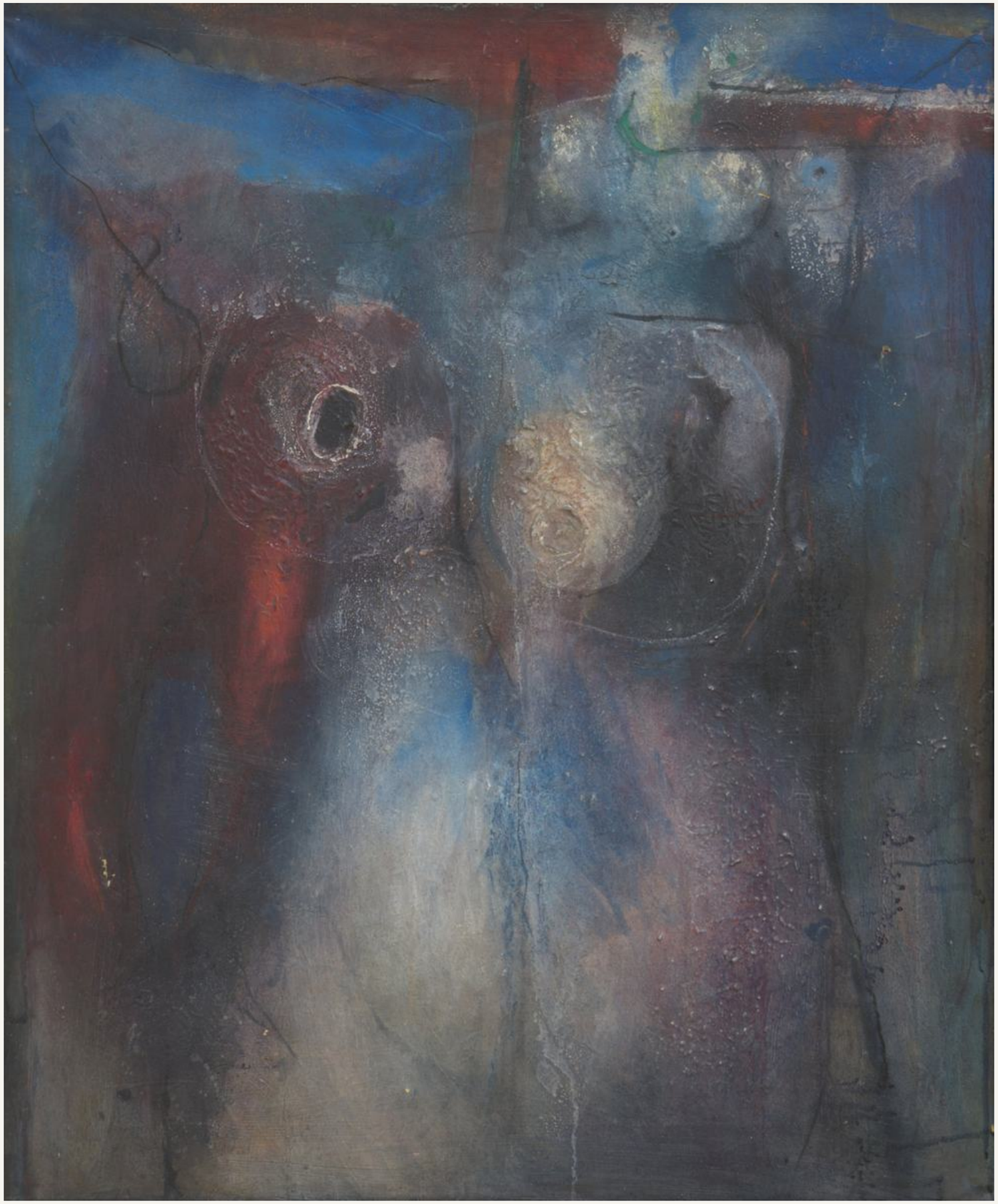
Brown Torso. 1969. Oil on canvas, 85 × 68 cm. [D131]



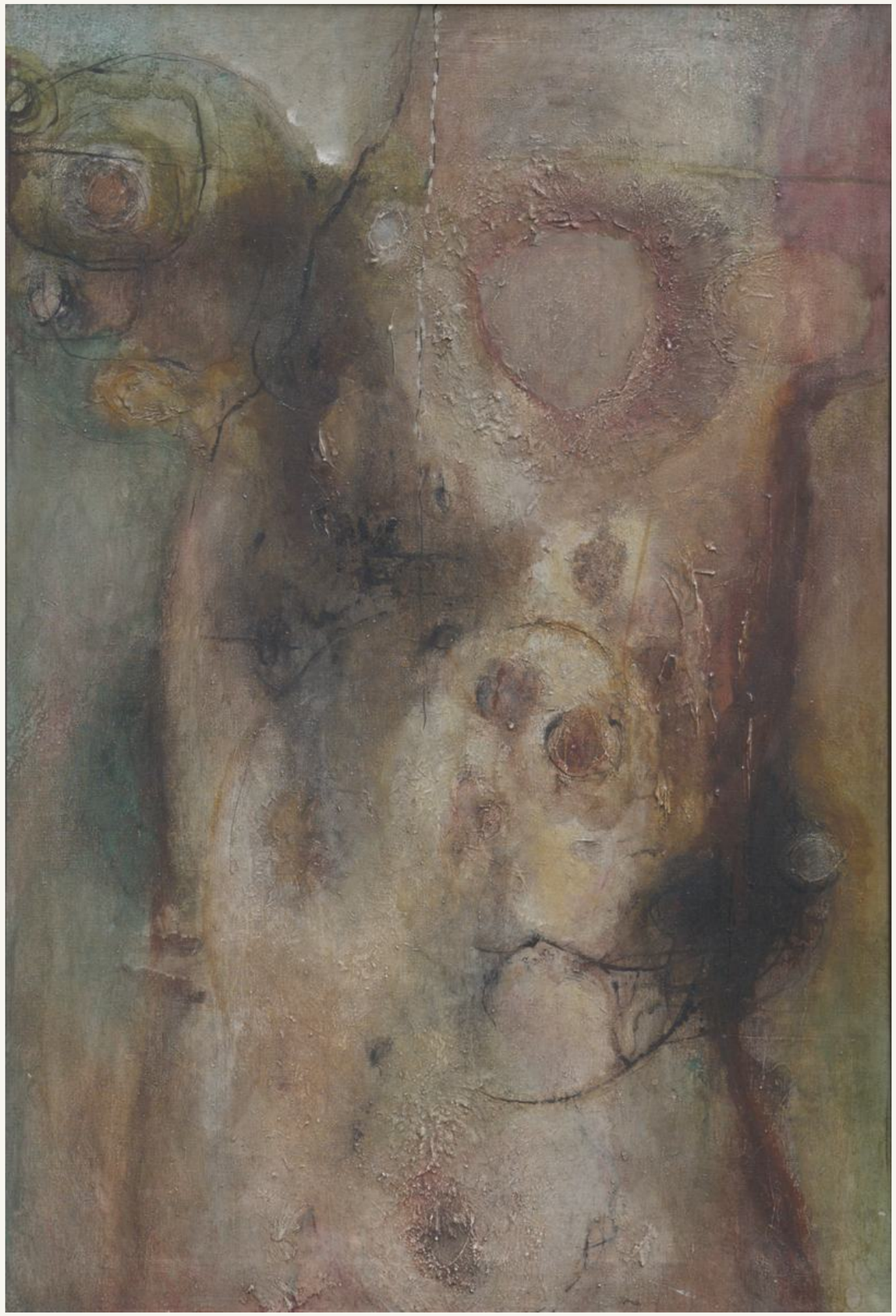
Torso 7. 1960s. Oil on canvas, 65 × 95 cm (unverified). [D132]



Torso 2. Probably 1960s. Oil on canvas, 60 × 75 cm. [D133]



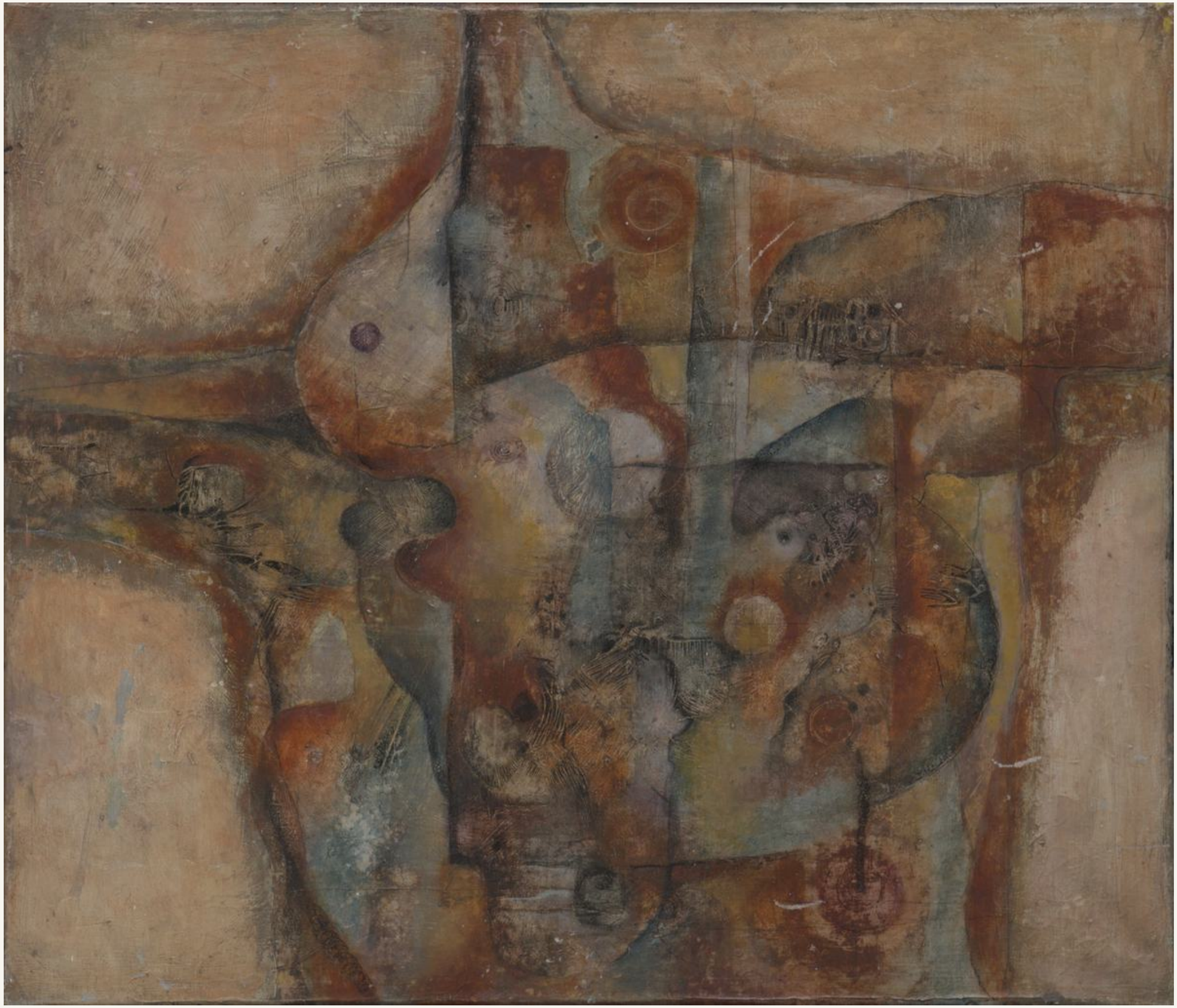
Torso. 1960s. Oil on canvas, 75 × 62 cm. [D142]



Torso 15. Probably 1960s. Oil on canvas, 93 × 63 cm. [D146]



Cage. 1967. Oil on canvas, 60 × 65 cm. [D134]



Humanity Has Mastered the Elements. Probably 1960s. Oil on canvas, 60 × 70 cm. [D137]



Thought. 1960s. Oil on canvas, 60 × 70 cm. [D147]



Eva. Undated. Tempera on paper, 52,5 × 68 cm. [D303]



Windows. Probably 1960s. Unidentified medium, 65 × 60 cm. [D136]



Window. 1960s. Oil on canvas, 68 × 88 cm. [D141]



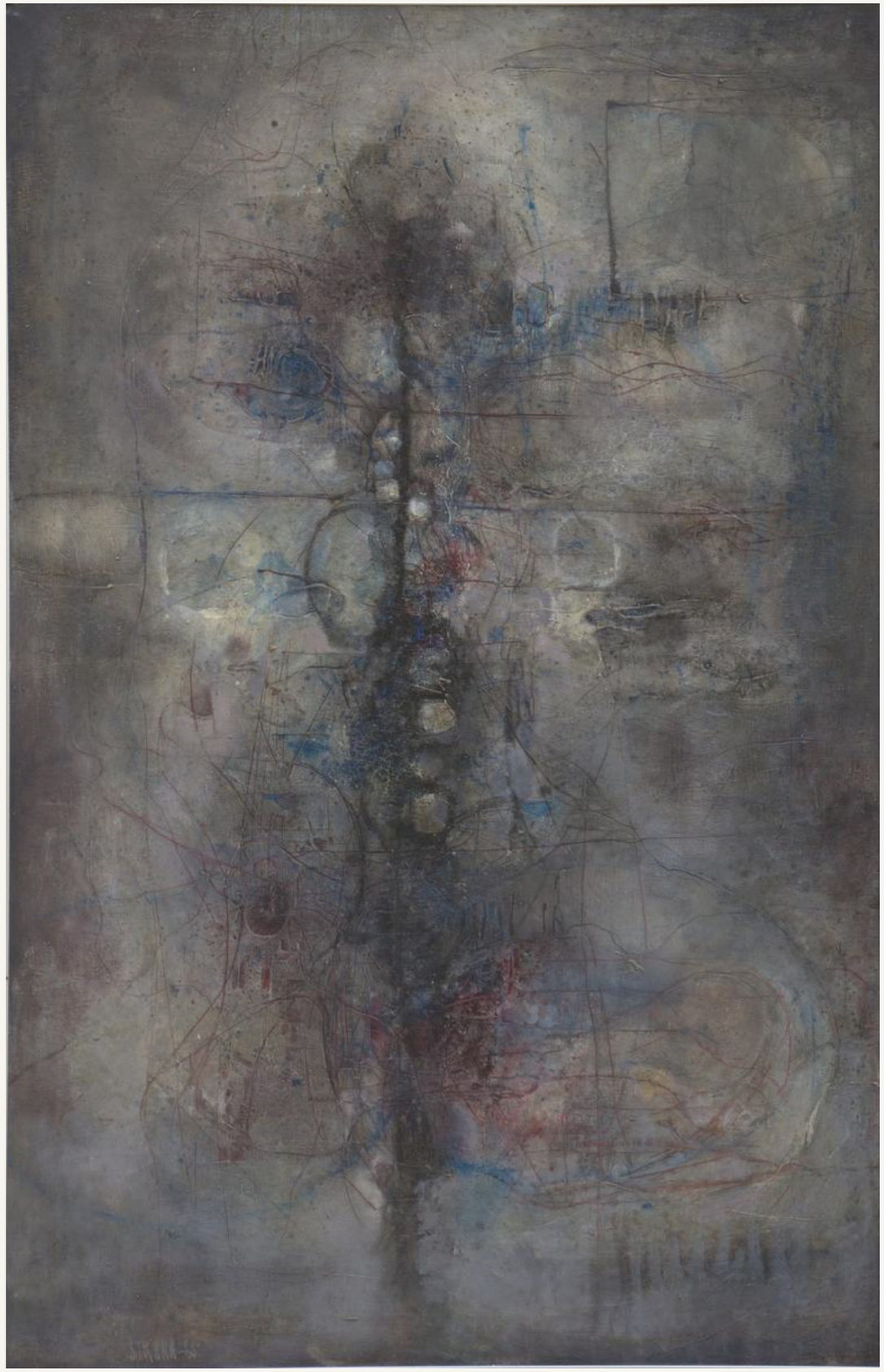
Counsels 1 [title as recorded in the inventory]. Probably 1960s. Unidentified medium, 80 × 65 cm (unverified). [D145]



Subjugated City. 1960s. Oil on canvas, 63 × 84 cm. [D139]



Anatomy of the City 1. Undated. Oil on canvas. [D140]



City 1. 1965. Oil on canvas, 115 × 73,5 cm. [D143]



London. Probably 1960s. Oil on canvas, 65 × 80 cm. [D129]



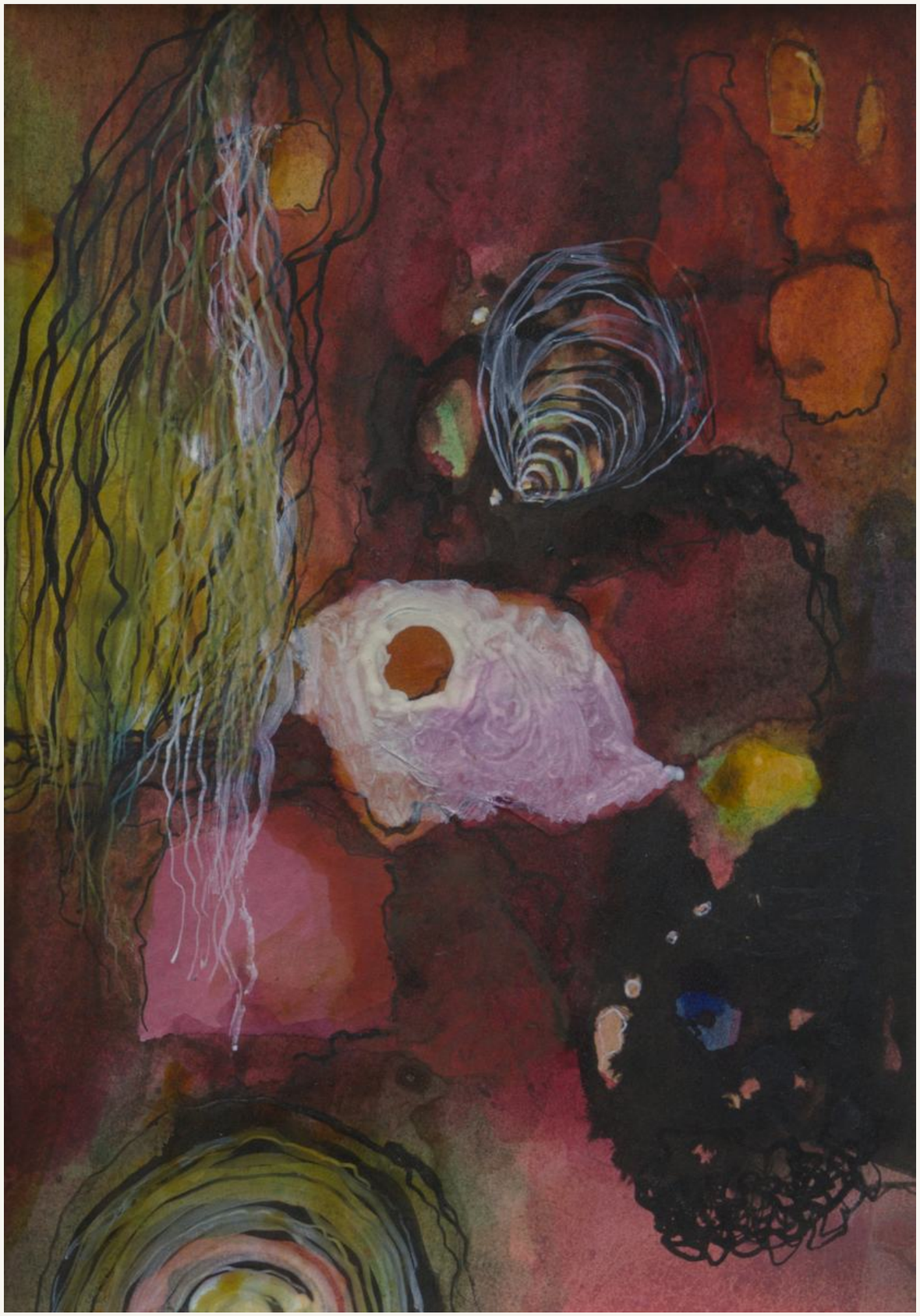
Information 5. 1965. Collage, 77 × 110 cm. [D138]



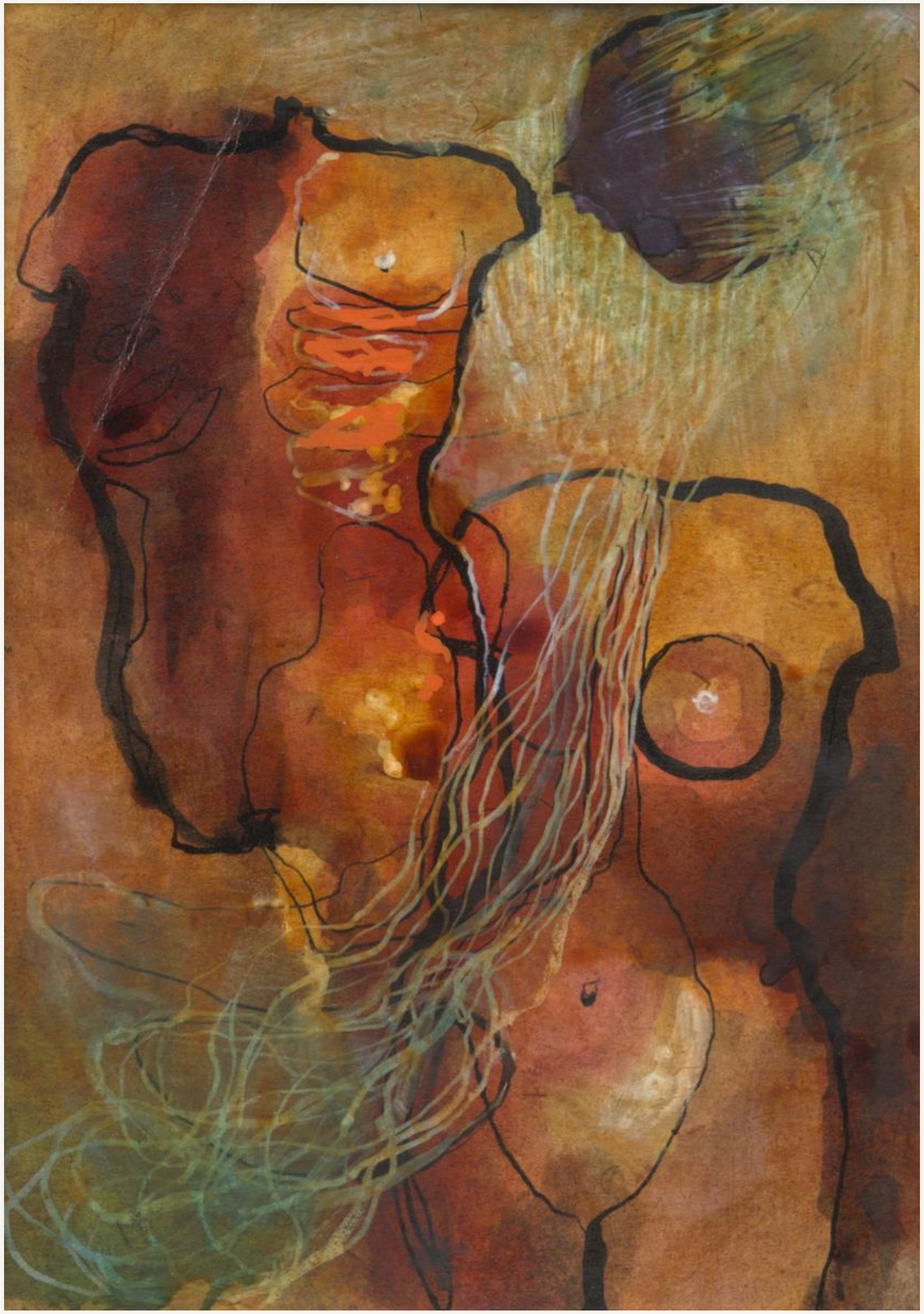
Veil. 1960s (estimate). Oil on hardboard, 78 × 65 cm. [D71]



Red Mood. 1960s. Oil on hardboard, 59 × 50 cm. [D124]



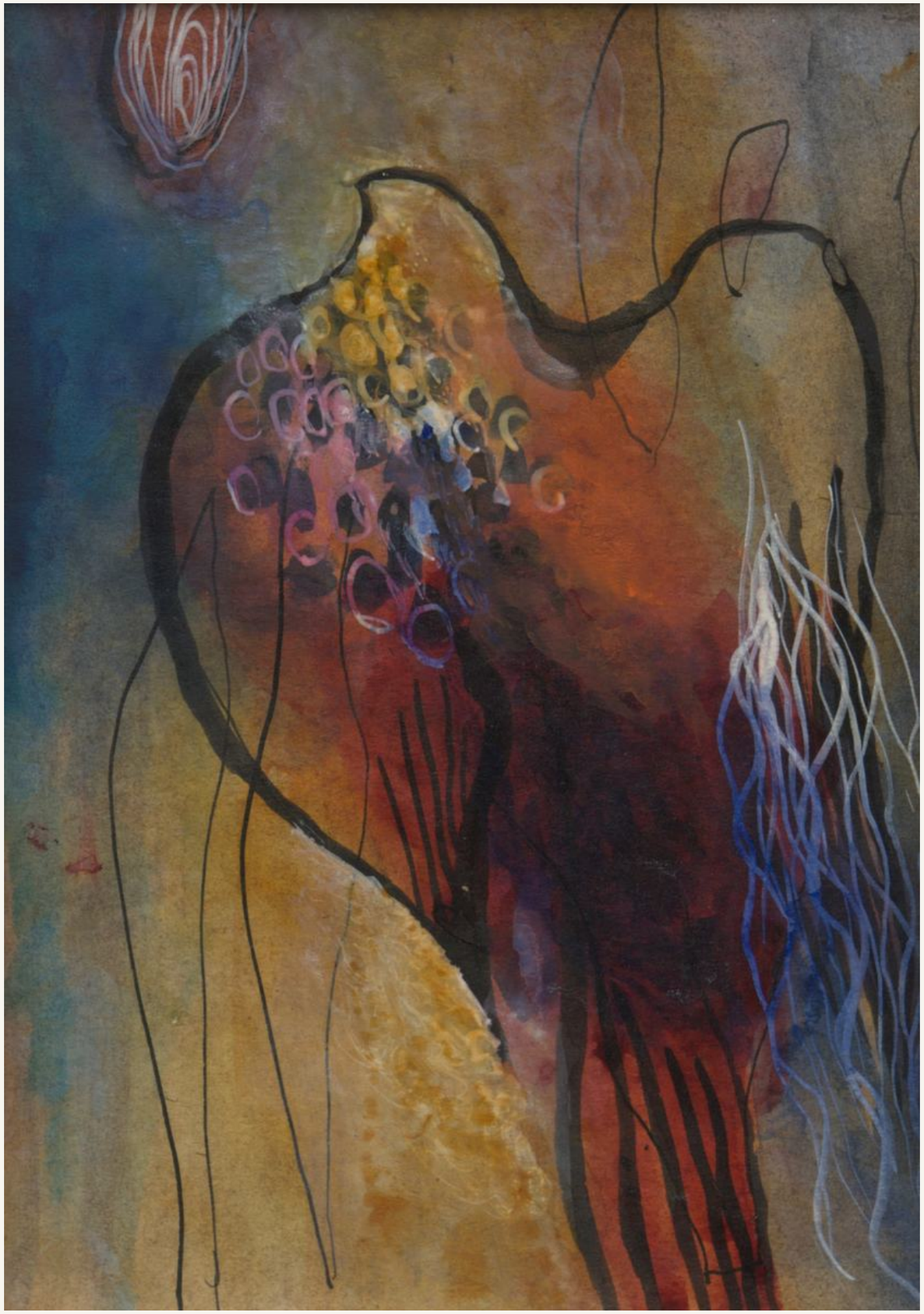
Sea. 1970. Watercolour on paper, 20 × 13,5 cm. [D186]



Lovers. 1970. Watercolour and ink on paper, 20 × 13,5 cm. [D187]



Tree. 1970. Watercolour and ink on paper, 20 × 13,5 cm. [D188]



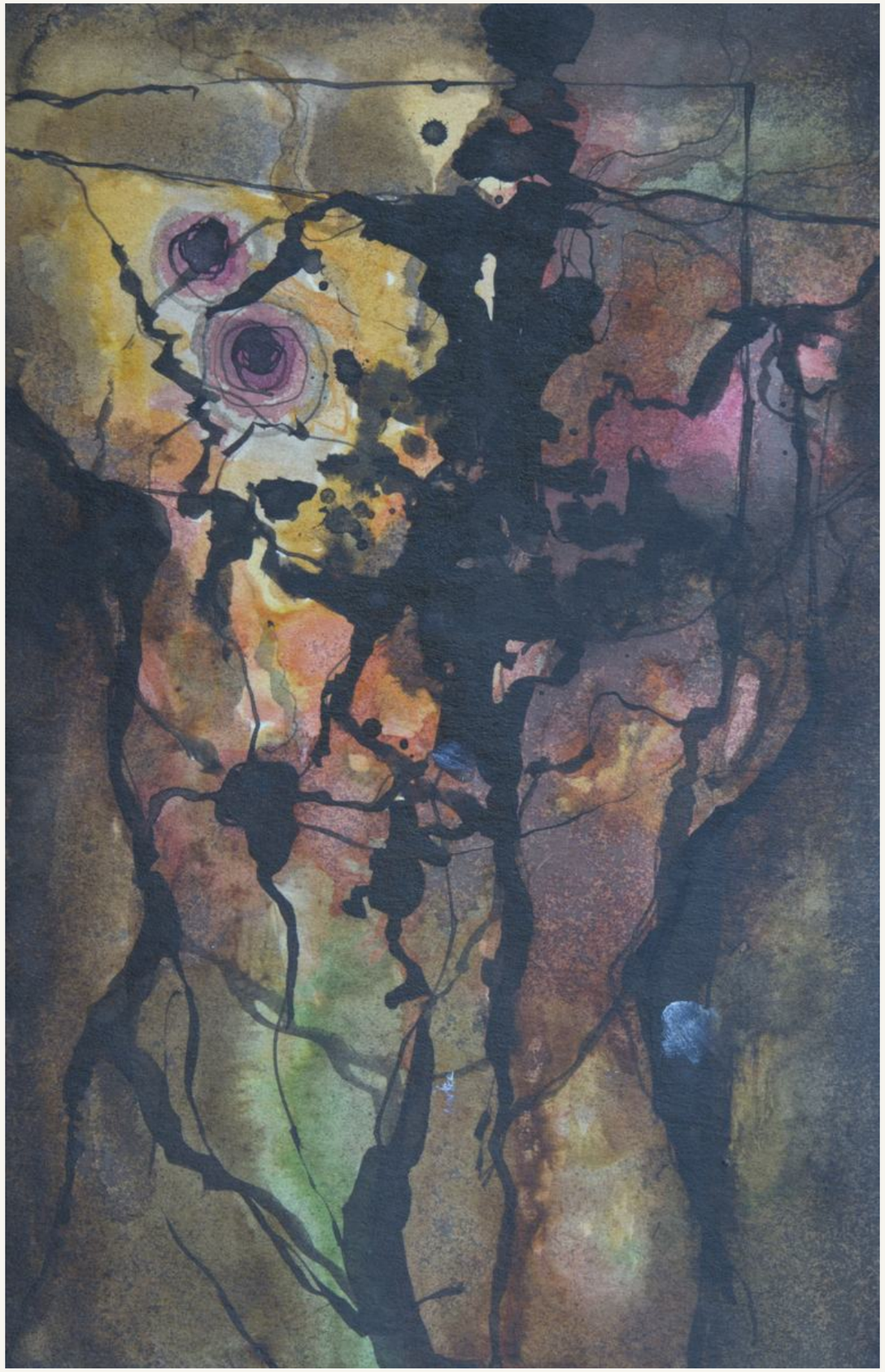
Dove. 1970. Watercolour and ink on paper, 20 × 13,5 cm. [D189]



Circle. 1970. Watercolour and ink on paper, 20 × 13,5 cm. [D190]



Female Torso. Undated. Ink and tempera on paper, 15 × 22 cm. [D459]



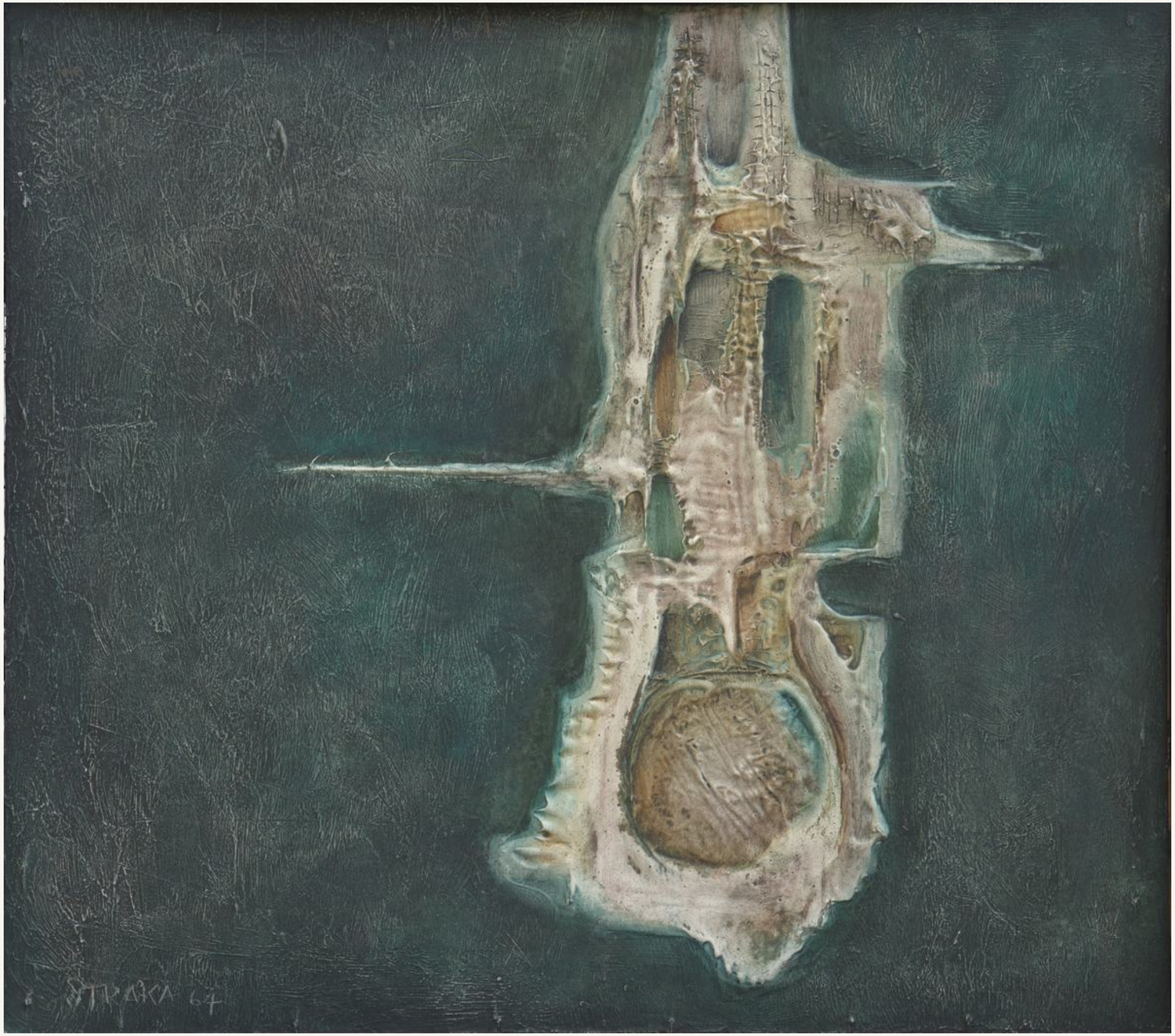
Colour Abstract / Miniature. Undated. Ink and tempera on paper, 17 × 11 cm. [D462]



