

GALERIE
CHANTAL CROUSEL

Heimo Zobernig

REVUE DE PRESSE | SELECTED PRESS

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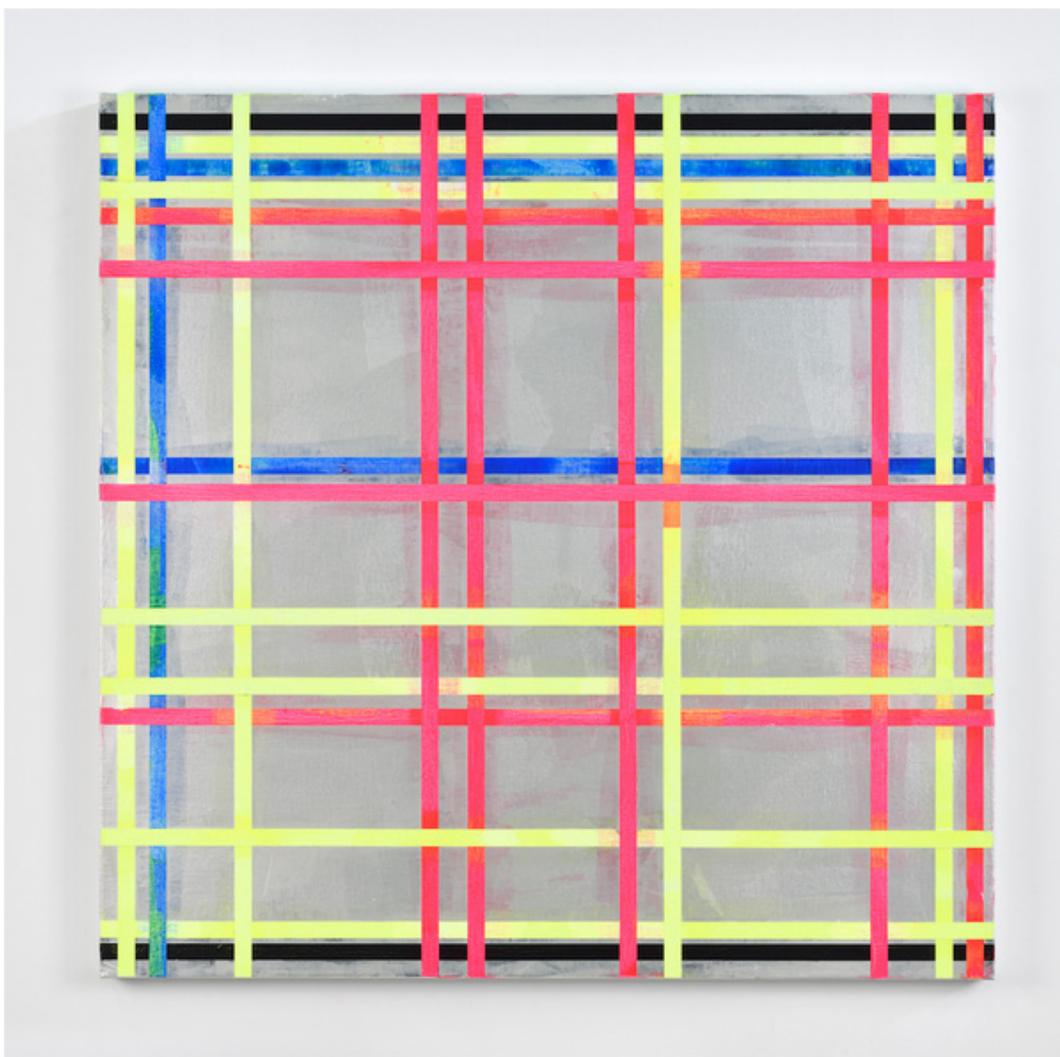
ELEPHANT

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

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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.

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Heimo Zobernig, *This New This*

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

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 Sofía 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 Kestnengesellschaft, 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.

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In the Studio

Heimo Zobernig

Vienna, Austria

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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?

