

GALERIE CHRISTINE MAYER

Liebigstraße 39
80538 München

HEIMO ZOBERNIG

4.6. – 9.7.2016

Connecting back to his recent display wood painting in the Konsthall Malmö (Sweden), the current exhibition by Heimo Zobernig in the Galerie Christine Mayer has at its heart a chess board. *Trämålning* (Wood Painting) has its origin in a play by Ingmar Bergman – it was initially created as an exercise for drama students at the city theatre Malmö and was adapted in slightly modified form into a film with the title *The Seventh Seal* in 1957. The play is set in the 14th century and the driving element of the plot is a crusader who forges a pact with the devil to hold off death; he manages to negotiate a time span which lasts exactly one game of chess. In Malmö, Heimo Zobernig also referenced the earlier exhibition by Joan Jonas by integrating its temporarily movable walls.

As the crossed-out wood painting already implies, the exhibition's central element in the first room is *not* a "wood painting" but a doubled wooden platform which carries a throw with a black-and-white chequerboard pattern. The textile and haptic quality of the fabric and its arrangement in folds and bulges disrupts the purist, clean system of the geographical surface, which is based on orthogonal coordinates. With subversive lightness, the mathematically rational is transformed into a sensual aesthetic. The object almost provokes sitting or lying down – the spectator is literally inserted back into the artwork by way of playful irony. Abstract minimalism of the 20th century had rejected narration and figuration. Here, the loss of them is counteracted to restore the gestural, physical moment in complexly playing with these border crossings. The chess board is a recurrent theme in Heimo Zobernig's work with which he constantly renews the discourses of formalism by employing various materials and procedures. At David Pestorius in Brisbane in 2015 for example he pointed to the 18th century's preference for black-and-white chequerboard floor patterns – they reflected the rational impetus of the Enlightenment. In his exhibition in Brisbane, Zobernig expanded this pattern over the walls and thus neutralized their function as architectural border guards.

In the series of seven abstract MDF pictures which were created in 2005 and can be found in the second room, wood actually acts as carrier. The main motive here is the squared grid which repeats itself within the vocabulary of black and white patterns. Only two examples loosen up this arrangement via the colours yellow and red respectively. One black-and-white picture defies the squares with its stripes. Via the democratically coded material of MDF, the paintings' foundations carry the minimalistic principle so characteristic for Zobernig's work. This approach is further pursued by the techniques of trowelling, scaffolding and gluing – together with the reduction on the formal level and in terms of colour, this hints at Piet Mondrian's neoplasticism. One concrete reference point is Mondrian's grid painting titled *New York City 1* from 1941. Here, he substitutes colour with tape to reach a new level of rhythmic harmony. This has often been interpreted as a consequence of his move from Paris to the American metropolis. Mondrian's death left the work incomplete and thus opens up a space to speculatively continue his thought processes. The monochrome-black MDF artwork clearly references the constructivists and displays an elegant pattern of tarnished blacks. The red-and-white painting which forms the series' conclusion, recalls Blinky Palermo's pinball paintings. Contradicting the first impression of a clear and reduced use of forms, Heimo Zobernig

has created multi-faceted and complex situations in both invoking historical role models and in setting in motion the chess board as an elementary principle of his art.

Agnes Stillger (M.A.)

translated by Jennifer Leetsch