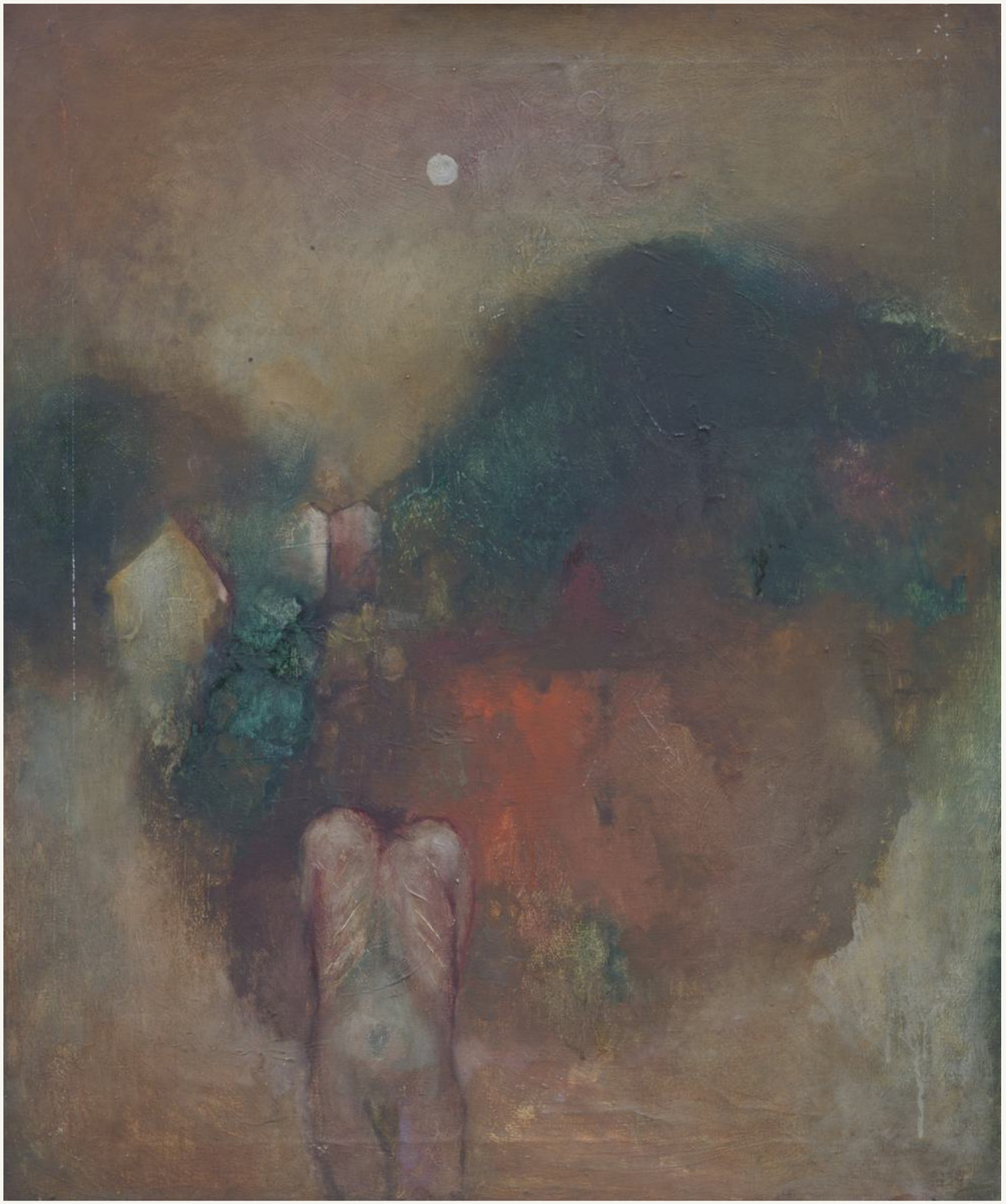
INFORMATION II. 1965. Oil on canvas, mixed media, 89,5 × 71 cm. [D3]



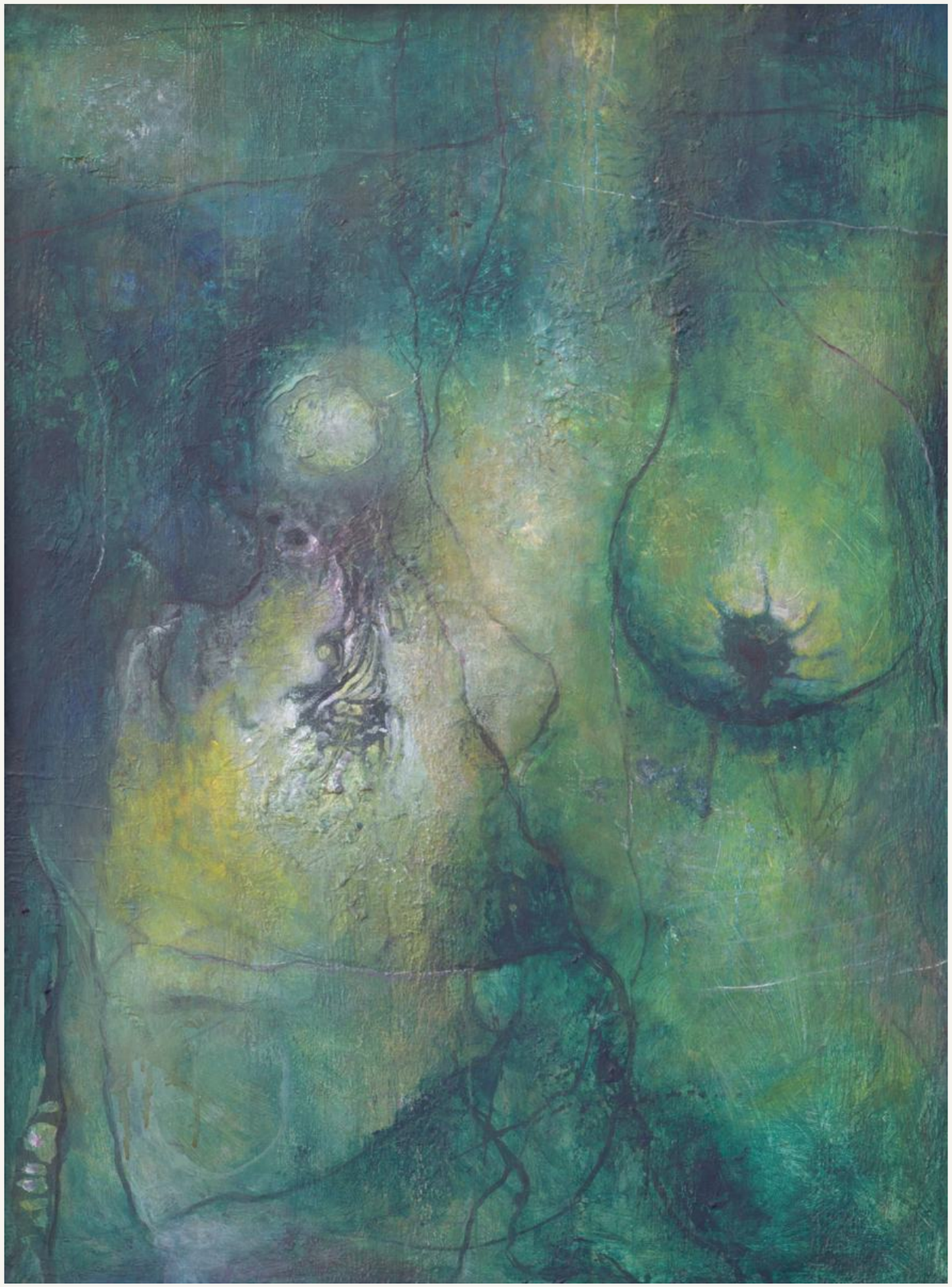
INFORMATION III. 1965. Oil on canvas, mixed media, 70 × 60 cm. [D2]



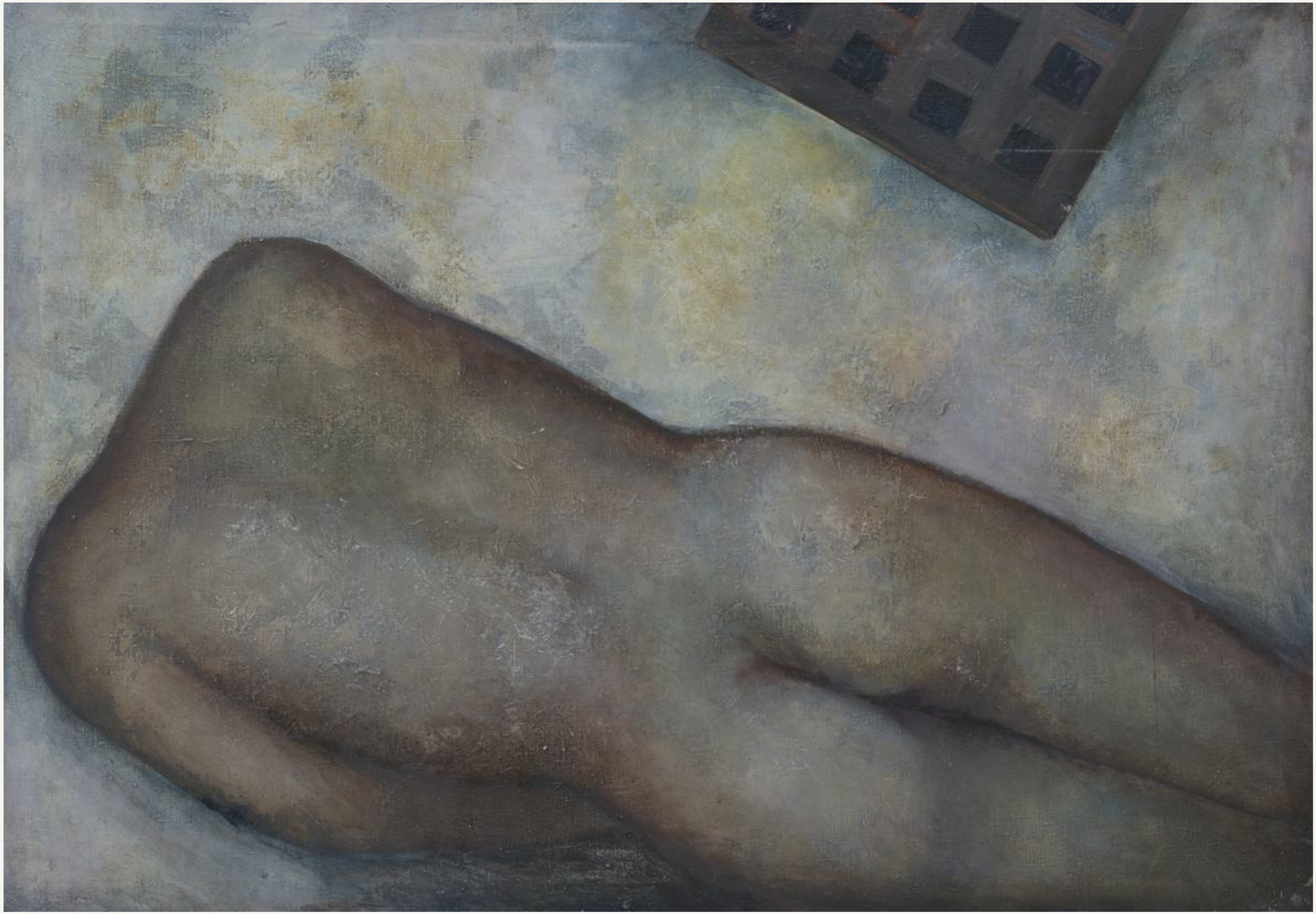
Place 3. 1964. Oil on cardboard or hardboard, 53 × 60 cm. [D135]



Torso from the Mácha Cycle. Undated. Oil on canvas, 78 × 65 cm. [D70]



Motherhood, Abstract. 1960-1969 estimate. Acrylic on wood, 95 × 70 cm. [D45]



Male Torso. Undated. Oil on canvas, 100 × 140 cm. [D639]



Untitled. Undated. Oil on canvas, 95 × 145 cm. [D640]



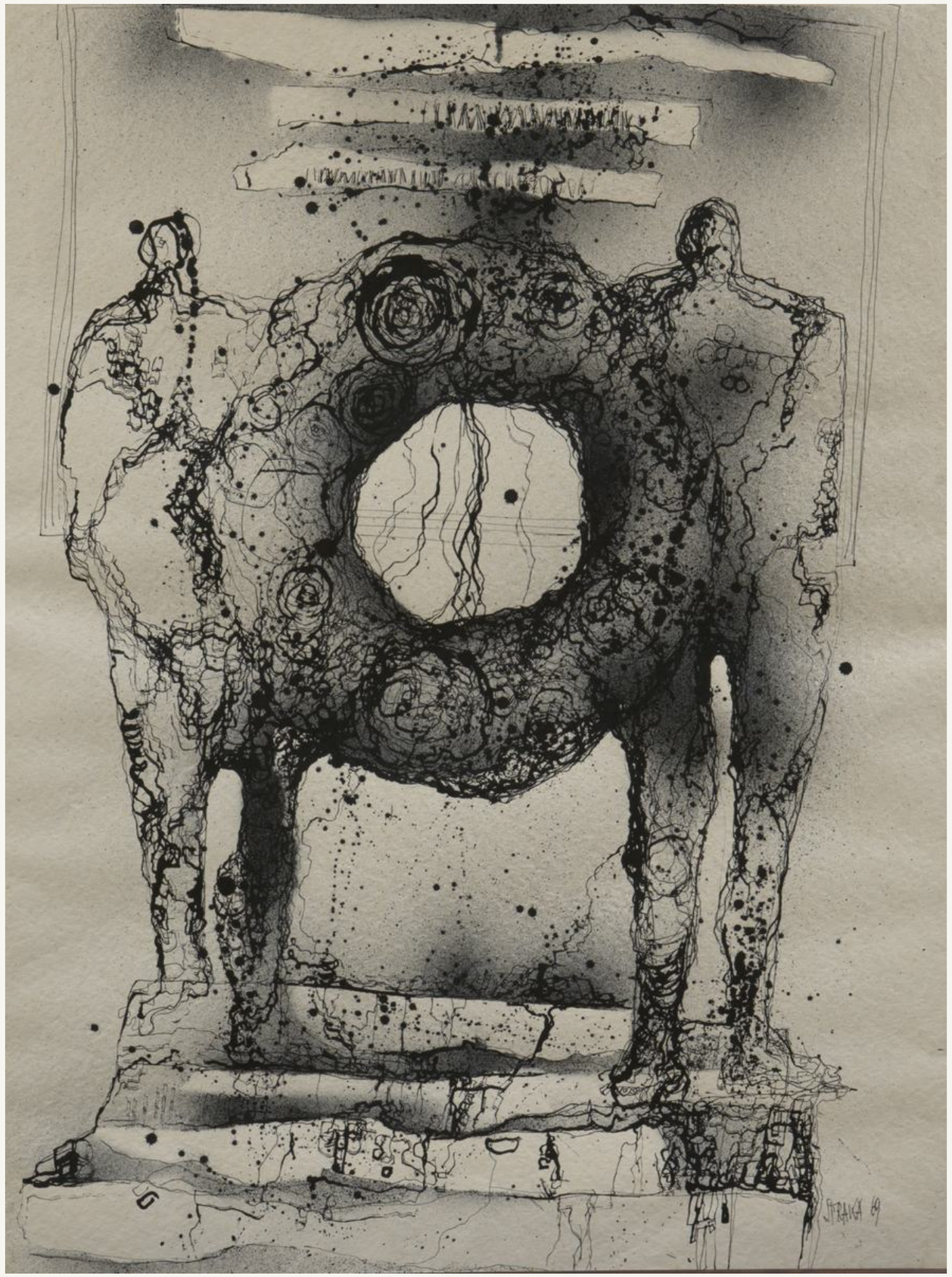
Torsos. Undated. Mixed media on card, 47 × 64 cm. [D644]



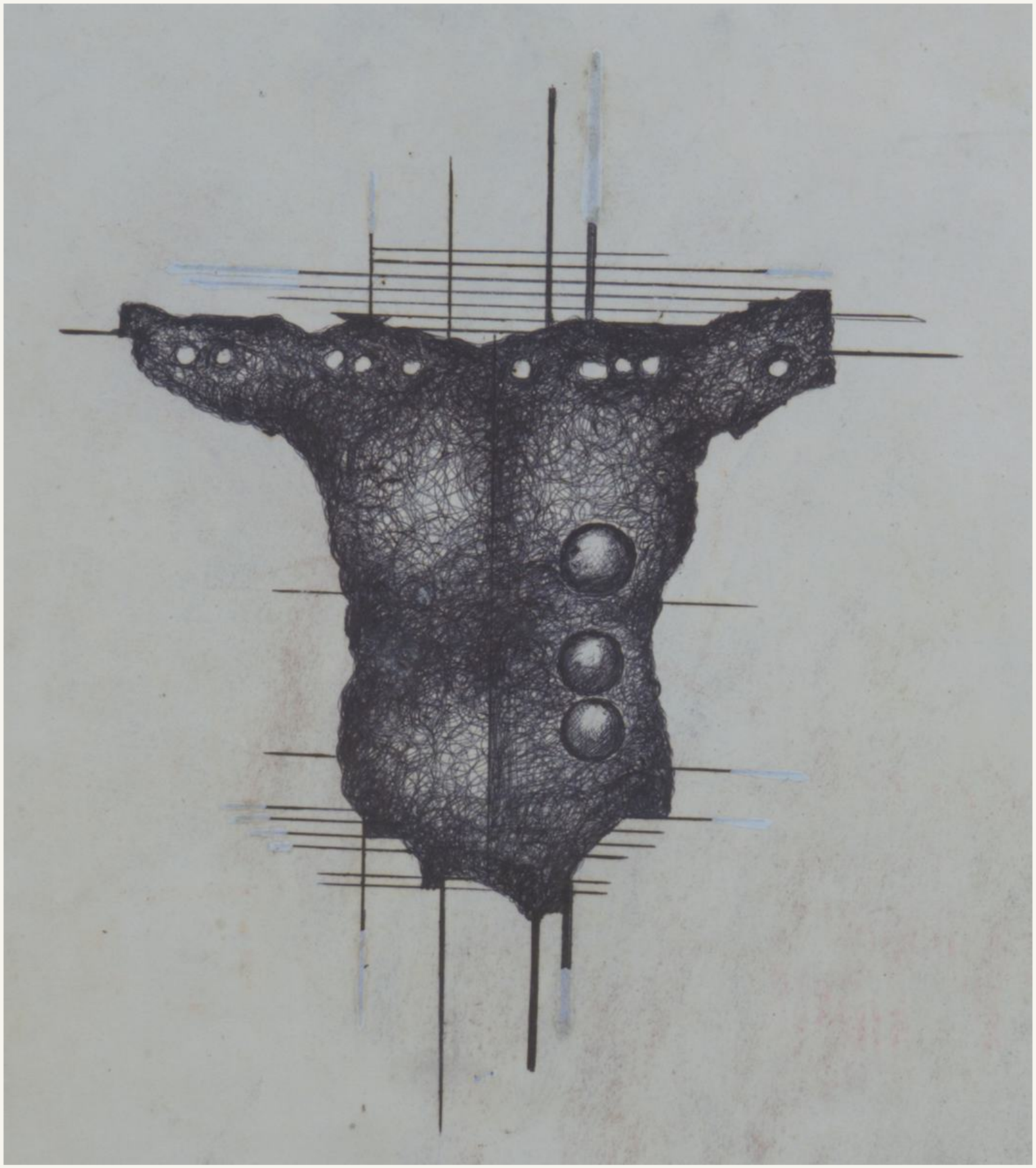
Two Torsos. 1969. Ink on paper, 58,5 × 39 cm. [D263]



Torso. 1970. Ink on paper, 56 × 45 cm. [D271]



From the Series of Large Prints No. 7. 1969. Tuschkreide (as recorded in the inventory), 60 × 80 cm. [D256]



Torso / detail. Undated. Ink on paper; full sheet according to the inventory 45 × 62 cm. Detail of work D344. [D344_DETAIL]



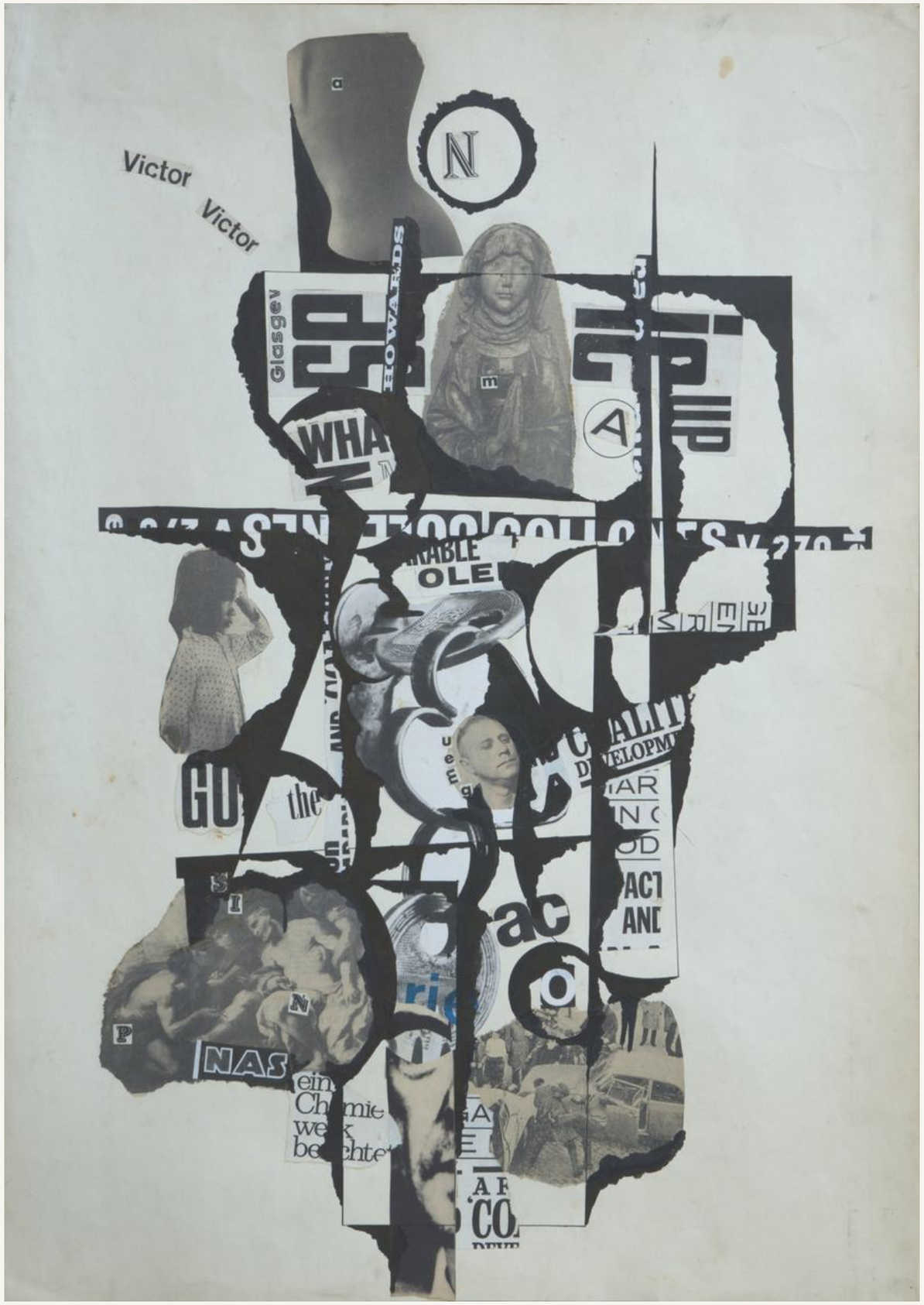
Terezín Torsos. Undated. Pencil and tempera on paper, 44,5 × 64,5 cm. [D349]



Sheep and Cloud. Undated. Ink and tempera on card, 66 × 88 cm. [D595]



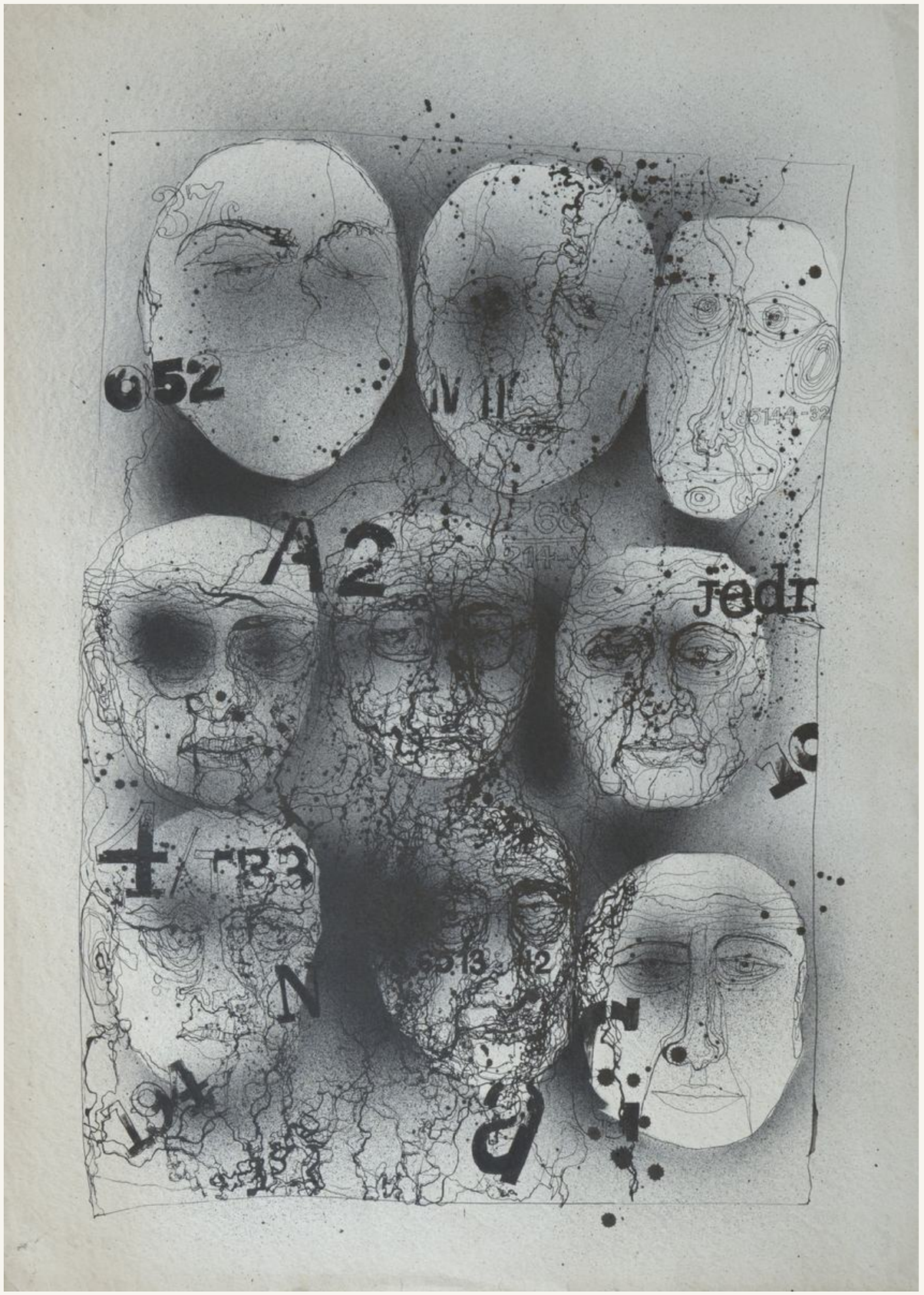
Pop Art 1. Undated. Collage, 66 × 47 cm. [D599]



Pop Art 2 / Victor. Undated. Collage, 88 × 62,5 cm. [D602]



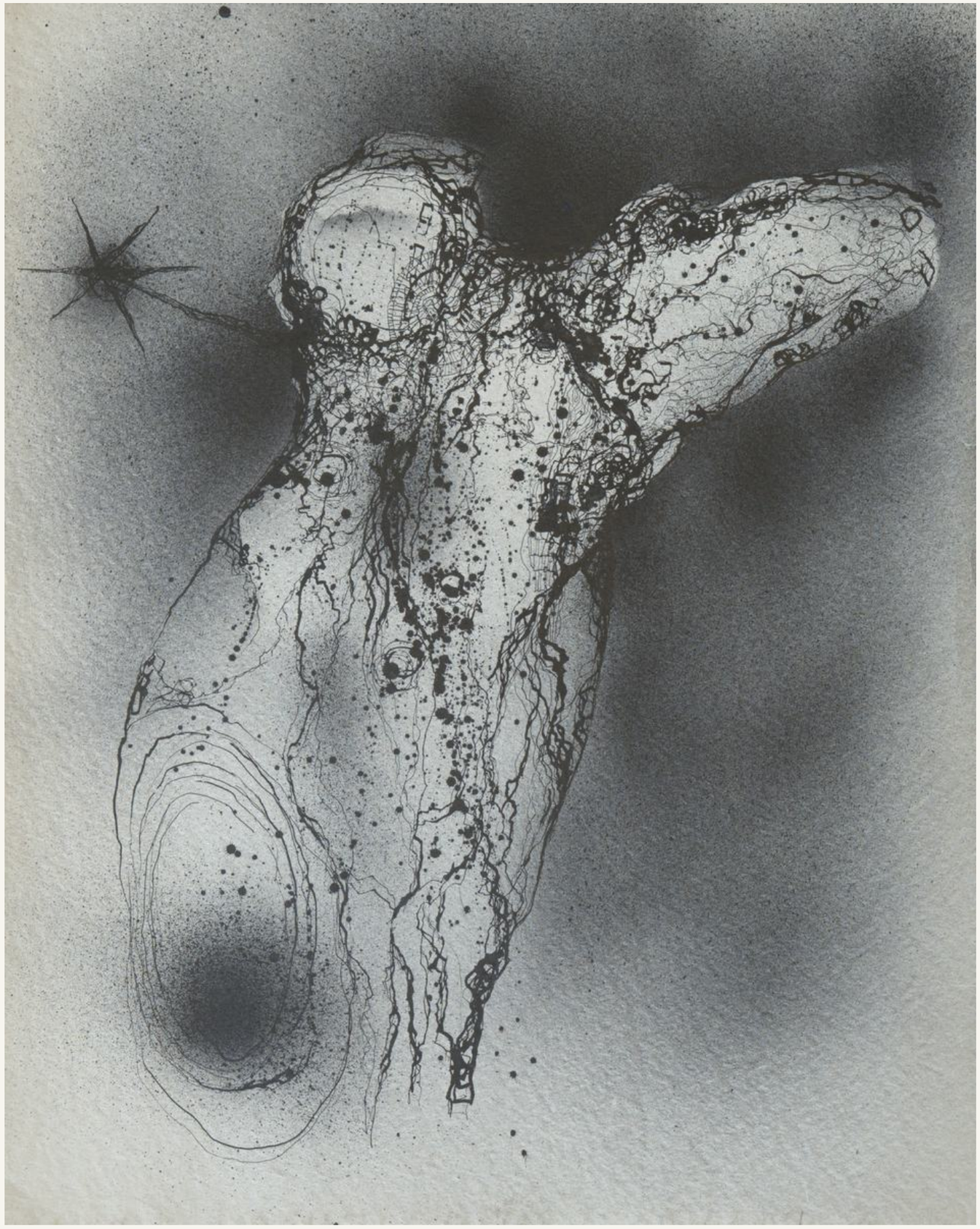
Pop Art 3 / DD. Undated. Collage, 88 × 62,5 cm. [D603]