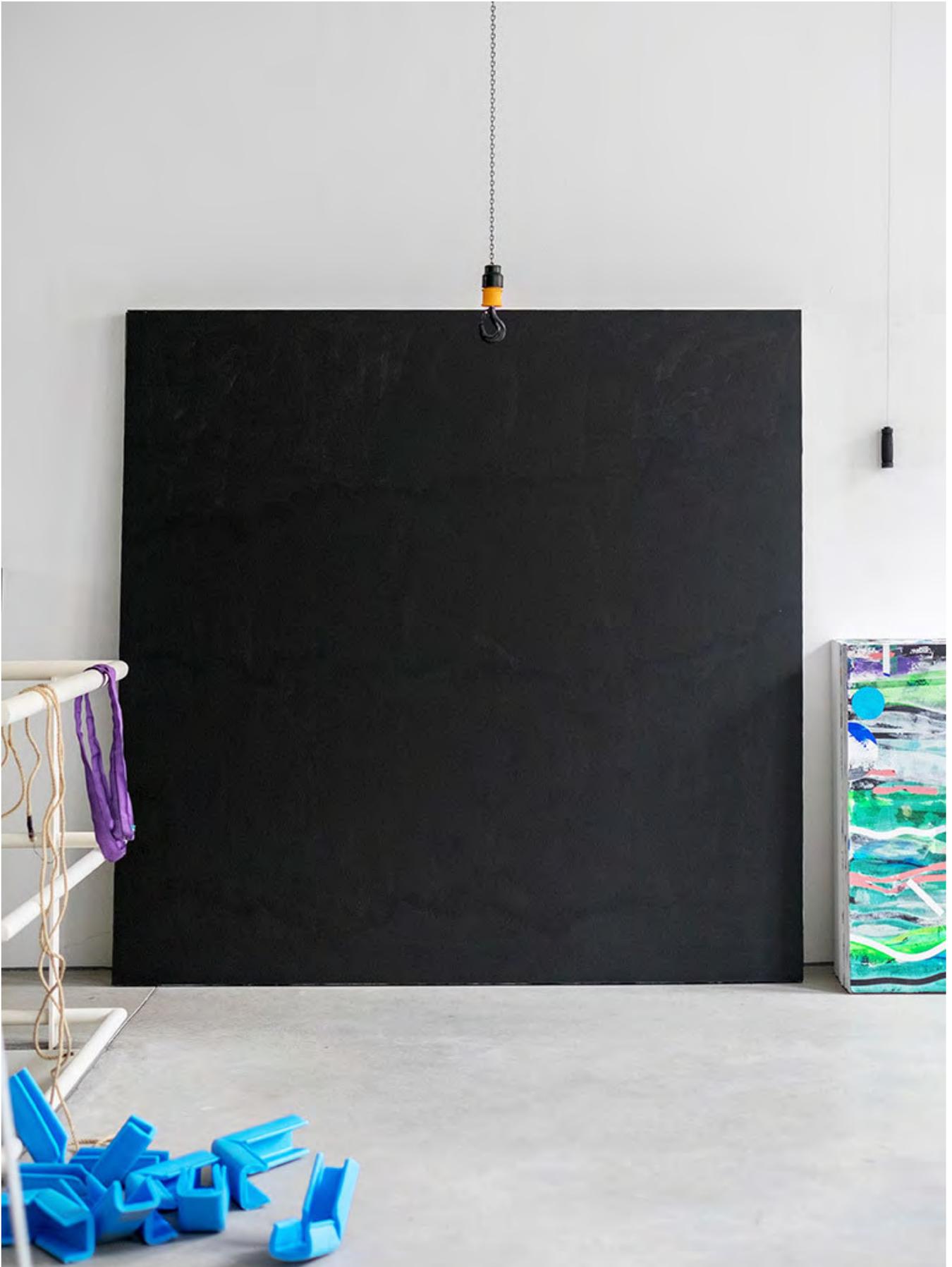
While it is certainly important for an artist to develop clear concepts, one may possibly underestimate all the other necessary conditions that have to be coordinated for an exhibition to be successful. This is the curator's achievement. Curators are very important and helpful as partners in the dialog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

