

# ***Winter 2008***

## **Heimo Zobernig and the Tate Collection**

4 October 2008 – 11 January 2009

## **Notes for Teachers**

These notes are designed to accompany the KS1/2 and KS3/4 *focus works* for the winter season at Tate St Ives. The pack provides a summary of the current displays, key themes and information on Tate resources. It also includes 'questions to ask of any art work'.

Combined with the relevant focus work notes, this pack should help you create an introductory discussion about some of the issues raised by the current displays. It can be used to help focus work in small groups in the exhibition, and allow follow-up within the classroom.

This pack contains material relevant to non-specialist teachers as well as specialist art teachers.

There is a free exhibition guide that can be picked up at Tate St Ives and downloaded from [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk). A broadsheet has also been produced for this exhibition. Price £3

# Introduction

“With art I would like to raise questions and as a result produce things that put themselves in question” **Heimo Zobernig**

Heimo Zobernig's work has never been exhibited before in the UK, so this is an important exhibition to introduce this contemporary artist and the first opportunity for students to view his work.

## The Facts

Heimo Zobernig moved from the countryside to Vienna in his early twenties, and studied theatre and set design at a time of experimental theatre, minimalist sets and props and ideas about the breaking down of space to facilitate engagement between actors and audience. These concerns can be seen in the work which contains elements of performance, design, video, sculpture, furniture and painting.

The show questions the ideology underpinning modernism; Zobernig utilises playfulness in his witty but unsettling art. This is partly achieved through his subversion in the use of everyday materials rather than the expected materials usually presented in an exhibition: cardboard, domestic paints, and plywood.

Zobernig also plays with idea of the original, and copies, surrogates, replicas, and prototypes of the original, by making reference to key works and ideas in art history. His art also questions how we display work, through his use of architectural interventions and how he might make new supports for work.

## Key themes

The display offers a number of different ways to link Zobernig's eclectic selection from the Tate Collection, art history and concepts/ideology with contemporary visual art. The resource notes select work from *Heimo Zobernig and the Collection* and offer suggestions of approaches including works in focus, questions and themes. They also include ideas for practical activities and further research.

Listed below are some key themes that follow the recommended route, and encourage links across the displays, with suggestions for works for these themes. However, you may want to explore your own links from this considerable selection by Heimo Zobernig.

## Ground Floor - Heron Mall

The Mall provides a huge impact of intense colour and light from the Trevira Television TS chroma-key blue material hung over the walls. This is used for special effects in film and television production, where it becomes a technological 'void' on which digital imagery can be superimposed, as in television weather forecasts; familiar television technology can be considered in the space of a gallery. The draping of the Mall in blue also may recall theatrical or industrial spaces.

**Intense colour and light.** What impact do large scale colour interventions have on the display? Why might Zobernig choose to use industrial/technological materials rather than paint to provide this colour and light? Consider artists like Yves Klein and his identification with a 'branded' colour. How does colour theory influence works of art?

**Wrapping.** *Young Tate Online* has exam help on the theme of wrapping; this is a useful

site for considering how Zobernig uses chroma-key fabric to wrap the galleries and to look at other artists who use wrapping in their work.

<http://www.tate.org.uk/youngtate/examhelp/themes/wraps.htm>

## Gallery One

This space, which often displays work from the St Ives Modernists, echoes this format with minimalist formal elements of surface and form, devoid of narrative. Zobernig's work could be regarded as 'standing in' for these usual St Ives works and his use of surprising domestic and 'poor' materials raises various issues about materials in art.

Works in this gallery link to Zobernig's interest in theatre and set design, and could be regarded as 'props' or surrogate models, alluding to the work usually exhibited here, but remade in domestic or mundane materials.

**Surrogates.** Consider how surrogates for original artworks might be made, using 'poor' materials.

**Materials and art.** Look at the use of domestic materials in the exhibition; the work may historically reference other artists' work. How does the use of deliberately unfinished edges and scrap or industrial materials affect our viewing? Look at work from the Arte Povera movement. Does the nature of the materials suggest a 'plan' rather than a finished work? What connotations might the use of tar and feathers bring to the work?

**Does aesthetic interpretation, not artistic production make art?** This might raise the debate about 'does the viewer decide what art is?' Would an object still be art without the reinforcement of marketing, posters, catalogues, exhibition architecture, and invitations?

Zobernig has chosen various works by St Ives artists, including Naum Gabo, Patrick Heron, Terry Frost and Margaret Mellis to exhibit from the Tate Collection. A special find (in gallery two) is the aluminium prototype Barbara Hepworth made as a trial for a later bronze, *Forms in Movement (Pavan)* 1956-9 (cast 1967). This work is exhibited for the first time, as it has remained on a workbench in Hepworth's studio since her death in 1975.

