

Heimo Zobernig

Heimo Zobernig, who first presented his work to the Zagreb audience at the Museum of Contemporary Art in 2019, now exhibits his recent 2021 paintings thanks to the Manuš Gallery and Duje Mrduljaš, who initially brought him to Zagreb.

Heimo Zobernig is one of the most prominent Austrian contemporary artists. Since the 1980s, his wide-ranging output spanning various media - from architectural interventions and installations to performance, film, video, sculpture, and painting - has been defined by a striking heterogeneity of expression. Throughout his career, the artist has consistently reflected on the integrity and presentation of artistic form, evident in his works that intertwine and overlap different media, spatial relations, and styles. A defining feature of Zobernig's artistic practice is what might be described as "consistent inconsistency", manifested in deft shifts between various forms and contents. Witty and playful, Zobernig employs art to pose fundamental questions not only about artistic creation, its historical relations and heritage, but also about the very idea and purpose of art itself.

After a prolific period of video and film production, the artist turned to painting, extending his exploration of artistic and media language. Here, the canvas functions as a cinematic frame and becomes an image that "emits" specific meaning through bold colors and the suggestion of forms and words transformed into visual signs. As critic Dimitris Lempesis observed in *Presentation: Heimo Zobernig*, painting, along with sculpture, film, performance and design, is a central component of Zobernig's intermedia art. Since the beginning of his artistic practice in the early 1980s, the artist has built up a comprehensive painterly oeuvre, always based on his attempts to explore color like a "scientist". Thus, in Zobernig's work, painting has become a machine for the creation of insight.¹ 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. The works created in 2021 continue this trajectory and, deliberately left untitled, resist the imposition of labels, instead directing attention to the content of the paintings themselves. Conceived as a code, they connect color with encrypted messages built on wordplay. Sequences such as *HELP PAIN TING*, *PAIN/TING NATURE*, and *INFRA STRUC NATURE* exemplify Zobernig's conceptual method: rather than depicting motifs literally, he uses painting as an analytical tool of enquiry. By breaking down words, Zobernig emphasizes their multiple meanings and links language with visual elements, blurring the contours of the words with strong colors, from which the words surface to suggest associations – such as the interplay between *help* and *pain* - thus turning the word itself into an object of experimentation. Arranging the semantic elements into larger units (*help painting*), the artist questions the very function of painting today; the fragmented words indicate his systematic exploration of color and form, exposing the ties between art, industrial standards and everyday visual patterns to reveal how the structure of the visual world shapes perception. These works demonstrate Zobernig's ability to transform painting into a medium of critical reflection and inquiry, where both language and visual media turn into experimental systems.

Zobernig's approach affirms painting as both a historical category and a communicative code, establishing a performative dimension in which painting serves as medium for transmitting information, resulting in a new artistic form at the intersection of visual code and graphic typology.

¹ Dimitris Lempesis: *Presentation: Heimo Zobernig*; <https://www.dreamideamachine.com/?p=87272>

Galerija Manuš

In painting, Zobernig systematically yet subtly disrupts the modernist ideal of the monochrome surface and its aesthetic purity by introducing semantic elements. Within the fixed dimensions of the canvas, instead of a static, decorative surface, the viewers are confronted with an interplay of color, text, and various structures and meanings inviting them to work out the proposed puzzles.

As in his previous exhibitions, the works remain deliberately untitled. They avoid pointing to a specific content, idea, or concept; instead, they call for active engagement and reflection within the framework of the forms presented.

In his own way, Heimo Zobernig opens a space for considering art after art, as well as the individual position in today's world shaped by the deconstruction of familiar patterns in everyday life. At the same time, he underscores the fragility of both life and art when confronted with circumstances beyond our control.

Martina Munivrana

Heimo Zobernig was born in Mauthen, Austria, in 1958. He lives in Vienna. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna from 1977 to 1980 and at the University of Applied Arts Vienna from 1980 to 1985. From 1994 to 1995 he was a visiting professor at the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg and 1999 to 2000 he taught sculpture at the Städelschule in Frankfurt. From 2000 to 2022 he was a Professor of sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

Selected exhibitions and awards: stage design, Schauspielhaus Frankfurt Main, 1983; Galerie Peter Pakesch, Vienna 1985; *De Sculptura*, Messepalast, Vienna 1986; *Sonsbeek '86*, Arnheim 1986; Forum Stadtpark, Graz 1987; *Aperto 88*, Biennale di Venezia, 1988; Villa Arson, Nizza 1991; *documenta 9*, Kassel 1992; Neue Galerie, Graz 1993; Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg 1993; Otto Mauer Prize 1993; Kunsthalle Bern 1994; Národní galerie v Praze, Praha 1994; The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago 1996; *documenta 10*, Kassel 1997; *Skulptur Projekte Münster* 1997; Portikus, Frankfurt Main 1999; mumok, Vienna 2002; Kunsthalle Basel 2003; K21, Düsseldorf 2003; *Biennale of Sydney* 2004; Kunstverein Braunschweig 2005; Artspace, Sydney 2006; Biennale Busan 2006; Galleria Civica, Modena 2008; Tate St. Ives, Cornwall 2008; MAK, Vienna 2008; deSingel international arts centre, Antwerpen 2008; Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon 2009; CAPC, Bordeaux 2009; Galerie Sud, Centre Pompidou, Paris 2009; Austrian Frederick Kiesler Prize for Architecture and the Arts, 2010; Kunsthalle Zürich 2011; Palacio de Velázquez, Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid 2012; Kunsthaus Graz 2013; Mudam, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg 2014; kestnergesellschaft, Hannover 2014; Austrian Pavilion, 56. Biennale di Venezia, 2015; Kunsthaus Bregenz 2015; Malmö Konsthall, Malmö 2016; Museum Ludwig, Cologne 2016; Roswitha Haftmann Prize 2016; MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge MA 2017; Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah 2018; Albertinum, Dresden 2019; Galerija Kula, Split 2019; MSU, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb 2019; mumok, Vienna 2021; MARE, Bukarest 2021; Galería Juana de Aizpuru, Madrid 2022; Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt Main 2022; Galerie Nicolas Krupp, Basel 2022; Petzel Gallery, New York 2022; Galerie Nagel Draxler, Cologne 2023; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris 2023; Galerie Meyer Kainer, Vienna 2024.

All works:

Heimo Zobernig

Untitled 2021 / 22

Acrylic on canvas

100 × 100 cm