

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

Heimo Zobernig

REVUE DE PRESSE | SELECTED PRESS

REAL – EGAL – REGAL – LAGER

*Heimo Zobernig in
conversation with Sabine Kienzer*

SK: *When did you begin painting REAL, and is it true that you're referring to Robert Indiana here?*

HZ: In 1993 I was invited to take part in an exhibition project at the Salzburg Kunstverein, the Vienna Secession and the Graz Kunstverein. The original title of the project consisted of several sentences. For the graphic design I suggested REAL. Indiana was the inspiration here because he created an iconic work in his LOVE image – a hippie slogan – which he in turn took from a relief under the pulpit of a church. In the colours orange, brown, grey, black and white – a realistic slogan, that is – I produced the design for everything from the poster through to the invitation card and book. A year later, I made the first painted REAL pictures in the same colours with my 'sculpture colours', which do not look colourful in their composition, but rather correspond to a sober world that includes the orange of the city waste bins at that time.

SK: *How and when did a minimised use of colour result in colourfulness and how did you develop your colour theory?*

HZ: So that I could have a better understanding of the effect and use of colour, I studied colour theory. After all, paint can be smeared onto the canvas intuitively, without thinking, from a predefined palette. That's why I added professional research to my academic training, and that's how my personal colour palette gradually emerged: Striped paintings with colours placed next to each other on an equal footing, which create different effects and moods in their sequence. Rows with five, seven, ten, fifteen colours, which I've arranged differently according to their names such as red, yellow, green, blue, black, white, etc., conceptual versus material reality.

SK: *The word REAL was both subjected to and superimposed on this colour theory corresponding to physical reality. What led you from serious, colourless objectivity to the colourful side?*

HZ: The birth of my son in 1994, when I painted my first colourful REAL for him, which was not exhibited until years later.

SK: *You published the book *Farbenlehre* in collaboration with the literary theorist Ferdinand Schmatz. How does it differ from Newton's, da Vinci's or Goethe's texts?*

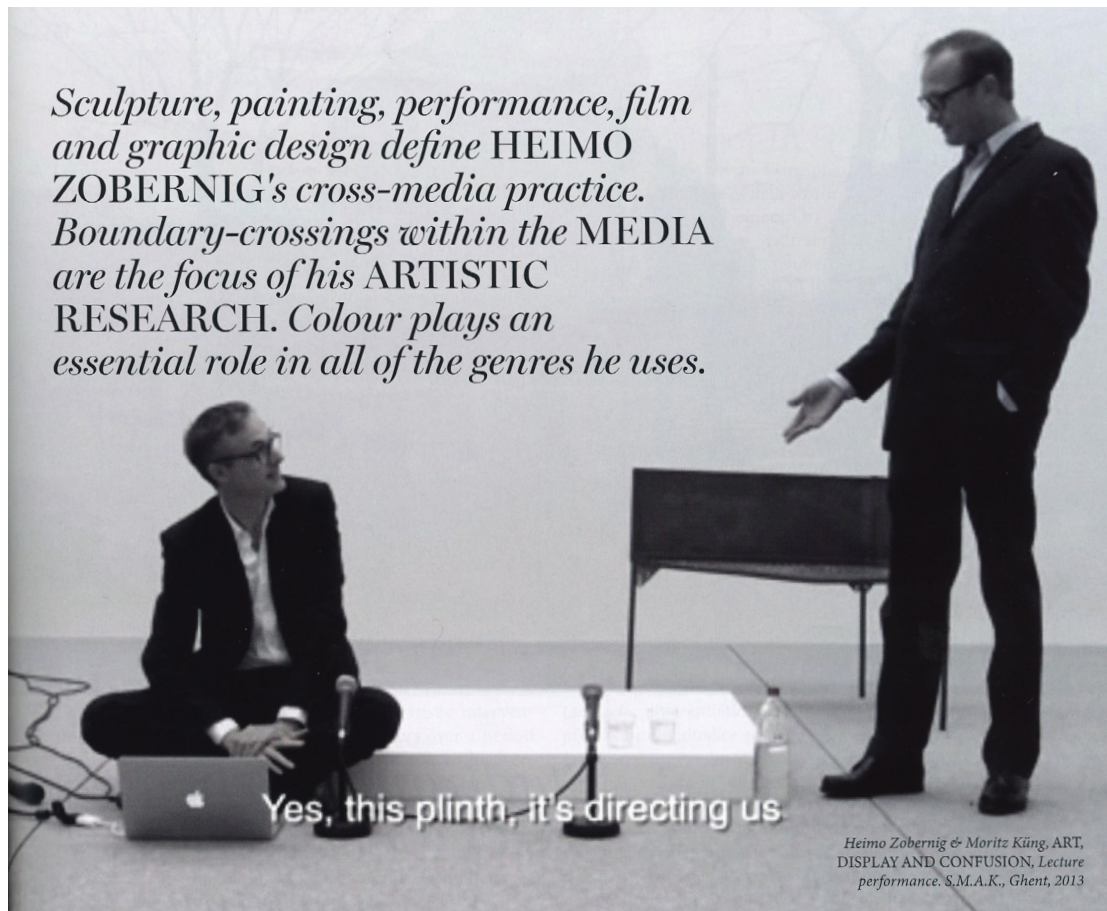
HZ: Through and via language – our gaze is directed at the history of colour theory, into its texts and models: what you read also has colour. We focused exclusively on the materially present bodies of text, the theories of colour. There is not one universally valid version. Unlike the notation system, where an A, for example, is clearly defined, there are attempts at grasping colours in diverse idealised worlds. Material colours (pigments, for example) display jumps and no continuous course of development. There is a beautiful Pantone book that lists 3,000 colour names – translated into six languages – such as chocolate, mouse grey, mustard, mauve, etc.

SK: *The word EGAL also joined the painted REAL pictures and the extended colour palette during this period.*

HZ: EGAL was added in 2006. My colour palette expands with paradoxical rules of paint application in favour of a kind of scratchiness. I avoid rainbow gradients and harmonies, but follow my intuition through rules, such as complementary contrast, in order to increase the colour effect or to give the colour a different value. EGAL reflects this paradox in REAL.

SK: *REAL – EGAL – Regal (shelf). The anagram can also be read further in terms of content, translating Lager (storage) with the simple, readily available and inexpensive material pressboard – and this brings us to the series of Billy shelves.*

HZ: I like word games. In one of my video works, I take on the role of a piece of furniture – known as a Dumb Waiter – with which you somehow communicate, speak or not. *Regal* – a shelf – is something similar, a human image,



Sculpture, painting, performance, film and graphic design define HEIMO ZOBERNIG's cross-media practice. Boundary-crossings within the MEDIA are the focus of his ARTISTIC RESEARCH. Colour plays an essential role in all of the genres he uses.

Yes, this plinth, it's directing us

Heimo Zobernig & Moritz Küng, ART, DISPLAY AND CONFUSION, Lecture performance. S.M.A.K., Ghent, 2013

a humanoid frame. My body has always been present in my videos. For another video, I covered my skin with a blue grid. In preparation, I put a shop mannequin in the studio – as a stand-in. Time and again this mannequin bothered me, making me think there was someone in the room. An animism that I was not originally familiar with, with my sober view of the world.

SK: How were you able to eliminate this irritation? By merging the dummy and the Billy shelf?

HZ: That was to follow a few years later. First, through my teaching at the academy, the question of the absence of figuration in sculpture arose. I made myself available as a nude model for an exchange student from Milan who worked figuratively. He modelled my body conditions on the dummy. So it continues until the last figures with an implied historical baroque setting – pink skin with blue-green background – and romantic posture in a modified Billy shelf, in architecture. as it were.

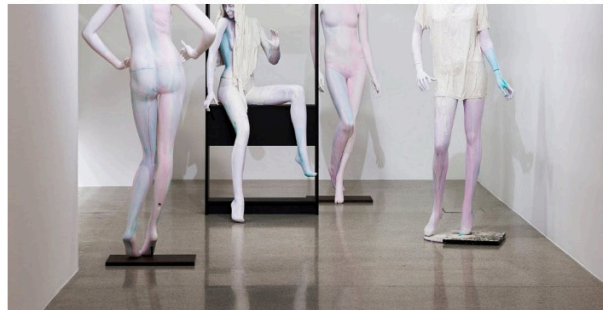
SK: This takes us onto the topic of communicating, dialogue with viewers. In your work for the Biennale, for example, you

refer both to the history of the architecture of the pavilion and to the visitors, who in your setting become an absent sculpture, as it were. Not, however, to thematise one and the other, but to eliminate both, ultimately to confront your audience with new facts and leave them to their own reflections.

HZ: If I succeed in doing that, that's a wonderful description. Exploration of the figure inevitably leads to the question of the environment and its relationship to architecture. Who is there first: the space or the sculpture, and on what scale is what made? It is important to consider how the dimensions of a figure influence the building that surrounds it, or vice versa. The Austrian Pavilion, which I rebuilt for the Venice Biennale in 2015, was given different, new proportions. I changed the usual hierarchy and symmetry of the place in favour of an atmosphere that encourages visitors to stay and allows them to perceive it in a new way.

If I can successfully communicate these kinds of incentives in a simple and uncomplicated way, then that is definitely my intention!

SK



ENTERTAINMENT

Exhibition review – Heimo-Zobernig’s big show at Mumok

Harley Allen · June 20, 2021 · 3 min read

For Heimo Zubrnig’s first retrospective in 2002/03 at Mumok, shortly after the latter moved into the Museum District, the White Cube was installed in the stairwell, which spanned Level 2 by one corridor. Since then, the metallic structure of the gondola has embellished this spatial sculptural intervention, and now the artist has placed a large black cube on top of the cube, which, when descended at an angle, suggests heaviness. In fact, it is a lightweight cardboard box that reminds us once again of the black square icon of Casimir Mallewicz and his origins in the theater.

Even if the untitled exhibition focuses primarily on the discourse of painting, sculpture at the Vienna Academy devotes the education of artists, as is usually the case to the history of work, which has brought it to several notable exhibition sites, where the catalog chronology displays, extensive art-studies Scientific.

on the border for information

From highly rigorous measurements to critical questions to the museum as an institution, it is made on many levels of thought and of many materials. From the architecture to the presentation of the Impulstanz Festival dancers who will be here soon, from the sculpture to the graphic quotes, the furniture and the distribution of painted mannequins, but also a music video has been composed for the informative concert.

The grid design is based on Gerrit Rietveld’s “Sonsbeek Pavilion”, designed by the Dutchman for a sculpture exhibition in Arnhem in 1955. Friction in the style of Classical Modernism also broadened the concept of painting in the 1980s, as Zubrinj, according to Helga Philipp’s concepts, began to bring abstract geometry From the so-called mystical esoteric realms of the early days to an analytical level.

New geometry or new geometry cited monochrome, checkerboard or stripes patterns from simplicity and conceptual art, but also colors from video technology have enriched it all. In 2011, Zubrignig suddenly added Pablo Picasso and, after much colour, also quoting gestural painting, sometimes paradoxically, sometimes as a counter-concept for major geometrically strict motifs such as the grid. The gesture is now also extended to Sections, which act as a hybrid of painting in order to blur the boundaries between art – a feat of the 1980s, which loosely mixed the commodity character of sculpture with postmodern appropriation quotes.

The early color palette and reduced use of materials has now been greatly expanded, the shelf is black as if dripping and still scattered, even the painted mannequins now transcend the palette previously reduced to 15 pure pigment colours, changing as the partially inscribed stained white crystals of a kind of diamond dust. Joseph Boys or Kitsch, the subversive transgressor, lurks next to a screen made of silver nettle, set in a zigzag like a masonry fence. Mannequins drape like in a movie set, the plush blanket in a black and white checkerboard pattern attached to Ingmar Bergman's play "Painting Wood," which is set on lounge chairs and furniture for visitors.

The crusader from "The Seventh Seal" Ingmar Bergmans or Stanley Kubrick's "2001 A Space Odyssey", as well as the use of diamond dust for pigments predicted by Piet Mondrian: You can learn about all these quotes. It is almost clear that the lines of sight are also "disturbed", far from the strict, directed view of modernity. The technical situation is still changing.



Heimo Zobernig: Piet Mondrian

**Demonstration Rooms: Céline
Condorelli, Kapwani Kiwanga, Judy
Radul**



Based on spatial designs created for Dresden by artists and designers working in the international context of the Bauhaus in the 1920s, contemporary artists question traditional spatial and exhibition concepts at the Albertinum, Dresden.

Heimo Zobernig has been investigating the design of spaces and the presentation of art since the mid-1980s and has dealt with the abstractions of Piet Mondrian. Zobernig develops a new installation for the atrium at the Albertinum and interprets one of Mondrian's unrealized designs from 1926, which was created for a room in the private villa of the Dresden art collector Ida Bienert.

Céline Condorelli, Kapwani Kiwanga and Judy Radul are invited to attempt new displays in the museum's collection with artistic interventions. In doing so, they reflect a range of historical exhibition designs, including El Lissitzky's *Room for Abstract Art*, which was created for the 1926 Dresden International Art Exhibition.

The radical designs of Lissitzky and Mondrian aimed to activate the viewer's experience of space and art. Through their innovative potential they inspire new artistic approaches for the development of design and spatial concepts today.

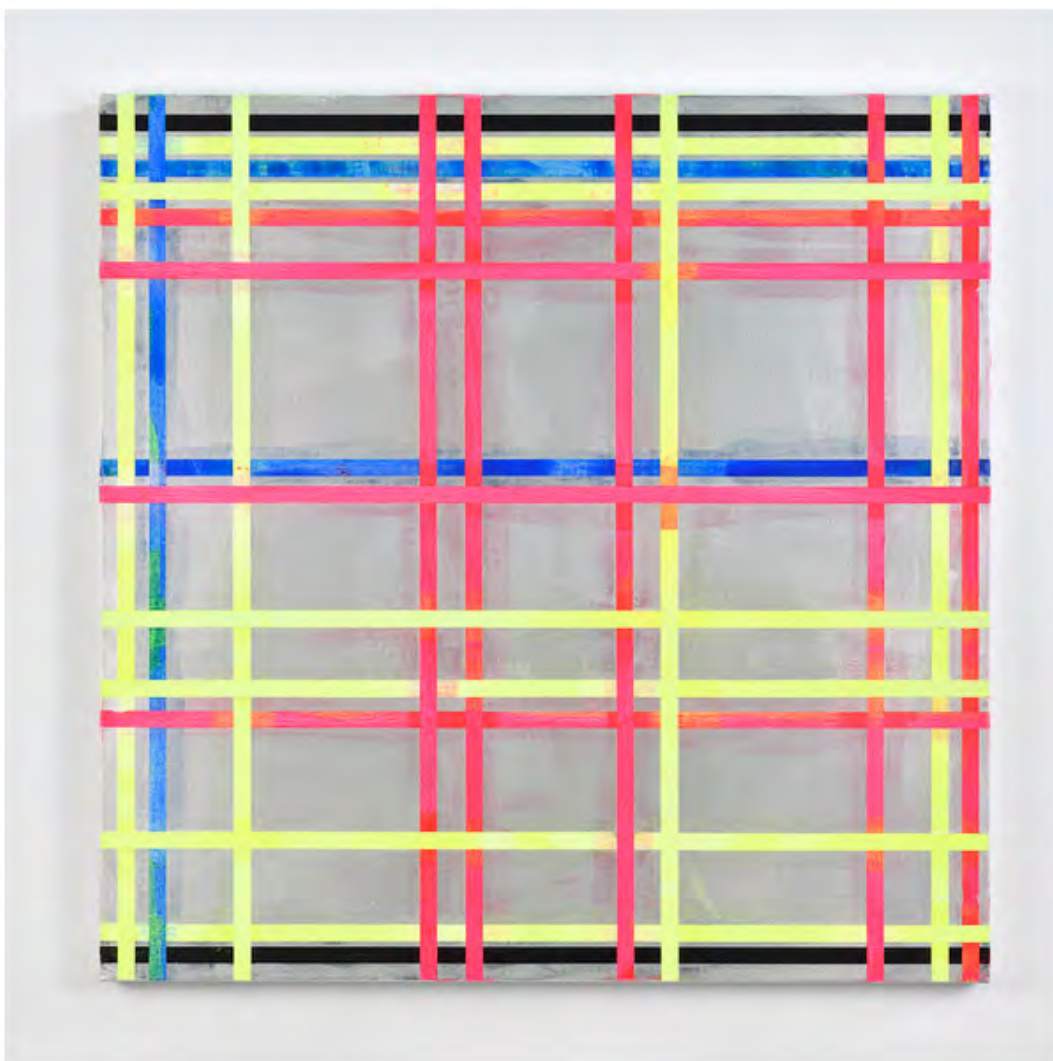
The projects run parallel with the exhibition *Visionary Spaces. KANDINSKY, MONDRIAN, LISSITZKY and the Abstract-Constructivist Avant-Garde in Dresden 1919 – 1932*.

20 Dec 2017

Five Shows to See in Paris

Art made by a Franciscan monk, Real Madrid bed sheets and gold take over galleries in Paris this month. Words by Jessica Saxby

Galerie
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Heimo Zobernig, *This New This*
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Florian Kleinfenn

As global gatherings for art go, it has been a busy year: from the Venice Biennale, Documenta and Munster Skulptur Projekte to the annual finale of Art Basel Miami Beach, marking the end of this 2017's international programming earlier this month. Back in Paris, however, there are a number of newly opened gallery shows still worth venturing out for.

ELEPHANT

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Heimo Zobernig, *This New This*

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Florian Kleinfenn

Heimo Zobernig at Chantal Crousel

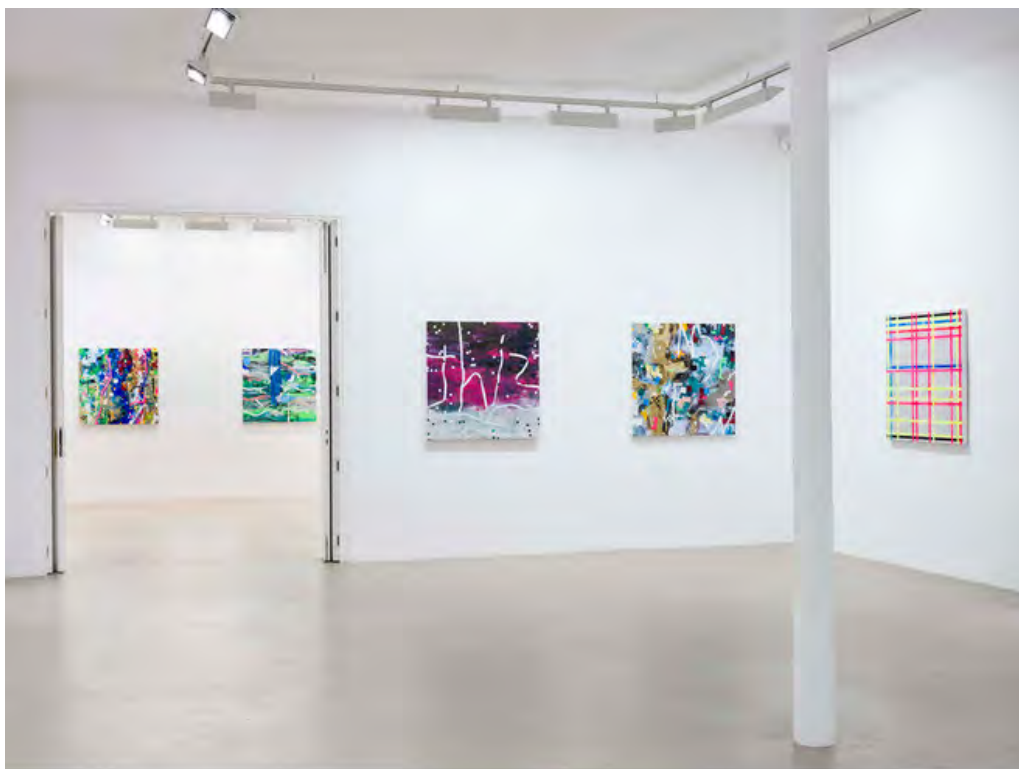
Sat somewhere between a reimagining of the 20th-century European avant-garde and an investigation into digital culture, Zobernig's new exhibition at Chantal Crousel spans six years of the artist's creation, with works displayed chronologically throughout the gallery: beginning with Klein-esque monochromes, passing via acid Mondrian grids, to a 2014 series of pixelated tableaux, a meditation on the TV sets of the 80s. Every piece on display is created to the same format, his most recent work evolving into more painterly gestures. Such gestures, combined with the chronological hanging creates an explicit narrative on the linear progression and evolution of Zobernig's work since the beginning of the decade.

Until 20 January

« This New This – Heimo Zobernig », *Slash/Paris*, December 2017.

https://slash-paris.com/fr/evenements/this-new-this-heimo-zobernig/sous?utm_source=Abonn%C3%A9s+newsletter&utm_campaign=dde08a686c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_11&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_05e2767744-dde08a686c-102199537

Slash/Paris



Heimo Zobernig, This New This

Vue d'exposition à la Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

Courtesy de l'artiste et de la Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris —

Photo : Florian Kleinfenn

This New This Heimo Zobernig

Encore 19 jours : 1 décembre 2017 → 20 janvier 2018

Heimo Zobernig s'exprime par la sculpture, la vidéo, la performance et la peinture. Depuis les années 80, il questionne sans cesse deux fondamentaux de la peinture du XXème siècle : la grille et le monochrome. Son œuvre offre une grande variété d'approches.

En 2013, lors de la préparation de son exposition rétrospective au Palacio de Velázquez du Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia à Madrid, il a déclaré : « Au début, je peignais de manière frénétique, dans tous les styles imaginables. Ensuite l'abstraction géométrique radicale est devenue mon langage de prédilection. À l'époque, mes sources d'inspiration provenaient souvent de domaines étrangers à l'art, et évoluaient en marge des conventions. Ce n'est que graduellement que je suis arrivé au monochrome. À partir de là, certaines sources d'inspiration sont devenues évidentes. Dans l'ensemble des nouvelles techniques utilisées par les jeunes artistes, l'émerveillement pour la peinture phénoménologique est incontestable. Des monochromes émergent les fantômes et démons d'un mouvement de résistance. Les essais d'émancipation, l'échec permanent à accomplir l'objectif sont inscrits à l'intérieur du monochrome. Aucun monochrome ou image vide qui ne révélerait les traces de sa propre création ne peut livrer de manière pérenne un énoncé historique. »¹



Présentées de manière chronologique, les œuvres montrent l'évolution de la peinture de Zobernig au cours des six dernières années. Elles sont les témoins de l'évolution de son travail, charnière entre chaque série. Chaque peinture marque ainsi une transition par rapport à la série d'œuvres suivante — résultat de premières études pour des motifs d'images à venir. Les dernières œuvres empruntent à l'histoire de l'art et à des modèles de textes provenant de sources multiples.

Les peintures-textes de 2011 (bleu, blanc et ocre), avec leurs effets fantomatiques dans lesquels la forme pure et minimale n'est plus le privilège de la langue, ouvrent graduellement sur la série suivante. De larges aplats de couleurs combinent entre elles ces compositions complexes.

Les surfaces pixellisées des peintures de 2014 rappellent celles des téléviseurs de basse résolution des années 80. Ces peintures traitent davantage de la surface que de la couleur. À travers leurs textes, leurs palettes digitales, et leur pixellisation approximative, elles affirment leur relation à l'image mouvante d'une manière explicite, mais aussi ludique et évasive.

Enfin, des peintures dont la grille plus formelle s'oppose à celles déstructurées et sinueuses, les bandes adhésives utilisées sont grossièrement coupées à la main, faisant émerger des mots comme : THIS.

1. Interview par Beatrix Ruf, *Kaleidoscope*, Hiver 2012/2013.

À propos de l'artiste

Les expositions majeures de Heimo Zobernig (né en 1958 à Mauthen, Autriche) incluent Kunsthau Bregenz, Autriche (2015), Mudam — Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg et Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover, Allemagne (2014), Kunsthau Graz am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Autriche (2013), Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, Espagne (2012), Essl Museum, Vienne, Autriche (2011), Kunsthalle Zurich, Suisse (2011), CAPC, Bordeaux, France (2009), Heimo Zobernig and the Tate Collection, Tate, St. Ives et Londres, Royaume Uni (2008-2009), Kunstverein Braunschweig, Allemagne (2005), MUMOK, Vienne, Autriche (2002), Der Katerlog (avec Ernst Stroubal), MAK, Vienne, Autriche — House of Arts, Brno, République Tchèque — Kunsthau Bregenz, Autriche — Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster — Portikus, Frankfurt, Allemagne (1999).

Il a également participé à la 56ème édition de la Biennale de Venise, Italie (Pavillon Autrichien — 2015), Biennale de Busan, Corée du Sud (2006), Biennale de Sydney, Australie (2004), Biennale d'Istanbul, Turquie (1992), documenta IX (1992) et documenta X (1997).

Ses œuvres ont fait l'objet d'acquisitions par de nombreuses institutions, parmi lesquelles le Mamco à Genève (Suisse), le Mudam au Luxembourg, le Museum Ludwig à Cologne (Allemagne), le CAPC de Bordeaux (France), le Centre Pompidou à Paris (France), le SMAK à Gand (Belgique) et le Kunsthau Graz (Autriche).

Heimo Zobernig enseigne la sculpture à l'Académie des Beaux-Arts de Vienne depuis 2000. Il a reçu le Roswitha Haftmann Prize 2016 en hommage à l'incessante productivité et hétérogénéité de sa production, ainsi qu'à l'éloquence de son œuvre.

Plusieurs expositions personnelles sont prévues pour 2018, notamment au Museo de Arte de Rio, Brésil et au Sharjah Arts Museum, Emirats Arabes Unis.



POINT OF UNDOING

ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER, NICK MAUSS, HEIMO ZOBERNIG
AND CATHERINE WOOD IN CONVERSATION

**A conversation about the relations between art, dance,
and theater: about the movement between the spaces and
values of these disciplines, and what is lost and gained.**

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (1960 Mechelen, Belgium) is a contemporary dance choreographer.

Nick Mauss' diverse artistic practice encompasses drawing, sculpture and performance along with some curatorial projects that he initiated in the last years.

The work of **Heimo Zobernig** spans an array of media, from architectural intervention and installation, through performance, film and video, to sculpture and painting.

Catherine Wood is a critic and as Senior Curator (Performance) at Tate Modern she works on performance projects, exhibitions, collection acquisitions and displays.

If performance in Western visual art was founded upon ideas associated with experimental collaboration between different disciplines, a "theater of mixed means" since the 1950s (the Rauschenberg/Cage/Cunningham model), it seems that we are in a fascinating, evolved moment where single practitioners move between the spaces and rituals of those disciplines. Dance is presented in the gallery, but often without the collaboration of visual artists; artists make theater plays. A more fitting historical precedent for this mind-set might be the attitude of the Gutai group in their *Gutai on the Stage* (1957-1958): a group exhibition as theater presentation.

CATHERINE WOOD

We seem to be in a situation now that is less about that cross-disciplinarity colliding in a single space, and more about how dance or theater practice might appear within the space of art; or how art might appropriate the format of theater, or use choreography. What does this mean for your own practice?

ANNE TERESA DE KEERSMAEKER

I have spoken a lot about the kind of framed, limited time and space you have in the theater. In the museum, you have instead duration and continuity. You have the state of "availability": that the work of art is simply there. This raises, then, the question "do you also continue to perform even when there is not one spectator?"

CW

That's a nice characterization. Could you say something about the relative satisfaction of the two formats? Because your practice has long been about working in the theater, and that specific discipline. What do you lose from that in a gallery? I ask because I think that there is often an idea now that dance gains from the museum or gallery some kind of freedom and lack of constraint.

ADK

I find that, generally speaking, this idea of a day practice and an evening practice is quite crucial. Museum people are about daylight and visibility. Theater people go into the night...they go into the darkness. They make a campfire. The museum is a time of reflection, of celebration or of mourning during the daytime. In the museum, it's normally a time when people work. And in the theater, it is after working hours. The distinction is to do with what appears in the light. What appears in the darkness...

In terms of my own work, I was quite skeptical when there were these first propositions to perform in the museum at MoMA and Tate. Yet for both the dancers and myself, it was a transformative experience. You definitely get to a different relationship with your spectators, visitors. With the public, you approach the ideal duration and continuity, the aspect of proximity, the freedom of as many people... everyone can decide individually in his or her time and organize his or her time and space. There is the fact, also, that as a performer, you see the people that are watching you. This is nice. You know, when you are on stage, you basically have a black space with anonymous people, and you rarely see how they react. Somebody who decides to walk away in the theater is quite a strong statement. Somebody who goes away in the museum is liquid space and liquid time.

NICK MAUSS

An idealistic response to your question about where we are now is to see our current moment as a point of undoing, or at least as a moment of serious reevaluation of the terms of the relations between art, dance, and theater. But there is also the suspicion that the way in which dance and elements of theater appear in the spaces of art is a desultory engagement. What do we do with the glib language of performativity that circulates so freely now, with hollowed-out words such as *immersive*, *activation*, *liveness*, *engage*, *intervene*, even *queering*, applied so freely, and whenever convenient?

I believe that a central tension in the recent vogue for dance and stage performance in the spaces of art has to do with the very strange and shifting status of spectatorship, and with that, of attention and disinterest. The question of how an audience is constituted, on the one hand, and how attention can be modulated, on the other, calls into question how traditional spaces for art, such as museums, will function in the future.

CW

But Nick, what about the way in which "theater" figures in your work in installation, painting, sculpture, and also live performance?