## Gallery 2

The huge red curtain splits this space, creating an enormous impact and interrupting the visual boundary between the Gallery and Porthmeor Beach. Might this work link with theatrical spaces and raise questions about form and function as a backdrop or screen? Could the work be viewed as a colour field?

Consider the great effect of light and sun through this curtain screen on the gallery space. Look closely at the torn edge of the fabric and consider why it was left frayed. When you stand underneath the work it may recall boundaries between outside and inside, backstage and stage front. If you view the back of the fabric from the steps you can see the outside landscape reflected there. Also consider how the wiggly line of the fabric relates to the waves breaking on the beach.

Below the vast red swathe of colour are sculptures from the Collection, interspersed with Zobernig's collection of gold painted chairs. Zobernig plays with the idea of unexpected display and form/function; chairs that were once functional (now forbidden to sit upon) transformed into art and mixed up with an eclectic array of sculptures. Again Zobernig makes choices of sculptural themes and 'isms'; can you identify what these might be?

**Architectural design and exhibition spaces.** How do these influence our expectations and perception of art? Look at the way Zobernig uses colour and structure to interrupt space within the gallery. Do we visit a gallery with preconceptions of how we might view art?

**Cultural and historical art spaces.** Zobernig challenges the way we might view art (the experience is culturally derived from the institutional idea of the museum as an exhibition place for the viewing of art history). He achieves this by splitting space apart through architectural interventions, by hanging over windows and doors, and by challenging scale.

What might the architecture of museums and galleries tell us about our culture and society, both historically and in this contemporary show; this is a good opportunity to compare the 'salon hang' in Gallery four with this space.

**Replica.** The installation of replicas and derivatives of the iconic Arne Jacobsen chair, raises connections between absence/presence and surrogates/originals; themes reiterated in works by Henry Wallis (gallery five) and Marcel Duchamp (upper terrace of gallery two) in Zobernig's selection. The theme of narrative might be considered in imaginative explorations regarding who might sit on the chairs, where did they come from or what might happen in the space at night when everybody has left the gallery?

**Seriality/variations** Consider how the iconic Jacobsen chair has many derivatives, and how Zobernig has given them new meaning by applying gold 'tomb stone' paint. Identify copies, maquettes and casts in the exhibition.

**Theatre and stage sets.** Zobernig's background in theatre informs the concept of art as a stage set and 'prop-like' qualities in his work. Can we identify works that provide this link? Do we see plinths as a support for art or as minimalist sculptures themselves?

**Readymades.** What makes an object become readymade art? Consider Duchamp's selection and appropriation, where he took possession by selecting an object and representing it as art. Is the worth of art determined by the artist's signature?

**Absence/presence.** Although much of the work is minimalist we sense human presence in the voids and spaces where humans may have left traces. Link this to works like *The Room in Which Shakespeare Was Born* (1853), where the space suggests human activity but is surprisingly void.

## **Off Lower Gallery Two - Studio**

Heimo Zobernig has been commissioned to design the Studio, off lower gallery two as a new resource room for Tate St Ives, making this space both an art work in the exhibition and a valuable resource room.

The window onto the Heron Mall has been reopened, allowing blue colour from the Mall to impact upon the space, and original architectural features have been restored. New lighting, furniture and equipment have been fitted, considering the relationship between functional design and sculptural form.

The question may arise about boundaries in this resource room between a functional space and an artwork? The extended labels for the show can be accessed in this resource room and computers are available for study.

**Domestic objects that recall art.** Ikea *Billy* bookshelves could be compared with minimalist sculpture, such as work by Donald Judd, and boundaries explored between sculpture, painting and mass produced industrial design. Could a cubist sculpture (non functional) also function as a modular table?

## Apse

The diamond-shaped single canvas is hung over a classical niche, suggestive of a space for sculpture. The issue of artist as curator raises the question of why hang a painting in a space that looks like a niche for a classical sculpture? Links to mathematical shapes arise with definitions of square, diamond and lozenge forms. Is this canvas a true lozenge or a square displayed differently?

**Grids** Zobernig reinterprets the grid in art, experimenting with different processes and materials. Consider the work of artists such as Piet Mondrian, Ian Burn, Blinky Palermo, Kenneth Martin and Carl Andre. Can the grid be free of all meaning or personal content and therefore have no narrative? Consider the use of grids and repetition in Islamic art where no human form can be represented. Compare how Sandra Blow used masking tape in her paintings made in St Ives.

