

Heimo Zobernig

19.1.–2.3. 2024

New and New

In his current exhibition, Heimo Zobernig recalls two cycles of works but at the same time rejects any retrospective character.

"Then again, such gestures that took up historic models by emptying them of their original meaning were also benefiting from that very meaning, and so his work revised the canon in a way that from the outset made no secret of its own indebtedness to it."¹

The view through the glass front of the entrance shows three bronze sculptures in the first room. Zobernig extended two of his well-known sculptures, which originate from a group of works begun on the occasion of the Venice Biennale 2015, with a third figure, which creates an irritating, cinematic effect through its fractal doubling and displacement. In fact, a static setting is transformed into a dynamic scenario.

So what is it? "Unfortunately, not a sculpture"—was an exhibition title that was considered years ago for a show but, was ultimately not used.

Throughout his life, Heimo Zobernig has explored the depicting possibilities of his genre, and here he now seems to be testing his own sculptural experiences. Set in the appropriate contrast, the heavy weight of the sculptures is dynamized, as if the presumption of a fixed order found its visual contradiction.

In the sequential development of his work across exhibition series, Zobernig repeatedly produces new, surprising ensembles of works without being unfaithful to his basic principles.

A few additional syntactic modules increase the variability of his syntax exponentially, resulting in a highly complex texture throughout the exhibition, which in the central room of the gallery seems to show the greatest possible emotional contrast.

Back in the 1990s, the Kunstraum Daxer in Munich, which was lined with drawing paper, and the similarly designed bedroom for Martin Kippenberger built a bridge between the seemingly opposing poles of institutional critique and artwork. The gesture, repeated in many institutional exhibitions with differently colored photo background cardboards, is now recycled in the central room of the gallery with the help of leftover material. The setting is reminiscent of the use of chroma keying in TV studios, also known as the blue screen technique. In order to be able to subsequently place any image on a medium, for example, the color ultramarine, or more precisely bluebox blue, is used as a background because it is the color that occurs most rarely on the human body. The Chroma-Key nettle fabrics in the colors red (video red), neon green (greenbox) and blue (bluebox), which are also utilised in this process, are used in the new textile sculptures hanging from the ceiling.

For his gallery exhibitions in 2000, Zobernig had already created a picture composed of colored fabrics hanging from the ceiling, which was to provide a surface for several projections and interpretations—also because a video ("Nr.18") was shown on an enclosed monitor, in which Zobernig could be seen trying to arrange a patchwork, a geometric picture, with fabrics of the kind used for chroma keying, winding his way through the cloths and coming to no end. At the same time, however, he succeeded in replacing conventional compositional and visual methods with an anti-hierarchical, net-like pattern. Stripes become a kind of body painting that divides and fragments the figure.

Heimo Zobernig does not develop his compositions out of the artistic design process. They are more or less fixed from the start. Abstraction, figuration, gesture, line, positive and negative forms, structure and dissolution. It's almost as if he mixes his pictorial elements in a Petri bowl to observe how they interact with each other.

This closes the circle to the bronze sculptures, because overall a concept of physicality emerges that corresponds to a playful, self-forgetful experimental arrangement, but on closer inspection remains within the framework of a strict choreography: Video "Nr. 3" from 1989 shows Zobernig in a blonde long wig dancing to heavy metal music against a neutral background, while video „Nr. 33“ rewrites the scenario in 2022 in a slowed-down variation. A regulated form of self-presentation is staged. Gender discourse, media space and color theory merge into a space-sculpture hybrid.

¹ Isabelle Graw, *Canon and Critique: An Interplay; Heimo Zobernig*, Texte Zur Kunst, December 2015, p. 54