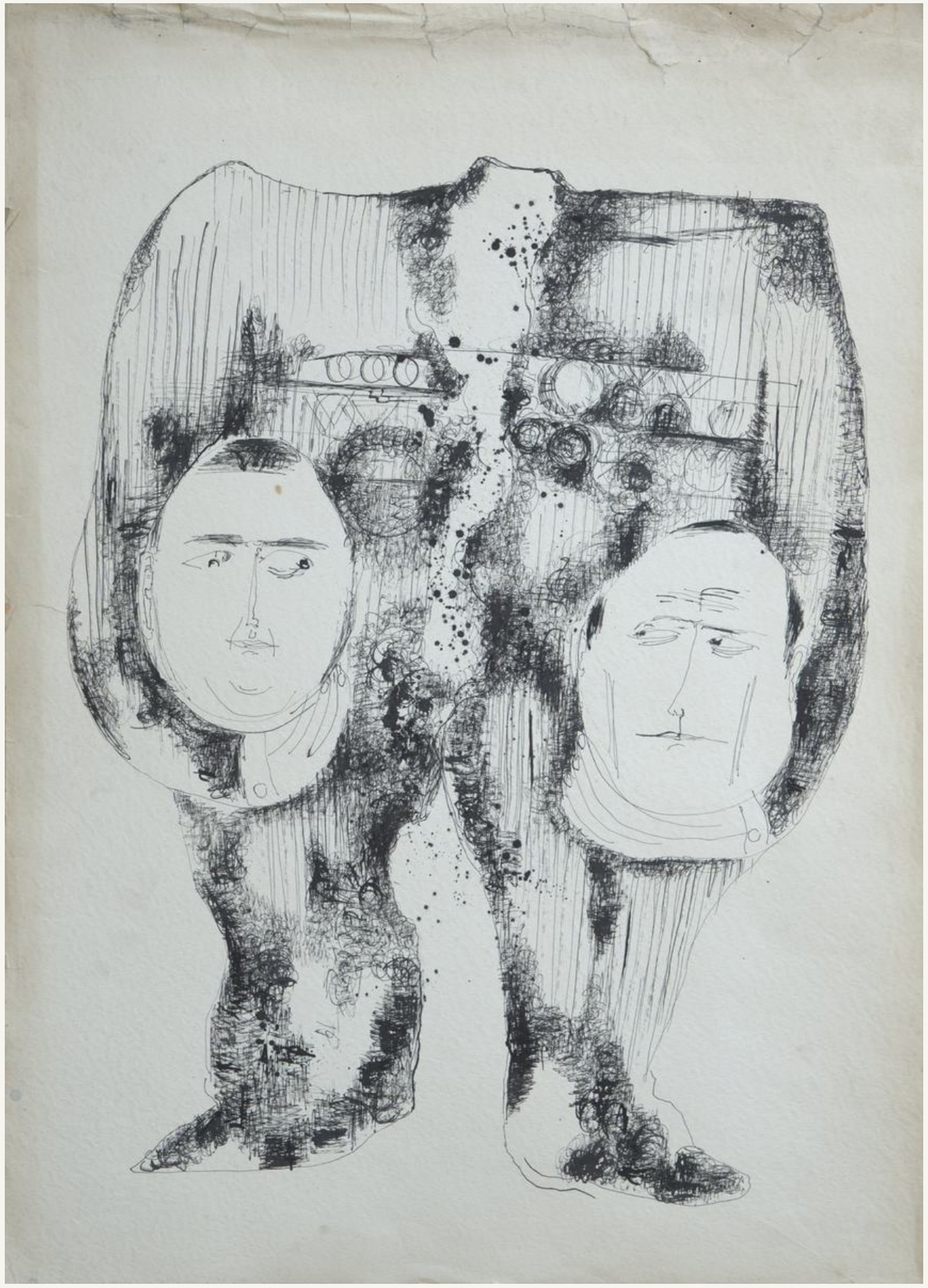
Pop Art 4 / Nine Faces. Undated. Ink, 90 × 65 cm. [D604]



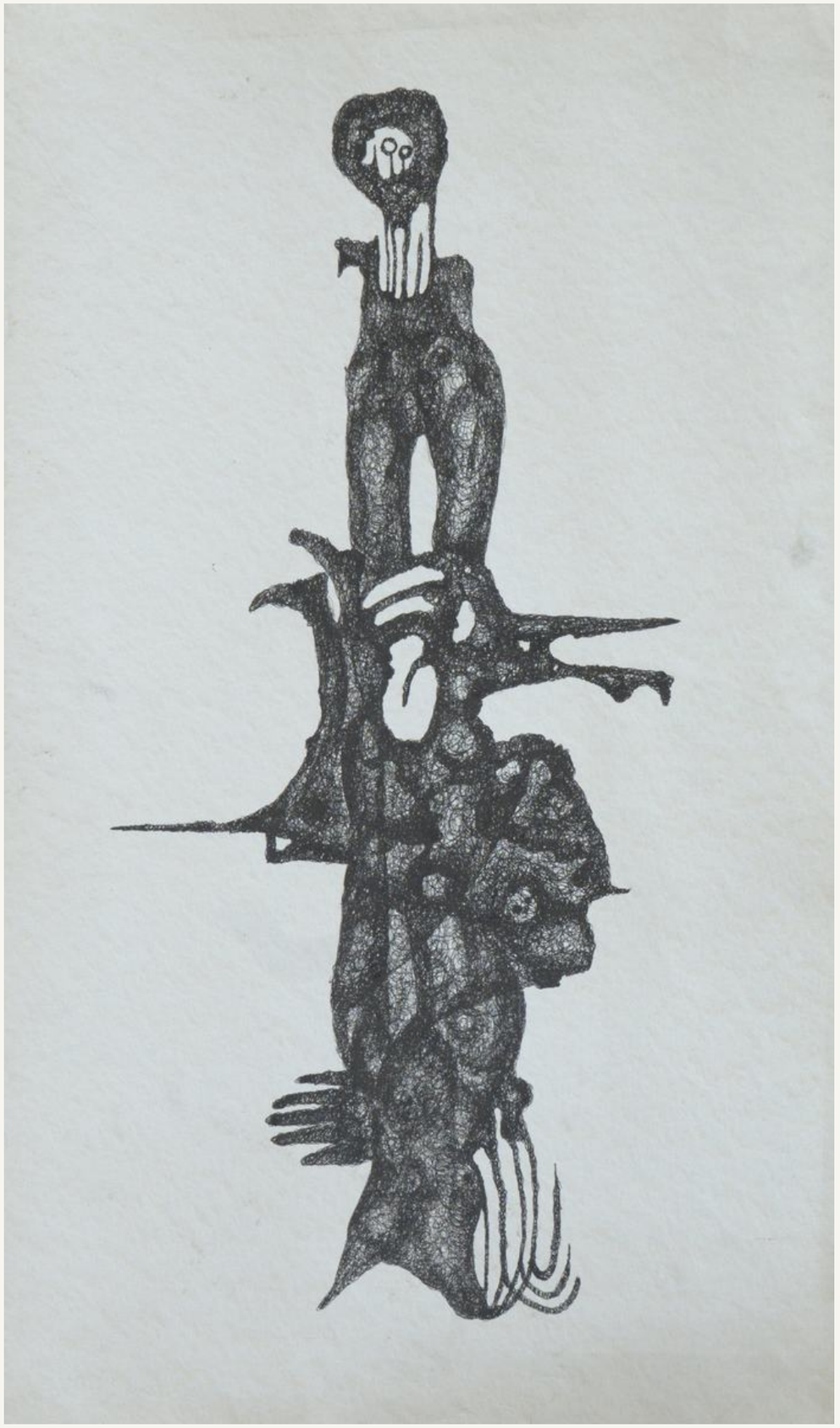
Four Men. Undated. Ink on card, 90 × 65 cm. [D600]



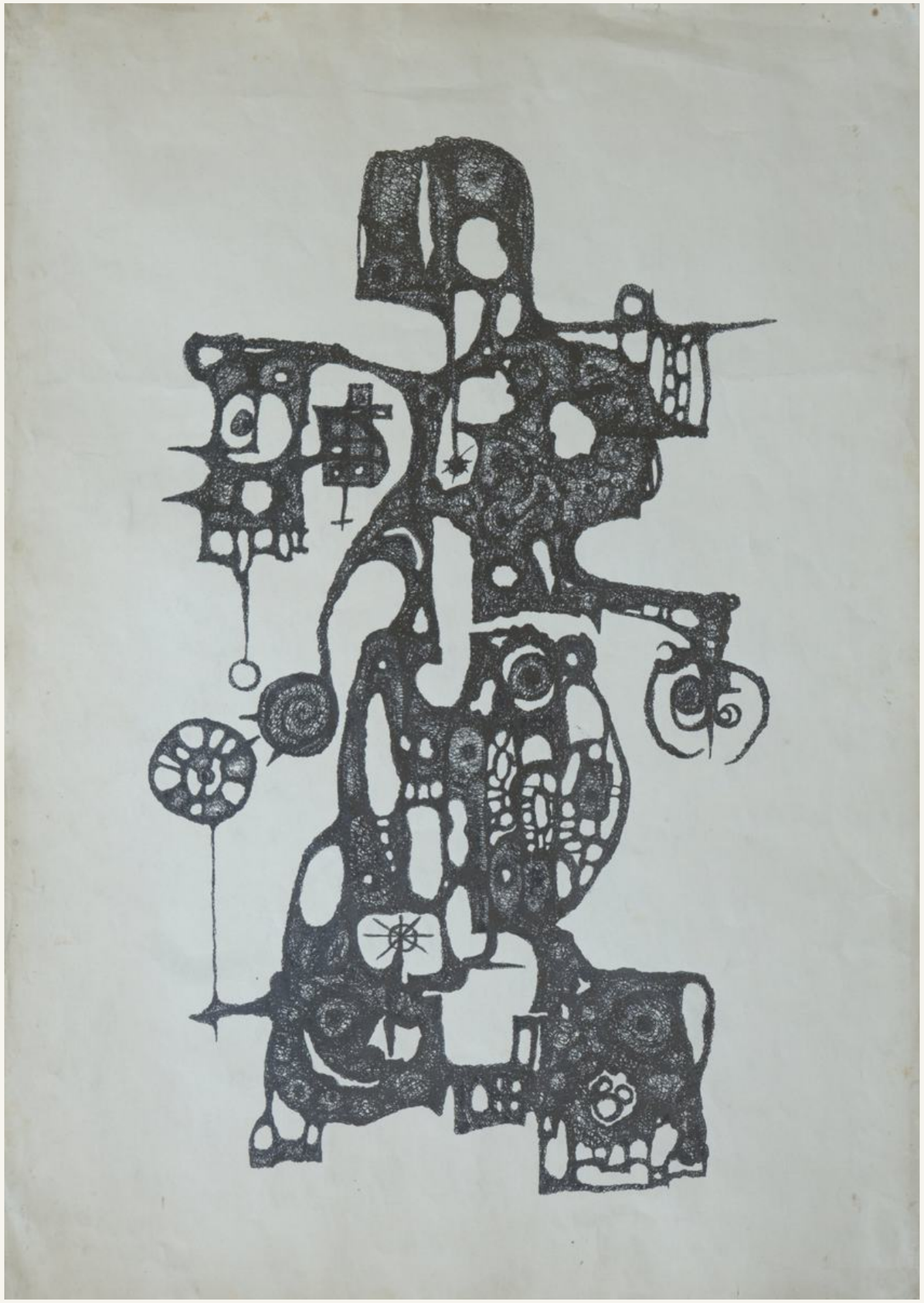
Torso and Circle. Undated. Ink on card, 77 × 61,5 cm. [D606]



Headless Torso and Two Heads. Undated. Ink on card, 90 × 65 cm. [D607]



Vertical Abstract. 1965. Ink on card, 65,5 × 38,5 cm. [D608]



Abstract Drawing: Four Verticals. 1965. Ink, 88 × 62,5 cm. [D609]



Man with a Cross. Undated. Ink on card, 90 × 65 cm. [D610]



Abstract. c. 1960s. Tempera on card, 85 × 58,5 cm. [D593]



Sun, Abstract. 1963. Tempera on card, 89,5 × 66 cm. [D578]



Abstract: Black and Pink Abstract. Undated. Ink and tempera on paper, 65,5 × 38 cm. [D348]



Abstract. Undated. Acrylic or tempera on card, 52 × 68 cm. [D361]

Study for a Torso



Study for a Torso. 1968. Tempera, pen and ink on paper, 9 × 11 cm. [D197]



Study for a Torso. 1968. Tempera, pen and ink on paper, 9 × 11 cm. [D198]



Study for a Torso. 1968. Tempera, pen and ink on paper, 9 × 11 cm. [D199]

Terezín and the memory of place

Terezín was Straka’s birthplace. In his work, a personal closeness to the place is intertwined with reflection on the human tragedies that occurred there. The town and Malá pevnost recur both as architecture and as spaces of memory. A view from above gives way to a pause at a gate, an empty courtyard or a wall whose silence can feel more urgent than human activity.

Colour painting develops light and atmosphere, while black-and-white works focus attention on the rhythm of walls, windows and shadows. The same place can appear as a clearly legible whole in one work and a constricted passage in another. Each return opens a different distance between the viewer and what the image recalls.

Human figures emerge alongside the architecture. Their closeness, solitude and attachment to one another give the memory of the place a concrete form. This chapter brings these different aspects together without seeking an explanation for every detail. It allows room for the townscape, empty space and human presence to speak to one another.

Terezín and human dignity

Jiří Dolejš

At his very first exhibitions, Straka presented paintings linked in both subject and content to Terezín. To the town and to the wartime transit camp. These paintings were no obligatory tribute to socially engaged subject matter. Straka was born in Terezín, spent his childhood there and had lived its particular, unrepeatable atmosphere. He knew the fates of many of those who ended up behind the walls of the ghetto, as well as those who merely passed through Terezín on their way to other, still more terrible death camps.

Somewhere here lie the deepest roots of his profound aversion to everything that can threaten the human being, their inner dignity and integrity.

The artist’s complex feelings were shaped by the fact that, earlier than others, he could observe in his immediate surroundings the consequences of the totalitarian practices that followed February. Even in his first Terezín paintings, Straka did not convey his inner protest against violence through outward means. From the earliest years, his concern was to capture the inner dimension of violence, violence inflicted on the human spirit.

Jiří Dolejš, text for the exhibition of Přemysl Straka at Památník Terezín, 1991. Excerpt, translated for this edition.



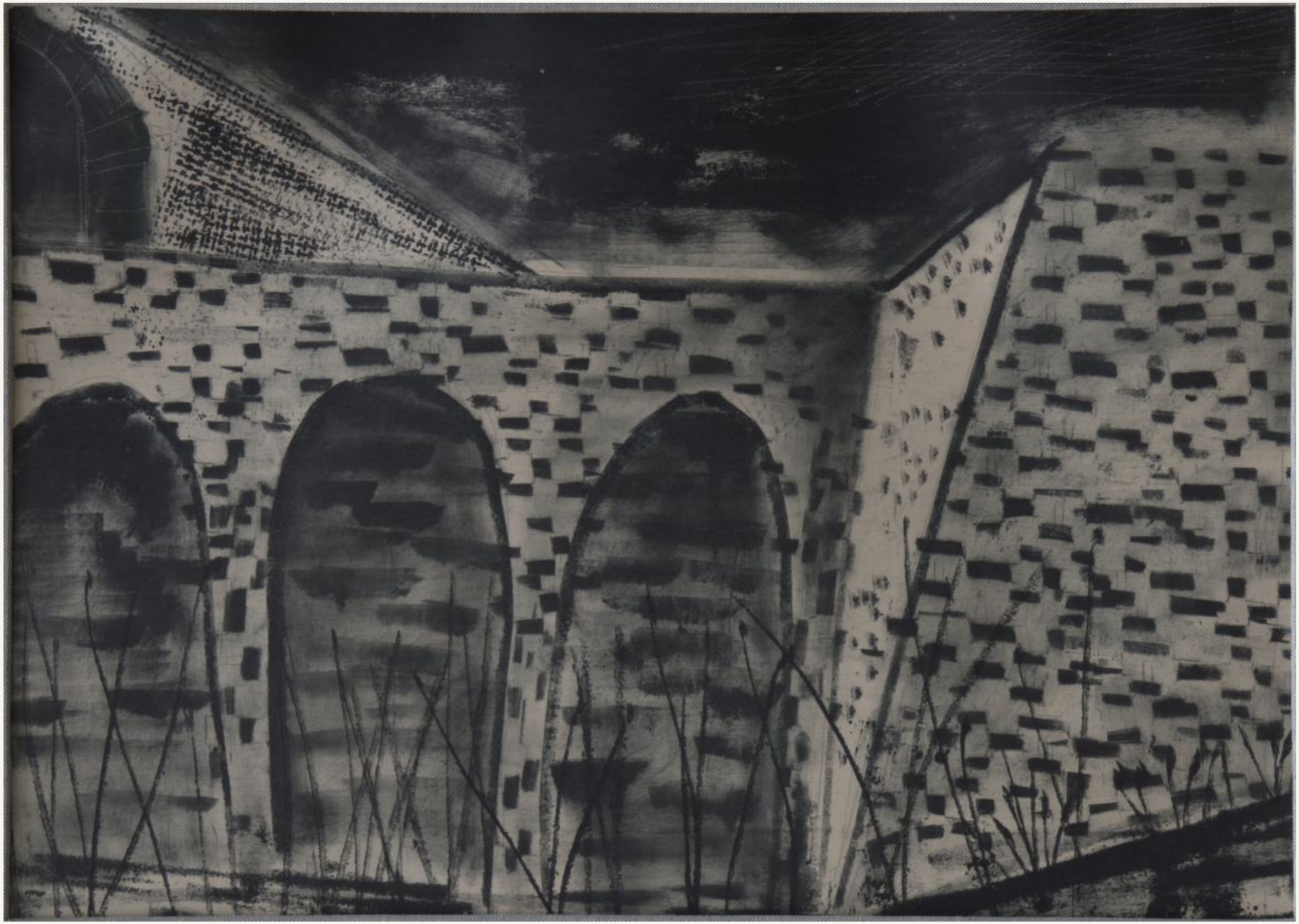
Terezín from Above. 1960. Pastel and tempera on card, 62 × 88 cm. [D623]



Litoměřice Gate. 1963. Gouache, 51 × 67 cm. [D154]



Terezín. 1960. Ink and pastel on paper, 40 × 58 cm. [D306]



Malá pevnost: Bridge. Undated. Ink or print on paper, 34 × 47 cm. [D162]



Malá pevnost: Courtyard. Undated. Ink or print on paper, 34 × 47 cm. [D167]

Terezín walls

Jiří Dolejš

Přemysl Straka’s paintings began appearing in the exhibition rooms of the North Bohemian Region in the early 1960s. At that time, he exhibited paintings of Terezín, the place where he was born and where, in the years when a human being is most receptive and most vulnerable, he looked across the walls and fences of the Jewish ghetto into an absurd drama directed by the monstrously functioning machinery of German fascism.

He dedicated his first cycle of drawings and paintings, inspired by this fateful and debilitating experience, to the prisoners of Terezín, to those who did not live to see liberation. Already in this cycle, he indicated that his concern was not with the naturalistic evocations of physical violence still common at the time. His approach was entirely different and artistically far more successful and serious. He drew inspiration from the prisoners’ inscriptions on the walls of Terezín, which were as remarkable as the drawings by the children of Terezín that are now known throughout the world, but succumbed to time and the elements.

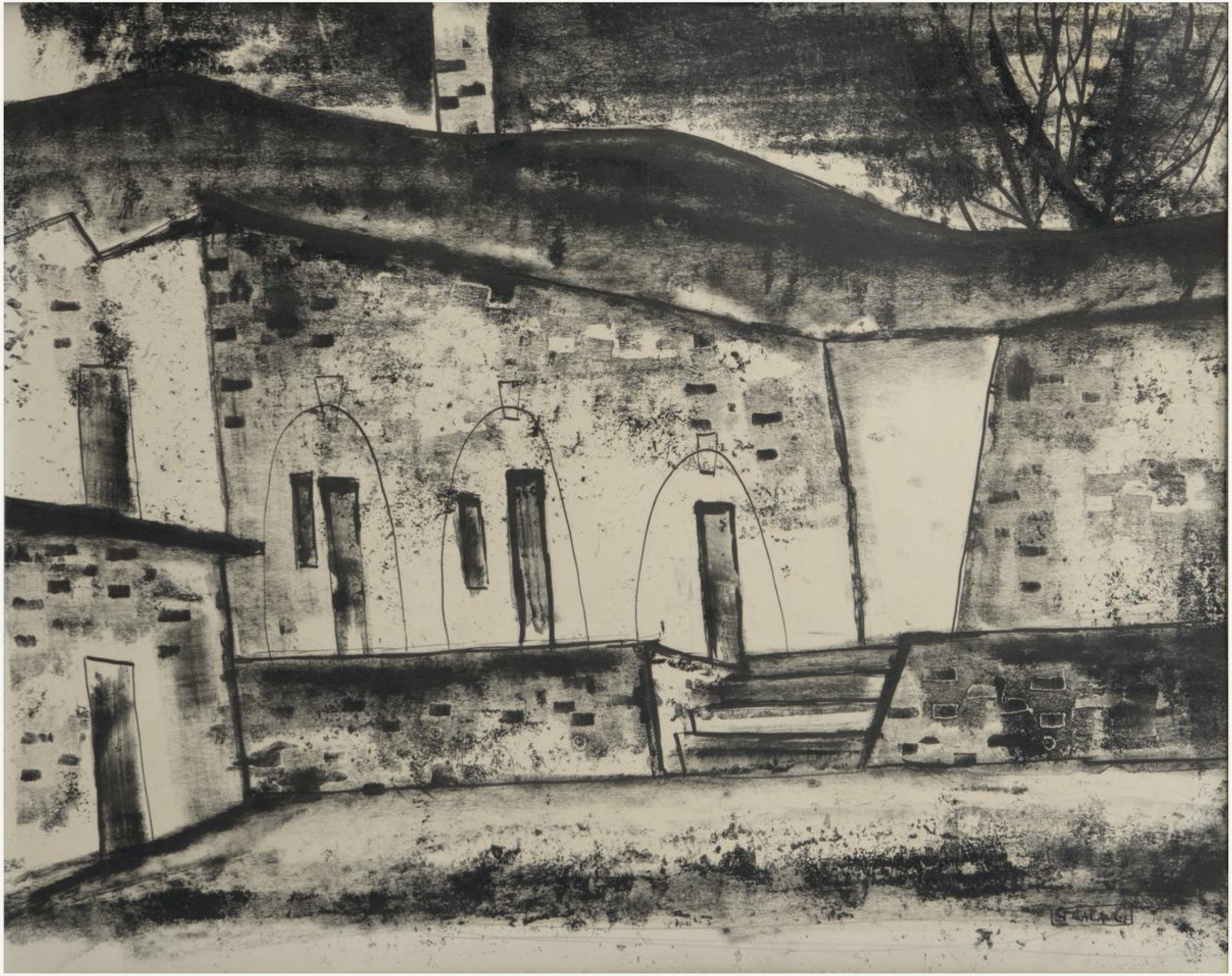
Jiří Dolejš, Přemysl Straka: Paintings and Drawings, Duchcov, 1980. Excerpt, translated for this edition.



Terezín, Malá pevnost: Workshops. Undated. Ink or print on paper, 34 × 47 cm. [D169]



Gate of Death, Malá pevnost. Probably 1961. Ink or print on paper, 34 × 47 cm. [D177]



Malá pevnost: Courtyard IV. 1961-1962. Ink and print, 44 × 51 cm. [D242]



Terezín, Bohušovická kotlina. c. 1960. Ink and print on paper, 38,5 × 52 cm. [D320]



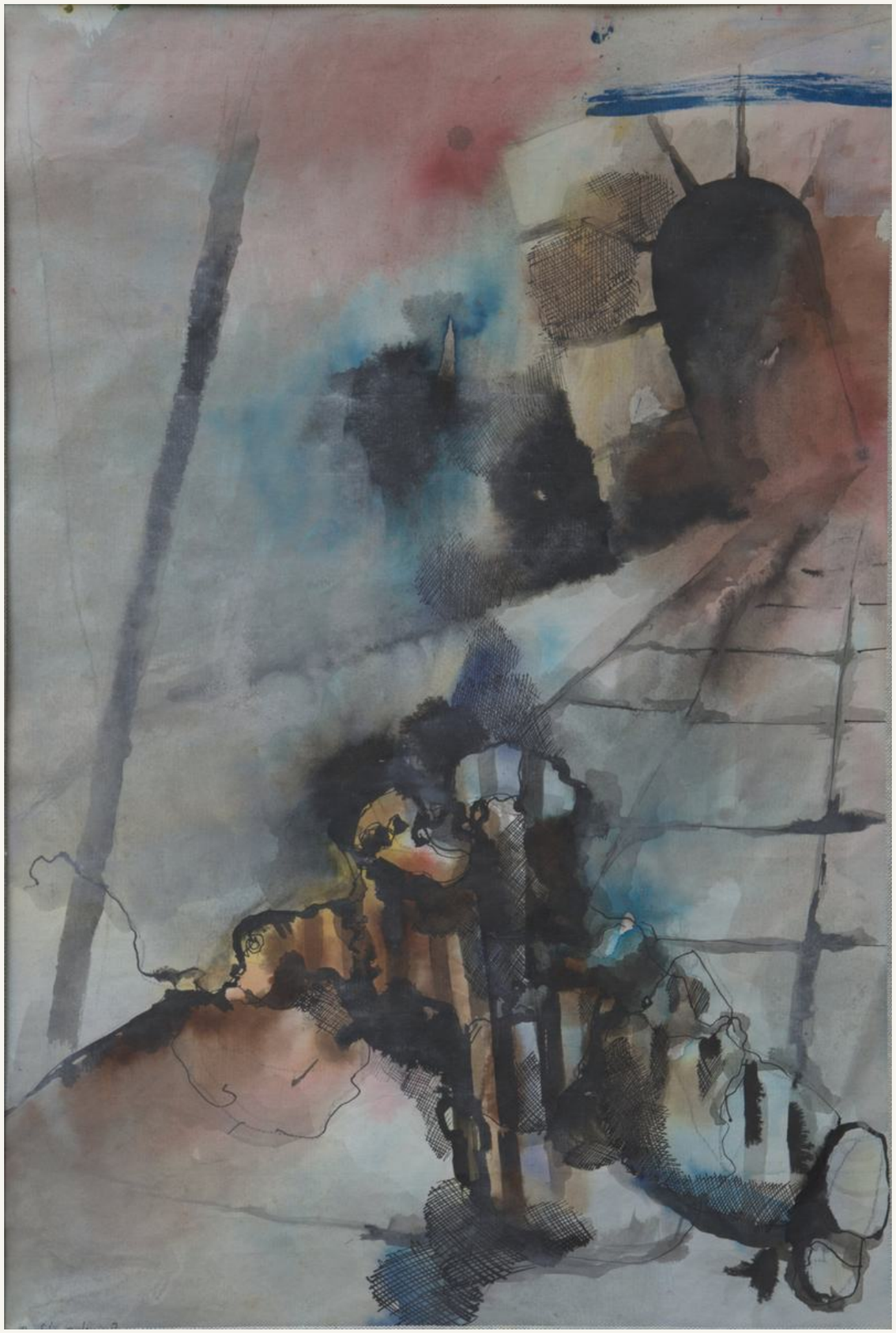
Mortuary of the Terezín Ghetto. c. 1960. Mixed media, ink and print on paper, 37 × 50 cm. [D324]



Terezín Gate. c. 1960. Mixed media, ink, tempera and print on paper, 45 × 62 cm. [D327]



Untitled: Victim. Undated. Ink and tempera on paper, 49 × 25,5 cm. [D328]



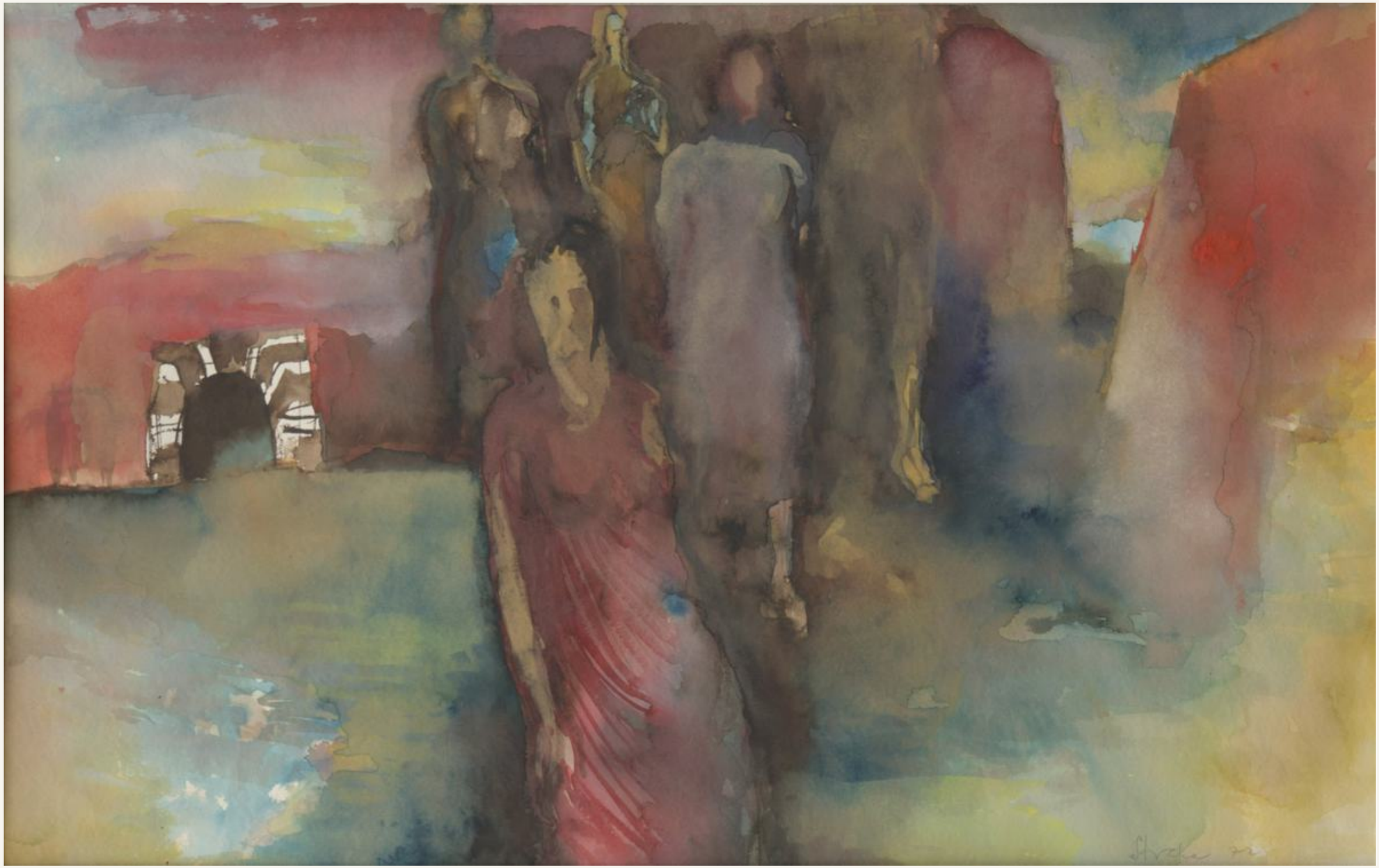
Return from Richardo. 1970. Watercolour and tempera on paper, 37,5 × 23,5 cm. [D149]



Terezín / Old Men 1. 1969 or 1970. Watercolour on paper, 23,5 × 37,5 cm. [D150]



Lovers. 1969 (date uncertain). Gouache, 31 × 40 cm. [D152]



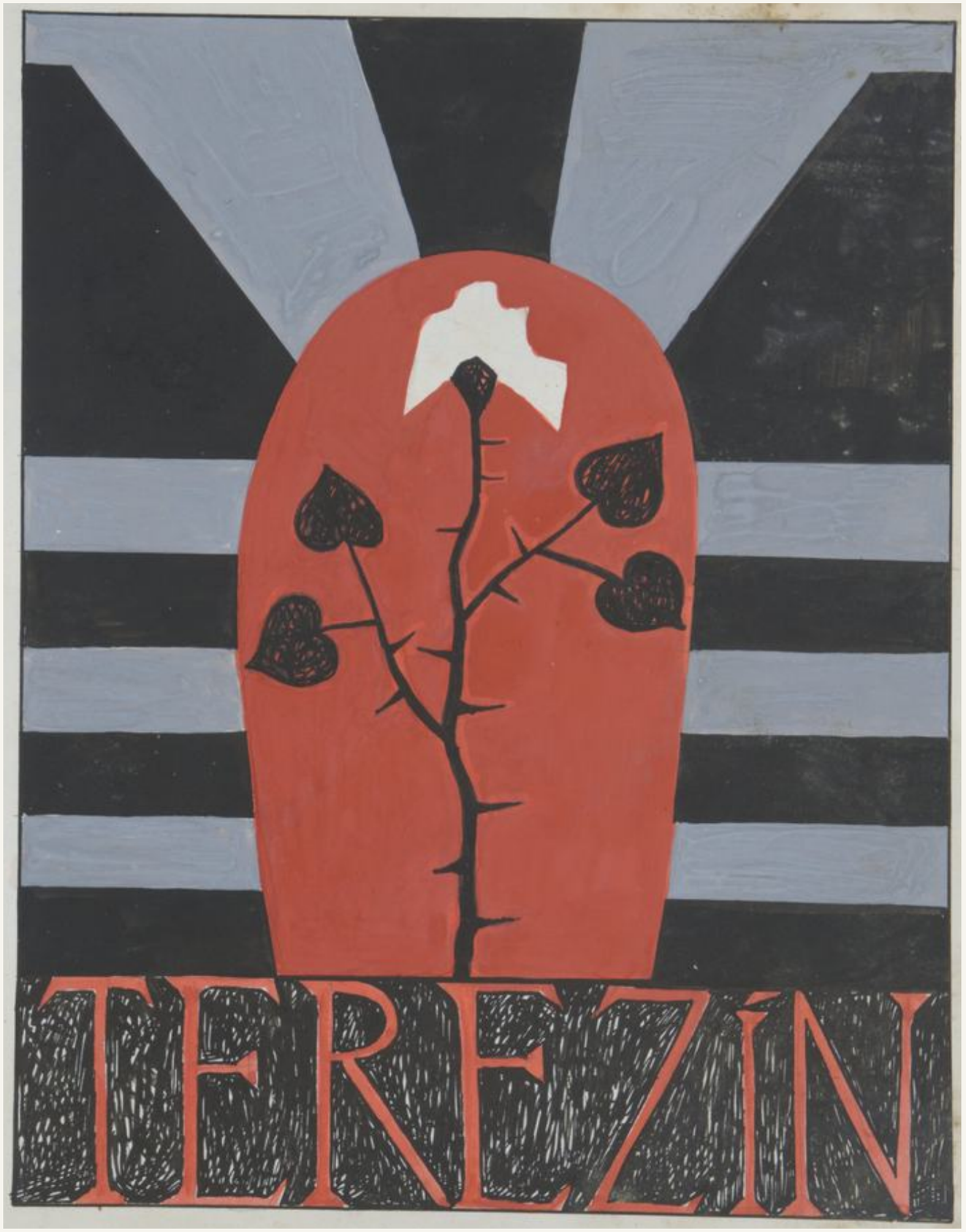
Women of Lidice in Terezín 1. 1972. Tempera drawing, 45 × 65 cm. [D244]



Women’s Courtyard 2. 1971 / 1972 (dates differ). Tempera drawing on paper, 55 × 70 cm. [D246]



Lovers from the Ghetto. Date unclear. Medium not specified, 60 × 90 cm. [D249]



Graphic Work: Terezín 1. Undated. Pen, ink and tempera on paper, 44 × 31 cm. Crop of the pictorial part of the design. [D393]

Litoměřice and its surroundings

A town can be explored from afar or from a few paces away. In Straka’s paintings, it opens out above the rooftops, then descends among façades, fences and trees. A familiar silhouette offers a point of orientation, while a small detail gives us a reason to slow down. Colour and light transform even the places we ordinarily pass without noticing.

Here, Litoměřice is a town of everyday life. Alongside its streets are gardens, the edges of built-up areas and greenery that overlaps the firm outlines of houses. Industrial motifs extend this space into a landscape shaped by human labour. Between home, the outskirts and the wider surroundings, a continuous world emerges in which buildings and nature constantly meet.

