# NICK OBERTHALER
# SEQUEL

**Opening: Sunday, 27 January 2019, noon**
27 January – 16 March 2019
Mirabellplatz 2, Salzburg



1.

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac presents the third solo exhibition of works by Austrian artist Nick Oberthaler. Titled *SEQUEL*, the exhibition features five large-format, vertically hung canvases painted over the past two years and shown in the gallery Annex. The artist considers the title *SEQUEL* as a succession: not so much representing a kind of temporality or a specific narrative, but rather as a continuation of painterly concepts and their variation within the visual systems of the canvas' composition.

Through this series of works Oberthaler addresses geometric abstraction - its history, vocabulary and reading - which can be understood as *painting about painting*. A Digital Native technoid look is dominant in these new works, with contemporary reproduction techniques and collaged geometric forms combined with writing, objective motifs or gestural and impasto elements. Highlighting fields within the canvas with hatching or by crossing them out, Oberthaler then marks individual places with an *X* or indicates the direction of reading or motion with arrows. The colours he favours are reminiscent of the soft-ice-cream colours used by artists such as Jonathan Lasker or the chroma-keying hues in Heimo Zobernig's work, as Christoph Bruckner writes in his essay, written to accompany this exhibition *SEQUEL*:

## Stress test. On Nick Oberthaler's artistic work

Exploration of macrosocietal implementation and optimisation of the vocabulary of geometric abstraction – so ubiquitous as to be no longer noticed – still appears, at least discursively, to be a feasible path to take.

The work of Austrian artist Nick Oberthaler is situated in the largely unoccupied space between this *ultima ratio* and the stylistic stewardship of the legacy of Concrete Art, using a wide variety of strategies in order to avoid being smothered by the historicity of geometric abstraction. One of these is to think of geometric abstraction not from an imagined historical centre, but from its margins. (The artist has a wide knowledge of the history of abstraction, ranging from the French Supports/Surfaces group to the Belgian painter Marthe Wéry, also including obscure and marginal positions.)

Oberthaler subjects the pure forms of historical abstraction to a stress test, combining them with representational motifs and gestural and pastose elements, at the same time bringing them closer to contemporary reproduction techniques, making them into collages, using them contextually or in combination with functional objects or typographical elements. He is interested not so much in abstraction as a style – although in geometric abstraction style is generally unavoidable, the semantic field in this area being too wide – but as an exportable *modus*, thus opposing those who are merely administering a formal legacy, as well as avoiding the danger of treating former Concrete Art as a new Naturalism.