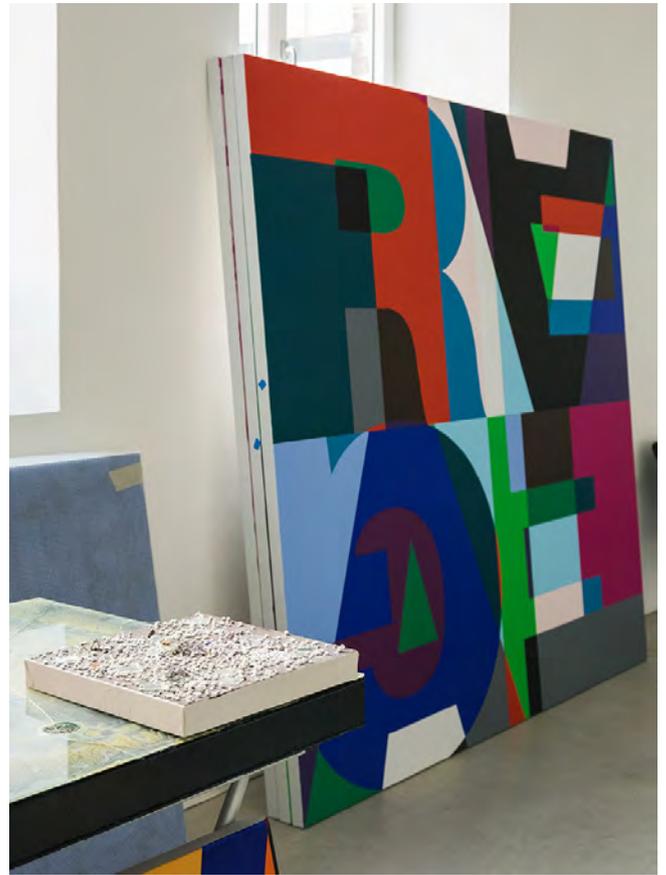
What the art market offers as a temptation or promise is not a central theme for our education. It is rather about finding out what one wants to do in order to build an existence that is based upon solid artistic work, or one will have difficulties. I consider it very important, that during their years 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

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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.



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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.



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Interview: Michael Wuerges, Silvia Jaklitsch
Photos: Maximilian Pramatarov

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

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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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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

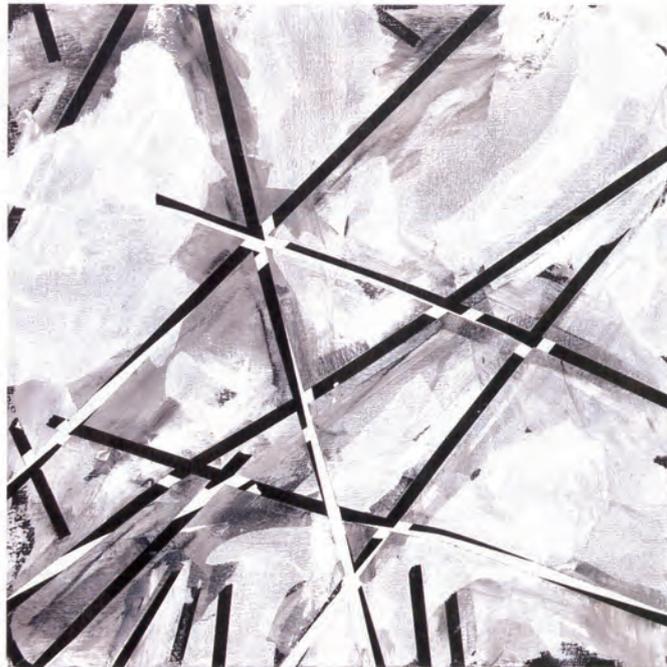
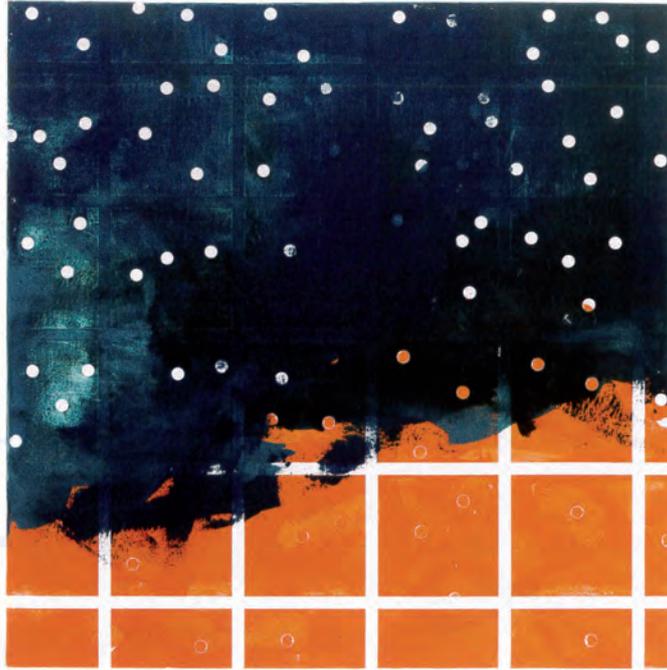
In 1995, I authored an essay titled 'Unmistakably Art, Anything But Art: Zobernig's Subversive Doubt', which originally appeared in the catalogue of the artist's exhibition at the Vienna Secession that year. What follows is a reassembling of fragments from the text, serving as a preamble to my speculations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