The final painting, By the Post Office, Litoměřice, from 2001, is the last known dated painting. The building remains partly hidden behind tree trunks and crowns. Once again, a particular place opens itself to close observation of nature: delicate branching loosens the architecture and leads the eye towards the changing life around it.



Old Litoměřice: From the Studio. 1984. Oil on canvas, 100 × 115 cm. [D648]



Litoměřice, Krupina Street. 1958. Tempera on paper, 30 × 43,5 cm. [D671]



Litoměřice. c. 1960. Pastel on paper, 51 × 87,5 cm. [D403]



Litoměřice from Above. Undated. Ink, pastel and pencil on card, 42 × 48,5 cm. [D514]



Street in Litoměřice. Undated. Pastel on card, 44 × 62 cm. [D517]



Advertising Sign. 1958. Oil on card, 50 × 60 cm. [D111]



The Bereaved. 1950s or 1960s. Tempera on paper, 40 × 52 cm. [D128]



Flowers by the Fence. 1950s. Oil on canvas, 58 × 51 cm. [D112]



Acacias. 1960. Ink and pastel on paper, 40 × 58 cm. [D308]



Winter beyond the Village. 1957. Oil on plywood, 43 × 38 cm. [D122]



Outskirts. 1995. Oil on canvas, 70 × 70 cm. [D652]



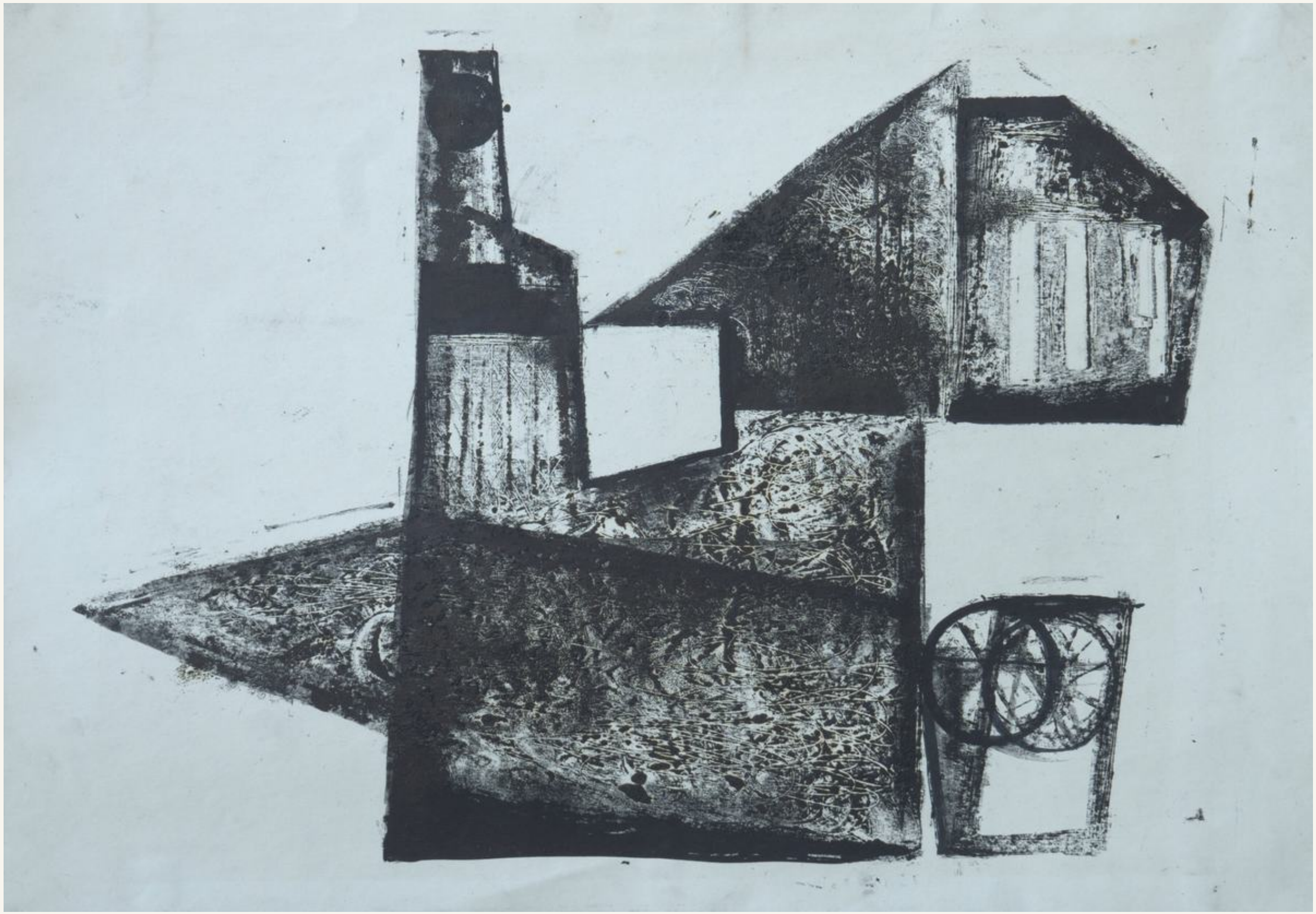
Open-Cast Mine. 1988. Acrylic on hardboard, 75 × 107 cm. [D650]



Open-Cast Mine. Undated. Tempera on paper, 26 × 44 cm. [D569]



Tower at the Open-Cast Mine. Undated. Tempera on card, 52 × 68 cm. [D483]



From the Boundaries Cycle: Manufactory. c. 1964. Print, black-and-white monotype, 44 × 62 cm. [D632]



The Fifth of October at 16-20. 1974. Oil on canvas, 92 × 83 cm. [D20]



Cloud. 1974. Oil on canvas, 92 × 68 cm. [D21]



By the Post Office, Litoměřice. 2001. Acrylic on hardboard, 30 × 40 cm. Last known dated painting. [D669]



Lorry. Undated. Tempera on card, 44 × 62 cm. [D535]

Nature close up and horizons

The landscape of České středohoří has a recognisable rhythm. Individual hills rise above the fields, and a familiar summit can guide the way. Říp is associated with the legend of Forefather Čech, Radobýl with Karel Hynek Mácha and his time in Litoměřice. These cultural associations accompany our perception of the places; the paintings add an immediate experience of light, colour and space.

In his later work, Straka’s gaze more often draws close to the ground. The horizon rises, the sky narrows, and grasses, flowers, shrubs and water fill the foreground. The expansive panorama becomes an intimate section of nature. A brushstroke can both suggest a blade of grass and reveal the substance of the paint itself.

Close views of vegetation alternate with more open prospects, and North Bohemian motifs are joined by landscapes from elsewhere. The chapter is unified by attentive observation of change: the thaw, the thickening of grass in summer, autumn colour, and signs of decline and renewal. The landscape is never confined to a single form. Each painting offers a different moment in its continuing existence.

Landscape close up

Jiří Dolejš

In the early 1980s, a more fragmentary approach began to assert itself in his paintings, concentrating on sections of landscape. The purpose of this change in focal length was to reveal nature’s hidden order and life. The artist is interested not in a state that can be fixed permanently, but in nature in the process of its being, its coming into existence and passing away, and in the traces left by the action of the natural elements.

New motifs appear: melting snow, flattened grass, the rippled surfaces of ponds and rivers, the shadows of passing clouds across the landscape. At last, he can apply the structural approach characteristic of the Torsos and Figures. At last, he has discovered how to bring both reflection on landscape and the experience of it into the very elements of his painterly handling, how to introduce spontaneity into painting and appeal to the viewer’s emotional identification with a place.

Jiří Dolejš, text for the exhibition of Přemysl Straka at Památník Terezín, 1991. Excerpt, translated for this edition.



Cloud with a Silver Lining. 1976. Acrylic on hardboard. [D85]



Hradiště before a Storm. 1984. Oil on canvas, 100 × 110 cm. [D94]



Říp. 1978. Oil on canvas, 87 × 108 cm. [D99]



Landscape beneath Radobýl. 1976. Acrylic on hardboard, 50 × 70 cm. [D108]



Road to Radobýl. 1996. Acrylic on hardboard, 58,5 × 48,5 cm. [D646]



Ronov. 1997. Acrylic on hardboard, 30 × 40 cm. [D659]



Dusk over Varhošť. 1999 according to the inventory; date requires verification. Acrylic on hardboard, 29 × 39 cm. [D674]



Summits. 1979. Oil on canvas, 83 × 98 cm. [D34]



Středohoří. 1982. Oil on canvas, 58 × 77,5 cm. [D28]



Landscape with a Dark Form. c. 1994. Oil on card, 50 × 60 cm. [D110]



Ploughed Field. 1980. Oil on canvas, 75 × 86 cm. [D36]



Landscape with a Pond. 1982. Oil on card, 50 × 70 cm. [D654]



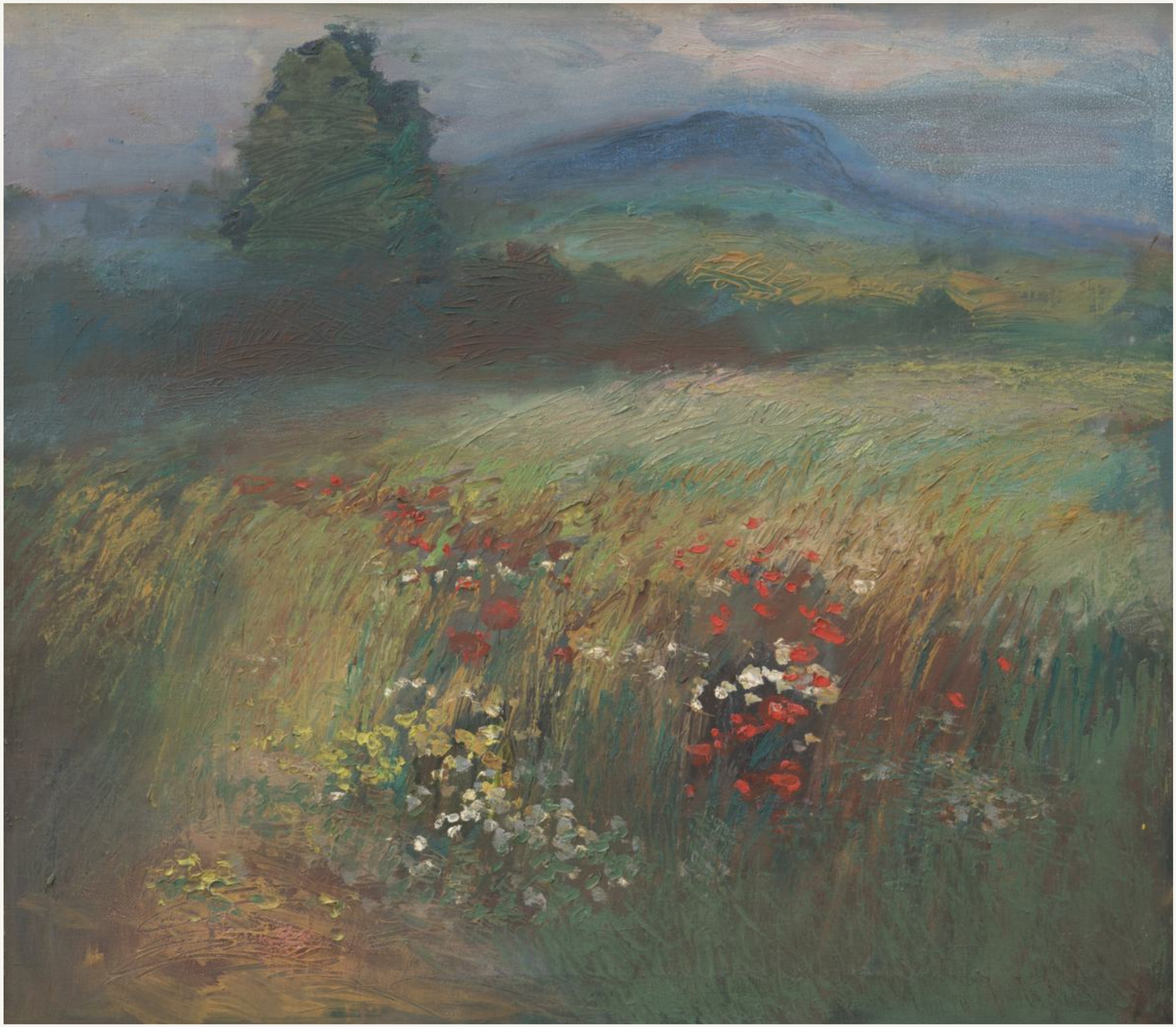
Spring in the South. 1999. Acrylic on hardboard, 67 × 63 cm. [D665]



Summer Afternoon. 1991. Acrylic on hardboard, 33 × 44 cm. [D673]



A Hidden Place in Středohoří. 1979-1981 estimate. Oil on canvas, 58 × 88 cm. [D39]



In Středohoří 1. 1988–1992 (estimate). Oil on canvas, 69 × 79 cm. [D40]



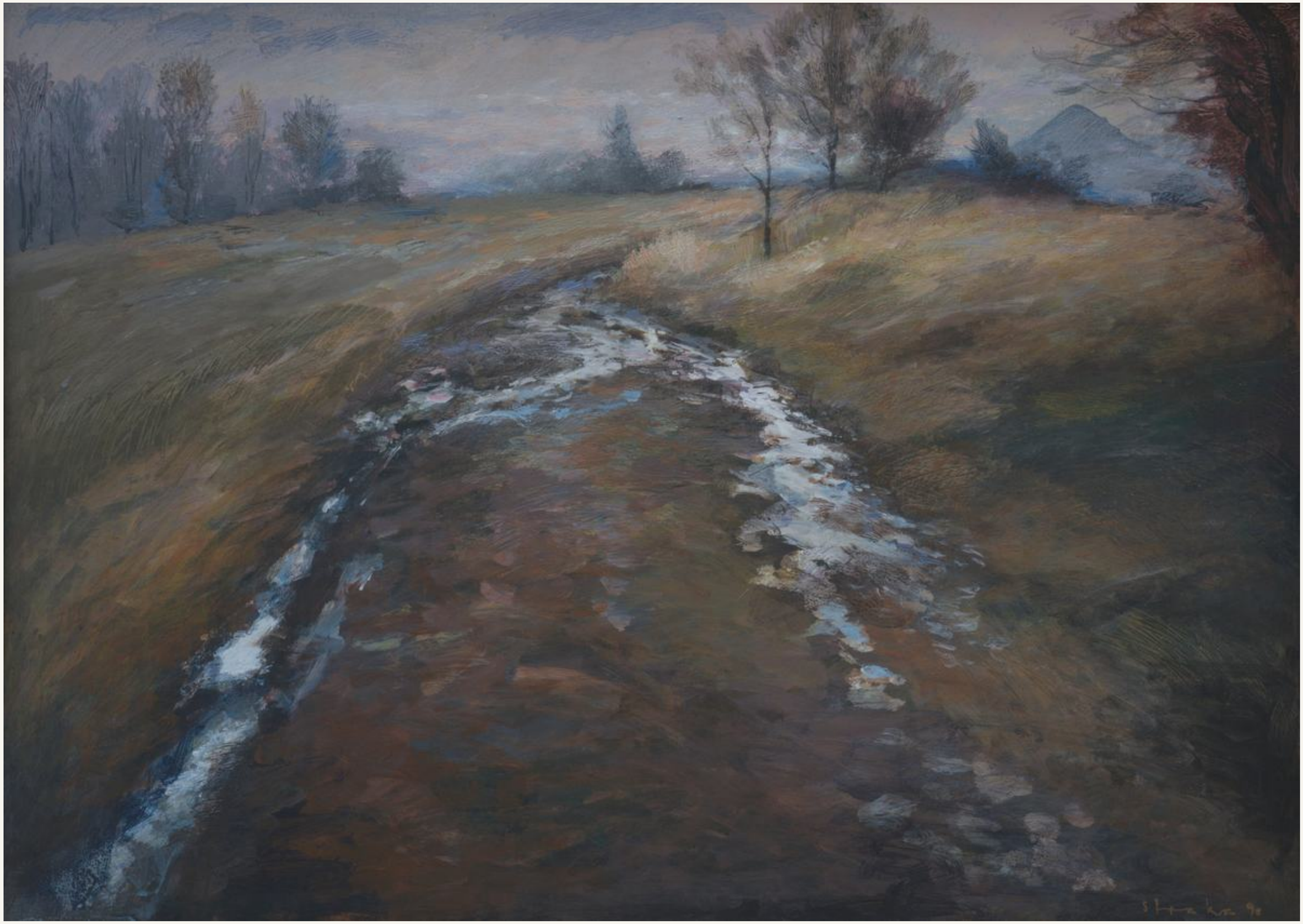
Meadow in Středohoří. 1996. Acrylic on hardboard, 70 × 80 cm. [D15]



Horizon. 2000. Acrylic on hardboard, 40 × 50 cm. [D663]



In the Děčín Region. 1998. Acrylic on hardboard, 60 × 70 cm. [D664]



Early Spring in Středohoří. 1990. Acrylic on hardboard, 73 × 103 cm. [D31]



Melting Snow: The Thaw. 1980. Oil on canvas, 66 × 88 cm. [D35]



Thaw in Středohoří. 1980. Oil on canvas, 70 × 95 cm. [D44]



Thistles in Středohoří. 1987-1988 estimate. Acrylic on hardboard, 95 × 96 cm. [D30]



Prey. 1989. Acrylic on hardboard. [D6]



Apple Orchard. 1984. Oil on plywood, 101 × 101 cm. [D97]



Forest in Retreat. 1989. Acrylic on hardboard, 20 × 30 cm. [D60]



Autumn in the Třeboň Region. 1999. Acrylic on hardboard, 30 × 40 cm. [D658]



Before Terezín. 2000. Acrylic on hardboard, 25 × 33 cm. [D660]



On the Bank of the Ohře. 1997. Acrylic on hardboard, 50 × 60 cm. [D16]



Autumn by the Ohře. 2000. Acrylic on hardboard, 40 × 50 cm. [D661]



Footpath. 2000. Acrylic on hardboard, 40 × 50 cm. [D662]



Ohře - Křešín. 2000. Acrylic on hardboard, 60 × 70 cm. [D668]



Blue Flowers. 1980s. Oil on canvas, 71 × 81 cm. [D107]

Still lifes

A few objects on a table can create an entire world in paint. A bottle, a vessel, a piece of fruit or a flower brings different outlines and surfaces; their proximity allows us to observe how colours affect one another. Ordinary things acquire weight through concentrated looking, light and the way the painter assigns them their place.

Straka sometimes lets objects emerge from a dark background; elsewhere, he arranges them in closely adjoining planes. A firm edge can become a loose brushstroke, volume turns into a sign in colour, and the table almost disappears beneath the arrangement of vessels. Alongside fruit and flowers are the tools of everyday work, bringing a trace of the human hand into the painting’s quiet space.

This chapter allows us to compare related arrangements and markedly different solutions. As we move slowly through it, small differences emerge: the height of a bottle neck, the distance between two objects, a bright spot between leaves. It is through these relationships that a simple subject becomes a new painting each time.



Still Life with Brushes. Undated. Unidentified medium, 40 × 46 cm. [D48]



Still Life with Apples. 1961. Tempera on paper or cardboard, 42 × 61 cm. [D657]



Still Life with Apples. 1957 (uncertain). Watercolour or oil on paper, 32,5 × 45 cm. [D279]



Still Life with a Bottle and Pears. Undated. Oil on canvas, 67 × 52 cm. [D53]



Still Life with Four Flowers. c. 1960s. Tempera on card, 62 × 88 cm. [D619]



Still Life with a Sunflower. 1962. Tempera on card, 88 × 63 cm. [D584]



Still Life with Yellow Flowers. 1960. Ink and pastel on card, 48 × 35 cm. [D533]



Still Life with Sewing. Undated. Tempera on card, 44 × 62 cm. [D494]



Still Life with Three Bottles. 1961. Tempera on card, 62 × 44 cm. [D469]



Still Life / Three Bottles and a Carafe. 1961. Tempera on card, 62 × 44 cm. [D471]



Still Life with Six Vessels. Undated. Tempera on card, 62 × 44 cm. [D489]



Still Life with Bottles. 1961. Tempera on paper, 62 × 43 cm. [D284]



Black Still Life. Undated. Tempera on card, 52 × 68 cm. [D467]



Blue Still Life: Wine. Undated, c. 1960s. Tempera on card. [D479]



Still Life with Bottles. Undated. Tempera on card, 62 × 88 cm. [D621]



Still Life with a Jug and a Flower. 1981. Oil on canvas, 66 × 80 cm. [D42]



Bouquet of Roses. Undated. Oil on canvas, 75 × 71 cm. [D655]



Lilies of the Valley. Undated. Acrylic on hardboard, 40 × 30 cm. [D656]



Peppers. 1991. Acrylic on hardboard, 30 × 45 cm. [D670]



Still Life with Apples. 1988. Acrylic on hardboard, 25 × 30 cm. [D61]

Journeys

Travel changes not only our location but also the way we look. An unfamiliar house, a coastline or a moment of pausing together draws attention that we might not give it at home. The excursion that opens this chapter is a moment between arrival and further movement: beneath a vast sky, people and landscape meet for a while.

The other paintings draw the eye towards solitary buildings, Gothic architecture and the sea. In some, the title identifies the place; in others, it remains open. A house at the edge of a space can become a significant motif, as can a few stones whose shapes suggest how a landscape takes form as a painting.

At the coast, looking slows down. Bands of coloured water, solid boulders and a distant horizon create a different rhythm from that of a town street. Drawing and painting can approach a similar subject differently: one follows the outline, another atmosphere and light. This selection brings together various subjects recorded during travels.



Trip to the GDR. 1975. Oil on canvas, 84 × 93 cm. [D1]



Spanish Landscape. 1984. Oil on hardboard, 60 × 80 cm. [D7]



Abandoned Homestead 2. 1984. Oil on canvas, 70 × 90 cm. [D13]



Farmhouse. 1993. Acrylic on hardboard, 44 × 48,5 cm. [D49]



Somewhere in England / Gothic Building. 1978. Oil on canvas, 75 × 86 cm. [D66]



Story of a Journey. Undated. Oil on canvas, 75 × 92 cm. [D65]



Spanish Bay. Undated. Oil on canvas, 70 × 90 cm. [D10]



Stones by the Sea. 1990s (estimate). Unidentified medium, 43 × 53 cm. [D29]



Rocks in the Sea. 1981. Oil on canvas, 60 × 95 cm. [D67]

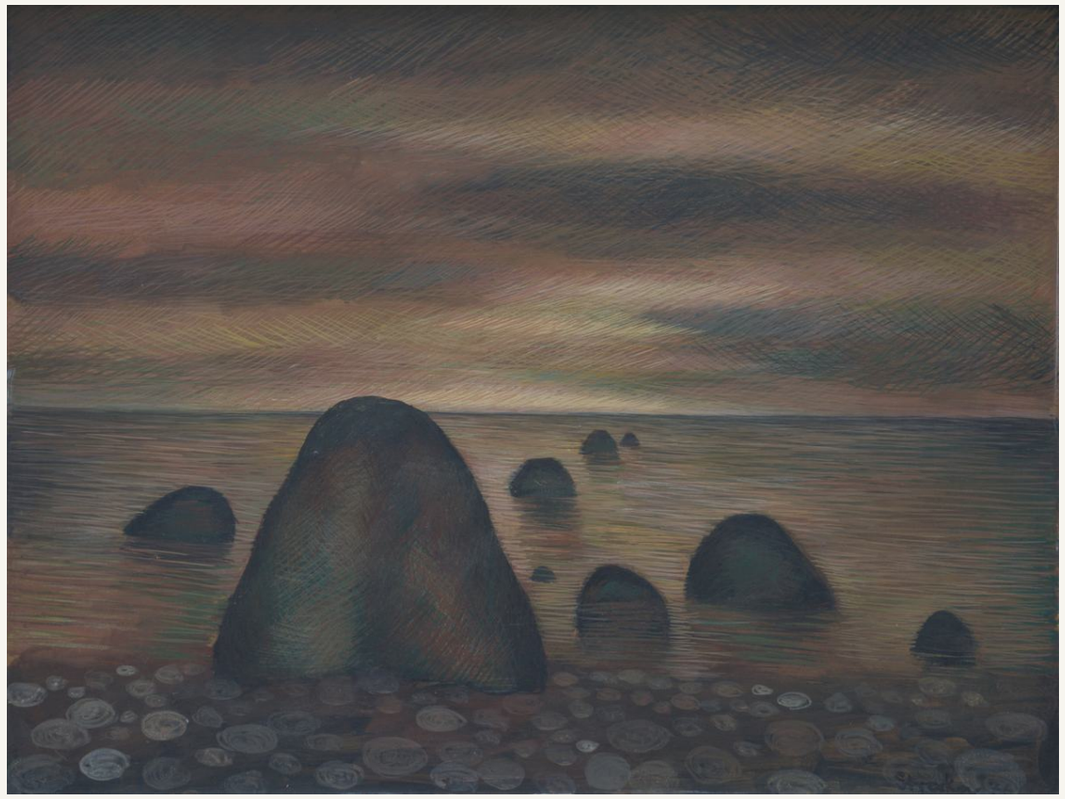


Fishing Village. 1976. Acrylic on hardboard, 49 × 68 cm. [D69]

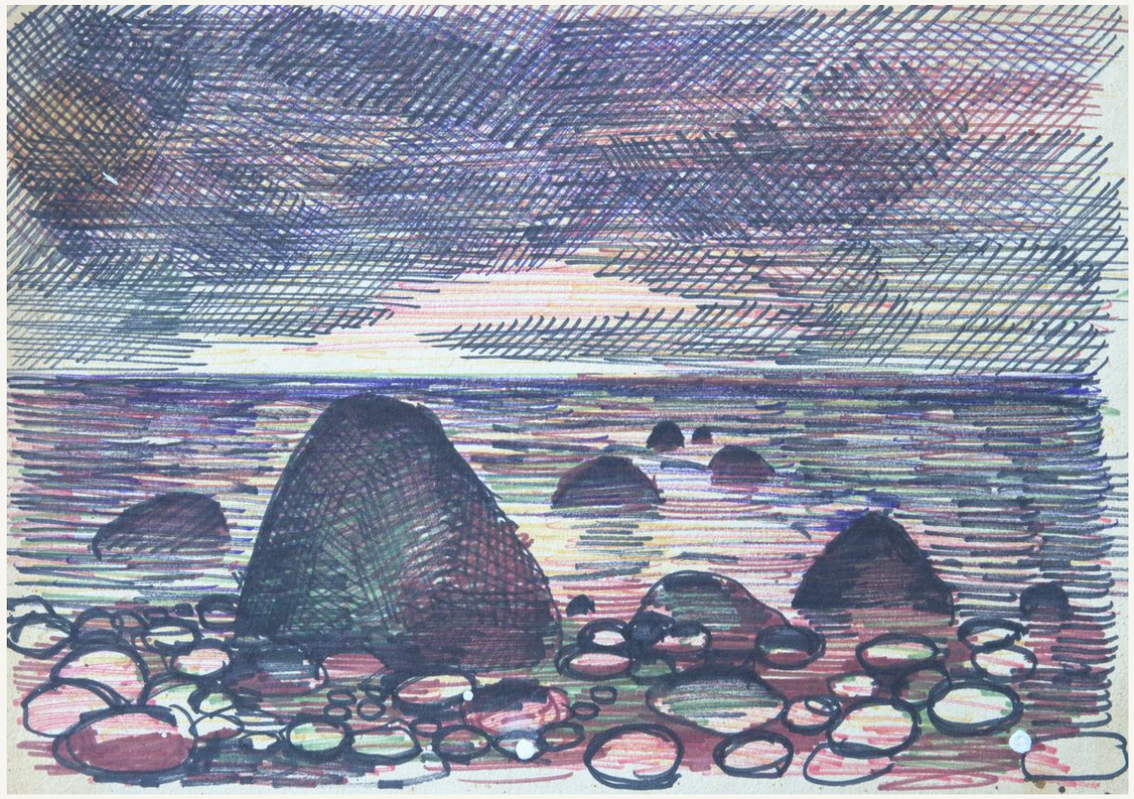


Coast. 1961. Medium undocumented, dimensions undocumented. [D285E]

Calm sea and coastal studies



Calm Sea. 1976. Acrylic on hardboard, 60 × 80 cm. [D83]



Study: Boulders by the Sea. Undated. Coloured felt-tip pens on paper, 15 × 21 cm. [D454]



Cyprus: Bay. 1990. Acrylic on hardboard, 60 × 70 cm. [D666]



Boat in the Bay. Undated. Acrylic on hardboard, 61,5 × 81 cm. [D118]



Boats in the Bay / Homage to Zrzavý. 1961 or 1962. Tempera on card, 44 × 62 cm. [D491]



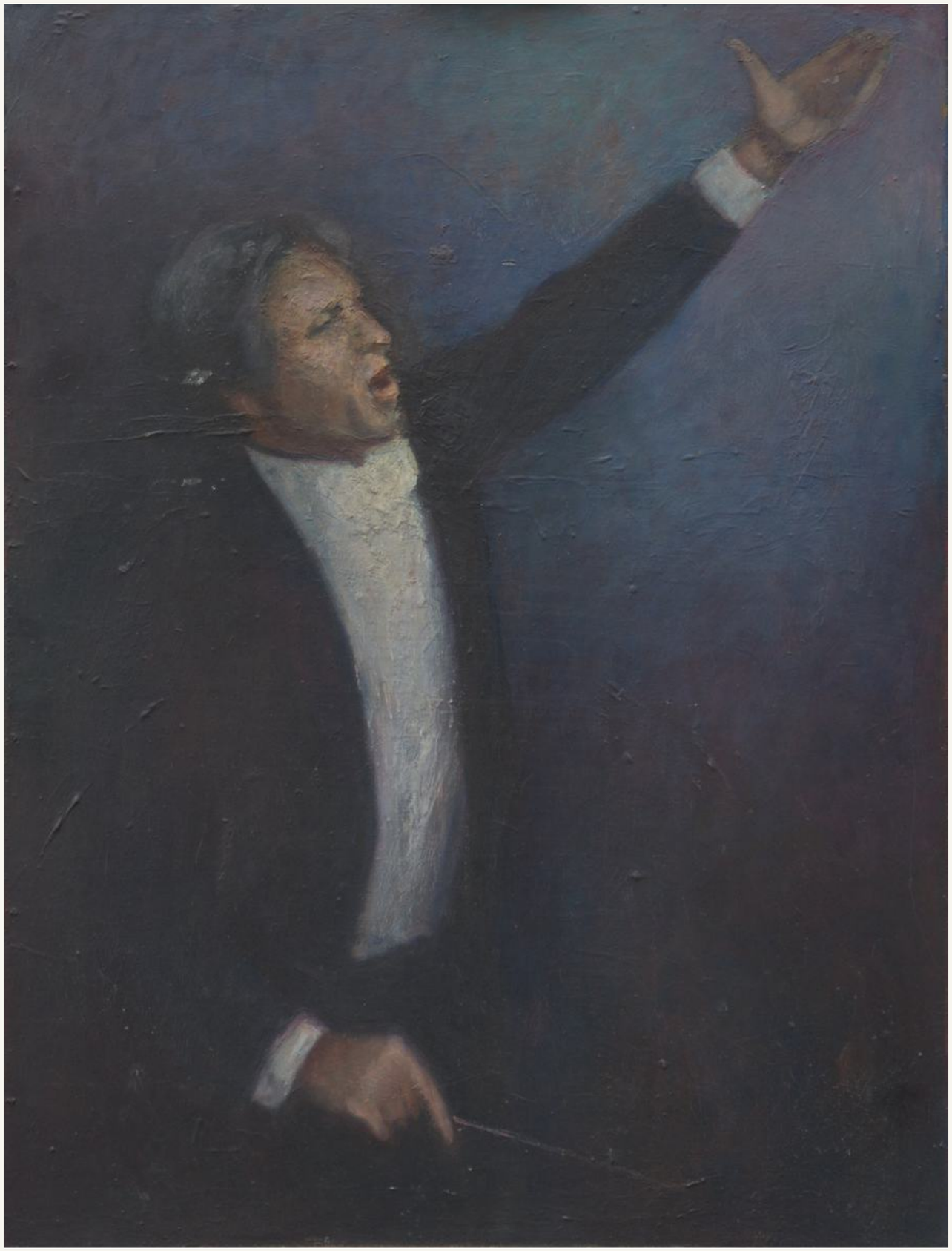
Jewish Cemetery, Tučepy. 1993. Acrylic on hardboard, 60 × 70 cm. [D114]

Libor Pešek

A conductor’s gesture lasts only an instant, yet concentrates the movement of the whole body within it. In Straka’s painting from 1983, a light shirt emerges from a dark blue background, and a raised arm leads the eye upwards. The painting captures a person at work, in a state of concentration that remains palpable even without the orchestra’s presence.

Here, music is revealed through the body and the rhythm of the painting. The movement of the hands, the turn of the head and the relationship between light and dark areas give the still image an inner tempo. The portrait allows us to pause over something that is constantly moving forward during a concert.

We present the interview of 10 August 1991 through an editorial summary of the surviving passages. The clipping comes from Přemysl Straka’s archive and places the conductor’s publicly expressed reflections alongside the painting.



Conductor Libor Pešek. 1983. Oil on wood, 104 × 79 cm. [D75]

Let Us Remain a Reflective Nation

In an interview with Terezie Jungrová dated 10 August 1991, Libor Pešek reflects on everyday life in Britain and Czechoslovakia. He describes British society in terms of reserve, respect for privacy and tolerance. He also observes social differences and historical habits that shape how people meet and how they perceive the world beyond their own country.

Turning to Czech society, he expresses appreciation for its broad cultural outlook and natural interest in matters beyond one’s immediate profession. He recalls a social closeness that allows people of different occupations and standing to meet. For him, such encounters belong among values that cannot be taken for granted even in a society with a higher standard of living.

Running through the interview is the question of what may be lost as society changes. Pešek reflects on the pressure to succeed, new social barriers and the danger that the pursuit of prosperity may displace time for thought. He links personal freedom to the possibility of preserving one’s own judgement and an independent inner life. His wish that we remain a reflective nation thus becomes a call for attentiveness towards ourselves and others.