2.
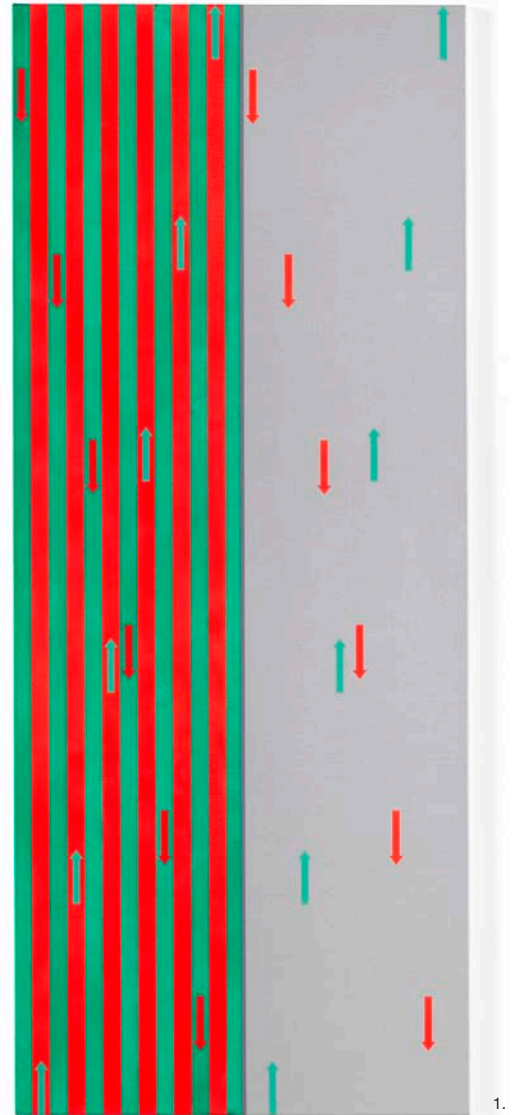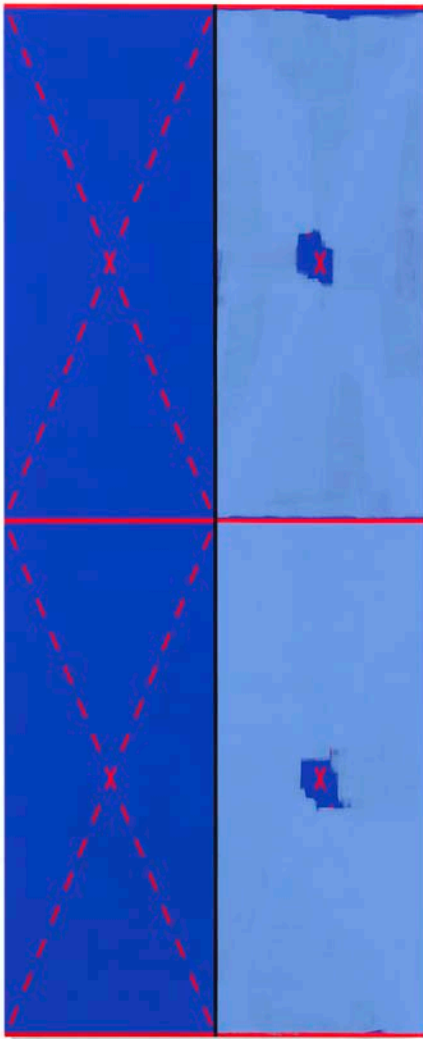
This is borne out by the artificial colours he favours, vaguely reminiscent of the soft-ice-cream colours used by artists such as Jonathan Lasker or the chroma-keying hues in Heimo Zobernig's work. The very fact that in his works Oberthaler speaks about geometric abstraction is in itself anti-essentialist and anti-naturalistic, all those elements being included that have now become part of the visual DNA of western industrial societies. He highlights fields with hatching or by crossing them out, marks individual places with an *X* or indicates the direction of reading or motion by means of arrows.

This kind of painting about painting is of course quintessentially a post-Modern pursuit, though aesthetically distinct from the painting of the Neo-Geo movement, which – apart from Peter Halley's works – was rather intimate, and in comparison with Oberthaler's abstraction in the era of post-internet art, really quite painterly.

As in the art of the Digital Natives, a technoid look is dominant in Oberthaler's work. In his works on paper, which are often based on laser prints or use the technique, the correlations mentioned here are more pronounced. Media-specific opposition in painting is dropped in favour of an inherent flexibility.

Oberthaler's works on paper cannot be reduced to the function of sketches or subsequent reproduction; they represent an independent sphere of his design theory which, however, cannot be transferred to his mostly large-scale paintings without sacrificing something in the process.

Text by Christoph Bruckner 2019

## BIOGRAPHY

Nick Oberthaler was born in Bad Ischl in 1981. He studied at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Geneva, and now lives and works in Vienna and Hamburg. His works are displayed in important collections including the 21er Haus/Belvedere, Vienna, Landesgalerie Linz and Caldic Collection/ Museum Voorlinden, Rotterdam, and have been shown internationally in exhibitions including Adelaïde, Marseille (*Distinct Oscillations Revisited*, in collaboration with Wilfrid Almendra, 2018), Institut d'Art Contemporain Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes (*RIDEAUX/blinds*, curated by Marie de Brugerolle, 2015), Centre d'Art Bastille, Grenoble (*The Blackbird Must be Flying*, in collaboration with Thomas Julier, 2014/15), Museo Hendrik Christian Andersen/Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome (*Calculated Reserve*, curated by Pier Paolo Pancotto, 2014) and Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (*Minimal Myth*, curated by Francesco Stocchi, 2012).

IMAGES
1. **Nick Oberthaler**, *untitled (witness the change #4)*, 2017. Gesso and acrylics on canvas. 245 x 100 cm (96,46 x 39,37 in). © Nick Oberthaler, 2019. Photo: Ulrich Ghezzi.
2. **Nick Oberthaler**, *untitled (comfortable cut #6)*, 2017. Gesso and acrylics on canvas. 245 x 100 cm (96,46 x 39,37 in). © Nick Oberthaler, 2019. Photo: Ulrich Ghezzi.

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For further press information, please contact: Madeleine Freund, madeleine.freund@ropac.net