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Heimo Zobernig

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Heimo Zobernig

Kunsthaus Graz

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search for the perfect blue, that he finally patented as IKB (International Klein Blue), gained him international fame with its deep ultramarine hue. Heimo Zobernig considers the logically consistent continuation: On blue photo background paper he creates a space-embracing wall design with large-format pictures. Into their monochrome painterly texture he inserts central concepts—like watermarks raising its voice in the monochrome surface. The blue is in motion, blurred.

Heimo Zobernig

1958 born in Mauthen, lives in Vienna

1977–80 Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna

1980–83 Academy of Applied Arts, Vienna

1994/95 Visiting professor, Academy of Fine Arts, Hamburg

1999/2000 Chair of sculpture, Academy of Fine Arts,

Städelschule, Frankfurt/Main

since 2000 Chair of sculpture, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna

2010 Frederick Kiesler Prize, Vienna

Galerie Peter Pakesch in Vienna, where the tightly packed hanging was another reference. Twenty years later, the black space becomes more stringent, as a work putting an exhibition into the exhibition, that evolves in the visual minimalism of image, space and seat.

The images hung in front of the lengths of fabric are square, monochrome, chiefly white. The white and black have effaced all colour. While with Malevich the history of the square begins black on white, ending with white on white, Zobernig changes this to the opposite. The white square hangs freely in front of a black ground, vanishing on it as a black form.

Heimo Zobernig writes REAL in large letters on the vast four-part canvas hanging from the ceiling. He cites the famous picture by Robert Indiana, who painted LOVE with the O canted sideways on the canvas in 1958. Heimo Zobernig sets his message in standardised forms of expression. On the one hand, he uses the Helvetica font, which was created in 1957 and is regarded to be the world's most-used sans serif font, particularly when conveying very

matter-of-fact or official messages. On the other, the colours he uses are the same ones he uses for his sculptures. The cylindrical cardboard elements are also standardised that Zobernig connects like three-dimensional lines in space, positioning them on the requisite transport crate as plinths in space.

The monumental black cube with the impressive edge length of four metres was first exhibited in Müzzzuschlag in 1992. Glossy black squares seem to swallow space, while at the same time reflecting the image of the surrounding space. The painted surface is another homage to the early days of abstract monochrome, with the image no longer simply generating space, but rather becoming real space itself. A black box, the black cube is reminiscent of things that happen without becoming palpable, at the same time referring to closed systems of which only a few people know the inner workings. An allusion to the art system itself?

In 1960 Yves Klein staged his leap into the void in order to proclaim himself a painter of space. His

Heimo Zobernig explores boundaries in the exhibition space. Subtly he challenges the classical concepts of exhibition, installation, stage, sculpture, image and furniture. By playing with these definitions, he develops new things from the tried-and-tested, presenting maximal changes with supposedly minimal interventions. Quotations from the history of art and exhibiting in the 20th century continue a discourse that has remained valid throughout the decades.

Heimo Zobernig

In 1993 Peter Weibel invited Heimo Zobernig to create an exhibition at Neue Galerie Graz (which was still housed in the baroque Palais in Sackstraße 16 at that time), connected with the aim of readapting the premises. The main problem consisted in the gallery's nonexistent entrance area, a problem which could only be tackled with an artistic but not a permanent architectural solution owing to considerations of historic preservation. Zobernig used chipboard panels, a temporary, reversible material which conformed to the Monument Preservation Department's requirements, to create a small space providing room for the ticket desk, bookshop, shelf, chairs, tables and coffee-machine. Zobernig saw the intended new behaviour of visitors as an integral part of his performative sculpture, which remained in use after the end of the exhibition until autumn 1993. It was later on show at the *KontextKunst* exhibition and purchased for the collection of Neue Galerie Graz. The structure was reconstructed on site in metal and glass, thus los-

ing its temporary character, but enabling the gallery to keep using the newly acquired entrance area for another two years.

The bare, mounted canvas is a starting-point of painting. Using elements covered with coarse jute, Heimo Zobernig creates an octagon that turns its outward-facing side inside, thus shutting itself off to the viewer, particularly as he can now no longer enter the space. The emptiness of the closed space references early exhibitions in which the octagon played a role. The show at Vienna's Secession in 1902 for example, the first celebration of the total work of art, in which everything was subordinated to the theme of the exhibition, Ludwig van Beethoven, with a sculpture of the musician by Max Klinger posing atop an octagonal plinth at the centre of the show designed by Josef Hoffmann. It also cites the famed *Armory Show* in New York in 1913, where coarse sack- ing was used to divide the various sections of the exhibition, some octagonal. Heimo Zobernig quotes the big exhibitions that were to become fundamental to the understanding of art presen-

tation in the 20th century. Painting began to merge with space, frameless and ornamental.

The work created by Heimo Zobernig for Unité d'Habilitation in Friminy (F) as a scale model with stairs and bar is seen as a transition between architecture, exhibition, sculpture and furniture. The apartment, laid out in the style of a maisonette, was built after the plans developed as of the 1920s by Le Corbusier, who regarded the house as an autonomous urban system that was also to provide adequate space for social interaction. Heimo Zobernig was invited in 1993 to create works for one of the building's 414 vacant maisonettes. He turned the entrance area cited here into a social space by adding coffee-tables and chairs to the coffee bar for people to use. As a spatial sculpture, the packing-table not only references the coffee bar but also work in the studio from which the table came, while the circular hole in the floor panel alludes to the preceding exhibition at the neoclassicist Palacio de Velasquez of the Reina Sofia in Madrid.

The black curtain bounds a space whose structure is defined by metal bars familiar from stage structures. The exhibition becomes a stage that turns visitors into actors, at the same time humorously making reference to the history of exhibition design. It was in 1915, when Kazimir Malevich first hung his *Black Square on a White Ground* over the corner of the exhibition space – an intentionally conceptual act – as an icon of new art; building on this, the dynamism of his art known as Suprematism lent momentum to the reception of the pictures throughout the entire exhibition space. The picture had broadened its boundaries into three-dimensional space, becoming part of the spatial concept itself. It had to subordinate its individual status to the experience of space, the monochrome form was part of the picture, the monochrome picture form dissolved into space. For Kazimir Malevich too, the stage was the venue for the first appearance of the *Black Square* in 1913. The history of the radical start of abstract modernism is cited by Heimo Zobernig as early as 1985 in his first solo exhibition at