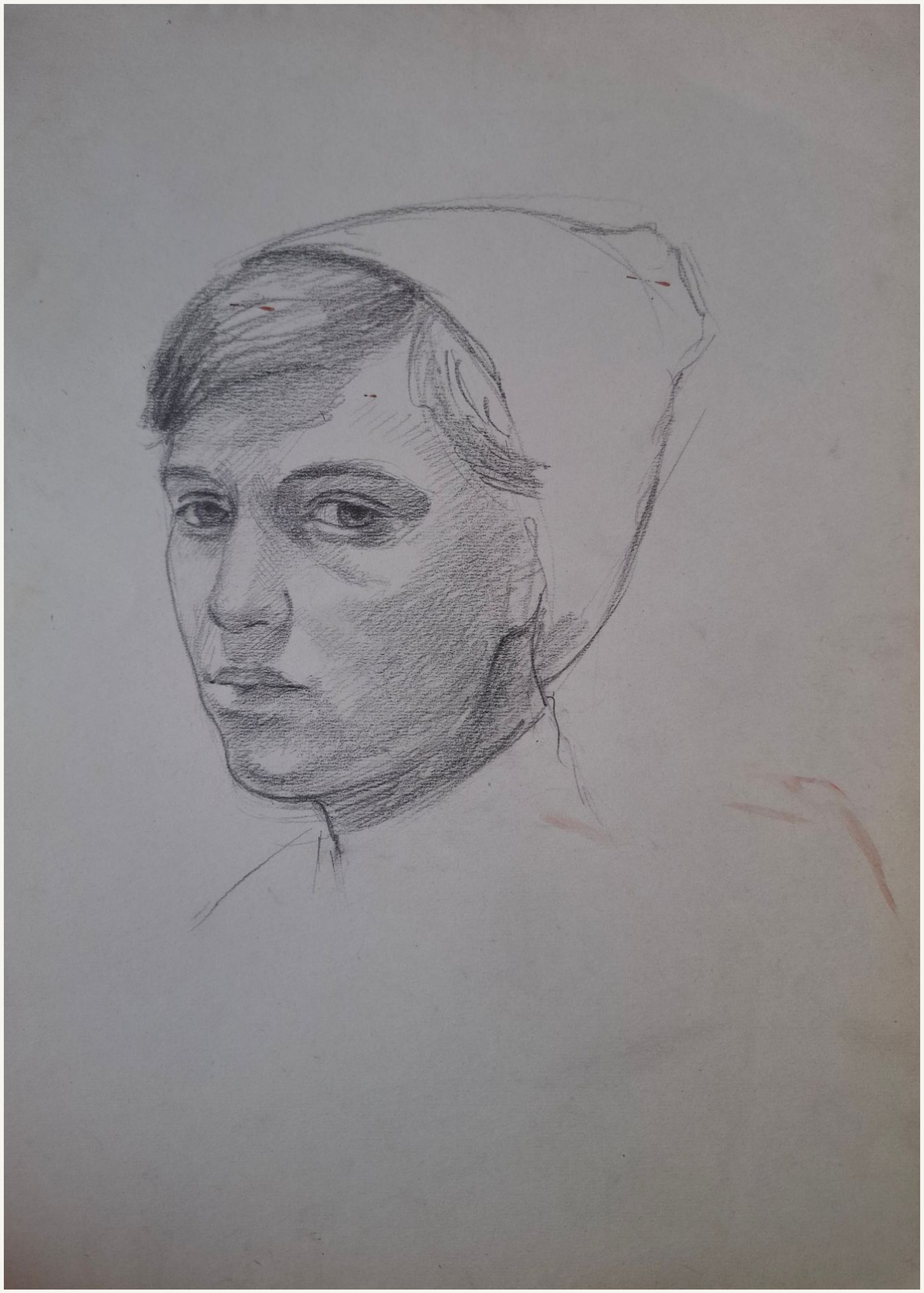
From an article by Terezie Jungrová, 10 August 1991.

The sketchbook as workshop

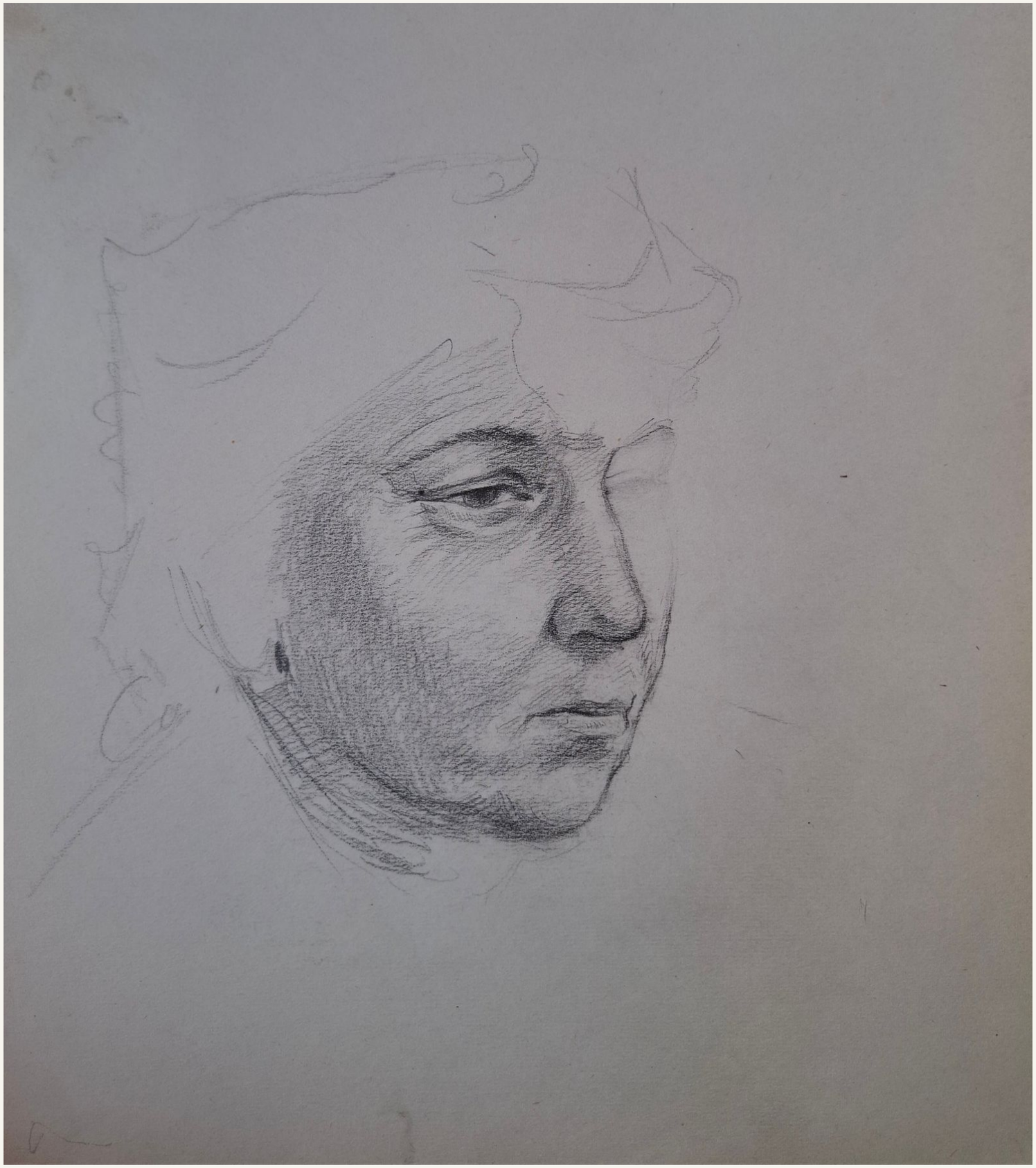
A sketchbook preserves a thought at a moment when it need not yet have a final form. A rapid line searches for the position of a body, a few strokes for the outline of a face, while denser hatching gradually builds volume. Different attempts, returns and empty spaces can remain side by side on a single page. The viewer thus enters directly into the draughtsman’s working space.

The cats invite particular attention. At one moment they are captured in a few brief strokes; at another, through patient observation of a head, an ear or fur. A tension emerges between the animal’s swift movement and the concentrated drawing, giving these sheets their vitality. The finest lines are joined by strong shadows, and an outline may almost disappear for a moment.

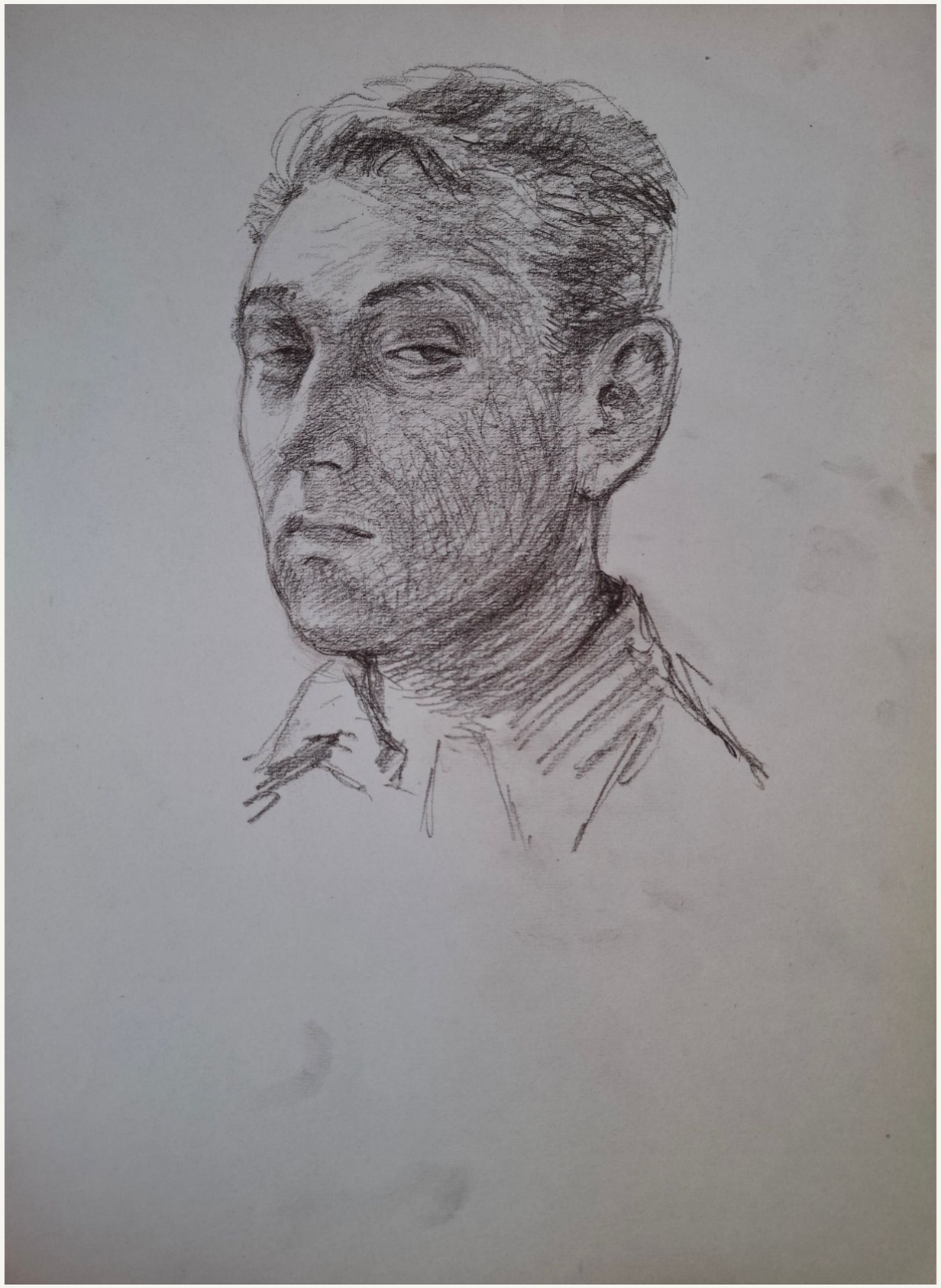
Some pages combine drawings with newspaper clippings. A recorded stimulus and the artist’s own work share the same surface, sometimes closely, sometimes with space between them. Whole sheets reveal their arrangement; enlarged details allow us to move closer to the stroke itself. The sketchbook remains a place for observation, collecting and further exploration.



Study of a Face. Undated. P095. [P095]



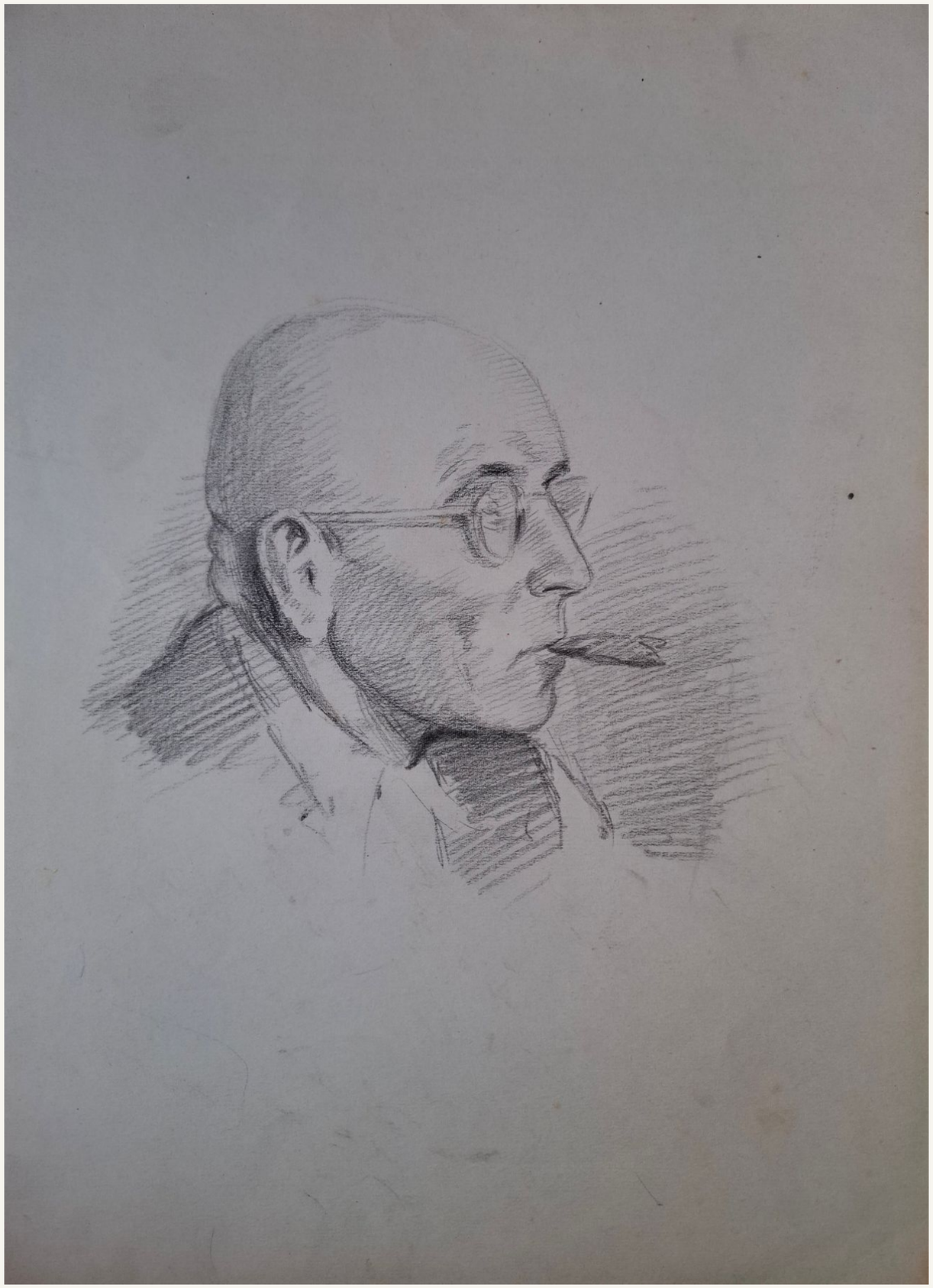
Study of a Face. Undated. P097. [P097]



Study of a Face. Undated. P103. [P103]



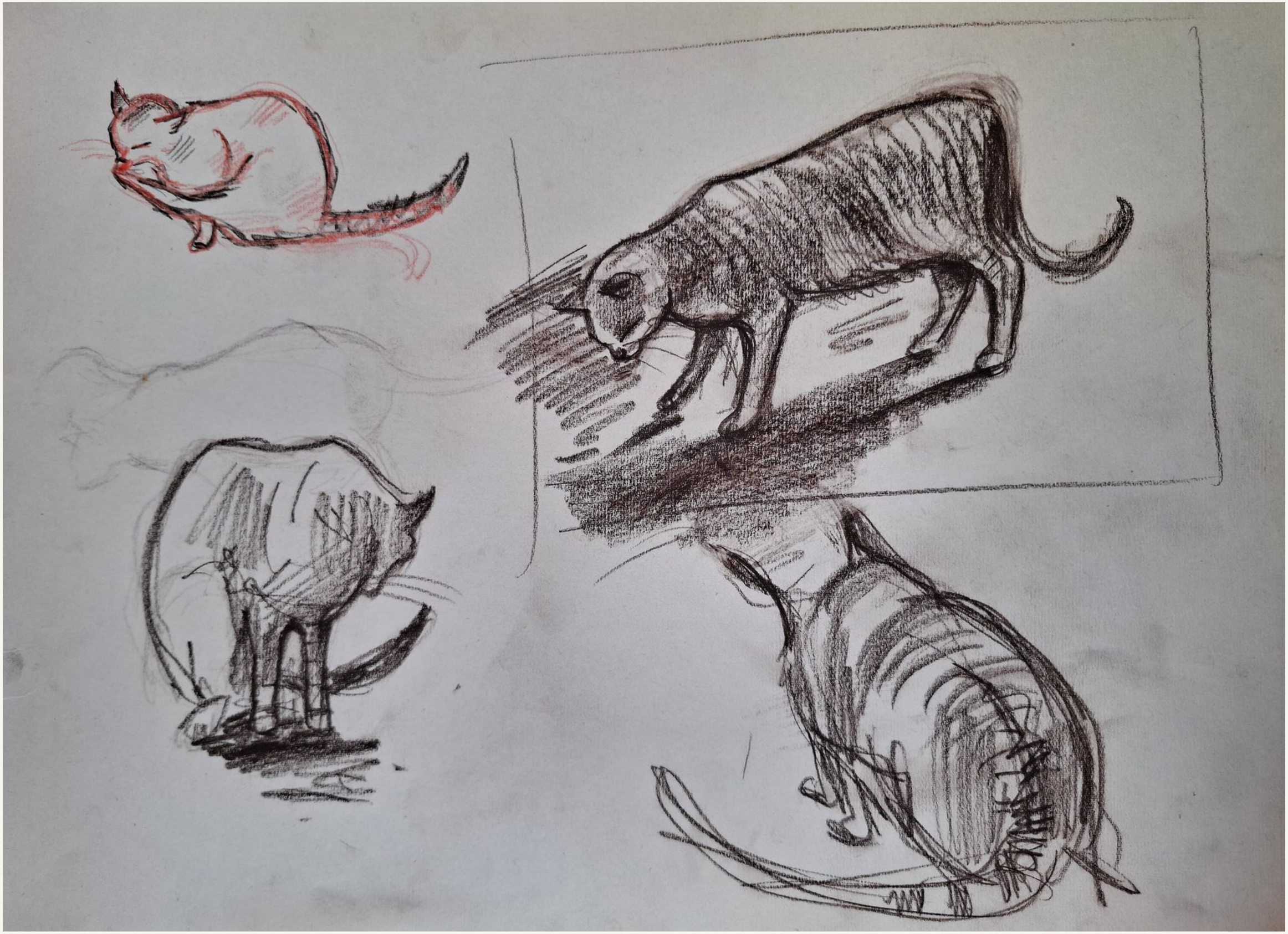
Study of a Face. Undated. P105. [P105]



Study of a Face. Undated. P108. [P108]



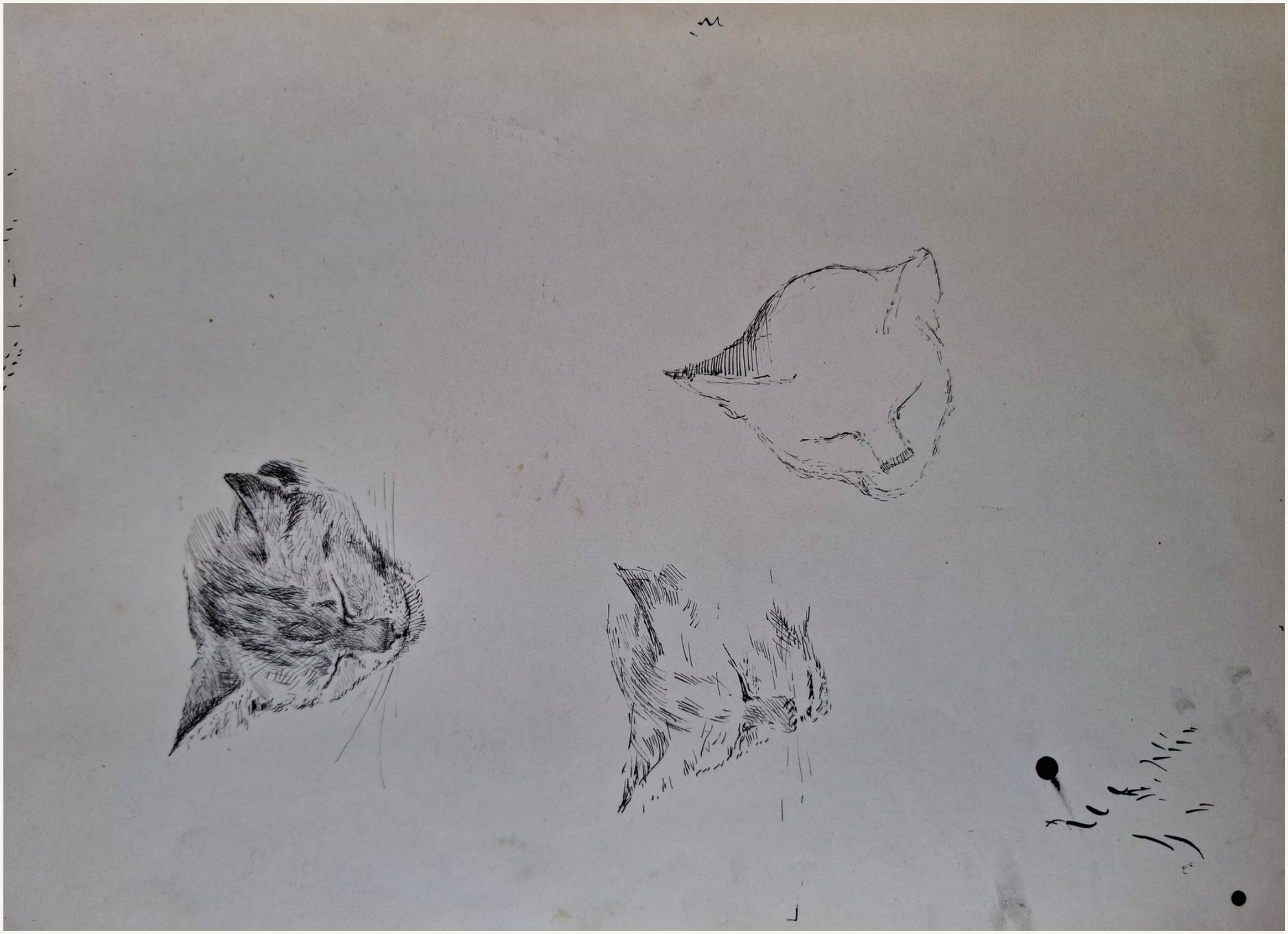
Studies of Cats. Undated. P099. [P099]



Studies of Cats. Undated. P101. [P101]



Cat’s Head. Undated. Pen drawing, sketchbook. Detail of a cat study. [P029]



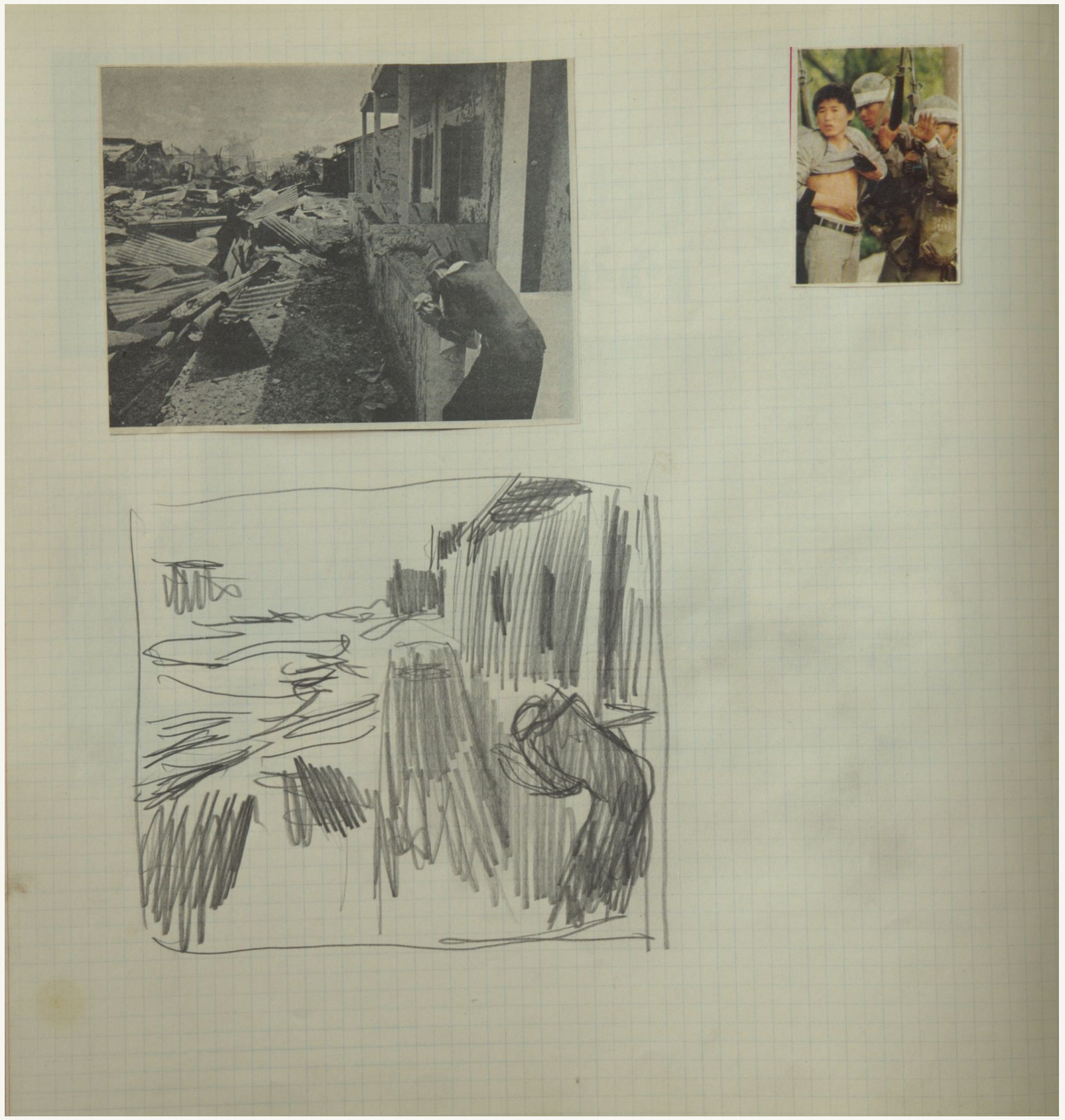
Three Studies of a Cat’s Head. Undated. Pen drawing, sketchbook. [P109]



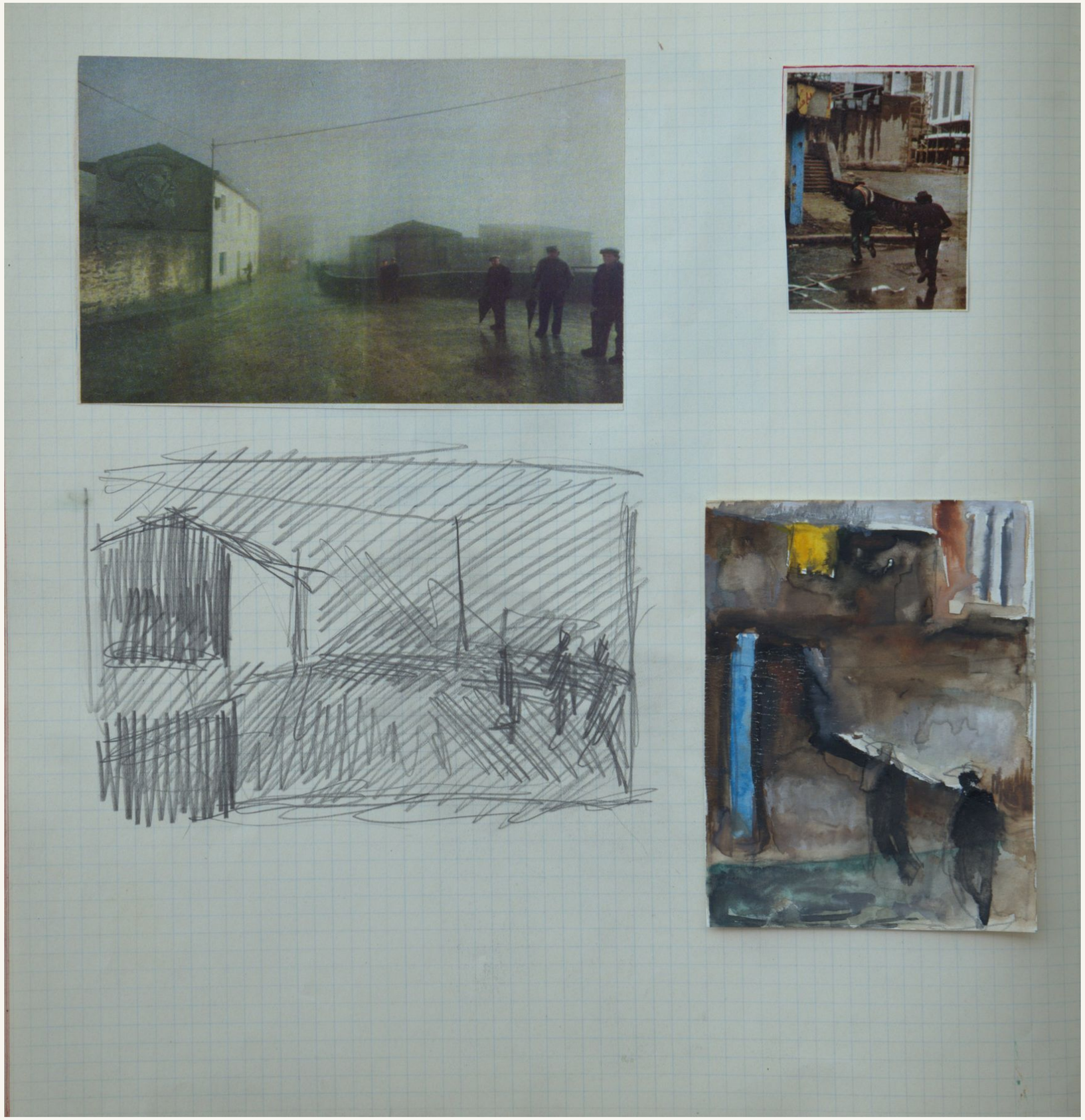




Sketchbook Page with Clippings and a Drawing. Undated. P244. [P244]



Sketchbook Page with Clippings and a Drawing. Undated. P250. [P250]



Sketchbook Page with Clippings and a Drawing. Undated. P256. [P256]

Image and lettering

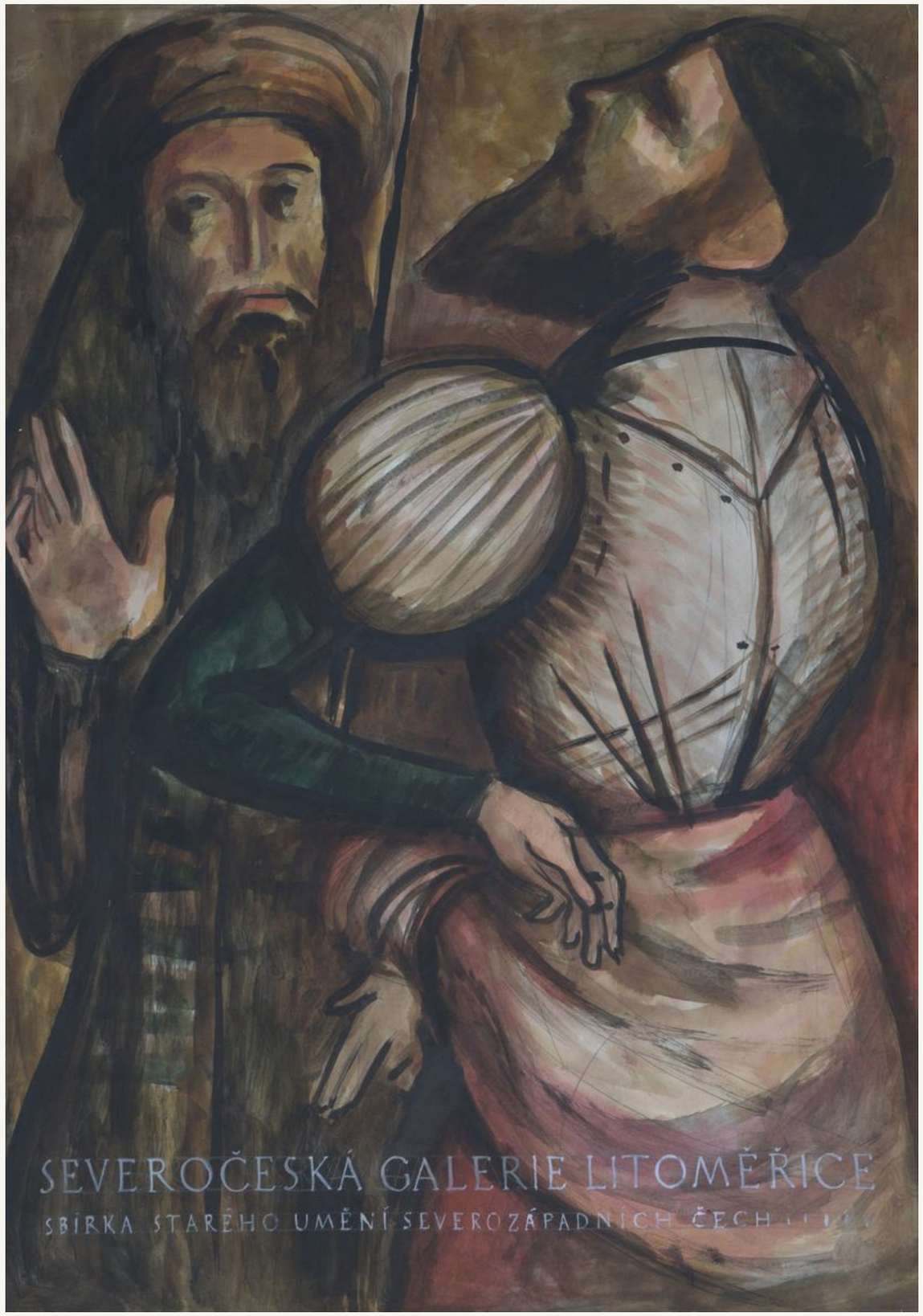
In graphic design, image and lettering must find a common language. A name needs to be legible, a drawing engaging, and the whole surface must maintain a balance between the message and open space. Straka’s working sheets preserve hand-drawn marks, pasted-in materials and the search for a future layout. They allow us to see a printed piece before it reaches its final form.

