As previously shown in the exhibition *The Unknown Masterpiece*, Heimo Zobernig structures the pictorial space of his work in layers of grid-like constructions. In light of this, one can recognize that as he sequentially develops his oeuvre across exhibition series Zobernig continues to produce new, surprising work ensembles while always remaining true to his fundamental principles.

With the picture plane now structured by the word "tHIS," like a trellis on which the composition finds its support, one could simply count the new work among his text paintings. Yet an early Zobernig looks different from a later one, in which, over the course of time, the increasingly complex relationship between text and image has condensed to the point of their becoming indistinguishable. For Zobernig seems to put everything back on the line in every moment of production. Contrary to an intellectual reading, according to which art requires a prior intention — with the result that one is led to expect a meaning and message from the work — it is clear that for Zobernig every painterly act is constitutive, in the sense of being simultaneously both free and structured. It is structured by the habitus — it is a work by Zobernig, experts will recognize his very particular workmanship. That is the logic of practice, a freedom under structural constraint — under the constraint of habitus, of work already realized — a freedom that would not exist for another in this form.

In Zobernig's eye and hands there is a complete set of practical schemata, schemata of perception and action, which lead him to pose practical problems and to find practical solutions to these practical problems, without necessarily taking an approach based on concept. A practical schema produces references that are not citations, which is why one can say of Zobernig that he always does the same thing, and at the same time always does extremely different things. He appears to begin a painting the way one begins a book, without knowing what he will tell, only discovering it by and by, one step after the other, starting again from the beginning, making corrections, etc.

Modernity brings with it a progression toward abstraction, toward the elimination of the subject, in the interest of accentuating formal qualities. Under these circumstances, the ability to understand the work of art, reduced to its aesthetic dimension, is depleted — quite clearly, however, with the intention of thereby liberating art. The freedom to make unstrained, at times parodic use of outdated representational forms and content, to which Zobernig tends, provokes a little aesthetic shock, yet it is a technical, practical shock. A break with style and subject. His purely technical, pictorial approach, which seeks to avoid any indication of the intimate and subjective, has a moral component. An aesthetic-political view that tolerates no pictorial hierarchy, thus easily allowing the background to come to the fore. Using the "cut and paste" method, it can be inserted into the pictorial space like a backdrop or tapestry. Zobernig uses sketches and adds these to the compositions on the basis of his competence and practical intelligence — they have a structural function. An intelligence of a different order, however, than thinking thought, knowing knowledge, theoretical theory.

In the "tHIS" series, Zobernig uses the background like a canonical and classical subject, referencing the painterly coherence of traditional sfumato painting — yet the paint is applied by trowel, not by brush.

Throughout the entire picture plane, the radiant, transparent atmosphere of the background merges with the trellis of characters and even seems to assume some of its texture and firmness, while the contours of the lettering become absorbed. A play of light and color. As a modernist, Zobernig's practice is a formal one that serves as its own benchmark, yet is generated in conscious relation to other artists. To exist in an artistic field means to produce in relation to producer peers, for that is the lesson of structuralism: A sound exists only in relation to a range of possible sounds. Pierre Bourdieu* emphasizes the *fait social total*, by which he means that every social fact, including art, contains the entire system of relations that constitutes the society in question. It is upon this insight that members of the *Painting 2.0* generation base their production, by explicitly including in their work the logic of the existence of an artistic field as a social field.

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**) *Painting 2.0: Malerei im Informationszeitalter* (Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age), Museum Brandhorst, München / mumok Wien, Prestel, 2016