NM

My own interest in theatrical notions of space, and in dance, came from a wish for a larger framework, both on the level of history and of the experience of the artwork, or of the exhibition as a form. I started making exhibitions in which my "work" became the arranging of dissonances between artworks and nonartworks by friends, known artists, and anonymous practitioners, in which the objects on view enacted new relationships, or took on the character of performers. But I was also looking at the "applied" role of painting in theater and dance, and this appeared as a trapdoor out of a solipsistic painting discourse to a space where decoration, irreverence, travesty, and contamination gain resonance.

CW

I agree, and I like how bodily movement in relation to artworks, or in the space of art, implies shifting positions that are emblematic of questions about value or meaning. I think a cluster of very recent presentations is relevant to this question: Anne Imhof's German Pavilion in Venice and her use of non-dance-derived movement

Opposite - Nick Mauss, *Intricate Others* installation view at Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, 2017. © Nick Mauss. Courtesy: Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, 2017. Photo: Filipe Braga



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C. WOOD

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A. T. DE KEERSMAEKER, N. MAUSS, H. ZOBERNIG

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and choreography; Maria Hassabi's live dance installation, combined with her theater-lighting and carpet sculptures, at Documenta; and Trajal Harrel's Barbican exhibition (developed after his MoMA residency), in which the gallery spaces are set up with different performance situations (seating, stages, plinths), which are activated according to a complex, overlapping schedule, daily.

NM

Trajal Harrel's work is deeply affecting—as dance, it manages to be both fragile and adamant, and it derives great power from the precise economy of its staging. As a viewer, one feels as though one has been invited personally to a special event, and the dances feel independent of, or even in defiance of, the institutional spaces that host them and for which they have been constructed. With simple make-do props, sleights of hand, and transformative gestures and expressions, Harrel conjures entire atmospheres and then pulverizes them.

Ralph Lemon's exhibition at the Kitchen in 2016 was by far the most important artwork I have seen in recent memory. Not only

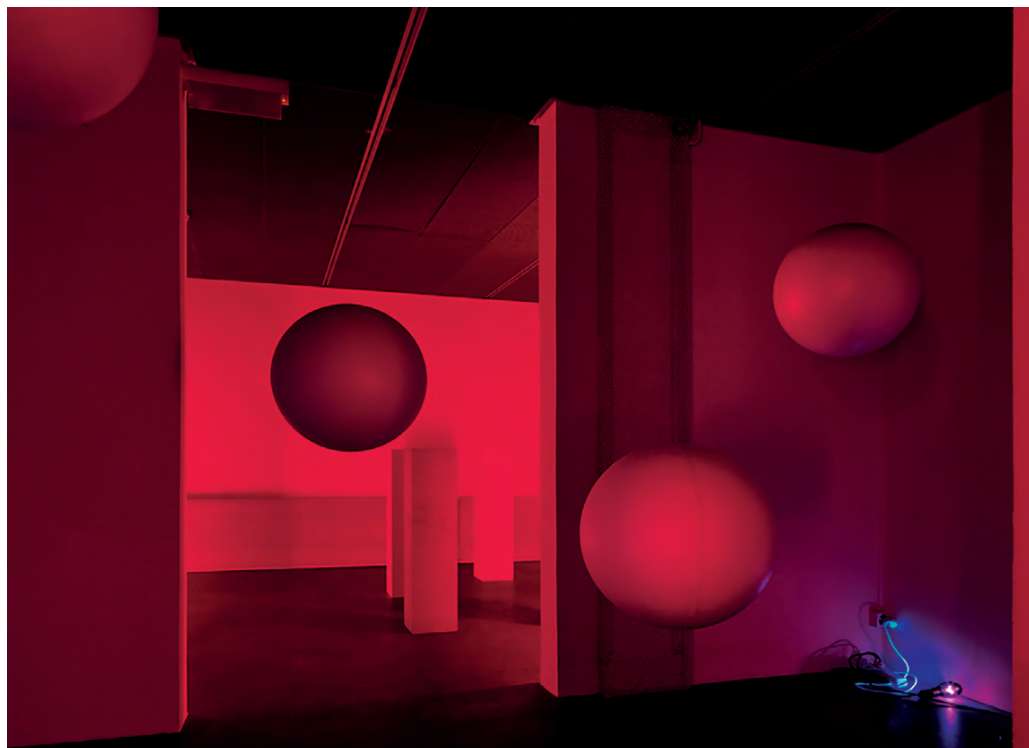
within this context, modes that are calibrated in a much more theater-like way. It's not that flat work-time of daylight, actually.

I'm curious as to how you see this: as a merging of disciplinary specificity or the movement from one kind of practice into the space of another, a "contamination"?

ADK

My collaboration with Ann Veronica Janssens has been important, not in terms of adding objects or "décor," but to find ways to work with what is already there in a space. It has always been a very strange thing, for me, that when you create dance, you work for months, you work during the day in the daylight, and you construct everything, the whole moving architecture of the dance, during daylight in the working hours. And then at the last moment you go into the black box of the theater, and you make it all black around, and you start to put artificial light, and you start to create a whole thing around it. I was always frustrated by that. Then it was Ann Veronica who made me think differently: to empty that space and look at ev-

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Heimo Zobernig, *ohne Titel (in red)* installation view at Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich, 2011. Courtesy: Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin. Photo: Archive HZ

did Lemon completely undo and blur the purpose and order of the "white cube" upstairs and the "black cube" downstairs, it was hard to leave the various experiences presented during its duration with a sense of how to capture it in a category—dance, lecture, exhibition, reading, casting, performance, installation, reperformance, political fantasy, and fiction were all held in play. This splinter stays with me: Yvonne Rainer cast to read the Marquis de Sade, almost as if she were one of those drag queens in Pasolini's *Salò*, interrupting her reading to wonder aloud why she had been asked to do this.

CW

Yvonne embodies all of this in one person! In the works we've mentioned here, the codes of black box and white cube are scrambled in ways that unsettle the position of the viewer and the experience of time and duration. Interestingly, Imhof and Harrel both move on from the looping strategies of artists like Tino Sehgal's enactors' permanent presence. Instead, they create arcs and pauses of attention

ery object—including the body: the body, the sound, the existing architecture. She directed me to observe it and then to try and frame it, to frame what was already existing. Without adding. The Latin origin of the word *abstraction* comes from the Latin word [meaning] "to pull away." When I think about embodying abstraction, it means performing an operation of taking away. But somehow to allow more freedom to emerge, and to create another space that is available. So, it is not the fact of putting objects on stage but... the framework...

CW

So actually Anne Veronica's contribution was to help you think through that framework materially and conceptually—from a point of view as a visual artist—rather than adding an object or a décor. A different kind of cross-disciplinarity?

ADK

Exactly, exactly. And she also helped me with Wiels. She was the one that said let's take the windows away and allow the daylight



POINT OF UNDOING
C. WOOD

and its movement to come in. And she systematically always takes things away. In the theater also, when we worked together, it was always operations of taking things away but not adding objects. Sort of scrape things away and you get to the DNA of things. Whether you come in a theater or in a museum space, just first looking at what is available. So it's nearly also an aesthetic, ecological, ethical thing. Since my first collaboration with Ann Veronica about nine years ago, which was with *Keeping Still* in the theater, we have this joke going on that in the last decade we don't have a technical crew anymore. We just have a cleaning crew. We throw everything out, you know, all the dust and all the draperies and so on.

CW Heimo, what does this characterization of the white cube gallery-time as "daytime" or daylight mean for you? I'm interested because it focuses less on the usual question of theater as fixed ritual versus the gallery as autonomous, ambient. I wonder how you think about this daylight mode of viewing in relation to "pictoriality"?

CW These approaches of yours in the gallery with lighting might appear quite "theatrical," in contrast with the stripping away that Anne Teresa describes. At the same time, the "theatrical" has long been a denigrated term, art historically. Is it a term that is relevant to contemporary sculpture, such as yours, Heimo? What kind of seeing do you want or imagine with such an approach? Is it about seeing with the body as well as the eyes? Are you interested in a viewer's narrative projection into the scene?

HZ In my work now, I totally do not refer to the theater. Theater, dance, film, etc., are some of many art forms that reflect on reality as such: The body takes in reality with every sense. Next, there is the brain that finds combinations for everything and creates perception: the "presentation." We then know what is behind, above, below us. We have a rough vision of our position, in space and time. The things, the spaces, the city lead our way through the world. And this is reflected in very different art forms.

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Heimo Zobernig, *untitled*, 2009, installation view at CAPC, musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux, 2009. Courtesy: Gallerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Photo: Archive HZ

HEIMO ZOBERNIG Light has a predominant role in theater. In its qualities for composition, it is a highly complex medium. In my early works as stage designer, I repeatedly searched for very simple but effective solutions in lighting. I wanted to make sure that the light design is easy to understand—only one light source, for example. But even simple light settings have complications.

In an exhibition, I am looking for the opposite of dramatic light. No shadow play. I want to have a situation where you do not think about it at all. It is bright, and everything is obvious—a pragmatic point of view.

On other occasions, I was using the light and its color as the dominant figure or medium in itself. My contribution for the Kunstverein Bonn was a huge space with nothing but engulfing heavy lighting. For the CAPC Bordeaux, my installation was dominated by a red: the vibrant red light in the space originated from a red curtain on the one side and a video projection of an animated red curtain on the other.

1 UNHAPPY DAYS IN THE ART WORLD?
De-skilling Theater, Re-skilling Performance by Claire Bishop, December 10, 2011
Brooklyn Rail

Of course, the behavior/performance of an audience/viewer of sculpture can be seen as dance performance. And, evidently, all art forms are part of our reality. Additionally, I like to make references to the routine/behavior of people in the situation of theater, dance, music performance. But not in the sense of genre crossover.

CW Related to this point, recall that Claire Bishop wrote a few years ago in her *Brooklyn Rail* piece¹, "dance satisfies a yearning for skill and seduction that visual art performance rejected in its inaugural refusal of spectacle and theater." Is it an extension of the "reskilling" that she says it is? Or a real moment of deep rethinking about how we segregate these disciplines? (Or is art just sucking up and claiming everything else?) Anne Teresa has described learning something from the conceptual and material discipline of Ann Veronica. What is art learning from theater? (And perhaps to Nick specifically, since you so productively borrow from theater and dance in your



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Left - Nick Mauss, *Untitled*, 2014; Léon Bakst, *Une nymphe, costume for L'Après-midi d'un faune*, ca. 1912. Exhibition design by Nick Mauss. *Designing Dreams: a celebration of Léon Bakst* installation view at Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Monaco, 2016. © Nick Mauss
 Right - Heimo Zobernig, *untitled*, 1998, installation view at Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, 1998. Photo: Archive HZ

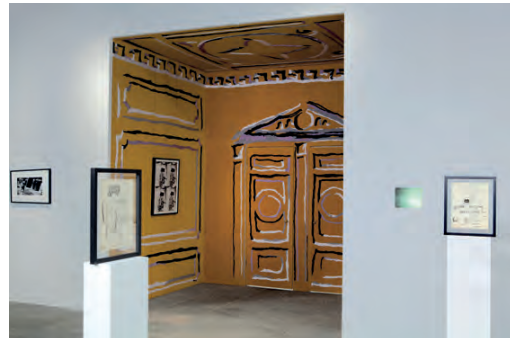
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Below, from top clockwise - Nick Mauss, *Untitled*, 2014, installation view at Art Basel | Art Unlimited, 2014. © Nick Mauss. Courtesy: 303 Gallery, New York and Campoli Presti, London / Paris. Photo: Andrea Rossetti

Garry Winogrand, *Beverly Hills, California*, 1978, from the portfolio *Women are better than man. Not only have they survived, they do prevail*, 1968-1980; Eyre de Lanux, [Sketches of women], date unknown; Nick Mauss, *Concern, Crush, Desire*, 2011; Andy Warhol, *Untitled (Cyclist)*, ca. 1976; Nick Mauss, *Untitled*, 2011; Eyre de Lanux, [Sketch for Consuelo], date unknown. Whitney Biennial 2012 installation view at Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2012. © Nick Mauss. Courtesy: Whitney Museum of Art, New York

Nick Mauss, *Depend, fasten, lower, suppose, dwell*, 2010. *Non-Solo Show, Non-Group Show* installation view at Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich. © Nick Mauss. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography

Heimo Zobernig installation view at MUDAM Luxembourg, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg, 2014. Photo: Remi Villaggi



Opposite - Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, *Work/Travail/Arbeid* at WIELS, Brussels, 2015. Photo: Anne Van Aerschot



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own work, in order to resituate the art object in a meaningful/useful social context: do you have disciplinary envy?!

NM Disciplinary specificity is essential and rare, especially if it manages to reinvent the discipline. As a spectator of Anne Teresa's work, I would say that this specificity is crucial to the work, and distinguishes it from other occurrences of dance in the museum that tend to look imported.

Perhaps I am motivated by a kind of envy to look to fields outside art that appear truly rigorous. To study the couture of Madame Grès, for example, as though I had Isa Genzken's sculptures in mind. I am trying to think and see together what is otherwise seen apart, so I tend to move across or in combinations of disciplines. But a specific disciplinary framework can be a great excuse to articulate new ideas. In the twentieth century, ballet and avant-garde dance sparked new possibilities for criticism in the voices of Edwin Denby and Jill Johnston. Johnston herself admits that "...while my column was still headlined DANCE, or DANCE JOURNAL, my subjects were anything but." She goes on to say, about the "confusion of roles (artists making dances, dancers using artists as performers)," that "those games of identification are usually substitutes for seeing...they arise from fear."

One thing that is now possible, rather than the experimental, cross-disciplinary collisions of the classical avant-garde you refer to, is the construction of historical collisions, by which I mean the active rewiring and re-presentation of histories—"what if" or "as if." Trajal Harrel performs such an operation in his cycle *The Twenty Looks or Paris Is Burning at the Judson Church*, by taking the synchronism of Judson Dance Theater with the development of vogue balls as a way to mutually interrogate and assign new values to both forms and histories.

I had such an experience years ago when I watched a VHS tape of *Saturday Night at the Baths* and noticed Robert Morris's infamous bare-chested self-portrait in helmet and chains decorating the bedroom wall of one of the protagonists, somehow perfectly out of place and in place at the same time. Alvin Baltrap's photographs of men cruising on the West Side piers under Gordon Matta-Clark's giant cutout of the pier facade, or even the thought of George Balanchine and Merce Cunningham choreographing during the same historical moment, have a similar effect of almost unfathomable copresence: history as heterotopia. We can take our current vantage point as a position from which to radically reconfigure, or think together, previously unthinkable relations.

I'm interested in deep discipline, whatever form that may take. I am trying to imagine, for example, a museum that could show the charged spaces between a painting, a perfume, a gesture, a dress, and a film. Your question about how we segregate disciplines is crucial, particularly in a global situation tending more and more towards polarization and essentialism. But I don't want to acquiesce to the notion that art is a single, steam-rolling entity that has it within its power to suck up and claim other forms, without regard for their specific histories and economies. To do so would give the current notion of art too much power, and would mean that it is no longer possible to think of other kinds of art.

CW Tino Sehgal raised questions in the past about the relative cultural power of theatre and art: seeing the arena of art as the locus of significant effect. But Anne Teresa, you are committed to working in theatre. Yet is the disciplinary specificity of theater something you seek to break? I'm trying to think from the work of yours that I've seen on stage. You haven't gone as far as to make the whole situation light inside a theater? Do you feel that would be cross-contaminating the wrong codes somehow?

APK Well, the fact that the audience are in the dark is relatively recent. Until Wagner, there was always light in the audience. It was Wagner who said that the audience and the orchestra had to go in the dark and to create this kind of super illusion. Before there was always light. It also has to do with architecture, in the sense that since the Italian

theaters, very often you have the possibility to strip the stage, but the theaters are full, full, full of information architecturally. So the attention created by light is a focus thing also. We had the premiere of my new work in this industrial space in the Ruhr, in Germany, and we purposely started the performance at seven o'clock with the daylight, and then the night came in. The piece incorporated the falling of the day and then in the night, coming from the darkness into the light.

And my experience has been that when you try to do that in a black-box theater in the evening, then you have to do it with artificial light, and it's super difficult and you can't compete with it. And also, of course, because the stage is very fixed, and everyone is sitting on their chairs. I also realize people prefer to go to museums... but people have real difficulty to stay in groups in stillness! It's this notion of shared concentration, and attention in a group is super difficult.

If the theater performance is historically also an extension of sitting around the campfire and then assisting at a ritual and going to church, which is, you know, a moment of reflection and celebration or mourning and where, as a collective, you sit together and create physical stillness... I mean, to a certain extent theater performance *grew* out of that, and in the same way it disappeared in Western society. It hasn't in other parts of the world, but in Western society it disappeared. I sometimes wonder if the same thing is going to happen with theaters. That people will not go to the theater anymore.

CW But it's interested to consider how the matrix of relations that is "theatre" morphoses in new ways too. Nick, in terms of your works that don't involve actual live dance, where you use tape or metal structures to articulate a provisional architecture, or make and install curtains, often in relation to painting: could you say a bit more about what you hinted at earlier in terms of utilizing ideas of theater to "situate" painting?

And maybe also you could say a little about your work for Frieze Projects, which—perhaps unlike Anne Teresa at WIELS—put the dancers very much on display?

NM I can't really think of an art viewing experience that is not theatrical. But a particular relationship to theater in my work comes through in my focus on the frame. In making exhibitions, I put a great deal of emphasis on the presence of people looking at my work, apprehending it but also becoming the figures in the work. Protocols of spectatorship are warped or rerouted by structures such as the ones you've described, this banister-like sculpture that is a drawing of the movement of the eye through the space, or hanging, collapsible rooms made of ribbons that impose themselves on a space while delimiting another kind of possibility. I think of the way one might move through the space, and what can be encountered along the way, or how this experience can be frustrated. The automated curtains are large paintings running on automated tracks programmed to open and close at varying intervals, creating volumes of air between them. They open and close, revealing nothing but the different spaces they create.

The most directly theatrical work I can think of is *Concern, crush, desire*, a velvet appliqué reiteration of a proscenium-like antechamber designed by Christian Bérard for Jean-Michel Frank, invoking the overlay of stage design with interior architecture with surrealism. The work is installed in such a way that the viewer enters the work and finds herself looking out the "fourth wall" into a space in which a constellation of other works is encountered. At the 2012 Whitney Biennial, I mounted recto-verso rebus drawings by Eyre de Lanux on freestanding pedestals like game pieces, or characters populating this scenario.

My work "with" dance has generally been linked to a curatorial process. Dance objects and artifacts have an amazing charge, but a dubious status, and I think they pose interesting questions with regard to the supposedly more stable status of art objects and the narratives to which they are made to adhere. But *INVERSIONS*, in 2014, the work I made for Frieze Projects, was the first time I made what would normally be called a performance. The work was entirely shaped by the context of the fair and by my questions about how a performance might exist within its particular energy. It also became a frame for a set of invitations I was able to make to two ballet companies, to choreographer Lorena Randi, and to



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Kim Gordon and Juliana Huxtable, none of whom were intended to be compatible with one another, but rather singular in their roles within the setting I devised. Juxtaposed in the entirety of their internal and external contradictions—to bring a way of working over from “curating.” I resisted a performance with traditional staging conventions, turning the process of a ballet inside-out, rather than presenting it frontally and temporarily. There were long pauses and interruptions, things let to happen as they happened, and also simultaneous intensities—rehearsals and improvisation. And moments that also felt “on stage.”

The antic ebb and flow of the art fair’s audience became an important element of the work. It was fascinating to see people try to negotiate this kind of time and viewership that was very different from how one is supposed to “use” and “do” an art fair, and what to do with that space of uncertainty as well as the pleasure of viewing something that is forming without a purpose.

CW

It’s a tough call to negotiate this highly purpose-driven context, the fair. A losing battle so far as inviting any kind of concentration that Anne Teresa was talking about. But how to “perform” as a question of asserting visibility is surely a key part of what it means to make work today, so in this way, the fair is a harsh frontline context in which to experiment! Whatever criticisms there are of ambient modes of museum performance, it remains in contrast with even the most atomized autonomy of the conventional gallery situation.

Heimo, speaking of conventional viewing modes, I was especially curious about your exhibition at MUDAM, in Luxembourg, where you separated the theatrical quality of the sculpture from the pictorial quality of your painting. How do these two approaches to illusion coexist, for you?

HZ

It does not matter whether the objects/sculptures are theatrical or not. For the perception of things in a space, we want to and have to go beyond and around them—in order to understand them. With pictures, a similar thing can be experienced; they, too, encourage the viewer to observe them from various distances.

In order to be able to move freely, I was showing paintings and sculptures in separate rooms. The viewers should not trip over things when they step back to view the paintings from different perspectives. Certainly, paintings are objects, and sculptures are pictorial. Through the spatial separation of sculptures and paintings, the differences can be experienced—probably in a better way.

CW

And referring to your Bregenz show, Heimo: what about the language of plinths, podiums, platforms, screens, and of furniture such as shelves: it is as though your work is a perfect setting for the display of something else, or for some action to take place?

HZ

It is exactly what it is meant to be: objects, sculptures in an exhibition. The dimensions result from the common use of such objects. Take shelves, for example. We have certain experiences and ideas of the usage of those objects. Curiously, we talk to them: Where is this book? Can I put this on here? and the like. We have ideas and knowledge of their character and style. I try to show their structure in a very reduced form. And with “reduction/reduce,” I refer to the fundamental form of things, in order to make their impact/effect/appeal comparable. In the exhibition design, we are confronted with these things as sculptures, and in this setting, we can reflect our vision and use of everyday objects. In other site-specific installations, the sculptural aspects of those objects would step behind their usage as a display. However, the exhibition in Bregenz focused on the inspection rather than their application.

ADK

In dance, the fact is that we create an experience. The fact that we don’t create something that can be speculated (sold) and that with dance, we are doomed to disappearance... let’s celebrate that, no?

CW

Yes, absolutely. It’s beautiful. But the interesting thing is, since the so-called dematerialization of the art object in the sixties, art needs to learn some things from theater and dance. Learning about calibrating time and configuring spectatorship. These issues are relevant to objects too, I think.

ASK

Yeah, but maybe that doesn’t really work in the market.

CW

I’m talking more about sharing a work. I was thinking, for example, of the artist Senga Nengudi, who used to collaborate with a dancer, Maren Hassinger. She’s part of the African American Studio Z movement in the 1970s. She chose to make sculpture out of women’s tights and sand: stretching the nylons and pinning them on the gallery wall because she said that she liked the idea that she could turn up with her handbag and open it and make her work. And her sculpture was as much about portability and disappearance as the performance that she staged with Hassinger around it. But of course, you’re right, galleries are selling them as objects. But that comes after the intention of the artist.

Yet my point is that “performance” is the catchall under which live art, dance, theater appear in galleries and museums. Shannon Jackson identifies the elements of performance (describing an emergent context of performance studies) as “gesture, image, space, voice, facial expression, corporeal motion, and collective gathering” but leaves out materials, which in my view (and in both of your work) can appear as performers or performative elements.

Without wishing to replicate the casual application of terms to do with performance in the art world that Nick describes, is the “choreographic” a better term to approach this continuum between bodies moving and things? What does choreography mean for you both, in terms of considering our encounter with an aesthetic space that includes all of these elements, as well as / in relation to the art object? The idea that beyond dancing per se, choreography is a way of stabilizing or ritualizing a “state of movement” seems more and more important—as does the idea of witnessing, and collective gathering as the foundation of the experience of art.

NM

I see choreography as a mode of organization and reorganization, of working with material over time to find new forms and sequences, as well as bringing historical material to life in the present. The walls of Eileen Gray’s villa E-1027 are stenciled with commands that prescribe uses (and misuses) for its different spaces: ENTER SLOWLY, LAUGHTER FORBIDDEN, BIRD SANCTUARY... I am fixated on the architecture of encounter, which vibrates with my own memories of experiences of viewership or spectatorship. Of being confronted with an object or an event that produces new language. Choreography becomes a spatial organization, a pacing, a delimiting of spaces. What I am curious about now is the meeting of choreography with the archive, with the traces and artifacts of movement, or how thinking through their status destabilizes the status of the artwork.

ADK

Well, firstly, I am a choreographer; therefore I work on organizing movement through time and space with a certain energy. The time and space of a theater and the time and space of a museum remain fundamentally different. Secondly, what I like so much about dancing is embodying: the presence of the body as a medium. Thirdly, I am interested in collective experience: in relations, relationships between people, whether in the theater or the museum. Ultimately, in the museum, the space and time allow you as an individual to decide how to attend to the work. When people get connected, the intensity of it can be really quite beautiful. I feel that at WIELS, you had people coming back day after day. People said, “I want to be here.”

CW

And the constellation of an audience group of people you see is a kind of choreography of their free will. It’s not because they’re expected by convention to sit in seat number E14 for an hour? I also find that kind of mobile architecture of the audience quite thrilling.

ADK

Yes, yet within these shifting contexts, the central question that remains, maybe, is how you can create stillness and concentration. Sometimes the work needs that.



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Left - Nick Mauss installation view at 303 Gallery, New York, 2015.
© Nick Mauss. Courtesy: 303 Gallery, New York. Photo: John Berens

Below - Nick Mauss, *Answering a glance, glance up* installation view at Campoli Presti, Rome, 2012-2013. Courtesy: the artist and Campoli Presti, London / Paris



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In the Studio

Heimo Zobernig

Vienna, Austria

Galerie
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» To be making something is really magnificent.«

Heimo Zobernig is undoubtedly one of today's leading contemporary artists. He has, perhaps more than any other artist, been highly influential not only within the Austrian art scene, but has also been an equally successful protagonist in international discourses on art and the wider exhibition world. More recently, Zobernig was awarded the Roswitha-Haftmann-Preis, Europe's highest endowed award in visual arts. We met him in his studio in Vienna, where we spoke with him among others about his years at the theater, whether one should prepare art students for the art market, and about Vienna as an art metropolis.

Last year was quite an exciting one for you. You participated in the Venice Biennale staging the Austrian Pavilion. That must have been both work intensive and emotionally quite exhausting.

Yes, last year was very exciting. The days preceding the Biennale and the Biennale itself were truly exhausting, because people expected me to answer many questions. The management of the Biennale wasn't really a problem because I had a wonderful, very professional team.

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I've organized larger exhibitions but there is usually less hype than in Venice; that is what distinguishes the Biennale. In Venice every one is interested in you and has an opinion about your work. In a museum's exhibition things are more specific, also public perception and subsequent feedback are not as immediate.

On the one hand it is an honor to stage the pavilion of a country in the Venice Biennale. On the other hand one receives the label "state artist".

I don't believe that one still thinks in these categories today, things have changed. The art world has very different borders. We live in a democratic society in which the label state artist no longer exists; I have never had it thrust upon me. In Austria and many other European countries the curator's decisions are completely free and independent, and accepted by the cultural authorities, although this is certainly not true for all countries that participate in the Biennale.

Long before you knew that you would stage the exhibition in the Austrian Pavilion in the Giardini in Venice you had played with the idea and even mentioned in another interview that your concept could have been quite different.

That's true. But these ideas were already obsolete at the time when I received the official invitation. I more or less began completely anew. However, in addition to the two large sculptural installations that form the floor and ceiling, another sculpture might have been installed in the space. It was an opportunity to realize a first large bronze sculpture that I had planned for quite some time and included the idea for the architectural conception but with the option that I could decide whether I wanted to show it or not as soon as I saw the result. For me it was clear from the beginning that I had to have this option until the end.

What would have changed for you?

Had this bronze sculpture been additionally installed in the pavilion, it would have been clear that the conception was about this sculpture, but that was precisely what I did not want. It was Yilmaz Dziewior, the curator of the Austrian Pavilion, who adhered to the idea of adding the bronze sculpture the longest, but eventually it was installed at Kunsthaus Bregenz where the interaction of the intended relationship was possible because the bronze sculpture and the black object were placed at some distance from each other. The figure looked towards the black cube so that a similar situation resulted as in the Mies van der Rohe Pavilion in Barcelona with the Georg Kolbe sculpture.

You are an artist who develops very concrete concepts that determine precisely how a project is to be realized in an exhibition space? Which role does the curator play in your case?