Exhibition designs connect this work with galleries and Památník Terezín. The design bearing Leo Haas’s name survives as a working sheet; neither the date nor whether the planned exhibition took place has been established. Andrej Romaňák’s book Terezín Fortress recalls another project on whose graphic design Straka collaborated.

The colophon of the catalogue Památník Terezín 1947–1992 explicitly credits him with the graphic design of the catalogue, poster and invitation; the cover painting is by Ivan Bukovský. Alongside cultural publications are designs intended for everyday use. In both settings, the same attention to colour, the rhythm of lettering and the clarity of the image is evident.



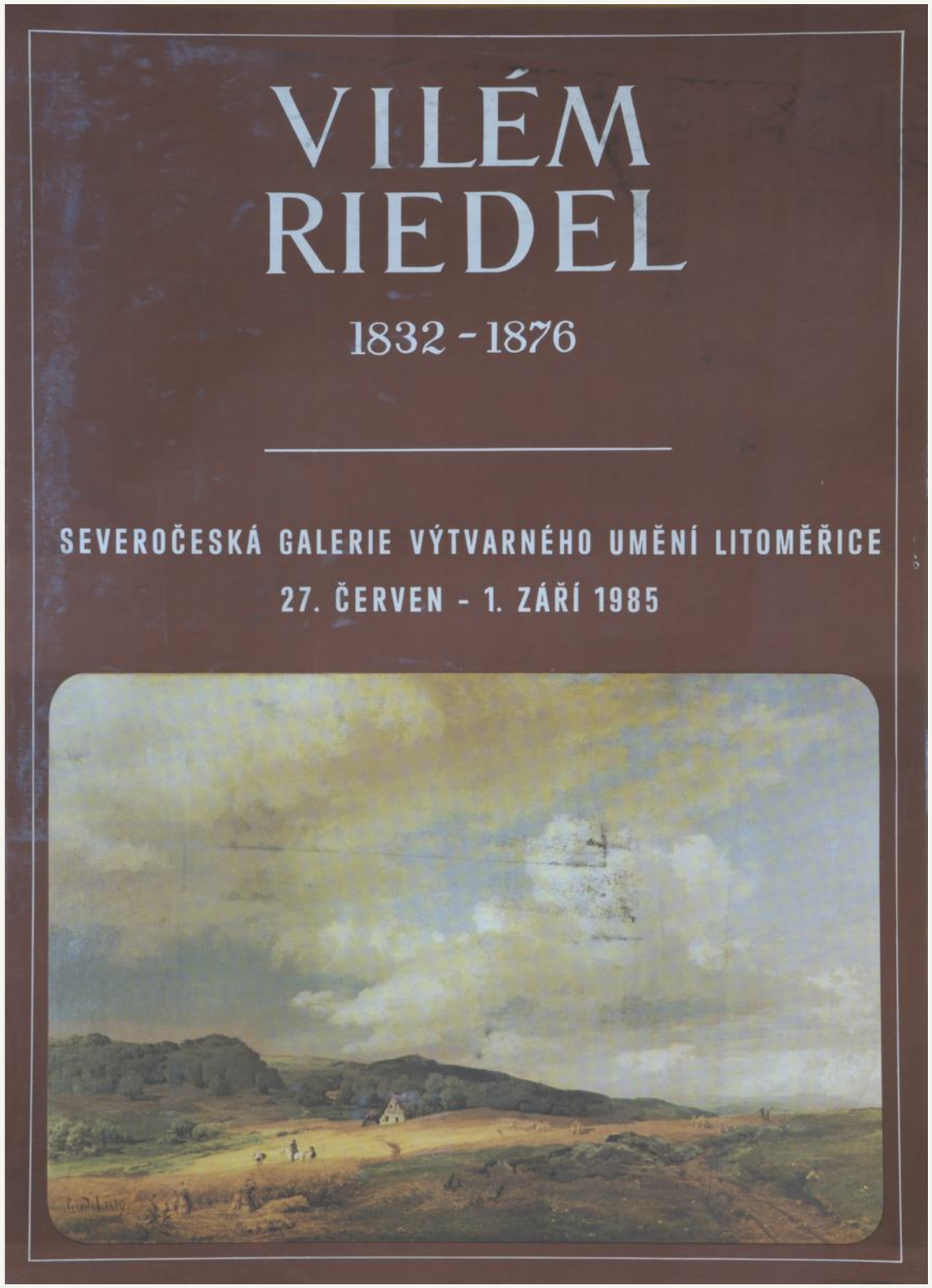
Graphic Design: Leo Haas, Terezín Ghetto. Undated. Ink and tempera on card, 88 × 62,5 cm. [D601]



Graphic Design for the Gallery in Litoměřice. Undated. Pencil and tempera on card, 82,5 × 58 cm. Graphic design incorporating reproductions of works by other artists. [D591]



Graphic Design for the Litoměřice Gallery. Undated. Pencil and tempera on card. Graphic design incorporating reproductions of works by other artists. [D611]

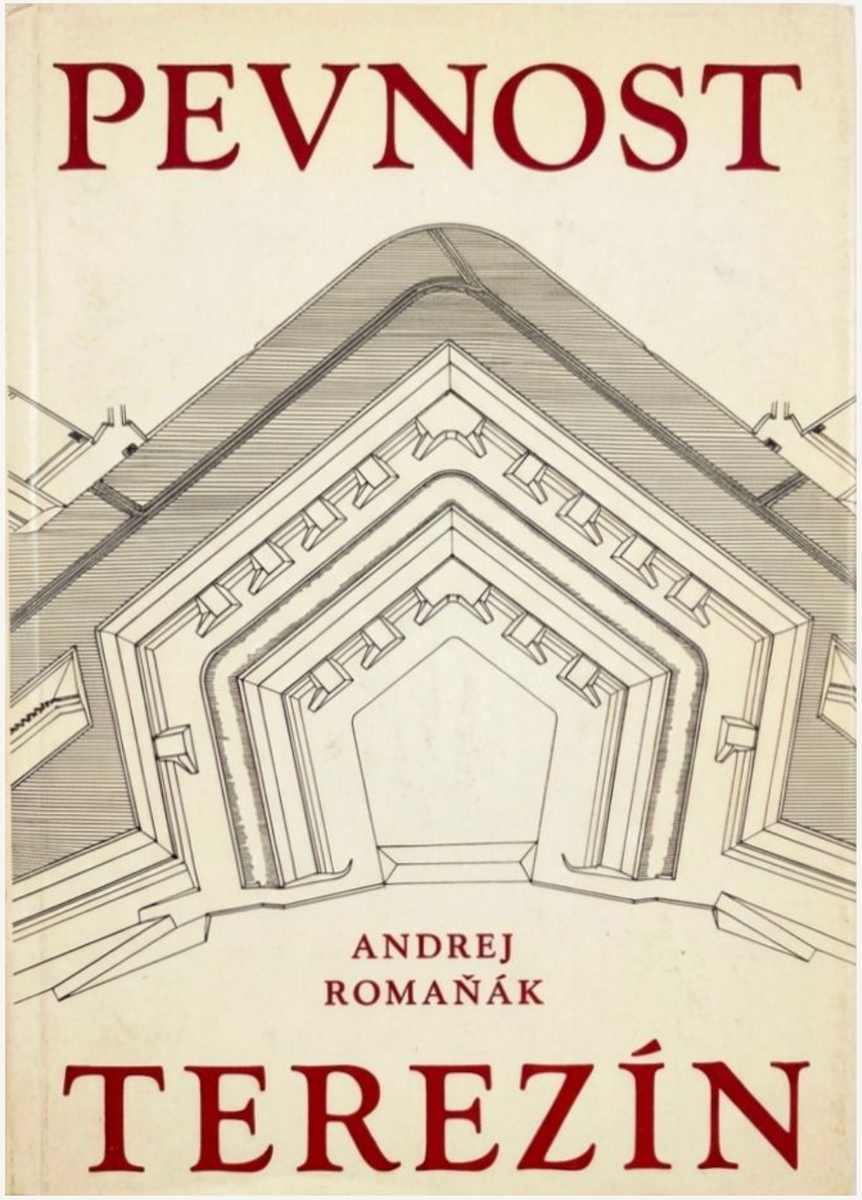


Graphic Design for the Litoměřice Gallery. 1985. Printed poster, 79 × 57,5 cm. Poster for the Vilém Riedel exhibition, 27 June – 1 September 1985; the reproduced painting is not by Straka. [D594]

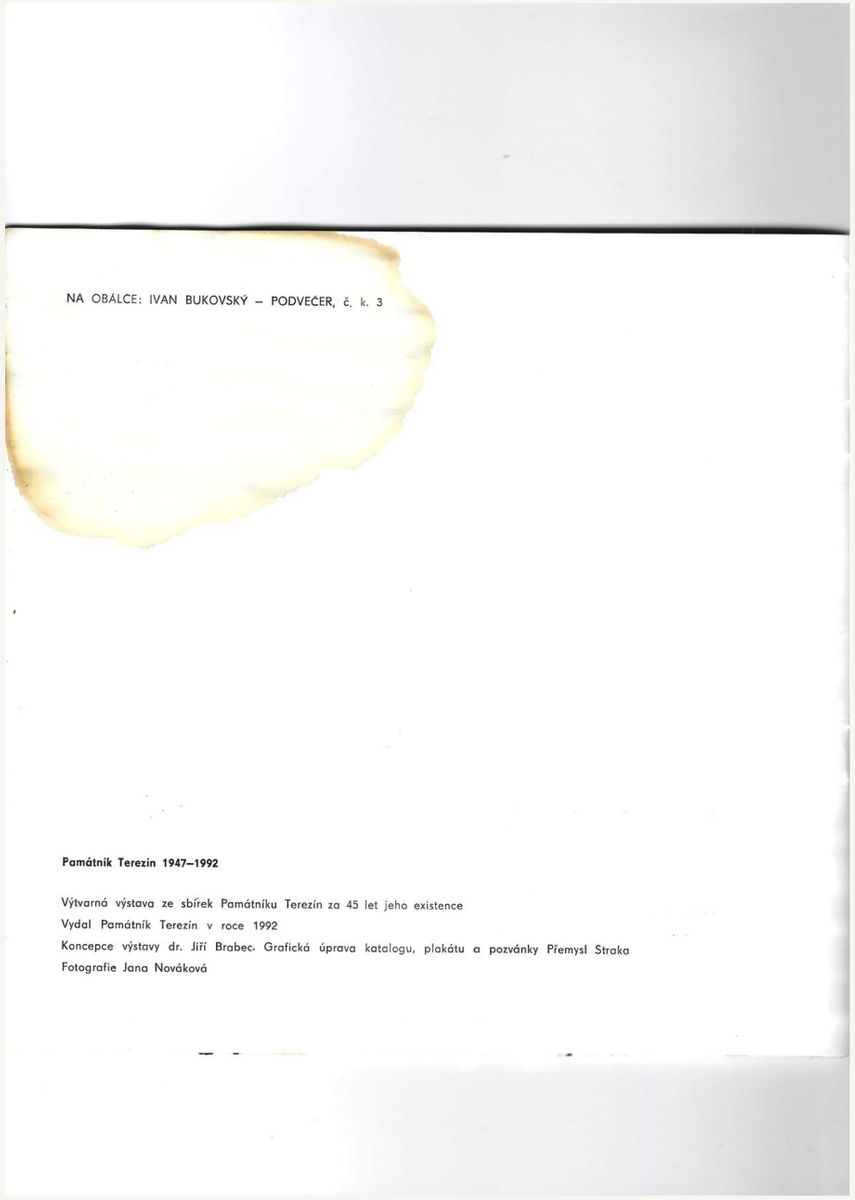


Graphic Work for Galerie Litoměřice on the Reverse. Undated. Unidentified medium, 41 × 51 cm. [D470B]

Book and catalogue



Andrej Romaňák: Terezín Fortress, 1972. A project with graphic design contributions by Přemysl Straka.


NA OBÁLCE: IVAN BUKOVSKÝ – PODVEČER, č. k. 3

Památník Terezín 1947–1992

Výtvarná výstava ze sbírek Památníku Terezín za 45 let jeho existence
Vydal Památník Terezín v roce 1992
Koncepce výstavy dr. Jiří Brabec. Grafická úprava katalogu, plakátu a pozvánky Přemysl Straka
Fotografie Jana Nováková

The colophon of the catalogue Památník Terezín 1947–1992 credits Straka with the graphic design of the catalogue, poster and invitation.

The full title of Romaňák’s book, according to the gallery record, is Terezín Fortress and Its Place in the History of Fortification Architecture. Severočeské nakladatelství, Ústí nad Labem, 1972. We note Straka’s graphic design contribution to the project; the precise extent of his involvement is not determined here.

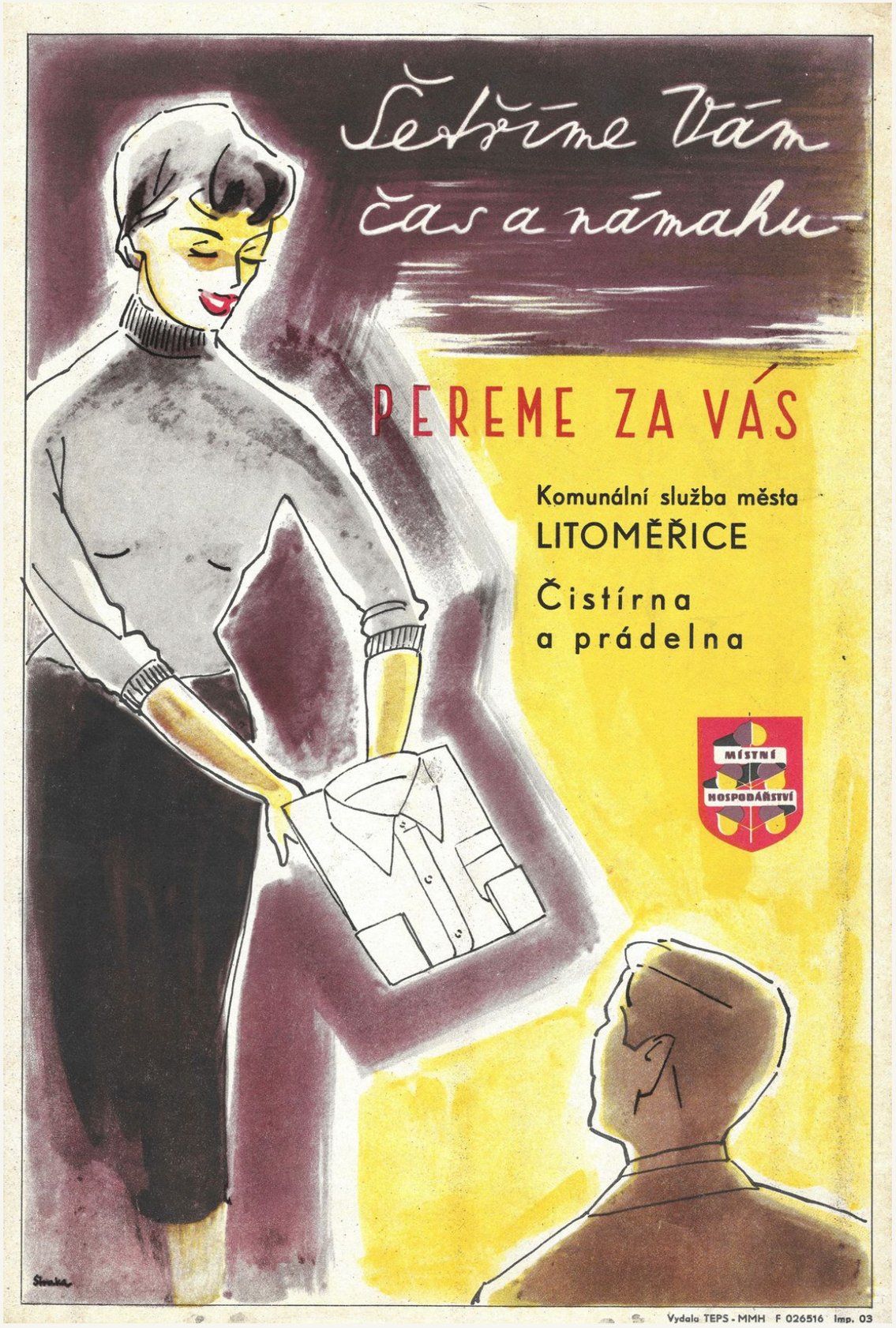
Graphic design for everyday life

The advertisement for Čistírny a prádelny komunální služby města Litoměřice combines a bold yellow area with drawn figures and several styles of lettering. The words “We Do Your Laundry” are set within an open field of colour; the diagonal line of a figure links them to the image of clean laundry. Straka’s signature is visible in the lower left corner.

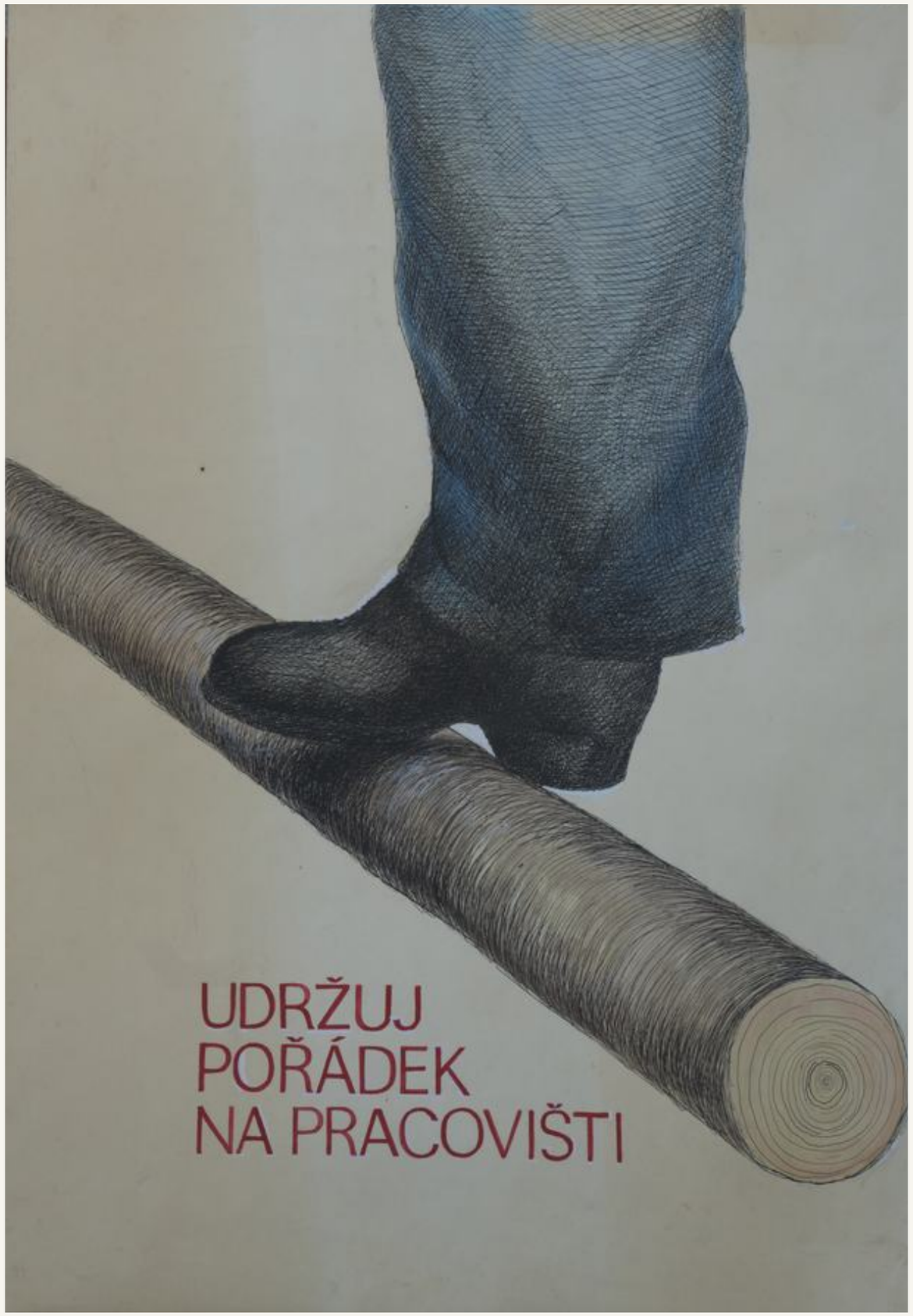
The sheet, dated to 1956 in the archive, recalls applied graphic work intended for the town’s everyday services. Alongside exhibition catalogues and invitations, it represents another setting in which his combination of drawing, colour and lettering found a place.

The following design, Keep Your Workplace Tidy, carries economical drawing into another everyday setting: the lettering and figure together draw attention to safety at work.

Přemysl Straka: We Do Your Laundry. Published by TEPS–MMH. Dated 1956 according to the archival annotation.



We Do Your Laundry / Dry Cleaner and Laundry, Litoměřice



Keep Your Workplace Tidy. Undated. Ink and tempera on card, 83 × 58 cm. [D597]

A mosaic for a façade

Here, the picture surface takes on a different scale. The design for the façade of a health centre envisages colour entering public space and being read from a greater distance. A large circle assembled from small pieces focuses the gaze; further circular forms and colour relationships set its interior in motion.

The attached label specifies a wall measuring 300 × 400 cm, a circular mosaic 260 cm in diameter and coarse grey plaster. The surviving sheet, measuring 34 × 39 cm, allows us to imagine the transformation of a small design into something that would become part of a building.

It is not known whether the mosaic was realised. The particular health centre and the date of the design also remain unidentified. Even so, the design opens a striking chapter in Straka’s work: the meeting of a free composition in colour with architecture and the everyday movement of people around it.



Design for a Mosaic on the Façade of a Health Centre. Undated. Pencil and tempera on paper; design sheet according to the inventory 34 × 39 cm. The label specifies a wall of 300 × 400 cm and a circle 260 cm in diameter. Realisation is not documented. [D341]

Letter to the president

On 25 April 1995, in Litoměřice, Přemysl Straka dated a letter beginning “Dear Mr President”. In it, he responds to an article that, according to his account, he had read in Lidové noviny the previous day. He expresses concern about the return of totalitarian political tendencies and asks for an explanation of the democratic state’s position.

We include the surviving two-page document as the artist’s personal voice. Its wording and political judgements belong to the moment in which it was written. The reproduction preserves both pages; the transcription also makes passages that are less clear in the scan readable. The archival description associates the letter with President Václav Havel. The surviving copy itself does not confirm that it was sent or delivered.

PŘEMYSL STRAKA

HAVLÍČKOVA 18, 412 01 LITOMĚŘICE
TELEFON 0416/2634

Vážený pane prezidente, Litoměřice, 25.4.1995

ujišťuji Vás, že se necítím být grafomaněm, nicméně níže uvedenou skutečnost mám za tak závažnou, že považuji za svou povinnost obrátit se na Vás jako představitele naší "mladé" parlamentní demokracie se žádostí o vysvětlení.

Když jsem otevřel v pondělí 24.4.1995 Lidové noviny, úžasem jsem oněměl. Na poslední stránce tohoto deníku jsem totiž našel článek " Mladí komunisté podpořili Štěpána", ozdobený fotografií předsednického stolu nové Strany československých komunistů /SČK/, v jejímž čele stojí p.Miroslava Štěpán. Postoje oněch mladých mně nijak nezaráží, protože mentalita mladých se vždycky vyznačuje vzdorem proti postavení starších generací a mladé obvykle velmi málo zajímá co mohou způsobit. Co mně však šokuje je fakt, že navzdory mému přesvědčení, že v našich zákonech je zakotven zákaz propagace fašismu, komunismu a rasistických tendencí, vzniká tu nová komunistická strana v čele s člověkem, který byl de facto pro praktické prosazování ideií komunismu odsouzen. Tato strana navíc nezakrytě propaguje stále stejné cíle komunismu, jak ve svém názvu, tak ve svých heslech.

Nemám zřejmě natolik vytříbené právní vědomí, abych si správně vyložil termin propagace totalitních režimů, ale vzpomínám na postoj našich otců k režimu Hitlerovua natupujícímu hnutí Henleinovu, jakož i režimu Stalinovu, v němž se projevila ona laxnost, jež se nám - či lépe řečeno mnoha z nás - později tak vymstila.

Rádi se porovnáváme se Spojenými státy, i když - podle mně - máme málo společného. Nepřetržitá kontinuita vývoje, zcela rozdílná historie, obrovská rozloha této země a další podmínky, nedávají možnost stejných východisek pro porovnávání. Tam měl možnost vznikat a vyvíjet se samočistící společenský mechanismus. Smysl pro zodpovědnost a pro fair play pro všechny se u nás projevuje spíše snahou po dosažení osobních výhod b e z o h l e d u na fair play.

Nemyslím si a nechci být jediným sprvedlivým, ale uráží mně benevolence vůči těm, kteří nás přes čtyřicet let usurpovali,

Letter to the president, 25 April 1995. First page.

Transcription / 1

PŘEMYSL STRAKA
HAVLÍČKOVA 18, 412 01 LITOMĚŘICE
TELEPHONE 0416/2634

Dear Mr President,

Litoměřice, 25.4.1995

I assure you that I do not consider myself a compulsive writer, yet I regard the matter set out below as so serious that I consider it my duty to address you, as the representative of our “young” parliamentary democracy, with a request for an explanation.

When I opened Lidové noviny on Monday, 24.4.1995, I was struck dumb with astonishment. On the last page of that daily, I found an article entitled “Young Communists Supported Štěpán”, adorned with a photograph of the presidium table of the new Strana československých komunistů /SČK/, headed by Mr Miroslav Štěpán. The attitudes of those young people do not surprise me in any way, because the mentality of the young is always marked by defiance towards the position of older generations, and young people are usually very little concerned with what they may cause. What shocks me, however, is the fact that, despite my conviction that our laws prohibit the promotion of fascism, communism and racist tendencies, a new communist party is being formed here under the leadership of a man who was, in effect, convicted for putting the ideas of communism into practice. Moreover, this party openly promotes the same unchanging aims of communism, both in its name and in its slogans.

My understanding of the law is evidently not refined enough for me to interpret correctly the term promotion of totalitarian regimes, but I remember our fathers’ attitude to Hitler’s regime and the

emerging Henlein movement, as well as Stalin’s regime, in which there was a laxity that later came back to haunt us — or, more precisely, many of us — so bitterly.

We like to compare ourselves with the United States, although, in my opinion, we have little in common. The uninterrupted continuity of its development, its entirely different history, the enormous size of the country and other conditions do not allow us to begin comparisons from the same starting points. There, a self-cleansing social mechanism had the opportunity to emerge and develop. In our country, a sense of responsibility and fair play for everyone tends instead to manifest itself as an effort to secure personal advantages regardless of fair play.

I do not think of myself, nor do I wish to be, the only righteous person, but I am offended by the indulgence shown towards those who usurped our lives for more than forty years,

PŘEMYSL STRAKA

HAVLÍČKOVA 18, 412 01 LITOMĚŘICE
TELEFON 0416/2634

a kteří nemají ani tolik slušnosti, aby se živili v občanském zaměstnání bez překážek, které oni sami po celou dobu svého nezdařeného panování kladli druhým. Jestliže právem voláme po nekompromisním postoji vůči těm, kteří z politováníhodné nevědomosti oslavují zločince Hitlera a užívají atributy NSDAP, pak by bylo namístě postupovat stejně vůči propagatorům komunistické strany. Víme dobře, že jejich cíle a způsob jak jich dosáhnout se liší jen nepodstatně.

Demokracie spoléhá na to, že při volbách tyto extrémní strany a hnutí neuspějí. Nezodpovědným a neuspokojeným však příjde vhod každá strana, která bude vládě oposicí.

Nechtěl bych se ještě dočkat chvil, kdy opět povstanou " staronoví" bojovníci. Jejich výsměch je deprimující, ale mohl by být jen předzvěstí něčeho horšího.

Na vědomí :
Předseda poslanecké sněmovny
p.Milan U h d e ,
Předseda vlády p.Václav K l a u s,
Ministr vnitra p.Jiří R u m l,
Vydavatelství lidových novin, Praha

Letter to the president, 25 April 1995. Second page.

Transcription / 2

and who do not even have the decency to earn a living in ordinary employment, free from the obstacles they themselves put in the way of others throughout their failed rule. If we rightly call for an uncompromising stance towards those who, out of [uncertain reading: regrettable] ignorance, glorify the criminal Hitler and use the symbols of the NSDAP, then it would be appropriate to proceed in the same way against the proponents of the communist party. We know well that their goals and their means of achieving them differ only in minor respects.

Democracy relies on these extremist parties and movements failing at elections. Yet any party that opposes the government will suit the irresponsible and the discontented.

I would not wish to live to see the time when the “old-new” fighters rise again. Their mockery is depressing, but it could be merely a harbinger of something worse.

Copies for information:
Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies
Mr [Milan] U h d e,
Prime Minister Mr Václav K l a u s,
Minister of the Interior Mr [Jan] R u m l,
Publishers of Lidové noviny, Prague

The first names in square brackets have been supplied editorially according to the officeholders at the time.

Exhibition life

After an exhibition closes, its catalogue remains as a small, portable space. It preserves a selection of paintings, their titles and sometimes the voice of the person who introduced them to the public. An invitation, in turn, recalls a particular place and day of meeting. From these modest printed items, a long journey of creative work between studio and viewer gradually emerges.

Straka’s solo exhibitions were complemented by exhibitions of the Objekt group, members’ exhibitions and thematic surveys of North Bohemian art. Contemporary texts by Jan Škvára and Jiří Dolejš record how his work opened itself to different readings. The lists of works allow us to trace changes in subject matter and the repeated return of individual paintings to the exhibition space.

The painter also contributed to the graphic design of his own exhibitions. The Litoměřice catalogues of 1965 and 1991 document his graphic design; the earlier one also credits him with the poster. For him, the exhibition thus continued on paper, in the layout of the page and the relationship between reproduction and lettering. The following survey brings these surviving traces together over time.



Ústí nad Labem 1973 / catalogue, image 1

A journey through exhibitions

The exhibition journey begins in Terezín and the towns of northern Bohemia, gradually extending to Prague and Vienna. The catalogues allow us to follow the changing composition of the works exhibited: from urban corners and the Places cycle to Information, from torsos to landscape and its details. The following survey records solo exhibitions and then group appearances documented by the surviving material.

The survey brings together all individually named solo and group exhibitions in the catalogues, invitations and the artist’s list that have been consulted. General information remains general; the names of unknown events have not been supplied. Conflicting dates and limited information are explicitly identified in the survey.

The 1973 catalogue also records participation in the SKNV competition marking the 25th anniversary of the February events and in a competition marking the anniversary of Lidice. Participation in a competition is not automatically presented here as an exhibition that took place.

Solo exhibitions

1961 — **Teplice / Terezín in the Drawings of Přemysl Straka**

Galerie Dílo, 3–31 March. The earliest solo exhibition documented in the sources used.

1961–1962 — **Terezín / Terezín in the Drawings of Přemysl Straka**

Památník Terezín. Contemporary catalogues give 1961; the artist’s later list gives 1962.

1965 — **Ústí nad Labem**

Solo exhibition listed in the catalogue biographies of 1970, 1973 and 1980.

1965 — **Litoměřice / Paintings and Drawings from Recent Years**

Galerie výtvarného umění, November–December. Selection and text by Jan Škvára; graphic design of the catalogue and poster by Přemysl Straka.

1966 — **Ústí nad Labem / Paintings and Drawings**

Divadlo hudby, 4–30 January.

1966 — **Vienna / Paintings and Collages**

Volkshochschule Wien–Margareten, April.

1966 — **Teplice**

Solo exhibition listed in the catalogue biographies.

Solo exhibitions / continued

1967 — **Ústí nad Labem / Dílo**

7–30 April.

1968 — **Ústí nad Labem**

Solo exhibition listed in Straka’s biographical profile in the Objekt 69 catalogue.

1970 — **Ústí nad Labem / Přemysl Straka**

Divadlo hudby, April–May. Text by Jan Škvára.

1973 — **Ústí nad Labem / Paintings from Recent Years**

Divadlo hudby, November. Text by Jiří Dolejš.

1977 — **Prague / Paintings from Recent Years**

Ústav makromolekulární chemie ČSAV, 5–18 September. Opening address by Jiří Dolejš.

1980 — **Duchcov / Paintings and Drawings**

Státní zámek, 9 April–4 May. Text by Jiří Dolejš.

1980–1990 — **Exhibitions in Dílo galleries**

The artist’s list names Ústí nad Labem, Teplice, Liberec, Karlovy Vary, Plzeň, České Budějovice and Hradec Králové. Individual dates are not specified there.

Solo exhibitions / continued

1989 — **Ústí nad Labem / Paintings**

Dílo, 9–31 May. Introductory address by Jiří Dolejš.

1989 — **Plzeň / Paintings**

Dílo, 28 September–14 October. Introductory address by Jiří Dolejš.

1991 — **Terezín / Přemysl Straka: Terezín**

Památník Terezín, opening on 5 May; exhibition until September.

1991 — **Litoměřice / Paintings and Drawings**

Severočeská galerie, 12 September–13 October. Exhibition marking the artist’s milestone birthday; text by Jiří Dolejš, graphic design by Přemysl Straka.

1991 — **Prague / Paintings**

Galerie Centrum, 1–15 October.

1992 — **Hradec Králové and Pardubice**

Venues of solo exhibitions added by hand to the artist’s exhibition list.

1996 — **Galerie Hefaistos / Paintings**

11–31 July.

Solo exhibitions / continued

Year not given

Ústí nad Labem / Paintings

Dílo, September. The surviving invitation does not give the exhibition year.

Joint and group exhibitions

From 1960 — **Members’ and regional exhibitions**

Catalogue biographies record participation in members’ exhibitions of the Ústí nad Labem branch of SČVU and in regional surveys. Individually documented events follow.

1960 — **Most / IX. Members’ Exhibition**

Dům horníků, 1–30 September; Ústí nad Labem branch of SČVU.

1960 — **Litoměřice / Contemporary Painters of the Litoměřice Region**

Gallery, 15 September–31 October. The 1965 catalogue recalls this participation under the title Artists of the Litoměřice Region.

1960 — **Děčín / 14. Members’ Exhibition**

Okresní knihovna; the list gives the date as 2 October.

1961 — **Litoměřice / Exhibition of Paintings and Sculptures**

Gallery, April–May.