## Gallery 3

Zobernig's grids echo Piet Mondrian as a source, together with Modernist design from the Bauhaus. Colour theory is also explored in the grid paintings. The Ikea *Billy* bookshelves refer again to the question of form/function and questions mass produced objects in relation to modular minimalist sculpture.

Zobernig has selected works for gallery two and four that relate to his own practice; specifically geometric abstractions, monochromes and grids.

**Reduction.** The debate about the possibility of making art devoid of all symbolism, narrative content or the artists hand is explored here. There is also the question of reduction to flatness; when does reduction in abstract make work become an object and not a painting? Consider the work of Kasimir Malevich, Donald Judd and Carl Andre. Can a projection screen be viewed as a functional object and also as a monochrome minimalist painting?

## Gallery 4

The 'salon hang' is surprising in the context of Tate St Ives and exhibits works which link with themes in Zobernig's work, explored in his vast choice, spanning 250 years of art history from the Tate Collection.

**The Collection.** Zobernig selected work to 'stand for' an idea/concept/'ism' in art history; can we identify what these may be? In this room contrast ideas about space/atmosphere, absence/presence, empty/catastrophic, stage sets/illusionistic landscape and painted portraits/video real-time self portrait.

**The reinterpretation of historical art movements.** By analysing and challenging historical ideas and works, can we raise questions and make new interpretations for contemporary issues? How should we make links between historical and contemporary work?

**Making links.** This space provides an opportunity to select work from Zobernig and to link

and compare his ideas and contemporary work, with its industrial, theatrical, or domestic references, with art from other times.

**The Salon Hang.** Historically, this was once the convention for viewing art, with connotations of hierarchy of genre and place within the display denoting importance. Compare how students expect to view art in a gallery now, and the effect of trying to look at paintings hung very high. Maybe students could select their own choice and plan a new hang? Which work would have the dominant space?

**Narrative.** There are many paintings depicting people and the theme of narrative in paintings invites the viewer to imagine a 'freeze frame' and to question what occurs in the story, what noise may be implied, who are the characters in the work? Stories and dramas may be developed from questions arising in front of the work.

## Gallery 5

The work in this space includes Zobernig's own 'voids' and his choice from the Collection that explore this theme. The gallery is reinvented by hanging it with green chroma-key fabric; itself used as a void in cinematic special effects.

**Theatrical space.** The green fabric invites links with theatre and included in this room is *The Room in Which Shakespeare Was Born 1853*, by Henry Wallis. Themes of stage sets, absence/presence and narrative are again evident.

Zobernig writes about this work in a short text for [Tate Etc](#) magazine:

*Looking for the void – for what's not there. Nothing found. I drew a blank... there is nothing in the centre of the room. And the centre of the painting is not only optically empty, creating a real spatial void; it's also empty as far as time is concerned. Is the empty space in the middle intended for what is to come, or is it an echo of what has already been?... Despite the highly detailed, painterly description of these various objects and the planes defining the space, they merely provide a backdrop for what is missing in the middle of the room... Was this the inspiration for a monochrome painting in golden ochre, like the one by Oliver Mosset that I recently saw at the Whitney Biennale in New York, or for images of non-existent centres, in the shape of holes, as in the sculptures of Barbara Hepworth?*

There are allusions too, to display and theatre in this room in George Bernard O'Neill's *The Foundling* 1852, John Tunnard's *Reclamation* 1944 and Susanna Duncombe's *The Ghost Scene from 'The Castle of Otranto'* 1757

**Colour theory.** Links to the science of colour, complimentary colours, the spectrum of light and the physiology of the eye may all be suggested by the action of the unnatural chroma-key fabric dominating this space. How might this unnatural colour affect our viewing of the work?

# Ways of Looking

The changes to the National Curriculum, September 2008, have been considered in the following:

## **Listening to others/responding personally/sensory experiences**

What are your first reactions to the work?

What word(s) does it make you think about?

What stands out the most?

Have you seen anything like this before?

Why do you think Zobernig uses no titles in his work?

How does the colour in the room make you feel?

How do you feel about walking on the Carl Andre sculpture?

## **Visual experience/what can you see/traditional and new media**

What materials and processes has the artist used to make the work? Have you seen this material in art before? Do you think some materials have more relevance to art than others?

We experience blue screen technology in our everyday lives, e.g. tv weather reports; have you ever seen the material in real life?

What authenticity does the work have? Is it original, or a copy, a cast, or has work been remade using another material or process?

Is the work made in traditional or new materials?