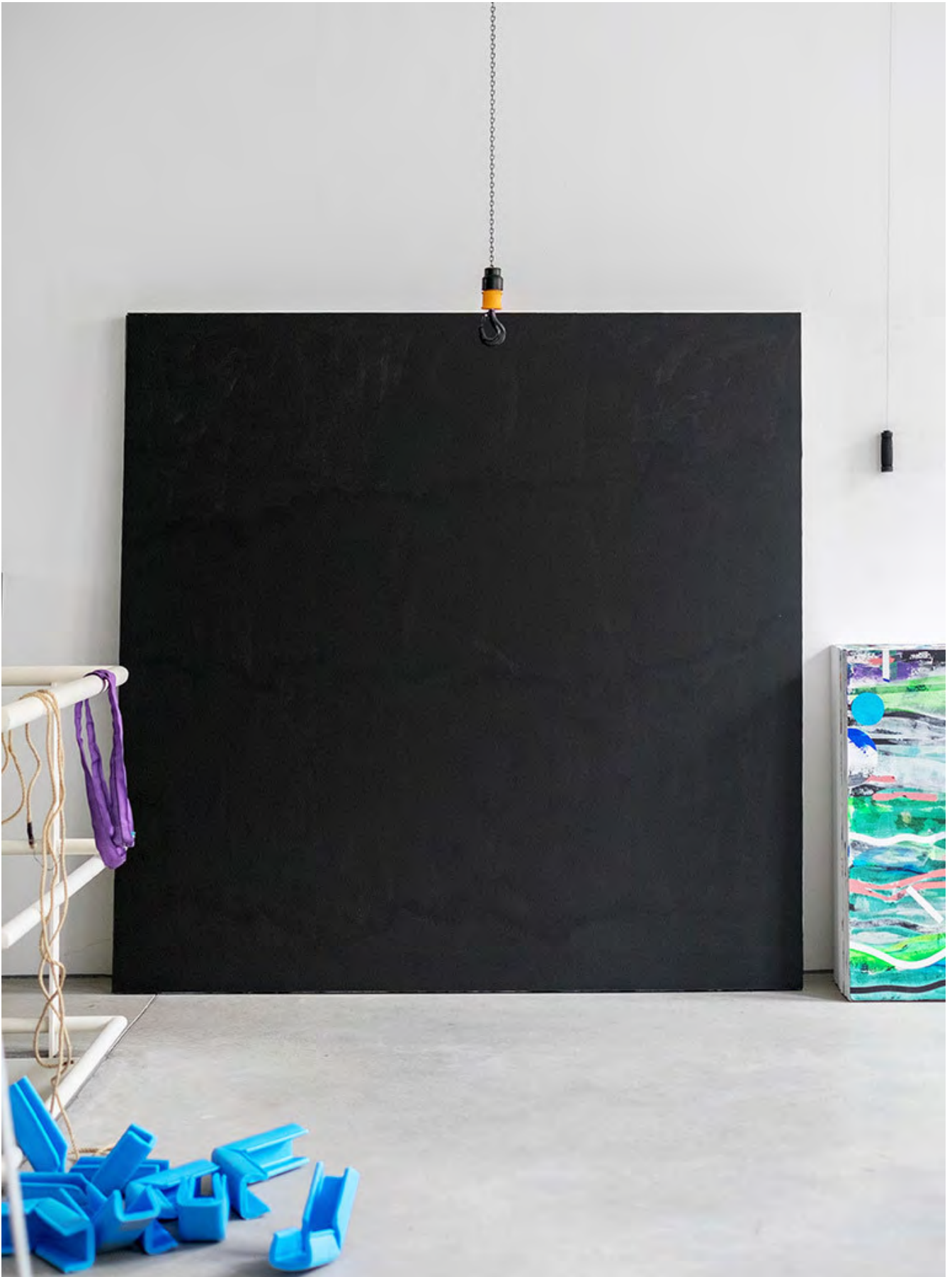
While it is certainly important for an artist to develop clear concepts, one may possibly underestimate all the other necessary conditions that have to be coordinated for an exhibition to be successful. This is the curator's achievement. Curators are very important and helpful as partners in the dialog when discussing the work.

Interviews with you began in 1977 when you moved from Kärnten to Vienna. What happened before that?

The wish to move to Vienna! I visited Vienna for the first time when I was in fourth grade. At the time it was customary for students from the city to spend one week in the country and for students from the country to come for one week to Vienna. When we stood in front of the Art Academy at the Schillerplatz in Vienna, my teacher who was also my German, drawing and sports teacher said, "One day Heimo will study here!" The next day, we stood in front of the Technical University at the Karlsplatz and he said the same thing. That irritated me because I wasn't sure if he had forgotten what he had said the day before. Eventually he was right, I did both; at age fourteen I went to a school for machine engineering.

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Installation view 3rd floor, Kunsthaus Bregenz

Photo: Markus Bretter, © Heimo Zobernig/Kunsthaus Bregenz/Bildrecht, Wien, 2015

Before you studied art you studied set design?

That was not really my intention: it was something of a detour because I was not accepted into a painting class. I was interested in literature but literature was not offered in other study branches, however theater set design was offered, I found it to be congenial. There were many who studied set design and did not, like myself, appreciate the theater that much. I may have only been in a theater twice before that.

You didn't find access to the theater through the theater per se?

No, certainly not out of love and passion for this art form, because the two times while I was in middle school did not inspire in me a passion for the theater. Yet I turned relatively quickly into a theater person, because everything that happened at the time was very new and interesting. The theater of the 1970s was quite avant-garde. Much was in movement at the time and one anticipated from the theater that the visual arts and performance would develop a new art form. However, as we now know it did not quite develop that way. I have worked early as an assistant for various theaters and I soon had the opportunity to create my own stage sets. At age 23 the city of Frankfurt invited me to the Schauspielhaus for really spectacular plays like Heiner Müller's »Quartett« or Peter Handke's »Über die Dörfer«. As a young artist you could not have imagined anything better. But very quickly I found out that I did not want to do this over a long term. With some foresight I believe, I therefore decided to stop the theater work. I am quite certain I would not have been taken seriously as an artist otherwise.

Your teacher prophesied that you would study art. Was there ever a specific time when you realized that you would like to earn money with art, to support your life with it?

During my studies and also afterwards I did not think about such existential things. There were scholarships and promotions to apply for and on which to survive. That still exists. At that time we didn't have much money, but I've never felt it. On the contrary! I have felt very rich. When I created my first public work together with Alfons Egger in the »Dramatic Center « in Vienna we were asked how we intended

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to realize it, were we the sons of millionaires? We had just done our work and not thought about things like that. We researched the right institutions and addresses that would be prepared to provide support to us and we were able to realize what we had intended. However, not-doing was rather the thing to aspire towards at the time. Vienna's art scene was quite transparent, a few intellectuals and artist-bohemians. The highest art was to be clever and to be able not to reveal oneself by somehow having to sell something. Not-doing was the highest art.

You've taught in Hamburg and Frankfurt am Main. Now you are a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. In comparison to the earlier part of your career, how have times changed today?

Everything has changed radically! There is no comparison to how national and regional art once was and how international it is now. When I began to teach, the predominant language in the classroom was colloquial German, today it is English. Education too, has changed tremendously. Since its foundation, there has always been an extensive theoretical education –philosophy, mathematics, geometry, and similar disciplines have always been taught, but in recent years, theory and history have been greatly extended. The range is now fantastic. These days we actually have to watch that the artistic practice stays remains as the main subject.

Has the relationship between professors and students changed?

Yes, the hierarchical distance between students and teachers is not as great as I have experienced it in the past. During my time one was happy to leave the academy and go where one could receive a true response to what one was creating as a young contemporary artist. Today teachers and students understand each other so well and the students feel so comfortable that they don't want to leave the academy. As might be expected, revolt is no longer intrinsic to the academic experience.

One may get the impression that self-marketing as an artist or thinking in terms of market strategies during training is playing an increasingly bigger role. Is this impression deceptive?

Yes, it is deceptive. I experience my students rather as interested in cultivating the improvement of the quality of artistic thinking and practice. In the process of speaking about what one is doing communication plays a big role. This was not the case thirty years ago. During their education, architects for example are taught how to speak with their clients, how to understand them and how to be able to present their plans better. That is exemplary. However, I tell the students time and again that talking about art is very important, but that it may be wiser to say nothing at the right moment. The artistic intention should be communicated primarily through the work itself. Strategies of marketing are not a complicated matter; they don't need to be taught in a seminar.

In your opinion students should not be involved in the art market too early?

What the art market offers as a temptation or promise is not a central theme for our education. It is rather about finding out what one wants to do in order to build an existence that is based upon solid artistic work, or one will have difficulties. I consider it very important, that during their years at the academy students have the freedom to find out what they are capable of, to compare themselves to others in order to see whether what they are doing may be enduring. And that is exactly what the students want to know and experience: - the development of a work in which they can believe and which is relevant in the discussion.

Have you ever doubted your decision and questioned art?

No never! I have always felt it to be right. To this day, I can truly say that making something is really magnificent. When I was young it was not that important, I mean the making, at that time I thought more of being. From early on my life plan was to be able to determine my obligations myself and now it is so: I make and I have the freedom to wait for the indication that shows me what it is I want to make, but do not have to.

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Heimo Zobernig, *untitled*, 2014 (detail), Cardboard, wood glue, synthetic resin varnish, plywood, 215 x 88 x 77 cm, Courtesy of the artist, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2014

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You often work with simple, cost-effective materials – even cardboard or plywood. Is this based on pragmatism or is the choice of material only a means to an end?

That is not easy to answer. If it hadn't included the provocation not to use the traditional materials of sculpture I would probably not have tackled it the way I did. Sometimes I was convinced that there was also an ecological component involved that I still find exciting as an ethical component of the trade. But art can't be determined by these aspects as one cannot answer everything that results in questions. Material is always a means to an end. It is the medium of what one wants to realize. In the early days I often used to build in a model-like way. Model building materials have a rather transient character. One achieves results faster or immediately. Perhaps that has something to do with the impatience to achieve quickly what one wants. To build something solidly and with an expensive finish naturally takes time – and it must be paid for.

Are you impatient?

Well, to wait for a long time until something is finished that is ... (laughs) ... one way or another. Patience – I do have it. I have made sculptures from toilet paper rolls. Sometimes that took two, three years before

Collectors Agenda

I felt they had reached a sense of completion. I started with one roll and had no idea where it would lead. The first roll I let turn to the left, the next to the right and this went from one piece to the next. Here the material determines the process, because the glue that I used to connect the rolls dried slowly. It could have been done faster with a glue pistol. But in this case I didn't want to do that because it was not a suitable tool for working with cardboard.

Since you came to Vienna both art education and the Vienna art scene have changed tremendously. Yes, that's true. Vienna is turning more and more into a lively contemporary art city. When I came here years ago, I had no idea how the whole thing functioned, which role galleries played. At the time there were only a few and most doors were closed. That has changed tremendously. More and more professional galleries established themselves, like Peter Pakesch with whom I've worked with for a long time. At the same time, producer galleries have been founded by artists who have created their own locations – so-called off-spaces. Very exciting institutions like the »Depot« have established themselves, they almost act like academies, organizing lectures and initiating projects. All in all, in both education and training as well in the art scene, Vienna has become much more international.



Collectors Agenda

You are one of Austria's most important artists. Would it not have been easier for your career to go abroad and to work directly in the cities in which the art market booms?

That is really not so easy since these regional centers are often very hermetic. It is not easy to make a career in London as a non-British person or as a non-American breakthrough in New York. I realized that quite early. Many of my colleagues who followed this call have failed there. If I were living in New York for example my resources might not be sufficient to exist as a successful artist. Besides, it was always very important to me to travel a lot and I have always taken the opportunity to spend time here and there. And I haven't received a lot of attention in Austria – I've been much more successful abroad. When my son was born it became clear to me that I wanted to be where my family was. I taught in Frankfurt and Hamburg, but I was commuting.

You have several studios in Vienna. How may we imagine a typical workday of Heimo Zobernig? Are you in your studio every day?

I am in my studio when I know what I want to do. I don't go into the studio and wait for something to happen. Where I have to go follows its own accord, I don't have to think about it. I go to the painting studio because I want to paint a picture. Or I spend a day in the office or I am in school or traveling, or nowhere ... Your publications follow one conception and therefore become part of your work. My books are not merely documentations. I found many catalogs in the 1980s quite uninteresting and therefore wanted to create publications that had more character. In the process I learned a lot through making mistakes. I also wanted to simplify things, to liberate myself from too many decisions, therefore I decided to always use the same script. Right now a publication about my publications is in process. It was a tremendous amount of work: to get out all the books, to photograph everything with the accompanying small texts.

You work a lot. That is the impression. Where do you get the inspiration?

I am quite surprised that I give this impression. My inspiration as well as my recreation derives from the excessive demand as well as from the condition of exhaustion that comes from both extremes: It can also come from films, concerts, lectures, and of course especially books. But I also like to go to places where absolutely nothing is happening.



Collectors Agenda

Galerie
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Interview: Michael Wuerges, Silvia Jaklitsch
Photos: Maximilian Pramatarov

**DEUTSCHER,
ÖSTERREICHISCHER
UND SCHWEIZER
PAVILLON**

56. Biennale di Venezia

PAUL TEASDALE Mit Ausnahme von Hito Steyerls schillernder Videoinstallation *Factory of the Sun* (2015) bietet der Deutsche Pavillon – eine Gruppenausstellung von Steyerl, Olaf Nicolai, Jasmina Metwaly & Philip Rizk sowie Tobias Zielony – leider eher fade Kost. Kurator Florian Ebner will unter dem Titel *Fabrik* aus dem Pavillon eine „Fabrik der politischen Erzählungen“ machen – ein sinnvolles Ziel?

PABLO LARIOS Der wohlgemeinte Ansatz von Ebner ist zwar hochaktuell, doch statt der angestrebten „produktiven Profanisierung“ kommt dabei eine eigenwillige Ästhetik der Ablenkung und Irreführung heraus. Man nehme nur die Hochglanz-Videoinstallation von Steyerl. Es sind gerade die visuellen Anreize ihrer Computerspiel-Parodie – eine umfangreiche Mischung aus Motion Capture, technischer Virtualisierung und sogar einem fiktiven, von der Deutschen Bank gestarteten Drohnenangriff –, die mich abschrecken. Bedenkt man, dass die heutige Kriegsführung ähnlich virtualisiert

schlagen muss, scheint der Titel des von Pamela Rosenkranz bespielten Schweizer Pavillons von Anfang an reichlich ignorant gewählt zu sein: *Our Product*. Es stellt sich die Frage, wer dieses „Wir“ ist und wer bestimmt, wer dazu gehört. Ich hätte das von Rosenkranz konzipierte, blubbernde Schwimmbecken mit „hautfarbener“ Flüssigkeit – abgeleitet von den Hauttönen in Renaissance-Gemälden – wohl als Kommentar auf „rassische Homogenität“ gelesen. Stattdessen aber greift das Begleit-Booklet auf eine beinahe faschistisch anmutende Sci-Fi-Poesie zurück, die alles andere als wasserdicht ist: „Die Natur hat Millionen Jahre gebraucht, um uns zu erschaffen“, „unsere gemeinsame Grundlage“, „fackelt den Überschuss ab“. Die Arbeit scheint den Betrachter einzuladen, eine eigene sinnliche Erfahrung zu machen, aber leider ist sie derart von ihrem eigenen, absolutistischen Denken erfüllt, dass sie jede vom Dogma der Künstlerin abweichende Lesart ausschließt.

PT Der von Heimo Zobernig bespielte Österreichische Pavillon dagegen könnte kaum offener sein. Hier ist eine seltsam „machohaft“ Zurückhaltung am Werk: kurzer Blick auf die Baupläne, ein missmutiger Strich hier, ein weiterer dort. Fertig. Lasst mich bis Mai in Ruhe.

PL Die „schwebende“ Deckenkonstruktion von Zobernig verhüllt die historisierenden Details des von Hoffmann und Kramreiter 1934 entworfenen Österreichischen Pavillons. Außerdem hat er einen neuen Boden installiert, durch den der Pavillon auf eine gleichmäßige, schwarze Ebene angehoben wird, darauf vier aggressiv-weiße Bänke. Durch die Verwandlung des Pavillons in eine Art Mausoleum verweigert sich die Arbeit dem geschichtlichen Kontext und verweist auf die Schwierigkeit der Präsentation in einem Pavillon-Kontext, der von Mal zu Mal anachronistischer wirkt. Wegen seiner stillen Selbstverneinung gehört er in diesem Jahr zu den besseren Länderpavillons.

PT Es war eine augenzwinkernde Verweigerung gegenüber jeder Form von erwartbarer Effekthascherei oder Selbstgefälligkeit, die üblicherweise mit der Repräsentation des eigenen Landes in Venedig einhergeht. „Sollen sie sich doch hinsetzen und den Garten bewundern. Das Wetter ist gut, und wir haben einen schönen Tag.“ Recht hat er. *Übersetzt von Harriet Fricke*

PAUL TEASDALE Aside from Hito Steyerl's vibrant film installation *Factory of the Sun* (2015), the German pavilion – a group presentation featuring Steyerl, Olaf Nicolai, Jasmina Metwaly and Philip Rizk and Tobias Zielony – was pretty lacklustre fare this year. With the title *Fabrik*, curator Florian Ebner intended to turn the pavilion into 'a factory of political narratives' – a productive ambition?

PABLO LARIOS Ebner's attempt was well-meaning and topical, but instead of the intended 'productive profanation' what resulted was a certain aesthetics of distraction and deception. Take the sheen of Steyerl's video installation. The visual allure of her spoof video game – a reaching mix of motion capture, technological virtualization, even a fictionalized drone attack launched by Deutsche Bank – contributed to what put me off about the work. Given how present conditions of war have been similarly virtualized (in their interfaces, but not their effects) I was left wondering why this project couldn't take a form that more truthfully bridges 'real' and 'spoof' interfaces – an actual video game, say. Instead, the would-be 'factory' produced just another toy; the pavilion proved to be just another temple.

PT An actual video game would have jumped straight to the conclusion, the product, whereas I read Steyerl as teasing out, albeit goofily, the political realities that underscore screen-based ecologies. The film's lustre, and our easy seduction, makes us complicit in the questionable politics it har-

bours. It was irritating but interesting. The concept of 'sunlight' she uses, somewhat ironically – as a generative and emancipatory metaphor: the immateriality of light, a cipher for digital 'reality', the speed of light, instantaneous networked connectivity – shines through the pavilion. Ebner's description of Nicolai's project as 'a shadow economy under the blazing sun' pointed to the sun as burden, the toil of the labourer under its hot rays. Metwaly and Rizk also used the 'work' of sunlight too, with the floor installation of sun-baked clay tiles (*Draw It Like This*, 2015) replacing the pavilion's marble floor, and with the drawn floorplan of the 'factory' from the film they also showed, *Out on the Street* (2015).

PL For me the tired metaphors of 'light' ironically obscured the works' legibility. By design there is a highly interesting ontology of representation in every technological product – one reliant on illusion and obscurity. What's to distinguish here the sun-blinded work of art from the product it refers to, or the scripted version of a Deutsche Bank press officer from the obscurantism of a Foxconn executive? Today, the simple-seeming product, the 'real' infomercial, the drone photograph all come out superior precisely on the aesthetic level, making the art 'about' it pale in comparison unless it is smarter in its techniques. Art has to go the other direction if it stands a chance in presenting its own artifice. We're back to Marinetti and his racing car.

PT Tobias Zielony's urgent, well-meaning project *The Citizen* (2015) presented the very 'reality' quotient you refer to: photographs of African migrants in Berlin and Hamburg laid out in the style of a newspaper, while in the middle of the room display boards showed articles on the plight of such migrants published in newspapers from their countries of origin. Stacks of the newspaper Zielony himself produced featured interviews with some of the migrants he had photographed. Zielony seemed to be pointing admirably to the moral dimension implicit in the media depictions of migrants, how images are never neutral, but his display overload seemed cold and disengaged. Similarly with Metwaly and Rizk's low-fi film *Out on the Street* (2015). A group of local men were asked to perform imagined work scenarios in a fictional factory – which looked like the set of Lars von Trier's 2003 film *Dogville* – that has been privatized and then closed. It seemed an interesting platform to speak to power relationships and the specific political realities in Egypt, but with what outcome?

PL I shared this feeling of disengagement with what should have been interesting material. Perhaps it was a curatorial question of combination and scale: the sheer quantity of Zielony's images and text, albeit engaging with media surplus and circulation, made the eye gloss over. Or, optimistically, maybe that was his point: disengagement as a critical tool.

PT Speaking of disengagement, Olaf Nicolai's *GIRO* (2015) was nowhere to be seen. Apparently it consists of a group of people working on the roof of the pavilion for the duration



REVIEWS



ist (hinsichtlich ihrer Interfaces, nicht ihrer Auswirkungen), stellt sich doch die Frage, warum Steyerl für ihr Projekt keine Form gefunden hat, die eine passendere Brücke zwischen „realen“ und „fiktiven“ Interfaces schlägt – beispielsweise ein echtes Computerspiel. Stattdessen produziert die Pseudo-„Fabrik“ nur ein weiteres Spielzeug – und der Pavillon wird wieder einmal zum Tempel.

PT Ein echtes Computerspiel hätte sich aber sofort geschlossen, hätte ein fertiges Produkt angeboten. Wie ich es sehe, will Steyerl, wenn auch auf etwas naive Art, die politischen Realitäten ausloten, die bildschirmorientierte Ökonomien untermauern. Der schöne Schein der Videoinstallation und unsere leichte Verführbarkeit machen uns zu Mitschuldigen an der fragwürdigen Politik, die die Installation thematisiert. Ein irritierender, aber mit Sicherheit interessanter Ansatz. Das Konzept von „Sonnenlicht“, das Steyerl gewissermaßen ironisch verwendet – als generative und emanzipatorische Metapher: die Körperlosigkeit von Licht, ein Code für digitale „Realität“, Lichtgeschwindigkeit, unser Verlangen nach sofortiger Netzwerkverbundenheit –, durchflutet gewissermaßen den gesamten Pavillon. Wenn Ebner die Arbeit

von Nicolai als „Schattenökonomie unter gleißender Sonne“ beschreibt, wird die Sonne zur Last, unter ihren heißen Strahlen gerät Arbeit zur Schinderei. Metwaly und Rizk nutzen ebenfalls die „Arbeit“ des Sonnenlichts: In ihrer Bodeninstallation (*Draw It Like This*, 2015) wird der Marmorboden des Pavillons durch sonnengetrocknete Tonziegel ersetzt, auf denen der Grundriss der „Fabrik“ aus ihrem ebenfalls gezeigten Video *Out on the Street* (2015) nachgezeichnet ist.

PL Für mich erschweren die abgenutzten Licht-Metaphern die Lesbarkeit der Arbeit ironischerweise eher. Es ist einfach so, dass jedes technische Produkt eine hochinteressante Ontologie der Repräsentation enthält – die von Illusion und Unklarheit abhängig ist. Wo aber ist hier der Unterschied zwischen dem von der Sonne geblendeten Kunstwerk und dem Produkt, auf das es sich bezieht? Was unterscheidet die Drehbuchversion eines Pressesprechers der Deutschen Bank von einem die Fakten verschleiernenden Manager von Foxconn? Heutzutage sind vermeintlich einfache Produkte, „echte“ Infomercials oder von Drohnen geschossene Fotos ja gerade in puncto *Ästhetik* besser gemacht. Sofern die Kunst, die sich mit diesen Phänomenen „befasst“, auf techni-

scher Ebene nicht cleverer ist, wirkt sie im Vergleich blass. Wenn Kunst überhaupt eine Chance haben will, die eigene Kunstfertigkeit zu präsentieren, muss sie sich in die andere Richtung entwickeln. Damit sind wir wieder beim Sportwagen von Marinetti angekommen.

PT Tobias Zielony präsentiert in seiner hochaktuellen, gut gemeinten Arbeit *The Citizen* (2015) genau dieses Realitätselement, von dem du sprichst: Fotos von afrikanischen Migranten in Berlin und Hamburg, im Stil eines Zeitungslayouts angeordnet, dazu in der Raummitte Schaukästen mit Artikeln über die Misere dieser Migranten, veröffentlicht in Zeitungen aus ihren Herkunftsländern. Von Zielony selbst produzierte Zeitungen enthalten Interviews mit einigen der von ihm fotografierten Migranten. Einerseits scheint Zielony engagiert auf die moralische Dimension hinzuweisen, die in der Mediendarstellung von Migranten implizit enthalten ist, schließlich können Bilder niemals neutral sein; andererseits lässt die Überfrachtung des Displays seine Arbeit kalt und unbeteiligt wirken. Ähnliches lässt sich auch über das Low-Fi-Video *Out on the Street* von Metwaly und Rizk sagen. Darin stellt eine Gruppe von ägyptischen Arbeitern erfundene Arbeitsszenarien in einer fiktiven Fabrik nach, die erst privatisiert und dann geschlossen wurde – und stark an das Filmset von Lars von Triers *Dogville* aus dem Jahr 2003 erinnert. Das hätte eigentlich eine interessante Plattform sein können, um die Machtverhältnisse und besonderen politischen Gegebenheiten in Ägypten zu diskutieren – nur mit welchem Ergebnis?

PL Auch ich habe den Eindruck, dass hier im Grunde interessantes Material teilnahmslos präsentiert wird. Vielleicht ist es aber ein kuratorisches Problem der Größe und Zusammenstellung: Obwohl sich die Bilder und Texte von Zielony mit dem Überangebot und der Zirkulation der Medien auseinandersetzen, führt ihre bloße Quantität das Auge in die Irre. Vielleicht geht es aber, jetzt einmal optimistisch gesehen, genau darum: Teilnahmslosigkeit als kritisches Instrument.

PT Wo wir schon bei Teilnahmslosigkeit sind: Olaf Nicolais Arbeit *GIRO* (2015) bleibt fast unsichtbar. Angeblich besteht sie aus einer Gruppe von Leuten, die während der Biennale auf dem Dach des Pavillons arbeiten. Sie stellen dort „Bumerangs“ her und schleudern sie hin und wieder in die Giardini hinaus. Jede Woche werden einige dieser Objekte an Straßenverkäufer verteilt, die sie dann verkaufen sollen. Der Rückzug aufs Dach wirkt dabei wie eine Weigerung, sich im Spektakel des Events zu „engagieren“ und die Erwartungen der Besucher und des Kurators zu erfüllen. Arbeit als eine Form des schüchternen Widerstands. Diese Haltung gefällt mir ganz gut.

PL Statt Widerstand demonstriert der Schweizer Pavillon zweifelhaft Uniformität. Im Kontext der benachbarten Hauptausstellung, die sich mit einer Art würdevollem Scheitern in Bezug auf Fragen zu Pluralismus, Unterrepräsentation, Amalgamierung, Rasse und Migrationsbewegungen herum-

of the biennale fabricating 'boomerangs' and occasionally tossing them out into the Giardini. Every week a number of these objects will be given to local street hawkers to sell. It seems that the retreat to the roof resisted 'engaging' with the spectacle of the event, the audience, the curator's expectations. Work as a form of shy resistance. I quite liked that.

PL Instead of resistance, the Swiss Pavilion, in contrast, presented a rather dubious uniformity. In the context of the neighbouring main exhibition that grappled with a kind of graceful failure with questions of pluralism, underrepresentation, amalgamation, race and itinerancy, Pamela Rosenkranz's title felt coolly ignorant from the get-go – *Our Product*. Just who is this 'we', and who determines such a grouping? I might have read Rosenkranz's bubbling pool of 'flesh'-toned pink liquid – derived from the skin tones of Renaissance paintings – as a comment on racial homogeneity. Instead, the accompanying booklet reverted to Fascist-sounding sci-fi poetry that didn't hold water: 'It's taken millions of years for nature to build us'; 'our common foundation'; 'burn off the surplus'. The work seems to invite the viewer to engage in a sensory experience, but it's so burdened with its own absolutist thinking it bars any reading outside of the artist's dogma.

PT Heimo Zobernig's Austrian pavilion, on the other hand, couldn't have been more open. It had a kind of macho diffidence to it: a quick look at the architectural blueprints, a grumpy line here, another one there. Done. Don't bother me till May.

PL Zobernig's 'floating' ceiling construction veiled historicizing details of Hoffmann and Kramreiter's 1934 Austrian pavilion. He also installed a new floor that levelled the pavilion into one clean, black plane, supporting four aggressively plain white benches. In the blank denial of history through this mausoleum-like intervention, the work pointed to problems of representation in a pavilion context that seems increasingly anachronistic. Quietly self-negating, it was among the better national pavilions this year.

PT It seemed a rather funny refusal of any form of expected showmanship or egotism tied to representing one's nation at Venice. 'Let them sit and admire the garden. The weather will be nice, it will be an enjoyable experience.' He was right.

Joshua Decker. «This is (not) Heimo Zobernig's project for the Austrian Pavilion of the 2015 Venice Biennale», *Art Review*, May, 2015, pp. 92 - 99, p. 173.

ArtReview

Heimo Zobernig

Galerie
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Venice Biennale

This is (not) Heimo Zobernig's project for the Austrian Pavilion of the 2015 Venice Biennale

by Joshua Decter



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Heimo Zobernig will represent Austria at the 56th Venice Biennale. At the initial time and place of this writing – Thursday, 12 March 2015, in Mexico City – I have no idea what Zobernig is planning for the Austrian Pavilion. And it is better not to know in advance. Why give it away before it needs to be given away? Several days later, as this writing continues in New York City, I remain in the dark. There's really no doubt that Zobernig is an excellent choice: he's arguably Austria's most significant living contemporary artist, having received a survey show in 2013 co-organised by the Reina Sofía, Madrid, and the Kunsthaus Graz. For his 2011 non-retrospective show at the Kunsthalle Zürich, the artist bathed the entire exhibition in red light, thereby playfully recoding the works and suggesting a kind of new-millennium *gesamtkunstwerk*. These recent shows, by the way, should be a cue for US institutions: it's about time for Zobernig to have a survey there too.

Still, I'd prefer to add something more than just another hagiographic essay to the already voluminous amount of writing (including my own) produced about this artist over the past few decades.

And so it occurred to me that to spice things up a bit, another path could be taken: speculate about what Zobernig *might* do in Venice. Of course, writing is not a crystal ball, and this text is not predictive engineering, yet it's possible to offer clues regarding what he might have in store for us at the Biennale. Or, rather, what will just have opened by the time this text goes public. At least one thing *seems* certain, even if this is more projection than speculation: Zobernig will engage with Josef Hoffmann's original design of the 1934 pavilion building. Given the artist's history of cannily rethinking art's interdependence with design and architecture, Hoffmann's early-modernist building would seem to be an ideal site for surgical tweaking.