1961 — **Teplice / Exhibition of North Bohemian Artists**

Museum, November–December.

Joint and group exhibitions / continued

1962 — **Litoměřice and Roudnice / Landscape and People**

Oblastní galerie Litoměřice, 1–18 June; Městská lidová knihovna Roudnice, 22 June–8 July. Straka: City with a Moon and Street with a Maple Tree.

1962–1963 — **Teplice and Ústí / Houra, Raboch, Straka, Veselý**

Dílo Teplice, 1962; catalogues place an early joint appearance at the theatre in Ústí nad Labem in either 1962 or 1963. Straka: The House That Survived the Century, Factory in the Mountains, Factory Courtyard, City and Still Life.

1962 — **Ústí nad Labem / XVI. Members' Exhibition**

Dům osvěty, 1–24 November.

1963 — **Liberec / Members' Exhibition**

Severočeské muzeum, February–March; exhibition of North Bohemian artists from Ústí nad Labem and Liberec.

1964 — **Brno / Objekt**

Grafický kabinet Domu umění at Dům pánů z Kunštátu, 7 February–7 March.

1964 — **Ústí nad Labem / Objekt**

Dům kultury, 3–31 December. Straka: Place I–IX.

Joint and group exhibitions / continued

1965 — **Děčín / Objekt**

Museum.

1965 — **Litoměřice / New Paintings and Sculptures**

Gallery, May–June.

1965 — **Artists of the Litoměřice Region for the Anniversary of Liberation**

Litoměřice, Roudnice nad Labem and Libochovice; participation recorded in the 1965 catalogue.

1965 — **Ústí / 20 Years of Art in the North Bohemian Region**

Dům kultury, 31 May–30 June.

From 1966 — **Teplice Art Salons**

The biographical profile in the Objekt 69 catalogue records regular participation from 1966 onwards.

1966 — **Most / Objekt**

Museum.

Joint and group exhibitions / continued

1966–1967 — **Ústí nad Labem / Objekt**

Dům kultury, December–January. Straka: Inedible Fruit, Torso I, Torso II, Torso with a Shield, Painting I and Two Figures.

1967 — **Litoměřice / New Paintings and Sculptures Acquired in 1965–1966**

Gallery, January–February.

1967 — **Teplice / 2. Teplice Art Salon**

Museum, 20 October–19 November. Straka: Torso 427, Miracle in a Cave and Targets.

1968 — **Prague and Brno / North Bohemian Artists**

Mánes, Prague, April, also titled A Land Won through Defiance in the artist’s list; Dům pánů z Kunštátu, Brno.

1968–1969 — **Cheb / Triennial**

Gallery, October 1968–January 1969; triennial of South Bohemian, West Bohemian and North Bohemian artists.

1969 — **Roudnice nad Labem / Objekt 69**

Galerie výtvarného umění, May–June. Straka: Torso 427, Night at Summer’s End, Torso 15, Orders II, City I and City II.

Joint and group exhibitions / continued

1970 — **Vladimir / North Bohemian Artists**

Exhibition in the then USSR, documented in the catalogue biography of 1973.

1970 — **Teplice / 25 Years of Art**

Museum, 28 May–28 June; survey of the Ústí nad Labem branch.

1970 — **Artists of Podřipsko and Středohoří**

Galerie Litoměřice, June–September; Galerie Roudnice nad Labem, September–October. Exhibition marking the 25th anniversary of liberation.

1971 — **Litoměřice / The North Bohemian Region in the Works of Painters and Graphic Artists**

Galerie výtvarného umění, April–May. Straka: Terezín Walls, 1961, ink, 36 × 52 cm.

1977 — **Duchcov / North Bohemian Landscape**

Château, 10 August–4 September.

1977 — **Prague**

Group appearance listed in the survey in the 1980 Duchcov catalogue, with no further title given.

Joint and group exhibitions / continued

1979 / 1970 — **Ústí and Litoměřice / The Landscape of Northern Bohemia**

Výstavní síň B. Smetany and the gallery in Litoměřice. The artist’s list assigns the event to 1979 but prints May–June 1970 in the date line.

1981 — **Roudnice / Artists of the Litoměřice Region**

Gallery, May–June.

1981 — **Paintings, Prints, Sculptures, Glass, Jewellery and Tapestries**

Muzeum Teplice, Výstavní síň města Mostu and Galerie Litoměřice.

1984 — **Teplice / Survey of Work by North Bohemian Artists**

Museum.

1986 — **Rakovník / České středohoří in 20th-Century Art**

Rabasova galerie, January–May.

1990 — **Teplice / Introducing Unie výtvarných umělců Teplice**

Museum exhibition hall, December.

Litoměřice 1965

The November and December exhibition presented a transition from landscape motifs to imaginary structures and to paintings imbued with the urgency of contemporary events. The titles Place, Painting and Information recur: simple words that open onto very different pictorial spaces.

The list begins with Boundary I and Boundary II, followed by nine works entitled Place I–IX. Next come Cathedral and Terezín, four paintings entitled Painting I–IV and eight works entitled Information I–VIII. Two entries bear the title Terezín Walls; the list concludes with five pen drawings. The catalogue thus records a total of 32 entries.

Škvára’s text links Cathedral with the painting identified as Place VII in the 1964 Objekt catalogue. A period title can illuminate a painting’s journey without replacing its present inventory information.

Catalogue Paintings and Drawings from Recent Years, list of works nos. 1–32. Text by Jan Škvára.

Ústí nad Labem 1970

The human figure comes to the fore in the 1970 exhibition. Mother, child, torso and window offer different measures of human presence: physicality, vulnerability and the tension between figure and space.

Fourteen exhibited works: Mother; Woman, Child and Animal; Biafra; Blue Torso; Torso 15; Brown Torso; Figure I; Figure II; Figure III; Torso 427b; Torso 427; Window; Orders I; Orders II.

The catalogue dates these works to 1968–1970. The titles of the torsos and figures repeat motifs familiar from the preceding period, but the exhibition as a whole concentrates on painting and its capacity to carry an inner human drama.

Divadlo hudby, April–May 1970; list nos. 1–14. Text by Jan Škvára.

Ústí nad Labem 1973

The cover from November 1973 stands in this guide for the entire body of surviving catalogues devoted to the artist. Inside, images of war and Terezín meet tributes to Andrej Rublev and continuing figurative motifs.

Exhibited works: War; Woman, Child and Animal (2); Women of Lidice in Terezín; Terezín; Mácha Motif; Homage to Andrej Rublev (1), (2) and (3); Red Torso; Yellow Torso; Window; Looking Back (1) and (2).

The list records thirteen works from 1970–1973. Here, Red Torso denotes an oil painting on wood measuring 160 × 55 cm, dated 1970. This historical catalogue entry is therefore not conflated with the undated painting Untitled D640, included among the torsos in this guide.

Paintings from Recent Years, Divadlo hudby, November 1973; list nos. 1–13. Text by Jiří Dolejš.

Duchcov 1980

The Duchcov survey brought figurative paintings together with recent landscapes, drawings and designs. Dolejš’s text also mentions art protis: the colour designs showed another way of freeing the imagination from an immediately recognisable subject.

Twenty paintings: Brown Torso; Torso 15; Window; Orders I; Blue Torso; Figure I, II and III; Woman, Child and Animal; Biafra; War; Oppenheimer’s Legacy; Women’s Courtyard in Malá pevnost; Women and Sheep of Lidice in Terezín; Refugees; Silence; Village in Středohoří; Cloud; Early Spring; Elderly Married Couple.

Among the drawings, the list names Happiness, Lofoten I and II, Torso, Warrior, Lovers, Black Sun, Expulsion, Senses, Eye, Disintegration, Skeleton of the City and Cells. Small studies and designs for public settings expand this section.

The section of studies and designs includes studies for torsos, Women of Lidice in Terezín, Time, Terezín, Cart, further Terezín studies and Lovers. The art protis designs are titled Torso, City, Dove, Sea, Tree, Circle and Lovers. These are followed by four designs for a youth club and studies for the Terezín paintings. The catalogue contains 77 numbered entries; some denote groups of works.

Paintings and Drawings, Státní zámek Duchcov, 9 April–4 May 1980; list nos. 1–77. Text by Jiří Dolejš.

Litoměřice 1991

The anniversary exhibition once again brought figures, torsos and landscapes together in one space. The earliest works in the catalogue date from the late 1960s, the most recent from the year of the exhibition. Its range clearly shows the many different paths by which Straka returned to the human being and to place.

Figurative and Terezín section: Blue Torso; Window; Brown Torso; Crowd; Ghetto – Courtyards I and II; Night; Heads; Woman, Child and Animal; Figure I, II and III; Sheep of Lidice in Terezín.

Landscapes and other paintings: Early Spring in Středohoří; Windy Day; Hradiště before a Storm; Apple Orchard; The Last Snow; Žumberk – Orchard; From Nízké Tatry; Žumberk – Village Green; Morning; Meadow in Bloom; Field Margin in Bloom; Spring in Opárno I and II; Radobýl; Wild Rose in Bloom; Pergamon; Field in Středohoří; Autumn Afternoon.

The list continues with the titles Krušné hory; By the Pond; Thaw in Středohoří; Late Summer in Středohoří; Hawthorn in Bloom; Harbour at Honfleur (Normandy); Low Tide (Normandy); Boats (Normandy); Dry Slope; Hillock; Hradiště; Rutted Field; Thistles; Sunken Lane; Snow-Covered Furrows; Old Orchard.

Paintings and Drawings, Severočeská galerie, September–October 1991; list nos. 1–47. Text by Jiří Dolejš.

Litoměřice 1991 / drawings

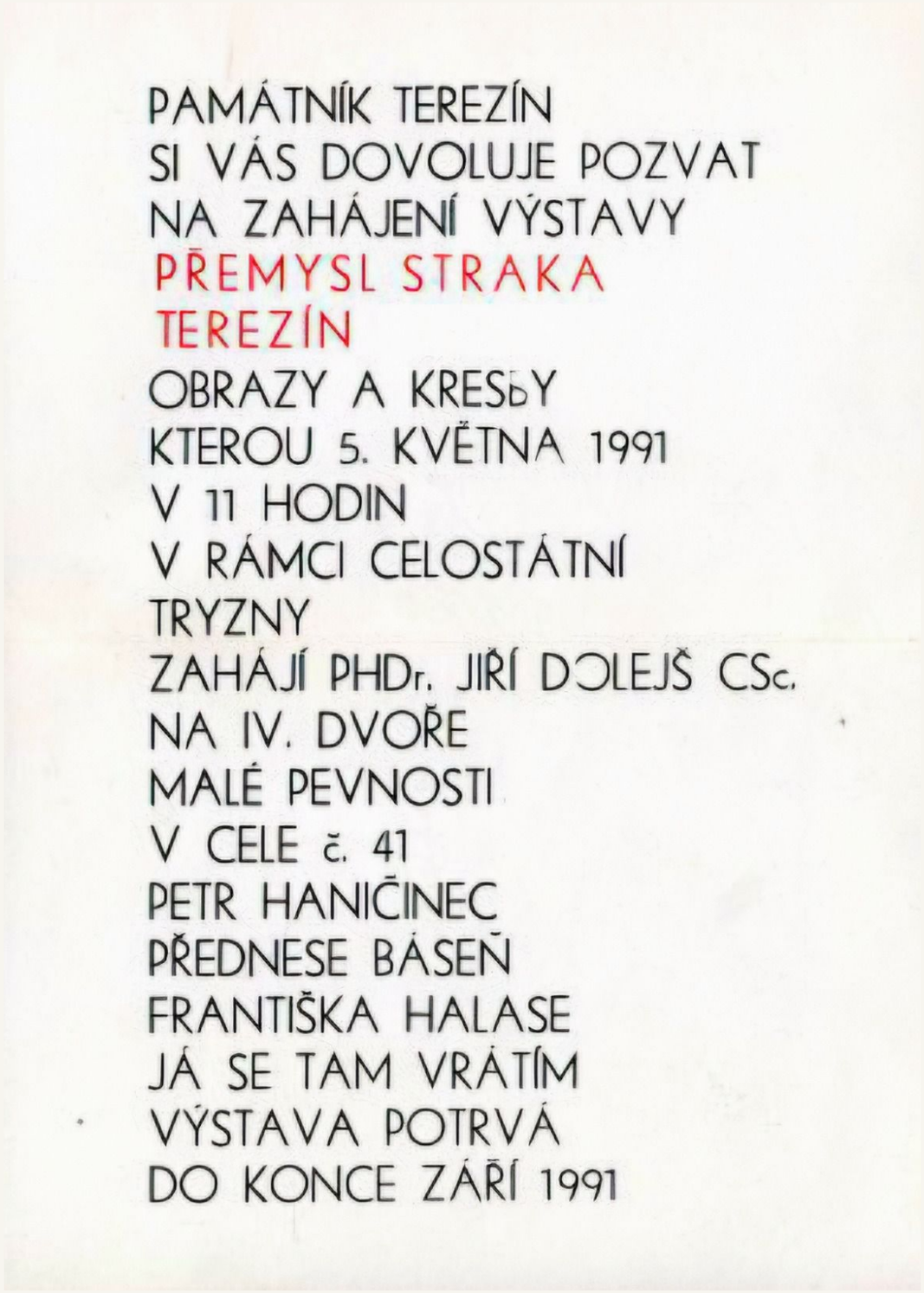
Drawings and monotypes formed a distinct concluding section of the exhibition. Alongside northern landscapes were figures, bodily fragments and politically urgent titles; the final series brought the visitor back to the walls of Terezín.

Lofoten; from the Laying of Wreaths cycle; Hero; Proliferation; Torso [Torzo]; Fraternal Assistance; Eye; From the Background; four works from the Targets cycle; Fall; Ear; Torso [Torso]; six entries entitled Terezín Walls.

The catalogue distinguishes two entries spelled Torzo and Torso. In this historical survey, their different forms are retained. The titles and lists serve here to reconstruct the exhibition selection; they do not in themselves establish a work’s identity with present inventory numbers.

The same catalogue, Drawings and Monotypes section, list nos. 48–68.

Invitations and exhibition programmes



Památník Terezín, 5 May–September 1991

The Objekt group

The Objekt group grew out of encounters between people with different artistic interests. Přemysl Straka belonged to its early circle alongside Miroslav Houra, Miroslav Raboch and Zdeněk Veselý, and described himself as a co-founder. Their collaboration preceded both the adoption of the name Objekt in 1963 and the arrival of further members.

Painters, graphic artists, sculptors and architects sought a shared space for discussion of modern art. In the programme, Jan Škvára emphasised the individuality of each artist. Exhibiting together thus created an opportunity for different approaches and experiences to work alongside one another. Straka’s structures, prints and later torsos entered this setting with their own concentrated expression.

Catalogue covers, membership lists and reproductions give a sense of this collaboration. They show changes in the group and in the individual artists, allowing us to follow Straka’s place among them. The period texts are represented by selected excerpts, while the lists preserve the specific titles of the exhibited works.

The membership

The early core: Miroslav Houra, Miroslav Raboch, Přemysl Straka and Zdeněk Veselý.

The catalogues of 1964, 1966–1967 and 1969 also record Eva Brodská, Václav Daneš, Milan Chlíbec, Jan Krejník, Václav Kůs, Milan Míšek and Rudolf Bergr among the group’s changing membership. The 1969 catalogue gives the surname of the architect Jan Krejník as Kreník.

The historian and theorist Jan Škvára collaborated on the group’s programme; the catalogues also include him among the names associated with it. Individual lists reflect different periods, rather than an unchanging membership.

Joint exhibitions

1958 — **Teplice / before the shared name**

Miroslav Raboch and Zdeněk Veselý exhibit together; the exhibition is opened by Jan Škvára, later the group’s theorist.

1961 — **Litoměřice / Mining Region**

Zdeněk Veselý and Miroslav Houra take part in the exhibition Mining Region. The Objekt 69 catalogue includes this event in the group’s prehistory.

1962 — **Teplice / Houra, Raboch, Straka, Veselý**

Joint exhibition of four artists at Dílo. Přemysl Straka is already explicitly named among the exhibitors.

1963 — **Ústí nad Labem / the founding of Objekt**

The Objekt 69 catalogue dates the joint exhibition at Státní divadlo and the adoption of the name Objekt to 1963. The group formulates a programme; Václav Kůs, Milan Chlíbec, Milan Míšek and Jan Kreník join (the 1964 catalogue spells the latter’s name Krejník).

1964 — **Brno and Ústí nad Labem**

Grafický kabinet Domu umění at Dům pánů z Kunštátu, Brno, 7 February–7 March; Dům kultury, Ústí nad Labem, 3–31 December.

Joint exhibitions / continued

1965 — **Děčín and collaboration with architecture**

Exhibition at the museum in Děčín. The catalogue also records the first collaboration between group members and architects on the artistic finishing of a residential hotel building in Bílina.

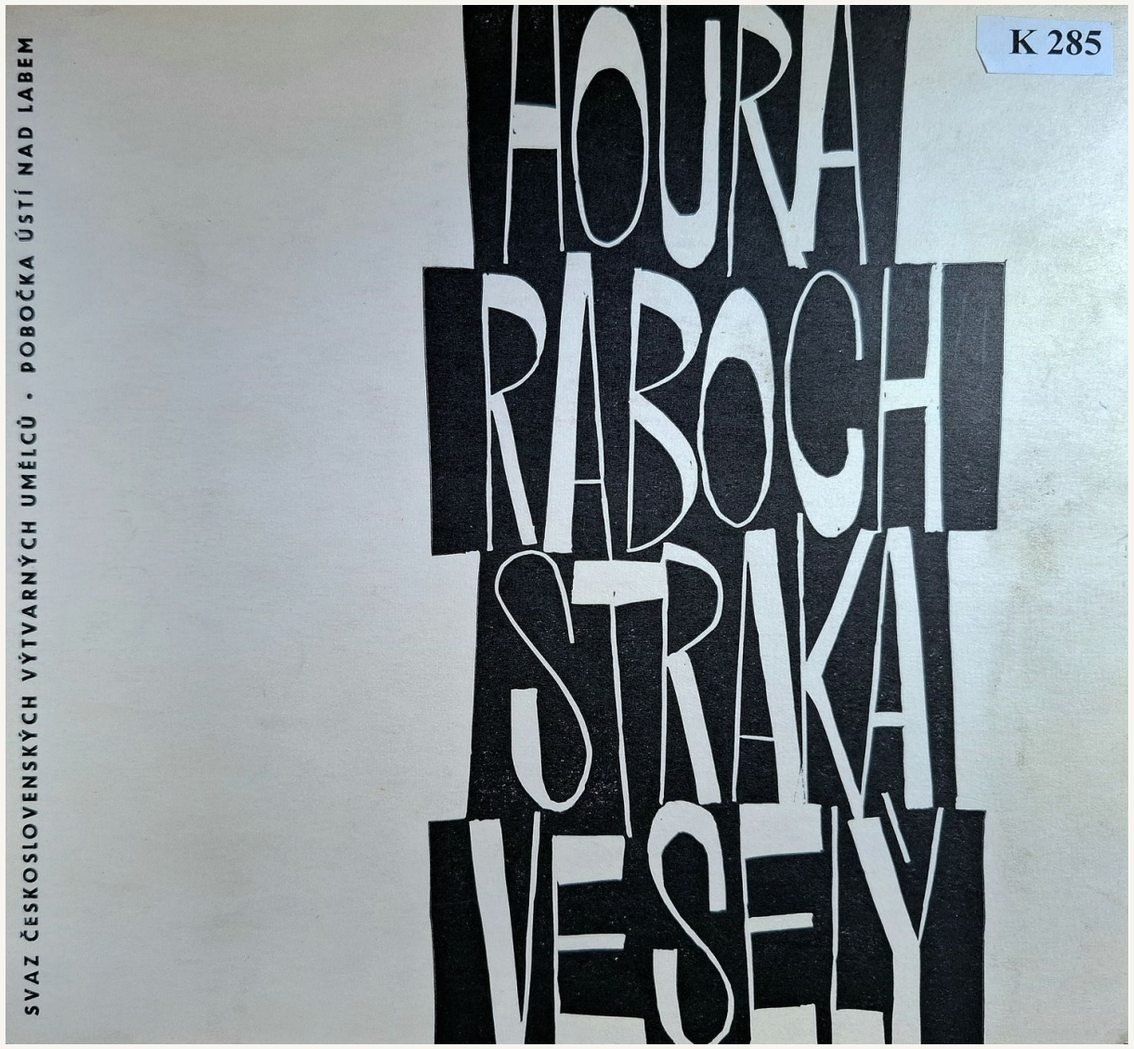
1966–1967 — **Most and Ústí nad Labem**

Eva Brodská and Václav Daneš join in 1966. The group exhibits at the museum in Most and at Dům kultury in Ústí nad Labem; the Ústí exhibition continues into January 1967.

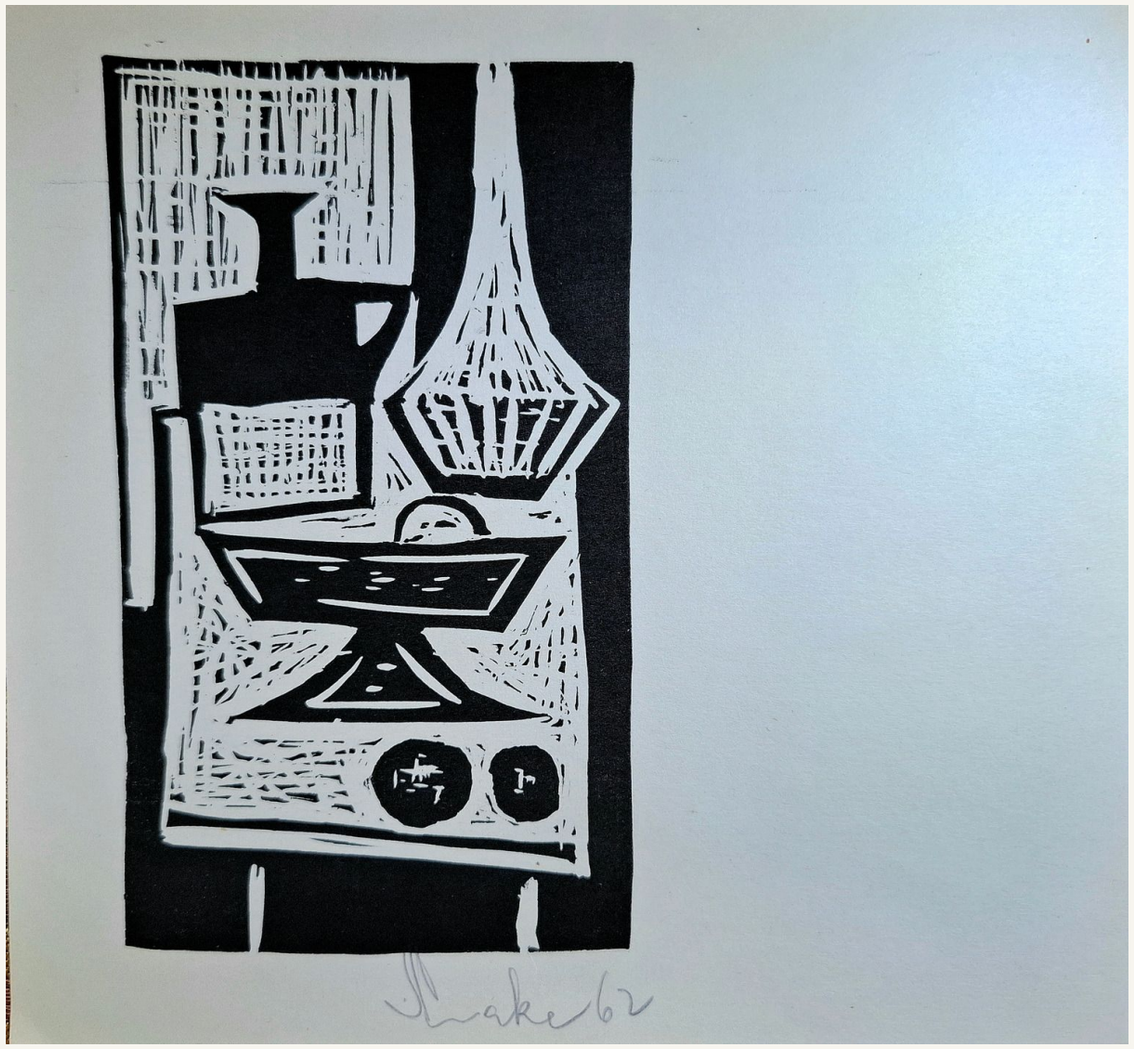
1969 — **Objekt 69 / Roudnice nad Labem**

Rudolf Bergr becomes a member of the group. The exhibition at Galerie výtvarného umění in Roudnice nad Labem runs in May–June; the catalogue lists six paintings by Straka from 1968.

Objekt / contemporary documents

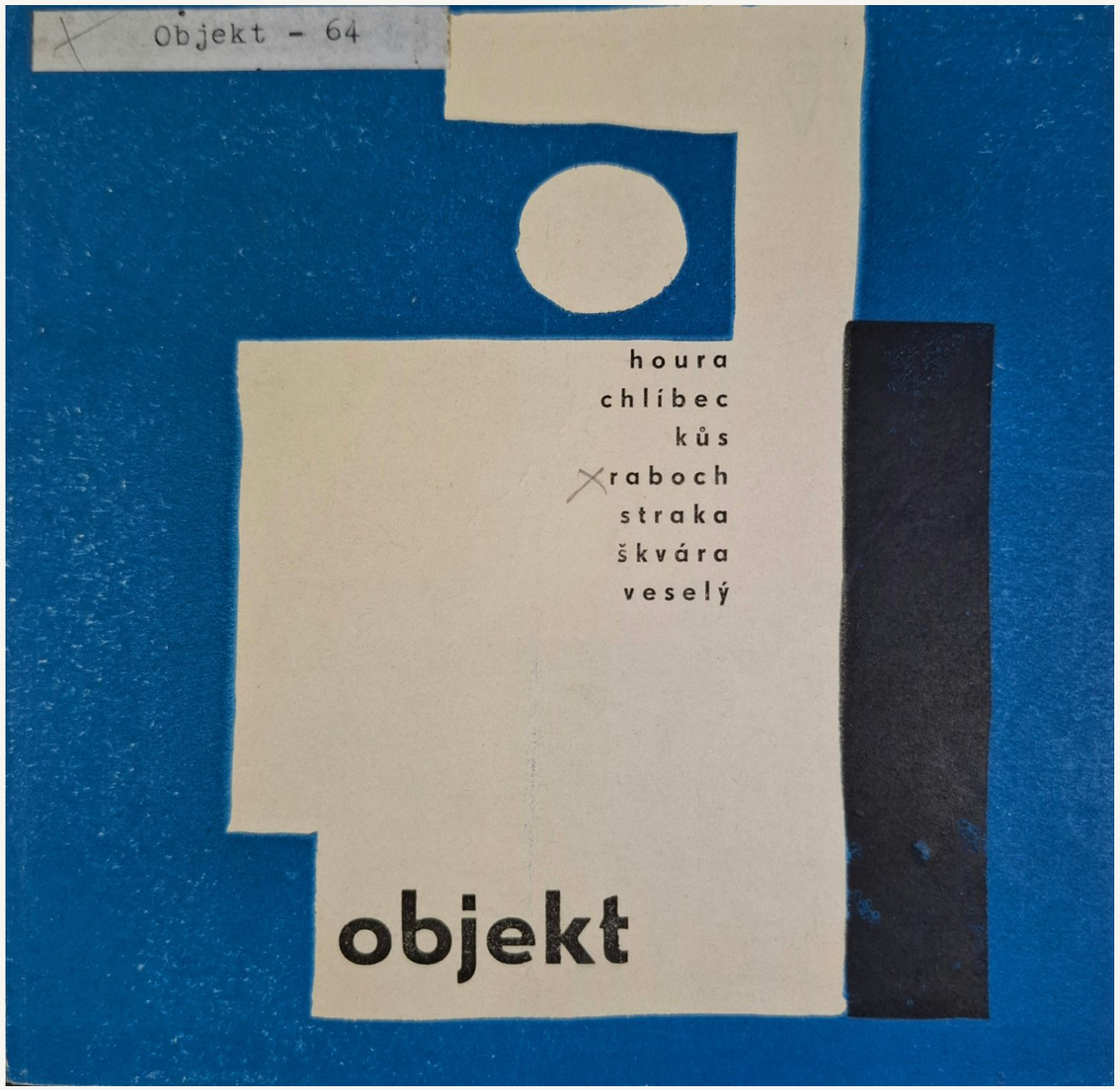


Houra, Raboch, Straka, Veselý / exhibition catalogue, 1962



Still Life, signed Straka 62 / reproduction in the 1962 catalogue

Objekt / Brno 1964

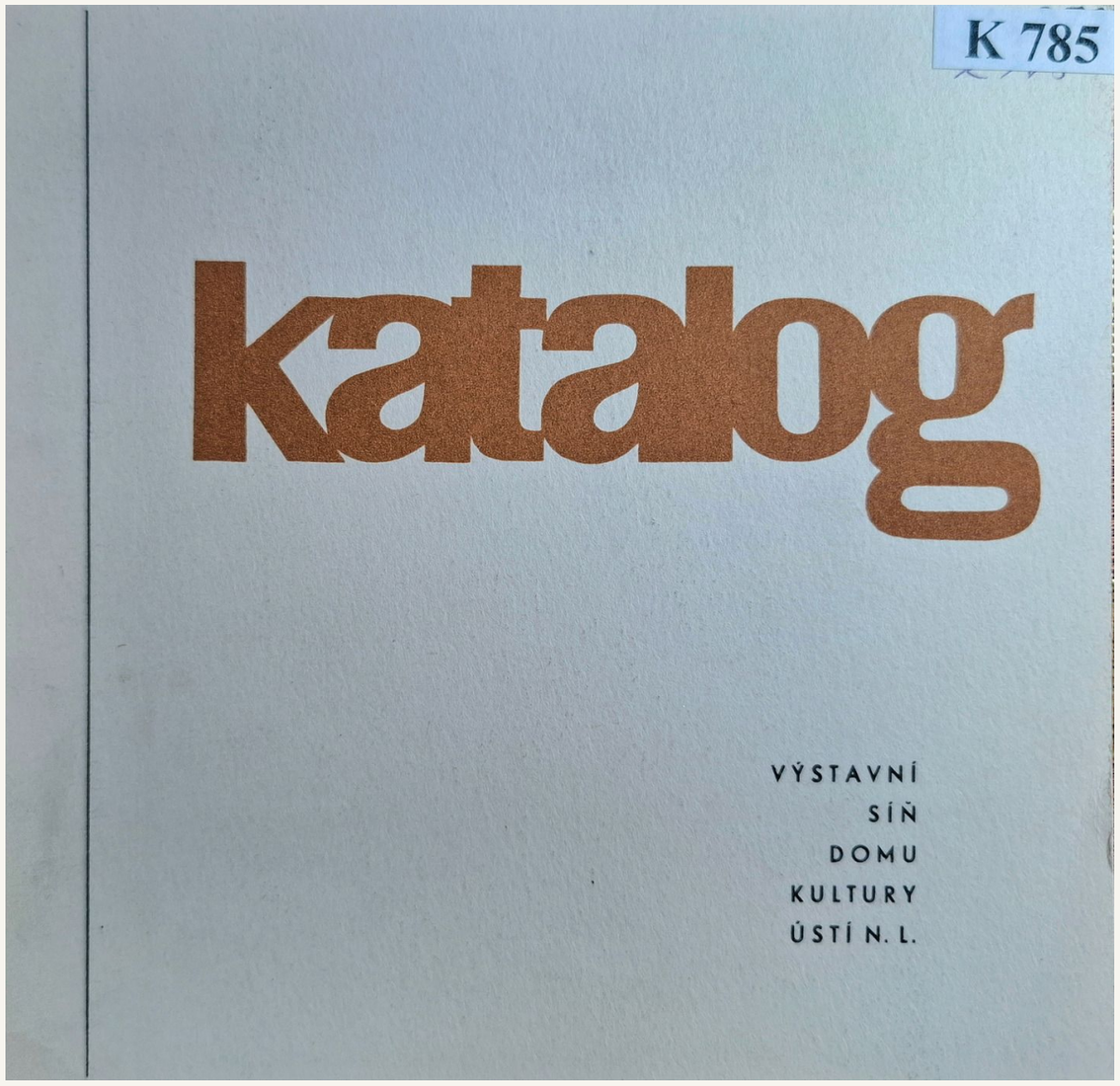


Objekt 1964 / catalogue, image 7



Objekt 1964 / catalogue, image 9

Objekt / Ústí nad Labem 1964



Objekt 1964 / catalogue of the exhibition in Ústí nad Labem



Přemysl Straka / reproduction in the Objekt catalogue, 1964

The formation of Objekt / contemporary records

Editorial account based on the Objekt catalogue, Ústí nad Labem, December 1964

The Ústí catalogue records the gradual expansion of the circle of collaborating artists. Its earliest entry is the joint exhibition of Miroslav Raboch and Zdeněk Veselý in Teplice in 1958. They were joined by Miroslav Houra and Přemysl Straka. The catalogue associates the name Objekt with the year 1963.

This source places the early joint appearance at the theatre in Ústí in 1962; the Objekt 69 catalogue dates it to 1963. We leave the discrepancy unresolved. Exhibitions in Brno and Ústí nad Labem are documented for 1964. Jan Škvára contributed to the formulation of the programme and to the catalogue texts.

Sources: Objekt, Ústí nad Labem, December 1964, Facts section; Objekt 69, Roudnice nad Labem, 1969, chronology.

The group’s programme / 1964

Jan Škvára: excerpts with editorial commentary

The Brno catalogue defined Objekt as an association intended to enable its members’ individual work. Jan Škvára captured this relationship in a programmatic sentence:

“We are building the group not in order to merge into it, but so that each of us, outside personal isolation, may find himself; so that together we form not a uniform plane, but a logical sum.”

The phrase logical sum gives collective activity a meaning different from the unification of artistic style. The group is meant to draw the individual out of isolation while preserving a path of their own. The differences between Straka’s urban structures, figures and torsos need not, therefore, conflict with a shared programme.

“Graphic art represents only part of our work, but in a certain sense it is of key importance to us; most of us began with it, and today it also anticipates and most clearly reflects the changes and the crystallisation of ideas within the group as a whole and among its individual personalities.”

Graphic art is not merely a secondary medium here. Škvára attributes to it the ability to anticipate change and make it legible. The following list of Straka’s works allows this programmatic role to be related to specific exhibition selections. A distinction must nevertheless be made between the group’s collective statement and the meaning of an individual sheet.

Source: Jan Škvára, programme text in the Objekt catalogue, Dům umění města Brna, 7 February–7 March 1964. Two separate excerpts; commentary by Galéria Přemysl Straka.