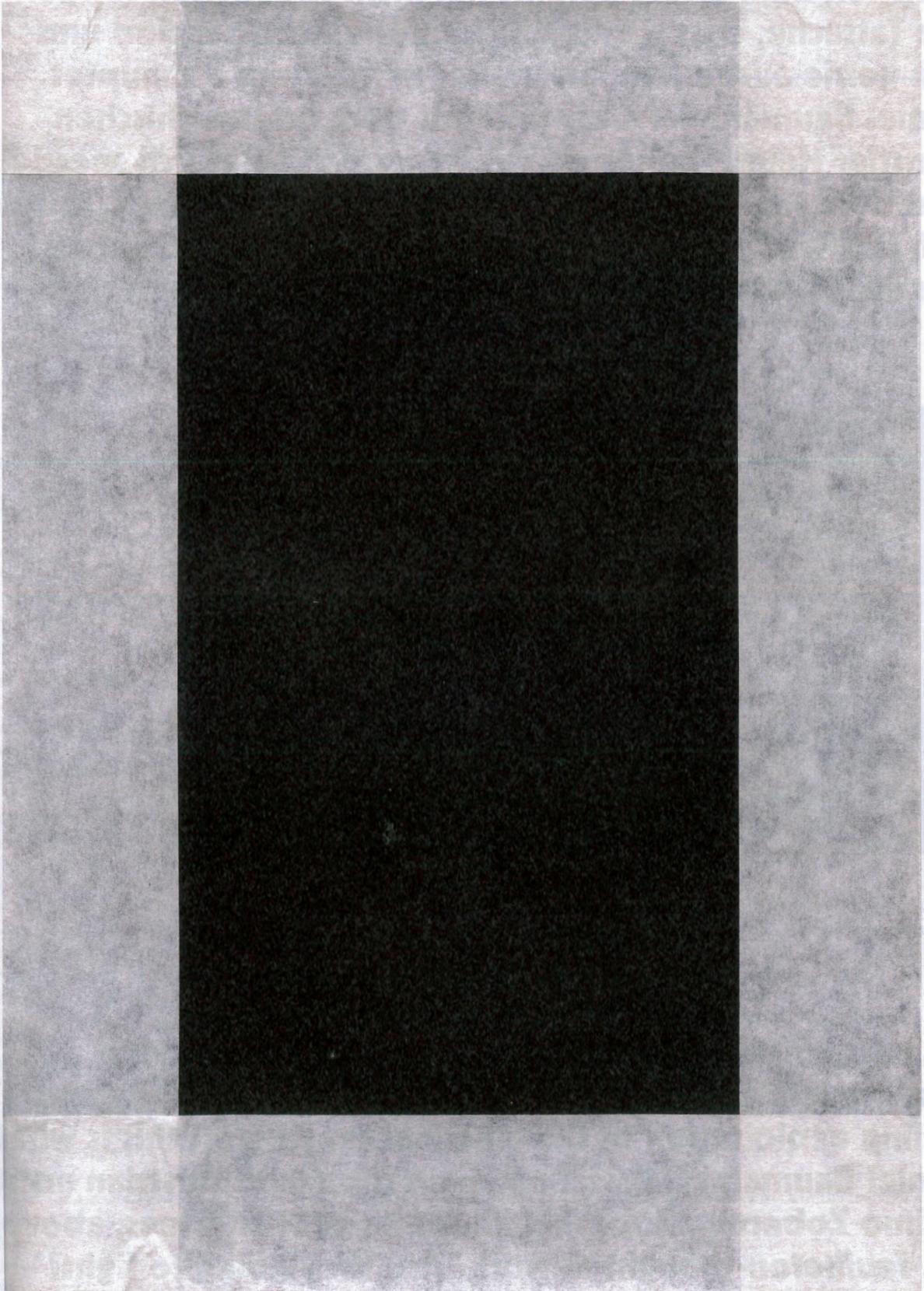
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Heimo Zobernig