Since the 1980s, often in dryly humorous, occasionally self-mocking neovaudevillian ways, Zobernig has deftly manipulated the modernist codes that underpin geometric abstraction in visual art, design, display and architecture. He amplifies

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than just another hagiographic essay
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this language not to destabilise the social space of art presentation, or to perform an orthodox form of institutional critique of the museum's power, but rather to underscore how exhibitions are always in some way constructed, even theatricalised situations. Zobernig synthesises supposedly opposed characteristics: a rigorous analysis of the spaces of art as a way to rethink interconnections between painting, sculpture, architecture, design, place and utilitarian things (ie, appurtenances and furnishings) on the one hand, and an irreverence regarding his own mastery, on the other. It's the contradictions simmering just beneath the surface that make Zobernig's work crackle and pop. I identify something of Michael Asher's context-driven dialectical spirit in him: the reality that art frames the institutional spaces it appears in and that those spaces in turn reframe the art (the architectural frame occasionally becoming the art, *per se*).

Zobernig seems intuitively to grasp spatial design both as a discipline with its own set of aesthetic principles, as well as an instrument for reengineering how publics encounter the places of contact between art and its frames. In his

oeuvre, exhibition design can become 'the art', and art can become the 'exhibition design'. Zobernig allows space to perform itself back to us, as a platform for art – even if the art, itself, becomes the platform, stage, podium, chair or other seemingly innocuous element to navigate built space. And though his work exudes the confident intelligence of a well-engineered grammar – a grammar developed through recursive, tautological reworkings of the language itself – there is also something that suggests it is not completely comfortable in its own skin. Or maybe I'm just thinking about Zobernig's videos, such as *Nr. 12* (1996) and *Nr. 24* (2007), wherein he appears, a bit awkwardly, *only* in his own skin, stripped naked to the world – the artist's body as an almost accidental vehicle for the

performance of intersections of televisual media, painting, sculpture, theatre, comedy and other phenomena. The body as the first and last architecture.

Ohne Titel (in red), 2011 (installation view,
Kunsthalle Zürich at Museum Bärengrasse, 2011).
© Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zürich.
Courtesy Kunsthalle Zürich

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opening pages, left *Untitled*, 2009, mixed media,
244 × 148 × 50 cm. Photo: Archive HZ. Courtesy the artist and
Simon Lee Gallery, London & Hong Kong
opening pages, right *Weißer Kubus (White Cube)*, 2002.
Photo: Mumok, Vienna. © the artist. Courtesy Mumok, Vienna

above Documentation of the making of a video
installation included in *Heimo Zobernig*, 1996,
Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago.
Courtesy Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago

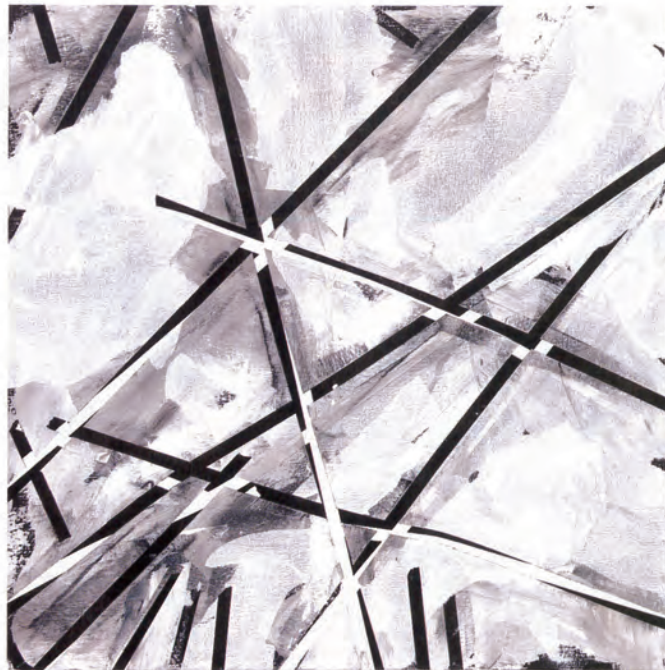
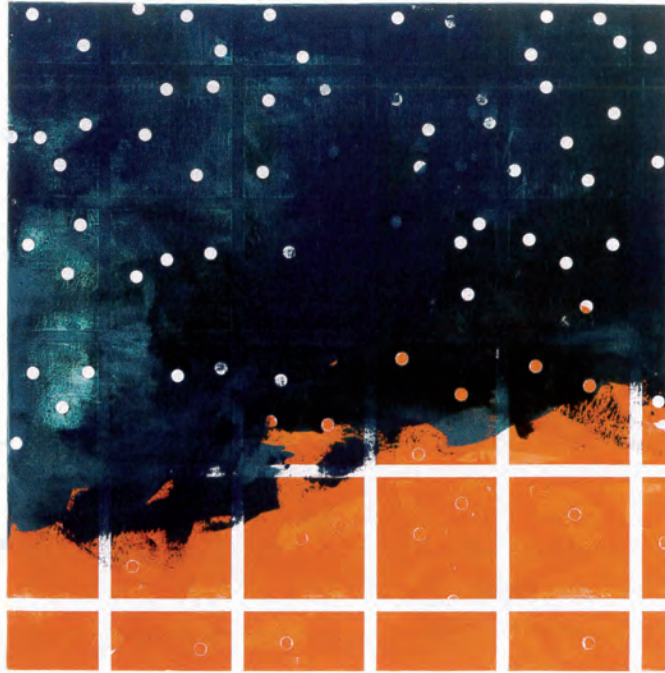
In 1995, I authored an essay titled 'Unmistakably Art, Anything But Art: Zobernig's Subversive Doubt', which originally appeared in the catalogue of the artist's exhibition at the Vienna Secession that year. What follows is a reassembling of fragments from the text, serving as a preamble to my speculations about what might happen in Venice:

- Art, for Zobernig, has at the very least a double life.
- Is Zobernig a conceptual artist? And what does it mean to be named a conceptual artist today? Is he producing meta-statements, or something akin to meta-art? Does anyone really know the difference between art and meta-art, anyway? And what do we make of Zobernig's smooth integration of painting into architecture – or is it the other way around? For his 1994 exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern, Zobernig deftly set into motion a number of conceptual and material conversions: painting into place, place into painting, painting into object, architecture into painting, painting into object, and architecture into object.
- Is this thing what it appears to be, or is it something else? Is it a painting? Architecture? A sculptural object? None of the above?
- Take away the apparent order established through systems of cultural distinction, and things begin to fall apart in the loveliest way imaginable.
- When is architecture both architecture and not architecture? When it is the product of an art activity that creates the similitude of architecture.
- And when is sculpture at once sculpture and not sculpture? When it is the product of an art activity that creates the similitude of sculpture.
- For instance, when is a café at once a café and not a café? When it is the product of an art activity that creates the similitude of a café.
- Zobernig produced the similitude of a café, and yet this similitude was also a real, functional, café.
- As a complex object/art object located within an architectural field of visible and invisible structural relations, a Zobernig painting becomes a material signifier for an intervention – a sign that becomes the index for site.
- For Zobernig, painting is camouflage for an art activity or an art condition. Painting is a mask that makes art look more like art.
- A Zobernig painting is certainly an actual painting, but it is also quite possibly something other than a painting.
- When is a painting at once a painting and not a painting? When it is the product of an art activity that creates the similitude of a painting.
- And when is an art object or art activity at once an art object/art activity and not an art object/art activity? When allegory takes over.
- The allegorical function of an art object or an art activity brings it into a narrative (or meta-narrative) relation with both everyday life and art. Art cannot be taken for granted. Why? Because it no longer takes itself for granted – if it ever did.
- As art begins to distance itself from itself in order to become more like an everyday thing, it moves closer to what it is already.
- In other words: an extraordinary-everyday thing.



Heimo Zobernig, 2012 (installation view, Palacio de Velázquez, Madrid, 2012).
Photo: Joaquín Cortés / Georg Petermichl.
Courtesy Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

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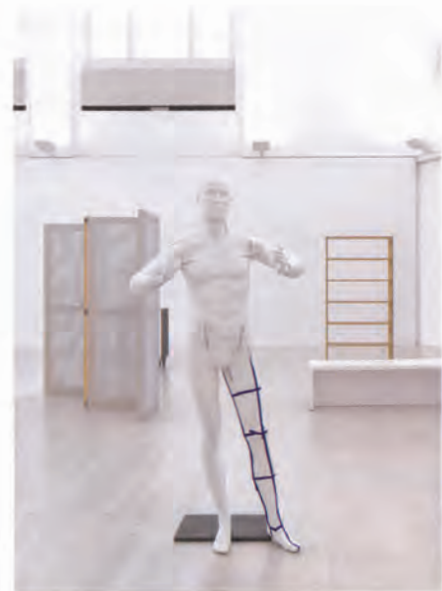


top *Untitled*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 100 × 100 cm.
Photo: Todd White Art Photography, London.
Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, London & Hong Kong

bottom *Untitled*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 100 × 100 cm.
Photo: Todd White Art Photography, London.
Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, London & Hong Kong

And to conclude: my speculations, educated guesses and questions regarding what Zobernig might do in Venice:

- A performance of the production of the exhibition; the exhibition conceived as a performance.
- Reenactments of early theatrical pieces in which elements of conceptual art and performance art converge.
- A selection of early geometric abstract paintings.
- Sculptures that play with minimalist tropes wherein painting and object merge.
- Shall we play tennis on a concrete slab conceived by Zobernig?
- The exhibition space as discursive and social space, as an exhibition.
- The White Cube Is Always a Temporary Construct Until It Is Not.
- Monochromes. Stripes. A grammar of geometric abstraction in painting.
- Are these tables, sculptures, both, or something else?
- The use-value of art determined by the public within the frame of a social contact zone engineered by the artist.
- A room within a room: the museum-as-architecture composing rooms for art inside other rooms.
- Documenta 9 restaged within the Venice Biennale: the public's access to the artworks is blocked.
- Backstage as frontstage as backstage: all the world's a stage, including the pavilion.
- Reconfiguring the extant walls of the pavilion to resemble the artist's initials: HZ.
- A video of the artist walking naked through Venice projected onto the exterior and interior walls of the pavilion.
- Event-space pavilion: a podium, seating, Internet café and other functional appurtenances doubling as art objects assembled for a series of readings, discussions, talks and other social gatherings during the Biennale.
- The exhibition as the grammar of the exhibition.
- The pavilion is furnished with chairs. The chairs may be repurposed from other places within the Biennale ecosystem, or from elsewhere in Venice. The chairs may be custom-made according to the artist's specifications, or designed in collaboration with another artist.
- A tribute to the late Franz West, with whom the artist collaborated, most notably for Documenta X.
- Chairs are artworks too. And not. And.
- Multiple projection screens placed in relation to one another to suggest a constellation of projection screens. The exhibition is always a *screen* for something else.
- A monochromatic painting is always just a painting and also a screen for something else.



top *Untitled*, 1999, Parsol blue glass, glass overlay, angle steel, lacquer, 74 × 74 × 74 cm. Photo: Archive HZ. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, London & Hong Kong

bottom *Heimo Zobernig*, 2014 (installation view, Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover, 2014). Courtesy Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover

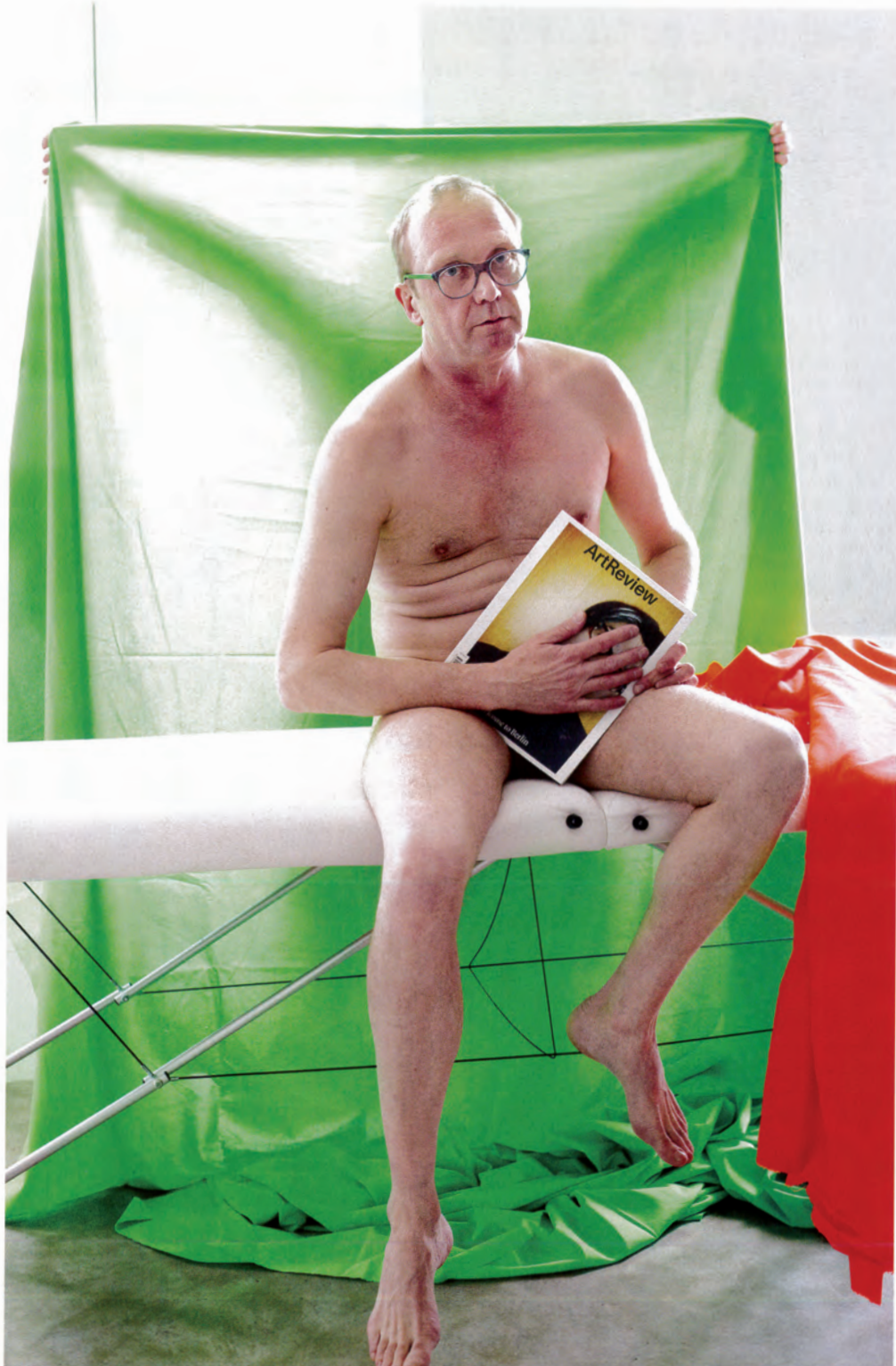
- Visitors to the pavilion are invited to design a Zobernig poster for the exhibition; the designs are displayed throughout the duration of the Biennale.
- Zobernig places reflective materials on the walls of the pavilion, mirroring the space. The space is doubled, and publics are doubled.
- A video showing the artist, naked, wrestling a malleable object; the video is accompanied by a presentation of the object itself, a kind of artwork-prop-artwork.
- Halfway through the run of the Biennale, Zobernig deinstalls the exhibition, and reengages the space with a different set of actions, gestures, works or things. The process is documented, and the video screened for the remainder of the Biennale.
- An immense white cube is built into the space, connecting two extant walls. It becomes a permanent feature of the pavilion.
- Mannequins are distributed throughout the space; some are displayed within structures, some clothed in T-shirts, while others are partially painted. The mannequins are stand-ins for the artist, or a surrogate public welcoming the public.
- Zobernig restages – in compressed and respatialised form – his entire 2003 Mumok survey in the pavilion.
- The pavilion becomes a black-box theatre for a series of theatrical productions and screenings.
- Zobernig redisplay replicas of three cabinets originally made for the 2003 exhibition at Kunsthaus Zug, *Josef Hoffmann and the Wiener Werkstätte*; the cabinets were designed and produced in a prison workshop in Switzerland by the artist, a master carpenter and two inmates of the prison. The pavilion as prison?
- Red curtains (theatrically lit) are draped over the extant walls of the pavilion, suggesting a stage set for an exhibition about to take place. Videos are presented behind certain curtains, and the artist's publication designs are archived in glass cases. The exhibition is a layering of facades.
- A bluescreen video features Zobernig, naked, accosted by three anonymous figures in chroma-key jumpsuits; they tape over his mouth and genitals, erasing body parts. The three tormentors heap art magazines and catalogues onto him, and wrestle him down, enacting a symbolic obliteration of the artist.
- Various grid paintings are installed on a large gridlike armature. Grids over grids. Additional paintings are displayed within cagelike structures that connote art storage systems; each day, a new work is taken out of 'storage' and displayed on the structure's exterior.
- The artist introduces a new wall into the Hoffmann building that exists, almost invisibly, as both sculptural object and architectural element, altering the public's experience of the liminal qualities of the pavilion space.
- Zobernig delegates all curatorial decisions to the commissioner of the pavilion, as an artistic-curatorial gesture.
- The commissioner decides to delegate back all curatorial responsibilities to the artist. ar



top Heimo Zobernig, 2009 (installation view, CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux, 2009).
Photo: F. Deval, Mairie de Bordeaux.
Courtesy CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux
bottom *Untitled*, 1993, synthetic resin lacquer on particle board, 202 × 102 × 35 cm. Photo: Archive HZ. Courtesy the artist

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Heimo Zobernig, Vienna, April 2015. Photo: Till Janz



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Portrait

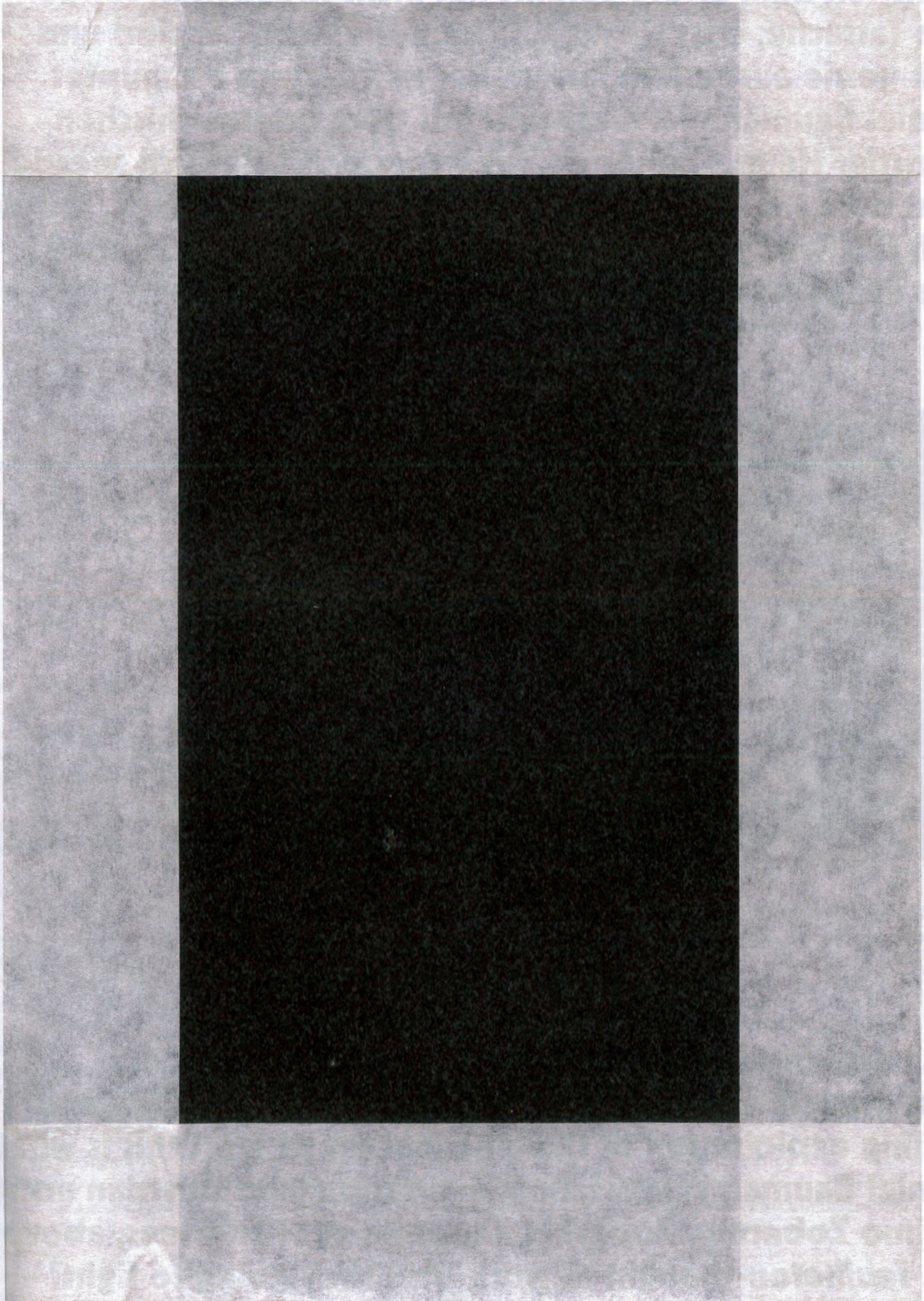
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Heimo Zobernig

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Nix ausgeliefert **No requirements**

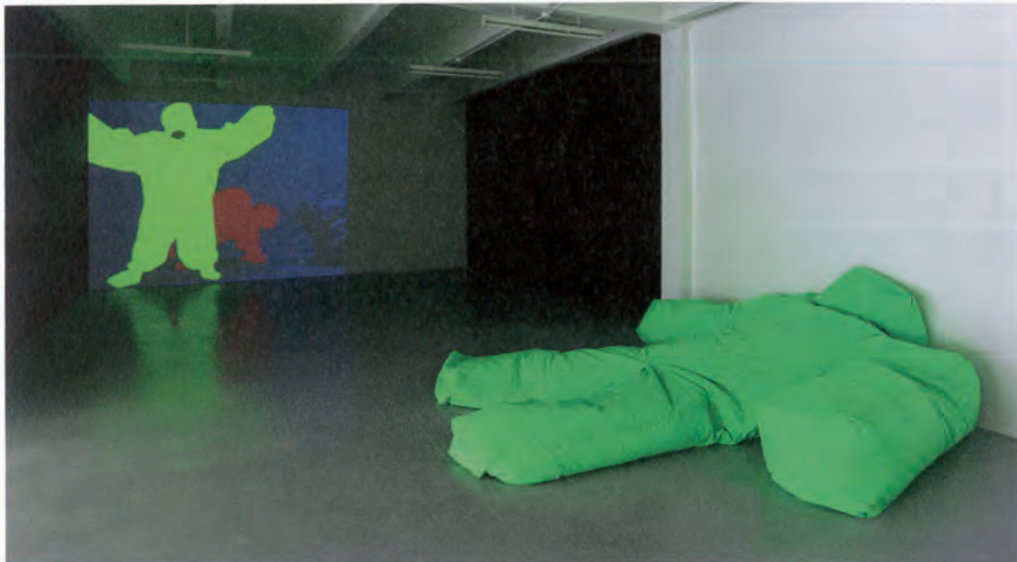


UNTITLED, 1986

Klebeband auf Karton / Tape on cardboard, 30 x 21 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

Jetzt sind wir soweit: alle Menschen sind Künstlerinnen und Künstler. Zum Erfolg geführt hat nicht Kreativität, sondern die Tatsache, dass sie als Allrounder einsetzbar sind und sich gerne ausbeuten lassen. Das mindestens behauptet Daniel Baumann im Gespräch mit dem österreichischen Künstler Heimo Zobernig. Dieser jedoch zeigt sich sperrig und sieht hier vor allem Feuilletondenken am Werk. Ob sie sich streiten? Wer auch immer Recht hat, eines ist sicher: das ewige Reden über den Kontext frisst die Kunst.

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NR. 24 WITH SCULPTURE, 2007

*Video, Skulptur (grünes Nesselgewebe aus Trevira Television CS, Styropor) / Video, sculpture (green Trevira Television CS - muslin, polystyrene), 47 × 329 × 188 cm, Installationsansicht / Installation view Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris 2012
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris*

It's happened: everyone's an artist. It isn't creativity that has led to success, but rather the employability and willing exploitation of the all-rounder. At least this is what Daniel Baumann claims, in conversation with Austrian artist Heimo Zobernig. Zobernig keeps his cool and sees, above all, feuilleton-thought at work. Are they going to fight? Whoever is right, one thing is certain: all this endless talk about context is eating up art.

D Daniel Baumann: *Wie ist das mit dem Künstlersein?*

Heimo Zobernig: Es gibt Momente, da finde ich es ganz besonders gut, das Künstlersein, aber auch die Momente, in denen ich es gänzlich vergesse, schätze ich sehr.

Du wirst als Maler, Bühnenbildner, Zeichner, Plastiker, Performer, Videokünstler, Architekt, Buch- und Ausstellungsgestalter, Theoretiker bezeichnet und bist seit über dreißig Jahren tätig. Was hat dich daran interessiert, diese Rollen zu übernehmen, dich jeweils anderen Abhängigkeiten anzuliefern?

Nix ausgeliefert. Das ist alles irgendwie eins, in aller Freiheit, geleitet vom Gestaltungszwang. Das Material, das Medium, ist der Widerstand beim Formen. Eine Skulptur ist ein Bild ist ein Film ... Als ich vor über dreißig Jahren angefangen habe, waren die Disziplinen durch die Dekade davor ordentlich durcheinander gekommen. Sich auf eine zu beschränken war damals eher die Ausnahme. Für manche hatte das ja auch existentielle Gründe gehabt. Zum Beispiel grafische Aufträge zu machen, um Geld zu verdienen. Es gab, ich glaube Anfang der 1990er, den Begriff „Slash People“, das meinte, dass auf der Visitenkarte mehrere Praktiken aufgeführt waren – Design/Sculpture/Video. Aber irgendwie ist das eh normal, dass man als Künstler oder Künstlerin mal dies oder das macht.

Ich frage deshalb, weil mir scheint, dass Deine Arbeit von Anfang an diese Vorstellung des „freien Künstlers“ mitvehielt hat, mit ihr spielt. Es gibt diese selbstbewusste Bescheidenheit im Material (Karton, Grundfarben, usw.) und das Sich-in-den-Dienst-Stellen. Es kommt aber nie pole-

E Daniel Baumann: *Tell me about being an artist.*

Heimo Zobernig: There are moments when I really enjoy being an artist, but I also really appreciate those moments when I completely forget about it.

You have been variously described as a painter, stage designer, draughtsman, sculptor, performer, video artist, architect, book and exhibition designer, and theoretician, and have worked in these fields for over 30 years. What interested you in taking on these roles? Were you interested in subjecting yourself to other requirements?

No requirements. Somehow these many roles are actually one; I can pursue them all freely, driven by a compulsion to make. The material, or medium, provides resistance during the shaping process – a sculpture is a painting is a film ... When I started out over 30 years ago, the disciplines had become thoroughly mixed up as a result of what happened in the previous decade. At the time, it was more of an exception to limit yourself to just one. For some people, it also had to do with making a living – for example, they did graphic

design jobs to earn money. At the beginning of the 1990s, I think, the term “slash people” was in common use. It referred to the way people listed several practices on their business cards: designer/sculptor/video artist, and so on. But actually it's normal for an artist do to a bit of this and a bit of that.

I'm asking because it seems to me that your work articulated and played with this idea of the “free artist” right from the start. You had a self-conscious modesty regarding materials (cardboard, primary colours, and so on) and the idea of putting yourself at the service of others. But it never came across as polemical – unlike those works that loudly proclaim the start or end of something. Am I mistaken, or does nobody talk about the role of the artist anymore? Everyone talks about the market, or how the economy determines relationships, but the artist as a figure has disappeared, or has become irrelevant, or both. Nowadays artists write their own press releases, buy back their own works on the secondary market, and produce trailers for their own shows. Everyone is more of a slash person than we first thought. Or is this description off the mark?

misch dabei, wie von jenen, die laut das Ende oder den Anfang von etwas verkünden. Täusche ich mich, oder spricht heute niemand mehr von der Rolle des Künstlers? Alle sprechen vom Markt oder wie die Ökonomie die Beziehungen bestimmt, aber der Künstler als Figur ist verschwunden bzw. irrelevant bzw. alles gleichzeitig. Er schreibt ja auch die Presse release jetzt selbst, kauft auf dem Sekundärmarkt die eigenen Bilder zurück und macht Trailer für seine Shows. Alle sind mehr Slash People, als wir je dachten. Oder ist das falsch beschrieben?

Wie schon erwähnt folge ich einem Gestaltungszwang. Mein Verhältnis dazu ist im Laufe der Zeit ein sehr professionalisiertes geworden. Das basiert auf Kompetenz und natürlich auch auf einer Ethik – gerne Haltung genannt. Von Haltung spricht man zur Zeit ja nicht mehr so wie in den 80ern. Das finde ich aber auch gut so, da hatte man Haltung so stark in den Vordergrund gestellt, vor das Formale. Lieber nichts tun als das Falsche machen.

Ich finde keineswegs, dass alle vom Markt sprechen. Wenn ich mit meinen Freunden oder Studenten diskutiere, ist das nicht das große Thema, mein Alltag ist vom Machen bestimmt und nicht vom Geld Zählen. Ich habe natürlich auch bemerkt, dass das Feuilleton sich zur Zeit total darauf fokussiert. Das finde ich ziemlich öde, weil viel Lärm um ein kleines Segment im ganzen Kunstfeld gemacht wird. Da wendet man sich besser an diese Autoren und fragt sie, warum sie an der Kunst nichts Interessanteres finden.