What is it? (Painting, sculpture, print, video, photograph, installation, readymade etc?)

How is it displayed? What space does it occupy and does it relate to other work in the exhibition?

What is the scale of the artwork and how does this affect our relationship to it?

Does it have a frame or a support?

Is the work made to be permanent?

What tactile qualities does the work have?

## **Communication of ideas and meaning**

What do you think the artist wants to communicate?

Is it about real life?

Is there a story or narrative in the work?

Does it communicate an issue or theme?

Does it have cultural, social or political meaning?

Does it relate to contemporary life?

Is the work titled; if not, why do you think the artist chose not to title it? Does the title affect the meaning of the work?

## **Art in context/cultures/times**

Who is the artist? Is it important to know who created the work? Does the background of the artist inform the work?

Is the work site-specific?

Does the work connect to art from other times and cultures?

Does the work comment on contemporary society?

Has the work reinvented art from other times and cultures?

Is the work an original or a surrogate in some form? Has it been made permanent by casting from original found materials?

# Tate Resources

The Studio has been redesigned by Zobernig as a Study Point; you can access the **Tate Collection databases online** at this point.

The **Tate Shop** has a selection of books, catalogues, postcards and related materials.

Visit [www.tate.org.uk/schoolsteachers](http://www.tate.org.uk/schoolsteachers) for an up-to-date listings on CPD opportunities and to download resources – including this one – for free.

For definitions of **key art terms and movements** please refer to the **Tate Glossary** at [www.tate.org.uk/collection](http://www.tate.org.uk/collection)

## Websites

[www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk) Tate online

[www.tate.org.uk/learnonline](http://www.tate.org.uk/learnonline) Tate E-Learning

[www.tate.org.uk/schoolsteachers](http://www.tate.org.uk/schoolsteachers) Tate resources for schools and teachers

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Tate publications have produced a series of **Key Work Cards for Teachers** which can be ordered online.

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The **St Ives Archive Study Centre** holds a range of material about artists associated with St Ives. Tel: +44 (0) 1736 796408, e-mail: [archive@stivetrust.co.uk](mailto:archive@stivetrust.co.uk), [www.stivetrust.co.uk/archivesite](http://www.stivetrust.co.uk/archivesite)

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## Further research

*Heimo Zobernig*, exh. Cat., Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Eva Badura-Triska (ed.), Vienna 2003

*Heimo Zobernig*, Kunstverein Braunschweig, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, Köln, 2006

Helmut Draxler, 'Construction as Allegory: Sculptural Discourse, Methodology, and Aesthetic Praxis in the Work of Heimo Zobernig', *Heimo Zobernig, ibid.*

Isabelle Graw, 'The Guided Hand: On Painterly techniques in the work of Heimo Zobernig', *Heimo Zobernig, ibid.*, 2003

Jan Avgikos, 'Heimo Zobernig: Andrea Rosen Gallery', *Artforum* (September), 1991

Matthias Dusini, 'In the White Cube: Heimo Zobernig's Pragmatic Conceptualism,' *Heimo Zobernig (ex. Cat.)*, Museum Ludwig Vienna, Kunsthalle Basel, K21 Dusseldorf, Cologne, 2003

*Who or What is Heimo Zobernig?* Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, Köln, 2003.

With essays by Eva Badura-Triska, Klemens Gruber, Christian Holler, Matthias Dusini, Helmut Draxler, Isabelle Graw, Doris Krystof, Martin Prinzhorn.

[www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk) Further information on all Tate works and glossary

[www.tate.org.uk/learning/schools](http://www.tate.org.uk/learning/schools) Teachers' Notes

## St Ives School

Axten, Janet, *Gasworks to Gallery: The Story of St Ives*, Tate Gallery, 1995

Bird, M. *The St Ives Artists*, 2008

Cross, Tom, *St. Ives and British Modernism*, 1999.

Cross, Tom, *Painting the Warmth of the Sun, St Ives Artists, 1939-1975*, Penzance, 1984

Gale, M & Stephens C, *Barbara Hepworth: Works in the Tate Collection*, Tate Publishing, 1999

*Barbara Hepworth, A Pictorial Biography*, Tate Publishing 1970. Reissued 1985

Lax, Julian, *St. Ives. Eighty Years of Modernism*, 2001

*St Ives 1939-64, Twenty-Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery*, Tate Gallery, 1985

The St Ives Artists Series, Tate Publishing includes: *Terry Frost, Barbara Hepworth, Patrick Heron, Roger Hilton, Bernard Leach, Janet Leach, Alfred Wallis, Bryan Wynter and Christopher Wood.*