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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.

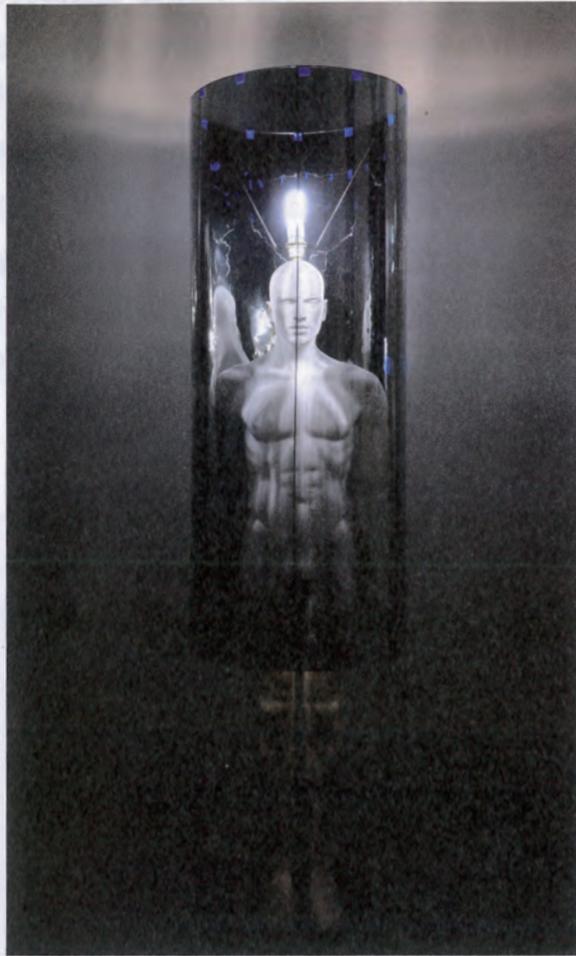
Ich finde keineswegs, dass alle vom Markt sprechen. Wenn ich mit meinen Freunden oder Studenten diskutiere, ist das nicht das große Thema, mein Alltag ist vom Machen bestimmt und nicht vom Geld Zählen. Ich habe natürlich auch bemerkt, dass das Feuilleton sich zur Zeit total darauf fokussiert. Das finde 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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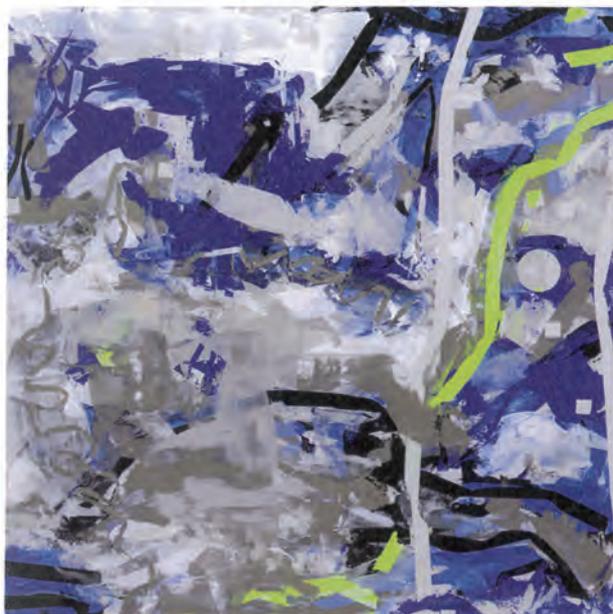
Emodity is a step towards self-empowerment for any artist; it's about not being at the mercy of the art industry's goodwill. And I should add that successful artists have always done this – there's nothing new about it, as a bit of historical research will reveal. But it's always obscured by the myth 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*