Selbst seine Presse release zu schreiben und sich um die Kunst als Ware zu kümmern ist ja für jede Künstlerin ein guter Schritt in die Selbstermächtigung, eben nicht dem Wohlwol-

As I already mentioned, I am driven by a compulsion to make. My relationship to this has become very professionalised over time. It is based on skill and of course an ethics – often called attitude. But attitude isn't talked about today as it was in the 80s. I think that's good though; at the time, attitude was pushed to the forefront, and it took priority over the formal. It was better to do nothing than to make a wrong move.

I don't think in the least that everyone is talking about the market. When I talk to my friends or students, it isn't really a big topic of discussion, and my day-to-day life is determined by what I make, and not by counting money. Of course I have also noticed that the newspaper *feuilleton* are currently obsessed with this subject. I find it rather tedious that so much fuss is being made about such a small part of the overall art scene. It would make more sense to ask these journalists why they can't find anything more interesting to write about when it comes to art.

Writing one's own press releases and being concerned about art as a com-



oben / above UNTITLED, 2010

Polyesterfigur, transparente Spiegelfolie, Stahl, Lampe/ Polyester figure, transparent-mirrored foil, steel, lamp, 228 x 60 x 60 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

rechts / right A BROADCASTING STUDIO SET FOR UTV
Installationsansicht / Installation view, Galerie Christian Nagel, Köln/Cologne 1997, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne



D len des Betriebs ausgeliefert zu sein. Im Übrigen haben das erfolgreiche Künstlerinnen schon immer gemacht – das ist gar nicht neu, das kann man bei genauem Studium der Geschichte alles lesen, aber wird eben immer wieder vom befreiten Künstler-Mythos verstellt. Dass bei diesem Gewerbe auch finanzielle Umstände eine Rolle spielen ist doch selbstverständlich. Der ganze Betrieb hat sich natürlich gewandelt, wenn man an die Ausbildung an den Akademien denkt – die gut ausgebildeten Künstlerinnen und Künstler mit Umsicht, Weitsicht, Verlässlichkeit und stabilem Charakter sind das Modell der Gegenwart.

Gerade das oben beschriebene Modell des stabilen Künstlers, der umsichtigen Künstlerin, ist doch genau Ausdruck des Zustandes, wie er das Feuilleton beschreibt und beschwört. Es ist zugegebenermaßen ein ödes, streckenweise selbstmitleidiges Klagen, aber mittlerweile bauen Ausbildung und Vermittlung auf diesem Künstlerbild auf, haben es internalisiert. Da kann man ja gleich die Akademie schließen. Ich bin mir auch nicht mehr sicher, ob es sich wirklich noch um Selbstermächtigung handelt. Geht es nicht viel mehr um Selbst-Promotion, um ein ewiges sich „Liken“?

Wieso Akademie schließen? Sollen die Künstler wieder naiv und dumm sein? Den eloquenten Selbstbeschreibungen der Autoren muss man ja nicht glauben. Das ist sicherlich fatal, dass

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Emodity is a step towards self-empowerment for any artist; it's about not being at the mercy of the art industry's goodwill. And I should add that successful artists have always done this – there's nothing new about it, as a bit of historical research will reveal. But it's always obscured by the myth of the free artist. Of course finances play a role in this profession, too. The whole industry has changed, of course:

you only need to look at art schools. The well-educated artist is prudent, far-sighted, dependable, and has a stable character – and this has become a model for the present.

The model artist described above – stable and prudent – expresses precisely the condition that the feuilleton are describing. Admittedly it is a tedious, slightly self-pitying lament, but nowadays art education and art discourse are

based on this image of the artist – it has been internalised. In which case you might as well close the academy. I'm also not sure anymore whether it's really about self-empowerment. Isn't it far more about self-promotion, about constantly "liking" one another?

Why close the academy? Should artists be naïve and dumb again? You don't have to believe an author's eloquent descriptions of themselves. Surely it's disastrous if critics and those working in



UNTITLED, 2014

Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 200 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

die Kritik und Vermittlung sich nicht mehr die Mühe machen genau hinzusehen, zu lesen und zu überprüfen, ob denn der Text zum Werk überhaupt passt oder ob er eben ein ebenso zu deutender Subtext ist. Das Selbstpromoten wurde in der Vergangenheit doch genauso, wenn nicht noch mit viel mehr überzogener Präpotenz, praktiziert.

Mich interessiert die Rolle des Künstlers heute, ob sie sich tatsächlich so sehr verändert hat, wie es scheint: Du warst 1992 und 1997 zur documenta eingeladen, 1997 auch zu den Skulptur Projekten Münster. Für alle drei Großanlässe hast Du „angewandte“ Werke realisiert, für Münster die Großplakate, die als Werbung und Wegleitung funktionierten, für die documenta einmal das Bühnenbild für die Konzerte, dann den Vortragssaal

the field no longer make an effort to look closely, to read and check whether the text even fits to the work, or whether it should be interpreted as a subtext. In the past, self-promotion was practiced in exactly the same way, if not with more arrogance.

I'm interested in the role of the artist today, whether it really has changed as much as it seems. In 1992 and 1997 you were invited to documenta, and in 1997 to Skulptur Projekte in Münster. For all three of these major events you created "applied art": for Münster the big billboards, which functioned as advertising

and signage, for the first documenta, a stage set for concerts, and for the second, a lecture hall and café. Your work encapsulated how the artist at such exhibitions is also always a service-provider – for the location, for the curatorial concept, and for himself. These projects were therefore also an analysis of the position and function of the artist. Other artists have tried something similar, but none of them with your laconic precision. Now this approach has become mainstream; it has become a model supported by art schools and has led to greater permeability. Was this your intention?

It was to be expected that it would enter into academia. If it hadn't been success-



UNTITLED, 2013

Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 200 cm
Courtesy of Galerie Meyer Kainer, Vienna

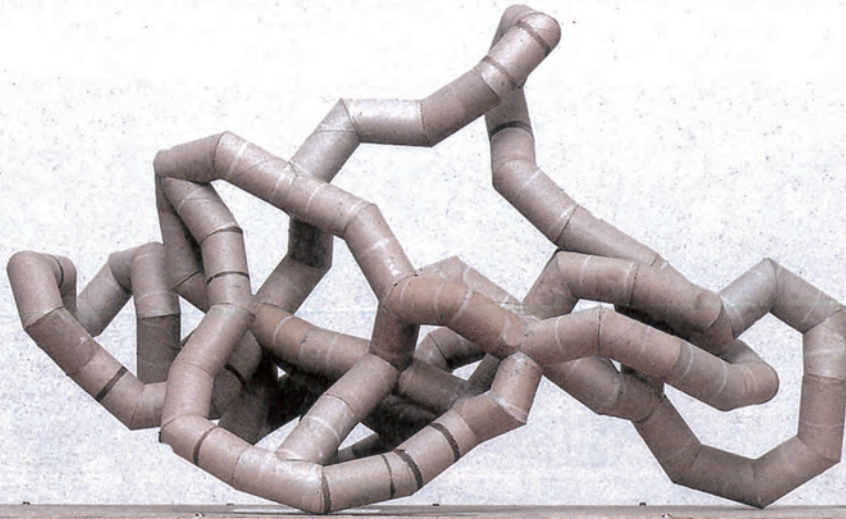
und das Café. Da wurde genau auf den Punkt gebracht, wie der Künstler bei solchen Ausstellungen immer auch Dienstleister ist für den Ort, das kuratorische Konzept und sich selbst. Somit waren alle Projekte auch Analyse zu Stellung und Funktion des Künstlers. Andere haben Ähnliches erprobt, aber keiner mit dieser lakonischen Präzision. Nun ist dieses Vorgehen im Mainstream angekommen, es wurde zum Modell, auf das sich Kunsthochschulen abstützen und wurde sozusagen zum Gemeinplatz. War das so gemeint?

Dass das akademisiert wird, davon ist doch auszugehen. Wenn es nicht erfolgreich gewesen wäre, vielleicht nicht. Es wurde dann zu einem Art Genre und von manchen weiterentwickelt oder auch nur so getan als ob. Schon damals habe ich neben der Funktionalität betont, dass es sich um Skulpturen handelt. Die

ful, then perhaps it would not have. It became an art genre. Some artists developed it further, while others just pretended to. Even at the time, I emphasised that in addition to the functional aspect, these were sculptures. It turned into a topic of debate at the time. Now of course it's established and has become part of art history. Whether I meant it like that or not is irrelevant. Even if it was barely visible at first, I worked to make it more visible.

Do your students continue to orient themselves using texts? Are there certain theoreticians,

UNTITLED, 1991
Karton, Holzkeiste / Cardboard, wooden box, 50 x 60 x 90 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery



Galerie
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- D Diskussion hat sich zu dieser Zeit entfaltet. Jetzt liegt das vor und wird Kunstgeschichte. Es ist nicht wichtig – ob ich das so gemeint habe. Auch wenn es zunächst fast unsichtbar war – ich habe daran gearbeitet, dass es sichtbar wird.

Orientieren sich Deine Studenten weiterhin an Texten? Gibt es Theoretiker, Philosophen und Kritiker, die besonders viel Aufmerksamkeit erhalten, oder hat die Theorie an Anziehung verloren?

Das ist je nach Temperament verschieden. Manche brauchen das nicht. Manche haben profunde Vor- oder Parallelstudien

und sind tolle Denkerinnen. Insgesamt ist das Niveau besser als früher, weil das mittlerweile zum Akademioprogramm gehört.

Und gibt es Autoren, die oft auftauchen? Themen? Und du selbst? Du hast oft betont, dass Text und Buch wichtig sind, bis hin zu deinen Künstlerbüchern über Bücher. Gab es in letzter Zeit Publikationen, die dich begeisterten oder verwirrten?

Viel wird im Internet gelesen (lacht). Ich lese die ganze Zeit Wittgenstein ... nein im Ernst, das Feld ist weit. Viele Studentinnen sind in ihrer Lesekultur sehr gebildet ... von Georges



Ausstellungsansicht / Exhibition view „Heimo Zobernig“, Generali Foundation, Wien/Vienna 1991

- E *philosophers or critics who are particularly popular? Or has theory lost its appeal?*
This depends a lot on the student's character, of course. Some don't need it. Others have studied philosophical subjects before, or are studying them parallel to their art degree and are great thinkers. The breadth of students' knowledge is generally better than in the past because it is now part of the art-school programme.

But are there authors who crop up frequently? And what about you? You've often stressed the importance of texts and books, right through to your own artist books about books. Have there been any recent publications that have impressed or bewildered you?

A lot of reading happens online [laughs]. I read Wittgenstein all the time No, seriously, it's a broad field. Many students are very educated in their reading habits Georges Bataille, Karl Mannheim, Michel Serres,

Svetlana Alpers, Jens Soentgen, through to Bazou Brock. I'm very seldom confronted with theoretical drivel. Students have a strong sense of the difference between theory and the experience of what they are actually doing. I normally have a pile of books by my bed. For a while I have been dipping into *Patio and Pavilion* by Penelope Curtis, and I loved Bernd Stiegler's *Belichtete Augen* [exposed eyes] – a very curious book. For a while I was reading Peter

- D Bataille, Karl Mannheim, Michel Serres, Svetlana Alpers, Jens Soentgen bis Bazon Brock. Sehr selten bin ich mit Theoriegelenker konfrontiert. Das Bewusstsein vom Unterschied zwischen Theorie und den Erfahrungen mit dem eigenen Tun ist meist sehr entwickelt. Bei mir liegt immer eine Vielzahl von Büchern neben dem Bett. Seit einer Weile lese ich immer wieder in „Patio and Pavilion“ von Penelope Curtis, begeistert habe ich Bernd Stieglers „Belichtete Augen“ gelesen – sehr kurios. Eine Zeit lang habe ich in Peter Bieris „Das Handwerk der Freiheit“ gelesen, und nun ist mir von Juliane Rebentisch „Die

Kunst der Freiheit“ in der Buchhandlung begegnet – da komme ich sehr langsam voran – mal eine Seite vorne, mal eine Seite in der Mitte ... liegt mehr als Dekoration da.

Kehren wir nochmals zum Künstlerdasein zurück. Es gab in deinem Fall zwei Karrieren. Eine erste, internationale, bis Anfang 2000 mit wichtigen Einzel- und Gruppenausstellungen und sogar Retrospektiven. Größere Galerien interessierten sich für dich, du hast aber nicht gewechselt. Dann verebbte es merklich. Vor ein paar Jahren ging es wieder los, wie du selbst gesagt hast, auch in den USA mit der Friedrich Petzel Gallery und einer



Installationsansicht / Installation view INIT-Kunsthalle Berlin, 1998, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/ Cologne

- E Bieri's *Das Handwerk der Freiheit* [the craft of freedom], and recently I came across Juliane Rebentisch's *Die Kunst der Freiheit* [the art of freedom], but I'm only making slow progress with it – a page at the beginning, a page in the middle ... it's lying around more as decoration, really.

Let's go back to talking about being an artist. In your case you had two careers: The first, up until early 2000, was international, with im-

portant individual and group shows, and even retrospectives. Bigger galleries were interested in you, but you didn't change over. Then your career started flagging a little. A few years ago it picked up again, as you said yourself, in the USA, with Friedrich Petzel Gallery, and with a younger generation of artists who rediscovered your practice. Did this have an effect on your work? Would it be esoteric to say that the appearance of the human figure in your sculptures and the more recent appearance of gestural painting are connected to these developments?

Or should they be regarded as immanent to the work?

No, your interpretation isn't quite right. My career didn't die down. In 2002 and 2003 I had large exhibitions in Vienna, Basel, and Düsseldorf. After which I could take a break for a while. But during that time I had exhibitions in Japan, Australia, and Korea. The frequency of the exhibitions increased all the time – just not as quickly as before. Too much success can be negative for a good

D jüngeren Generation von Künstlern, die deine Arbeit für sich entdeckten. Hat sich das auf Deine Arbeit ausgewirkt? Wäre es esoterisch zu sagen, dass das Auftauchen der menschlichen Figur als Skulptur und der neuerliche Auftritt gestischer Malerei in einem Zusammenhang mit diesen Entwicklungen stehen? Oder sind sie rein werkimmanent zu betrachten? Da trifft deine Wahrnehmung nicht ganz zu. Verebzt ist es nicht. 2002 und 2003 hatte ich die großen Ausstellungen in Wien, Basel, Düsseldorf, dann durfte ich mich ein bisschen erholen, aber in dieser Zeit hatte ich Ausstellungen in Japan, Australien, Korea. Die Ausstellungsfrequenz war immer steigend – halt etwas flacher. Zu viel Erfolg kann für ein gutes Leben negativ sein. Ab 2005 hat sich das Format geändert, größer und mehr Museen. Die Figur kommt ins Werk, unter anderem, mit dem Beginn der Professur in Wien. Ich hab mich gefragt, warum das Figurative so total aus der Akademie-Praxis verschwunden ist und wollte provokativ damit herumarbeiten, an einer Schaufensterpuppe, den Studenten etwas vorhüpfen. Die gegenwärtige Malerei sehe ich ganz sicher als werkimmanent. Gerade zeige ich in Paris bei Chantal Crousel Arbeiten auf Papier und aktuelle Bilder. Da kann man ganz klar sehen, wie sich das ergänzt.

Als Nichtösterreicher fragte ich mich, warum du erst 2015 dazu eingeladen wirst, den österreichischen Pavillon in Venedig zu bespielen. War es die erste Einladung? Hast du im Kopf schon mehrmals diesen Pavillon durchinstalliert?

Hm, ja eh – ich weiß nicht – vielleicht – schon ja – aber du möchtest es wahrscheinlich ein bisschen ausführlicher. Also: im Arsenal war ich schon zweimal, kollateral einmal mit Franz West im Palazzo Barbarigo und mit einer großen Arbeit aus Murano Glas im Museo Ca'Rezzonico. In der Tat hab ich mir im Laufe der Jahre immer wieder Gedanken für den Pavillon gemacht. Ich finde den Zeitpunkt meiner Einladung sehr gut. So liegt das nun eben noch vor mir – und ist nicht schon lange vorbei und vergessen. Mein Vorhaben ist ganz neu und basiert nicht auf alten Überlegungen, bezieht sich aber trotzdem auf Arbeiten, die ihren Keim schon in den 80ern haben. Vielleicht bin ich aber erst jetzt in der Lage das in der richtigen Weise umzusetzen. ✓

Daniel Baumann ist Direktor der Kunsthalle Zürich.

HEIMO ZOBERNIG, GEBOREN 1958 IN MAUTHEN, ÖSTERREICH, LEBT IN WIEN. AUSSTELLUNGEN: Österreichischer Pavillon, Biennale Venedig; Galerie Meyer Kainer, Wien (solo); Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (solo) (2015); kestnergesellschaft, Hannover (solo); One Million Years – System und Symptom, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel; Mudam Luxembourg (solo) (2014); Against Method, Generali Foundation, Wien; Kunsthaus Graz (solo); GEO-NEO-POST, Vasarely Müzeum, Budapest (2013); Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid (solo) (2012); The Indiscipline of Painting, Tate St. Ives, Cornwall; ohne Titel (in red), Kunsthalle Zürich (solo) (2011). VERTRETEN VON: Petzel Gallery, New York; Meyer Kainer, Wien; Simon Lee Gallery, London; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; Galleria Gentili, Prato; Galerie Micheline Szwejcer, Brüssel; Galerie Nicolas Krupp, Basel; Galeria Juana de Airpuru, Madrid; Galerie Christian Nagel, Köln/Berlin; Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt/Main; Galerie Christine Mayer, München

HEIMO ZOBERNIG, BORN 1958 IN MAUTHEN, AUSTRIA. LIVES IN VIENNA. EXHIBITIONS: Austrian Pavilion, Venice Biennial; Galerie Meyer Kainer, Vienna (solo); Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (solo) (2015); kestnergesellschaft, Hannover (solo); One Million Years – System und Symptom, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel; Mudam Luxembourg (solo) (2014); Against Method, Generali Foundation, Vienna; Kunsthaus Graz (solo); GEO-NEO-POST, Vasarely Müzeum, Budapest (2013); Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid (solo) (2012); The Indiscipline of Painting, Tate St. Ives, Cornwall; ohne Titel (in red), Kunsthalle Zürich (solo) (2011). REPRESENTED BY: Petzel Gallery, New York; Meyer Kainer, Vienna; Simon Lee Gallery, London; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; Galleria Gentili, Prato; Galerie Micheline Szwejcer, Brussels; Galerie Nicolas Krupp, Basel; Galeria Juana de Airpuru, Madrid; Galerie Christian Nagel, Köln/Berlin; Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt/Main; Galerie Christine Mayer, Munich

E life. From 2005 on the format simply changed: bigger and more museums. The appearance of figures in my works, among other things, coincided with the start of my professorship in Vienna. I asked myself why figurative art had totally disappeared from art-school practice and wanted to show students that this was still possible by playing around with a mannequin. I certainly see my current paintings as immanent to the work. I am currently exhibiting works on paper as well as my latest paintings at Chantal Crousel in Paris. Here you can clearly see how they complement each other.

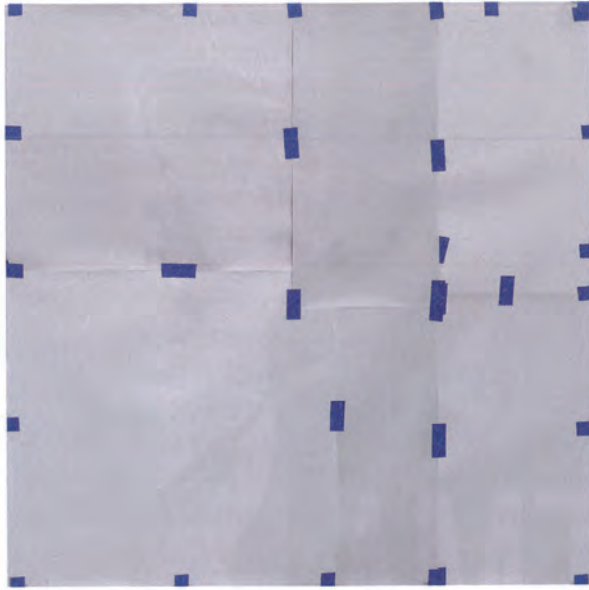
As a non-Austrian I asked myself why you were only first asked to contribute to the Aus-

trian Pavilion in Venice in 2015. Is this indeed your first invitation? Have you sometimes imagined how the pavilion would look if you were showing?

Hmm, yes, well – I don't know – maybe. Yes, I suppose so. But you probably want me to explain in more detail. Well: I've already been in the Arsenal twice, and once collaterally with Franz West in the Palazzo Barbarigo. And I was represented with a big piece made of Murano glass in the Museo Ca'Rezzonico. It's true that over the years I have often thought about the pavilion. The timing of the invitation is just right. It means I still have it before me and it's not something already passed and forgotten. My current project is also some-

thing completely new and isn't based on old ideas, though it still relates to works that have their roots in the 80s. Perhaps I just haven't been able to implement it in the right way until now. ✓

Daniel Baumann is director of the Kunsthalle Zürich.



UNTITLED, 2012
Klebeband und Spiegelfolie auf Leinwand / Tape and reflective foil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery

Galerie
Chantal Crousel



oben / above UNTITLED, 2011
Acryl auf Leinwand / Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 200 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery

links / left UNTITLED, 2010
Gips, Baumwolle, Holz, Pressspanplatte / Plaster, cotton, wood, particle board,
227 x 105 x 74 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York



Le top 5 des expos de la semaine

Chaque semaine, le meilleur des expositions art contemporain, à Paris et en province.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel



Heimo Zobernig, "Untitled", 2014, Acrylique sur toile, 200 x 200 cm, HZ15 9, Courtesy de l'artist et Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

Heimo Zobernig

A ceux qui s'empresent d'enterrer l'abstraction géométrique, qui considèrent que tout est dit et que l'on vient trop tard, Heimo Zobernig, né en 1958 apporte un déni vigoureux. Inspiré des recherches de Piet Mondrian et Ian Burn, il livre dans ses peintures la vision d'un formalisme qui se fait lyrique : la ligne courbe envoie valser la grille. Il investira simultanément les deux espaces de la galerie Crousel à Paris, celui de la Douane et de la rue Charlot, pour une intervention autour du thème du double, entre réinterprétation d'œuvres des années 1980 et nouvelles toiles. Une leçon de peinture par une figure incontournable de la scène autrichienne, choisi pour représenter l'Autriche à la 56ème Biennale de Venise cet été.

"Heimo Zobernig", du 14 février au 11 avril à la Galerie Chantal Crousel à Paris. www.crousel.com

HEIMO ZOBERNIG

CURRENTLY
ON VIEW
Solo shows
at Mûdam
Luxembourg
through Sept. 7;
Petzel Gallery,
New York,
through June 21;
Nicolas Krupp
Contemporary
Art, Basel, through
June 28.

Interview by Karin Bellmann
Studio photography by Florian Rainer

KARIN
BELLMANN
is a writer based
in Vienna.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

IN THE STUDIO

Karin Bellman. «Heimo Zobernig: In the Studio», *Art in America*, June/July 2014.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel



Karin Bellman. «Heimo Zobernig: In the Studio», *Art in America*, June/July 2014.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel



AUSTRIAN ARTIST HEIMO ZOBERNIG is tirelessly productive, although he is lesser known stateside than his sometime collaborators Albert Oehlen, the late Martin Kippenberger and the late Franz West. Zobernig has been involved in some 25 exhibitions or projects in each of the last 20 years. This year will be little different. As of June, he will have shown in nine group exhibitions around the globe. This month alone, his work is featured in three solo exhibitions, at Petzel Gallery in New York, Nicolas Krupp in Basel, and Musée d'art moderne Grand-Duc Jean (Mudam), Luxembourg.

Since the beginning of his career, in the early 1980s, Zobernig has worked across disciplines—from painting and sculpture to video, performance, architectural intervention and design. His exhibitions almost always upend expectations in some way, as he persistently questions the boundaries of art, while incorporating its history by drawing upon and interrogating 20th-century art movements, from modernism to Post-Minimalism.

Born in 1958, Zobernig studied set design at Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts, after being rejected from the painting department. Yet, in the mid-1980s, he made a name for himself with paintings of abstract geometric forms and minimalistic cardboard objects. In the late 1980s, he created tall monoliths, lacquered in black synthetic resin and covered in feathers. Recently, Zobernig has taken up this motif again, with "tarred" and feathered objects made of cardboard sheets folded to resemble portable room dividers or open plinths into which the viewer can peek.

Zobernig moves with seeming ease between graphic, architectural and interior design. He is well known for his sculptural shelves and bar stools that straddle fine art and decor. He has been asked frequently to design museum interiors, including the entrance areas at the Kunstverein München, in 1992, and at the Kunstverein Braunschweig, in 1999. A more recent example is his design (in collaboration with architect Michael Wallraff) of the new cinema at MUMOK, Vienna, commissioned in 2011.

In 1994, he and six other artists living in Vienna were asked to collaborate with a non-Austrian artist of their choice for the exhibition "Jetztzeit" (Now-Time), which appeared at Kunsthalle Wien and de Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam. Zobernig decided to work with Oehlen. Inspired by the limited palette of Picasso's *Guernica*, Zobernig installed 15 Oehlen paintings bathed in red fluorescent light. The multicolored works then appeared to be monochromatic, as if painted in the light-dark modulations of the red spectrum.

How does Zobernig, known for his rigorous inquiries into exhibition-making and for his thorough engagement with art history, keep up? He seems to take a systematic, pragmatic approach to everything he does. A lot of his works follow sets of self-imposed rules. For instance, he never titles his pieces; he uses "neutral" colors for sculptures; all of his self-made catalogues and graphic-design commissions employ A4 paper and Helvetica font. His restrictions have led to an almost scientific approach to color. Since 1987, he has limited himself to a fixed palette of 15 pigments for a series of stripe paintings.



Heimo Zobernig:
Untitled, 2006,
acrylic and tape on
canvas, 113 inches
square. Courtesy
Nicolas Krupp
Contemporary
Art, Basel.

In these works, vertical monochrome stripes of equal width are arranged according to criteria such as tone or contrast of hues. He creates a written list that predetermines their organization on the canvases.

Since 2000, Zobernig has been occupied with the creation of square "grid paintings." Initially he applied white acrylic to chroma-key fabrics—commonly known for their use as backdrops for TV weather forecasts—producing checkerboard or grid structures with blue, red and green lines. In 2004, after being struck by the work of Australian artist Ian Burn, he abandoned the chroma-key fabrics in favor of strips of masking tape, which remain on the canvas to make patterns. In 2011, after seeing a Picasso show at Kunsthau Zurich, on view during his own show at Kunsthalle Zurich, Zobernig started a new group of paintings combining grid structures with free lines.

A less familiar aspect of Zobernig's oeuvre is his mannequin sculptures. For these, he uses parts from male and female dummies to construct hermaphrodite figures, presenting them half-dressed or naked. Painted with a white acrylic finish, they often feature superimposed grids of blue masking tape.

In March, Zobernig and I met at his sculpture studio at the Academy of Fine Arts, where he has been teaching since 2000, in order to examine the objects he has selected for his exhibition at Petzel. We then went to his other studio—a spacious loft, where he makes his paintings—to talk in more detail.

KARIN BELLMANN You are premiering three new groups of work in your Petzel exhibition—display dummies, minimalistic sculptures covered in feathers, and paintings. Do you define the mannequins as sculpture, too, even though they are found objects?

HEIMO ZOBERNIG Yes, I take them out of shop windows but not without a twist. Through my manipulations,

Untitled, 2014,
feathers and
synthetic varnish
on cardboard,
approx. 82%
by 31½ by 23½
inches. Courtesy
Petzel Gallery,
New York.

Untitled, 2005,
acrylic and tape
on canvas, 39½
inches square.
Courtesy
Nicolas Krupp.



I introduce elements that turn them into sculptures. As a result, they become fetishlike objects.

BELLMANN When did you start using mannequins?

ZOBERNIG When I was studying at the Academy in Vienna, I wanted to have showroom dummies in my studio but didn't really know why. I had little money so I asked various department stores if they could spare mannequins that were no longer in use. I got arms, legs, torsos—never a whole figure. I had all these parts in my studio, but I did not know quite what to do with them. Eventually they were lost. When I returned to the Academy as a teacher in 2000, I was invited to participate in an exhibition about sculpture in Austria after 1945 at the Belvedere [museum in Vienna]. I had just taken over the academic post of Joannis Avramidis—a modernist sculptor who divided the human figure into meridians for use as idealized abstract segments. So, I bought a dummy for the show to try taping a grid onto it. I wanted to use my own body this way in a video [No. 19, 2001]. After the shoot, the dummy remained in my studio. In the evenings, at dusk, I always had this creepy suspicion that somebody was there with me.

BELLMANN Scary! Did this frighten you?

ZOBERNIG It was a brief but powerful sensation of alarm. It occurred to me that objects could appear alive. I think of it as an instance in which the unconscious enters consciousness. It really fascinated me, particularly because my approach to art is usually very sober. When I started to teach at the Academy, I asked myself why the tradition of figurative representation had been abandoned. It used to be the only valid approach to sculpture, but the knowledge seems to have been lost altogether. Two students from Milan, who came from more conservative backgrounds, caught my attention. As a daily routine, one of them mod-

eled faces based on plaster casts. I asked him to make a cast of my naked body. A realistic representation was the outcome. This exercise was an attempt to draw the other students' interest back to the figure. As a consequence, I turned to the figure myself. That was when I started working with dummies.

BELLMANN Can you tell me about making *No. 19*?

