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ART & DESIGN

## What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By ROBERTA SMITH, MARTHA SCHWENDENER, JASON FARAGO and WILL HEINRICH FEB. 7, 2018



### Heimo Zobernig

*Through Feb. 17. Petzel, 456 West 19th Street and 35 East 67th Street, Manhattan; 212-680-9467, [petzel.com](http://petzel.com).*



lation view of Heimo Zobernig's "chess painting." Petzel, New York

The Viennese artist Heimo Zobernig's carefully staged designs and installations focus on the delicate pivot between action and intention that is a contemporary artwork's invisible motor. In each of the nine variously tinted but otherwise identical paintings currently showing at Petzel's uptown location, he's overlaid the words REAL and EGAL (German for "whatever") in hard-edged Helvetica. The geometry of their intersections has the lucid, slightly false simplicity of a traffic sign: It's just complex enough to point to the idea of formal complexity.

Neatly paired with those bright colors is the artist's reprise, at the gallery's Chelsea location, of "chess painting," his 2017 installation at the List Visual Arts Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Unlike the hero of Stefan Zweig's "Chess Story," who drove himself mad in Gestapo captivity, trying to play both sides of a mental chess game, Mr. Zobernig finds a way to make the severe black-and-white grid warm and fuzzy. Five checkered fake-fur rugs spread on portable stages invite the weary viewer to take a rest in the comfortable clarity of modernism, while nine primed white canvases hanging on walls covered in broad rolls of black photo paper remind us that the grid was a design scheme before it was an ideology.

WILL HEINRICH