UNTITLED, 2013

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

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-

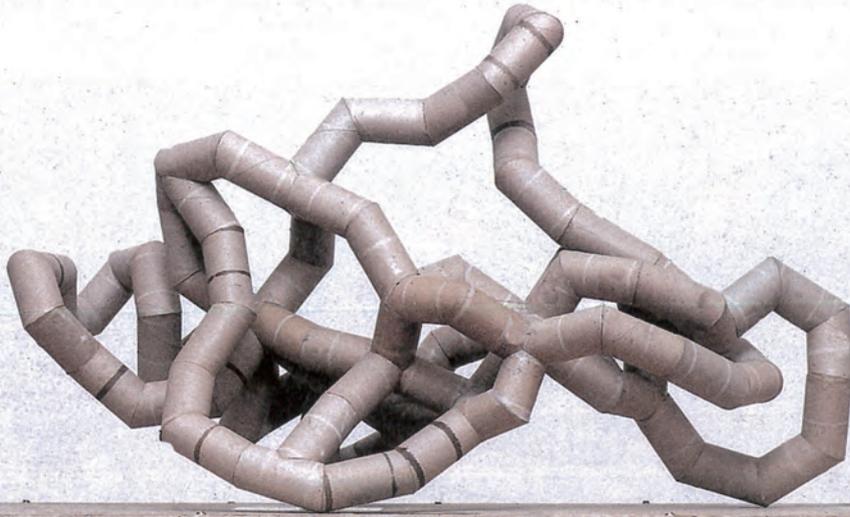
und das Café. Da wurde genau auf den Punkt gebracht, wie der Künstler bei solchen Ausstellungen immer auch Dienstleister ist für den Ort, das kuratorische Konzept und sich selbst. Somit waren alle Projekte auch Analyse zu Stellung und Funktion des Künstlers. Andere haben Ähnliches erprobt, aber keiner 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



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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.

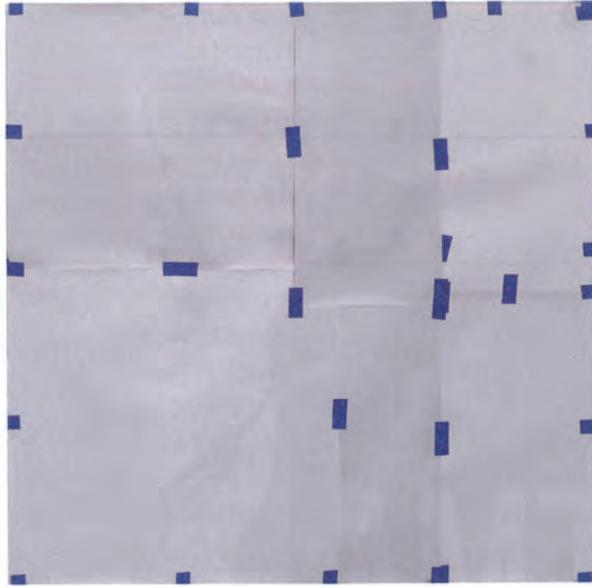
As a non-Austrian I asked myself why you were only first asked to contribute to the Aus-

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

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?