ZOBERNIG For the video I covered my body with a grid of blue adhesive tape, which I had tried out on the mannequin. Using the chroma-key process, the grid could be manipulated in postproduction, resulting in the disintegration of my body into abstract fragments in the video. Additionally, I wore a latex wig to increase the effect of abstraction. There was an embarrassing aspect to the video, too, because the camera filmed my body in extreme close-up.

BELLMANN What relationship exists between segmenting your body into fragments and the grid paintings? Did you want to experiment with the grid in different mediums?

ZOBERNIG Yes, the grid sticks with me. Ultimately, the world can be grasped through grids and geometrization. In today's digitized world, particularly, lines become an increasingly important means of rationalization.

BELLMANN Do you trace the dummies to anything in your early work?

ZOBERNIG One of the mannequins I'll be showing in New York is wearing a blue T-shirt with the word "Sale" printed on it. Only recently, I discovered this motif in a very early work of mine. In the 1980s, I kept a visual diary. Each day I made paintings or drawings in A4 format. Everything that came to my mind was chronicled this way. Among these images there is a drawing of a young, melancholic man with one arm shorter than the other. He wears nothing more than a shirt. The half-dressed mannequin is a reference to this early image of shameful nakedness.

BELLMANN There are two more figures you will be showing in New York. Both are partially covered with grids—one on the face, the other on a leg.

ZOBERNIG Yes, the grids are made of the same blue tape I used in *No. 19*. Originally, I did not conceive of the mannequin parts as a whole. In 2003, I showed them at Galerie Christian Nagel, Berlin. At the time I had no idea what to do with them, so I spread them out on the floor of the gallery. Years later, I reused the fragments, assembling them in my studio and arranging them in different postures. One of the mannequins lifts its arms as if embracing an imaginary space—a sort of nothingness, a void.

BELLMANN And how have you come to the paintings at Petzel, in which you combine the grid with free forms?

ZOBERNIG My painting has undergone a simple development. My engagement with color theory and color ordering systems led to monochromes—paintings that are also empty, naked—and eventually to black monochromes. The grid came out of this.

A painting is not always seen from an ideal viewing position. When passing by an image, the frame is necessarily

perceived as an integral part of it. This change of perspective is apparent in my early grid paintings. I wanted to paint frames slipping into the images. Mondrian's grid originates from a view out of a window. In 1917, he painted a stained-glass window. It was not an invention; he tried to reproduce a perceptual phenomenon.

BELLMANN What made you change your approach to the grid paintings? You gave up the chroma-key fabrics and started using masking tape.

ZOBERNIG Mondrian used tape to hold the places of his lines, but he never exhibited them that way. Since Barnett Newman, using tape has become ordinary. In 2004, I was in Brisbane, Australia, for an exhibition. There I discovered the work of Ian Burn. In his painting *Yellow Blue Equivalence* [1965-66], which he described as "bringing Mondrian to the modern space," he references Mondrian's diamond paintings. Burn's image is painted bright yellow and blue though. Additionally, he handled the divisions differently from Mondrian. Burn's divisions are odd in number rather than even, which decenters the picture. You can divide Mondrian's grids by two again and again. An odd number is a more complicated geometric task. For me, this was a peculiar irritation that I only came to realize by imitating Burn and by counting the divisions. The encoun-

ter with Burn's works was deeply inspiring. After that there was a lot to do.

BELLMANN Infinite divisions?

ZOBERNIG Yes, countless possibilities opened up. You have to decide what the interesting cases are. After discovering these geometric possibilities, bringing the frame into the picture was not important anymore. It was a totally new field.

BELLMANN How does the grid fit with the gestural forms in your new paintings?

ZOBERNIG The free line adds something like expression to the paintings. Furthermore, the classic topic of figure and ground seems pertinent. In my new paintings, some gridlines appear to be in the foreground. Actually, I had to decide on those first. But the tape for those is the last to be removed from the canvas. This can cause a fantastic confusion. The straight grid lines appear to be a reliable system. The free lines, the curves, provoke obsessive interpretation and open up the whole problem of aesthetics: is it a beautiful, an ugly or an awkward line?

BELLMANN After you saw the Picasso exhibition in Zurich, your work took on expressive, subjective gestures, with direct references to Picasso. Are the new paintings at Petzel a continuation of these?



Far left, *Untitled*, 2011, silkscreen, linen, polyester and steel, 73¼ by 26¾ by 19¾ inches. Courtesy Petzel Gallery.

Left, view of Zobernig's installation of painted mannequin parts at Galerie Christian Nagel, Berlin, 2003.

Karin Bellman. «Heimo Zobernig: In the Studio», *Art in America*, June/July 2014.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel



ZOBERNIG The new ones grew out of those paintings, but they bear little relation to Picasso. Every now and then, an exemplary artist triggers a new painting. One of the works at Petzel alludes to Gustave Moreau. When I started this cycle of works in 2011, the paintings were made after Picasso and his forms. Simple lines can evoke certain forms. A curved line inevitably suggests a guitar. I try to bring the form into the present. In Zurich, I discovered a relation between geometric and free forms in Picasso's paintings. I started to see regularities in the free forms. They appear to be spontaneous but are actually quite deliberate. In my newest works, I wanted to combine free forms and grids without relying on any existing artistic model. My aim was to realize something similar to the depiction of nature.

The immediate, expressive gesture is a fiction. One isn't surprised and satisfied right away. If I succeed in realizing a certain idea, I always want to know whether I can repeat it.

BELLMANN Is this the reason why certain themes surface again and again? Is it why you work in series?

ZOBERNIG Series are unintentional. I always work on one painting at a time, rather than working on various paintings simultaneously. Not until one is finished do I start the next. This is the reason I'd rather speak of a cycle, which enables me to branch in different directions.

BELLMANN In your studio at the Academy, you showed me your feathered objects. Why have you returned to this idea you experimented with once so many years ago?

ZOBERNIG This is a question I ask myself, too. On the one hand, it refers to the problem of the series versus the cycle. The minimalistic sculptures made out of cardboard are all very different, despite their common surface. The feathered sculptures were a move to a different type of finish, if you like. They generated distinctive and humorous feedback. At the time, I thought, that's it, and I did not follow up. Today, certain issues have reemerged. I draw from a rich pool of work I've done over the years. And of course it intrigued me to see how these specific forms would work today. In contrast to pieces from the 1980s, the new feathered sculptures are more complex, architectonic forms.

BELLMANN The works you are showing in New York appear disparate, but they have a lot in common. How do you think the individual pieces are perceived as a whole in the exhibition?

ZOBERNIG It remains to be seen if the works complement each other. Sometimes, I want to make a single statement in an exhibition. That is why I will show only white monochromes on chroma-key fabrics at Nicolas Krupp in Basel. At Mudam, I am showing sculptures in one room and a selection of monochromes and more recent paintings in another one. The show ends with paintings that can be considered the starting point of the works I will send to Petzel. Over the past several years, curators and gallery owners have asked to do historical surveys of my work. They wanted to show the artistic development, and I acquiesced to their request. When the work is shown in chronological order, a golden thread is discernible, but discontinuities are fine as well.



Untitled, 2012,
acrylic on Trevira
Television CS
fabric, 15½ inches
square. Courtesy
Nicolas Krupp

BELLMANN Why does the square play such a big role in your work?

ZOBERNIG For one thing, the square format is neutral. In the 1990s, I limited myself to that format to see how I could set it in motion or stabilize it.

BELLMANN Because a square form does not lead to an interpretation right away?

ZOBERNIG Yes, in a way. The vertical format is used in portrait painting, the horizontal in landscape painting. I did not want to prescribe a meaning—not even with a title. Within the confines of the square, my aim was to place emphasis on color and form in order to expand it irregularly to the left, to the right, to the top and to the bottom.

BELLMANN In the stripe paintings, the grid paintings and the monochromes, you have experimented with the possibilities of painting and challenged art historical predecessors.

ZOBERNIG Challenging models is essential. Sometimes it can be great fun to paint "the painting after the last painting."

BELLMANN You seem to be working without ever taking a break. How is this possible?

ZOBERNIG I am surprised myself, since being lazy has always appealed to me. In my daily routine, progress seems to be very slow. There is beauty in cultivating that slowness. Things that are well done need time. And I always take the time.

BELLMANN Your art is very allusive. Is there an artist or person who deeply matters to you—someone that could be called a role model?

ZOBERNIG In many respects, I'd say Sol LeWitt—both in his artwork and as a person. At the start, his work followed strict rules but later it became more cheerful and free. □

Untitled, 2013,
acrylic on canvas,
78¾ inches square.
Courtesy Petzel
Gallery.

VIOLAINE BOUTET DE MONVEL



Heimo Zobernig
Palacio de Velázquez, Madrid
8 November - 15 April

The main gallery of Madrid's Palacio de Velázquez is an expansive, uninterrupted space well suited to theatrical gestures, but few artists have succeeded in pulling off quite such an eloquent *coup de théâtre* as Heimo Zobernig. As demonstrated by the 40-odd elements that make up this 30-year 'retrospective', his practice intersects with architecture, design and theatre while flitting with seeming ease between painting, sculpture, installation and video. Most of all, however, the Austrian artist engages with the staging of art, foregrounding not so much *what* is exhibited as *how*.

In the words of James Brown's 1970 funk classic, Zobernig's works are 'talkin' loud and sayin' nothing'. Borrowing from the Robert Indiana school of typographical tweets and, at the other extreme, from the modernist tradition of minimal monochromes, Zobernig treats both work-types as throwaway gestures, easily appropriated and slickly executed, but no more significant than the canvases he leaves blank. We find them hung on scaffolding and curtains (lots of curtains), framed by paper scrolls, propped against walls or assembled as sculpture. Or else only present by their absence, as in his museum-style storage racks that remain conspicuously vacated. And not only paintings. When even the curtains are parodied by video representation, it is clear that Zobernig's irreverent scavenging regards nothing as sacred.

Significantly, all the works here are untitled, the show slipping seamlessly from one installation to the next. In *Untitled* (1998), stretched canvases of loosely woven jute combine to form an enclosed structure hinting at Richard Deacon's 1980s aesthetic, while a vast arena of black curtains enshrines nine monochromes executed between 1993 and 2005 (although the dates are extraneous, the works being interchangeable). From 1992, a four-metre cardboard cube richly painted in black gloss references Mecca's Kaaba and thus Gregor Schneider's aborted 2005 project for Piazza San Marco in Venice. Mirrored walls in polished aluminium evoke Michelangelo Pistoletto; the metal grids of the painting racks recall Bruce Nauman's *Double Steel Cage Piece* (1974). Even the one canvas in which the brushwork lets rip could be a take on Juan Uslé or Bernard Frize.

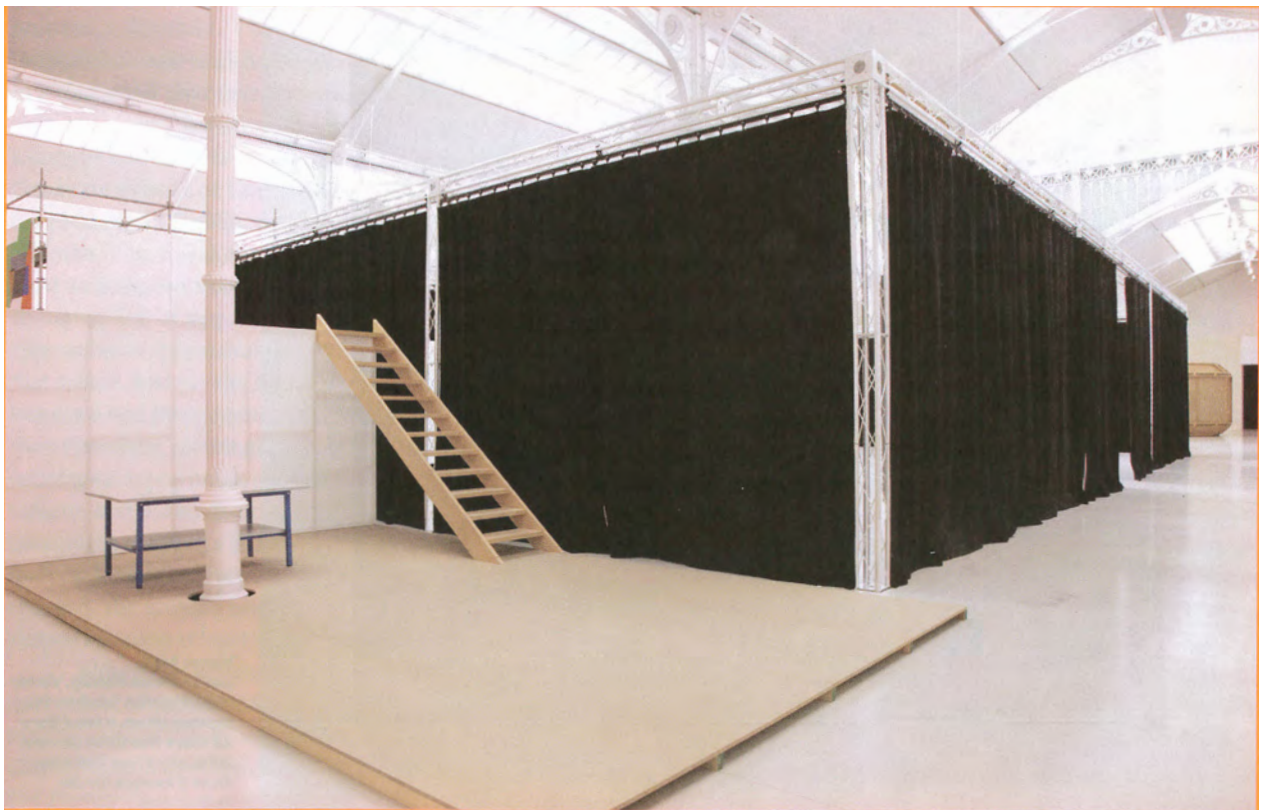
However, Zobernig's appropriation of contemporary art is at best generic. These are artworld Rorschach tests, inconsequential in themselves but inviting our collusion in contextualising them within the familiar canon; quotations that, like his monochromes, have been whitewashed so that their reading barely bleeds through.

Voiding the work leaves only the methodology of display and its context. The iron superstructure of the nineteenth-century exhibition hall and the single partition wall, preserved from the previous exhibition, become as important as the works they enclose. In this theatre in the round where the props are laid bare, we become implicated in the staging, the sleights of hand that vouchsafe the seeming neutrality of the white cube and which here are replaced by relational aesthetics-style user-friendliness, interactivity and DIY: a kind of honest shabbiness that points up the tricks of the trade.

This laboratorylike openness draws obvious comparisons with the curatorial *modus operandi* of the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, except here there is no danger of the institution and its framing upstaging the artist. Zobernig's deadpan humour has taken over the asylum and, as in Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* (1963), turned it into a site of theatre all his own.

KEITH PATRICK

Galerie
Chantal Crousel



MAIN THEME



Exhibition view of Heimo Zobernig

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Heimo Zobernig



in conversation with
Beatrix Ruf

Untitled, 2006

Problems

of



Galerie
Chantal Crousel

Form

HEIMO ZOBERNIG'S PERSPECTIVE

MAIN THEMES

BEATRIX RUF At Simon Lee Gallery in London you are currently showing a group of paintings inspired by the recent "revival" of the first museum retrospective of Picasso's work at Kunsthaus Zürich, which was mounted last year at the same time as your show at Kunsthalle Zürich. As you know, the original retrospective was held in 1932 at the Kunsthaus, and it provided a scandal for the art world and was followed and commented on by the press in great detail. Picasso put the exhibition together himself, selecting more than 200 works without a curator and installing them in the museum's collection rooms, which had been emptied out completely. The homage to the 1932 exhibition and the review of its reception included more than 70 works by Picasso. What interested you about the exhibition? What moved you to reference these works in your art?

HEIMO ZOBERNIG I liked everything about the show. I have always been an enthusiastic museum visitor and have spent a lot of time in picture galleries, as I find much inspiration there. Up until this time I had never really had any particular interest in Picasso, but this exhibition surprisingly offered me a new perspective. Especially important was when I saw and retraced how the artist himself hung the pictures, reflecting the development of his work in strict chronological order. I also discovered paintings that I hadn't known. I was fascinated above all by works from the late 1920s. Some are like playful anecdotes about abstraction and figuration. The provocative effect that they must have had back then can still be felt today. The joy and lightness that comes through in the works captivated me. For many years I have been working with monochromes and screens, and then some time ago the stretched line got torn and twisted into free forms in front of and behind the screen. When you look at the forms you can't help but see figures. What is allowed and what is to be avoided is always the question. With this personal development, and with the delight in drawing lines that I discovered in Picasso's pictures, I went

to work in my studio and tried to see what could be done. One thing led to another—and the work is still going on.

BR Your works offer a great variety of approaches: from great precision and the zooming in on details to complex compositions that combine color fields, iconographic inner structures and extended pictorial phenomena from the modern history of painting.

HZ Initially I painted wildly, in all imaginable styles, but later on I settled on radical geometric abstraction as my preferred technique. My sources back then often had nothing to do with art, which led to clear deviations from convention. Only gradually did I come to the monochrome, and from that point onward certain sources became apparent. In all the new techniques of young artists this astonishment with phenomenological painting is evident. In monochromes the ghosts and demons of the resistance movement emerge. The attempt at noncompliance, the continual failure to achieve the goal, is inscribed in the monochrome. No monochrome or empty picture that doesn't reveal the traces of its own creation can continually deliver a historical statement. In Madrid I've now put together a series of white-and-black pictures that have been emptied out. I'm excited to see what the result will be looking back.

BR You say that your sources and references often have nothing to do with art. What goes into your work then?

HZ Well, I said that off the cuff, of course. I meant observations and models from nature, science—those kinds of things. It can be diagrams or different reconstructions of an architectural nature. Sometimes this includes things that we don't consider art, but instead what stands behind or next to it. Sociology and politics are, in the end, also problems of form.

BR Your work is often associated with the terms "Neo-Geo" and "contextual art." How do you feel about these terms and their attempt to capture

categories and movements? Who do you think belongs to such groups?

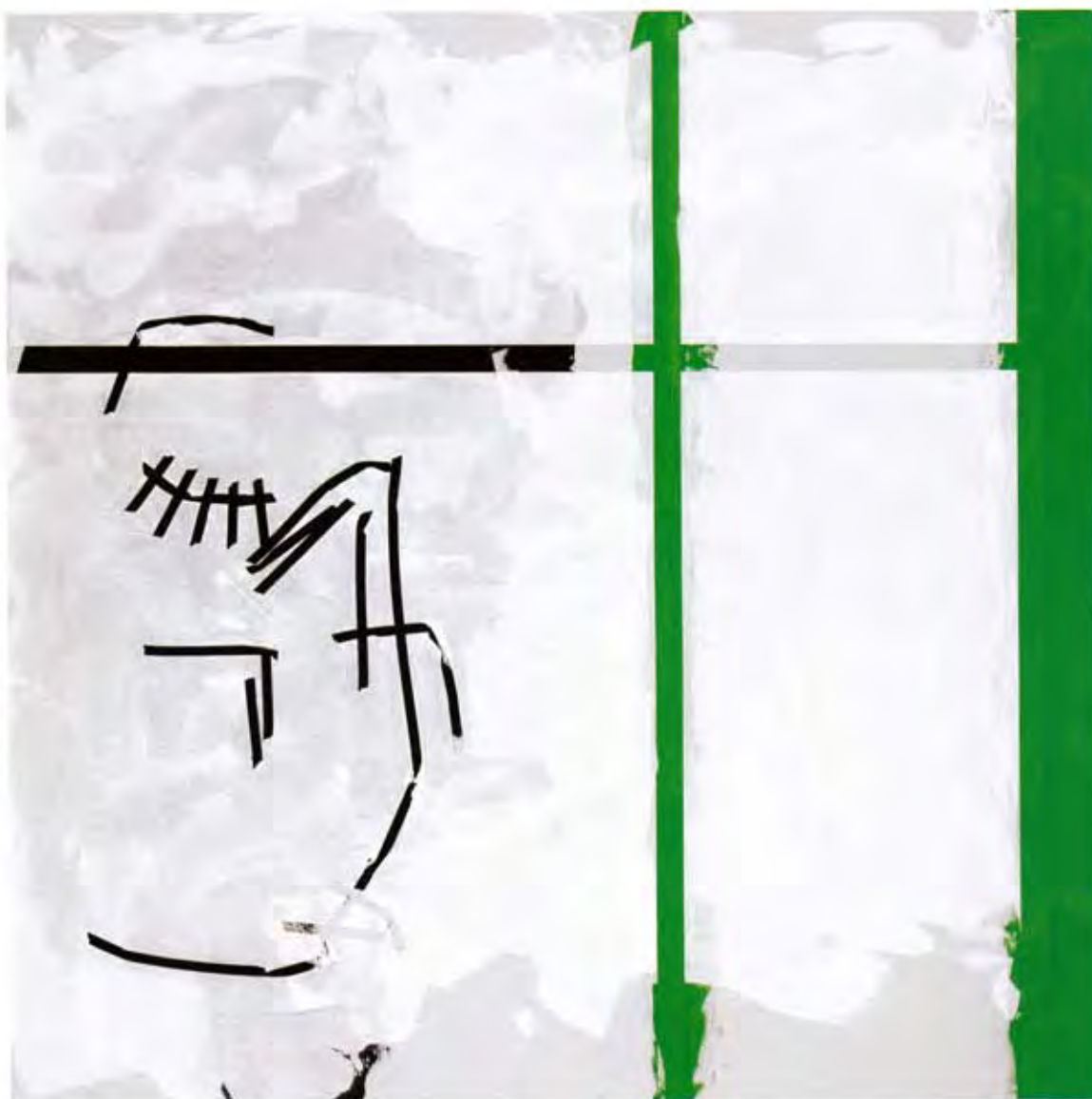
HZ My first exhibition worthy of mention was my inclusion in a group show in the early 1980s at Galerie nächst St. Stephan. The title was "Zeichen, Fluten, Signale: neukonstruktiv und parallel!" (Signs, Tides, Symbols: New Constructive and Parallel), and the artists Helmut Federle and John Armleder, who in their approaches stood at opposite sides of the spectrum, were primarily responsible for the selection of the works. The attempt was made to make a statement with the label Neo-Geo. After Neue Wilde had dominated the painting of the early 1980s, this exhibition was the first concentrated presentation of contemporary "non-Wilde" works in Vienna. Above all, it brought together pictogramic, figurative works that examined the potential connotations of signs in the field of tension between the sublime and banal, emotionality and distance, representation and abstraction. The participating artists were Federle and Armleder, as well as Ecke Bonk, Brigitte Kowanz and Franz Graf, Imi Knoebel, Peter Kogler, Matt Mullican, Heinrich Pichler, Gerwald Rockenschau, Romana Scheffknecht and Dieter Teusch. Those are some of the names that came together there. Each then went on in his or her own individual direction. After that I exhibited at the Galerie Peter Pakesch. That's where I met Sol LeWitt, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Albert Oehlen, Martin Kippenberger, Günter Förg, Mariella Simonì, Herbert Brandl, Otto Zitko and Beatrix Sunkovsky, and that seems to be the right environment for me.

BR Do you see any connection at all to so-called "appropriation art," which with artists like Sturtevant or General Idea found a significant formulation in the 1960s—though they themselves categorically rejected this term?

HZ I don't think that this term really applies to the way that I work. I don't just take things and use them, I reinterpret them and insert them into new contexts. Things are transformed or alienated. It's not about

**What is allowed and
what is to be avoided is
always the question.**

Galerie
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HEIMO ZOBERNIG'S PERSPECTIVE

MAIN THEME

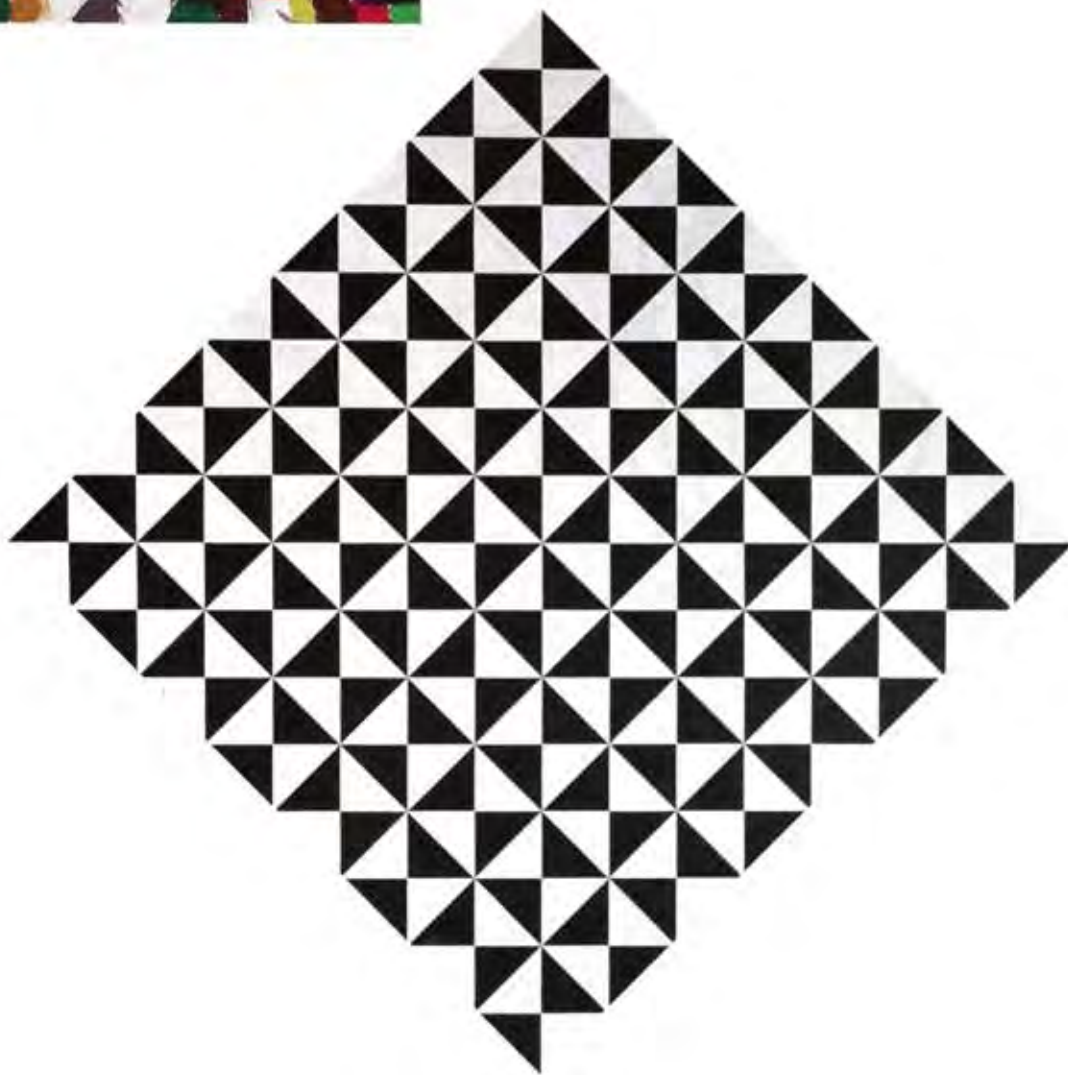
In monochromes the ghosts and demons of the resistance movement emerge. The attempt at noncompliance, the continual failure to achieve the goal, is inscribed in the monochrome.

Galerie
Chantal Crousel





The internet is perhaps somewhat overrated as a source for speculations.



Untitled, 2006

Galerie
Chantal Crousel

HEIMO ZOBERNIG'S PERSPECTIVE

MAIN THEME



Galerie
Chantal Crousel

**Authorship will
always become evident
despite the dissolution
of artists.**

co-opted readymades. What I do is better described by the word "paraphrase." This applies as much to the things I directly create as it does to the works based on models, as it's a classic technique.

BR What does "appropriation" mean for you now?

HZ Like I say, that's not my method and I don't think it's an accurate description anymore of a young generation that uses the World Wide Web. I follow developments with some curiosity, but I have the impression that the correct terminology hasn't emerged yet. "Copy" and "sample" aren't right anymore either.

BR Yes, I have always thought that the label "appropriation" was too one-dimensional. Sturtevant's or General Idea's early exploration of the subjects of difference, repetition and questioning of authorship in the face of new digital reproduction and the indistinguishability of the original and the copy are quite distinct from the use of media materials by the Picture Generation starting in the 1970s; the appropriative methods of Richard Prince in the 1980s that deny authorship; the repetitions of Sherrie Levine; and the use of digital and analogue models of the first generation for which the Internet was an everyday phenomenon—Wade Guyton, Seth Price, Kelley Walker and Josh Smith, among them, though one could add many more names to that list. The newer generation, for whom the Internet is no longer a technical element but almost a full-fledged part of reality in a different aggregate phase, work very differently with pre-existing images and material, as well as with styles and historical continuities. I often speak with Helen Marten, whose work is currently being exhibited at Kunsthalle Zürich, about the difference between collage and inlay, about surface and the differentiations that define surfaces. This also applies to historical linearities and chronologies, which now portray repetition, appropriation and reenactment quite differently, and perhaps make them obsolete.

HZ The enthusiasm for new media in the 1960s led to a repetition of artistic forms and descriptions of methods that then slowly lost their usefulness. Painting was declared dead. It's now regaining its status. But the break seems to have done it some good. The strained discussion coming out of New York in the 1950s has come to an end. Such basic approaches as pictorial, photographic, sculptural or cinematic don't limit the medium; they provide an indication of an artistic approach. The term "new media," on the other hand, has long since been declared obsolete and I don't think it will come back again. Authorship will always become evident, despite the dissolution of artists. I believe that the idea taken from psychology that thoughts are created of their own volition is still quite true. For example, Guyton uses a printer, a machine used as a tool for reproduction, like a paintbrush. Or Michael Krebber takes a brush, begins to make a gesture and then abruptly stops because his uncertainty about the return prevent him from continuing. A new form is created in the process. Sarah Morris's screen is well known, but it gives rise to new interpretations all the time.