Straka in joint exhibitions

The early exhibition of the four artists Houra, Raboch, Straka and Veselý lists five temperas by Straka from 1962: The House That Survived the Century; Factory in the Mountains; Factory Courtyard; City; Still Life. The urban environment enters the painting through walls, courtyards and deserted architecture.

The Ústí Objekt catalogue of December 1964 records nine works entitled Place I–IX, all dated 1964. The first six are temperas; the final three use mixed media. The Litoměřice catalogue of the following year links the work listed here as Place VII with Cathedral.

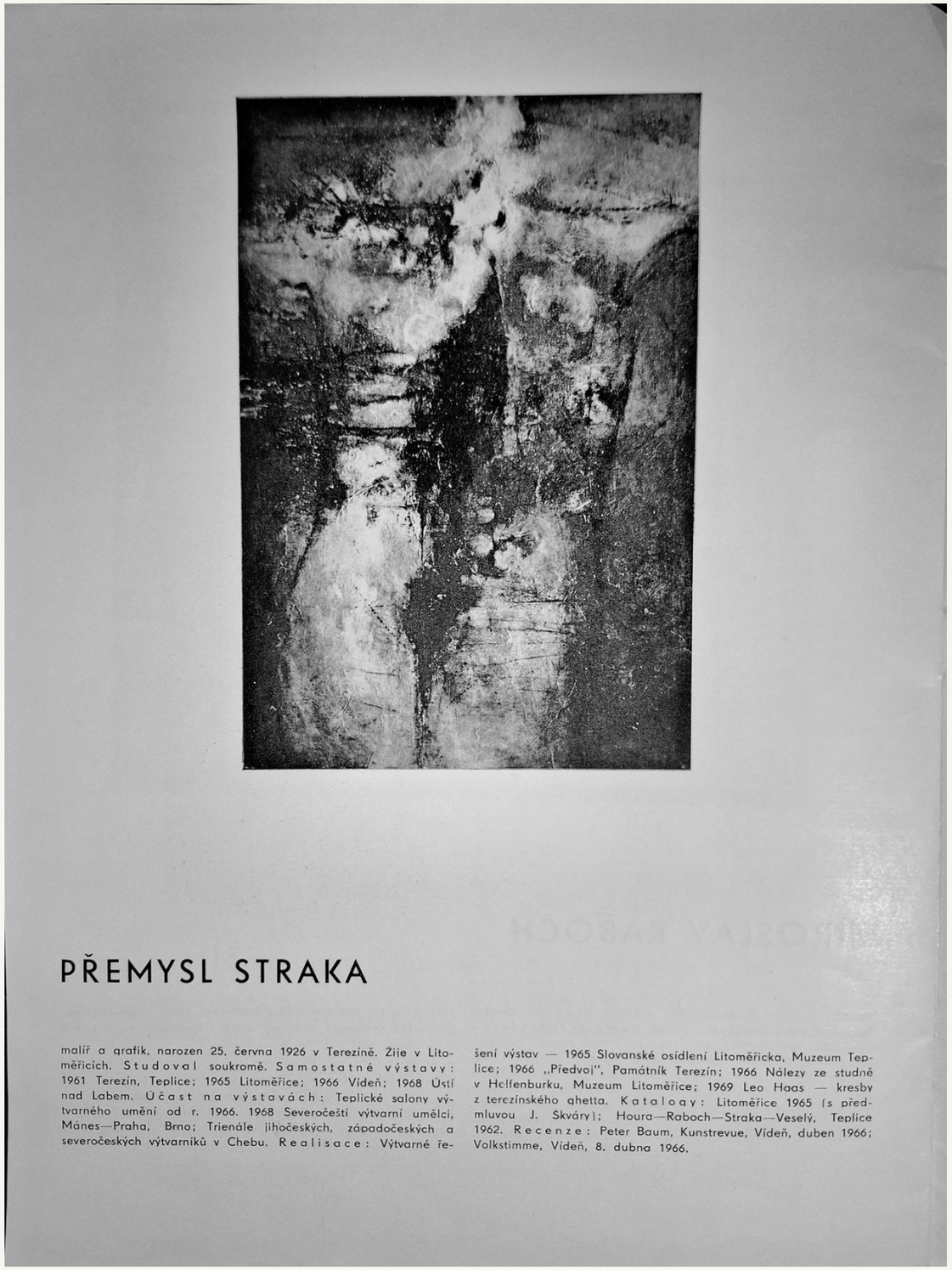
Six mixed-media paintings from 1966 were selected for the exhibition at Dům kultury in Ústí nad Labem at the turn of 1966 and 1967: Inedible Fruit; Torso I; Torso II; Torso with a Shield; Painting I; Two Figures. The titles register a shift from city and place towards the body and its transformations.

Lists in the catalogues of 1962, Ústí 1964 and Objekt 1966–1967; Litoměřice 1965 catalogue, text by Jan Škvára.

Objekt 69



Objekt 1969 / catalogue, image 1



Objekt 1969 / catalogue, image 4

Objekt 69 / Jan Škvára’s perspective

Jan Škvára: excerpts with editorial commentary

Returning to the group’s beginnings in 1969, Jan Škvára emphasised the importance of mutual support alongside exhibiting together:

“The North Bohemian artists’ group Objekt was founded in 1963 for reasons similar to those behind most such associations of young artists emerging in the early 1960s — that is, as a defence against a sense of solitude, but also in the awareness that the idea of a reborn modern art could be advanced more readily through mutual support and closer personal and creative contact.”

Compared with the programmatic demand of 1964, this is already a retrospective view. Personal and creative contact explains the purpose of the association without presupposing a shared pictorial language. In characterising Straka, Škvára then turned to the torsos:

“In the forms of imaginary human torsos, Přemysl Straka’s painting became a sounding board for the inner states of analytical meditations […]”

In this sentence, sounding board denotes a pictorial form that gives expression to inner experience. It is striking that Jiří Dolejš later used a similar metaphor for Straka’s landscapes. This comparison does not establish a direct connection between the two texts; it shows how different subjects can be read through the relationship between visible form and lived experience.

Source: Jan Škvára, introduction to the Objekt 69 catalogue, Galerie výtvarného umění v Roudnici nad Labem, May–June 1969. Two separate excerpts; […] indicates the omitted end of a sentence. Commentary by Galéria Přemysl Straka.

Objekt 69 / Straka’s paintings

The catalogue of the Roudnice exhibition lists these six paintings by Straka. It dates them all to 1968 and identifies them as oils on canvas.

40. Torso 427 — 142 × 90 cm
41. Night at Summer’s End — 130 × 90 cm
42. Torso 15 — 115 × 73 cm
43. Orders II — 93 × 70 cm
44. City I — 73 × 115 cm
45. City II — 73 × 115 cm

The numbers, titles, dates and dimensions are taken from the contemporary catalogue. Differences from other lists are not automatically transferred into the current inventory.

The Objekt 69 catalogue names the following exhibitors: Rudolf Bergr, Eva Brodská, Václav Daneš, Milan Chlíbec, Jan Kreník, Václav Kůs, Milan Míšek, Miroslav Raboch, Přemysl Straka and Zdeněk Veselý. The text was written by Jan Škvára. Miroslav Houra has his own entries in the list of exhibited works in the same catalogue, although he is absent from this introductory page of names.

Objekt 69, Galerie výtvarného umění v Roudnici nad Labem, May–June 1969, List of Exhibited Works, nos. 40–45.

Objekt in contemporary writing

The Roudnice catalogue Objekt 69 summarises the group’s earlier exhibition activity and adds a bibliography. It lists Objekt catalogues from Brno and Ústí nad Labem (1964), Děčín (1965) and Ústí nad Labem (1966), accompanied by prefaces by Jan Škvára.

Other publications recorded are 20 Years of Art in the North Bohemian Region (Ústí nad Labem, 1965, preface by Otakar Votoček), II. Teplice Art Salon (Teplice, 1967), Exhibition of North Bohemian Artists (Brno, 1968) and 50 Years of Czech Art in Northern Bohemia (Litoměřice, 1968); the last three have prefaces by Jan Škvára.

Among articles, the catalogue mentions Igor Zhoř’s Objekt Has Appeared (Kulturní tvorba, February 1964), Škvára’s essays Ústí Artists Exhibit in Brno (Průboj, February 1964), At the Close of the Brno Exhibition (Průboj, March 1964) and The Objekt Group (Výtvarná práce, 9 March 1967). These are followed by Miroslav Kindl: Objekt Exhibits (Kulturní kalendář Mostecka, January 1967), Jiří Dolejš: Confrontations (Dialog, 1967, no. 4) and Jan Škvára: The Contemporary Face of Art in the North Bohemian Region (the anthology Severočeský kraj, Liberec, 1969).

The Objekt 69 catalogue was published by Galerie výtvarného umění v Roudnici nad Labem in May 1969. Jan Škvára prepared the catalogue and exhibition installation, and Václav Kůs designed the catalogue. The colophon names the photographers: Jiří Kopa, Jiří Mareček, Ladislav Ovsík, Václav Vokráčka, Jan Sirový, Jiří Vlček and Fr. Lamač. Printing was carried out by Severografia, Litoměřice branch.

Editorial account based on the chronology, bibliography and colophon of the Objekt 69 catalogue (1969), archival image OBJP03. The information is as recorded in the contemporary catalogue.

Works in collections

Public collections offer another perspective on Straka’s work. Paintings, drawings and prints held in Litoměřice, Roudnice nad Labem, Louny, Liberec and Terezín complement works from the gallery archive. Alongside urban motifs are torsos, Terezín subjects and landscapes, allowing us to trace several periods and forms of his practice.

The selected reproductions extend the encounter with paintings that existed before this guide. A firm black-and-white construction of space meets the substance of colour, a monumental figure meets an economical graphic sign. A change of collection context brings new connections, while familiar artistic questions remain present.

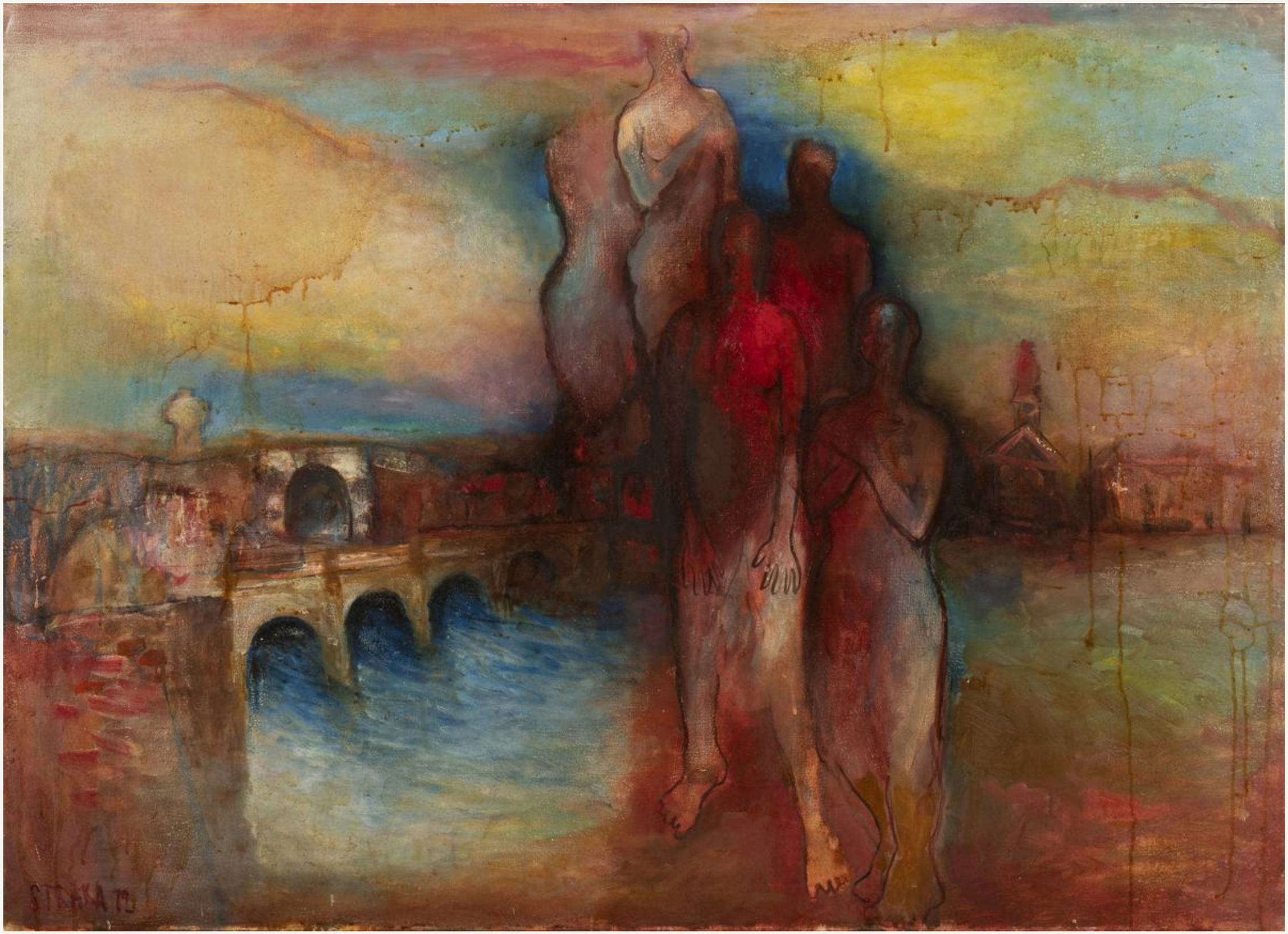
The final list contains 37 entries from five institutional lists. It gives titles, inventory numbers, dates, media and dimensions. The survey also includes works not reproduced here, thereby preserving a broader picture of the documented holdings in collections.



No Man’s Land, 1950s–1960s. Lithograph on paper, 44 × 62 cm. Galerie moderního umění v Roudnici nad Labem, inv. no. G 283. [COL_G283]



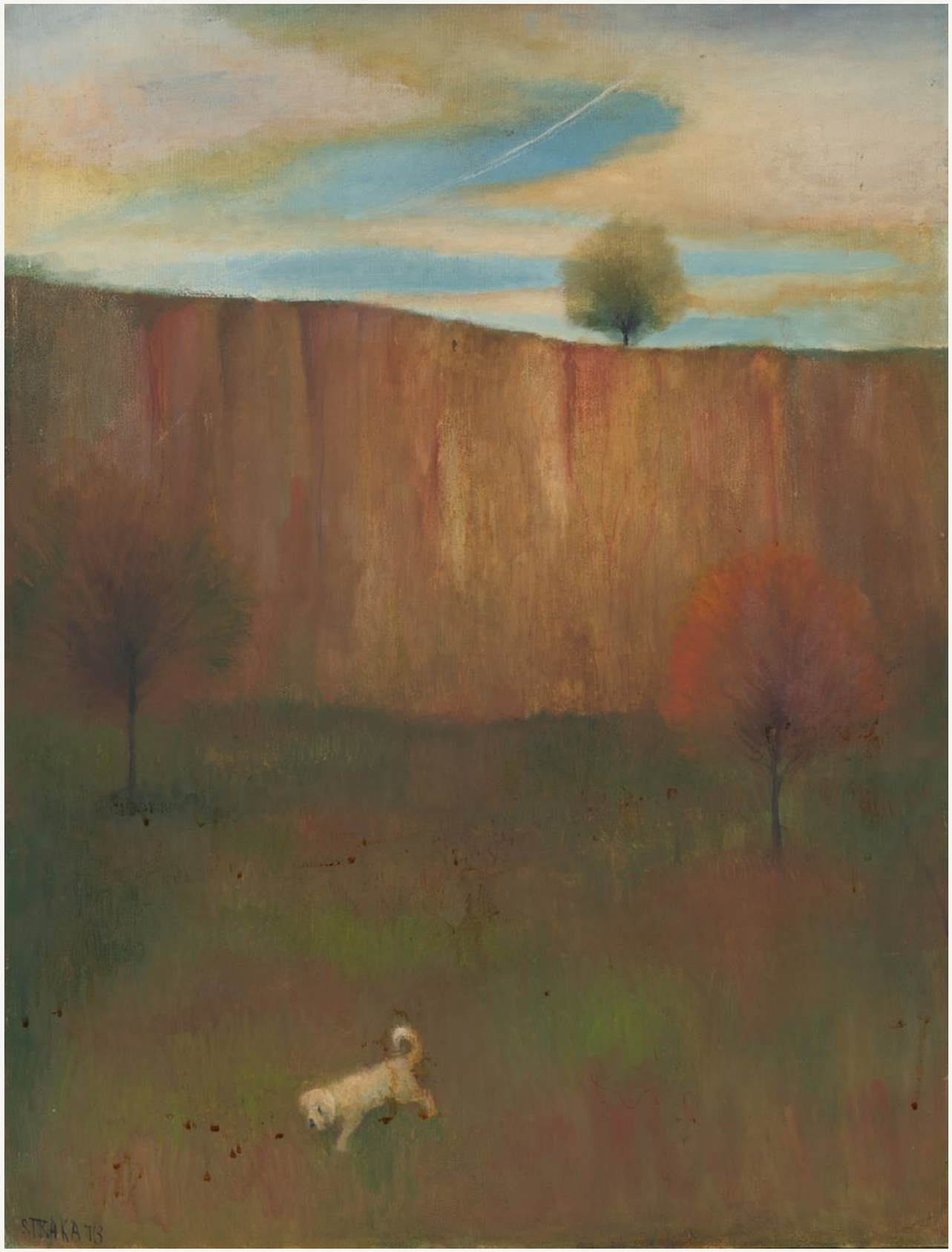
Cathedral, after 1955. Mixed media, canvas, wooden panel, 108,5 × 88,5 cm. Galerie moderního umění v Roudnici nad Labem, inv. no. O 323. [COL_O323]



Women of Lidice in Terezín, 1972. Oil on canvas, 90 × 125 cm. Galerie moderního umění v Roudnici nad Labem, inv. no. O 686. [COL_O686]



Terezín, 1963. Tempera on paper, 50 × 62 cm. Galerie moderního umění v Roudnici nad Labem, inv. no. O 882. [COL_O882]



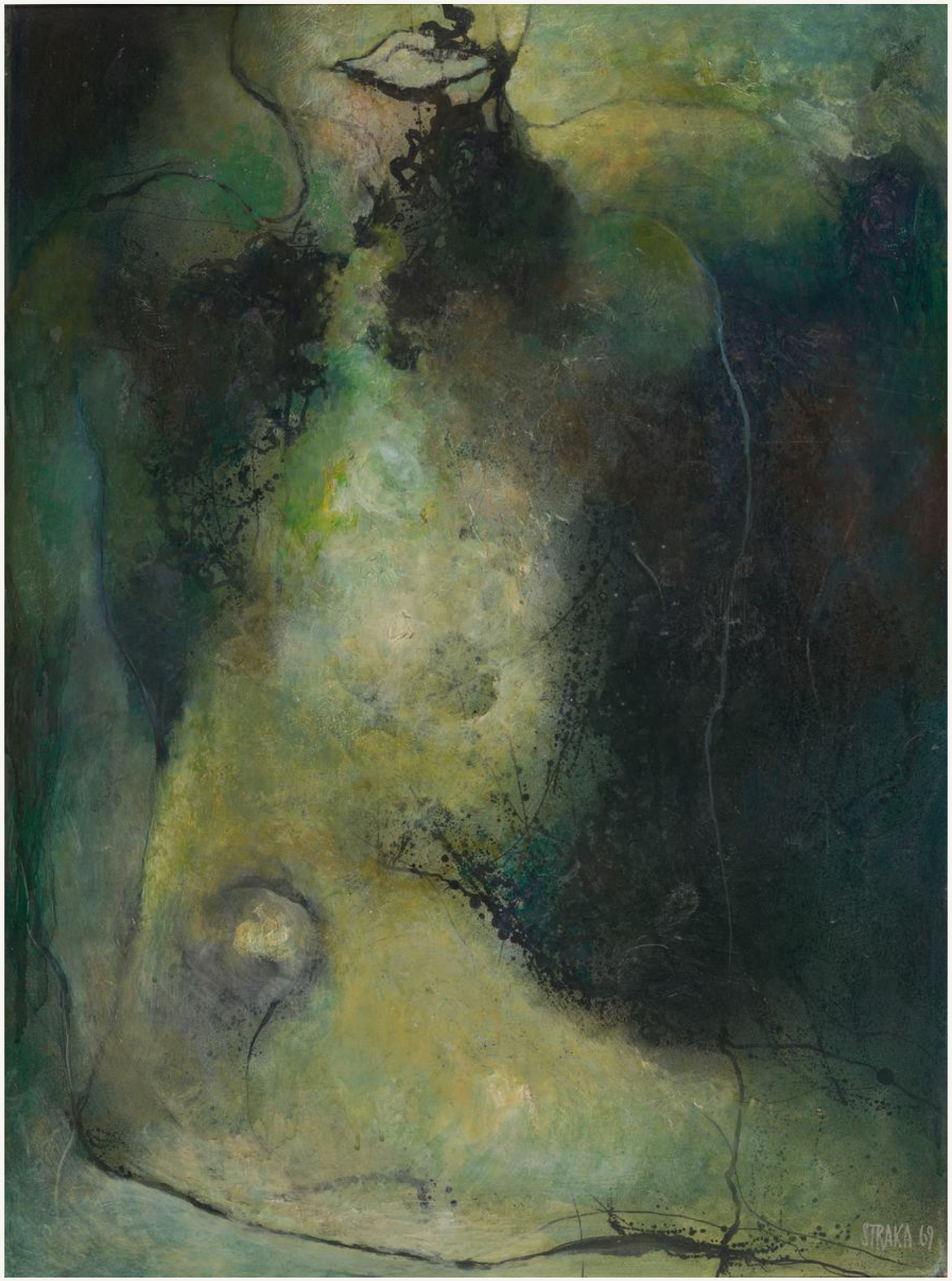
In the Quarry, 1973. Oil on canvas, 93,5 × 71 cm. Galerie Benedikta Rejta v Lounech, inv. no. OG 0374. [COL_OG0374]



České Středohoří, 1977. Oil on canvas, 68 × 80 cm. Galerie Benedikta Rejta v Lounech, inv. no. OG 0527. [COL_OG0527]



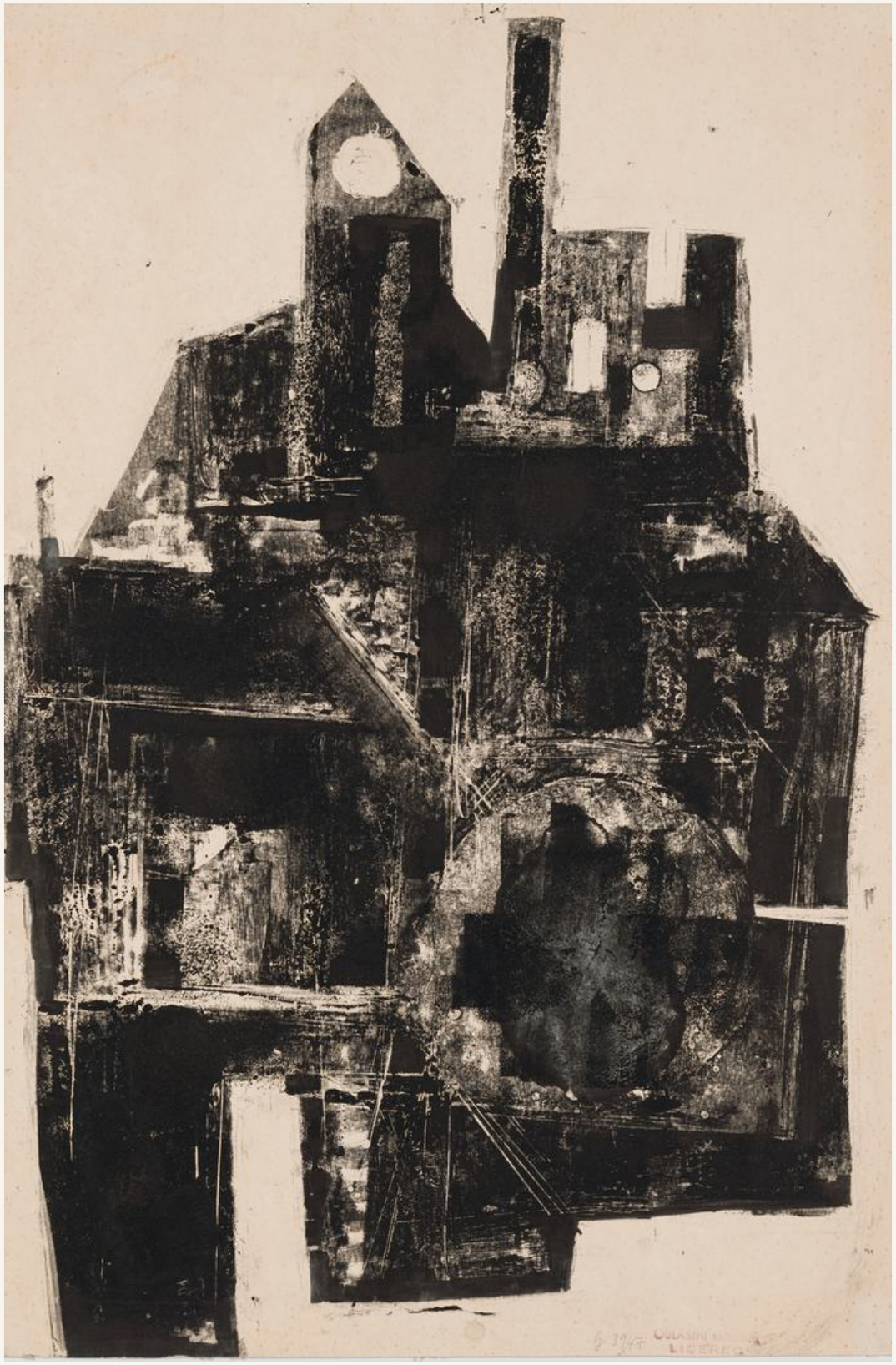
Woman, Child and Animal, 1969. Oil on canvas, 171 × 100 cm. Galerie Benedikta Rejta v Lounech, inv. no. OG 0851. [COL_OG0851]



Figure, 1969. Oil on card, 102 × 74 cm. Galerie Benedikta Rejta v Lounech, inv. no. OG 0852. [COL_OG0852]



Figure II, 1969. Oil on card, 102 × 74 cm. Galerie Benedikta Rejta v Lounech, inv. no. OG 0853. [COL_OG0853]



From the Boundaries Cycle, undated. Monotype on paper, sheet 64,1 × 44,3; print 62,3 × 41,2 cm. Galerie Lázně Liberec, inv. no. G 3947. Photograph by Jaroslav Trojan. [COL_G3947]

Severočeská galerie výtvarného umění v Litoměřicích

O-250

City with a Chimney / 1961

Tempera on paper; 62,5 × 44 cm

O-290

He Died a Hero’s Death / 1963

Tempera on cardboard; 88 × 62 cm

O-454

Painting III / (1965)

Oil on canvas; 136 × 96,5 cm

O-594

Torso with a Shield / 1966

Oil on canvas; 80 × 108 cm

O-865

Terezín / 1972

Oil on canvas; 105 × 90 cm

O-1025

Karel Hynek Mácha / 1973

Oil on canvas; 100 × 74 cm

O-1197

Old Orchard above Litoměřice / 1978

Oil on canvas; 95 × 162 cm

Information according to the institutional list supplied. Dimensions are given as height × width unless sheet and print sizes are distinguished.

Severočeská galerie výtvarného umění v Litoměřicích

O-1600

Pokratice / 1983

Oil on canvas; 70 × 80 cm

O-1762

Confluence / 1987

Oil on canvas; 95 × 95 cm

R-708

Terezín – Park / 1961

Ink on paper; 37 × 50,5 cm

R-709

Terezín / undated

Ink on paper; 38,5 × 52 cm

Information according to the institutional list supplied. Dimensions are given as height × width unless sheet and print sizes are distinguished.

Galerie moderního umění v Roudnici nad Labem

G 283

No Man’s Land / 1950s–1960s

Lithograph on paper; 44 × 62 cm

O 323

Cathedral / after 1955

Mixed media, canvas, wooden panel; 108,5 × 88,5 cm

O 686

Women of Lidice in Terezín / 1972

Oil on canvas; 90 × 125 cm

O 882

Terezín / 1963

Tempera on paper; 50 × 62 cm

Information according to the institutional list supplied. Dimensions are given as height × width unless sheet and print sizes are distinguished.

Galerie Benedikta Rejta v Lounech

OG 0374

In the Quarry / 1973

Oil on canvas; 93,5 × 71 cm

OG 0527

České Středohoří / 1977

Oil on canvas; 68 × 80 cm

OG 0851

Woman, Child and Animal / 1969

Oil on canvas; 171 × 100 cm

OG 0852

Figure / 1969

Oil on card; 102 × 74 cm

OG 0853

Figure II / 1969

Oil on card; 102 × 74 cm

Information according to the institutional list supplied. Dimensions are given as height × width unless sheet and print sizes are distinguished.

Galerie Lázně Liberec

G 3947

From the Boundaries Cycle / undated

Monotype on paper; sheet 64,1 × 44,3; print 62,3 × 41,2 cm

Information according to the institutional list supplied. Dimensions are given as height × width unless sheet and print sizes are distinguished.

Památník Terezín

PT 1378 Railway Siding (from the Terezín cycle) / by 1969

Ink drawing, print; 38,1 × 48,5 cm

PT 1379 Entrance to Terezín from Litoměřice (from the Terezín cycle) / 1960

Ink drawing, print; 37 × 50,3 cm

PT 1380 Watchtower (from the Terezín cycle) / 1961

Ink drawing, print; 44 × 50 cm

PT 1381 Death Walk (from the Terezín cycle) / 1961

Ink drawing, print; 38,2 × 47,5 cm

PT 1382 Terezín Street (from the Terezín cycle) / 1960

Ink drawing, print; 38,7 × 55 cm

PT 1383 Women from the Ghetto / 1961

Tempera on card; 67 × 92,2 cm

PT 1384 Girl with a Chestnut Necklace / 1961

Tempera on card; 68 × 93,6 cm

Information according to the institutional list supplied. Dimensions are given as height × width unless sheet and print sizes are distinguished.

Památník Terezín

PT 1385

Funeral / 1961

Tempera on card; 92,5 × 66,5 cm

PT 9212

Liberation of Terezín / 1972

Oil on canvas; 93,5 × 108,2 cm

PT 13253

Aggression I. / 1969

Pen and ink drawing with wash; 66,5 × 86,7 cm

PT 13254

Aggression II. / 1968

Pen and ink drawing; 67,5 × 87 cm

PT 13255

Wounded City / 1969

Oil and ink on canvas; 76 × 116,9 cm

PT 13256

Women of Lidice / 1960s

Watercolour; 69,6 × 89,8 cm

PT 13257

Prisoners in Courtyard IV / 1970s

Watercolour; 69,7 × 79,8 cm

Information according to the institutional list supplied. Dimensions are given as height × width unless sheet and print sizes are distinguished.

Památník Terezín

PT 13258

Winter in Terezín / 1963

Tempera and gouache on card; 69,5 × 89,8 cm

PT 13259

Painting I. / 1964

Oil on canvas; 116 × 92 cm

Information according to the institutional list supplied. Dimensions are given as height × width unless sheet and print sizes are distinguished.

Editorial note

The accompanying texts and image sequence were created for this guide. Jiří Dolejš’s retrospective essay of 1988 is presented in full; further passages come from the catalogue Paintings and Drawings (Duchcov, 1980) and from exhibition texts of 1991. Their thematic headings are editorial. Selected excerpts by Jan Škvára are marked with quotation marks, supplied with source references and accompanied by commentary. Omissions within a quoted sentence are indicated by […]. Exhibition surveys are based on surviving catalogues, invitations and the artist’s list. Contemporary texts, documents and the transcription of Straka’s letter are distinguished from the newly written guide texts.

The titles, dates, media and dimensions of most works are based on the gallery inventory, which in many cases adopts the names of digital files. Uncertain information remains marked in the captions.

The translations of historical texts were prepared for this language edition. Document facsimiles retain their original language.

Sources and acknowledgements

The guide was prepared by Galéria Přemysl Straka. Its image and documentation archive is the principal source of reproductions.

Artworks and graphic design: Přemysl Straka. Works by other artists reproduced in designs for printed materials are not his paintings. Historical written sources: Jiří Dolejš and Jan Škvára. Letter of 25 April 1995: Přemysl Straka.

Interview with Libor Pešek of 10 August 1991: Terezie Jungrová; presented through an editorial summary. Catalogue Památník Terezín 1947–1992: concept by Jiří Brabec, graphic design by Přemysl Straka, photographs by Jana Nováková; cover painting by Ivan Bukovský, Early Evening.

Exhibition documentation: Archiv výtvarného umění, Prague, and the archive of Severočeská galerie výtvarného umění v Litoměřicích. Catalogue texts: Jan Škvára and Jiří Dolejš. Photographs in the Litoměřice 1965 catalogue: L. Landy; in the Litoměřice 1991 catalogue: Karel Holan. Reproductions from collections: Roudnice nad Labem, Louny and Liberec; Liberec photograph by Jaroslav Trojan. List of works also supplied by Památník Terezín.

Biography: Galéria Přemysl Straka, About the Artist / Přemysl Straka 1926–2003, www.galeriapremyslstraka.org; professional biography of Přemysl Straka.

Divadlo Na zábradlí: History of Our Theatre, sections The Beginnings and Pantomime. www.nazabradli.cz/en/about-us/history-of-our-theatre/ Divadlo Semafor: Semafor’s Past, year 1959. www.semafor.cz/minulost-semaforu Both official histories verified on 21 October 2026. Used for general historical context; the association of Straka’s sheets with Na zábradlí is based on the gallery inventory.

Sources and acknowledgements / continued

Jiří Dolejš: Looking Back at the Painting of Přemysl Straka. Kulturní listy litoměřického okresu, 1988, pp. 34–36. Complete text. Jiří Dolejš: Přemysl Straka: Paintings and Drawings, Duchcov, 1980. Excerpt. Jiří Dolejš: exhibition texts for Památník Terezín and the gallery in Litoměřice, 1991. Excerpts.

On Czech cultural memory of places: České středohoří, A Trip to Říp, section Climbing Říp in the Footsteps of Forefather Čech (www.stredohori.cz/detail/vylet-na-rip/3); Weekend TIP: Royal Litoměřice, 14 May 2020 (www.stredohori.cz/detail/tip-na-vikend-kralovske-litomerice). Accessed on 22 October 2026. These links document the cultural associations of the places; the interpretation of individual paintings is editorial.

Names supplied in the letter transcription: Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu ČR, profile of Milan Uhde for the 1993–1996 term (psp.cz); Úřad vlády ČR, List of Government Members, 2. 7. 1992 – 4. 7. 1996 (vlada.gov.cz).

Galéria Přemysl Straka, 2026.

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