

Heimo Zobernig

Exhibition duration:
June 19 through October 17, 2021



Heimo Zobernig
Untitled, 2018
Courtesy Galerie Meyer Kainer, Wien
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Painting, along with sculpture, film, performance, and design, is a central component of the intermedia art of Heimo Zobernig. Since the beginning of his artistic practice in the early 1980s, the artist has built up a comprehensive painterly oeuvre, always based on his attempt to explore color like a “scientist”. Thus, in Zobernig’s work, painting has become a machine for the creation of insight. Characteristics of the artist’s method in this context are strategies of simplification, standardization, and systematization using predefined rules and the artistic appropriation of industrial norms and widespread samples (such as TV test patterns).

After mumok’s presentation of the consistent and yet utter multifaceted development of the internationally renown Austrian artist in a first retrospective show in winter 2002/2003, this one will place its emphasis on Zobernig’s extended concept of paintings with select recent groups of works. The artist designed the exhibition architecture himself. With it, Zobernig references the classical-modernist architecture of the Sonsbeek Pavilion, which the Dutch designer Gerrit Rietveld created for a sculpture presentation in Arnheim in 1955.

Heimo Zobernig’s expanded concept of painting is already clearly visible in early works from the mid-1980s, when he produced both paintings with abstract geometric shapes and first cardboard sculptures coated with monochrome synthetic resin paint. For his object group the artist defined a five-part color palette of “uncolorful” colors. He called them “sculpture colors”: gray, black, white, brown, orange. This way, he demonstrated a hybrid painting practice, between two and three dimensions, which he later both radically and subtly expanded with his chessboard-patterned blankets around 2016. For his “striped pictures,” created from 1987 on, the artist defined a fixed palette of fifteen pure pigment colors, which he specified using the names of elementary colors: red, green, yellow, blue, brown, orange, violet, black, white, gray, ocher, purple, light green, light red, and light blue. Even in these early paintings, the ubiquity of technical images and the one-of-a-kind character of painting draw together.

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In the mid-1990s, Zobernig again brought the principle of transfer into play by transposing so-called chroma key colors from video technology (bluescreen blue, video blue, video red, and video green) into the realm of painting. Although the various work phases generally hint at or bear reference to the avantgarde playbook and its traditions (monochromes and grids, minimalism, color-field painting, gestural and geometric abstraction, or text art), contemporary culture and its technological visual media are also discernible as an important influence. Such ambivalences are a recurring motif in Zobernig’s art. He calls it his “unequivocal commitment to equivocality”. His grid images, produced from 2000 onward, again make use of chroma key textures as their medium, coated with white acrylic paint to create different checkered and gridlike structures.

Along with the previous main motifs of monochromes and grids, the lasting impression a 2011 Pablo Picasso exhibition left on the artist also reveals a third motif in Zobernig's work: the gestural.

Art appears as a vast, contradictory field of research in Heimo Zobernig's work—to which one must relate in a variety of ways. Art appears as both a demonstration item and the object of analysis. Early on, the artist described himself in this regard as a "historian" and "scientist". In keeping with this image, Zobernig's artistic investigations take place on almost all levels and are devoted to details as well as the greater whole. The artist forms his own analytical system and focuses on the interplay of aesthetics and society—asking under what conditions art is ready to emerge. "My aesthetic, my art, is the result of my work; it evolves when I question and knead content and style long enough to reach a valid form and don't follow any theoretical models but think for myself".

Processes of artistic production and material aesthetics as well as the examination of display and architecture or the challenge of the working mechanisms of museums and galleries can all be found in Heimo Zobernig's work. Even the catalogues' graphic design is subject to this system and thus becomes an important part of Zobernig's artistic practice. His own role as an artist appears like an attitude in motion that he constantly explores and develops.

The planned publication, (co-)designed by Heimo Zobernig, is a conceptual companion piece to the book accompanying the 2003 retrospective, which Zobernig humorously titled *Katerlog*—a formal counterpart, as the artist again uses the Din-A4 format and the Helvetica font, but also—and importantly—a companion in terms of content, as it continues the painstakingly encyclopedic lists of Zobernig's artistic work and exhibition practice up to the very date of publication (albeit absent any claims to completeness). The publication thus spans Zobernig's wide range of artistry and media, while at the same time keeping a skeptical tongue in cheek regarding any attempt to be "scientific" about an artistic oeuvre.

Along with short descriptions of the installations and exhibitions from 2003 to 2020 and numerous illustrations, the comprehensive, approximately 400-page publication will contain a preface by Karola Kraus and in-depth essays by renowned international authors—from Manuela Ammer, Beatrice von Bismarck, and Helmut Draxler to Hans-Jürgen Hafner. Dorothea Brunialti, who has been accompanying Zobernig's work for many years, has signed on to do the catalogue's graphic design. There will be an English and a German edition of the book, both of them published by Walther König, Cologne.

Curated by Karola Kraus

Biography:

Heimo Zobernig (born 1958 in Mauthen, lives in Vienna) studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna from 1977 to 1980 and at the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna from 1980 to 1985. 1994/1995 he has been a visiting professor at the Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg. 1999/2000 Zobernig taught sculpture at the Städelschule Frankfurt. Since 2000 he is professor of sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Furthermore, Zobernig received an honorary doctorate at the Academy in Lund, Sweden.

Selected solo exhibitions and awards: Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (2019); Sharjah Arts Museum, Sharjah (2018); MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA (1917); Roswitha Haftmann Prize (2016); Malmö Konsthall (2016); Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2016); Kunsthau Bregenz (2015); 56th Venice Biennale (2015); Kestner Gesellschaft Hannover (2014); Mudam – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg (2014); Kunsthau Graz (2013); Palacio de Velázquez / Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid (2012); Kunsthalle Zürich (2011); Österreichischer Friedrich Kiesler-Preis für Architektur und Kunst (2010); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2009); CAPC, Bordeaux (2009); Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lissabon (2009); Tate St. Ives, Cornwall (2008).

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