BR What kind of future development do you see? What artistic approaches do you find interesting in this context?

HZ I have no idea how things will develop. I can only say something about some of the comments I've made: that such completely different artists as Merlin Carpenter, Florian Pumhösl, Esther Stocker, Martin Erik Andersen, Lone Haugaard Madsen and Lucie Stahl have all set out in a profound search for forms using their academic and intellectual training, and with familiar artistic methods. I believe that such approaches are influential for an even younger generation. The Internet is perhaps somewhat overrated as a source for speculation.

BR But do you have a new term for what repetition stands for today or what it will become in the future?

HZ Well, some time ago the term "informalism" occurred to me: it is a kind

of word play and combines contradictory phenomena. I don't think I need to say anything else about it. In any case, it only works if the term becomes loaded with meaning by different sources.

BR What have you been working on since the Picasso exhibition?

HZ My retrospective exhibition in the Palacio de Velázquez of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid. It features a series that is paradigmatic for me as a further attempt to bring the works together—partly as a new formulation—to create an exhibition as an exhibition and in this way to show the potential genesis of my painting. The thing with Picasso will occupy me for some time. A lot is still open there.

All images courtesy of the artist; Galerie Meyer Kainer, Wien; Simon Lee Gallery, London; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris and Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York



Par François Salmeron

Ces toiles minimalistes de Heimo Zobernig répètent et déclinent de façon quasi-hypnotique diverses associations de mots, en suivant le même procédé créatif. Effectivement, ces tableaux ont été réalisés à partir de lettrages adhésifs qui ont été placés sur les toiles et recouverts de peinture. Puis, une fois ces adhésifs retirés, un effet de relief apparaît alors entre les mots composés et leur toile de fond. Se donnant tour à tour sur fond blanc, bleu ou brun, ces inscriptions en police Helvetica créent ainsi un effet de retrait ou d'avancement.

Les compositions de Heimo Zobernig explorent donc une dialectique de l'effacement et de l'apparition. En effet, soit les mots sont noyés dans leur fond, cryptés, et toute notre attention est retenue pour tenter de les déchiffrer et de les faire émerger du brouillard. Soit les mots se détachent de leur fond et apparaissent instantanément comme une surface visible.

Les fonds blancs peuvent complètement englober les tracés et la visibilité des écrits, qui semblent alors absorbés dans une sorte de voile nuageux. Mais ces fonds blancs peuvent également mettre en avant les mots de Heimo Zobernig, comme ce «Lavatory» jaillissant sous notre regard de toute sa splendeur immaculée. De même, les fonds bleus peuvent présenter un velours sombre ou une mer pétrole dans lesquels les inscriptions se perdent ou, de quelques touches fluorescentes, les mettre en exergue.

Dès lors, les mots se balancent entre deux significations possibles. Soit ils sont pur dévoilement, et se livrent quasi-instantanément dans un mouvement de pure immanence. Soit ils se donnent de manière plus énigmatique, comme si leur véritable signification ne pouvait se découvrir que via le décryptage d'un sens caché ou d'un tissu métaphorique plus opaque et complexe à saisir.

Ces toiles semblent ainsi reprendre à leur compte des problématiques proprement poétiques, où il serait notamment question d'une possible «objectivation» des mots. En fait, il semblerait qu'il ne faille pas tellement dissocier inscriptions et fond de couleur, en essayant de discerner un texte lisible sur une surface colorée. Il faudrait bien plutôt se rendre compte que les mots sont eux-mêmes peintures. Apparaissant à la fois comme formes et couleurs, ils seraient de pures apparitions phénoménales, tantôt fantomatiques, tantôt détachées.

Et les lettrages calibrés et uniformisés ne doivent pourtant pas nous tromper: Nous n'avons pas affaire à une exécution automatique suivant un procédé purement objectif. Car les mots se chevauchent parfois, empiètent les uns sur les autres, se coupent, se répètent comme un écho, ou jouent encore avec de grandes lignes rouges traversant la toile, preuve d'un mouvement carrément spontané et subjectif dans l'acte créateur.

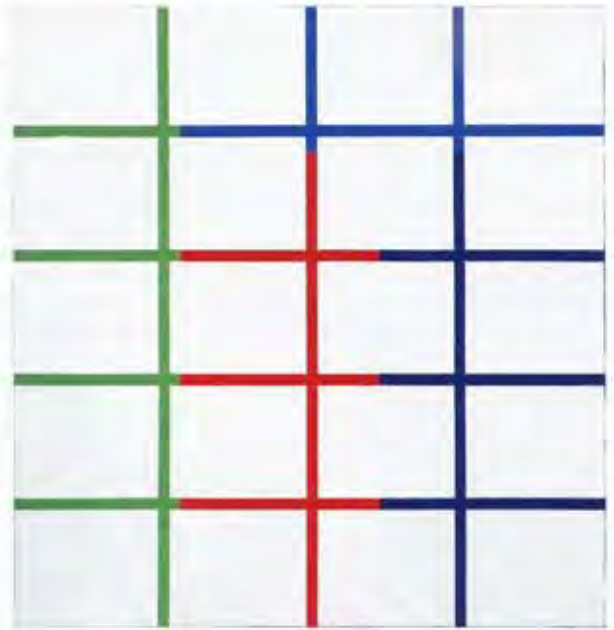
Mais l'acte de peindre ne devrait-il pas justement se suffire à lui-même au lieu d'avoir recours au langage? Il ne faudrait cependant pas considérer ces inscriptions comme de vulgaires «doubles verbaux» venant paraphraser l'acte créateur. Elles semblent bien plus accompagner le geste artistique et participer à son accomplissement. Le verbe aurait alors une valeur proprement performative: en utilisant les concepts de «painting», de «sculpture», ou de «monochrome», et en les inscrivant sur la toile, la main du peintre crée effectivement des tableaux monochromes.

— Heimo Zobernig, Untitled, 2011. Huile sur toile. 200 x 200 cm

— Heimo Zobernig, Untitled, 2011. Acrylique sur toile. 200 x 200 cm

<http://www.paris-art.com/marche-art/heimo-zobernig/zobernig-heimo/7670.html#haut>

1000 WORDS
Heimo Zobernig
Talks about his recent work · Introduction by
Achim Hochdörfer



Below: View of "Heimo Zobernig: Olive Tintel (in Red)," 2011, Kunsthalle Zürich. Photo: Stefan Aisenburger.

Right: Heimo Zobernig, Untitled, 2008, acrylic, projection screen, paint, projection screen fabric, 30 1/2 x 30 1/2".



SINCE THE LATE 1970S, Heimo Zobernig has played a multilayered game, using a system of his own devising to pit various historical references, media, and artmaking strategies against one another. Deploying a reduced formal language based on basic geometric shapes, simple materials, furniture, and Helvetica typefaces, Zobernig explores art's relationships to design, architecture, theater, and the public sphere. At first glance, the objects in his exhibitions can seem like laboratory apparatuses primed for an experiment, but the function of the individual elements is never entirely unambiguous. Something that appears pictorial might turn out to be a sculptural construction, only to fade into the background a moment later as the institutional or gallery space itself is laid bare; or else it might become a video projection surface, or a support for neon pieces.

This diversity of outcomes could be seen in four shows on view this past spring: The rooms of the Kunsthalle Zürich primarily featured videos and sculptures bathed in ambient red neon light, while his recent show at Friedrich Petzel Gallery in New York contained almost exclusively pictures, as is typical for Chelsea; at Galerie Meyer Kainer in Vienna, Zobernig thematized the relationship between painting and theatrical staging, and finally, in a show on view through mid-June at the Essl Museum outside Vienna, he addresses the relations between small and large objects, between model and space. All four presentations taken together form a sort of superretrospective: They not only provide an overview of his past work but also indicate the range of what can be signified by the format and presentation of an exhibition.

Zobernig studied set design in Vienna, after which he worked in various theaters until, in 1980, he put together his first artworks, postdramatic actions in which theater served as a medium-transcending conceptual framework that rendered visible the ideological dynamics of the art industry as if from the outside. He has since engaged in what one might call institutional critique from a bird's-eye view. In this way, Zobernig has been able to unite what Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

Below: View of “Heimo Zobernig,”
2011, Galerie Meyer Kainer,
Vienna. Photo: Tina Herzi.



Right: Heimo Zobernig, Untitled,
1987, oil on cardboard, 4 x 4 x 2”.



calls the traditions of “allegorical procedures” with strategies of “parody and appropriation,” or, to put it more pointedly, to bring together Michael Asher and Martin Kippenberger. In this freewheeling play with the genealogies and sensibilities of critical modernity, Zobernig’s interventions are interspersed with carefully orchestrated slipups, dissonances, and productive misunderstandings. The titles of shows are written incorrectly, for instance; plates are shifted during the printing process; hierarchies of “good” and “bad” taste are upended. For some exhibitions, Zobernig intentionally disrupts the ostensible minimum requirements for the presentation of art. At the Essl Museum, for example, a group of paintings are mounted on sliding walls within a metal cage, as if they were in storage: They are literally behind bars. Regardless of the humor of their presentation, such gestures always involve the violation of boundaries; the awkwardness that ensues makes these boundaries visible and reveals our aesthetic prejudices.

To some extent, Zobernig’s art displays a paradoxical desire to dissect a joke. His transgressions are not straightforward parodies, however, and unlike Kippenberger’s projects, they are not defused in a liberating punch line. It is, rather, as if Zobernig were trying to systematically use the production of error as a tool of analysis. The resulting embarrassment depends, on the one hand, upon the emotional investment of both artist and viewer, while on the other, it reveals unconscious aesthetic and social codes. Zobernig’s mode of institutional critique is not merely an intellectual game that might run aground in a navel-gazing metareflection on the art industry; instead it is a means of maneuvering through various ideological dynamics as they have played out in recent art history, or navigating trends and processes of canon formation (as well as what is excluded from them). Zobernig’s work pushes you to the point at which you are forced either to get involved and take a stand—or else to be satisfied with mere commentary.

—Achim Hochdörfer



Heimo Zobernig, *Untitled*, 2009,
steeel. Installation view, Eski
Museum—Kunst der Gegenwart,
Klosterneuburg, Austria.
Photo: Georg Petermichl.



Heimo Zobernig, *Untitled*, 2007,
Swarovski round stones and
acrylic on linen, 29 1/4 x 19 1/4"

WE GENERALLY EXPECT ARTISTS to have a position: to stick their necks out and create something that then stands there, vulnerable to attack. The opposite of this is refusal or failure, the unproductive artist. Isn't it seductive to consider a nonaction that is nonetheless productive—just living one's life, allowing something to happen that was never intended? By way of example, let's consider that moment of uncertainty upon waking that leads to our suddenly leaping out of bed to do something. I ponder the question of whether I should get up or not; and while I am still thinking it over, I've already gotten out of bed without realizing it and have missed this transitional moment. How and from where does this thing we call intention or inspiration arrive? Can we catch up with it by an act of self-reflection? Or is art a matter of submitting unconstrainedly to constraints? Sometimes I read about the psychic and neurological aspect of human nature, the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious. I find it surprising, for instance, that this moment of waking, brought about by some sound or other, induces a reversal in the temporal structure of our dreams. In the briefest of moments, a story is constructed that retroactively leads up to this sound. Around 1980, I built a machine using a film camera, a light, and a timer set to awaken me

repeatedly during the night. The period of time I felt was passing between the moment of waking and my reaching for the camera to turn it off seemed to me unbearably long. But the film document shows that it lasted only a fraction of a second.

It may be that I am a person who thinks very analytically. Sometimes what I'm doing seems like engineering or research. That's one side of things. On the other hand, interesting results often come from making leaps rather than following a step-by-step process—that is, when ideas arrive by surprise. This explains the great pleasure we take in absurd, spiritual constructions. In the early works I made for the theater in collaboration with other young artists, we picked out the most difficult stories possible in order to interpret them visually: the temptation of Saint Anthony, for example, or the book of Revelation. How can these crazy visions be represented? For me, the solution lies in reversal: creating an atmosphere in which showing as such is rejected and instead placeholders are created that will call up these stories obliquely, keeping the metaphoric and symbolic on the outside, but only in order to reveal how unavoidably they keep slipping back in. If I put myself in a particular situation—as in one video where I'm naked with a blue sausage, say—I am

creating abstract elements. We have a blue sausage one hundred meters long, I'm naked, and I'm quoting the form of a Greek figure, wearing a wig whose shape recalls a Greek sculpture. These are all more or less abstract ingredients that then, in context, produce the effect of an aesthetic expression. No snakes, no Greeks, no pain—and nonetheless the entire Laocöon story is there.

Making things intentionally means raising a statue, placing something front and center. So-called installation art may blur the boundaries between objects and their surroundings, but the objects and materials being used nevertheless remain, for the most part, positive acts of placing that define space as a neutral container. I prefer to speak of a *display* in which the atmosphere of the entire surrounding area becomes the material. The display concept struck me in the early 1990s as a suitable basis for a new way of thinking about sculpture: I no longer make sculpture because it is already there. I look at a place and can see how it moves me, disciplines me, what feelings it summons. And of course the part that interests me is the matter of form-giving: on the one hand, in the sense of a free interpretation of the fundamental Marxist principle that physical objects influence people's behavior, and on the other, in terms

Just as simple abstract means suffice in painting to produce the illusion of pictorial space, in sculpture it's often almost unavoidable for the work to take on the character of an anthropomorphic interlocutor.



Heimo Zobernig, *Nr. 24, 2007*, still from a color video, 14 minutes 22 seconds.



Heimo Zobernig, *Untitled, 2006*, acrylic on canvas, 39 1/4 x 39 1/4".

Below: Heimo Zobernig, *Untitled, 2010*, plaster, cotton, wood, particleboard, 89 1/4 x 41 1/4 x 29 1/4".

of the relationship between art and design that Dan Graham formulated hyperbolically with his notion of “art as design/design as art.” Admittedly, things go wrong when the engagement with art spaces gets out of hand and the space of display finds itself excessively loved. This is what happened with institutional critique in the '90s: It turned into an affirmation of the institution. I wanted to avoid this. I wasn't so much interested in providing suggestions for improving things as in just observing the situation—I'm not the improvement director, or anything like that. What's important isn't the love of institutions but rather of art itself—through which institutions can themselves be created. This can be done the way we build relationships, or like at a Kippenberger party. It can be done with violent arguments, or as a lovefest. In this way it might be possible to bring together many things that appear irreconcilable in institutional critique. As for my own approach, you could call it a dystopian institutional critique, resembling a set of rules for a game. But seeing art as a game is not equivalent to a position of cynical parody. Quite the contrary: The ideal game necessarily inscribes an ethics. If everyone stuck to the rules, our lives could be infinitely enriched. This isn't going to happen; it's a utopian promise that can't be kept. What's at stake

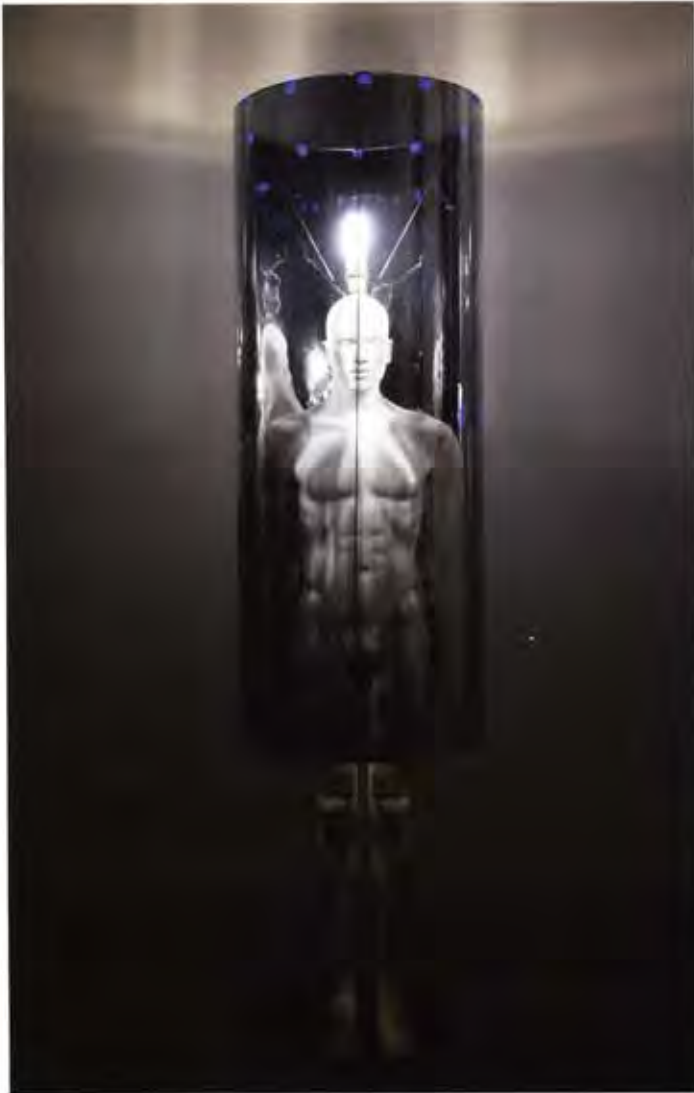
in this game is, among other things, communication. The failure to communicate makes one an ass.

In order to make all these things visible and legible I avail myself of the usual media. I have no interest in multimedia clutter, where quantity usually wins out over quality and you can go badly astray. Sometimes like just looking at the paintings and forgetting about the space that surrounds them. To make this clear, in my last show at Friedrich Petzel in New York I exhibited only pictures in the main gallery, while at the show taking place at the same time at the Kunsthall Zürich, I didn't show any paintings at all. Just a simple abstract means suffice in painting to produce the illusion of pictorial space, in sculpture it's often almost unavoidable for the work to take on the character of an anthropomorphic interlocutor. In the second room at Petzel I had two sculptures, and for one of them I twined a ghostly, informal figure through a shelf. This is an unexpected hiccup in my oeuvre. Something mysteriously alive entered in, to uncanny effect. I've found such encounters fascinating for almost thirty years now, and it's only been a couple of years since I first gave these modified mannequins a whirl. Who knows? Maybe they could be something for my late work. □

Translated from German by Oliver E. Deyfus.



Galerie
Chantal Crousel



Stumme Diener Showroom Dummies

Heimo Zobernig spricht mit *Kirsty Bell* über seine Skulpturen, Gemälde und Videos aus drei Jahrzehnten – und über Rotlicht, Schaufensterpuppen und die Literaturhinweise Oswald Wieners

Heimo Zobernig talks to *Kirsty Bell* about his sculptures, paintings and videos from the early 1980s to the present – and about red light, mannequins and Oswald Wiener's literary sources



Von links nach rechts
From left to right:

Ohne Titel
Untitled
2010
Polyester-Figur,
transparente Spiegelfolie,
Stahl, Lamie / Polyester
figure, transparent mirror-
foil, steel, lamp
220-60-60 cm

Ohne Titel
Untitled
1986
Kunstharzack, Karton
Synthetic-resin varnish,
cardboard
182-66-66 cm

Nr. 24
No. 24
2007
Standbild / Video still

Das Jahr 2011 begann für Heimo Zobernig mit fünf Einzelausstellungen: Galerieausstellungen in Antwerpen, New York und seiner Heimatstadt Wien sowie Einzelausstellungen im Essl Museum in Klosterneuburg vor den Toren Wiens und in der Kunsthalle Zürich. Für einen Künstler, dessen Werk sich so intensiv mit den Strukturen des Ausstellungsmachens auseinandersetzt, ein enormes Unterfangen. Oder eher eine konzeptuelle Masche?

Zobernigs Einzelpräsentation in den temporären Räumen der Kunsthalle Zürich, dem Muscum Bäregasse, war zugleich die Eröffnungsausstellung in den beiden im Stadtzentrum gelegenen, aneinandergrenzenden vierstöckigen Barockhäusern aus dem 17. Jahrhundert. Zobernig zeigte hier nur ausgewählte Skulpturen und Videoarbeiten der letzten 25 Jahre – und kein einziges Gemälde, obwohl die Malerei seit den frühen 1980er Jahren einen wichtigen Bestandteil seiner Praxis ausmacht. Fraglos hat diese Beschränkung etwas mit den räumlichen Gegebenheiten dieser

denkmalgeschützten Gebäude mit ihren holzgetäfelten oder stuckverzierten Decken, den wohnraumgroßen Zimmern, Keramiköfen und den mit Türöffnungen und Fenstern durchsetzten Wänden zu tun. Zentral war auch Zobernigs Entscheidung, eine Arbeit wieder aufzunehmen und weiter auszuformulieren, die er 1994 für Albert Oehlers Ausstellung „Jetztzeit“ in der Kunsthalle Wien produziert hatte: Damals hatte Zobernig rote Neonröhren im Ausstellungsraum installiert und so eine nicht unwesentliche Wahrnehmungsbarriere geschaffen, die es schwierig machte, Oehlers Malerei adäquat zu betrachten. In Zürich war jeder Raum des Muscum Bäregasse mit roten Neonröhren beleuchtet, was einerseits eine kohärente und dramatische Lösung für die Nutzung dieses historischen Gebäudes als Ausstellungsraum für zeitgenössische Kunst darstellte, während es andererseits die Wahrnehmungsbedingungen für seine Skulpturen produktiv in Mitleidenschaft zog. So unterstrich die Lichtregie die Art und Weise, in der seine Arbeiten selbst durch ihre billige



Materialität (häufig Pappe, Styropor oder MDF) und ihre mal aus dem Minimalismus, mal aus Inneneinrichtung und Ausstellungsarchitektur geläufigen Strukturen Fragen der Oberfläche und formalen Autonomie aufwerfen.

Diese Form der pragmatischen Entscheidungsfindung taucht immer wieder auf bei Zobernig, dessen Arbeiten häufig aus Zufällen produktives Kapital schlagen. Das biografisch prägendste Beispiel ist vielleicht seine Entscheidung, sich an der Wiener Akademie der Künste im Bereich Bühnenbild einzuschreiben, nachdem er in der Malereiklasse abgelehnt worden war. Diese unorthodoxen Anfänge haben sicher gestellt, dass disziplinenübergreifende Kontaminationen zu einem zentralen Merkmal der Arbeit Zobernigs wurden; er setzt sich mit fundamentalen Fragen der Abstraktion auseinander, mag es sich dabei aber nicht verkneifen, diese mit Anleihen aus Performance, Innenarchitektur und Möbel- oder Ausstellungsdesign zu verunklaren. Das ewig wiederkehrende Figur-Grund-Problem in der Malerei ist selbst ein Kernthema: der Grund (insbesondere die grelle Farbe des blauen, roten oder grünen Hintergrunds, der in der Farbstanx-Video-technik eingesetzt wird) nimmt eine entscheidende Stellung ein, während häufig als zu vernachlässigend angesehene Objekte – das Bücherregal, der Konferenzstuhl, der Sockel – zu Hauptfiguren werden, denen der Status einer autonomen Skulptur zugewiesen wird. Tatsächlich wurde in der Kunsthalle Zürich die Beleuchtung, die normalerweise kein expliziter Aspekt von Ausstellungen ist, zum Protagonisten, wenn auch mit einer machiavellistischen Wendung: Die von Zobernig ausgewählten roten Neonlichter beleuchteten die Arbeiten weniger, als dass sie sie gerade noch sichtbar bleiben ließen.

Bei Zobernig kommt bestimmten Formen, Materialien und Strategien immer wieder eine Schlüsselrolle zu; so gewinnen Arbeiten, die zunächst

kryptisch, wenn nicht gar leichtfertig erscheinen mögen, mit zunehmendem Wissen um ihre Vorläufer an Dichte und Gewicht. Mit der Zeit wird diese Form der Selbstreflexivität ein weiterer kontingenter Faktor, der die Objekte und Malereien davor bewahrt, einfach nur das zu sein, als was sie auf den ersten Blick erscheinen. Seit den 1980er Jahren ist Zobernig mit Ausstellungen in Kontinentaleuropa äußerst präsent und genießt im deutschsprachigen Raum hohes Ansehen (seit 2000 ist er Professor an der Wiener Akademie, 2010 gewann er den renommierten Friedrich Kiesler-Preis). Außerhalb Europas jedoch ist er bislang weit weniger bekannt – was der Anerkennung seiner Arbeit eine gewisse Schlagsseite verleiht.

Vielleicht führt auch der spezielle Charakter seines Oeuvres selbst – eine durch ihre Kontingenz verkomplizierte, selbstreflexive Abstraktion – zu dieser gespaltenen Form der Anerkennung. Jedes Werk spielt die ihm zugewiesene Rolle – die Skulpturen agieren ihre eigene Unbeholfenheit aus, die Videos sind in ihren Wiederholungsschleifen gefangen, die Malereien übermitteln ihre kompositorische Struktur, die Bühne stellt ihr tautologisches Selbst zur Schau – und wartet gespannt. Der Künstler und Medientheoretiker Peter Weibel bringt es in einem 2010 vom CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux publizierten Katalog auf den Punkt: „Im Gegensatz zur Postmoderne übercodiert [Zobernig] nicht, er untercodiert.“ Es ist am Publikum, wo auch immer es sein mag, den Code zu bestimmen.

Kirsty Bell Simultaneität taucht in deiner Arbeit in verschiedenen Formen auf, sei es in der parallelen Verwendung unterschiedlicher Medien, sei es in der Konkurrenz verschiedener Bedeutungen innerhalb ein- und derselben Arbeit. War es ebenfalls eine strategische Entscheidung, so viele Ausstellungen gleichzeitig stattfinden zu lassen?

hinter auf beiden Seiten
Images on both pages:

Oben Titel
Unifield
Ausstellungsansichten
Installation Views
Essel Museum,
Klosterneuburg, 2011

Helmo Zobernig Es war sicher ein Zufall, dass alle diese Ausstellungen so dicht zusammengekommen sind, also kein überlegter Strategieplan. Aber es kam mir dann doch sehr entgegen, weil mein Atelier wegen Umbau zur Zeit nicht benutzbar ist und ich auf diese Weise meine Lagerprobleme lösen konnte. Diese Umstände haben mir also vorgegeben, die Dinge auf die Ausstellungsorte zu verteilen. Es ist vielleicht damit vergleichbar, wie schwer es sein kann, auf einer leeren, weißen Leinwand mit dem Malen zu beginnen; wenn es da aber schon Spuren gibt, dann ergibt sich alles weitere wie von selbst.

KR Obwohl deine Ausstellung in der Kunsthalle Zürich mehr oder weniger chronologisch aufgebaut ist, war ich überrascht von der Reformulierung bestimmter zentraler Ideen oder Arbeiten aus deinem Oeuvre: bemalte Pappsäulen oder -pfeiler; Objekte, die wie Tische oder Sockel aussehen; sogar das Display für die jeweiligen Videoarbeiten war identisch, das ja auch selbst als „unbetitelt“ Arbeit von 1989 ausgewiesen war, bestehend aus einem Hantarex Monitor und einem Tisch. All diese Schlüsselthemen kann man durch die gesamte Ausstellung verfolgen...

HZ ...die natürlich durch die spezielle Situation eine neue Formulierung bekommen. Auch wenn es jetzt Arbeiten sind, die aus verschiedenen Zeiten stammen und auch eine Chronologie möglich ist, so sehe ich das nicht als eine Retrospektive. In einer Retrospektive würde man sich mehr bemühen, die Arbeiten zu kontextualisieren oder zumindest den Kontext, in dem sie entstanden sind, irgendwie auch zu erzählen. Das ist in Zürich ganz und gar nicht der Fall, weil die Umstände dieses Bärenmuseums so dominant sind, dass die Arbeiten in ein ganz neues Licht gestellt sind, sprichwörtlich.

KR Die roten Neonröhren waren auch ein zentraler Beitrag zu einer Installation, die du 1994 gemeinsam mit Albert Obhlen gemacht hast...





HZ Das Statement mit dem farbigen Licht und der Malerei von Albert war sehr viel eindeutiger in diesem Zusammentreffen: Wie kann man Malerei einer Prüfung unterziehen, indem man nur durch das Rotspektrum einen ganz anderen Blick auf diese Bilder hat. Können die Bilder unter diesen Bedingungen bestehen? Natürlich waren auch historische Momente überlegt, man denke an Picassos *Guernica* (1937), das er unter dem Schock und Eindruck des Bürgerkriegs gemalt hat und das die Schönheit der Farbe ausschließt und sich auf schwarz, weiß, grau beschränkt, um die Drastik des Unglücks zu schildern. Das ist ein Grundmotiv in einer engagierten Kunst, die etwas will, die etwas bewirken will. Das war eines von diversen Motiven, die Malerei unter schwierigen Bedingungen zu zeigen.

KB Hattest du bei der Beleuchtung im Museum Bäregasse den gleichen Gedanken?

