

NAGEL GALERIE DRAXLER

HEIMO ZOBERNIG & LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY

Opening: Thursday, April 25, 2024, 6-9 pm

Exhibition: April 26 – August 31, 2024

PRESS RELEASE

Missing for 86 years, the experimental film “ABC in Sound / Tönendes ABC” (1933) by Hungarian artist and Bauhaus educator László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) was rediscovered by curators at the British Film Institute in 2019¹. This film is the starting point for the exhibition “Heimo Zobernig & László Moholy-Nagy”, which opens on April 26th at our Berlin Crypto Kiosk. The exhibition is organized in collaboration with the Moholy-Nagy Foundation.

Throughout his career, Moholy-Nagy worked across various media. He was a painter, sculptor, photographer, filmmaker, industrial designer, typographer – an approach he shares with Austrian artist Heimo Zobernig (*1958). Zobernig is widely known for his intense studies on typography, language, classification systems, and color theory. In his abstract works, he combines elements of Minimalism with expressive brushstrokes, geometry, or typography, all while maintaining a focus on the grid and monochromatic elements.

Captivated by the advancements in sound recording in the 1930s and intrigued by the concept of synthetic sound creation, Moholy-Nagy delved into the idea of reverse-engineering a sound alphabet from the visual patterns engraved on gramophone discs. “ABC in Sound / Tönendes ABC” showcases a playful array of geometric shapes, textures, cartoon faces, and typography, even incorporating his own fingerprints. In this film he blurred the boundaries between sound and images, challenging the perception of hearing and seeing sound.

In response to “ABC in Sound / Tönendes ABC” Zobernig created the video work “Untitled” (2023). The screen recording depicts a digital brushstroke seamlessly transitioning between white and black, shaping the letters of the alphabet. The video provides a direct yet powerful demonstration of its own creation, presented at triple speed. Zobernig skillfully blurs the lines between the emergence and vanishing of the letters, as well as between foreground and background. Additionally, the use of the alphabet in the film is also concrete and self-referential, as Zobernig introduced a letter listing system that “tagged” all his exhibitions between 1990 and 1992². Furthermore, since 1986, he has consistently utilized the sans-serif typography Helvetica in his catalogue and poster designs, making it a recurring element in his oeuvre.

The integration of technology and industry into art was a primary goal for the visionary László Moholy-Nagy. Throughout his career, he developed techniques that challenged conventional perceptions of how artistic mediums could intersect with technology and everyday objects. One of his most famous works are the so-called “Telephone Paintings”, he described the process of creating as following:

¹ [British Film Institute](#)

² Heimo Zobernig: *Farbenalphabet*. 2018.

„In 1922 I ordered by telephone from a sign factory five paintings in porcelain enamel. I had the factory's color chart before me and I sketched my paintings on graph paper. At the other end of the telephone the factory supervisor had the same kind of paper, divided into squares. He took down the dictated shapes in the correct position. (It was like playing chess by correspondence.)”³

In formal terms, the “Constructions in Enamel” share an identical abstract, geometric composition in three different sizes. While Moholy-Nagy described the creation process as a game of chess by correspondence, Zobernig uses white and black as a form to play with and brings the checkerboard grids directly onto the canvas. In both chess and painting, one can discern structures and rules, requiring time to comprehend the relationship between the figures on the chessboard.

³ László Moholy-Nagy: *Abstract of an Artist*, in: *The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist*, published by George Wittenborn; First Edition Thus, 1947, p. 79.