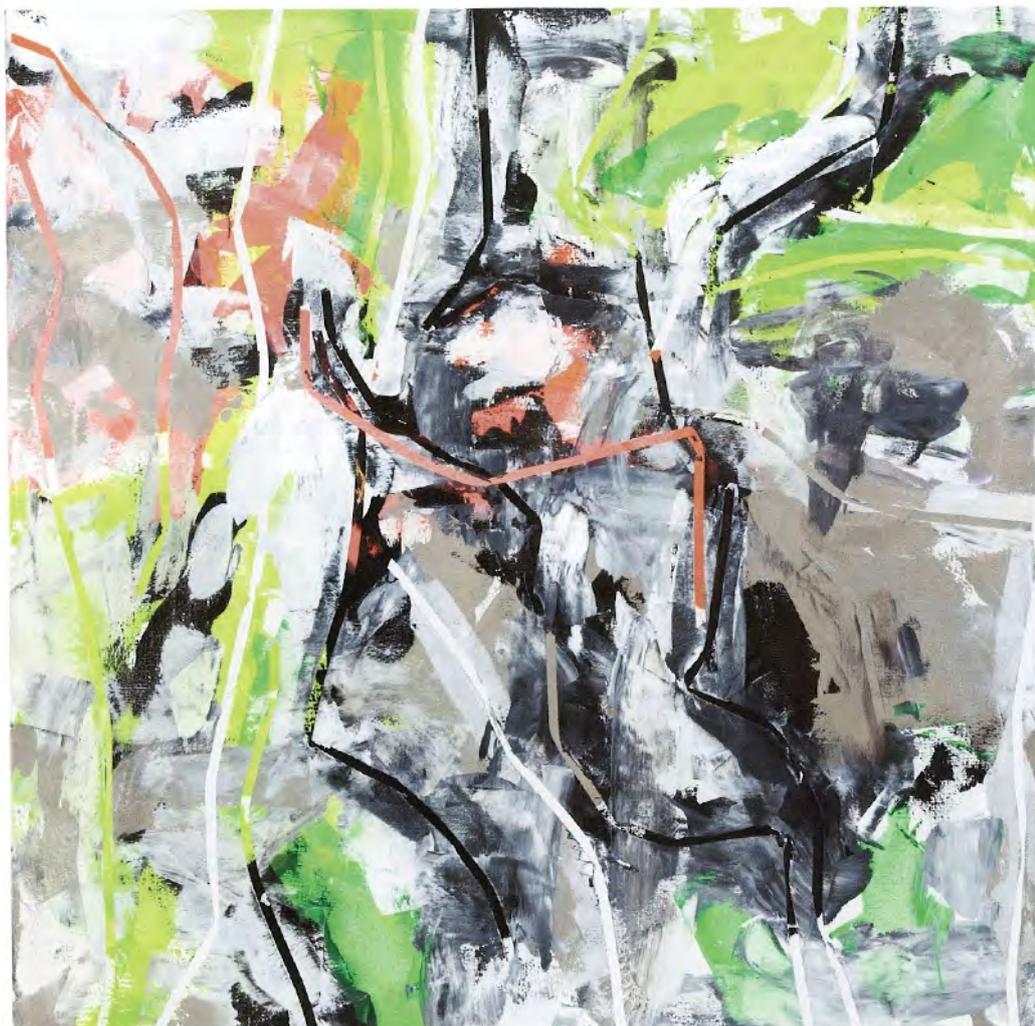


Far left, *Untitled*, 2011, silkscreen, linen, polyester and steel, 73¼ by 26¾ by 19¾ inches. Courtesy Petzel Gallery.

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?

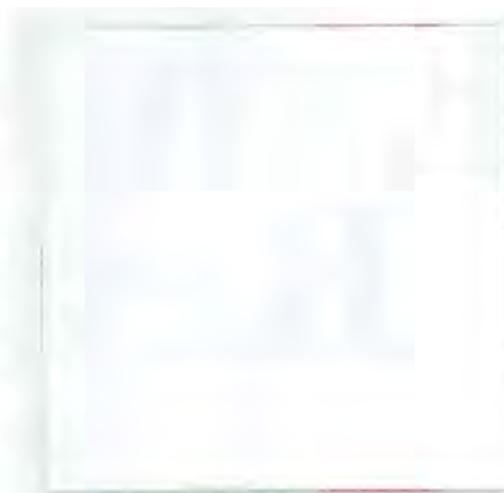
ZOBERNIG Series are unintentional. I always work on one painting at a time, rather than working on various paintings simultaneously. Not until one is finished do I start the next. This is the reason I'd rather speak of a cycle, which enables me to branch in different directions.

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.