HZ Ja, es war so, dass das Haus keine seriöse Beleuchtungseinrichtung hatte, dass eine Beleuchtung erst zu überlegen war, und jetzt ist dieses Problem durch meine Ausstellung etwas aufgeschoben worden. Es gab nur improvisierte Lampen und Vitrinenbeleuchtungen. Da war mein Gedanke: Wenn etwas schon sehr schlecht ist, dann kann man die Bedingungen noch schlechter machen. Und dieses Haus kann etwas,

„Warum stellt sich mit Weglassen des Überflüssigen keine Eindeutigkeit her? Die Ausstellung, in der alles weg war, gab es, aber das Problem des Eindeutigen war nicht gelöst.“

was andere Ausstellungsräume nicht können: Um eine ausgesuchte Lichtstimmung zu erzeugen, muss man eben verdunkeln. Dieses quasi typische Schweizer Haus hat Holz-Fensterläden, die man alle schließen kann. Und es ist sicher auch ein schönes Moment, das Haus einmal so verschlossen und hermetisch vorzuführen. Außerdem stehen ähnliche alte Häuser oft so isoliert an Orten, wo kein übliches modernes Geschäftstreiben ist, und werden eventuell in ein Rotlichtmilieu übernommen. Dieses freistehende Haus in dieser Umgebung hatte den Charakter eines „Moulin Rouge“. Diese „roten Mühlen“ sind Orte des Eskapismus, wo man seinen Wünschen und seinem Begehren nachgeht, außerhalb des alltäglichen Lebens, den Wegen des täglichen Geschäfts.

KB Auf der einen Seite gibt es in deinen Arbeiten den Wunsch nach Struktur und indexikalischer Systematisierung, auf der anderen Seite widersetzen sie sich jeglicher strikten Kategorisierung und schweben häufig zwischen Bühnendesign und Malerei oder zwischen minimalistischer Skulptur und alltäglichem Objekt.

HZ Das Bemühen um Abstraktion ist ein grundsätzliches und da scheint es mir natürlich ganz wichtig, alles Überflüssige wegzulassen. Also, das Bemühen ist groß, aber es wirkt immer wieder irgendetwas entgegen, das

Material oder die Inhaltlichkeit stört das immer wieder. Das ist quasi die Befragung: Warum stellt sich mit weniger keine Eindeutigkeit her, in der Kunst, der Malerei? Es gab eine Zeit in den frühen 1990er Jahren, da habe ich mich darum bemüht, ganz ans Ende zu kommen, habe mich ans monochrome, weiße Bild herangearbeitet, das nicht mal mehr gemalt wird, sondern nur mehr die grundrierte Leinwand ist. Diese Ausstellung, in der alles weg war, hat es gegeben, aber damit war das Problem des Eindeutigen nicht gelöst.

KB Der Widerstand der Objekte gegen die Abstraktion führt zu einer Art gegenseitiger Verunreinigung, die auch durch die Gegenüberstellung von Videos mit Skulpturen oder Malereien betont wird.

HZ Ja, als ich begonnen habe, meine Ausstellung sozusagen unrein zu machen, so dass man nicht nur auf Skulpturen oder Bilder trifft, da habe ich das Video dazugenommen, als eine Art Kommentarebene, die die Mängel in Sachen Reinheit der Medien herausstellt. Was bei einem fehlt, das wird durch etwas anderes eingelöst. Das Videobild kann etwas, was das Malereibild nicht kann, da tritt bei mir das Anthropomorphe auf, also der Mensch.

KB War es klar, dass du der Hauptdarsteller sein würdest?



Ohne Titel
Unfilled,
2002
Diverse Materialien, Karton
Mixed media, carton
120 x 49 x 41 cm

HZ Es ist so, dass ich, noch während ich an der Akademie studierte, mit einem Freund begonnen habe, Performances zu machen. Bei der Performance-Reihe, die ich mit meinem damaligen Freund Alfons Egger erarbeitet habe, war das Moment des Flüchtigen natürlich ganz wichtig. Nach der Aufführung ist da nichts mehr. Für die Fragen - Dokumentation oder nicht, Publikum ja oder nein - war Video die Lösung. So konnte ich im Atelier machen, was ich wollte - ohne Termindruck oder Publikumsstress - mit einem Medium, das relativ unpräzise zu benutzen ist. Die Videos haben eher den Charakter von aufgezeichneten Handlungen, die nicht großartig filmisch strukturiert sind, es ist ja in den meisten Fällen eine statische Kamera, die auf etwas Bewegtes blickt.

KB Slapstick ist in deinen Videoarbeiten sehr ausgeprägt...

HZ Humor ist wichtig. Der Witz kann ja etwas Besonderes, da er von etwas handeln kann, was man vielleicht gar nicht versteht. Und trotzdem gelingt es dem Witz, so was wie Verstehen herzustellen, nämlich wenn es gelingt, dass man darüber lachen muss. Der tiefere Sinn bleibt eventuell versteckt.

Ein gelungener Witz ist manchmal schöner als ein logischer philosophischer Schluss.

KB Bestimmte zentrale Aspekte tauchen über einen längeren Zeitraum immer wieder auf; Arbeiten werden in verschiedenen Kontexten immer wieder verwendet. Diese wiederkehrenden Fluchtlinien scheinen nahezuzeigen, dass deine Arbeit sich weniger linear als vielmehr in einer spiralförmigen, selbstbezüglichen Bewegung entwickelt

HZ Ich kann nicht sagen, welche Vorgehensweise gewinnt, ich muss mich da auch zurücklehnen und beobachten, was da vorliegt. Ich sehe ja auch, dass nicht alles möglich ist, alles egal ist. Es gibt für mich Entwicklungen, die in einer Chronologie sichtbar werden. Wie wirkt sich etwa ein Gedanke, den ich schon mal gefasst habe auf weitere Entscheidungen aus? Die Frage nach Folgerichtigkeit ist schon eine Sache, der ich versuche nachzugehen. Ich vermute da kein Chaos. Natürlich haben mich in meinen frühen Jahren die Wiener Positivisten und deren Interesse für den Behaviorismus sehr interessiert und begeistert. Da gibt es ein Buch, einen Roman - *Die Verbesserung von Mitteleuropa* von Oswald Wiener (1969) - in

dem er im Anhang eine sehr umfangreiche Literaturliste anführte und dazu voranstellte, wie gerne er auch noch alles andere Gehörte, Gesehene usw. aufgenommen hätte, quasi um einer späteren Generation die Möglichkeit zu bieten zu erforschen, wie dieser Text zustande gekommen ist. Da wäre so eine Idee zu finden, wie künstlerische Arbeit erklärt werden könnte. Reverenz und Referenz, Respekt und Bezugnahme auf Historisches sind Umstände, die bewusst und unbewusst wirken. Wie wir wissen, wenn man nur ein bisschen zu weit von diesen Wegen abweicht, ist man schon außerhalb der Kunstwahrnehmung, dann wird es nicht Teil der Diskussion, ist vielleicht existenziell, aber ergibt keine Existenz, führt zu einer Subexistenz, einer Liebhaberei oder einem Hobby.

KB Einige Feinheiten deiner Arbeit mögen für ein nicht deutschsprachiges Publikum verloren gehen: Wenn sie nicht erkannt werden können, setzt das die Arbeiten nicht dem Risiko genau jener von dir erwähnten „Subexistenz“ aus?

HZ Die Ironie oder der Humor ist ja nur ein Aspekt, ein Vermittlungsmoment, ist nicht zentral für das Verstehen. Trotzdem bin ich immer neugierig, wie Übersetzungsfehler auf die Arbeit Einfluss nehmen. Diverse Missverständnisse können ja produktiv werden. „Abstraktion als Weltsprache“, eine Parole der 1950er Jahre, hat ja große Hoffnungen in das Universelle des Visuellen gesetzt. Nun wissen wir, wie kultur- und kontextabhängig auch das ist, aber wer will schon immer zwischen den Zeilen lesen...

KB Deine Arbeiten erscheinen fast hermetisch in ihren sorgfältig geplanten, konzeptuellen Strukturen, die dem Zufall wenig Raum geben.

HZ Das hat eben so einen Charakter, wenn man sich eine empirische Gewissheit verschaffen will, dann muss man das Experiment wiederholbar machen. Also wenn das jetzt zu sehr ein Chaos ist und alles reinhängt, dann kann man Wirkungen schlecht beurteilen, herausfiltern, weil sie immer gestört sind. Erzeuge also bereinigte Bedingungen, aber tue es in dem Bewusstsein, dass es schwer ist, so eine Reinheit überhaupt herzustellen. Wenn man einen Tisch in die Mitte eines Raumes stellt, dann kann man schon in relativen Verhältnis seine Wirkungen feststellen. Was passiert? Wie teilen sich dann Betrachter im Raum auf, weil dieses Objekt da in der Mitte einen Platz annimmt und wie verhalten sie sich in Bezug darauf? Und gerade bei so einem scheinbar einfachen Ding wie einem Tisch ist es interessant, wie darauf im Unterschied zu einer Skulptur reagiert wird, dass sofort die Hände draufgelegt werden, weil wir das sofort als etwas alltägliches, nützlich in Gebrauch nehmen, Gläser und Blumen darauf stellen...

KB Wie kam es dazu, dass du Schaufensterpuppen verwendet hast?

HZ Ich weiß es nicht mehr so genau, aber ich probier mal so eine Geschichte zu erzählen. Aus irgendeinem Grund habe ich mich bemüht, vor ca. 30 Jahren eine Schaufensterpuppe zu bekommen, habe aber aus Geldmangel in dieser Zeit nur billige Fragmente zusammenbekommen – einen Unterleib, einen Arm usw., aber keine ganze Figur – und wusste nicht, was damit werden soll. Diese Teile habe ich halt so durch meine diversen Studios mitgeschleppt und irgendwann verloren. Dann viele Jahre später – und wieder weiß ich nicht warum –, gerät eine Schaufensterpuppe in mein Atelier. Jedenfalls habe ich eine Entdeckung gemacht, die mich sehr überrascht hat: dass die Gegenwart dieser Puppe die Gegenwart von etwas Lebendigem in meiner Wahrnehmung ausgelöst hat. Ich habe mich im Atelier, besonders in so Dämmerstimmungen, nicht mehr alleine gefühlt, für Augenblicke. Das Wiederkehrende und Intensive dieser Empfindung hat mich schwer beschäftigt. Dieser Moment, indem ich ein bisschen abwesend bin, und – „da ist doch jemand“, doch nur diese Puppe...

KB Unheimlich...

HZ Ja, es ist absolut unheimlich. Dieses „lebendig oder nicht“, so eine seltsame Sache. Was können andere Gegenstände in gleicher Größe im Vergleich? So wurde die Puppe immer interessanter.

KB Hat sich das wie ein großer Schritt angefühlt, die menschliche Figur neben den geometrischen Maleisen oder minimalistisch wirkenden Skulpturen einzuführen?

HZ Es war schon so was wie ein Einfall notwendig. Von der Figur zur Abstraktion – von der Abstraktion zur Figur. In meinem Atelier hat vor meiner Zeit ein klassisch-moderner Bildhauer gearbeitet, Joannis Avramidis, der hat die Menschenfigur in Meridiane gegliedert, abstrahiert und Rotationsformen daraus gemacht. Daran angelehnt habe ich ein Video gemacht, in dem mein Körper durch blaue Klebestreifen-Meridiane zerfällt und sich durch den blauen Videoraum bewegt. Die geometrischen Muster dafür habe ich auf dieser ersten Puppe ausprobiert. Damit war der Weg in die Ausstellung geöffnet.

KB Als ich eine Schaufensterpuppe in der Nähe einer Skulptur entdeckte, die wie ein Bücherregal aussah, erschien sie wie eine weitere standardisierte Einheit, wie ein weiteres Regal. Sie sah gar nicht so fremdartig aus, wie ich es möglicherweise erwartet hätte.

HZ Die Proportionen eines Bücherregals folgen doch sehr denen der menschlichen Figur. Oder denken wir an den Kleiderschrank. Das ist ein schöner Topos. Kleider reinhängen oder Bücher draufstellen – das kann der „Stumme Diener“, Stellvertreter oder Wächter. Im Video Nr. 24 (2007) breche ich unter der Last dieser Aufgaben und viel Farbe zusammen.

„Wenn etwas schon sehr schlecht ist, dann kann man die Bedingungen noch schlechter machen.“

KB Es stellt sich auch ein lautologisches Verhältnis ein zwischen dem Betrachter und einer Skulptur, weil dieses figurative Element enthält. Du siehst, und wirst angesehen.

HZ Ja, man fühlt sich beobachtet. Diese architektonischen Regalskulpturen mit den Puppen darin wachen über die Rückstellung der geliehener Bücher. Dann habe ich mit diesen Figuren Diverses probiert. Einer Schaufensterpuppe meine Physiognomie anmodelliert, das Geschlecht verändert, die Schambereich wie eine Strumpfhose gestaltet oder die Brüste abgenommen. Die Figuren in Zürich sind einigermaßen neutral. Schaufensterpuppen sind meist sehr dem Geschmack der jeweiligen Zeit entsprechend gestaltet vom Haarschnitt bis zur Haltung. Aber es gibt natürlich auch so eine Idee von einer idealen Durchschnitts-Schönheit, so eine Art Klassizismus im Design dieser Puppen. Das fand ich interessant – Klassizismus, da hat man eine gewisse Berührungsangst, kommt aber in die künstlerische Arbeit, dort, wo die Wiederholung der eigenen Arbeit auftaucht.

KB Während sich die Züricher Ausstellung auf die skulpturalen Aspekte deiner Arbeit konzentrierte, wird die Ausstellung im Essl Museum eine stärker architektonische Form annehmen und Fragen des Displays oder der Bühne als Ausstellungsstrategie in den Vordergrund rücken. Beide Ausstellungen scheinen auch endgültige

„Ohne Titel (In Red)“
Umkleen (In Red)
Ausstellungsansicht
Installation view
Kunsthalle Zürich
Museum Bärengraben, 2011



Lesarten deiner Arbeit abwehren oder zerstreuen zu wollen. Warum diese Abwehrstrategie?

HZ Einerseits haben sich Entscheidungen aus den eingangs erzählten Umständen ergeben, andererseits folge ich auch gerne intuitiven Impulsen, die ich gar nicht rationalisieren mag. Im Essl Museum zeige ich ganz kleine ältere Skulpturen in einer großen, raumfüllenden neuen Installation mit der Einladung an diverse Musikperformer und -performerinnen, auf einer Bühne aufzutreten. Zentral ist dabei ein roter Vorhang, der vor drei Jahren im MUMOK auf der Bühne zu sehen war, im Rahmen der Performancereihe „Nichts IST AUFREGEND. Nichts IST SEXY. Nichts IST NICHT PEINLICH.“, in meinem Beitrag *Heimo Zobernig erklärt seinem Double, wie man eine Performance macht*. Dieser Vorhang war dann in der Tate St Ives, der Gulbenkian Foundation Lissabon und ganz groß im CAPC in Bordeaux. Nun hab ich auch die Gelegenheit, eine Auswahl von Texten, die für diese Ausstellungen entstanden sind, in einem Katalog zusammenzubringen... Wiederholung der eigenen Arbeit...
Übersetzung Einleitung, Fragen: Daniel Pies

For Heimo Zobernig, 2011 began with five solo exhibitions: gallery shows in Antwerp, New York and his hometown of Vienna as well as exhibitions at the Essl Museum in Klosterneuburg near Vienna and the Kunsthalle in Zurich. For an artist whose work engages so keenly with the structures of exhibition making, this seems like an enormous undertaking. Or is it a conceptual ploy?

Zobernig's solo show inaugurated the Kunsthalle's temporary premises in

the Museum Bärengrasse, two adjacent, four-storey 17th-century baroque buildings in downtown Zurich. Zobernig exhibited only sculptures and video works selected from the last 25 years and none of the paintings which have been a staple of his practice since the early 1980s. No doubt the constraints of exhibiting in these listed premises - with their wood panelled or plasterwork ceilings, domestically scaled rooms, ceramic ovens and walls punctuated with windows or doorways - played a role in this decision. Crucially, he also decided to revisit a work made for an installation of Albert Oehlen's paintings in the show 'Jetztzeit' at Vienna's Kunsthalle in 1994: Zobernig installed red fluorescent lighting, which created a considerable hindrance to viewing Oehlen's work. In Zurich, each room in the Museum Bärengrasse was lit with red fluorescent light, providing a coherent and dramatic solution for this historical building as an exhibition space for contemporary art, while casting into doubt the viewing conditions for his sculptures. The lighting accentuated how the works question aspects such as surface and autonomous form through their cheap materiality (cardboard, styrofoam or MDF) and their structures which recall Minimalism, furnishing or display.

Such pragmatic decision-making features repeatedly in Zobernig's work, where coincidence is often put to productive ends, the most formative example being the artist's enrolment in the set design department at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna after his application to the painting department was rejected. This unorthodox start ensured that cross-disciplinary contamination would become a cornerstone of

Zobernig's practice; he may wrestle with fundamental questions of abstraction but persistently confounds them with borrowings from performance, interior design, furnishing and display. The perennial painterly problem of foreground and background is itself a central theme. The background (especially the vivid colour of the blue, red or green screen used in chroma key video technology) takes on a role, while objects more often accorded negligible status - the bookshelf, the conference chair, the pedestal - become central players, re-designated as autonomous sculpture. Indeed, in Zurich, the lighting itself, not usually an explicit feature of an exhibition, was cast as a protagonist, albeit with a Machiavellian twist: Zobernig's choice of red fluorescents did not so much light the works as render them barely visible.

Zobernig often revisits certain key forms, materials and strategies; works that may initially appear cryptic, if not flippant, grow in density and weight with greater knowledge of their predecessors. Over time, this self-reflexivity becomes another element of contingency, preventing the objects and paintings from being simply what they appear to be. Zobernig has exhibited prolifically throughout continental Europe since the 1980s and is an authoritative figure in the German-speaking world (he has been a professor at the Academy in Vienna since 2000 and won Austria's prestigious Friedrich Kiesler prize in 2010). Yet he remains less well known outside Europe - a situation that has led to a somewhat lopsided appreciation of his work.

Perhaps the nature of his work - self-conscious abstraction complicated by its contingency - supports this split appreciation. Each work performs

„Ohne Titel (No Red)“
Untitled (In Red)
Ausstellungsansicht
Installation view
Kunsthalle Zürich,
Museum Bärengrasse, 2011



its assigned role – the sculptures acting out their awkwardness, the videos locked in their repetitive loops, the paintings stating their compositional structure, the stage displaying its tautological self – and waits expectantly. As artist and media theorist Peter Weibel aptly put it in his contribution to a catalogue published in 2010 by CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux: 'in contrast to Post-Modernism, [Zobernig] does not overcode but undercodes.' It is up to the audience, wherever it may be, to determine the code.

Kirsty Bell Simultaneity appears in your work in various forms, through the different media used or concurrent meanings occurring within one work. Was it another kind of conscious simultaneity or strategic decision to have so many exhibitions taking place at the same time?

Heimo Zobernig The fact that all these shows came so close together was a coincidence, not a deliberate strategy. But it worked very well for me, as my studio is currently unusable due to building work, and this situation solved my storage problems. I was obliged by circumstance to divide things up between the exhibition venues. You can maybe compare it to the difficulty of starting to paint on an empty white canvas; if there are marks on it already, everything else unfolds as if of its own accord.

KB Although the Zurich show is more or less chronological, I was struck by a reformulation of certain key ideas from your *oeuvre*: painted cardboard columns or pillars; objects that look like tables or

pedestals; even the identical display for each of the different video works which is designated as an 'untitled' work from 1989 consisting of a Hantarex monitor and table. All of these themes may be traced throughout the exhibition...

HZ ... and are of course reformulated through the specific situation. Even if these works are from different periods which can be considered chronologically, I don't see it as a retrospective. In a retrospective, more effort would be made to contextualise the works, or at least to somehow mention the contexts in which they were originally made. This is not at all the case in Zurich, because the conditions at the Museum Bären-gasse are so dominant that the works appear in a totally new light, quite literally.

KB The red fluorescent light was also your key contribution to a joint installation with Albert Oehlen back in 1994...

HZ The statement with the coloured light and Albert's paintings was much clearer, in the combination: How can painting be subjected to scrutiny when the only available light is in the red range, giving a totally different view of the pictures? Does the work stand up under these conditions? Of course, there are also historical precedents, such as Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), painted under the shock of the Civil War; he avoided the beauty of colour and reduced the palette to black, white and grey to reflect the extreme nature of the disaster. This is a basic motif in a type of political art that wants something specific, that wants to produce an effect. That was one of several motives for showing painting under difficult conditions.

'Instead of presenting painting and sculpture alone, I added video to expose the flaws in the supposed purity of media.'

„Ohne Titel (In Red)“
Untitled (In Red)
Ausstellungsblick
Installation view
Kunsthalle Zürich,
Museum Bären-gasse, 2011

KB Did you have the same idea in mind with the light in Museum Bären-gasse?

HZ Yes, the thing was that the museum didn't have a proper lighting system, the lighting problem still needed to be addressed, and dealing with it has now been postponed slightly by my exhibition. There were only improvised lamps and illuminated vitrines. And I thought: When something is already that bad, then you might just as well make the conditions even worse. And this building can do something other exhibition venues can't do: To create a specific light atmosphere, it must be possible to darken the rooms, and this more or less typical Swiss house has wooden shutters on the windows which can all be closed. It's an added attraction to be able to present the building closed and hermetic like this for once. Also, old buildings like this are often isolated in places far from the bustle of modern commercial areas and become integrated into red light districts. This free-standing house in this setting thus took on the character of a 'Moulin Rouge'. Such 'red windmills' are places of escapism where people follow their wishes and desires, outside of everyday life, off the paths of day-to-day business.

KB On the one hand, your works are driven by the desire for structure and indexical systematisation; on the other, they defy categorisation and often hover between set design and painting or between Minimalist sculpture and the quotidian object.

HZ The quest for abstraction is a fundamental endeavour, so it seems very important to me to omit all that is superfluous. A lot of effort is invested, but there's always something working against it, the material or some element of content keeps getting in the way. This is basically the question: why doesn't less lead to greater clarity, in art, in painting? There was a time in the early 1990s when I tried to get right to the end and worked towards a monochrome, white picture that isn't even painted, just a primed canvas. This exhibition took place, where everything was gone, but that didn't solve the problem of clarity.

KB The objects' resistance to abstraction leads to a kind of cross-contamination that is also underscored by the juxtaposition of videos with sculptures in the Zurich show.

HZ Yes, when I began to make my exhibition impure, so to speak, I presented not just sculptures and paintings but added video as a layer of commentary that exposed the flaws in the supposed purity of media. What's lacking in one is supplied by something else. Video images can do something a painted picture cannot; that's where the anthropomorphic, the human, appears in my work.





KB Was it clear you would be the main protagonist of your videos?

HZ While I was still studying at the Academy, I started making performances with a friend. In the performance series devised with my friend at the time Alfons Egger, the fleeting quality was of course very important. After the show, nothing remains. As for the question of whether or not to document, whether or not to have an audience, video was the solution. That way, I could do what I wanted in the studio - without time pressure or the stress of an audience - with a medium that can be used relatively unpretentiously. The character of the videos is more that of recorded actions, with no great filmic structure; in most cases, it's a static camera looking at something in motion.

KB Slapstick is very pronounced in your video works...

HZ Humour is important. A joke has a special capability because it can be about something one doesn't understand. And yet the joke manages to generate something akin to understanding, if it succeeds in making people laugh. The deeper meaning may remain hidden. A good joke is sometimes more beautiful than a logical philosophical conclusion.

KB Certain aspects come up regularly over longer periods, or works are reused in different contexts. These threads of reappearance suggest that your work develops not so much linearly but in a spiralling, self-contained way.

HZ I can't say which approach wins: I need to step back and look at what's there. I also see that not everything is possible or of equal value. To me, there are developments that become visible in a chronology. What, for example, is the impact of an idea I've already had on future decisions? The issue of consistency is certainly something I try to pursue. I don't assume chaos. In my early years I was of course very interested in and enthusiastic about the Vienna Positivists and their focus on behaviourism. There is a book, a novel, by Oswald Wiener - *Die Verbesserung von Mitteleuropa* (The Improvement of Central Europe, 1969) - he appended an in-depth bibliography and wrote how much he would have liked to include everything else he had heard, seen, etc., as a way of offering later generations the possibility of studying how this text came about. Perhaps this provides an idea of how the artistic process could be explained. Reverence and reference, respect and historical quotation are factors that exert a conscious and unconscious influence. As we know, if you stray even a little too far from the paths set by these factors, then the work is no longer perceived as art, it doesn't become part of the discussion, it may be existential, but it doesn't exist, it leads a sub-existence, as a private passion or hobby.

KB Some subtleties and jokes may be lost on a non-German-speaking audience. If they cannot be recognised, does your work risk leading this 'sub-existence'?

HZ Irony or humour is just one aspect, a communicative element, it's not central to understanding. Nonetheless, I'm always curious how translation

mistakes influence the work. Some misunderstandings can be productive. 'Abstraction as a lingua franca,' a slogan from the 1950s, pinned its hopes on the universal quality of the visual. Now we know how much this, too, depends on culture and context, but who wants to be forever reading between the lines...

KB Your works seem almost hermetic through their carefully thought-out conceptual structures which don't allow much space for accident or coincidence.

HZ If you want to obtain empirical certainty, the work has to be that way - you have to make the experiment repeatable. If there's too much chaos and if there are loose ends, then it's hard to judge and filter out effects because they're always disrupted. So you create adjusted, 'pure' conditions, but with the knowledge that it's difficult to achieve such purity. If you place a table in the middle of a room, then its effect can be gauged in relational terms. What happens? How do viewers position themselves throughout the space because this object occupies a central position, and how do they respond to it? And precisely with such a seemingly simple thing as a table it's interesting how people react to it in contrast to a sculpture, that people immediately put their hands on it, because we start using it, as a useful everyday object, putting glasses down on it and flowers...

KB How did you start using mannequins?

HZ I'm not entirely sure any more, but I'll try to tell the story. Around thirty years ago, I wanted for some reason to have a mannequin, but, due to a lack of money at the time, all I could get was cheap fragments - a torso, an arm, etc. - not a whole figure, and I didn't know what to do with them. I hugged them from one studio to the next and eventually lost them. Then, many years later - and once again, I don't know why - a mannequin turned up in my studio. In any case, I made a discovery that really surprised me: that the presence of this mannequin triggered in me an awareness of a living presence. For a split second or so in my studio, especially at dawn or dusk, I didn't feel alone. The recurrence and intensity of this sensation intrigued me. This moment when I'm slightly distracted and 'there's someone there,' but it's just this mannequin...

KB Uncanny...

HZ Yes, it's absolutely uncanny. This living or not, a strange business. What can other objects the same size do by comparison? So the mannequin became more and more interesting.

KB Did it feel like a great leap to introduce the human figure alongside geometric paintings or Minimalist-looking sculptures?

Blue Titel
Untitled
2009
Acryl auf Leinwand
Acrylle 60 canvas
200x200 cm

HZ It did take something like a leap. From the figure to abstraction – from abstraction to the figure. Before I moved in, my studio was used by a classical Modernist sculptor, Joannis Avramidis, who divided the human figure into meridians, made them abstract and turned them into rotational mouldings. With that in mind, I made a video in which my body is split up by meridians of blue adhesive tape and moves through the blue video space. I tried out the geometrical patterns for this work on that first mannequin, which paved the way for exhibiting that part of my work.

KB When I saw a mannequin displayed near a sculpture that looked like a bookshelf, the mannequin appeared like another standard unit, like a shelf, so it didn't look as alien as I might have expected.

HZ The proportions of a bookshelf follow the proportions of the human figure very closely. Or think of a wardrobe. This is a nice topos. Hanging up clothes or putting away books – these are tasks for the 'dumb servant', deputy or guard. In my video *Nr. 24* (2007), I collapse under the weight of these tasks and a great amount of colour.

KB There's also a tautological relationship between the viewer and a sculpture that includes this figurative element. You're watching while being watched.

HZ Yes, one feels observed. These architectural shelf sculptures with the mannequins inside stand guard, making sure borrowed books are returned. Then I tried out various things with these figures. Moulded my face onto one, altered the sex, made the pubic area look like it was covered by a pair of stockings or removed the breasts. The figures in Zurich are fairly neutral. Most mannequins are designed to match the tastes of a given period, from haircuts to postures. But of course there is also a notion of some ideal average beauty, a kind of classicism in the design of these mannequins. I was interested in that – classicism inspires a certain reticence, but it also enters one's artistic practice at the point where repetition of one's own work occurs.

KB While the Zurich show concentrated on the sculptural aspects of your work, the show at the Essl Museum will take a more architectural form and foreground questions about display or the stage as an exhibition strategy. Both exhibitions also seem to deflect attention away from a definitive reading of your work. Why this deflective strategy?

HZ On one hand, decisions came out of the circumstances I've already mentioned, and on the other hand, I also like to follow intuitive impulses which I don't like to rationalise. At the Essl Museum, I'm showing very small,

'A good joke is sometimes more beautiful than a logical philosophical conclusion.'

older sculptures in a new, large-scale installation including invitations to various musicians to perform on a stage. A central element here is a red curtain that was shown three years ago on the stage at Vienna's MUMOK as part of the performance series 'Nichts IST AUFREGEND. Nichts IST SEX. Nichts IST NICHT PEINLICH.' (Nothing is exciting, nothing is sexy, nothing is not embarrassing), in my piece *Heimo Zobernig erklärt seinem Double wie man eine Performance macht* (Heimo Zobernig explains to his double how to make a performance). This curtain was then shown at the Tate St Ives, the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon and in a very large version at CAPC in Bordeaux. Now I have the opportunity to bring a selection of texts written for these exhibitions together in a catalogue... another repetition of one's own work...
Translation unszwers: Nicolas Grindel

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Kirsty Bell is a writer living in Berlin.

Ohne Titel
Untitled
Ausstellungsansicht
Installation view
Galerie Meyer Kainer,
Wien 2011

